

4. THE WRITINGS OF ST. LOUIS MARIE DE MONTFORT

I - The Principal Writings

During his relatively short life, and despite the rigours and demands of a very active apostolate which comprised (apart from his ministry in the Hôpital Général in Poitiers, and similar periods of ministry in other places) around 200 complete parish missions around the West of France, St. Louis Marie managed to find the time to write three books, two shorter booklets, two major religious rules, several shorter rules, at least thirty-four personal letters or fragments of letters and some more general or ‘circular’-style letters, many prayers, and at least 164 hymns (some of them as many as 30 or more verses long), as well as a number of minor works for use during his missions or designed for particular groups to use. His collected writings in English make up two volumes¹ of around 600 pages each:

- *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1987 - which contains all his surviving works (including his letters) except for all but a handful of his hymns and most of his *Notebook* and *Book of Sermons*;
- *God Alone II: The Hymns of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 2005 - containing all the known hymns that are attributed to him, in a non-rhythmical format.

Among all this prolific output, the works which would generally be considered the most important, in that they set forth most fully and clearly his spiritual teaching, are the following:

- *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*
- *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*
- *The Secret of Mary*
- *The Secret of the Rosary*
- *Letter to the Friends of the Cross*

We will examine each of these in turn in what follows; but it should be noted that St. Louis Marie’s Hymns are also an important witness to his spiritual teaching; however, because of their special use and format, we will consider them separately.

All of these writings are available online for private study and consultation: see <http://www.montfort.org.uk/Writings/MontWork.php>.

The Love of Eternal Wisdom (LEW)

Content

This book gives the essential context of all the other writings of St. Louis Marie. In it he treats of the relationship between God and mankind, stressing first and foremost the love of God for human beings, and the plan he devised for saving them from the consequences of sin. Using many texts from the Old Testament Wisdom literature, he meditates on the extraordinary desire God has to love them and be loved by them. He, like St Paul and St John, sees the Saviour, Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of the Wisdom of God, and applies to Christ the title “Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom of God” - therefore the “Eternal Wisdom” in the title of the book is to be taken as Jesus Christ himself. In his reflections on the love of

God for humans, St Louis Marie picks out the death of Christ on the Cross as the greatest manifestation of this love, to the point where he can say: *Wisdom is the Cross, and the Cross is Wisdom*. Making the assumption that all human beings desire happiness, and that “wisdom” (in a natural sense) is the way to achieve this, he discusses various forms of wisdom, and states that the only true wisdom is the Wisdom of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ himself. It then becomes the life-long quest of all Christians to seek to acquire this Wisdom, or, in other words, to seek to know and love Jesus Christ, the Eternal Wisdom of God. He proposes four principal means to achieve this: (1) An ardent desire to do so; (2) Constant prayer for this grace; (3) “Universal” mortification; and (4) A tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He claims that this fourth means (devotion to the Blessed Virgin) is the most effective way to acquire and preserve Divine Wisdom, and it is this theme which he develops in the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* and *The Secret of Mary*. The third means (universal mortification) is seen as a way of participating in the Cross of Christ, by accepting our own “crosses” and so becoming more aware of the love shown by the sufferings of Christ. He develops this theme more in *A Letter to the Friends of the Cross*.

History

Despite a claim made in 2003 that this book was the work, not of St. Louis Marie, but rather of Fr. Charles Besnard (1717-1788), the third Superior General of the Montfort Missionaries and the Daughters of Wisdom—a claim which did not seem to be based on any concrete evidence, and which was robustly refuted by others—it is generally accepted that *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* is an early work of St. Louis Marie. There is no clear evidence of when it was written, but according to many who have studied the matter in depth, the most likely date is 1703 or 1704. This was the period when St Louis Marie was in Paris, having left the hospital in Poitiers, and was living (for some of this time) in the hovel in the Rue du Pot de Fer. Besnard says (repeated by Picot de Clorivière) that at this time he gave a conference or a series of conferences to the students of the Holy Spirit seminary established by his school-friend, Claude Poullart des Places, in which he spoke eloquently of Wisdom and “gave a very beautiful paraphrase of the book of the Bible that bears this name” (the Book of Wisdom)—a theme which is extensively pursued in LEW. Others think that it may have been written around 1700, even perhaps before his ordination to the priesthood, while still others claim that it was perhaps written towards the end of his life, in 1713 or after. It has been claimed that the style of the work shows a certain immaturity when compared with the texts of *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (TD) and *The Secret of Mary* (SM), which might support the argument for an earlier date rather than a later one.²

The general archives of the Montfort Missionaries in Rome possess a precious manuscript of LEW, which some claim is in the handwriting of St. Louis Marie himself, though this has been disputed by others, including a handwriting expert employed by Mgr. Frehen to examine all the manuscripts we possess of the writings of St. Louis Marie. Their conclusion is that our MS shows traces of a number of copyists, including Frs. Mulo, Vatel and Besnard. Although the work was, therefore, known to early generations of Montfort Missionaries, LEW had to wait until 1929 for a definitive edition to be published, and translations into other languages had to wait even longer.

Significance

On the understanding that this is a genuine work of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, experts in Montfortian Spirituality point to its great doctrinal value and see it as of fundamental importance for the understanding of Montfort’s work as a whole. It has even been claimed to

be the only book that gives us the overall view of Montfortian spirituality, while *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (TD) has been seen as “only a magnificent commentary on Chapter 16” of LEW.³ Although this book has not enjoyed the popularity of TD, perhaps because of the tastes of the general Catholic public, it deserves to be better known, and can be especially valued today when a spirituality nourished on the Bible is more appreciated.

In recent years there have been various interpretations of LEW, by Montfortians and others, all of which recognise its importance for an understanding of Montfort’s spirituality (and perhaps, even, of his life). In today’s theological climate, it has the great merit of being thoroughly Christocentric. It also offers, through Montfort’s understanding of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, a contribution to the theology of creation, a theme brought to the fore by Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). And finally, through St. Louis Marie’s insistence in this work on the Cross as the greatest proof of God’s love for mankind, LEW offers an important contribution to the theology of Redemption currently enjoying renewed attention in theological circles.

