

**THE LOVE OF ETERNAL
WISDOM ACCORDING
TO ST MONTFORT**

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Bro Lawrence Joseph, sg



Asian Trading Corporation
Bengaluru, India

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK

St Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort was born in the year 1673 in a small town called Montfort in the Province of Brittany in France. He had his secondary school and college studies in St Thomas Becket College, Rennes, run by the Jesuit Fathers.

When Montfort joined St Sulpice Seminary, Paris, he discontinued his theological studies in Sorbonne University. Thus “he had more time to devote to God and could give full play to his dominant inclination for solitude and prayer.” (Blain p.70) Further “He was more interested in the science of the saints than in theological studies. He was brilliantly intelligent, and if he had continued his studies at la Sorbonne, he would have been an excellent student; however, he was keener on the science of the saints than on theological studies.” (Blain, p. 56)

For his seminary studies he was fortunate enough to get admitted in St Sulpice Seminary, Paris. While he was there between the years 1695 and 1700, he read a number of spiritual books as well as the Holy Scripture. He meditated on the matter given in the books, “The holy ways of the Cross and the sorrows of the world” written by Fr Boudon, “The Letters of Fr Surin”, “The Maxims” by Fr Amable Bonnefons and the writings of Fr Jean Baptiste Saint-Juré. Of course, his main book for meditation was the Bible.

After a short stay in St Clement’s Community, Nantes, Fr Montfort was appointed as one of the chaplains in the Poorhouse of Poitiers.

Here he lived with the poor and lived like them. Actually he lived the spirituality of the cross. Then he was a chaplain at the General Hospital of Salpetriere, Paris. After five months, he was asked to leave. He felt as if rejected by all. "My only friend here is God. Those friends I once had in Paris have deserted me." (L. 15) He spent many days in utter poverty under the staircase of a dilapidated building at the Pot-de-Fer street. His letters 15 and 16 reveal the serious way in which Fr Montfort integrated the mystery of Wisdom into his life.

Fr Jean Baptiste Blain, Fr Montfort's classmate and biographer, has presented a graphic picture of Montfort's stay at the Pot-de-Fer street: "At that time this great lover of poverty used to take shelter in a small corner of a derelict house, near the Novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers. Kept so well-hidden and so few people knew he was there that I had great difficulty in finding him in a place which looked like the cave of Bethlehem; it was a small recess under a flight of stairs which let in hardly any sun. The only pieces of furniture I could see were an earthen pot and a tumbledown bed fit for a tramp or a drop-out. This was the kind of lodging he had wherever he went either from choice or necessity; yet God made up for his poverty, his humiliations and sufferings by granting him the grace of communicating with Him so intimately and so frequently that the servant of God spent the greater part of his days and nights in prayer." (Blain, pp. 220-222)

Fr Louis Perouas in his biography of St Montfort wrote, "We must follow Montfort's pilgrimage in order to understand how, in the years 1702-1704, he meditated deeply on these pages (Wisdom Books) of the Old Testament. We have but sketchy information on the evolution of Montfort during this period." (Montfort, the man and message, p. 36)

During the period 1702-04, his Letters 13, 15, and 16 tell us that Montfort had a great desire to be united to Jesus Christ, the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. During autumn of 1702, he wrote

to a religious of the Blessed Sacrament, “In the beloved cross is true wisdom and that is what I am looking for night and day more eagerly than ever.” (L.13) At the beginning of May 1703, he wrote to Sr Marie Louise Trichet, “What wealth, what glory, what happiness would be mine if from all this (cross) I obtained divine Wisdom, which I long for day and night!” (L.15)

Montfort was very eager to be united to Wisdom and he prayed for it day and night. He, on Oct. 24, 1703, wrote to Sr Marie Louise Trichet expressing his inner sentiments: “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 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 me 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? ... So pray, entreat God, plead for me to obtain divine Wisdom. You will obtain it completely for me; of this I am quite convinced.” (L.16)

Montfort’s great desire to possess Wisdom can be seen in Hymn No. 124, which he perhaps wrote in 1703.

1. “Come, O Wisdom, come! Hear this, a beggar’s plea
By Mary’s womb, by every gush
Of Blood her Jesus shed for me,
Confound me not, nor bid me hush.
2. Why do you so prolong my painful martyrdom?
For you I languish night and day;
My heart keeps calling to you, “Come!”
My soul grows faint with you away.” (Hymn 124, 1&2)

Certain expressions here resemble The Dark Night of the Senses described by St John of the Cross. Again in the same hymn we have:

4. Perhaps you do not want me in your retinue.
At least allow me in that case
The privilege of seeking you
Though finding not your hiding place.

6. Wisdom I am beset by fears and dangers still;
Much cowardice enfeebles me.
I need a bolder faith and will,
A will to love you boundlessly.” (Hymn 124, 4&6)

The following lines resemble the words found in *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

“Where do you stop or stay,
O Wisdom, tell me now.
There I’ll fly without delay.
The love will teach me how.” (Hymn 126, 3)

“And if, O gracious Queen,
You wound my heart tonight,
That piercing pain, however keen,
Will be my soul’s delight.” (Hymn 126, 4)

Montfort’s goal is to get united to Jesus Christ. “All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus.” (TD 120) In his hymn 103, he has used expressions of a mystic.

“Oh Wisdom, God made man,
Oh come into me.
I know you, I call you,
Oh come into me.
With you and your cross,
I am more delighted than kings.

“Oh my mighty Princess!
Oh come into me.

Oh my charming Mistress,
Oh come into me.
With you I have more pleasure
Than what our heart can desire.”

Oh my immortal Spouse!
Oh come into me.
Oh my all beautiful, my faithful one,
Oh come into me.
With you one is more powerful
Than hell and death.” (Hymn 103, 5,6,7)

The language used is the language of a mystic, it is a quasi experience of God. Even in his hymn on the triumph of Cross, we notice the same language:

“Dear Cross, here in this hour,
I bow to thee in awe.
Abide with me in power
And teach me all thy law.
My princess, let me glow
With ardour in thine arms;
Grant me to chastely know
The secret of thy charms.” (Hymn, 19, v. 27)

“The ease with which Louis transforms the whole meaning of his dark night reminds us of similar sentiments voiced by St John of Cross in the description of the ascent of the mountain of love... The fourth and fifth degrees of love, according to the description of St John, suffering and unitive love become intertwined in Louis’ writings that date from this period. The power of expressiveness contained in them is proportionate to what he is suffering... What is most remarkable in Montfortian expression as compared with the language of the mystics is the equation of Wisdom with the object of his burning desire and divine spouse in an evolution towards

mystical marriage.” (Montfort, *A prophet for our times*, pp. 230, 231)

Miss. Benedetta Papàsogli, in her biography of St Montfort has stated: “One image is particularly suited for this interior of Montfort: the search for Wisdom. Father Surin is, perhaps, the initiator of this theme for Montfort, having with unique originality embodied it in his creation of a society which served as a living parable for it. Be that as it may, from 1703 onward, this theme completely dominates Louis’ horizon, for up till this time a different vocabulary has come from his pen: poverty, the cross, Providence, powerful definition of the Fatherhood of God.” (Montfort, *A Prophet for our Times*. p. 228) The same author, in her biography of Blessed Marie Louise Trichet, has stated: “Montfort’s contemplation of Wisdom dates back a long time: to the time when, as a student in St Sulpice, he found in the writings of Father Surin the invitation to embrace ‘the science of the saints’ and the wisdom of prayer; to the time when works of the Jesuit Saint-Juré proposed the identification of Wisdom with the Second Person of the Trinity who reveals God to men and women.” (*Wisdom of the heart*, p. 36)

Montfort was really enamoured of wisdom. a wisdom which is not merely a truth to be discovered but a person to be possessed, namely the Son of God seen under the feminine image of wisdom. On Oct. 28, 1704, Fr Montfort wrote to his mother, “In my new family - the one I belong to now - I have chosen to be wedded to Wisdom and the Cross, for in these I find every good, both earthly and heavenly. So precious are these possessions that, if they were but known, Montfort would be the envy of the richest and most powerful kings on earth.” (L.20)

Fr Poullart des Places invited Fr Montfort to give talks to his seminarians in the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. Not only did he give these talks, but he also wrote his first book, “The Love of Eternal

Wisdom”, during the period between 1702 - 1704. “This book which collects together the themes developed in the conferences at the Seminary of the Holy Spirit is his response to the crisis that threatens to stifle him. It represents the overcoming of the crisis and, in some sense, an interpretation of its authentic meaning; it grows out of his love and contemplation. In fact, in order to understand the real significance of his desert experience, a reading of this book is indispensable.” (Montfort, *A Prophet for our Times*. p. 231)

Fr Pérouas has this say about this book: “Mr Grignon is putting down on paper his own contemplation, rather than writing a book for others. He finds in the biblical texts what he is looking for. This gives to these pages a personal touch and freshness which will be missing in his other writings.” (Montfort, *Man and Message*, pp. 37,38) This book is a long meditation on the mystery of Incarnation. The loving contemplation of Jesus in His mysteries led him to a great desire for communion with him. St Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20) This same aspect is the leitmotiv of Montfort’s spiritual doctrine. His silent meditation is centred on Christ.

Fr Raymond Deville in his book on the French School of Spirituality has made this comment: “Especially on the topic of Eternal Wisdom, Montfort follows the Berullian thought, enriching it by a sort of long and loving contemplation of that Wisdom of God, who is none other than the Word Incarnate.” (*L'école française de spiritualité*, p.139) Even if Berulle loved to speak about Divine Wisdom, Montfort is the one among all the great Berullians, who has best understood and expressed this aspect of the mystery of the Incarnate Word. His meditation on the books of Wisdom produced in him a real enlightenment.



CHAPTER 2

A NOTE ABOUT THE BOOK

The manuscript, which is kept today at the General House of the Company of Mary in Rome, is in a remarkable state of preservation. It has 146 pages. The first printed edition came out only in 1856. The Definitive Edition of 1929 marked a turning point in the interpretation of Montfort spirituality. H. Huré, father general of the Company of Mary, in the preface emphasized the importance of Love of Eternal Wisdom as a masterpiece of Montfort and as a book of capital importance. He noted that this book alone gave us Montfort spirituality as a whole and that it gave us a more exact and more comprehensive idea of True Devotion to Mary. It invited us to be united to Eternal Wisdom as true slaves of Jesus through Mary.

