**

CATECHESIS 04

Catechesis about the Life and Works of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort

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#### Presentation

*Whoever enters the small “Chapel of the Annunciation” in the “Luján Village,” the IVE Mother House in San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina –which is our Religious Family’s first chapel– finds on one side wall of our humble and simple “little family sanctuary,” an enormous white ceramic medallion with the image of our dear Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort.* This image was made by an artist from Buenos Aires. In 1984, I had the grace to accompany Father C. Buela, founder of the IVE, when he brought the image to San Rafael.[[3]](#footnote-3) *From his throne in heaven, St. Louis de Montfort watches over and protects the lovers and slaves of the Virgen, for whom he wrote his Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary and some of his other illustrious works.*

*I am going to present his life as priest, missionary, religious founder and fervent slave of Mary. May his spirit and example inspire us to “marianize” our religious life, professed through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, together with the “fourth religious vow”, the “vow of Marian slavery” proposed by the saint. In a spirit of gratitude, we ask for his intercession in this Montfortian jubilee year, so that we may grow in understanding, fidelity, and fervor in our dedication to Jesus Christ by means of our self-surrender as slaves of love to Mary Most Holy*. We ask that we may become those saints formed by Mary who “will have the two-edged sword of the word of God in their mouths and the blood-stained standard of the Cross on their shoulders…[Who] will carry the crucifix in their right hand and the rosary in their left, and the holy names of Jesus and Mary on their hearts. [In whose whole behavior reflects]… [t]he simplicity and self-sacrifice of Jesus…” (*Treatise on the True Devotion, N. 59*) These saints know that the easier, shorter, more perfect and secure way to go to Jesus is through Mary. *We also desire to imitate the devotion to Mary (according to Saint Louis Marie) of Saint John Paul II, our Religious Family’s Spiritual Father.* Whose motto, written on the day of his episcopal ordination (September 28. 1958), repeated on the day after his pontifical election (October 17. 1978), and engraved on his heart and his shield was *Totus tuus* – All yours. These words were taken from the *Treatise on the True Devotion* (N. 216).[[4]](#footnote-4) Fulfilling the Virgin Mary’s request in Fatima, he solemnly consecrated the whole world to her in union with the universal episcopate on March 25, 1984. The day on which, by the inscrutable design of Providence, our Religious Family was born.

#### Birth, Infancy, and Youth

Around the year 1400, a gigantic Spanish missionary, Saint Vincent Ferrer, preached all over western France. After his passage, he left the echoes of a prophecy floating in time: a great man, a missionary blessed by God, would arise from that region. Almost three centuries later, on January 31, 1673, the first child of many was born in the Christian home of Grignion in Montfort, French Brittany. He was baptized and named Louis Marie. He grew up incorporating and practicing the family piety that reigned in their home. He then studied in the Jesuit school in Rennes, where some exemplary priests (among them an uncle, with whom he lived) helped form him in doctrine, Marian piety, and his commencing apostolate, especially with the poor and the needy. At the same time, these priests firmly planted in him contradiction to society’s liberal and frivolous worldliness, which surrounded him. This contradiction to the world expressed itself in a strong personality rooted in great stoutness, energy and physical strength with a radical and impulsive temperament. Grace and nature go hand-in-hand, and thus forged a great-souled youth. There he formed lifetime friendships with persons who shared his formation and ideals, such as the future canon of Rheims and his future biographer, John Baptist Blain, and John Baptist de la Salle. Towards the end of this period, at the age of 17 or 18, his friends noted his decided firmness as “with the step of a giant” on the way of sanctity shown especially in his assiduousness in prayer and penance. With some of his companions, he founded a small, regulated society and charitable apostolate with the poor. Several works, which were exemplary for that time, show that the young Montfort embodied the evangelical radicalism early on, without delay.[[5]](#footnote-5) Sanctity already showed itself in a youthful character forged in the “all or nothing,” or better said, in “all of God and nothing of the world…”

#### Vocation and Seminary

He confided a very intimate aspiration to a friend resuming the interior motion of the vocation to evangelical, priestly and missionary life: “to leave the paternal home, to go to an unknown country, so that deprived of all the goods of the earth, I could live poorly and beg for bread…”[[6]](#footnote-6)

At the age of 19, after finishing his studies, he, with a determined abandonment to Providence, left on foot to Paris to enter the seminary of Saint Sulpice. When a beggar came along, the young Louis continued on his way dressed as a poor man while the beggar kept his clothes.

While studying in the Seminary, he lived in a residence for poor seminarians, even keeping watch over the dead in order to receive alms with which he sustained himself. He dedicated himself not only to study, but also to a life of extraordinary mortification, penance, prayer, and to a love of the Cross that amazed his formators and companions. He lived out what he meditated from a book of Boudon: “The grace of God is a grace that nails to the cross. The spirit of the cross is the spirit of our spirit; it is the life of our life.” The mortification and the privations imposed on him by poverty were so great that he fell gravely ill and was brought to the point of death, yet he recovered and was admitted to the boarding school of Saint Sulpice.

