

## **Montfort, a founder of Religious Congregations**

### **1. Company of Mary, Montfort Fathers**

On Dec.06, 1700, Fr. Montfort wrote to his spiritual director, Fr. Leschassier, "I feel a tremendous urge to make our Lord and his holy Mother loved, to go in a humble and simple way to teach catechism to the poor in country places and to arouse in sinners a devotion to our Blessed Lady. This was the work done by a good priest who died a holy death here recently. He used to go about from parish to parish teaching the people catechism and relying only on what Providence provided for him. I know very well, my dear Father, that I am not worthy to do such honorable work, but when I see the needs of the Church, I cannot help pleading continually for a small and poor band of good priests to do this work under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin." (L. 5) His intentions for a foundation were evident.

In August 1702, Montfort met his friend Jean Baptiste Blain and probably expressed the desire to have him as his collaborator. Blain later wrote, "As I felt greatly inclined to imitate him and be his companion, I was the more interested in what concerned him and anxious to know how exactly I should rightly judge him." (Blain No. 224) In 1702 or the following year, Montfort invited his friend Claude Poullart des Places to join him to found a society, but he declined; yet he promised to help Montfort. In 1707, Fr. Claude agreed to supply priests to Montfort. "If God graces me with success, you can count on missionaries. I will prepare them for you, and you will put them to work. In this way you and I will both be satisfied." (Besnard Vol. 1. 278-279) Fr. Claude died in 1709 and yet the Holy Spirit Fathers continued to honour the agreement.

In 1705, Montfort, while hearing confessions in the church of the Penitents in Poitiers, saw Mathurin Rangeard, who expressed his desire to join the Capuchins. Montfort said to him, "It is God's Providence which led you here. Would you like to help Missionaries in the work? Follow me and thus you will follow your vocation." He followed Montfort and helped Missionaries till his death. He was Bro. Mathurin. Between 1707 and 1711, Bros. John, Peter, Nicholas and Philip followed Montfort; between 1711 and 1716, Bros. James, Louis and Gabriel followed him. Later more Brothers joined him and a few of them taught in the schools he founded.

While working in the Diocese of La Rochelle, Montfort started to write the Rule for the Company of Mary. He submitted "his proposal to the judgment and decision of the bishop in the diocese where he resided. The bishop was Etienne de Champflour of La Rochelle, a very enlightened prelate who supported and was in favour of anything that seemed to him to contain the spirit of God. The Bishop was completely sympathetic to Fr. De Montfort's views and he approved his project and promised to do all he could to facilitate the enterprise and assure its success." (Besnard Vol. 1. p. 286) Montfort must have met the Bishop during the summer of 1712. During winter between 1712 and 1713, he worked on the Rule and more or less completed it before he left for Paris in July 1713 to meet the Superiors of the Holy Spirit Seminary. The Rule has three parts: Prayer for Missionaries 2. The Rule and 3. Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary. The three parts formed a coherent whole since their pages were numbered consecutively. Considering theme also this trilogy goes together.

### **1. Prayer for Missionaries**

Prayer for Missionaries is truly a literary and vocational masterpiece, created in an ecstatic moment of contemplation in which all of Montfort's thinking about the Company was clarified. "Remember, Lord, this Congregation, which you have possessed from all eternity. You made it your own from the beginning, when your mind dwelt on it before time began." (PM1, hereafter only Nos. are given) "Give free rein, then, O Lord, to your merciful intent and raise up men of right-hand whom you revealed through the prophetic insight of some of your greatest servants." (2) "Remember the promises you made to us, time and again, through your prophets and through your divine Son, that you would grant our just petitions." (4)

"Lord Jesus, be mindful of your Congregation. Give your Mother this new company so that you may renew all things through her and bring the era of grace to close through Mary just as you began it through her... It is for your Mother's sake that I make this request. It was she who gave you birth and nurtured you. Remembering this, how can you refuse me? Remember whose Son you are and grant my plea. Remember what she means to you and what you mean to her, and fulfil my holy desires. It is no personal favour that I ask, but something which concerns your glory alone, something you can and, I make bold to say, you must grant since not only are you truly God having all power in heaven and on earth, but you are also the most dutiful of sons with an infinite love for your Mother." (6)