Fr Stefano De Fiores, smm, in an article on Montfort Spirituality, has mentioned, “Montfort puts stress on certain elements of Christianity which constitute the pillars of his spirituality: God Alone, Christ-Wisdom, the Cross, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, the apostolic and eschatological dimensions...The purpose of Montfort spirituality is union with God considered under the aspect of “Jesus Christ living in us.” Evidently, such a purpose is common to all schools of spirituality. Montfort, however, brings forth a particular aspect: “To make Jesus live in us through that total and absolute dependence that is called Holy Slavery.” (Jesus Living in Mary, pp. 816, 818)

Fr Jean-Pierre Prévost, smm, in an article on this book has stated, “A number of those who know Montfort spirituality well have not

failed to note the great doctrinal value of LEW and its fundamental importance for an understanding of Montfort's work as a whole. Besides considering it as 'an academic treatise' and a 'great work' equal to the True Devotion... the Love of Eternal Wisdom is a fundamental book. It is this book alone which gives us the overall view of Montfort spirituality. J.M. Dayet expresses a similar opinion: 'Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort appears here, as an undoubted contemplative and lover of Eternal Wisdom. This point of view is fundamental for a full understanding of his spirituality.' (Ibid, pp. 633, 634)

"The basic inspiration for Montfort comes first of all from the Bible. Certainly, his choice of Biblical sources and his interpretation of them owe a great deal to the exegesis of his day, notably to the translation and commentary of Le Maître de Sacy. But Montfort cannot be reduced to his sources, and we must recognize, with M. Gilbert, that none of his predecessors among the spiritual writers accorded quite so much importance to the Book of Wisdom." (Ibid, p. 638)

"The Love of Eternal Wisdom displays an unusual characteristic, not only among the works of Montfort but within the whole corpus of Christian spiritual writing, in making systematic use of the Wisdom theme. Certainly, his other writings are also full of biblical quotations, but never before had he made a systematic effort to explore a complete theme in the Bible, including fulfillment and its echoes in the NT as in LEW. That is what is so impressive. It presupposes clearly a remarkable mastery of the Bible as a whole, and a deliberate effort at synthesis. What is so striking here is not the detail of interpretation of some isolated verse or other but the fact that a vast network of texts is used: a large part of the Wis, some major chapters from Prov and Sir, the Prologue of Jn (filled with references to Wisdom), Jas (the only real Wisdom writing in the NT), and the passages that relate to the Wisdom of Jesus." (Ibid, p. 639)

“The Book of Wisdom, as we might expect, claims the major share of attention in Montfort’s reflection. No less than 140 verses (out of a total of 435 verses in Wisdom, or about one-third of the book) are cited by him, and are often quoted and commented upon. We should note, too, that Montfort used the central section of Wis, chapters 7-9: 65. Most of the verses quoted by Montfort in fact come from this section. Taken all in all, Montfort truly made Wis his own and used it as the basic framework of his own book, so much so that this can be seen as a veritable ‘paraphrase’.” (Ibid, p. 639)

Montfort has written this book not for mere reading or for instruction. Mere reading can be tiresome as it contains a chain of scriptural quotations. After a first reading one may come to the conclusion that this book is a kind of bible history in the first part and a book of asceticism in the second. Hence another deeper type of reading is required in order to interiorize Montfort’s spirituality. He is conveying to us the process he went through in order to obtain Wisdom. He is inviting us, like himself, to contemplate the events of the Salvation History as described in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament and also the events connected with the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Incarnate Wisdom, thereby knowing and experiencing, one may get united to Him.

Montfort’s personal experience is that God loves us unconditionally unto folly. He wants us to turn to God, to be influenced and transformed by Him. This transformation will lead us to love God and others unconditionally, as God loves us. When we realize that God loves us we begin to love Him, and this process goes deeper and deeper. Contemplation of God’s love, of the initiatives which He has taken even in our own personal life and in the simple happenings of our life, we will nurture our love for Him.

When we appreciate a beautiful flower or a beautiful scenery, we not at all think about ourselves. When one appreciates his mother’s love for him, once again the concentration is on her qualities and not on

his own. This was experience of Montfort with regard to God. He was captivated by His love that he did not bother about the miserable material conditions in which he was while living under the staircase in Paris. And in his book, he is inviting us to contemplate God in eternity, and God effecting the creation and the Redemption. “This eternal beauty, ever supremely loving, is so intent on winning man’s friendship that for this purpose he has written a book in which He describes His own excellence and His desire for man’s friendship.” (LEW 65)

If one is filled with thoughts about self, God and others cannot become objects of one’s love and so self-emptying is a must. If one is preoccupied with his own survival, then he has no time to love. Only by dying to self and by making room in our hearts for God and for others can we be converted from self-centredness to God centredness, which is the object of spirituality and mysticism.

For Montfort, “obtaining and keeping Divine Wisdom” (LEW 203) was the core of his spirituality, and according to him, “all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus” (TD 120) and he yearned for this union with Jesus. His meditation on the Book of Wisdom led him to take “Wisdom as the spouse of God, a personification of the attributes of God ... Wisdom is with God in the creation, Wisdom is the companion of God in ruling the world ... This Wisdom becomes also the companion of man ... Wisdom becomes the spouse of man. From this derives the major part Christian mysticism ... Spiritual life is the entering into this union with God in Wisdom. Taking Wisdom home, living with him, man becomes capable of realizing his vocation as man.” (Divo Barsotti, *The Book of Wisdom*, pp. 34, 35)

“O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in me” (Night Prayer, No. 20) was a prayer which Montfort repeated often and he yearned for a mystical union with Christ. The Dutch Province of the Daughters of Wisdom requested the Titus Brandsma Institute in Nijmegen, the

Netherlands, to do research work on *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*. Based on research done, Pierre Humblet published a booklet entitled “*The Mystical Process of Transformation in Grignon’s LEW*”. In this booklet it is mentioned: “In our study of ‘*The Love of Eternal Wisdom*’ what struck us most was the fact that its spirituality is highly pervaded by a fundamental undercurrent ... Mystical experience can be described as the inescapable human experience of being seized to the core of one’s existence by ‘Something’ or ‘Someone’; a shocking encounter with the Absolute; being touched at the deepest level in such a way that one is transformed by it and cannot go back to the ‘old self’ without a lasting sense of loss and/or unfaithfulness. The mystical way is the profound process of change initiated by it ... It is also important to realize that mysticism is not just something for the ‘great ones’, the saints among us. Its essence does not lie in a remotely situated final ‘perfection’, but is actually very close to us in its starting point: a passionate love which serves to orient our lives ... Every true experience of being ‘called’, for example, is at the bottom a mystical experience which starts the person called on a certain road and helps that person to stay on it. It calls away from the restrictiveness of self-orientation and makes us go forth to the Other (our Sovereign) and to the other (our neighbour), to cite the adjacent words of Montfort. Mysticism does not just express itself in words; it has a transformative impact on the whole person, on our entire being, and all of our conduct.” (*Mystical Process of Transformation*, pp. 13,17)

Montfort’s passionate love for Wisdom increased as he meditated upon the *Book of Wisdom* and according to him, “The book reads like a letter written by a lover to win the affections of his loved one.” (*LEW* 65)



CHAPTER 3

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

Montfort starts his book with a prayer to Eternal Wisdom: “Because I long so dearly to possess you, I am looking for you everywhere, like Solomon, wandering in all directions. . . . Bestow your blessings and your enlightenment so that those who read it may be filled with a fresh desire to love you and possess you, on earth as well as in heaven.” (LEW 2) Hence the purpose of this book is to invite people to desire and possess Wisdom.

“LEW 1-7 form a whole and serve as a prelude or prologue. This prelude is made up of three elements: a prayer addressed to Wisdom, in which Montfort, in the style of the prophets of the OT and the NT, expresses his conviction that he is inspired to speak while remaining very conscious of his limitations (LEW 1-2); a quotation of Wis 6, which is an exhortation to seek wisdom with all one’s strength (LEW 3-4); and finally a word to his readers (LEW 4-7), inviting them to join him in contemplating and seeking Wisdom. The first chapter is also to be seen apart from the following ones. Here we have an introduction to the discourse, punctuated by questions, which tries to capture the attention and interest of the reader: “Can we love someone we do not even know? . . . Why is Jesus, the adorable, eternal and incarnate Wisdom loved so little [?] . . . What good will it do us to know all the other branches of knowledge necessary for salvation if we do not learn the only essential one, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?” (LEW 8-12). The whole chapter culminates in the expression of one of Montfort’s major convictions: ‘To know Jesus Christ incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need.’” (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 641)

In LEW Nos. 3 and 4, Montfort has quoted the entire chapter 6 of the Book of Wisdom. The author of the Book of Wisdom warns the princes to search for Wisdom (1-21), and tells them how to acquire the virtue of wisdom (22-25). In LEW 5, Montfort tells us, “Eternal Wisdom invites men to come to him because he wants to teach them with a smile. He bestows blessings on them many times over and forestalls their needs in a thousand different ways, and even goes as far as to wait at their very doorstep to give them proofs of his friendship.” (LEW 5)

There is the constant invitation, “Desire ardently to know words, love them and you will find instruction in them. ... Those who seek Wisdom will find her. ... The first step, then towards acquiring Wisdom is a sincere desire for instruction; the desire for instruction is love; and love is keeping her laws.” (Wis 6:12,13,18)

The title “The Love of Eternal Wisdom” has a double meaning, i.e., the love of Eternal Wisdom for humans and the love of humans for Eternal Wisdom. The first part of the book deals with Eternal Wisdom’s love for humans and the second part deals with the means to be taken by humans to possess and keep Wisdom. Montfort raises the question, “Can we love someone we do not know?” (LEW 8) To know the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, Montfort has described the whole Salvation History in different tableaux for us to contemplate:

1. Wisdom in eternity (chapter 2)
2. His action in the creation of the world and of humans (chapter 3)
3. His actions before the Incarnation (chapter 4)
4. Nature of Eternal Wisdom (chapters 5 & 6)
5. His Incarnation (chapters 9 & 10)
6. The actions of the Incarnate Wisdom (chapter 11)
7. The words of Incarnate Wisdom (chapter 12)

8. His passion, death and Resurrection (chapters 13 & 14)
9. The means to acquire and preserve Wisdom (chapters 15-17)

The contemplation of Eternal Wisdom will lead us to love Him, i.e., contemplating on His love for us, we will fall in love with Him. This is the dynamic structure which leads to an interior transformation. “The history of redemption, the varied activities of Eternal Wisdom in relation to us humans, is sketched at such length in part I and presented to us for contemplation precisely in order to show us the love of Eternal Wisdom with passionate intensity and thus to arouse in us a response of love for that Wisdom.” (Ibid, p. 25)

In the first chapter, Montfort gives an introduction to his book and outlines his subject. He describes the nature of Wisdom and the need to know and appreciate Wisdom. He says, “Nothing is more consoling than to know divine Wisdom. Happy are those who listen to Him; happier still are those who desire Him and seek Him; but the happiest of all are those who keep His laws. Their hearts will be filled with that infinite consolation which is the joy and happiness of the Eternal Father and the glory of the angels. ... This knowledge of Eternal Wisdom is not only the most noble and the most consoling of all, it is also the most useful and the most necessary since eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ, His Son (Jn 17:3). ... To know Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need. To presume to know everything and not to know Him is know nothing at all.” (LEW 12) Wisdom can also be considered as a gift, that is, “a delectable knowledge, a taste for God and His truth.” (LEW 13)

Montfort gives us a clear picture of the book by saying, “Following the example of this great man (Solomon), I am going in my simple way, to portray Eternal Wisdom before, during and after his Incarnation and show by what means we can possess and keep him.” (LEW 7) “Starting with his very origin, we shall consider Wisdom in eternity, dwelling in his Father’s bosom and object of his Father’s love. Next we shall see him in time, shining forth in the creation

of the universe. Then we shall consider him in the deep abasement of his Incarnation and his mortal life; and then we shall see him glorious and triumphant in heaven. Finally we shall propose the means to acquire and keep him.” (LEW 14)

The words like “consider”, “contemplate”, “see”, etc., as found in LEW 14 are charged with mystical content. “To ‘see’ is a standard term of mystical experience, one which, along with expressions like contemplation, visions, illumination, belongs to the idiom of mysticism. The words ‘we shall contemplate’, with the author starts, setting the trend in a way, determine also the meaning of the other words and heighten their mystical content. ... The idea is to open oneself to and to appropriate Eternal Wisdom by continually pondering and ‘inhaling’, as it were, the story of Eternal Wisdom from the beginning to the end of the history of redemption. That is the focus of the entire first part of LEW.” (Ibid, pp. 23,25)



CHAPTER 4

THE ETERNAL WISDOM IN ETERNITY

In Chapter 2, Montfort presents us **the first tableau** for our contemplation. “Here, with St Paul, we must declare, ‘O the depth, the immensity and the incomprehensibility of the Wisdom of God!’ (Col 1:16)” (LEW 15) Montfort gives an exposition of Wisdom, beginning with his dwelling in the womb of his Father. It is this personal relationship of Wisdom with the Father that constitutes the excellence of his being. Montfort wants us to consider “Wisdom in eternity, dwelling in his Father’s bosom and object of his Father’s love.” (LEW 14) He is inviting us to meditate on what is given by St John at the beginning of his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” (Jn. 1:1,18) Further, Montfort’s appreciation of the first chapter of John can be seen from the fact that he has quoted from it in Nos. 17, 31, 56, 58, 95, 108, 119 and 166.