Literary style

In many ways the literary style of LEW is quite different from that of other works of St. Louis Marie. Where TD and SM are clearly written with what might be called a “missionary” intention—to persuade his readers to adopt a more effective way of drawing close to Jesus Christ and living the Christian life—LEW, on the other hand, (at least in the major part of the book) reads more like a personal meditation on God’s love for mankind and his offer of salvation. This is reinforced by his listing, in several chapters, of many scripture verses (principally from the books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and Proverbs), as though inviting his readers to read and reflect on the Scriptures: Introduction, nos. 3-4; Chapter 2, nos. 20-28; Chapter 4, nos. 48-49; Chapter 5, nos. 52-63; Chapter 6, nos. 65-69; and also from the Gospels: Chapter 12, nos. 133-153.

Sources

Montfort himself cites, in this work, some fifteen authors or saints whose testimony he gives. It is surprising that he does not make mention of members of the French School of Spirituality, although in fact they supplied him with a great deal of his material. Three names stand out among those who influenced him in the writing of this book: Henry Suso (a Dominican), Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure (a Jesuit) and Amable Bonnefons (also a Jesuit), though only Henry Suso is explicitly quoted by him; his dependence on the other two is however clear. Indeed certain sections of LEW are copied directly from Saint-Jure and from Bonnefons, even though Montfort does not acknowledge his borrowings.

From his extensive use of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament, it is clear that Scripture itself must be counted as one of his major sources; and it is striking how different his use of scripture is from that of the authors who influenced him—even to the number of verses of scripture he and they employ. His use of the Wisdom literature has been said to be “truly surprising”, especially since no Patristic commentary on the *Book of Wisdom* exists.⁴

True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin (TD)

Content

This is the book for which St. Louis Marie de Montfort is probably best-known. It should, however be read in the context of *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, where he makes it plain that a

“tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin” is only a means (although the most effective means) to acquire and preserve Divine Wisdom.

In the *True Devotion*, St. Louis Marie sets out his teaching on devotion to Mary in general, and proposes a particular form of devotion, involving a total dedication or consecration of oneself to Jesus through the hands of Mary. The first part of the book is devoted to showing that devotion to Mary is not an end in itself. It is always a means to becoming more dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ. It is, however, he claims, a necessary means to this, and is indeed the surest way to achieving this goal. He examines the qualities of what he calls “true” (or genuine) devotion to Mary, as opposed to false devotion. And he makes it clear that there can be many different kinds of “true” devotion to her. Yet he claims, based on his own experience and reading, to have found one form of devotion to Mary which achieves its aim (to bring us closer to Jesus Christ) more effectively than any other.

The form of devotion to Mary to which he refers (and which he earnestly proposes to his readers) consists in a *total dedication of oneself to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary*. This total dedication he calls “consecration”, and he is careful to explain that, even though we may speak of “consecration to Mary”, this must always be understood as only a step on the way to “consecration to Jesus Christ”. The rest of the book is taken up with an explanation of what this total dedication means in practice, and with descriptions of its effects in a person who undertakes it, intended to encourage us to embrace it. It also examines various “practices” of devotion intended to help us to live it out, both “exterior” and “interior” practices, as he calls them. Among the exterior practices, he speaks of the recitation of the Rosary, a topic which he treats more fully in *The Secret of the Rosary* (SR).

This form of devotion to Mary was known in St Louis Marie’s day (and before) as “Holy Slavery”, and he spends some time explaining the meaning of this phrase, insisting that, far from being a slavery of compulsion, it must be a “slavery of love”. Other phrases, more in tune with our modern way of thinking, could easily be used in place of this.

Another of St Louis Marie’s works, *The Secret of Mary* (SM), is a shorter presentation of much the same matter as is found in the *True Devotion*.

History

Tradition favours the view that this work was composed in the autumn of 1712, when St. Louis Marie stayed for several weeks at his ‘hermitage’ of Saint-Éloi in La Rochelle. Other dates suggested are the winter of 1710-1711, when he was obliged to rest for a few months in Nantes, after the failure of the Calvary project in Pontchâteau; or the second half of 1715, when he spent a few weeks in his cave-hermitage in the Forest of Mervent. But he makes it clear that the subject he writes about in this book, and the doctrine which gives rise to it, is something that he has constantly preached in his missions and other interventions for the whole of his priestly life: “I have taken up my pen to write down what I have been teaching with success both publicly and in private in my missions for many years” (TD 110). The only indication in the book itself of its date of composition is in no. 159, where he mentions Father Boudon who, he says, “died a holy death a short time ago;” it is known that Fr. Boudon died in 1702.

The original manuscript of TD appears to have been lost for some time: it was buried for safety with other precious documents in a chest and hidden in a field near Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre during the French Revolution, which began in 1789. This has been taken to be the fulfilment of the prophecy of Montfort himself in no. 114 of TD: “I clearly foresee that raging beasts will come in fury to tear to pieces with their diabolical teeth this little book and the one

the Holy Spirit made use of to write it, or they will cause it at least to lie hidden in the darkness and silence of a chest and so prevent it from seeing the light of day.” It seems that, even when this chest was recovered after the Revolution, the manuscript was not recognised as being one of St. Louis Marie’s writings, and it was only on 22 April 1842 that it was re-discovered in the library of the mother-house of the Montfort Missionaries. The handwriting was immediately recognised as that of Montfort himself, and the first printed edition was published the following year. The manuscript is preserved today in the General Archives of the Company of Mary.

It has never been seriously disputed that the manuscript is in Montfort’s own handwriting, though there are also other hands evident in some of the corrections made to the manuscript. However, it is clear from internal evidence that the manuscript that we possess is not the complete work written by St. Louis Marie. In nos. 227, 228 and 256 of TD, the author speaks of a “first part of this preparation for the Reign of Jesus Christ,” in which the reader would find a recommendation that he or she “should spend at least twelve days in emptying themselves of the spirit of the world,” in preparation for making the Consecration to Jesus through Mary; and of “exercises of the contempt of the world which we have given in the first part of this treatise.” These recommendations, as such, are not found in the present manuscript, which indicates that a number of pages from the beginning of the original work are missing. Also, in no. 230 he speaks of a prayer of St. Augustine “which they will find near the beginning of this second part;” this prayer is actually to be found in no. 67, which might indicate that the “first part” was originally much longer than what we have at present. Again, in no. 231, he speaks of “the act of consecration which is given at the end of this book”, and in no. 236 of wearing “a little chain blessed with a special blessing (given further on⁵)”. In fact, neither the act of consecration, nor the special blessing for the little chain are found in the manuscript as we possess it, which again indicates that some pages from the end may have been lost. However, what we actually possess in the manuscript preserved in Rome is an adequate presentation of his Marian theme.