"What, then am I asking for? Liberos, men who are free, priests who are free with the freedom that comes from you, detached from everything, without father, mother, brothers, sisters or relatives and friends as the world and the flesh understand them, without worldly possessions to encumber or distract them, and devoid of all self-interest." (7) "Liberos: free men. Men always available, always ready to obey you when those in authority speak." (10) "Liberos: true servants of the Blessed Virgin who, like a Dominic of old, will range far and wide, with the holy Gospel issuing from their mouths like a bright and burning flame, and the Rosary in their hands, and bay like your watchdogs, burn like fire and dispel the darkness of the world like a sun." (12) "Otherwise, I would be better dead. Would it not be better for me to be dead, Lord, than to see you offended daily so deliberately and with such impunity? ... I would rather die a thousand deaths than endure such a fate. Send me your help from heaven or let me die.... Yet, my trust in you is so great that I am inspired to cry out like another of your prophets: I will live and proclaim the Lord's mighty works. This I will do until the time comes when I can say with Simeon, 'Now, O Lord, you let your servant depart in peace because my eyes have seen your salvation'." (14)

"Be mindful of this your Congregation, for it is you alone who must, by your grace, make it a living reality." (26) "How is it, then, great God, that although it is so glorious, so satisfying and so profitable to serve you, hardly anyone will support your cause? Scarcely one soldier lines up under your standard! Scarcely anyone fired with zeal for your glory will stand up and cry out, like St. Michael in the midst of his fellow-angels: Who is like God? Let me then raise the cry of alarm: 'The House of God is on fire! Souls are perishing in the flames! The sanctuary itself is ablaze! Help! Help! Good people! Help our brother who is being murdered. Help our children who are being massacred. Help our kind father who is being done to death!' "(28) "Let the Lord arise and let his enemies be scattered... Create this bodyguard of handpicked men who will protect your house, defend your glory and save the souls that are yours." (30)

## **2. Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary**

"The priests who enter must be called by God to preach missions in the steps of the apostles who were poor, and not be curates, parish priests, teachers in colleges or seminaries, as so many other good priests are, God having called them to this good work." (RM 2, hereafter only Nos. are used) "Priests and Brothers alike must not accept even simple benefices and temporal possessions, even those they may inherit." (5) "The members of the Company are to have no money or possessions of their own either openly or in secret." (11) "It is strictly forbidden, either during the mission or after, to ask anyone, directly or indirectly, for money, food or anything else whatsoever. They must rely entirely on divine Providence for all things." (14)

"They will obey their superiors wholeheartedly, without reservation; readily without delay; joyfully without irritation; blindly without raising objections; and holily for God alone." (19) "Whether during the time of their mission or not, the poor are to be the especial objects of their care." (47) "The purpose of these missions is to renew the spirit of Christianity among the faithful." (56) "The preaching of God's word is the most far-reaching, the most effective and also the most difficult ministry of all. The missionaries will, therefore, study and pray unceasingly that they may obtain from God the gift of wisdom so necessary to a true preacher for knowing and relishing the truth and getting others relish it." (60)

"The catechist has the most important function of the whole mission, and the one who is appointed catechist by obedience must do all he can to fulfil his function worthily. It is more difficult to find an accomplished catechist than it is to find a perfect preacher." (79)

### **3. Letter to the members of the Company of Mary**

"Do not be surprised if the world hates you, but know that it began by hating me. If you belonged to the world, it would hold you dear as something of its very own, but because you do not belong to the world, you must endure its hatred, calumnies, insults, contempt and outrages." (LCM 2, hereafter only Nos. are used) "I am your protector; I hold you in my hands, Little Company, says the Eternal Father. I have graven you on my heart and on the palms of my hands in order to cherish and defend you." (3) "But it is not enough simply to be unafraid. God wants you to hope for great things from Him and to be filled with joy by reason of this hope." (5) "The man who is truly poor in spirit possesses God himself in his heart." (8) "You must truly value this real and effective poverty to which you committed yourself and have a real love for it." (9) "Experience, then, for yourselves the effects of poverty, for instance, 1. the labour it entails in the pulpit or the confessional by which you earn your bread by the sweat of your brow; 2. the humiliation and disdain which are usually shown to poor clerics; 3. other discomforts which poverty brings with it: lack of suitable clothing, of proper food and accommodations, and the fatigue and traveling it imposes." (10) "Let all your longings be centred on eternal things." (11)

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In July 1713, Montfort went to the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. Its founder, Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, before his death, had promised to train priests for Montfort. His successors were quite willing to help him. But at that time no one could be spared, and therefore Montfort had to return empty handed. In 1715 the Rule was approved by the Bishop of La Rochelle. Early in 1715, Fr. Adrien Vatel joined Montfort. On June 9, 1715, Montfort and Bros. Nicholas, Philip, Louis and Gabriel made their religious vows for one year at La Séguinière. During the second half of 1715, Fr. René Mulot joined Montfort.

During March 1715, Montfort sent 33 White Penitents from the parish of St. Pompain on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ardilliers in Saumur in order to pray to God to send him good missionaries. Fathers Mulot and Vatel accompanied them. On their return, Montfort and some Brothers made the same pilgrimage.