Montfort says, “Eternal Wisdom is a breath of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. Hence nothing defiled gains entrance into him. He is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of God’s majesty, the image of his goodness.” (Wis 7:25,26, LEW 16) Fr H.M. Manteau-Bonamy, O.P. in his book, *St Louis Marie Grignion, theologian of Eternal Wisdom*, says, “What is remarkable, what one can continually affirm is this double truth: Wisdom is the Word, divine and incarnate and at the same time Wisdom is the Holy Spirit, the divine Love, which proceeds ... Wisdom could be taken both as the Word and as the Spirit. If for Montfort, Wisdom is

surely the Word, eternal and incarnate, he makes it clear that it is not the conceptualized Word of the Scholastics, but the Word of St John (Apocalypse and the Prologue to his Gospel)” (pp. 34,40)

“This is the Eternal Wisdom of which Solomon often speaks in his books, when he says that Wisdom was created - that is, produced - from the very beginning before anything was made or even before the beginning of time. Speaking of himself, Wisdom says, ‘I was begotten from eternity, before the creation of the world. The depths did not exist as yet and I was already conceived’ ((Prov 8:23,24).” (LEW 18)

Montfort presents us with **the second tableau** to meditate upon: Wisdom’s activity in souls. For this he has quoted 32 verses out of 37 from the most famous chapter of the Book of Sirach, that is, chapter 24. Wisdom personified speaks to Israel, “I came forth from the mouth of the Most High; I was born before all creatures... I had my dwelling in the heights and my throne was in a pillar of cloud... Then the Creator of the universe commanded me and spoke to me. He who created me rested in my tent. And he said to me: ‘Dwell in Jacob, let Israel be your heritage and take root in my elect.’ ... I took root in the people whom the Lord had honoured, whose heritage is the portion of the Lord... Like a cedar on Lebanon and like a cypress on Mount Zion I have grown tall.” (Sirach 24: 3-13, LEW 21-25)

Wisdom has fixed her abode in Israel and there she exercises her power and grants all her gifts. Finally she concludes her words by calling all to her, “Come to me, all you who yearn for me, and be filled with my fruits.... Those who listen to me will not be put to shame; those who work with me will not sin.” (Sirach 24:19-22, LEW 27,28) This beautiful hymn forms the climax of the whole book of Sirach. Wisdom, who has throne in heaven, has chosen to dwell in Israel, i.e., in us. Montfort has given a small commentary on the verses in LEW 29 and concludes the chapter by saying, “Divine

Wisdom shows himself to be the mother and source of all good and he exhorts all people to give up everything and desire him alone... In verses 30 and 31, divine Wisdom lists three degrees in holy living: 1. Listen to God with humble submission; 2. act in him and through him with persevering fidelity; 3. finally, seek to acquire the light and unction you need to inspire others with that love for Wisdom which will lead them to eternal life.” (LEW 30)

Fr Ernest Lussier, s.s.s., in *Old Testament Reading Guide* on the Book of Sirach has said, “This chapter 24 is the high point of the book. It stands out by the beauty of its form and the depth of its doctrine. The introduction (1-2) presents Wisdom sounding her own praise. She describes her divine origin and her action in the physical world (3-6), her residence in Israel (7-12), her growth and her fruits (13-17), and finally makes her appeal (18-21). The author then shows her manifestation in the Law (22-27). He has drawn from that source for those who wish to be wise (28-31).” (pp. 96,87)

Seeking and obtaining Wisdom, according to Montfort, is the goal of Christian spirituality and mysticism. He tells us, “All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus.” (TD 120) Wisdom became incarnate to live among all people in order to draw them to himself. Fr Maurice Gilbert, sj, while writing about the personification of Wisdom in Old Testament, has said, “Wisdom, is she not the figure of Revelation of God to his people, the Revelation which makes itself known through acts and words... Ben Sirach underlines that Wisdom, who has come to dwell in Jacob, is none other than the Presence of God in the midst of his people. Presence is actualized in the temple; but it is also enlarged to include the whole people of God. The Presence finally offers itself to us as food to be welcomed or to make it our own everyday with docility. This is authentic cult.” (Cahiers Evangile, Mai 1980, pp. 31,32)



CHAPTER 5

THE POWER OF WISDOM IN CREATION

In Chapter 3, Montfort presents the **third Tableau**, ‘Wisdom’s action during creation’. Montfort invites us to contemplate the beauty of creation and to look at God’s love for man as shown by this wonderful creation. “Solomon says that Eternal Wisdom is the mother and maker of all things. Notice that Solomon does not call him simply the maker of the universe but also its mother because the maker does not love and care for the work of his hands like a mother does for her child.” (Ref. Wis 7:12,21; LEW 31) Further Montfort tells us that “after creating all things, Eternal Wisdom abides in them to contain, maintain and renew them. It was this supremely perfect beauty who, after creating the universe, established the magnificent order we find there.” (LEW 32)

In 1998, in Rome, Bro T.A. Joseph, sg, published Excerpts of his Doctoral Dissertation on the Book of Wisdom 6:22-10:21. In it he says, “Pseudo-Salomon does a re-reading of God’s creative action as described in Gen 1-3 through the attribution of creation to Wisdom in Wis 9:1-3; 10:1-2 and throughout the Book of Wisdom. He attributes God’s saving action right from the time of Adam through to the Exodus to Wisdom in Wis 9:18 onwards and offers a re-reading of the saving traditions of Israel found in the Book of Exodus. ... He identifies Wisdom with the Holy Spirit in Wis 9:17. He speaks of Wisdom’s power to renew all things and of her passing in every generation into holy souls to make them friends of God and prophets in Wis 7:27 thus attributing prophetic inspiration, a function of the Holy Spirit to Wisdom....In Wis 7:25-26 he seems to enter into the very depths of the mystery of God. To speak of

the divine origin of Wisdom without however compromising his faith in monotheism, he has recourse to metaphoric language.... Of the five metaphors of breath, emanation, radiation, mirror and image, he uses the first three to characterize Wisdom in her divine and dynamic aspect while the last (26) two seem to indicate her consubstantiality with God.” (Bro T.A. Joseph, pp. 24,25)

Montfort has quoted Proverbs 8:30-31. “I was with God and I disposed everything with such perfect precision and such pleasing variety that it was like playing a game to entertain my Father and myself.” (Ref. Prov 30,31, LEW 32) We must contemplate nature and come to admire and love the Creator. We need to spend time to admire the beautiful scenery and perfect order in nature. They reveal God and his love for us. “We are filled with wonderment at the changes we see in the seasons and the weather, at the variety of instincts in animals, at the different species of plants, at the diversified beauty of the flowers and the different tastes of fruits.” (LEW 33)

“In Prov 8:22-31 we have a clear personification of wisdom. This has been variously attributed to the influence of various near-eastern goddesses, especially the Egyptian Maat and more recently the Hellenistic goddess Isis in her Egyptian form. Similarly, Sirach in Sir 24 writing under the influence of Prov 8 identifies her with the Torah. ... It is Pseudo-Solomon who is most bold and innovative in his talk of Wisdom. He does not hesitate to use language and images that were used in the contemporary religious cults especially that of Isis. He presents her as the spouse of God (Wis 8:3), an initiate in his knowledge and an associate in his works (Wis 8:4). He dares to call her ‘God’s throne-partner’ (Wis 9:4). He not only re-affirms her presence at creation (Wis 9:9) as in Prov 8:30, but also speaks of her generative role in creation calling her the ‘mother of all things’ (Wis 7:22a)... Wisdom unveils and manifests herself to those who seek her ardently. She communicates herself to them inviting them to an

involvement similar to that of love. She takes possession of them and transforms them (Wis 6:12-20)” (Ibid, pp. 26,27)

Fr Ernest Lussier, sss, in Old Testament Reading Guide on the Book of Proverb has said, “In chapters 8 and 9 the teaching of the book of Proverbs on wisdom reaches its culmination. Wisdom speaks to confirm the teaching of the sages and guarantees by her divine character their promises. She appeals to us not only on the ground of what she bestows (8:1-21). But also on the ground of what she is (22-31)... Wisdom is the most exquisite product of the divine life considered in a practical way, that is, in relation to creation (22-31)... She was also present at the construction of the universe (27-31). The sky is thought of as a solid expanse standing like a vault or dome upon the sea (27). The earth is described as having foundation like a building (28). Wisdom was present at the time of creation, not as a mere spectator, but as God’s master craftsman, object of his constant complacency (30). She worked with joy and without effort. From counselor of God, wisdom becomes the counselor of men and finds joy in the occupation. Man should receive her with docility, for she has shown in the physical world what she can do in the moral order. Wisdom in this passage is clearly a personification of the essential intelligence of God, the attribute which presided over creation. There are some elements of the literary presentation which might suggest a real and distinct person in the Trinity.” (pp. 18-20)

In **the fourth tableau** Montfort invites us to meditate upon the creation of the crown of creation, i.e., man. “If the power and gentleness of Eternal Wisdom were so luminously evident in the creation, the beauty and order of creation, they show forth far more brilliantly in the creation of man. For man is his supreme masterpiece, the living image of his beauty and his perfection, the great vessel of his graces, the wonderful treasury of his wealth and in a unique way his representative on earth. ‘By your wisdom you appointed man to have dominion over every creature you made.’ (Wis (9:2)” (LEW 35)

“We might say that Eternal Wisdom made copies, that is, shining likeness of his own intelligence, memory, and will, and infused them into the soul of man so that he might become the living image of the Godhead. (Ref. Gen 1:26) In man’s heart he enkindled the fire of the pure love of God. He gave him a radiant body and virtually enshrined within him a compendium of all the various perfections of angels, animals, and other created things.” (LEW 37)