As the first pages of the original manuscript were evidently missing when it was rediscovered in 1842, the publishers had to choose a title for the printed work. In no. 227, Montfort referred to his book as a “preparation for the Reign of Jesus Christ.” However the first publishers decided upon the title *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, or rather *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (to give it its full title as in French), and the name has been retained in all subsequent editions. Shortly after its first publication in French in 1843, Father Frederick William Faber, an English convert from the Anglican Church, became acquainted with St. Louis Marie and the *True Devotion*, and translated it into English for the first time, this first English version being published in London in 1863. From that time on, there have been multiple re-editions of the work in many different languages.

Significance

This book is certainly the work which has most made the reputation of St. Louis Marie as a spiritual “master”. Since its first publication in 1843, it has appeared in so many languages and in so many parts of the world that it cannot be denied that it speaks to the hearts of Christians (and not just Catholics) all over the world. But it is far from being merely a work of “popular devotion”; it is solidly based in authentic Christocentric theology. The fact that the Catholic Church accepted it as authentic Christian teaching at the time of the Beatification and Canonization of its author, has given it a universal value that has only been reinforced by the adoption of its teaching by so many renowned Catholic thinkers, among them the late Pope John Paul II, who confessed, in a letter to the Montfortian congregations

of 8 December 2003: “the reading of this book was a great help to me in my youth: ‘I found the answer to my doubts,’ which were due to a fear that worship given to Mary ‘if developed too much, might end by compromising the primacy of the worship of Christ’ (*My Vocation, Gift and Mystery*, pg. 42). Under the wise guidance of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, I understood that, if we live the mystery of Mary in Christ, there is no such risk. This saint’s Mariological thought, in fact, ‘is rooted in the Mystery of the Trinity and in the truth of the Incarnation of the Word of God’ (*ibid.*). ...”

Pope John Paul’s words remind us also that this book is not just (or even primarily) a book about Mary—it is firmly based in the Church’s understanding of Jesus Christ; it is deeply Christocentric. This is most clearly seen in nos. 61–62 of TD itself, where St. Louis Marie expresses the absolute primacy of Jesus Christ in Catholic theology, and ends by saying: “If then we are establishing sound devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only in order to establish devotion to our Lord more perfectly, by providing a smooth but certain way of reaching Jesus Christ. If devotion to our Lady distracted us from our Lord, we would have to reject it as an illusion of the devil. But this is far from being the case.”

Another point that it is important to recall is the distinction that Montfort himself makes in the book between “true” (or *genuine*) devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and the “perfect” devotion to her, which he also claims is the “perfect” devotion to Christ himself—while there can be many forms of “true” devotion, he claims for a particular practice of devotion, known in his day as “Holy Slavery” and today more often as “Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary”, the distinction of being the most perfect way to grow in conformity to Jesus Christ, and therefore the perfect practice of devotion to Mary.

Literary style

While LEW presents more the air of a personal meditation, TD has the appearance and structure of a more theological reflection; St. Louis Marie himself does not call it a “treatise” (despite the English translation of no. 256), but it has been called such since the first publication in 1843. And the book is indeed well-structured, and its theology is sound. However, as with all his writings, St. Louis Marie did not intend it for a learned readership, but rather for “the poor and simple” (TD 26), and the style he used in writing it could be seen as more of a “popular” nature. He was ever the “missionary”, and his intention was always to draw people closer to Christ. So, for example, the many stories and anecdotes he quotes regarding miracles and the practices of the saints, are more calculated to appeal to the simple people of his day than to theologians. Much of the book is in the nature of encouragement to take up the devotional practice he is promoting: hence the whole of chapter 4 (Motives which recommend this devotion) and chapter 6 (Wonderful effects of this devotion), as well as chapter 5 (Biblical figure of this perfect devotion: Rebecca and Jacob). Much of this material may perhaps have less allure for modern readers than for those of his own day. On the other hand, his extensive use of the Bible and of the Fathers of the Church is striking, and will be appreciated in today’s climate.

Sources

St. Louis Marie claims to have “read almost every book on devotion to the Blessed Virgin” (TD 118), and states in TD 41: “I shall quote only one of the many passages I have collected from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.” We know, from his *Notebook*, that he deliberately made notes of much that he read, starting during his days as a seminarian in Paris, and the *Notebook* is very useful in identifying his sources for TD. Among the authors he used extensively in composing TD, we can list: F. Poiré, S.J., *La Triple Couronne de la*

Bienheureuse Vierge Marie; J.-B. Crasset, S.J., *La Véritable Dévotion à la Sainte Vierge*; L.-F. D'Argentan, Capuchin, *Conférences sur les Grandeurs de la Sainte Vierge*; J. de Cartagena, *Homiliae Catholicae de Sacris Arcanis Deiparae Mariae*; P. Grenier, *Apologie des dévots de la Sainte Vierge*; and many of the members of the French School of Spirituality, such as Bérulle, Olier, Boudon, Boissieu, and Bernardine of Paris. He did not, however, use all the material from these authors that we find in his *Notebook*; he made choices of what he would use, which underlines his own essential originality.

Again, St. Louis Marie quotes extensively from Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. With regard to the Patristic references, it has been pointed out that Montfort did not necessarily read extensively, himself, the works of the Fathers; rather he used already-existing collections of quotations to be found in books such as that of Crasset.

The Secret of Mary (SM)

Content

The Secret of Mary presents much the same matter as the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, in a shortened form, but it also includes a section on “The Tree of Life”. It seems to have been written for a member (or members) of a Religious Congregation. The title indicates the way in which St Louis Marie presents his topic: he wishes to disclose a “secret” of holiness, or a “secret” for finding happiness, and that “secret” is to be found in Mary, and in particular in the form of devotion to her which he proposes in the book.

As in the *True Devotion*, the first part of the book is concerned with the “necessity” of a genuine devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, for a real knowledge of, and adhesion to Jesus Christ. Again, this devotion to Mary is a means to this end, never an end in itself, and is necessary only because God himself has chosen the way of Mary to reveal himself in Jesus Christ.

In the second part of the book, St Louis Marie examines briefly some *genuine* forms of devotion to Mary, before presenting what he calls “the *perfect* practice of devotion to Mary”, which he says is “unknown to many and practiced by very few”. This perfect devotion, he says, consists in “surrendering oneself in the manner of a slave to Mary, and to Jesus through Mary, and then performing all our actions with Mary, in Mary, through Mary and for Mary”, referring to this as a “consecration”. He goes on to discuss what this means, and in particular what he means by performing all our actions “with Mary, in Mary, through Mary and for Mary”.