On April 01, 1716, Montfort and Bro. Gabriel reached St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre. Later Fr. Mulot and his brother, the Parish Priest of St. Pompain, joined them. The mission there started on April 5th. On April 22nd, Fr. Montfort fell seriously ill. On the 27th, he dictated his Will to Fr. Mulot and signed the document. On April 28th at 8.00 p.m. Montfort expired. The funeral took place on the 29th and he was buried in the Parish Church in front of Our Lady's altar. When Montfort died, the religious societies founded by him were not well established. Fr. Mulot registered Montfort's Will in Nantes and then came to St. Pompain to stay with his brother. Fr. Vatel also came to St. Pompain. In 1717, Bro. James came to St. Laurent to teach the children of the parish. Bro. Mathurin was also in St. Pompain at that time.

In 1720, Sr. Marie Louise established her first community in the Long House in St. Laurent, which was bought by the Marquis of Magnanne and his niece Madame Bouillé. Later on Sisters had to face problems from the parish priest. Sr. Marie Louise suggested to Madame Bouillé the possibility of getting Fr. Rene Mulot as their superior. Both of them met the Bishop of La Rochelle and the latter asked Fr. Mulot to take charge of directing the Daughters of Wisdom. Madame Bouille and her uncle bought the Holm-Oak House and gifted it to the Fathers and Brothers. On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1722, Fathers and Brothers came to settle down in St. Laurent.

After a retreat, Fr. Mulot was elected Superior General. All except two, made their vows in his hands, as per the Rule prepared by Montfort. Bro. Joseau too made his vows and from 1722-1752, he looked after the parish school for boys. In 1722, there were five priests and four Brothers. The Brothers lived in utter poverty and slept on folding cots. Fr. Mulot later sent two Brothers to La Rochelle to work in the school started by Montfort. As the Sisters needed a bigger campus, in 1723, the Fathers and Brothers came to stay at the Long House, while the Sisters moved to the Holm-Oak House.

A chapel in the Long House was called the Holy Spirit Chapel. Already in 1715 and 1716 Fr. De Montfort called the community by this name and he himself signed "Missionary of the Holy Spirit". In 1728, Fr. Mulot rewrote the original Rule of 1713 written by St. Montfort. He mainly suppressed from its articles the article precluding the education of the youth, since this was the apostolate of the Brothers. The Fathers carried on preaching missions in the Montfortian tradition. In 1749, Fr. Mulot died being affected by tetanus while preaching a mission.

In 1773, Fr. Besnard had to replace the 1713 Rules with Statutes for an Association of Missionary Priests and the religious vows had to be given up to get the government approval. On July 14, 1789, the French Revolution broke out. During the Revolution 4 Fathers, 6 Brothers and 33 Sisters were assassinated. On July 12, 1790, National Clergy was formed. The Company of Mary refused to accept this Constitution. On Jan. 31, 1794, the Republican soldiers pillaged the Holy Spirit House. On Feb. 11, 1795, the Assembly proclaimed liberty of worship. On Dec. 15, 1799, the Revolution was over. In 1800, there were nine Fathers and two Brothers. Then two more Brothers joined.

In 1816 missions were restarted. From 1821-41, Fr. Gabriel Deshayes was the Superior General. The Brief of Praise of Pope Leo XII in 1825 opened the way for the Congregation to be recognized as an Institute of Pontifical Right. In 1832, a new Constitution effected. The religious vows were re-introduced and on Feb. 5, 1835, the Fathers had their first profession.

The discovery of the Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin had a great impact on the congregation. On Nov. 14, 1853, Pope Pius IX granted the congregation papal approval. The congregation went back to its original name Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary. The title "Company of the Holy Spirit" came to an end. On Feb. 03, 1872, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith approved the Constitution of the congregation. On Jan. 22, 1888, Montfort was beatified. On March 18, 1903, the Parliament rejected the request for authorization to continue as religious congregation.

Before the anti-clerical laws came into existence, the congregation opened its mission in Haiti in 1871. Later the anti-clerical laws led to the congregation to to expand its mission to Holland (1881) and Canada (1883). Other expansions took place: Malawi (1901), England (1891), United States (1903), Madagascar (1932), Zaire (1933), Indonesia (1938) and many others. Constitutions were recast in 1904 and also in 1949. Montfort was canonized on July 20, 1947. Post Vatican II period has given a strong impetus to the renewal of the Institute. The Sacred Congregation and Secular Institutes approved the updated Constitutions as well as Montfort's Triptych.

In 2010, there were 850 members in the Congregation working in the following countries: France, Holland, Great Britain and Ireland, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Canada, U.S.A., Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Bahamas, Nicaragua, Haiti, Malawi, Madagascar, Zambia, Congo, Kenya, Uganda, India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Papua New Guinea.