Then Montfort draws our attention to the first steps in Salvation History. He refers to Adam’s fall. “But, alas, this vessel of the Godhead was shattered into a thousand pieces. This beautiful star fell from the skies. This brilliant sun lost its light. Man sinned and by his sin lost his wisdom, his innocence, his beauty, his immortality, in a word, he lost all the good things he was given and found himself burdened with a host of evils. His mind was darkened and impaired. His heart turned cold towards the God he no longer loved... In a single instant, man became the slave of demons, the object of God’s anger, the prey of the powers of hell.”(LEW 39)

“Love of Eternal Wisdom has also much to offer in that it is rooted in the biblical theme of Wisdom, the theology of which is first and foremost a theology of Creation. Even if it is important not to create an opposition between a theology of salvation and a theology of Creation, nevertheless the latter is very much more evident in the biblical Wisdom literature. The same could be said of LEW. Here more than anywhere else, Montfort gives us his theology of Creation and shows us, in line with the biblical theme of Wisdom, a vision of Creation that is basically optimistic.” (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus Loving in Mary*, p. 647)



CHAPTER 6

WISDOM'S GOODNESS AND MERCY BEFORE INCARNATION

The fifth Tableau: In chapter 4, Wisdom is depicted as goodness and mercy. Montfort wants us to contemplate the Council of the Holy Trinity during which Incarnation is decided upon. In Nos. 41-46, there is a vivid description of this council meeting. “I seem to see this lovable Sovereign convoking and assembling the most holy Trinity, a second time, so to speak, for the purpose of rehabilitating man in the state he formerly created him.” (LEW 42)

The sixth Tableau, the activities of Eternal Wisdom before the Incarnation: Montfort tells us, “During the whole time preceding his Incarnation, Eternal Wisdom proved in a thousand ways his friendship for men and his great desire to bestow his favours on them and to converse with them.” (LEW 47) In quoting the entire chapter 10 of the Book of Wisdom, Montfort invites us to meditate upon the actions of Wisdom in the history of humankind. The sacred author shows us how God entered into communion with humankind starting with Adam. The meditation on the Genesis continues with Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and during Exodus.

“It was Wisdom who safeguarded Adam, the first man, created alone to be the father of men. He rescued him from sin and gave him power to control and rule over all things.... When the Deluge flooded the earth, it was Wisdom once again saved it, piloting the just man Noah in a frail wooden ark... When the just man Jacob fled the wrath of his brother Esau, Wisdom guided him along straight paths

and showed him the kingdom of God... He liberated a holy people and a blameless race, the Hebrews, from a nation of oppressors. He entered the soul of God's servant, Moses, and withstood fearsome kings with signs and wonders.... For Wisdom opened the mouths of the dumb and made the tongues of the babes speak with fluency." (Wis 10:1-21, LEW 48,49)

Wis 10:1-21 is an ode to praise the activity of Lady Wisdom throughout the Salvation History, showing how she blessed and saved believers who trusted in her. "The Book of Wisdom is essentially an appeal to believe in the God of revelation. This complicated and sophisticated rhetorical exhortation was composed to justify the activities of the God of Israel in the eyes of intelligent, cosmopolitan Jewish students, some whom were being tempted to abandon their revealed religion in favour of prevailing secular culture... He climaxes this approach by the final series of narratives about the seven decisive interventions of this saving God on behalf of his chosen people... The Sage casts his net wide to provide his readers with as many motives as possible for choosing to remain loyal to traditional Israelite faith. The Book of Wisdom proper – Part II (**Wis 6:12-16 + 6:22-10:21**) is an aporia or philosophical inquiry to investigate the nature and features of Lady Wisdom, a personification... The Sage, however, has endowed this mythic figure with features not typical of her biblical role and accented her association with God in his work as creator and saviour. He shows that union with Lady Wisdom is the only way to ensure perfect communion with God." (James M. Reese, o.s.f.s., *The book of Wisdom*, pp. 15,16,18,68)

"Pseudo-Solomon affirms the men 'were saved by wisdom' (Wis 9:18) and goes on to attribute to her in **chapter 10** God's saving action from Adam to the marvels of the Exodus. Besides, even here he selects events which had not been mentioned or not been given importance in the well-known lists of God's saving deeds, choosing events that had parallels to the saving deeds attributed to Isis but now

in order to serve the praise of Yahweh (Wis 10:20). He makes use of language from Hellenistic religious circles aware of its use in those circles but he adapts it to serve his own Jewish monotheism. Thus he assimilates language, concepts, images from Hellenistic philosophy and religion to formulate the faith expressions of Israel... In fact, in Wis 7:17-20 which is based on the knowledge of the real Solomon, he claims knowledge of the branches of science known in his day, to which he makes further additions in Wis 8:8. Probably here Pseudo-Solomon is providing some autobiographical information about his own education in what was the language of the intellectual circles of Alexandria in that period. But again he clearly affirms that it was God who gave him all this knowledge, the God in whose hands are our lives and our words (Wis 7:16-17). And that even if one is a perfect human being, once again a Greek ideal, he will be regarded as nothing without the wisdom that comes from God (Wis 9:6)." (Bro T.A. Joseph, pp. 27,28,30)

"In this chapter of the Book of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit describes the various evils from which eternal Wisdom delivered Moses and the Israelites during the time in the desert. To this we may add those who were delivered from great dangers by eternal Wisdom in the Old and New Testaments. Among them were Daniel who was freed from the lions' den, Susanna from the false crime she was accused of, the three young men from the furnace in Babylon, St Peter from prison, St John from the cauldron of boiling oil and numberless martyrs and confessors from physical torments they were made to suffer and the calumnies which blackened their good name. All these were delivered and healed by Eternal Wisdom" (LEW 50)

Fr Rui de Menezes, sj in his book *Wisdom Traditions of Israel* says, "The real innovation brought forward the Wisdom of Solomon regarding Wisdom is her role in the realm of History. For him Wisdom is salvific. Thus she 'delivered' Adam from his transgression (Wis10:1b), she 'saved' Noah from the Flood (v.4), she 'preserved'

Abraham blameless before God (v.5), she 'rescued' Lot (v.6), she 'rescued' Jacob from his troubles (v.9), she 'delivered' Joseph from the sin of adultery (v.13), and in the case of Moses she 'delivered' people and blameless race from the Egyptians, a nation of oppressors (v.15). Note that the persons we have cited here are only alluded to their names are not mentioned." (p.193)

"Chapters 3 and 4 complement each other admirably, in that they give us a synthesis of the two great theological themes of the OT, namely Creation and Salvation. On the one hand, chapter 3 places us at the heart of the theology of the Wisdom writers, which is a theology of Creation, seeing the beauty of the world as a fruit of Divine Wisdom." (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus living in Mary*, p.642)



CHAPTER 7

THE EXCELLENCE OF ETERNAL WISDOM

In chapter 5, Montfort presents the **seventh tableau**, the excellence of Wisdom. He wants us to meditate on what is given in Wis 8:1-18. He has quoted these verses adding a brief commentary borrowed on the whole from Le Maistre de Sascy. Solomon fell in love with wisdom and set about obtaining her as his bride. He wanted her to be the guide for his life. The virtues which she teaches are knowledge, respect, immortality and skill in government. The Sage, in Wisdom chapter 8, explains how Lady Wisdom became for him the model of an upright worshipper.

“From my youth I have loved and sought Wisdom and desired to take him for my inseparable companion.’ (Wis 8:2) Whosoever wishes to find this precious treasure of Wisdom should, like Solomon, search for him, a) early and, if possible, while still young; b) purely and spiritually as a chaste young man seeks a bride; c) unceasingly, to the very end, until he has found him. It is certain that Eternal Wisdom loves souls so much that he even espouses them, contracting with them a true, spiritual marriage which the world cannot understand. History furnishes us with examples of this.” (LEW 54)

“ ‘Wisdom is the teacher of the knowledge of God and director of all his works.’ (Wis 8:4) Eternal Wisdom alone enlightens every man that comes into this world. He alone came from heaven to teach the secrets of God. We have no real teacher except the incarnate Wisdom, whose name is Jesus Christ. He alone brings all the works of God to perfection, especially the saints, for he shows them what

they must do and teaches them to appreciate and put into practice all he has taught them.” (LEW 56)

“I therefore resolved to take him as my companion in life, knowing that he would share his goods with me and be my consolation in my cares and sorrows.’ (Wis 8:9) Eternal Wisdom is so rich and generous; how can anyone who possess him be poor? He is so gentle, attractive and tender; how then can anyone who possesses him be unhappy? But among all those who seek Eternal Wisdom, how many can honestly say with Solomon, ‘I have resolved to possess him?’ The majority of men do not make such a resolution with real sincerity. Their decisions are mere wishful thinking or at best weak and wavering resolves. That is why they never find Eternal Wisdom.” (LEW 59)

“After summing up his previous commentary, Solomon draws this conclusion: ‘I went about seeking for Eternal Wisdom in all directions.’ To possess him we must seek him ardently; in other words, we must be ready to give up everything, to suffer everything, in order to obtain possession of him. Only a few find him because only a few look for him in a manner worthy of him.” (LEW 61)

Montfort has concluded the chapter by quoting fundamental texts on the nature of Wisdom, i.e., Wis 7:22-24. “Wisdom is an infinite treasure for men. Those who have utilized this treasure have become God’s friends, and praiseworthy for their gifts of knowledge.” (Wis 7:24, LEW 62) Montfort has added to this theme of excellence of Wisdom, the theme of seeking and desiring Wisdom in order to possess Him.