It is written that: “if Louis Marie Grignion had died at the age of 22, the vigil of the day on which he was to enter Saint Sulpice, he would have left the image of a young saint quite similar to the angelic Louis Gonzaga. They possessed the same tender devotion to Mary, the same horror of sin and of scandal, the same care of the senses, the same asceticism that frightens, the same absorption in God.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The young seminarian’s evangelical radicalism did not quite fit in with the community discipline of the Seminary, (which was very formalistic in the biographers’ opinions) and thus he was subject to merciless humiliations and corrections due to his “extraordinary way”. His humility and obedience in trial give eloquent testimonies of his virtue; these difficulties forged the daring missionary and future saint’s temper. While the library was under his care, he devoured the works of spiritual authors: “almost all [the works]… passed through his hands,” said his companion, friend, and biographer. He fully took on the Sulpician spirituality, represented by Bérulle and Don Olier, who emphasized intimacy with the Incarnate Word through Mary Most Holy. In the seminary he read all the books dealing with the Most Holy Virgin, and took as his own the work of Fr. Crasset: “The True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Established and Defended,” and later Fr. Boudon’s work: “Only God, the Holy Slavery to the Admirable Mother of God.” From the latter, Louis learned of Marian slavery which was “governed by the idea of absolute belonging.” With Bérulle, he proposed this Holy Slavery as a vow and lived it ever since, as a member of the “Society for the slavery to the Holy Virgin” together with other seminarians. At the suggestion of the Sulpician superior, they defined their surrender as “slave of Jesus in Mary” – which was more in line with the original Berullian and Sulpician inspiration.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

As immediate preparation for ordination, he made a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Chartres and there remained all day in prayer. In Notre Dame de Paris, he pronounced a vow of chastity, offering himself “as a spotless victim”, making an immolation of his flesh.[[9]](#footnote-9) On June 5, 1700, he was ordained a priest; “then I saw a man like an angel at the altar,”[[10]](#footnote-10) recounted the saint’s biographer friend regarding his first Mass.

#### First Apostolates, Contradictions, and the Love of Eternal Wisdom

As soon as Montfort was ordained priest, he asked to be sent to the Canadian mission; however, his superiors, fearing that he would let himself be carried away by excessive zeal, sent him to a community in Nantes. At that time he wrote: “…seeing the needs of the Church, I cannot prevent myself of continually asking, moaning for a small, poor company of good prieststo exercise that task under the banner and protection of Mary.”

The vicissitudes of his priestly life brought him to be the chaplain of the Hospital of Poitiers, the hospice of the poor, invalids, and the sick. This hospital sheltered some 400 souls, and, in his zeal, Saint Louis Gringion made himself poor with the poor by his untiringly generosity. However, he clashed strongly with the moral and administrative disorder due to his desire to Christianize the house. During this period he organized formation meetings with the youth and was asked to preach, awaking many vocations, among them two siblings, Alejo and Marie Louise Trichet. The former became a priest and the latter placed herself under our saint’s spiritual guidance. Once she began to grow in the spiritual life and works of charity, she had to wait for her vocation until Saint Louis Marie brought the foundation of the Daughters of Wisdom to maturity before God. During her wait, she participated in the contradictions of the way of the Cross: Her mother, somewhat frivolous, told her one day: “You will go crazy like that priest.” She then gathered the first group of young women, poor and invalids of the Hospital, in a small room of the hospital, called “Wisdom” whose principle characteristic was a big cross (now in the Mother House of the Daughters of Wisdom in Saint- Laurent sur Sêvre) in order to “incessantly remind the youth of the adorable mystery that appears only as foolishness to the eyes of the world.” With a blind girl as superior, the congregation was founded under a precise rule of prayer, meditation, reading, work, meal, recreation, and service to the needy of the Hospital. The contemporary biographer Benedetta Papásogli comments:

“the great theme of Wisdom thus imposes itself in the life of Father de Montfort; it imposes itself with a value of shock and contradiction. In the New Testament, the pairing of wisdom and folly is the keystone for the mystery of access to the Kingdom of God. Gathering under the shadow of Wisdom, the daughters more intimately associated to the mystery of the humiliation and poverty of Christ, expressing very eloquently, that the relationship with Wisdom passes through the cross. That erect log at the center of the room with its naked cross of lines, manifests the essential architecture of Montfortian wisdom. She is a judgment about the world that radiates from the glory of the cross, where God has become weak in the folly of love.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

 Two youth from the high society of Poitiers were added to that community, the already mentioned Marie Louise Trichet and Catherine Brunet, who entered like poor people into the Hospital. A great contradiction forced the administration of the hospital to dissolve the community and even the bishop forbade our saint to celebrate the Mass.

The contradictions, misunderstandings and persecutions increased in our saint’s life. On one hand, his evangelical radicalism brought the rejection and contempt of those who adhered to the formalisms of “moderation” in a society whose Christianity was being emptied by rationalistic illumination and “good manners”. On the other hand, his fervent preaching and mercy in his apostolate, his love of the Virgin Mary, abandonment to Providence and by grace, his wisdom of the Cross, which is foolishness for the world, gained for him enmity with Janesenism which swarmed France. He found no one, even among his best friends, to encourage him to continue in his desire for a company of Marian priest. Although he passed through situations of extreme contempt and abandonment, he only ever savored the taste of Jesus’ love of the Cross. It’s worthwhile to cite his letter written from Paris, where he had gone looking for followers:

“…I am infinitely more impoverished, crucified and humiliated than ever. Both men and demons in this greatcity of Paris are waging against me a war that I find sweet and welcome. Let them slander me, scoff at me, destroy my good name, put me into prison; these are precious gifts, tasty morsels, great and wonderful things. They form the accoutrements and retinue of divine Wisdom which he brings into the lives of those inwhom he dwells. When shall I possess this lovable and mysterious Wisdom? When will Wisdom come to live in me? When shall I be sufficiently equipped to serve as a place of rest for Wisdom in a world where he is rejected and without a home?Who will give me this bread of understanding with which Wisdom nourishes great souls? Who will give to drink of the chalice from which Wisdom quenches the thirst of those who serve him? When shall I be crucified and lost to the world?”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Lodged in the most miserable and abandoned way, under a hole in the staircase of an old town house, his first and extraordinary spiritual writing was born, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, which begins: “Oh Wisdom, look upon the strokes of my pen as so many steps to find you!” His entire spirit is summarized here, rooted in the Apostle Paul: “...but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...” (1 Cor 1: 23-24) This is work is the key to understanding Saint Louis Marie Gringion de Montfort. If the saying of Belloc is true that God has given to each age the saint most capable of contradicting it, than it is understood in Saint Louis Marie.