## **2. The Daughters of Wisdom, Montfort Sisters**

Montfort, while working as a Chaplain in the Poorhouse of Poitiers, formed a group of physically handicapped women. He gathered them in a room and taught them meditation, self-renunciation and consecration to Jesus through Mary. A large cross hanging on the wall had written on it a summary of his teaching. On the door of the room was inscribed "Wisdom". This group functioned from November 1702 to March 1703.

Miss Marie Louise Trichet from a respectful middle class family of Poitiers came and sought Fr. Montfort's advice in the confessional. In 1702, when Fr. Louis had gone to Paris, Marie Louise entered as a lay novice with the Canonesses of St. Augustine at Châtellerault. She became ill and her mother took her home. Fr. Louis came back to Poitiers and Marie Louise wanted his help to enter another convent. Montfort said, "Come and live in the Poorhouse." It was not easy for her to enter the Poorhouse as she was not poor. She got a special permission from the Bishop and entered the Poorhouse as an assistant to the woman who was in charge handicapped women. She ate the same food as the poor, did the same menial works, took care of the sick, cleaned the rooms and washed the linen. One day Fr. Montfort told her, "I believe the time has come to give you a religious habit." On Feb. 02, 1703, he gave her the religious habit. She was called Sr. Marie Louise of Jesus.

Fr. Montfort in 1705, left the Poorhouse for good. After 8 years, he came to Poitiers and had a long chat with Sr. Marie Louise. Catherine Brunet, a governess already working there with the poor expressed her desire to join. Later the Chaplain of the Poorhouse at Fr. Montfort's request, gave her the religious habit. She was called Sister of the Conception. At the invitation of Fr. Montfort as well as that of the Bishop of La Rochelle, both the Sisters after overcoming many objections from the Poorhouse authorities left Poitiers and reached La Rochelle on March 28, 1715. Sisters Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet took charge of the school for girls. Fr. Montfort wrote the Primitive Rule and it was approved by Mgr. Etienne de Champflour, Bishop of La Rochelle on Aug. 15, 1715. On Aug. 22, 1715, Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet pronounced their religious vows in the chapel of the Sisters of Providence in La Rochelle.

### **Primitive Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom**

Montfort got inspiration from St. Francis of Sales, St. Vincent de Paul and Fr. Tronson of St. Sulpice Seminary, Paris. "The interior aim of the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom is the acquisition of Divine Wisdom. The exterior aim is threefold, in keeping with the talents of its members: 1. the instruction of children in charitable schools, both in the town and in country places; 2. the proper care of the poor, whether in hospitals or not, sick or not, incurable or not; 3. the conducting of retreat houses to which the Sisters may be called." (RW 1, hereafter only Nos. are used)

"Poor and rich alike are received, provided their intentions are good and their vocation sincere, that is, if they are docile and poor in spirit." (8) "They have nothing they may call their own, not even a penny, a habit, an office book, piece of furniture or article of devotion; everything is in common, and after profession the community is obliged to give them whatever food, care and clothing they need."(24) "Holy obedience, practices with all possible perfection, is the special virtue that should characterize the Daughters of Wisdom." (46) "At their profession the Daughters of Wisdom make a simple vow of chastity for one year, and every year they renew it with the other vows if they decide to do so." (66)

"Beware of people tainted with worldliness, enemies of poverty and the cross of Jesus Christ." (92) "Be strictly on your guard against worldliness in religious life, which is prevalent in most religious institutes." (97) "Pure charity is, as has been said, the aim of the Institute of the Daughters of Wisdom, whether they are engaged, according to their talents and the call of holy obedience, in conducting charitable schools in towns and country places, in administering hospitals, in directing retreat houses, or in caring for and nursing poor incurable people." (99) "Each one concerns herself with her own work and does not take upon herself the supervision of another's." (120) "When you pray, nourish your soul as much as possible on pure faith, without depending on visible and exterior things." (136) "They look upon the Blessed Virgin as the Superior and Mother of the whole Congregation. To honour her, they recite the holy Rosary daily; they feed a poor person every day; they fast, in so far as their health permits, one day a week, ordinarily on Saturday." (139) "Do not neglect little mortifications, which are often more meritorious than great ones and are less apt to give rise to vanity." (174)

"The purpose of the schools of charity is to instruct and promote their spiritual welfare, a task performed out of pure charity with no self-seeking, but only for the greater glory of God, the salvation of souls and one's own spiritual progress." (281) "The Superior should do her best to

observe faithfully the rules and constitutions without making herself in any way different from others." (312) The Rule has 320 articles.