CHAPTER 8

ETERNAL WISDOM'S DESIRE TO GIVE HIMSELF TO MEN

In Chapter 6, Montfort presents the **eighth tableau**, the earnest desire of Eternal Wisdom to give herself to humans. Montfort says, “The bond of friendship between Eternal Wisdom and man is so close as to be beyond our understanding. Wisdom is for man and man is for Wisdom.” (LEW 64)

“This eternal beauty, ever supremely loving, is so intent on winning man’s friendship that for this very purpose he has written a book (Book of Wisdom) in which he describes his own excellence and his desire for man’s friendship. This book reads like a letter written by a lover to win the affections of his loved one, for in it he expresses such ardent desires for the heart of man, such tender longings for man’s friendship, such loving invitations and promises, that you would say he could not possibly be the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and at the same time need the friendship of man to be happy.” (LEW 65)

In Nos 66-68, Montfort has paraphrased **Prov 8:1-4, 15-31, 31-36** to show the desire of Wisdom for humankind. “You children of men, it is you I have been calling so persistently... I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me. He who finds me finds life and obtains salvation from the Lord.” (Prov 8:4,17,35)

Prov 8:1-36 has the last and the longest exhortation. This is perhaps the most well-known passage from the book of Proverbs. Wisdom personified invites the people of Israel to come to him. “In his pursuit of man, he hastens along the highways, or scales the loftiest

mountain peaks, or waits at the city gates, or goes into public squares and among the gathering of people, proclaiming at the top of his voice, 'You children of men, it is you I have been calling so persistently; it is you I am addressing; it is you I desire and seek; it is you I am claiming. Listen, draw close to me, for I want to make you happy' (Prov 8:4)." (LEW 66)

"I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me,' and in finding me they will find good things in abundance. 'For riches, glory, honours, dignities, real pleasure and true virtue are found in me; and it is far better for a man to possess me than to possess all the gold and silver, all the precious stones, and all the wealth of the whole universe, Those who come to me, I will lead along the paths of justice and prudence, I will enrich them with the inheritance due to rightful children and fulfil their greatest desires. (Cf. Prov 8:15-21) Rest assured, it is my greatest pleasure and purest delight to converse and to abide with the children of men' (Cf. Prov 8:31)." (LEW 67)

"My children, listen to me. Happy are those who keep my ways. Hear my instructions, be wise and do not ignore them. Happy is the man who listens to me, watching at my gates every day, waiting beside my door. He who finds me finds life and obtains salvation from the Lord; but he who sins against me, wounds his own soul. All who hate me love death' (Prov 8:32-36)." (LEW 68)

To understand the signification of the figure of Wisdom in the O.T., "a careful study of some major texts is a must. This involves Prov. 8; Prov 9:1-16; Sirach 24; Wis 7-9... Who is Wisdom? In Prov. 8, it is not clearly mentioned, of course, it identifies itself with intelligence, to that profound understanding of the reality, but this does not clarify much. It is presented also as a woman.. The Book of Wisdom essentially underlines the relationship which Wisdom likes to set up with her listeners." (Maurice Gilbert, sj, *Wisdom personified in the texts of the O.T.*)

In this chapter 8 of the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom speaks about her grandeur and her promises. In N° 69, Montfort has quoted **Wis 6:12-15** to show the great desire of Wisdom to communicate herself to humankind. “Even though Eternal Wisdom has spoken so kindly and so reassuringly to win the friendship of men, he still fears that they, filled with awe at his glorious state and sovereign majesty, will not dare approach him. That is why he tells them that ‘he is easily accessible, is quickly recognized by those who love him and is found by those who seek him; that he hastens to meet those who desire him and that anyone who rises early to look for him will have no trouble, for he will find him sitting at his door, waiting for him’ (Wis 6:13b-15).” (LEW 69)

Montfort then passes on from the OT to NT: “Finally, in order to draw closer to men and give them a more convincing proof of his love, Eternal Wisdom went so far as to become man, even to become a little child, to embrace poverty and to die upon a cross for them.” (70)

“Eternal Wisdom, on the one hand, wished to prove his love for man by dying in his place in order to save him, but on the other hand, he could not bear the thought of leaving him. So he devised a marvelous way of dying and living at the same time, and of abiding with man until the end of time. So, in order fully to satisfy his love, he instituted the sacrament of Holy Eucharist and went to the extent of changing and overturning nature itself.” (LEW 71)

Montfort’s praise of Wisdom ends with, “Above all else let us seek and long for divine Wisdom. ‘All other things that are desired are not to be compared with Wisdom;’ (Prov 1:15) And again, ‘Nothing that you desire can be compared with him.’ (Prov 8:11) You may desire the gifts of God and even heavenly treasures, but if you do not desire Wisdom, you desire always something of far less worth.” (LEW 73). But being a realistic man and knowing well his own

times, Montfort warns people about the choice to be made: “But we must beware of choosing a wrong wisdom, because there is more than one kind” (LEW 73).



CHAPTER 9

CHOICE OF TRUE WISDOM

In some ways, chapter 7 seems to differ from the rest of LEW and even from the Wisdom language. Yet Montfort continues to take up his stand within the Wisdom theme. On the one hand, he echoes here the very severe criticism leveled by James at “earthly” wisdom.

According to Montfort, “This **worldly wisdom** consists in an exact conformity to the maxims and fashions of the world; a continual inclination towards greatness and esteem; and a subtle and endless pursuit of pleasure and self-interest.” (LEW 75) “The worldly man bases his conduct of honour, on ‘What will people say?’, on convention, on high living, on self-interest, on ceremonious manners, and on witty conversation.” (LEW 77) “He obeys as faithfully as he can the commandments the world gives him: 1. You shall be well acquainted with the world. 2. You shall be respectable. 3. You shall be successful in business. 4. You shall hold on to whatever is yours. 5. You shall rise above your background. 6. You shall make friends for yourself. 7. You shall frequent fashionable society. 8. You shall seek the good life. 9. You shall not be a kill-joy. 10. You shall not be singular, uncouth or over-pious.” (LEW 78)

“The **wisdom of the flesh** is the love for pleasure. This is the wisdom shown by the worldly-wise who seek only the satisfaction of the senses. They want to have a good time. They shun anything that might prove unpleasant or mortifying for the body, such as fasting, and other austerities. Usually they think only of eating, drinking, playing, laughing, enjoying life and having a good time. They must

always be comfortable and insist on having entertaining pastimes, the best of food and good company.” (LEW 81)

“**Diabolical wisdom** is the love and esteem of honours. This is the wisdom of the worldly-wise who, secretly, of course, long for distinctions, honours, dignities and high offices. They strive to be seen, esteemed, praised and applauded by men.” (LEW 82)

“**Natural wisdom** consists in an eminent knowledge of nature in its primary elements... Philosophers boast that this wisdom is acquired through philosophical argumentation. Alchemists boast of cabalistic secrets for finding the philosopher’s stone in which, they imagine, this wisdom is found.” (LEW 84, 85)

Montfort concludes this chapter by saying, “So let us remain with Jesus, the eternal and incarnate Wisdom. Apart from him, there is nothing but aimless wandering, untruth and death. ‘I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life.’ (Jn 14:6)” (LEW 89)



CHAPTER 10

MARVELOUS EFFECTS OF WISDOM IN SOULS

In chapter 8, Montfort presents us **the ninth tableau**: the marvelous effects of Wisdom. He has mainly quoted from chapters 7 and 8 of the Book of Wisdom to explain the effects mentioned below. “Nothing gives Wisdom more pleasure than to communicate himself. That is why the Holy Spirit tells us that Wisdom is forever seeking throughout the world for souls worthy of him, (Ref. Gen 25:27) and he fills these holy souls with his presents making them ‘friends of God and prophets’ (Wis 7:27)... When divine Wisdom enters a soul, he brings all kinds of good things with him and bestows vast riches upon the soul.” (90)

“1. Eternal Wisdom communicates his Spirit of enlightenment to the soul that possesses him, ‘I prayed, and understanding was given to me. I pleaded and the spirit of wisdom came upon me.’ (Cf. Wis 7:22-24)... ‘Because of Wisdom, who communicates his spirit to me, I shall be found keen in judgment and even the great shall be surprised in my presence.’ (Wis 8:21)” (LEW 92)

“Eternal Wisdom communicates to man the great science of holiness as well as the natural sciences, and even the most secret ones when they are needed. ‘If anyone desires deep knowledge, Eternal Wisdom knows the past and can forecast the future. He understands the subtleties of speech and the lessons of parables.’ (Wis 8:8) To Jacob he gave the science of the saints (Wis 10:10). To Solomon he gave a true knowledge of the whole of nature (Wis 7:17). He revealed to him countless secrets that no one before him had ever known (Wis 7:21).” (LEW 93)

“2. Wisdom gives man not only light to know the truth but also a remarkable power to impart it to others. ‘Wisdom has the voice to convey knowledge’ (Wis 1:7). Wisdom knows what we want to say and communicates to us the art of saying it well, for ‘he opened the mouths of those who were dumb and made the tongues of babies eloquent’ (Wis 10:21). He cured Moses of his impediment of speech. He imparted his words to the prophets, enabling them ‘to root up and to pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant’ (Jer 1:10), although they acknowledged that left to themselves they could speak no better than children’ (Jer 1:6).” (LEW 95)

“3. Eternal Wisdom, besides being the object of the eternal Father’s delight, and the joy of angels, is also the source of purest joy and consolation for man who possesses him. He gives to man a relish for everything that comes from God and makes him lose his taste for things created. He enlightens his mind with the brightness of his own light and pours into his heart an indescribable joy, sweetness and peace even when he is in the midst of the most harrowing grief and suffering, as St Paul bears witness when he exclaims, ‘I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations’ (2 Cor 7:4).” (LEW 98)

“4. When Eternal Wisdom communicates himself to a soul, he gives that soul all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and all the great virtues to an eminent degree. They are: the theological virtues - lively faith, firm hope, ardent charity; the cardinal virtues - well-ordered temperance, complete prudence, perfect justice, invincible fortitude; the moral virtues - perfect religion, profound humility, pleasing gentleness, blind obedience, complete detachment, continuous mortification, sublime prayer, etc. These are the wonderful virtues and heavenly gifts described briefly by the Holy Spirit when he says, If anyone loves justice, great virtues are again Wisdom’s handiwork, for he teaches temperance for prudence, justice and fortitude. Nothing in the world is more useful to man in this life than these’ (Wis 8:7).” (LEW 99)

“5. Finally, as nothing is more active than Wisdom’ (Wis 7:24), he does not leave those who enjoy his friendship to languish in mediocrity and negligence. He sets them on fire, inspiring them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In order to discipline them and make them more worthy of himself, he permits them to engage in strenuous conflicts and in almost everything they undertake they encounter contradictions and disappoints...; But their affliction, says the Holy Spirit, ‘was light and their reward will be great, for God has put them to the test and found them worthy of himself. He has tried them like gold in a furnace and accepted them as sacrificial victims. When the time comes, he will look upon them with favour’ (Wis 3:4,6).” (LEW 100)

“The cross is the portion and reward of those who desire or already possess Eternal Wisdom. But our loving Saviour numbers, weighs and measures everything and sends crosses to his friends in proportion to their strength, and tempers them with divine unction to such an extent that their hearts are filled with joy.” (LEW 103)

Fr Maurice Gilbert, sj, the exegete and respected specialist on Wisdom, after making a detailed study of the “spiritual exegesis employed by Montfort,” wrote an article entitled “Montfort’s Spiritual Exegesis” in French in the Nov. - Dec. 1982 edition of *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*. It was later translated into English by Sr M.C. McAuley, dw. In it Fr M. Gilbert has said, “It is truly surprising to observe the impact of the Book of Wisdom on Montfort’s treatise. I do not know whether there exists any other spiritual writing of the same importance in which the doctrine is based, as in the case of Montfort, on this little Greek book of the Old Testament. If it may be said that, in general, the wisdom writings of the Old Testament has been little used, it is certain that no patristic commentary of the Book of Wisdom has been preserved. The case of Montfort’s spiritual exegesis of the Book of Wisdom is exceptional, especially when we think that his treatise is held by a religious family which draws inspiration from it.” (p.684)

CHAPTER 11

INCARNATION AND LIFE OF JESUS

Chapters 9-14 form the keystone of the book, the mystery of the Incarnation. In chapter 9, Montfort presents the **tenth tableau**, the mystery of Incarnation: The mystery of Incarnation provides us with a large number of tableaux for loving contemplation: the Annunciation, Mary's consent, the Birth of Jesus, the Epiphany, the Presentation of Jesus, flight into Egypt, the return to Nazareth, lost in temple, life of a carpenter in Nazareth, Baptism of our Lord, different events during the public ministry, etc. The hours spent in contemplation of the Incarnate Wisdom will help us to understand his love for us and excite in us love for him.