“...not in the contrast with the liberal atheistic figure, nor in the great sinner... (...) rather in the contrast with the “good man,” who risks nothing, who dares nothing, who loves nothing... (...) not sin in its profundity of denial; rather the “bourgeois” face and the mediocre: not rejection, rather that subtle rejection known as compromise; not atheism, rather the re-dimensioned God, forced into the box of human egoism. To this man Louis opposes He, whom Pilate designated as “without grace nor beauty,” in the nudity of his total donation. This is the meaning of carrying his cross, shouting the beatitudes in the face of his own times, accepting the consequences of God’s logic in his own life. He would not have screamed so loud if he had not felt so deep an urgency... (...) In this light we must read, in what follows, all the missionary’s successes: measure his gigantic Calvaries, understand his raging gestures of love; gestures of which he took upon himself, with the dramatic language of prophetic symbolism, the risk, and the spiritual passion which an ever more secular civilization had rejected.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

#### Pilgrimage to Loreto and Rome. Pontifical Missionary Sending.

After another brief phase in the Poitiers Hospital where he had been recalled by the poor and even the bishop himself, yet ever amid new contradictions, the saint began the great activity to which he would be dedicated until the end of his days: popular missions. In one of the first missions in a suburban neighborhood of Poitiers, the vicar of the diocese interrupted, putting an abrupt end to the copious fruits, prohibiting his preaching, and suspending the spectacle. The kneeling and indifferent Louis, humiliated before of all, only said: “My brothers, we were preparing to plant a cross at the door of the Church. God has not wanted it oursuperiors oppose it. Let us plant it in the middle of our hearts.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

He made the decision to go on pilgrimage to Rome, to prostrate before the feet of the Pope, placing himself at the Pope’s disposal, in order to ask “to be sent from church to church,” as a missionary. He went first to Loreto, the most important Marian Sanctuary of that time, and celebrated Mass on the altar of the Holy House. In silent colloquy with the Blessed Virgin Mary, he spent some days preparing himself for that crucial interview with the Vicar of Christ. Some opinions hold that there he received the inspiration for the future “Treatise on the True Devotion”.

Before the Pope, he asked to be sent as a missionary to faraway lands. However, the Pope, who had measured the saint’s stature present before him, told him: “Sir, you have a fairly vast field in France to exercise your zeal. Do not go elsewhere. Work always with perfect submission to the bishops in the dioceses where you will be called, and God will bless your work.”[[15]](#footnote-15) While Louis Marie spoke of his projects, the Pope certainly thought “in the meantime, that difficult land of the French dioceses, where Gallican currents and Jansenism push it farther from Rome, … corrodes in faith and fidelity.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Louis received the title of “apostolic missionary” and the Pontiff blessed a small ivory crucifix that he presented the saint, who fixed it upon his pilgrim staff.

The short period in which he carried out his missionary activity is also the climax of the long Jansenist controversy in France. Our apostolic missionary had to confront this insidious deformation of faith and Christian morals on various occasions due to his fidelity to Rome, preaching of mercy, search for the poor and little, insistence for the reception of the sacraments, and tender devotion of Marian slavery. This only partly explains the persecutions and obstacles that Louis would find as a missionary.

He began the tireless itinerary of his popular missions in Northeast France by first adding himself to some team of another missionary and later continued with his own. Ridded of everything, he went only with his bag and staff in hand, with his heart crucified and free. As a great contemporary biographer of our saint, B. Papásogli, said “a mystery of intimate treasure is prefigured in Louis’s solitude on the ways that lead to men. Some have said that for him the way is the monk’s cell; it’s also (...) the place where he died to himself, the tomb where he lived; in the dynamic psychology which is characteristic, the hard and sweet point of the Paschal liberation.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

#### Missions and Contradictions

The following missions are full of exemplary gestures and anecdotes, fiery preaching, extreme love for the poor, conversions of the masses, and also very resonant for some select souls: many confessions; public manifestations of the renewal of baptismal promises; public consecration to Jesus Christ through Mary; burning of impious books; processions; diffusion of pious popular songs; restauration of hermitages, chapels, and churches; institution of confraternities of penitents of the Sacred Heart and of the Virgin Mary, of the Rosary, of Saint Michael for soldiers; the “Association of the Friends of the Cross;” blessing of Crosses and Calvaries in towns and paths; and persons dedicated to works of piety, apostolate, and charity.

On one occasion, a parish priest expressed his astonishment at the effectiveness of his preaching and the saint shared with him a secret: “I have made more than two thousand leagues of pilgrimages to ask God for the grace to touch hearts, and He has heard me.” But these aren’t only his words, but rather are an authentic compendium of his soul and his passion for God. “This priest, with his mended cassock and his heroism of charity, is the very message, the living word that ‘touches hearts.’”[[18]](#footnote-18) His spirit is possessed by Wisdom, the Cross, the Incarnate Word in Mary, contemplative solidarity, missionary ardor, poverty, and Providence. The Incarnation and the Cross, the two supreme moments of the Son of God’s *kenosis*, Eternal Wisdom Incarnate, are his maximum points of inspiration. And his preaching strives to the heights. There is no compromise that detracts from his words, rather a focal point to which everything converges with the force of a whirlwind. This point is the consuming love of the Word on the Cross, where a *scientia crucis* is born, a wisdom that is foolishness for the world.[[19]](#footnote-19) By means of his charity, souls experienced a sweetness of God’s mercy and consolation.