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Towards the end of 1715, Marie Valteau and Marie Régnier joined the two Sisters as novices. Around Easter 1716, Fr. Montfort wrote to Sr. Marie Louise, "If I were to look at these setbacks from a human standpoint, I would be tempted, like the foolish people of this corrupt world, to complain and be anxious and worried, but that is not how I look at things. Let me tell you that I expect more serious setbacks, more painful ones to test your faith and confidence. We will then found our community of the Daughters of Wisdom, not on quicksand of gold and silver which the devil is always using to adorn his house, nor indeed on the strength and influence of any human being, for no matter how holy and powerful may be he will always be no more than a wisp of straw. We want to found our Congregation on the Wisdom of the Cross of Calvary." (L. 34)

Fr. Montfort died most unexpectedly on April 28, 1716 at St. Laurent and on the 29th he was buried in the parish church. Now the responsibility of the foundation fell on Sr. Marie Louise. In 1718, Mrs. Trichet came to La Rochelle and promising to find a suitable place to start the novitiate, took Sisters Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet to the Poorhouse in Poitiers. In Poitiers too Sr. Marie Louise could not start a novitiate. Finally Mr. Jacques Goudeau, who was looking after the chapel in Montbernage suggested to her to start her convent in St. Laurent. He knew Madame de Bouillé and her uncle the Marquis of Magnanne. It was suggested that she and her uncle could buy land in St. Laurent. They bought a dilapidated old inn called the Long House. Further, they secured permission from the Bishop of La Rochelle and the consent of the inhabitants. A deed was signed and the property was given to Sr. Marie Louise. The people at the Poorhouse of Poitiers did not want the Sisters to leave and hence they had to struggle a lot.

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1720, Sr. Marie Louise reached St. Laurent. Poverty welcomed her as the Long House was in a state of neglect. She set to work to improve the conditions. One Mr. René Joseau and his friends came to help her. They cultivated the garden, and made furniture and food was bought. Within two weeks the other Sisters from Poitiers reached St. Laurent. Later on the Sisters had to face problems from the parish priest. Sr. Marie Louise suggested to Madame Bouillé the possibility of getting Fr. René Mulot as their superior. Both of them met the Bishop of La Rochelle and the latter asked Fr. Mulot to take charge of directing the Daughters of Wisdom.

On 7<sup>th</sup> April 1721, The Holm-Oak House and the garden called "Les Huelles" were bought by Madame Bouillé "in the name of the Brothers, who are to teach small boys of the parish". On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1722, Fathers and Brothers came to settle down in St. Laurent. After a retreat, Fr. Mulot was elected Superior General. Fathers and Brothers made their vows in his hands. The Long House property was not big enough for the Sisters and hence in 1723, the Sisters moved to the Holm-Oak House and the Fathers and Brothers occupied the Long House.

Sr. Marie Louise as the co-Foundress of the Daughters of Wisdom and as Superior General developed the congregation. In 1750, she, at the age of 66, visited all her communities to strengthen the Sisters. Till 1758, she founded 37 convents in France. In 1758, she presented to the Sisters the manuscript of the Constitutions which was later completed and approved in 1760. In December 1758, she had a fall in a poorly lit corridor which caused a serious dislocation of the right shoulder. She died on April 28, 1759, exactly forty three years after the death of Fr.

Montfort. She was buried in the parish church next to the Founder. When she died, 175 Sisters had made Profession, 122 Sisters were living and there were 37 communities. She was beatified on May 16, 1993.

In 1789, there were 335 Sisters in 75 communities. The Civil Laws passed by the National assembly in 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the obligation of the oath of allegiance, imposed first on teachers and later on medical personnel, led to the expulsion from their convents of religious who refused to conform and with the confiscation of their properties. The subsequent Law of 1792 abolished all religious Congregations in France. During the French Revolution 33 Sisters lost their life.

After the Revolution, the Congregation flourished especially through the leadership of Fr. Gabriel Deshayes, who was the Superior General of the Company of Mary as well as that of the Daughters of Wisdom. On Dec. 28, 1841, Fr. Deshayes died and at his death there were 1668 Sisters in nearly 130 communities. Fr. Deshayes introduced the Sisters to the education of visually impaired and of the hearing impaired.

The Anti-clerical Laws in France at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Daughters of Wisdom found themselves expelled from 250 schools and institutions. One way of circumventing the law was laicization. Daughters of Wisdom did not opt for it. As a result hundreds of Sisters were expelled from the institutions. Many Sisters left for other countries. In 1900, the Daughters of wisdom were already established in Belgium, Holland, Italy, England, Canada and Haiti. From 1902 to 1912 foundations followed in rapid succession beyond all expectation in United States, Colombia and Malawi. On July 20, 1947, Montfort was canonized. In 1950, the Generalate was transferred to Rome. In the 1960s there were 5,000 Sisters in 400 establishments and 10 novitiates.