In a kind of supplement at the end of the book, we find two very beautiful prayers: a Prayer to Jesus, and a Prayer to Mary; and a short metaphor for this form of devotion, which he calls “*The Tree of Life*”.

The matter presented briefly in the Secret of Mary is much more developed in the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

History

It is difficult to know precisely (or even roughly) when St. Louis Marie penned this little booklet. We know from Sr. Florence's *Chroniques* that it appears to have been written in the form of a letter to a religious sister in Nantes, but this does not mean that he was living or working in the diocese of Nantes when he wrote it. All we can say is that Montfort seems to have a thorough grasp of his subject matter, and a facility in expressing it, which might

indicate that it is a work of his maturity. Fr. Dorio-Marie Huot, smm, in his presentation of the writings of St. Louis Marie⁶, gives it the date 1712.

We do not possess the original manuscript of *The Secret of Mary*. Instead we have two copies, with only slight variations in the text between the two: one in the archives of the Company of Mary, and the other in those of the Daughters of Wisdom. Both date from the first half of the 18th century, and may have been made by either Brother Jacques, a companion of St. Louis Marie himself, or by a layman called Joseau to whom Bro Jacques gave the writings of Montfort to be copied.

The Secret of Mary was not published until 1868, although fragments of the text were used by a number of biographers of St. Louis Marie before this date. The text of this 1868 edition was not, however, complete, and it was only in 1898 that Father Lhoumeau (a Superior General of the Company of Mary) published the entire text with one exception: certain passages on the wearing of little chains were omitted because of hesitations arising from certain condemnations of abuses of this practice by the Holy See⁷. In 1926, a definitive edition of the whole text, with many explanatory notes, was published by Fr. Huré, another Superior General of the Company of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom.

The manuscripts we possess do not give a title for the work. The first publishers took the title commonly given to it today from no. 20 of SM: “Happy, indeed sublimely happy, is the person to whom the Holy Spirit reveals the secret of Mary, thus imparting to him true knowledge of her.”

Significance

The basic structure of SM is much the same as that of *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (TD), and the primary thrust of the teaching contained in it is exactly the same; indeed, SM could be seen as a shortened version of TD. However, there are certain points that are more explicitly presented in SM, and there are a few variants. For example, the use of the word “secret” in SM has a particular significance: for St. Louis Marie, a “secret” implied several things: that Mary is “hidden”—too great and wonderful for us to be able to understand fully—but also that Mary is a wonderful means to find happiness, that she is “the secret of happiness”. This use of the word “secret” was certainly calculated to appeal to the sensibilities of the ordinary people to whom he regularly preached, whose diet of entertainment was nourished on the pamphlets hawked by the travelling peddlars, obtained from the “*bibliothèque bleue*” of Troyes⁸.

The definition of “the perfect practice of devotion to Mary” in SM is somewhat more precise than that given in TD: “Chosen soul, this devotion consists in surrendering oneself in the manner of a slave to Mary, and to Jesus through her, and then performing all our actions with Mary, in Mary, through Mary, and for Mary” (SM 28), and his manner of presenting what he calls in TD the “interior practices” of this devotion, and in SM “the interior practice” shows certain variations. Not only is the order of the four prepositions, “through”, “with”, “in” and “for” Mary slightly different (which is not all that important in itself), but the explanation of these four ‘attitudes’ is slightly different in the two works, especially regarding “in Mary”.

Literary style

As already mentioned, *The Secret of Mary* is presented in the form of a “letter” addressed to a “chosen soul”. While we know that it was addressed in the first instance to a particular individual, it is quite different in style to his personal letters, and could easily be taken as a

sort of “circular letter” intended for a number of persons (like the *Letter to the Friends of the Cross*). As such, it can clearly appeal to all kinds of people.

Sources

Montfort’s sources for his composition of *The Secret of Mary* are essentially the same as those for *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

The Secret of the Rosary (SR)

Content

One of the most honourable titles given to St Louis Marie (“the priest with the big rosary”) is that of “*Apostle of the Cross and of the Holy Rosary*”. The Rosary occupied an important place in his own spiritual life and in his apostolate. *The Secret of the Rosary* (sometimes called ‘The Admirable Secret of the Rosary’) is not as original in its composition as his other books, for here he is demonstrating the value of one particular devotional practice (among others mentioned in the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*), and at the same time borrowing extensively from many authors.

As he was primarily a missionary of the ordinary people, concentrating especially on the poor and abandoned, he set out to renew in them the spirit of Christianity, believing that this could be achieved by devotion to Mary which could only lead people to Jesus and holiness. He believed that the Rosary was a wonderfully effective way (a ‘secret’) of knowing Mary and finding Jesus through her. He established the devotion of the Rosary wherever he preached and had it recited publicly every day during his missions. This book, though not published in his lifetime, was certainly intended for all classes of people, as is clear from the “Little Roses” in the introduction. In the body of the book, which (like the Rosary itself) is divided into Decades, each with ten “roses”, he speaks about the origin of this form of Marian devotion and the climate of miracles in which it developed over the centuries. Well aware that critics would express doubts about some of his stories, he simply points out that he has quoted them from reputable authors. Other sections of the book deal with the power and effectiveness of the Rosary, the prayers of which it is made up, the beauty and usefulness of the meditations which should accompany it. He describes how to say the Rosary “worthily”, and at the end provides some Methods of Reciting the Rosary.

History

It is not known when or where St. Louis Marie may have written this book. What is certain is that a great part of his text is borrowed from other authors, although Montfort arranges his subject matter and interprets it in his own way. It was certainly not published in his own lifetime, although some appendices (which appear in *God Alone*, as in the *Oeuvres complètes* in French, at the end of *Methods for Saying the Rosary*) on the “Principal Rules of the Confraternity of the Rosary”, “The Power and Dignity of the Rosary”, and “The Dignity of the Hail Mary”, which were added to the end of the manuscript of SR, would cause us to believe that he had the intention of offering this work to the public.

We do not possess an original manuscript in the hand of St. Louis Marie himself; only a copy. But that copy appears to have certain texts and corrections that were written by Montfort himself.

The author of this article has been unable to find any information as to when the first publication took place.