If well-disposed souls love him, then contradictions and persecutions do not leave him. He is forced to change dioceses due to the, at times public and humiliating, prohibitions and restrictions which he suffered. Yet these hold secret delight of the Wisdom of the Cross and the nail of apostolic fecundity for him. He suffered so much to the extent that he said in a very calm mission: “We are doing poorly here!... We are too well off: our mission will not bear fruit. There is no cross, what a cross!” His native Brittany, Nantes, Luçon, La Rochelle, and finally Vendée trace his missionary itinerary and persecution, crosses and fruits. He writes to one of his sisters, a religious:

“May Jesus and his Cross reign for ever!If only you knew the half of the crosses and humiliations I have to bear, I don't think you would be so eager to see me; for I never seem to go anywhere without bringing something of the Cross to my dearest friends without any fault of mine or theirs. Those who befriend me or support me suffer for doing so, and sometimes draw down upon themselves the wrath of the devil I am fighting against, as well as the world I am protesting against and the flesh I am chastising.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

“...I have forever to be on the alert, treading warily as though on thorns or sharp stones. I am like a ball in a game of tennis; no sooner am I hurled to one side than I am sent back to the other, and the players strike me hard. This is the fate of the poor sinner that I am and I have been like this without rest or respite all the thirteen years since leaving St. Sulpice…”[[21]](#footnote-21)

As said by one of his biographers: “The adolescent who dreamed of running away to adventure, the young priest who solicited for the departure to unknown lands of foreign missions, finds himself in some diocese of the west, more uncharted and adventurous that he could have imagined.”[[22]](#footnote-22) There are so many paradigmatic anecdotes. While returning by night to his accommodation, he once met a begging and abandoned leper, who was huddled on the side of the road crying. Louis picked him up and carried him to his destination calling out to the sleeping landlords: “Open up… open up for Jesus Christ!” That night, a leper slept in Father de Montfort’s bed, who chose the floor for himself. On another occasion while preaching in his hometown, his family, whom he had not seen in years, invited him to eat, and he showed up with a group of poor and needy to share the feast. Another time, he entered a brothel, kneeled down, and prayed a Hail Mary. At that moment, a man “pounced on Montfort as a wolf on a lamb, grabbed him by the hair with his left hand and drew his sword with the other. With a horrible blasphemy he threatened Louis that if he did not leave immediately he would drive the sword through Louis’s body. Montfort, not at all intimidated, responded: “I accept, sir, that you take my life, and I will gladly forgive you for my death, provided that you promise to convert; because I love your salvation a thousand times more than ten-thousand lives like mine.”[[23]](#footnote-23) The poor wretch escaped trembling without being able to sheathe his sword again. On another occasion, a worldly young woman of society sat defiantly in front of him during a sermon in order to amuse her friends, but the saint’s words so deeply moved her that she burst into tears. After Mass she spoke with him at length and entered a monastery. One of the most resounding episodes took place in Pont-Château, Nantes, where he had a monumental Calvary built with the collaboration of all the inhabitants. Many people, even his elderly father, gathered to attend the inauguration, but the day before the inaugural blessing, the Bishop ordered to destroy it. A snare had come to the Parisian court and from there the order came through the Bishop. To make matters worse, he was forbidden to exercise his ministry in the diocese. It is one of his most bitter and painful moments. However, the unfinished Calvary was erected within him. His crucified soul conformed itself to the will of God.

During his stay in La Rochelle, the “crazy de Montfort” became the city’s most sought after confessor. He attracted souls to the pursuit of holiness “with his unwavering invitation to conversion, holiness, the nuptial banquet, poverty of spirit. Whomever sought after the confessional of Father de Montfort know that he was committing to the way of perfection.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

As Louis Marie de Montfort's life goes slowly towards its sunset, and that volcanic nature gradually fades away, the halo of the supernatural becomes so intense that it shines forth here and there in miraculous deeds. As B. Papasogli comments, "to state it simply, without recalling the multitude of marvellous episodes, in this part of his history the extraordinary blossoms under his feet as something familiar.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

During one mission in the city of La Rochelle, there was an attempted poisoning of Montfort, apparently due to Calvinist plotting. Though his life was saved, his health was crippled. From this moment on his exhaustion grew which continued to drain his energy at only forty years old. Not only this, but also due to his terrible ascetic weakening, daily fatigue from the missions, endless leagues travelled on foot in all road and weather conditions, moral tension, profound sufferings and disappointments. He is already, according to the Pauline expression, “spent and utterly spent.” (2 Cor 12: 15)

#### Retreats and Writings. The Treatise on the True Devotion.

In the meantime, Saint Louis Marie interspersed his missionary itinerary with the Exercises and in the search for times of eremitic solitude. There, in divine intimacy, he found all the strength of grace in his apostolic soul. He became intimately united to the saving mission of Jesus and to the mysteries of the Incarnation through Mary and the redeeming Cross. His motto: "God alone," which he wielded like a sword to cut off all disordered affection for the world, conveyed his attraction to solitude with God. His biographer and friend testifies: "He confessed to me that God favored him with a very special grace, the continuous presence of Jesus and Mary in the depths of his soul.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

In these eremitic times, the following writings came to life. First *The Secret of Mary*, the shorter and simpler preparatory work for the future *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgen Mary*. He had already proposed Marian slavery in that first work: “However, St Thomas assures us that following the order established by his divine Wisdom, God ordinarily imparts his graces to men through Mary. Therefore, if we wish to go to him, seeking union with him, we must use the same meanswhich he used in coming down from heaven to assume our human nature and to impart his graces to us. That means was a complete dependence on Mary his Mother, which is true devotion to her.”[[27]](#footnote-27) In this secret peace, probably between the summer and fall of 1713, the *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgen Mary* is born. It is the greatest of his works. This writing is the most perfect and mature fruit of Saint Louis Marie’s spirit. Louis’s prophetic gift makes him understand its importance for the Church. He foresees the wiles of the Evil One: “I clearly foresee that raging beasts will come in fury to tear to pieces with their diabolical teeth thislittle book and the one the Holy Spirit made use of to write it, or they will cause it at least to lie hidden inthe darkness and silence of a chest and so prevent it from seeing the light of day.”[[28]](#footnote-28) And so it happened, for the manuscript – and with it, the knowledge of this work – was lost until its accidental discovery by one of the Company of Mary’s priests in 1842, more than a century after its author’s death! Showing by that prophetic light that Louis did not write for his contemporaries, rather for a future time. “The salvation of the world began through Mary and through her it must be accomplished.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