After receiving approval in several dioceses in France, the Congregation was granted pontifical status by the decree of Pope Pius IX on November 14, 1853. After Vatican II, the Constitutions were updated. There were also painful departures as far as Sisters were concerned. In 1985, the Sacred Congregation for Religious approved the Rule of Life on the feast of the Queenship of Mary.. At present the provinces of the Western world suffer from lack of vocations. But new life is emerging in the developing countries. The Montfort charism continues to radiate.

In 2010, there were 1651 Sisters working in the following countries: Belgium, Canada, Colombia, USA, France, England, Ireland, Haiti, India, Italy, Madagascar, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Malawi, Holland, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, DR of Congo and Indonesia.

### **3. Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel**

In 1705, Bro. Mathurin Rangeard joined Fr. Montfort, between 1707 and 1711, Bros. John, Peter, Nicholas and Philip and between 1711 and 1716, Bros. James, Louis and Gabriel. A few of them helped the missionaries during the mission and a few of them taught in the schools Montfort founded.

In 1713, Fr. Montfort wrote the Rule for the Company of Mary and it was approved by the Bishop of La Rochelle. The Company of Mary mainly composed missionary priests, but it



had also some Brothers. The Brothers helped the Fathers during the Missions and some of them taught in schools. On June 09, 1715, Fr. Montfort and Bros. Nicholas, Philip, Louis and Gabriel made their religious profession at La Séguinière. Fr. Montfort started charitable schools.

Fr. Montfort, while preaching a mission in St. Laurent and on April 22, 1716 fell seriously ill. On April 27, he dictated his Will to Fr. René Mulot and signed it. He died on April 28th at 8.00 p.m.

### **The Will**

“I, the undersigned, the greatest of sinners, will that my body be buried in the cemetery and my heart under the step of the altar of the Blessed Virgin. I confide to His Lordship the Bishop of La Rochelle and to Fr. Mulot my small pieces of furniture and my mission books, to be preserved for the four Brothers who joined me in a life of obedience and poverty; namely, Brother Nicholas of Poitiers, Brother Philip of Nantes, Bro. Louis of La Rochelle, and Brother Gabriel, who is at present with me, for as long as they continue to renew their annual vows, and for the use of those whom divine Providence will call into the same community of the Holy Spirit. I give all the statues of the Calvary and the cross to the house of the Sisters of the Incurables at Nantes. I have no private money belonging to me, but there are 135 pounds belonging to Nicholas of Poitiers to pay for his keep after he has finished his stay with us.

Fr. Mulot will give the following monies from the common fund: ten crowns to James, if he decides to leave; ten crowns to John, if he also decides to leave; ten crowns to Mathurin, if he decides to leave and not renew the vows of poverty and obedience. If there is anything remaining in the purse, Fr. Mulot will use it like a good father for the Brothers and for himself. As the house at La Rochelle is reverting to its natural heirs, there will only be left for the community of the Holy Spirit the house at Vouvant, which was given to me by Madame de la Brulerie by an agreement, the conditions of which Fr. Mulot must fulfil; and the two pieces of land given by the Lieutenant of Vouvant's wife, and a small house given by a good lady of rank. If there is any possibility of building there, it should be put at the disposal of the Brothers of the community of the Holy Spirit to conduct charitable schools.

I give three of my banners to our Lady Patience at La Séguinière, and the other four to Our Lady of Victories at La Garnache, and to every parish of Aunis where the Rosary is still being said I give one of the banners of the holy Rosary. I give to Fr. Bouris the six volumes of sermons of La Volpillière, and to Fr. Clisson the four volumes of the "Catechism for Country People". If there is anything owing to the printer, he can be paid from the fund. Should there be anything over, Fr. Vatel must be given what belongs to him, if His Lordship decides that this is right.

This is my Last Will, and I make Fr. Mulot my executor giving him full right to dispose as it seems good to him of the chasubles, chalice and other church and mission articles, for the benefit of the community of the Holy Spirit.

Written during the mission at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre, this 27th day of the month of April, one thousand seven hundred and sixteen. All the pieces of furniture at present at Nantes are for the use of the Brothers who run the school, as long as the school remains there.