Significance

There is no doubt that the recitation of the Rosary was something very dear to the heart of St. Louis Marie. We have only to read what he says of this “exterior practice” of devotion to Our Lady in TD (nos. 249-254) to recognise this: “I do not know how this should be, but it is perfectly true; and I know no surer way of discovering whether a person belongs to God than by finding out if he loves the Hail Mary and the Rosary... I earnestly beg of you, then, by the love I bear you in Jesus and Mary, not to be content with saying the Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin, but say the Rosary too, and if time permits, all its fifteen decades, every day.” We know also, from his collaborator, Fr. des Bastières, that St. Louis Marie was known to refuse to return to a parish for a second mission if the people of the parish had abandoned the practice of reciting the Rosary. This book, then, clearly fits in with his own practical demonstration of devotion to Mary. But it is, nevertheless, only one of the exterior practices that he recommends for genuine devotees of the Blessed Virgin. The fact that this book is by far the least ‘personal’ of his writings (being to a great extent borrowed from other authors), does not mean that it is less important for an understanding of his thought. In fact, this book, perhaps because of its style, is one of the most in demand of all his works.

Literary style

The main body of SR is in the form (like the Rosary - or Chaplet - itself) of five ‘decades’, each divided into 10 ‘roses’⁹, in which he gives various reflections on the Rosary, often in the form of anecdotes about its power as a prayer or the miracles performed through it. There is no doubt that this style was intended to appeal to the ordinary people of his day, and was very much in accord with his ‘missionary’ purpose that is evident in all his written works. On the other hand, it has been suggested that this work was primarily intended for the Missionaries of the Company of Mary, perhaps to help them in the preaching of the Rosary, which he prescribes as one of their principal tasks: “During the whole of the mission, they must do all they can by the morning readings and by the conferences and sermons, to establish the great devotion of the daily Rosary and they will enrol (they have the faculties for this) as many as possible in the Rosary confraternity” (*Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary*, 57).

Sources

Montfort himself, in no. 33 of SR, reveals one of his major sources, when, speaking of the stories that abound in this book, he says: “all I have done has been to copy them from very good contemporary authors and, in part, from a book written a short time ago, *The Mystical Rose-tree*, by Fr. Antonin Thomas, O.P.” Others that he used (and seems to have copied whole passages from) are the Jesuits Boissieu and Spinelli and the Dominican Cavanoc, as well as one that he cites frequently, Alain de la Roche, O.P. The editors of the French edition of SR in the *Oeuvres complètes* chose to show the textual borrowing made by St. Louis Marie in this work in italics, and a brief glance at this French text shows that a great deal of Montfort’s text is in fact borrowed directly from other authors. This does not mean that it cannot be attributed to him; the use he made of his sources is still quite personal and original.

Letter to the Friends of the Cross (LFC)

Content

The *Letter to the Friends of the Cross* is largely a meditation on the words of Christ:

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, and take up his cross and follow me (Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23).

It is addressed to the members of an association which he seems to have established in various places during the course of his missions¹⁰, and presents the self-renunciation called for by Christ as a necessary, beneficial and glorious means of becoming a true disciple of Christ. St Louis Marie here gives practical “rules” for making our own sufferings and acts of penance and mortification a real “following of Christ”. It could well be read in conjunction with what he says in *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* on the third means for acquiring Divine Wisdom: universal mortification.

History

As we can read in Grandet’s biography of St. Louis Marie, this little work was printed and published during the lifetime of St. Louis Marie. Besnard tells us that he wrote it during a visit to Rennes, where he was making a retreat and was meditating particularly on the sufferings of Christ. This seems to have been in 1714, shortly after the mission in Roussay near Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. The original manuscript of the work was, in the days of Father Besnard, Superior General, still in the possession of the Missionaries in Saint-Laurent, according to Besnard himself, but has since been lost; and no example of the editions published by St. Louis Marie himself has survived. The earliest text we now possess is that published in 1839 by Father Dalin, Superior General, and this is the text generally used today, with certain minor additions found in extracts quoted by Besnard or others. It seems that the ending of the work, as written by Montfort, may be missing: Dalin’s edition ends with a series of full-stops, as though something has been omitted, but we cannot be certain.

The authenticity of the text as a whole, and its being a work of Montfort, is not in doubt, though the fact of our having no original manuscript nor copies of the original publication means that we cannot guarantee all the details of the text.

Significance

Grandet, in the section of his book already mentioned, notes that the Cross had great importance in the life, the thought and the preaching of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, and he links the *Letter to the Friends of the Cross* directly with this theme of Montfort’s spirituality and teaching. What we have in this work is well in accord with what he has written in other works, notably *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* (especially chapters 13, 14 and 15), and can be seen as practical advice on how to make our own sufferings and troubles meaningful in the light of Christ’s cross.

Literary style

This booklet is in the form of a ‘circular’ letter intended for the members of the associations of ‘Friends of the Cross’ that St. Louis Marie set up during many of his missions. As such it is readily understandable for the simple, honest souls for whom it was meant.

Sources

Once again, as in his other writings, Montfort quotes extensively from Scripture and to a lesser extent from the Fathers of the Church and a number of Saints. In several passages, his indebtedness to Henri Boudon’s book *Les saintes voies de la Croix* is evident.

II - Other Writings

A glance at the Table of Contents in *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, or that in the French *Oeuvres complètes*, will show that St. Louis Marie wrote many other things, apart from those that we have picked out as his principal works. We may list them as follows (roughly in order of their dates):

- His personal Letters
- Methods for Saying the Rosary
- Prayer for Missionaries
- Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary
- Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary
- The Wisdom Cross of Poitiers
- Original Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom
- Maxims and Lessons of Divine Wisdom
- Letter to the People of Montbernage
- The Rules
- The Covenant with God
- The Will of St Louis Marie de Montfort
- Morning and Night Prayers
- Rules of Voluntary Poverty in the Early Church
- Four Short Meditations on the Religious Life
- Dispositions for a Happy Death

To these we must add the 164 Hymns that have been attributed to the Saint, all of which are contained in the French *Oeuvres complètes*, a few in English translation in *God Alone*, and all in English translation in *God Alone II: The Hymns of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*.

We also possess a notebook, known in French as the *Cahier de Notes*, in which St. Louis Marie made many notes on his own reading, plans for sermons, etc. This has never been published in its entirety, but exists in manuscript in the Archives of the Company of Mary.

Finally, there is St. Louis Marie's Book of Sermons (*Livre des Sermons*), which again exists in manuscript in the Archives of the Company of Mary, and was published in 1983 as Volume VI of the collection *Documents et recherches* by the International Montfortian Centre.

We will give brief details of each of these, and a little more comment on the Hymns.