“During the 4,000 years since the creation of the world, all the holy people of the old Law pleaded earnestly in their prayers for the coming of the Messiah. They groaned, they wept and cried out, ‘Clouds, rain forth the just one. Earth, bud forth the Saviour’ (Cf. Is 45:8). ‘O Wisdom, who proceeded from the mouth of the Most High, come, bring us deliverance’.” (LEW 104)

“At last, when the time appointed for the redemption of mankind had come, Eternal Wisdom built himself a house worthy to be his dwelling place. He created the most holy Virgin, forming her in the womb of St Anne with even greater delight than he had derived from creating the universe. It is impossible on the one hand to put into words the gifts with which the Blessed Trinity endowed this most fair creature, or on the other hand to describe the faithful care with which she corresponded to the grace of her Creator.” (LEW 105)

“The torrential outpouring of God’s infinite goodness which had been stemmed by the sins of men since the beginning of the world, was now released precipitately and in full flood into the heart of Mary. Eternal Wisdom gave to her all the graces which Adam and all descendants would have received so liberally from him had they remained in their original state of justice.” (LEW 106)

“During the first fourteen years of her life the most holy Virgin Mary grew so marvelously in the grace and wisdom of God and responded so faithfully to his love that the angels and even God himself were filled with rapturous admiration for her... Desiring to give himself to her by becoming man in her, he sent the archangel Gabriel to greet her on his behalf and to declare to her that she had won his heart and that he would become man within her if she gave her consent... Humbling herself before her Creator she said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be done to me according to your word’ (Lk 1:38).” (LEW 107)

From LEW 109-116, Montfort describes the different events in the life of Jesus till his ascension, inviting us to contemplate each event and appreciate the love that Jesus has shown us. The habit of meditating upon the actions and teachings of Jesus must be a matter of daily routine. One should contemplate Jesus in his actions, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, etc., and try to be captivated by him. Jesus’ love for us must be responded by our love for him and by our desire to be united to him.



CHAPTER 12

THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS

In Chapters 10, Montfort presents **the eleventh tableau** the captivating beauty and the expressible gentleness of Jesus.

“1. Wisdom is gentle in his origin: Jesus was born of the sweetest, tender most and most beautiful of all mothers, Mary, the divinely favored Virgin. To appreciate the gentleness of Jesus we must first consider the gentleness of Mary, his Mother, whom he resembles by his gentle nature. Jesus is Mary’s child; consequently there is no haughtiness, or harshness, or unpleasantness in him, and even less, infinitely less, in him than in his Mother, since he is the eternal Wisdom and therefore pure gentleness and beauty.” (LEW 118)

“2. He is declared gentle by the Prophets: The prophets, who had in advance been shown the incarnate Wisdom, referred to him as a sheep and a lamb because of his gentleness. (Jer 11:19) They foretold that because of his gentleness ‘He would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax’ (Is 42:3). He is so full of kindness that even if a poor sinner be weighed-down, blinded, and depraved by his sins, with already, as it were, one foot in hell, he will not condemn him unless the sinner compels him to do so.” (LEW 119)

“3. He is gentle in his name: The distinctive characteristic of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, is to love and save men. ‘No song is sweeter, no voice is more pleasing, no thought is more appealing, than Jesus Son of God. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds to the ear and to the heart of a chosen soul! Sweet as honey to the lips, a delightful melody to the ears, thrilling joy to the heart’ (St Bernard).” (LEW 120)

“4. He is gentle in his looks: ‘Gentle is Jesus in his looks, and in his words and actions’ (Cf. St Augustine). The face of our loving Saviour is so serene and gentle that it charmed the eyes and hearts of those who beheld it. The shepherds who came to the stable to see him were so spellbound by the serenity and beauty of his face that they tarried for many days gazing in rapture upon him. The three Kings, proud though they were, had no sooner seen the tender features of this lovely child, than, forgetting their high dignity, they fell down on their knees beside his crib.” (LEW 121)

“5. He is gentle in his words: Jesus is also gentle in his words. When he dwelt on earth he won everyone over by his gentle speech. Never was he heard to raise his voice or argue heatedly. The prophets foretold this of him (Is 42:2). Those who listened to him with good intentions were charmed by the words of life which fell from his lips and they exclaimed, ‘No man has ever spoken as this man’ (Jn 7:46).” (LEW 122)



CHAPTER 13

THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS IN HIS ACTIONS

In Chapter 11, Montfort presents us the **twelfth tableau**, the gentleness of Jesus in his actions. Montfort wants us to contemplate the gentleness of Jesus in his actions. He tells us that Jesus was gentle in his dealings with the poor, the little children, the sinners, etc. One can choose a number of incidents in Jesus' life and meditate upon them in order to have an intimate knowledge of Jesus. Meditating upon Jesus in his actions and words is extremely important to understand his great love for us and for mankind. "Jesus loves me" is the theme of a number of hymns composed by Montfort. Montfort wants us to contemplate Jesus in heaven, where he continues to be gentle.

"Poor people and little children followed Jesus everywhere seeing him as one of their own. The simplicity, the kindness, the humble courtesy and the charity they witnessed in our dear Saviour made them press close about him. One day when he preaching in the streets the children, who were usually about him, pressed upon him from behind. The apostles who were nearest to our Lord pushed them back. On seeing this Jesus rebuked his apostles and said to them, 'Do not keep the children away from me' (Mt 19:14). When they gathered about him he embraced and blessed them with gentleness and kindness." (LEW 124)

"But how describe the gentleness of Jesus in his dealings with poor sinners: his gentleness with Mary Magdalene, his courteous solicitude in turning the Samaritan woman from her evil ways, his compassion in pardoning the adulterous woman taken in adultery,

his charity in sitting down to eat with the public sinners in order to win them over?” (LEW 125)

“Jesus continues to be gentle in heaven. Do you think that Jesus, now that he is triumphant and glorious, is any less loving and condescending? On the contrary, his glory, as it were, perfects his kindness. He wishes to appear forgiving rather than majestic, to show the riches of his mercy rather than the gold of his glory.” (LEW 127)

Montfort concludes the chapter by asking each one of us a question, “With this knowledge of Eternal Wisdom, shall we not love him who has loved us and still loves us more than his own life; and whose beauty and meekness surpass all that is loveliest and most attractive in heaven and on earth?” (LEW 131)

We must contemplate Jesus in his life and actions. Further we must meditate upon what he does in the Church. I must understand that he is also active in my own life. I need to recall the moments I encountered him in my life. I need to cultivate the habit of counting his blessings. This will develop in me an intimate love for him and a desire to love and serve my brothers and sisters.



CHAPTER 14

THE PRINCIPAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS

In Chapters 12, Montfort presents the **thirteenth tableau** showing Jesus as the teacher of wisdom: Montfort, has collected sixty-two words of Jesus. “Montfort sees these words of Jesus as sapiential sentences. We know that present day exegesis stresses the sapiential character of many of the teachings of Jesus, who is the authentic master of wisdom... As for the sixty-two sentences quoted without commentary by Montfort, the first forty-nine are exactly as they occur in a book by Bonnefons, except the fortieth. In this place Bonnefons quotes Mt. 6:1. ‘Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men.’ Montfort substitutes Mt 11:12 for this, ‘the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and men of violence take it by force’, which is a text more radical in tone... Finally, the ‘oracles’ 55 (Mt 20:16), 58 (Lk 14:11), and 61 (the beatitudes according to Mt 5:3-10) stress the reversal of values according to the teaching of Jesus and of all the Bible: the first will be last, those who humble themselves will be exalted and the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor. So it is indeed the radicality of Christianity that struck Montfort, this partly due to the trials he had to undergo, especially if this treatise was written about 1703-1704.” (Maurice Gilbert, sj, *The Spiritual Exegesis of Montfort*) When Montfort presents us with sixty-two sayings of Jesus, he identifies Wisdom with Christ in his function of being a permanent revelation.

“Since divine Wisdom is the Word of God throughout time and eternity, he has never ceased speaking and by his word everything was made and everything was restored.” (LEW 95) He speaks to us

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through the Gospels and also through his Spirit, who inspires us. Chapter 12 claims to be “the summary of the great and important truths which eternal Wisdom came on earth to teach us” (LEW 153), and it is made up entirely of quotations from the Gospel (together with a quotation from Acts 20:35). Here Jesus is presented as a teacher of Wisdom, and the Gospel as Wisdom for life.



CHAPTER 15

THE PASSION AND DEATH OF JESUS

In Chapters 13, Montfort presents the **fourteenth tableau**, the passion and death of Christ. In this chapter, Montfort invites us to meditate upon the love of the Incarnate Wisdom as shown by his passion and death on the cross. “Among all the motives impelling us to love Jesus Christ, the Wisdom Incarnate, the strongest, in my opinion, is the suffering he chose to endure to prove his love for us.” (LEW 154) He quotes Rom. 5:8 and says, “Jesus Christ proved how well he loved us because though we were sinners – and consequently his enemies – he died for us.” (LEW 156) Montfort wants us to contemplate upon the sufferings Jesus had to undergo even before his passion. Then Montfort invites us to spend a long time meditating upon the passion and death of Christ, which he has graphically described. “He chose rather to endure the cross and sufferings in order to give to God his Father greater glory and to men a proof of greater love.” (LEW 164) This contemplation on the sufferings and death of Christ is a must in order to understand the great love that the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom has for us.