Sd/- Louis Marie de Montfort Grignon

From Montfort's Last Will, it is very clear that the Brothers and the community of the Holy Spirit were uppermost in his mind just before his death. Actually the Brothers were the ones, who lived close to him. Mr. Gaëtan Bernoville, in his Biography of Montfort says, “In

length of time as well as in depth of service it is Brothers Mathurin and John, Jacques and Nicholas, Philip, Louis and Gabriel and other unknown to us, who were the full associates of Montfort's Missionary epic. They bore the thorns in their flesh, trials in their soul. They shared its deadly dangers. Whether they cooked or kept the shop, set the order of processions or sang hymns, walked miles and miles with their master or taught Catechism and schools according to his spirit, they were the volunteers of the great spiritual combat, the poor, the mortified ones, the humble of heart on whom rained mockeries and insults, often getting their food and lodging only from Providence, sometimes thrown away from presbyteries with their master and spending the night in the open air at the foot of some Calvary, their head resting on the last granite step, in short such as Montfort wanted them, lifted up by his own enthusiasm and hopes, espousing his deceptions and failures, learning from him how to bless them, taught by him the whole day long discovering through him the message of Jesus with greater light as days went on. With him they experienced the fervour of the crowds who were carried away by his words, with him they wept on the ruins of Pontchateau. It is they who informed Fr. Bastières about so many small or great events which form the best part of his memoirs. They were his truest companions in good and evil fortune, in the storms and lulls of life, in time and in eternity."

Montfort, in his journey and during his Missions, was accompanied by only one or two Brothers. Therefore the other Brothers had some other work. If Montfort gathered round him, so early in his career, so many helpers it shows clearly his intention of founding a congregation of Brothers destined to the Missions or to the charitable schools. Later on some of them made their religious profession. There were only four professed Brothers when Montfort died, but all, whether they had vows or not, lived their religious life from the day they joined themselves to him. That is to say, they practiced obedience, poverty and chastity. They had, if not a real religious rule, at least a rule of life and a regular time-table and a set of customs. We do not have the text.

Montfort's Last Will has mentioned about the Brothers of the Holy Spirit to conduct charitable schools. Further we know, from the Last Will that at least one Brother was teaching in Nantes. Since 1716, one Brother looked after the Parish School at St. Laurent. In 1728, Fr. Mulot, Superior General, to better harmonize the community of the Holy Spirit rewrote the Rule of 1713; he mainly suppressed from it the articles precluding the education of the youth, since this was the apostolate of the Brothers. At Montfort's death, Brothers were in St. Laurent, La Rochelle and Nantes involved in education. Later on only one kept on teaching in the parish school in St. Laurent: Bros. James (1716-19), Joseau (1722-52), Pierre (1752-70), Hilaire (1770-80), and Aulaire (1780-91). After the French Revolution Bros. Hilaire and Pierre survived the French Revolution, Bro. Elie was in charge of the parish school from 1801-1822.

On Jan. 17, 1821, Fr. Gabriel Deshayes was elected Superior General. When he came to stay at St. Laurent in 1821, there were only four Brothers, of whom one was teaching at St. Laurent. Fr. Deshayes had started an institute of teaching Brothers, which got amalgamated with a similar one started by Fr. La Mennais. Later on this amalgamated institute came to known as the Brothers of Ploërmel.

Fr. Deshayes sent novices Augustin and Pierre Marie and five postulants from Auray to St. Laurent to join the Holy Spirit Community. In September 1821, Fr. Deshayes came to stay in St. Laurent. As he wanted to start many schools, he recruited many young men and started a Novitiate in St. Laurent. In 1823, Fr. Deshayes wrote a Directory for the conduct of the Brothers.

The Rule of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary was no longer suitable to the new situation of the Brothers. Besides, as legal approval for teaching in schools was obligatory, he got an official recognition from the government as the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Spirit, and the Brothers were allowed to teach in five Provinces. As a consequence of this, the Brothers of the Holy Spirit became a legal body distinct from the Company of Mary, while still retaining the unity as a religious congregation with the same Superior General. On September 24, 1824, 42 Brothers including Bros Augustin and Simeon had their first profession of the three vows.

Fr. Deshayes felt the need to start schools, in order to provide Christian education to poor children in their own parishes. He started or took charge of a number of schools. He sent Brothers or even novices, after entering into an agreement with the parish priest concerned. In 1822, he started two schools, in 1824 twelve, etc. From 1836 onwards Fr. Deshayes started founding schools in the South of France. 1838 saw the foundation of St. Gabriel's Boarding school in St. Laurent. Altogether 76 schools were started between the years 1822 and 1841, out of which 47 were still in existence in 1841. One of the greatest achievements of Father Deshayes was the founding of schools for the deaf and schools for the blind. In 1827, Brothers took charge of the Boys' Section in the Chartreuse Institution for the deaf in Auray. In 1837, Fr. Deshayes started another Centre at Rouillé and later at Orléans. In 1839, he started the fourth school in Lille.