The Letters (L)

St Louis Marie wrote a number of personal letters during the course of his life, only 34 of which (or fragments of them) have been preserved. They are written to 14 recipients, the principal ones being M. Leschassier (his confessor and spiritual director), his sister Guyonne Jeanne, and Sr Marie Louise of Jesus (Marie Louise Trichet). They help us to understand him as an author and what he wrote in his works. Some of them (especially Letters 5, 6, 8-11 and

15-16) throw a great deal of light on the early period of his priestly life, when he was struggling to find the Will of God for him.

Methods for Saying the Rosary (MSR)

As would be expected from a popular missionary, St Louis Marie's book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, was meant to serve as a practical apostolate, and with this in mind he added to his book three methods for saying the Rosary, including one which he had composed for the Daughters of Wisdom. He gives two further methods in his Book of Sermons, and these are included in "*God Alone - The Collected Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*". An appendix to *Methods of reciting the Rosary* in *God Alone* adds some passages which St Louis Marie quotes verbatim from other authors, on *The Principal Rules of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary*, *the power and dignity of the Rosary* and *the dignity of the Hail Mary*.

The Prayer for Missionaries (PM)

From very early on in his priestly life, St Louis Marie de Montfort dreamt of "a small company of priests" who would be dedicated to the preaching of missions to the poor, under the banner of the Blessed Virgin. As the years went by, his efforts to secure some recruits who would work with him in this way were redoubled. This prayer, known in French as the "*Prière Embrasée*" (burning prayer), composed by him probably towards the end of his life, is a heart-felt cry to God to fulfil his dreams. It describes the sort of "apostles" he is seeking, who he foresees will be particularly necessary in what he calls in the True Devotion (nos. 35, 45-58), the "latter times".

This *Prayer for Missionaries*, together with *The Rule of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary* and *A Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary*, forms a kind of "triptych" which is the inspiration for the modern Rule and Constitutions of the Company of Mary (Montfort Missionaries).

The Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary (MR)

This original rule of the Company of Mary was probably written about 1710, maybe even before any priests had yet joined St Louis Marie in his work. It is fairly typical of the sort of rule which was common for Religious Congregations about this time, except for some interesting details. For example, St Louis Marie speaks of only two vows, those of poverty and obedience, instead of the normal trilogy of poverty, chastity and obedience. It may be presumed that, as he expected any priests who joined the Company of Mary to be already ordained, they would already be bound to chastity; but it is probable that he insisted on poverty and obedience as being essential for the *freedom* and *availability* of which he speaks in the *Burning Prayer for Missionaries*. For the same reason, he insists that the members of the Company of Mary must hold no benefices, must not be "installed" in parishes, must have only two houses in France, etc. Their task was to travel to bring the good news to the poor, and a great part of the Rule is concerned with the *Directives to be Followed during their Missions*, *Their Timetable during Missions* and *Rules for Catechetical Instruction*.

This Rule, together with the *Burning Prayer for Missionaries* and the *Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary*, forms a triptych which has been accepted by the Holy See as part of the official Rule and Constitutions of the Company of Mary today, in the sense of their being the source of the modern Rule.

Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary (LCM)

In this *Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary*, (or *Letter to the Associates of the Company of Mary*, as it is called in the French), beginning with the words of Christ: *Fear not, little flock, because it has pleased your Father to bestow a kingdom on you* (Lk 12:32), St Louis Marie applies these words to his Company of Mary. This short letter is an exhortation to the members of the Company to be faithful to their spirit of evangelical poverty and trust in the Providence of God. When it was written, it is probable that there were as yet no priests belonging to the Company, and St Louis Marie seems to foresee that the Congregation would always remain relatively small, since he insists on their not being discouraged on account of their small numbers. He insists, too, on hope and joy in the knowledge that God will care for them in his Providence.

The end of the manuscript is missing, finishing in the middle of a sentence, but an ending was supplied (probably by Fr Gabriel Deshayes) in 1837.

As mentioned above, this Letter, together with the *Burning Prayer for Missionaries* and the *Rule of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary*, forms a triptych which has been accepted by the Holy See as part of the official Rule and Constitutions of the Company of Mary today, in the sense of their being the source of the modern Rule.

The Wisdom Cross of Poitiers (WCP)

When St Louis Marie was chaplain of the “General Hospital” (poorhouse) at Poitiers from 1701-1703, he formed a group of young girls who gathered together regularly in a house which he called “La Sagesse” (Wisdom). Soon afterwards, Marie Louise Trichet and Catherine Brunet, who were to become the first Daughters of Wisdom, joined them. St Louis Marie composed for them a programme of the spiritual life based on the words of Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom: “*We must renounce self and carry our cross after Jesus Christ, under Mary’s guidance*”. He wrote this programme in a very simple way on a cross, which has been preserved by the community of the Daughters of Wisdom.

The Original Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom (RDW)

This original rule of the Daughters of Wisdom was almost certainly written in 1715, when Blessed Marie Louis Trichet and Sr Catherine Brunet arrived in La Rochelle to become the nucleus of the new Congregation. It is clearly inspired by M. Tronson, one-time Superior of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, but other influences seem to have been St Francis de Sales and St Vincent de Paul. Almost all its sections containing rules are followed by “Counsels” addressed personally to the Daughters of Wisdom by St Louis Marie himself. As with the *Rule of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary*, there are passages which are very practical descriptions of the work which St Louis Marie foresaw his Sisters undertaking: there is a whole section, for example, on *Rules to be observed in the Charity Schools of the Daughters of Wisdom*, which refer to the free schools for boys and girls which he set up in La Rochelle in collaboration with the Bishop.

Maxims and Lessons of Divine Wisdom (MDW)

St Louis Marie inscribed on the “Wisdom Cross” of Poitiers a concise programme of the spiritual life. He enlarged upon this programme for the benefit of the Daughters of Wisdom and wrote this small book of maxims and lessons, which contains the same message as that given in chapter 12 of *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* which is entitled “Principal Oracles of

Divine Wisdom”. They are clearly intended to be maxims to which the Daughters of Wisdom should conform if they sincerely wish to acquire the spirit of true wisdom.

Letter to the People of Montbernage (LPM)

In 1705, having been released from his post as chaplain to the “General Hospital” in Poitiers, St Louis Marie began preaching missions in the town and suburbs of Poitiers. He began by concentrating on those districts, such as Montbernage, where the ordinary people lived. He immediately met with great success, but at the same time encountered serious opposition, especially from the Vicar-General. For the sake of peace, the Bishop chose to sacrifice Louis Marie, who was forced to leave the town at the beginning of Lent 1706. Before leaving Poitiers and making a pilgrimage to Rome to see the Pope, he wrote a circular letter to the people of the parishes where he had preached, now known as the *Letter to the People of Montbernage*. In it he encourages them to be faithful to all that they had promised during his missions, and asks for their prayers at this particularly difficult moment for himself.