“Lastly, Mary must become as terrible as an army in battle array to the devil and his followers, especially in these latter times. For Satan, knowing that he has little time - even less now than ever – to destroy souls, intensifies his efforts and his onslaughts every day. He will not hesitate to stir up savage persecutions and set treacherous snares for Mary's faithful servants and children whom he finds more difficult to overcome than others.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

He strongly describes the future slaves of Mary as “arrows in the hands of the Omnipotent” against the enemies of Salvation, true apostles amid persecution “from among the clergy”,

“Lastly, we know they will be true disciples of Jesus Christ, imitating his poverty, his humility, his contempt of the world and his love. They will point out the narrow way to God in pure truth according to the holy Gospel, and not according to the maxims of the world. Their hearts will not be troubled, nor will they show favor to anyone; they will not spare or heed or fear any man, however powerful he may be.They will have the two-edged sword of the word of God in their mouths and the blood-stained standard of the Cross on their shoulders. They will carry the crucifix in their right hand and the rosary in their left, andthe holy names of Jesus and Mary on their heart. The simplicity and self-sacrifice of Jesus will be reflected in their whole behavior.

Such are the great men who are to come. By the will of God Mary is to prepare them to extend his rule over the impious and unbelievers. But when and how will this come about? Only God knows. For our part we must yearn and wait for it in silence and in prayer: “I have waited and waited. ‘*Expectans exspectavi.*’”[[31]](#footnote-31)

His life – as B. Papásogli said – is the key to reading the *Treatise*. He proposes to us the most complete and total, “easy, short, perfect, and secure”[[32]](#footnote-32) way to belong totally to Jesus: “to do all through Mary, with Mary, in Mary, and for Mary.”[[33]](#footnote-33) We cannot elaborate further here on this, for it deserves special consideration apart.

His writings manifest the expansion of his missionary spirit in space and time to the universal Church. He longs for a missionary congregation, a “Company of Mary”, but he is not able to fulfil this desire in his lifetime, which he felt was coming to an end. Therefore, he places everything in God's hands, writing his *Prayer for Missionaries*, to He whom he had begged to send workers into his harvest:

“Be mindful of this, your Congregation, for it is you alone who must, by your grace, make it a living reality. If man is the first to put his hand to the work, nothing will come of it. If he contributes anything of his own to what you are doing, the entire undertaking will be warped and come down in ruins.

*Tuae Congregationis*: your own Congregation. *Opus tuum fac*, it is your work, great God. Make your divine purpose a reality. Muster your chosen men from every corner of your dominions. Call them and gather them together. Mobilize them and make of them an army to fight against your enemies.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

In his supplication, which merits to be more extensively delivered and commented upon separately as well, “palpitates in the universal heart of the Church.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

He later writes, in holy audacity and confidence in Providence, the *Rule of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary*, and a posterior *Exhortation*, when his congregation did not yet exist. Neither was there some possible member on the human horizon of his life! But he is there, Montfort, who first lived and tested this rule, and the Spirit is there who breathed in his interior told him that it was from God. And there is Providence, which he must “conquer” with this act of absolute abandonment into His hands. He demands from his missionaries a “*wayfaring style*”; the most complete freedom from worldly things and promptitude to follow the Spirit's impulse in their obedience to their superiors:

“So, free from every other occupation and unimpeded by the administration of any temporal possessions which might hold them back, they stand ready, like St. Paul, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier and other apostles, to run wherever God may call them. Whether the call be to the city or the country, to a market-town or village, to one diocese or another, near or far, they will always be ready to answer, when obedience calls: *‘My heart is ready, O God’* (Ps. 107:2), *‘Here am I’* (Gen. 46:2), *‘Behold I come’* (Ps. 39:8)…”(6)

“...They must rely entirely on divine Providence for all things. God would sooner work a miracle than fail to supply the needs of those who trust in him.”(14)… “Their motto will be: *Noliteconformarihuicsaeculonequam.*” Do not follow the ways of the world. (38)Charityis “queen of all the virtues is the queen and superior who governs the Company with her golden sceptre. She is its life-blood, the bond which holds it together and its guardian.” (45)

On one of his last journeys passing through Rennes, where the bishop prohibited his preaching, he spent 8 days on retreat with the Jesuits where he had attended school. There he wrote the not any less admirable *Circular Letter to the Friends of the Cross*, intending to resume and transmit the “foolishness” of the *sapientia crucis*: I pray rather that the Spirit of the living God may be the life, strength, and guiding hand ofthis letter; that his unction may be my ink, the holy Cross my pen, and your hearts my book.”[[36]](#footnote-36) He wrote for the laity who have to live the wisdom of the Cross in midst of the world. It is in great measure an echo of the Ignatian Exercises of “Christ’s Kingdom” and of the “Two Standards”.[[37]](#footnote-37) The militia to which the Christian is called in order to follow Christ and His call, does not admit compromise with the world nor delay: “Whoever wishes to come after Me, must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mt 16: 24; cf. Mk 8: 34; Lk 9: 23)