At the end of the 1825 retreat after consulting each member of the group Fr. Deshayes appointed Bro. Augustin as the overall director and Bro. Simeon as his deputy. In 1830, he published the Rule governing the conduct of the Brothers of the Holy Spirit. On October 15, 1835, the teaching Brothers (with a few who were doing manual work) numbering 33 came to stay in Supiot House. One priest made the suggestion that this house could better be named St. Gabriel's House and Fr. Deshayes agreed to it. In 1835 there were Brothers, novices and postulants, all together 132, 57 of whom continued to stay in the Holy Spirit House while 75 were attached to St. Gabriel's House, 33 of them had their residence there and 42 were teaching in various schools.

In 1834, Fr. Deshayes confidentially told Brothers Augustin and Simeon about an alternative Rule he made to the 1830 Rule and discussed the wording with them. He worked for three years at improving it. He signed the altered Rule on January 7, 1837, and had it approved by the Bishop of Luçon on April 9, 1838. However, he kept the whole thing a secret. In this Rule at the insistence of Bro. Augustin, an article was included, «The Brothers choose from their own number a Superior who is to govern the Congregation; he will be helped by one or two Assistants according as the Congregation increases in number».

On December 28, 1841, Fr. Gabriel Deshayes died in St. Laurent. Many came for the funeral. Fr. Angebault, the Vicar General of Nantes, many priests from the dioceses of Luçon, Nantes, Poitiers and Angers led the funeral procession, followed by the members of the Montfortian congregations, the Superior of the Sisters of St. Gildas, boarders, students, orphans and a large number of friends and faithful. After the solemn blessing, the body was taken to the tomb at the end of the cemetery of the Daughters of Wisdom, actually the XIV station of the Way for the Cross, where Fr. Deshayes himself had desired to be buried, and there Fr. Deshayes was buried on 29th December 1841.

After Fr. Deshayes' death, Bro. Augustin took the lead in administering St. Gabriel's House. The First General Assembly of the Brothers took place in September 1842 and on 21 September 1842, Bro. Augustin was elected Superior General. His Assistants were Bros. Simeon and Abel. This was the moment when the Institute got separated from the Company of Mary. The Institute was then called the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Spirit.

In 1849, Bro. Augustin applied to the Government for approval of the Institute for the whole of France under the name of Brothers of St. Gabriel. In 1852, Bro. Simeon was elected Superior General. On March 03, 1853, the Institute was approved as Brothers of St. Gabriel. At the beginning of 1856, there were 480 members including Brothers, novices and postulants and 94 communities. In 1874, the General Chapter completed a new Rule and on July 3, 1874, the Bishop approved the Rule. The result was a small book of 72 pages and 224 articles. This Rule was in force from 1874-1969.

On 15 September 1888, six Brothers under the leadership of Bro. Louis Bertrand left for Canada to start a mission there and on 25<sup>th</sup> September, they arrived at Montreal. They took charge of St. Francis Xavier Orphanage.

The Republicans wanted to remove the control of schools from the clergy in order to reduce the influence of the Church. Mr. Jules Ferry, step by step, brought in laws. In 1879, law excluded from teaching members of non-authorized congregations. The law of July 1901 demanded all congregations to ask for authorization from the government. The authorization was denied for St. Gabriel. The law of July 7, 1904 forbade education of any type by congregations. The 13<sup>th</sup> General Chapter took place in April 1903. It decided upon a passive resistance regarding the anti-clerical laws. Every Brother in France (i.e., nearly 1,000 out of 1,089) would be given a letter of secularization, declaring him free of his vows in order to protect him from legal action and yet all the Brothers were expected to stay, if possible, at their posts and carry on the task of Christian education. All the scholastics, novices, postulants and juniors were sent home.

Anti-clerical laws led the Congregation to expand its mission: 1900: Belgium, Gabon, Djibouti, Abyssinia 1901: Thailand 1903: England, Italy, Spain, India and Madagascar. In 1903, the Central Administration shifted itself from France to Belgium. On Feb. 19, 1910, the Institute obtained Apostolic Approbation and thus became a Papal Congregation.

In 1939, 49 Brothers and their chaplain were massacred during the Civil War in Spain. On April 08, 1942, in France the law suppressing religious congregations was repealed and later the Central Administration was shifted from Belgium to France. In 1962, it was shifted to Rome. In 1965, there were 1,790 Brothers in the Institute. In 1969, there was a special General Chapter to update the Rule after Vatican II. The work was completed in 1971 and the Resulting Rule of Life and Constitutions came into force. The Institute decided to ordain some Brothers as priests to serve the needs of the institute. On April 28, 1986, the Rule was approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious.

At the end of 2010, there were 1149 Brothers working in the following countries: Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Central Africa, Colombia, Congo, England, Fiji, France, Gabon, India, Italy, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Papua New

Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Congo, Republic of Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Tanzania, Thailand and Tonga.

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