Rules for Various Associations (RVA)

St Louis Marie established a variety of “Associations” during the course of his missions, with the purpose of continuing the benefit gained by those who attended the missions faithfully. Some of these Associations (e.g. the Confraternity of the Rosary) already existed and had their own rules; others were apparently invented (or adapted) by himself, and he wrote rules for these. Two of them were *The Society of the Forty-four Virgins* and *The White Penitents*. *The Society of Virgins* was formed to protect girls from the corrupting influence of the world and the temptations arising from attending dances, etc. It was restricted to 44 girls at any one time, who took a temporary “vow” of chastity for the time that they remained a member. *The White Penitents* was modelled on the confraternities of penitents which began in Italy, and was intended to deter men from giving way to drunkenness, immorality, swearing and slander. Apart from the general rules for the White Penitents, St Louis Marie also wrote a set of rules for the *Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saumur* made by the Penitents to obtain from God good Missionaries, a pilgrimage made by the White Penitents of Saint-Pompain to the shrine of Notre Dame des Ardilliers in early 1716.

The Covenant with God (CG)

St Louis Marie’s aim in all his missions was “*to revive the Christian spirit through the renewal of the baptismal promises*” (according to his earliest biographer, Joseph Grandet). Grandet adds: “*And to help them to remember their undertakings, he had a formula of renewal printed, and those who could write were required to sign it*” during a special ceremony which was the highlight of the mission. St Louis Marie speaks of the consecration which he proposes in his True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin as a “*perfect renewal of the vows of Baptism*”.

Four printed copies of this *Contract of Covenant with God* have been preserved. Two of them, showing slight variations, are reproduced in *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St Louis Marie de Montfort*.

The Will of St. Louis Marie de Montfort

On the eve of his death at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, St Louis Marie dictated his last will and testament to Fr Mulot, whom he appointed his successor as Superior of the Company of Mary. He had very little to leave: a few books, some banners and other things which he used

in his missions, and a little money. He also left instructions concerning some properties which had been offered to him for the Company of Mary. From his will, we also learn something more of the few Brothers who had accompanied him in his missions.

Morning and Night Prayers

In the original rules of the Daughters of Wisdom and the Company of Mary, St Louis Marie speaks of prayers that both Congregations must say, but he does not give any further details. We know however that he did write a manuscript version of the prescribed Morning and Evening Prayers, which was printed in 1859. The main part of the Morning Prayers is *The Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin*, versions of which were popular in the 17th Century. The form of the Evening (or Night) Prayer was also commonly used at that time, but St Louis Marie's version contains some prayers (notably "*O Jesus living in Mary*" and prayers relating to the theme of rest and sleep) which are clearly drawn from the French School of Spirituality.

Rules of Voluntary Poverty in the Early Church

This text, found in Montfort's *Notebook*, appears quite abruptly among pages which had been left blank, and has nothing in common with the other matters in the Notebook. It may have been written at a moment when the theme of poverty for lay people living in community presented itself to him with a certain immediacy. It seems to have been written for a group of Brothers, but who these Brothers were, we do not know.

Four Short Meditations on the Religious Life

This text appears at the end of the manuscript of *The Secret of Mary*, and consists of four summaries of meditations on poverty, chastity, obedience, and Religious Rules. It may be a copy of notes taken by someone else who heard his talks.

Dispositions for a Happy Death

On the eve of the death of St Louis Marie, a copy of the *Dispositions for a Happy Death* was found among the effects of the missionaries accompanying him. On a few blank pages of this little book, Fr. Mulot wrote the *Last Will and Testament* that the dying man had dictated to him. This explains why the copy of this little work, the only one now existing, has been preserved. It comprises five parts, the last three of which are certainly not the work of St Louis Marie, but rather of Fr. J. Nouet, S.J. The second part "*Vast expanses of Paradise*" appears also to be borrowed from someone else. The first part, however, on the remote, proximate and final dispositions for death, which are similar to drafts of sermons found in St Louis Marie's Book of Sermons, could well be his own work. In the final dispositions, we find exhortations to true devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, and to renew our Baptismal promises, themes very dear to St Louis Marie.

The Notebook

From the time when he was a seminarian, and off and on perhaps for the rest of his life, St Louis Marie made notes on what he had read, or at least on some of this; for his Notebook certainly does not reflect all that he read, particularly when he was librarian at Saint-Sulpice. It contains especially notes on the Blessed Virgin and on devotion to her, and from it we can see clearly some of the sources he used in writing his great Marian works: *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* and *The Secret of Mary*.

The Book of Sermons

This is a manuscript notebook, in which from time to time, probably beginning in his days as a seminarian, St Louis Marie wrote notes for sermons to be preached in missions. A few extracts from this notebook have been included in *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St Louis Marie de Montfort*. And, as mentioned above, the whole Book of Sermons was published in the series *Documents et recherches* in 1983.

III - The Hymns

St Louis Marie believed in the people being involved at every level in his missions, and one of the ways he brought about that involvement was through singing. He was a copious writer of hymns, which he often set to the popular tunes of his day. In all, 164 of these hymns have been preserved. Most of these are to be found in four manuscript notebooks preserved in the Archives of the Company of Mary, some of which are clearly in the handwriting of the Saint himself. Fr. Fradet, who did a detailed study of the hymns of St. Louis Marie, concludes: "The manuscripts do not contain a single hymn that we can find in any previous collections." We can be fairly sure, then, that these hymns are authentic compositions of St. Louis Marie. Montfort started writing hymns even before his ordination in 1700, according to Blain¹¹. He continued to compose them right up to his death in 1716.

Their intention is, as always with St Louis Marie, to teach and encourage the ordinary people. They are not, therefore, of any great poetic merit, but they contain many indications, not found elsewhere in his writings, of the completeness of the spirituality which he lived and taught. For example, much of what he would have taught on the Mass, the Eucharist and Holy Communion is found more extensively among his hymns than elsewhere in his writings. It must be remembered, too, that many (if not most) of the people to whom St. Louis Marie was addressing his preaching were illiterate. These hymns could be learnt by heart, especially as they were so often sung to tunes already familiar to the ordinary people, and so were a valuable means of catechising these simple people, for whom such oral tradition was a normal source of learning.