In another time of solitary retreat, he wrote the Rules of the Daughters of Wisdom, having gathered in La Rochelle the two spiritual daughters, Marie-Louise Trichet and Catherine Brunet, from Poiters who had served at the Hospital of Poitiers ten years earlier. It was then that they had begun religious life and took a women’s school as their apostolate. He wrote to them that the “Community of Wisdom is founded not on the quicksand of gold and silver... but on the very wisdom of the Cross of Calvary.”[[38]](#footnote-38) “I will never forget you, provided you love the precious Cross. I am united with you in bearing the cross as long as you follow the holy will of God and not your own. In this holy will I am all yours...”[[39]](#footnote-39)

#### Last Journeys, in Search of Companions. Advocacy and Foundations.

Although still young by our current life standards, Saint Louis was witnessing the end of his days. Being deeply urged by foundation projects, he undertook his last trips, long and full of adventures, to visit his friends in priestly formation and to acquire followers. In Paris, he visited Claude Poullart, founder and rector of the Society of the Holy Spirit. Although no one was able to follow him at that time, his burning words planted the seed in some future disciples who would join him and, who after his death, would found on his tomb the longed-for “Company of Mary”, the Montfort Fathers. In Poitiers, he visited the Hospital where he had left his spiritual daughters in that apostolate and planned the foundation of the Daughters of Wisdom with them. He would later summon them from La Rochelle. Finally, on an impressive journey, he went to Rouen to meet his friend and biographer Blain (who would also write the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle). There he had been a canon and chaplain to the Lasallian Brothers. His last dialogue, which is a kind of apology, with his companion in secondary school and seminary formation, is paradigmatic and very important for understanding Grignion de Montfort’s life and spirit.He, himself, tells it; being unable here to quote more than the following, we refer to another place[[40]](#footnote-40):

“I then began the conversation by pouring out my heart to him about everything I had to say and had heard against his conduct and ways...” “...if he hoped there was someone who would want to follow him in the life he led. His life was a life so poor, so hard, so abandoned to Providence. It was for the apostles, for men of a rare strength, grace, and virtue; for those who had delight in it and grace ... If he wanted other priests to be associated with his projects and works, he had to mitigate the rigor of his life, the sublimity of his practices of perfection.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

Saint Louis Marie extracted the Gospel from his travel bag, and with it in hand asked Blain:

“If he found what Jesus Christ practiced and taught ridiculous, and if he could show him a life more like His and the Apostles’, than a poor, mortified life founded on abandonment to Divine Providence.” “[He] had no other goal than to follow it, and no other project than to persevere in it” [and] if God wanted to unite him with some good priests in this way of life, he would be happy, but it was God's business and not his.”

Back in La Rochelle, his last activities were the establishment of a boys’ school entrusted to a community of brothers that he founded, the “Brothers of Saint Gabriel” and the aforementioned foundation, the Daughters of Wisdom, and their educational work for girls. His last letters are pages of the purest spirituality, in intimacy with the Heart of Christ.

#### Last Mission and Passage to Divine Glory. Posthumous Montfortian Foundation.

In the last missions, he consumed the rest of his strength, but his word was more ignited by preaching from the fire of burning charity that is his soul. Thus he arrived to his last mission at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. On the day the bishop attended the mission, Saint Louis Marie was so exhausted that he did not go to lunch. However, that afternoon the missionary ascended the pulpit, and although at the end of his strength and health, his preaching was so fiery that the audience broke into sobs. He had to be helped down from the pulpit to his lodging called The Providence. There he instructed one of his companions, Fr. Mulot, to “continue the work,” saying: “Have confidence, my son, have confidence, I will pray for you.” He dictated his will to him, recited one of his verses aloud, and being attacked by the evil one, said: “It is useless to attack me,” the Saint continued to the infernal enemy, “I am between Jesus and Mary. *Deo gratias et Mariae*. I have reached the end of my course: I will sin no more.” It was April 28, 1716. He was forty-three years old. At the end of the mission, Father Mulo taddressed the assembled crowd: “My brothers, today we must plant two crosses: first this one which you have before your eyes, and secondly the cross on Father de Montfort's grave...”Everything serves as a symbol. Two years later, Renato Mulot and another former companion of Saint Louis Marie, Adriano Vatel, would return there under this small cross to begin “a small and poor Company” under Mary’s mantle, dedicated to the missions. Saint Louis Marie's extreme confidence and total abandonment to the designs of Divine Providence made it possible for him to carry out “her work” after his most complete identification with the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

#### Conclusion

“God has given each age a saint that is the most capable of going against it,” we said of St. Louis Marie, citing H. Belloc. We must then consider him in the light of Divine Providence, in the context of the time in the history of humanity, and in the history of the Church. Also in the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ and of the responsible correspondence or non-correspondence of people, society, and human culture. As well as considering him in the context of the “signs of the times,” which manifest the contradiction between the love of God and the love of self and the world, in the constant battle between the City of God and the City of the World, between God’s Jerusalem and the devil’s Babel.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, marked by the heroic continental mission, the monks gave birth to European Christianity, that is, the medieval Christian Civilization that arose from the ruins of the Roman Empire and barbarian people that were already largely Christianized. Those missionary, contemplative, and wayfaring monks, both ascetic and tireless walkers, spread the Gospel, sacraments, monasteries, and bishoprics, converting kings, nobles, populations, and nations to the Christian life. These missionaries were originally from Ireland and Great Britain, islands that had been populated by monasteries from Saint Patrick’s evangelization (first) and Saint Augustine of Canterbury’s (second). These islands, called the “islands of the saints”, kept a close union and fidelity to the Holy See. It was upon this foundation that the Roman-Germanic Christian Empire was born, originally under Charlemagne and later Otto, until the height of Christian civilization at the height of the Middle Ages. This order broke down and Christianity decomposed after the Protestant Revolution and monarchical absolutism, the Machiavellian “reason of state”: Rationalist Illuminism. Subjectivism and liberalism of customs were breaking through in the courts of the European Catholic nations, amid nobles and villains, and the bourgeois tepidity pertaining to commitment with the world invaded the clergy. After all this, a new missionary priest, Saint Louis Marie of French Brittany, comes into the scene. He re-edited the saga of wayfaring monks who, a thousand years before him, had planted the foundations of European Christianity.