“Our dear Saviour suffered in every member of his body. His head was pierced with a crown of thorns. His hair and beard were torn out; his cheeks were buffeted; his face was covered with spittle; his neck and arms bound with cords; his shoulders weighed down and bruised by the weight of the cross. His hands and feet were pierced by the nails, his side and heart opened by a lance; his whole body lacerated by more than five thousand strokes of the scourge, so that his almost fleshless bones became visible.” (LEW 161)

“His most holy soul was grievously tormented because every sin committed by man was an outrage against his Father whom he loved infinitely; because sin was the cause of the damnation of so many souls who would be lost despite his passion and death; and because he had compassion not only for all men in general but for each one in particular, as he knew them all individually.” (LEW 162)

“Further, he loved us so much that instead of shortening his sufferings he chose to prolong them and to suffer even more. That is why when he was hanging on the cross, covered with opprobrium and plunged deep in sorrow, as if not suffering enough, he cried out, ‘I thirst’.” (LEW 165) Montfort concludes the chapter by saying, “Holy Church makes us repeat every day, ‘The world does not know Jesus Christ,’ (Jn 1:10), incarnate Wisdom; and in truth, to know what our Lord has endured for us, and yet like the world, not to love him ardently is morally impossible.” (LEW 166)

“The important renewal currently taking place in the theology of the Redemption itself invites us to a deeper reexamination of what Montfort says on this theme in LEW. We know the importance he attaches to the Cross, and what he writes on this subject achieves great heights. LEW offers us a vision in which the theology of the Redemption is far from being an exaltation of suffering but is firmly anchored in the love God has for the world. Chapter 13, in fact, says clearly that it was not suffering that saved the world but the love Jesus Christ has shown for us in his sufferings. Montfort invites us to contemplate ‘the sufferings he chose to endure to prove his love for us’ (LEW 154). LEW 154-166 often return to this theme of love. In addition, this thirteenth chapter would benefit by being reread and reinterpreted in the light of what modern theologians call “the suffering of God’.” (J.P. Prévost, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 647)



CHAPTER 16

THE TRIUMPH OF ETERNAL WISDOM BY THE CROSS

In chapter 14, Montfort presents the **fifteenth tableau**, the triumph of Eternal Wisdom through the cross. Montfort gives us an inkling into his theology of the Cross, He was very much impressed by the wisdom of the Cross that St Paul speaks of in the first two chapters of the First Letter to the Corinthians. Quotations from St Paul are found in many places in the treatise. “The Cross is according to my belief the greatest secret of the King – the greatest mystery of Eternal Wisdom. How remote and how different are the thoughts and the ways of Eternal Wisdom from those of even the wisest of men. This great God wished to redeem the world, to cast out and chain up the devils, to seal the gates of hell and open heaven to men, and give infinite glory to his eternal Father... He wishes to become incarnate in order to convince men of his friendship; he wishes to come down upon earth to help men to go up to heaven... He perceives something which is a source of scandal and horror to the Jews and object of foolishness to the pagans. He sees a piece of vile and contemptible wood which is used to humiliate and torture the most wicked and the most wretched of men, called a gibbet, a gallows, a cross. It is upon this cross that he casts his eyes; he takes his delight in it; he cherishes it more than all that is great and resplendent in heaven and on earth. He decides that that will be the instrument of his conquests, the adornment of his royal state. He will make it the wealth and joy of his empire, the friend and spouse of his heart. O the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How amazing is his choice and how sublime and incomprehensible are his ways! But how inexpressible his love for that cross!” (LEW 167, 168)

“Montfort was very impressed by the wisdom the Cross that St Paul speaks of in 1 Cor 1-2. Although he does not quote the full text, he quotes part of it here and there even at the beginning of the treatise: In LEW 12 is the quotation ‘For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified’ 1 Cor 2:2; against worldly wisdom there is in LEW 14 ‘Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom’ (1 Cor 2:16) and this is repeated against worldly wisdom in LEW 74; in LEW 75, 1 Cor 1:19 is quoted: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise’; the inspiration behind LEW 168 is 1 Cor 1:23-24; ‘but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but ... the wisdom of God’, and Montfort then quotes Rom 11:33: ‘O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!’ Now, according to Paul, the wisdom of the Cross is precisely this reversal of human values referred to in the ‘oracles’ mentioned above. And Montfort will conclude these two chapters (13 and 14) dealing with the Passion and the Cross (before introducing the means of obtaining Wisdom): ‘Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom’ (LEW 180). So we see that the principal themes of 1 Cor 1-2 run through the whole treatise.” (Maurice Gilbert, sj, *The Spiritual Exegesis of Montfort*, p. 687)

“Jesus espoused the cross at his Incarnation with indescribable love. He sought it out and carried it with the utmost joy, throughout his whole life, which became but one continuous cross. After having made several efforts to embrace it in order to die upon it on Calvary, he asked, ‘How great is my distress until it is completed!’ (Ref. Lk 12:50)” (LEW 170)

“Do not think that, wanting to be more triumphant, he rejected the cross after his death. Far from it; he united himself so closely to it that neither angel nor man, nor any creature in heaven or on earth, could separate him from it. The bond between them is indissoluble, their union is eternal. Never the Cross without Jesus, or Jesus without the Cross... He will have his Cross borne in triumph by angels joyfully singing its praises. It will go before him, borne upon

the most brilliant cloud that has ever been seen. And with this Cross and by it, he will judge the world.” (LEW 172)

“He welcomes no child that does not bear its sign. He recognizes no disciple who is ashamed to display it, or who has not the courage to accept it, or who either drags it reluctantly or rejects it outright. He proclaims, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me’ ((Mt 16:24).” (LEW 173)

“The Cross is precious for many reasons: 1. Because it makes us resemble Jesus Christ. 2. Because it makes us worthy children of the eternal Father... 3. Because it enlightens the mind and gives it an understanding which no book in the world can give. ‘He who has not been tried, what can he know? (Sir 34:9) 4. Because when it is well carried it is the source, the food and the proof of love. The Cross enkindles the fire of divine love in the heart by detaching it from creatures. It keeps this love alive and intensifies it... 5. Because it is an abundant source of every delight and consolation; it brings joy, peace and grace to our souls. 6. The Cross is precious because it brings the one who carries it ‘a weight of everlasting glory’ (2 Cor 4:17).” (LEW 176)

At the end of the of the chapter, Montfort addresses the friends of Jesus Christ, “But you, true disciples of Eternal Wisdom, if you have trials and afflictions, if you suffer much persecution for justice’s sake, if you are treated as the refuse of the world, be comforted, rejoice, be glad, and dance for joy because the cross you carry is a gift so precious as to arouse the envy of the saints in heaven, were they capable of envy.” (LEW 179)

“Friends of Jesus Christ, drink of his bitter cup and your friendship with him will increase. Suffer with him and you will be glorified with him. Suffer patiently and your momentary suffering will be changed into an eternity of happiness. Make no mistake about it; since incarnate Wisdom had to enter heaven by the Cross, you also

must enter the same way... True wisdom is not to be found in the things of this world nor in the souls of those who live in comfort. He has fixed his abode in the Cross so firmly that you will not find him anywhere in this world save in the Cross. He has so truly incorporated and united himself with the Cross that in all truth we can say: Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom.” (LEW 180)

Fr Stefano De Fiores, smm, in his article on Montfort Spirituality says, “Fr H. Frehen, smm, after establishing the Christocentrism of Montfort, firmly states, ‘The principal mystery of the life and the personality of Christ is the Cross. Now Christ in his relationship to the Cross is called by Montfort Christ-Wisdom. Therefore this aspect, Christ Wisdom, constitutes the principal and specific aspect of the Christological vision of Father de Montfort.’ The mystery of the Cross occupies the center of the mystery of Christ, since even the Incarnation and the other mysteries “are ordered toward the Cross.” (De Fiores, *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 820, 821)

The result of these contemplations: As we meditate on the love of Christ for us, especially shown through his passion and death, love for Christ is kindled in our hearts. Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom has loved us and is loving us and we feel the need to respond to this with our own love for him. Hence there arises a mutual love and a love relationship between Christ and us. The starting point of this relationship is Christ himself and ours is the response to that love. “The cross is in the first place a sign of God’s love and nearness, a love and nearness which go so far that in the person of his Son, God gave himself for us, in this sense that we are loved at the deepest level even before we are capable of, or have arrived at, any responsive love or service, may persuade us that we are accepted as we are; that as such – as we are- we are loved and called. It is precisely this fact which can prompt our responsive love and furnish the strength to cope with the suffering that is inseparable from the course of our life and vocation.” (Pierre Humblet, *The Mystical process of transformation in Grignon de Montfort’s LEW*, p. 37)

CHAPTER 17

THE FIRST MEANS TO ACQUIRE WISDOM - ARDENT DESIRE

In Chapter 15, Montfort has mentioned ardent desire as the first means to acquire Wisdom. It is the starting point. We all know that we are called to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. We like to be holy; but holiness will not be forced on us and only the valiant will attain it. In our spiritual growth, our greatest enemy is our own laziness. Mr Scott Peck has passed this remark: “In the struggle to help my patients grow, I found that my chief enemy was invariably their laziness. And I became aware in myself of a similar reluctance to extend myself to new areas of thought, responsibility and maturation. One thing I clearly had in common with all mankind was my laziness. It was at this point that the serpent-and-the apple story suddenly made sense.” (Road Less Traveled, p. 291)

“Why do you not turn your eyes and your hearts towards divine Wisdom who is supremely desirable and who, to attract our love, makes known his origin, shows his beauty, displays his riches, and testifies in a thousand ways how eager he is that we should desire him and seek him . ‘Be desirous, therefore, on hearing my words’ (Wis 6:12), he tells us, ‘Wisdom anticipates those who want her’ (Wis 6:14). ‘The desire of Wisdom leads to the everlasting kingdom’ (Wis 6:21).” (LEW 181)

Montfort quoting Sir 6:37 invites the reader, “Son, ‘if you rightly desire wisdom, observe justice and God will give it you. Reflect on what God requires of you and meditate continually on his commandments and he himself will you insight and your desire

for wisdom will be granted' (Sir 1:26). 'For Wisdom will not enter into a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin' (Wis 1:4)'. (LEW 182)

“Solomon, the model given us by the Holy Spirit in the acquiring of Wisdom, only received this gift after he had desired it, sought after it and prayed for it for a long time. ‘I desired wisdom and it was given to me. I called upon God and the spirit of wisdom came to me.’ (Wis 7:7) ‘I loved and sought wisdom from my youth, and in order to have her as my companion and spouse I went about seeking her.’ (Wis 8:2) Like Solomon and Daniel we must be men of desire if we are to acquire this great treasure which is wisdom.” (LEW 183) Often our desire for Wisdom does not come first among our priorities and if it doesn't then we will not acquire Wisdom. Getting united to Wisdom must become a goal in our spiritual life.

Fr Patrick Gaffney, smm., in his article on Montfort Spirituality says, “This initial stage presupposes that “desire” for holiness so insisted on by Montfort as his first means of acquiring Divine Wisdom (cf. LEW 181-183). It is a desire—the determination to take all the means to arrive at the goal, no matter the cost—and not just a wish (velleity) that characterizes the person willing to examine the depth of one's own sinfulness. And as he tells us in LEW, this desire will express itself in mortification—the willingness to be stripped of all false idols—and in continuous prayer (LEW 184-193) marked by sincere petition springing from simple faith for the great gift of Divine Wisdom. Montfort's magnificent canticles on the desire for Wisdom powerfully express the basic content of this first step (cf. H 103, 124, 126).” (P. Gaffney, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.834)

2. Son of God, supreme beauty,
Come within me.
Without you, I am accursed,
Come within me.

With you I will be a king,
But a king submitted to your law.

4. Jesus, Incarnate Wisdom
Come within me.
Jesus, Incarnate Wisdom
Come within me.
With you, is there anything sweeter?
Yet what hell without you! (Hymn No. 103)

Hymn No. 124

1. Come, O Wisdom, come! Hear this, a beggar's plea
By Mary's womb, by every gush
Of Blood her Jesus shed for me,
Confound me not, nor bid me hush.
2. Why do you so prolong my painful martyrdom?
For you I languish night and day;
My heart keeps calling to you, "Come!"
My soul grows faint with you away.
3. Open, O longed-for one. O I knock here at your door.
Not as an alien fugitive
But as a suitor, heart-sick, sore
Whose only home is where you live.