Some of Montfort's hymns are more didactic than others; others are more expressions of wonder at the mystery of God's love and his dealings with men. Yet others are intended to help people to express themselves in a meaningful and sincere way to God.

Often the hymns are very long - they were sung during the processions and dramas which were a very effective part of the mission programme.

A few of them can be found in *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St Louis Marie de Montfort*. All are to be found in *God Alone II: The Hymns of St Louis Marie de Montfort*.

IV - The Use of Images

Although not exactly "writing", Montfort's use of visual images was an important part of his apostolic method. He himself was very aware of the impact that visual scenes, pictures, statuary, and even dramatic representations could have on people who were limited in their literacy, and he used all the visual means he could to drive his message home.

Perhaps the greatest example of his use of visual imagery was his ill-fated attempts to create a calvary that would be visible from a good distance and would be a striking reminder to the people of the truths he taught in his preaching. Having been impressed by the calvary he found on Mont Valérien in 1703-4, he planned his own, first of all in his native town of Montfort, then later in Pontchâteau. As we know, both attempts failed, although the Calvary

at Pontchâteau was revived and completed long after his death. St. Louis Marie still hoped, even after the failure at Pontchâteau, to see a monumental Calvary erected somewhere, and carefully preserved the statues he had had made for it. And, on a smaller scale, it was his common practice to erect crosses and small ‘calvaries’ in every place where he preached a mission, many of which survive to this day.

St. Louis Marie also used visual aids in various ways in his missions. We know from his Will that he carried about with him various banners that he had had made: banners of the Rosary mysteries and others illustrating various truths of the faith. He also used drama as an effective teaching tool. He wrote and produced various mission “pageants”, like mediaeval mystery plays, to be performed during the course of his missions, even taking part in them himself from time to time, as when he took the part of a dead man on his way to judgement. We have an example of such a dramatic presentation among the Hymns: Hymn no. 127 on “The Abandoned Soul Freed from Purgatory by the Prayers of the Poor and of Children” is preceded by instructions as to how it should be presented: “There should be 20 individual characters, as well as the Angels and the Poor... there should be five chairs, the middle one raised higher than the others, and the actors should be arranged more or less as follows...”—and there follows a diagram indicating the positions of the chairs and the characters in the drama. After St. Louis Marie’s death, his missionaries of the Company of Mary continued his use of visual aids, and were renowned a century later for the splendour of their “mission pageants”.

St. Louis Marie was himself a competent, if amateur, artist who took up painting as a hobby even as a student at the college in Rennes. Though we do not possess any of his paintings, we do have knowledge of a number of small statuettes attributed to him. One of these, a carved wooden figure of the Madonna and child, is said to have been carried by him everywhere he went, sometimes fixed to the top of his walking staff. It is preserved today in the mother-house of the Daughters of Wisdom in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. Others are to be found in La Séguinière (Our Lady of Patience), St-Amand-sur-Sèvre, La Rochelle and the mother-house of the Company of Mary in Saint-Laurent. The statue of Our Lady of Wisdom in Montfort’s birth-house in Montfort-sur-Meu is said to have been carved by him, as is the crucifix which used to be kept at Saint-Lazare outside Montfort, and is now in the birth-place of the saint.

V - Exercises

1. Reflect on your own reading of the works of Montfort. Which of them has had most impact on you? Why?
2. Briefly compare *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* and *The Secret of Mary*. What, in your view, is the most telling difference (apart from length)?
3. If you have consulted Montfort’s Hymns, which one most appeals to you? Why?

VI - Further reading

Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort (Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1994) contains many articles which should be read by the serious student of the works of Montfort. The most important, from this point of view, are:

- *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, by Jean-Pierre Prévost (pgs. 633-648)
- *True Devotion*, by Alphonse Bossard, SMM (pgs. 1209-1229)
- *Secret of Mary*, by Alphonse Bossard, SMM (pgs. 1113-1124)
- *Rosary*, by J.-C. Laurenceau, O.P. (pgs. 1055-1074)

- *Cross*, by Jean Bulteau, FSG, and Patrick Gaffney, SMM (pgs. 255-280)
- *Hymns*, by R. Payne, Odilon Demers, SMM, and G. Francini, O.S.M. (pgs. 515-526)

For his use of images, the article *Iconography*, by Marcel Sibold, SMM (pgs. 527-538) is useful.

Paul R. Allerton, smm

¹ These two volumes can be obtained from **Montfort Press, 28 Burbo Bank Road, Liverpool, L23 6TH**, in the United Kingdom; or from **Montfort Publications, 26 South Saxon Avenue, Bay Shore, NY 11706-8993**, in the USA.

² See the article by Jean-Pierre Prévost, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, in *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1994, pgs. 633-648 for the whole article; pgs. 634-5 for this question of date.

³ H. Huré, preface to the definitive edition of *L'Amour de la Sagesse éternelle*, Librairie mariale, Pontchâteau 1929, 1-2.

⁴ See the article *Montfort's Spiritual Exegesis*, by M. Gilbert, S.J., a translation of an article in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, November/December 1982.

⁵ This last phrase has been omitted from the English translation found in *God Alone*, though it is present in the French version.

⁶ Cf. D.-M. Huot, *I manoscritti delle Opere di S. Luigi Maria da Montfort*, in *Quaderni Montfortani*, no. 4, 1986, pgs. 118-131.

⁷ It is interesting to note that the book by Fr. Gabriel Denis, smm, *The Reign of Jesus through Mary*, which begins with the text of *The Secret of Mary*, omits the practice of the wearing of chains.

⁸ Cf. Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux 17e et 18e siècles*, Ed. Stock, 1964.

⁹ The 50th rose is not included in the manuscript, possibly because the author was distracted, or possibly because he intended the 'Methods of Saying the Rosary' to form this rose.

¹⁰ Grandet, the first biographer of St. Louis Marie, says in his *Vie de Messire Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort*, published in 1724, that "Monsieur Grignon... tried to inspire in all the people the love of crosses, of whatever kind, spiritual or temporal, such as illnesses, insults, humiliations, contempt, etc.... To inspire this devotion, so contrary to the senses and to corrupted nature, he set up associations of a number of people under the title of the cross. He gave them rules and practices approved by the bishops... and had printed a circular letter addressed to the Friends of the Cross, which contains Gospel maxims necessary for salvation" (pgs. 208-209 in the English version).

¹¹ Jean Baptiste BLAIN, *Summary of the Life of L-M Grignon de Montfort*, pg.116 in the original French, pg. 71, English version.