Faithfully and in submission to the Roman See, Saint Louis Marie’s holiness strongly contradicts the spirit of the world of his time. He was free from all ties, poor in spirit and life, penitent and contemplative, a preacher with the word and example of the Wisdom of the Cross. He was a pious soul and founder of religious institutes, fervent in his faith and trust in Divine Providence, planting the Cross that he himself carried in towns, at crossroads and in souls. He was a sign of contradiction for the lukewarm and worldly as are the Gospel and Jesus Christ.

He was aware of his particular consecrated vocation. He was aware that this call was not only personal but also one to be shared with other religious who were given to him by Providence. He knew that the Gospel and the radicalism of his spirit are for all Christians. His lifestyle as a consecrated missionary is the candle that burns to be the light and the salt that is poured to flavor, it’s the yeast of the Gospel to leaven the dough, to awaken to conversion the lethargic clergy and parishioners. . . in France and then throughout the Church. His fidelity to Rome contradicts the growing Gallicanism which contradicted Roman Catholic universality. His humility and poverty, total abandonment to Providence and total confidence in the aid of Jesus and Mary in the sacraments and prayer, contradicts rationalist Pelagianism. His missionary preaching stirred conversion and trust in divine grace and mercy and contradicted the infectious Jansenism in the French Church of his time through the promotion of frequent sacramental confession and communion and filial devotion to Jesus and Mary. When faced with persecutions and setbacks, his firm obedience to legitimate hierarchy and yet supreme freedom of spirit (which belongs to the authentic sons of God) totally contradicted the spirit of the liberalism generated by the liberal, rationalist and bourgeois revolution of the Illuminism that would explode in violent anti-Christian persecution towards the end of the century in which he preached. The filial bondage of love to the Blessed Mary, the “handmaid of the Lord,” who became incarnate in her womb, is the easiest, safest and simplest way to be free in Christ, the Incarnate Word, Who is the “Way, the Truth and the Life,” the “Truth that sets us free.” It is this very filial slavery that is lived in and proposed to the Church.

It is no coincidence that the Western France in which he had missioned, the towns of Nantes and La Vendée, resisted with heroic martyrdom of their noble locals, their peasants and settlers. These martyrs died defending the freedom of their faith and the Church before the “infernal columns” of the French Revolution. The western fields which he had traveled with tireless feet, watered with sweat drops, indoctrinated with his preaching and writings, and encouraged with his holy example, sown with crosses, were watered with martyrs’ blood. And this blood multiplied the seed of the radical evangelical testimony that germinates in grace for the entire pilgrim Church. Throughout all this, the number of the elect in the celestial and eternal Jerusalem is being completed with the multitude of “the ones who have survived the time of great distress; (…) [and] have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”(Rev 7: 14), those who “conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death. Therefore, rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them” (Rev 12: 11). It is the offspring of the Woman clothed with the Sun (Rev 12: 1) that crushes the head of the infernal enemy (cf. Gen 3: 15), the murderer, the liar and the father of lies, with “the victory that conquers the world is our faith.”(1 Jn 5: 4)

Today, the process of the Antichristian Revolution has continued in the world and culture and has even penetrated more insidiously, with immanentistic and relativistic subjectivism in so many members of the Church. The leading example of Saint Louis Marie and his invitation to be Mary’s children in slavery and apostles is more urgent than ever in these last times.

Almost four centuries ago, Saint Louis Marie wrote for when the devil multiplies his attacks more than ever, “for he knows he has but a short time.” (Rev 12:12) He thought and wrote for the saints of the end times, those called to be the heel of Mary that crushes the serpent. For them he proposed the holy slavery of Jesus through Mary. Hence, Benedetta Papásogli entitled her work on our saint *Montfort, a Prophet for our Times (A man for the Last Church).*[[42]](#footnote-42) If we are at the time of the Church, we are running towards the end, even without knowing for sure how much and how, we know that it is the moment of Mary. The moment of the Woman’s complete triumph, and of the total fulfillment of the first prophecy: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.”(Gen 3:15) Triumph began with Christ and continues “in the rest of his children” (Rev 12:17) who are born with a painful birth: the pain of Mary at the foot of the Cross. It is the Cross to which the children of Mary must be incorporated and which is a condition of triumph. The Mother and her child’s pain grow as the Earth’s revolutions near the end, in paroxysmal convulsions. Because whatever in the Globe does not become a Cross, will not be a “new heavens and a new earth;” hence the Great Tribulation, the final Great Easter. During the new “hour of the Power of Darkness”, the Evil One will believe he will win, when in fact he will end up being defeated. Time runs and with it, it increases the urgency of charity, “because the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14), and the urgency of the mission[[43]](#footnote-43), which the grace of our Institute’s charism has as an end, for, with Mary and for Mary prolonging the Incarnation in everything human. And with that, must not lose hope in the ideal of a new authentic historical Christianity,[[44]](#footnote-44) nor exclude its possible temporary realization. Even in the current worldly predominance of the anti-Christian Revolution, the “dictatorship of relativism”[[45]](#footnote-45) and the “culture of death,”[[46]](#footnote-46) as always in persecution and martyrdom, our hope is that the pilgrimage Church will remain true in time “between the persecutions of men and the consolations of God[[47]](#footnote-47)”, and that the Christian, the offspring of Mary, is victorious.

1. Taken from a book of the same author, *Todo tuyo. Esclavo de María. San Luis María Grignion de Montfort. Su vida, su obra y su espíritu*, Edive, San Rafael 2010. As indicated there, this work is based – as the reader will see by the footnotes – on the *Collected Works* of Saint Louis Marie, and in his biographies – in the proceeding order: B. Papásogli, C. M. Abad, De Luca y H. Daniel, from whom I have been able to contact and cite the most ancient sources of our saint’s life and work, such as Blain, Grandet, Besnard, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Taken from a book of the same author, *Todo tuyo. Esclavo de María. San Luis María Grignion de Montfort. Su vida, su obra y su espíritu*, Edive, San Rafael 2010. As indicated there, this work is based – as the reader will see by the footnotes – on the *Collected Works* of Saint Louis Marie, and in his biographies – in the proceeding order: B. Papásogli, C. M. Abad, De Luca y H. Daniel, from whom I have been able to contact and cite the most ancient sources of our saint’s life and work, such as Blain, Grandet, Besnard, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more information about the Institute of the Incarnate Word see: www.ive.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Also numbers 233 and 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We can say that in Rennes, “a strangely complex Christian proposition came to the eldest Gringion: a background note which distinguished him and it is the high, demanding, heroic character. Louis, if seen in his school years, is with men who take things seriously. The Christian vocation presented itself in him with strong colors and with the urgency of a radical opposition to other aspects of his experience: the encounter with liberalists, the cry of the poor, the charity of the saints, all, in Louis Gringion’s experience, had taken strong and clear dyes, dramatic and simple. And his temperament isn’t one to diminish or blur this first profound impression (B. Papásogli, *Montfort un uomo per l'ultima Chiesa* (Gribaudi, Torino 1979) 29s. Free translation.). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Grandet, *La vie de messire Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort*, composed by a priest of the clergy (Verger, Nantes 1724) 349. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. H. Daniel, *Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort. Ce qu'il fut, ce qu'il fit* (Téqui, Paris 1967) 27.Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Papásogli, 91, citando a J. B. Blain, *Abrégé de la vie de Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort* (Roma 1973) n. 78. The work of P. Lhoumeau, *La vie spirituelle à l’école de Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort* (Bruges - Paris 1954) marks the surpassing nature and originality of the Montfortian Marian Spirituality in respect to the preceding ones. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Blain, n. 187. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Blain, n. 197. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. B. Papásogli, 167. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Letter to Marie Luisa Trichet” (October 24, 1703), S. Luis Marie G. De Montfort, *Letters*, 10. Cf. Papásogli, 190. “Of Montfort’s 34 letters which we have, 7 are addressed to the Servant of God, Marie Luisa Trichet. Letter 15 and 16 date back to 1703, that is, the period in which Montfort, having left Poitiers, was in Paris. For the text, date, and authenticity of these two letters, cf. S. Congreg. pro causisSanctorum, *Beat. et Can. Ser*v*ae Dei Mariae Ludovicae a Jesu. Positio super virtutibus*, Romae 1986, pp. 72-79” (in: *Epistolario di S. Luigi Maria Grignion de Montfort edizionebilingue*, VI, Lettere a Madre Maria-Luisa di Gesù, Lettera 15 (in fonte:Pauvert, pp. 157-I58)nota (2) in: www.floscarmeli.org/Scritti di santi;trad. nuestra). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Papásogli, 208s. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cfr. Grandet, 89-92; 476s; Papásogli, 226. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Grandet, 100. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Papásogli, 233. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Papásogli, 263.Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid*., 273. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Cántico* 19, «Le Triomphe de la Croix», en *Obras,* 806s. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “Letter to Sr. Catherine of St. Bernard (Guyonne-Jeanne)”, (August 15, 1713), *Letters*, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibid*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Pérouas, L., *Grignion de Montfort, les pauvres et les missions* (Cerf, Paris 1966) 32. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Grandet, 364ss. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Papásogli, 314. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Papásogli, 315. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Blain, n. 340. Free translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *The Secret of Mary* n. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Treatise on the True Devotion,* n. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Ibid.*, n.49. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Ibid*., n. 50, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Ibid*., n. 55-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Ibid*., n. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Ibid*., n. 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *Prayer for Missionaries*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Papásogli, 344. Fr. Faber wrote in reference to this that “after the Apostoles’ epistles, it would be difficult to find more ardent words.” (Cited by Abad, In the “Introduction” to *Prayer for Missionaries*). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Circular Letter to the Friends of the Cross*, “Introduction”. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* nn. [91]-[98] y [136]-[147]. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. “Letter to Marie Louise of Jesus” (April 14, 1716). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Ibid*., 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See further: *Todo tuyo*. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Blain, nn. 331ss., also for the following citations. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Montfort un uomo per l'ultima Chiesa* (Gribaudi, Torino 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. John Paul II, *Redemptorismissio*, 1: “The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9: 16))”. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. “ wherever the Church has set her foot she has straightway changed the face of things, and has attempered the moral tone of the people with a new civilization and with virtues before unknown. All nations which have yielded to her sway have become eminent by their gentleness, their sense of justice, and the glory of their high deeds.” (Leo XIII, Encyclical *Inmortale Dei*, on the Christian constitution of States, 1.11.1885, Introduction). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Expression of Card. J. Ratzinger, Monday 18.04.2005, in the homily during the Holy Mass “pro eligendo Romano Pontifice”, Vatican Basilica, beginning of the conclave that he would be elected as Pope. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* n. 21, he repeated the espression 8 times in this same document and in many other documents in his Magisterium. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. S. Agustín, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51, 2: PL 41,614. Cf. Concilio Vaticano II, *Lumen gentium* 8, in finem. XVIII, 51, 2: *PL* 41,614. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)