Ardent desire in us must produce a joyful enthusiasm. "The second stage on our way to "God Alone" is marked primarily by joyful enthusiasm. With the zeal of a Montfort who as a youth tried to enlist all his fellow students into the Confraternity of the Holy

Slavery, the traveler is convinced that nothing stands in the way of union with God, nothing too difficult, no demands too great. The reason for this burst of energy is the experience that Our Lady shares her gift of faith with us. The Annunciation ‘Yes’ which personifies her, is in varying degrees, the life of the voyager into God. “It is a lively faith ... it is a firm faith ... it is a courageous faith ... it inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love” (TD 214).

“This step presumes a letdown after the initial burst of enthusiasm. Roadblocks spring up along the way, especially scruples, fears, over-concern (TD 215; cf. TD 168-169, 263). Saint Louis de Montfort insists throughout his writings that there can be no true advance into God Alone unless the traveler is imbued with pure love understood not in any quietistic sense but as an active and responsible surrender to the Lord like Mary’s fiat...Over-anxiety, over-concern about the future, about sinfulness, about our responsibilities, all have to be stripped away or else the path appears to be so rugged and the terrain so threatening that there is a serious danger of turning back. The answer to this almost insurmountable problem is, so Montfort simply states, to release ourselves into the tenderness of God. And this too is a gift of Mary, the Mother of Fair Love....

“Peaceful, active and responsible trust is the characteristic of this fourth stage of our journey. With the roadblocks removed, we continue on the way with a new depth of calm, total trust in God’s Providence and the maternal care of Our Lady. There is a steadiness now in the travel since the person lives the truth that there is a “Father in heaven who cannot fail me” (L 2) ...

“The turning point of the entire journey is found here in the fifth step: the travelers “hide themselves completely in the depths of Mary’s soul, becoming living copies of her” (TD 217). “You must offer yourself to Mary, happily lose yourself in her, only to find God in her” (SM 70; cf. TD 222, 264). This is really the specific crux of

Montfort's spiritual path of perfection, an essential element which is one of the chief distinguishing marks of his spirituality. This is achieved only through the great gift of the Holy Spirit who alone gives entry into this "paradise of God." It is both the result and cause of being faithful to the interior practices Saint Louis Marie explains: to do all our actions, with Mary, in Mary, by Mary, for Mary, so that they may be done more perfectly through, with, in and for Jesus-Wisdom (cf. SM 45-49, TD 257-265)." (P. Gaffney, *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 834-836)



CHAPTER 18

THE SECOND MEANS - CONTINUOUS PRAYER

To acquire wisdom Montfort tells us that we should continually pray for it and as an example for prayer he presents us the prayer found in the Book of Wisdom chapter 9. We need to grow in contemplation and the highest form of prayer is the unitive way. Unless we are faithful to contemplation, it is foolhardy to think of getting united to Wisdom. Receiving of Wisdom occurs precisely in this mystical act of praying. Prayer is the usual channel by which God conveys his gifts, especially his Wisdom.

“The greater the gift of God, the more effort is required to obtain it. Much prayer and great effort, therefore, will be required to obtain the gift of Wisdom, which is the greatest of all God’s gifts. Let us listen to the voice of Wisdom himself: ‘Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, and ask and it shall be given you’ (Mt 7:7)... Solomon received Wisdom only after praying most fervently for a long time: ‘I went to the Lord and besought him, and I said with all my heart... Give me that Wisdom that sits by your throne’ (Wis 8:21). ‘If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God, and it shall be given him, for God gives his gifts to all men abundantly and ungrudgingly’ (Jas 1:5).” (LEW 184)

“First, we should pray for this gift with a strong and lively faith, not wavering, because he who wavers in his faith must not expect to receive any gift from the Lord (Jas 1:6,7)” (LEW 185) “Secondly, we must pray with a pure faith, not counting on consolations, visions of special revelations... The Holy Spirit has revealed to us the grandeur

and the beauty of Wisdom, and the desire of God to bestow this gift upon us, and our own need of it. Here we find motives strong enough to make us want it and pray God for it with unbounded faith and eagerness.” (LEW 186)

“Thirdly, we must pray perseveringly to obtain this Wisdom. The acquisition of this precious pearl and infinite treasure requires from us a holy importunity in praying to God, without which we shall not obtain it... Whoever then wishes to obtain wisdom must pray for it day and night without wearying or becoming disheartened.” (LEW 188)

In LEW 191 and 192, Montfort has given Solomon’s prayer for Wisdom (Wis 9:1-6, 9-19) “To vocal prayer we must add mental prayer, which enlightens the mind, inflames the heart and disposes the soul to listen to the voice of Wisdom, to savour his delights and possess his treasures. For myself, I know of no better way of establishing the kingdom of God, Eternal Wisdom, than to unite vocal and mental prayer by saying the holy Rosary and meditating on its fifteen mysteries.” (LEW 193)



CHAPTER 19

THE THIRD MEANS - UNIVERSAL MORTIFICATION

Montfort did penance to obtain Wisdom and he is asking the readers to do the same. “The Holy Spirit tells us that wisdom is not found in the hearts of those who live in comfort (Ref Job 28:13), gratifying their passions and bodily desires, because ‘they who are of the flesh cannot please God’ and ‘the Wisdom of the flesh is an enemy of God’ (Rom 8:8,7). ‘My spirit will not remain in man, because he is flesh’ (Gen 6:3). All those who belong to Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, have crucified their flesh with all its passions and desires. They always bear about in their bodies the dying of Jesus. They continually do violence to themselves, carry their cross daily. They are dead and indeed buried with Christ, (Ref. Gal 5:24, 2 Cor 4:10, Lk 9:23, Rom 6:4,8).” (LEW 194)

“Do not imagine that incarnate Wisdom, who is purer than the rays of the sun, will enter a soul and a body soiled by the pleasures of the senses. Do not believe that he will grant his rest and ineffable peace to those who love worldly company and vanities. ‘To him that overcomes the world and himself, I will give the hidden manna’ (Rev 2:17).” (LEW 195)

“If we would possess wisdom: 1. We must give up actually possessions as did the apostles... 2. We must not follow the showy fashions of the world in our dress, our furniture, or our dwellings. Neither must we indulge in sumptuous meals or other worldly habits and ways of living. ‘Be not conformed to this world’ (Rom 12:2). Putting this into practice is more necessary than is generally thought. 3. We must

not believe or follow the false maxims of the world or think, speak or act like people of the world.... 4. We must flee as much as possible from the company of others, not only from that of worldly people, which is harmful and dangerous, but even from that of religious people when our association with them would be useless and a waste of time.... 5. If we would possess, we must mortify the body, not only by enduring patiently our bodily ailments, the inconveniences of the weather and the difficulties arising from other people's actions, but also by deliberately undertaking some penances and mortifications, such as fasts, vigils, and other austerities practiced by holy penitents.... 6. For exterior and voluntary mortifications to be profitable, it must be accompanied by the mortification of the judgment and the will through holy obedience." (LEW 197-202)

The first mortification to be practiced is the giving up of preoccupation with self. Christ invites us to walk along the narrow path. We often tend to be comfort loving people and easy going in many respects. Union with Christ is not possible without practising self-discipline and hard work. Our absolute fidelity to our duties and the demands of our mission will provide us with enough opportunities for self denial and mortification. Penance is clearly indicated in all the Gospels and it is a part of the primitive teaching of the Church. Repentance is a fundamental disposition of a Christian, an abiding disposition. Sin is something that we down play considerably nowadays; but it was something that Christ constantly warned us against. St Paul tells us, "I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest." (1 Cor 9:27)



CHAPTER 20

THE FOURTH MEANS - A TENDER AND TRUE DEVOTION TO MARY

In Chapter 17, the last one, Montfort presents tender and true devotion to Mary as the best means to obtain and preserve Wisdom. Montfort had great devotion towards Mary; but still he has presented it as a means, the best means, to get united to Wisdom. Hence Montfort's Marian devotion is Christ centred. "The greatest means of all, and the most wonderful of all secrets for obtaining and preserving divine Wisdom is a loving and genuine devotion to the Blessed Virgin." (LEW 203)

Sts. John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila and others attained union with God through infused contemplation. Through fidelity to God's will at all times and through apostolic commitment to God, one can remain united to God. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." (Jn 15:10) "I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:20) Montfort has taught us a Marian mysticism, i.e., getting united to Christ through Mary, and this is the special feature of his perfect devotion to Mary. We entrust ourselves to her as her children and allow her to transform us into Christ.

"Mary is his most worthy Mother, because she conceived him and brought him forth as the fruit of her womb. 'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus' (Lk 1:42)... Anyone who wishes to possess this wonderful fruit in his heart must first possess the tree that produced it; whoever wishes to possess Jesus must possess Mary." (LEW 204)

“Happy are those who have won Mary’s favours! They can rest assured that they will soon possess divine Wisdom, for as she loves those who love her, she generously shares her blessings with them, including that infinite treasure which contains every good, Jesus, the fruit of her womb.” (LEW 206) “The Fathers of the Church call her the tabernacle of the divinity, the place of rest and contentment of the Blessed Trinity, the throne of God, the city of God, the altar of God, the temple of God, the world of God and the paradise of God... Only through Mary, then, can we possess divine Wisdom. But if we do receive this great gift where are we to lodge him?... What then can we do to make our hearts worthy of him? Here is the great way, the wonderful secret. Let us, so to speak, bring Mary into our abode by consecrating ourselves undeservedly to her as servants and slaves. Let us surrender into her hands all we possess, even what value most highly, keeping nothing for ourselves. This good Mistress who never allows herself to be surpassed in generosity will give herself to us in a real but indefinable manner; and it is in her that eternal Wisdom will come and settle as on a throne of splendour.” (LEW 208-211)

Montfort has differentiated true devotion from perfect devotion to Mary and he has defined both of them. “If I were asked by someone seeking to honour our Lady, ‘What does genuine devotion to her involve?’ I would answer briefly that it consists in a full appreciation of the privileges and dignity of our Lady; in expressing our gratitude for her goodness to us; in zealously promoting devotion to her; in constantly appealing for her help; in being completely dependent on her; and in placing firm reliance and loving confidence in her motherly goodness.” (LEW 215) “But the most perfect and most profitable of all devotions to the Blessed Virgin consists in consecrating ourselves entirely to her and to Jesus through her as slaves. It involves consecrating to her completely and for all eternity our body and soul, our possessions both spiritual and material, the atoning value and the merits of our good actions and our right to

dispose of them. In short, it involves the offering of all we have acquired in the past, all we actually possess at the moment, and all we will acquire in the future.” (LEW 219)

“Mary is wise: let us place everything in her hands. She knows how to dispose of us and all that we have for the greater glory of God. Mary is charitable: she loves us as her children and servants. Let us offer everything to her and we will lose nothing by it; she will turn everything to our gain. Mary is liberal: she returns more than we give. Let us give her unreservedly all that we own without any reservation; she will give us a hundredfold in return. Mary is powerful: nothing on earth can take from her what we have placed in her keeping. Let us then commit ourselves to her care; she will defend us against our enemies and help us to triumph over them. Mary is faithful: she will not permit anything we give her to be lost or wasted... Let us, then, confide everything to the faithful Virgin Mary.” (LEW 222)

Montfort wants us to make the above mentioned consecration in all seriousness and live in constant relationship with Mary. After making the consecration we should completely depend on Mary so that she may form Jesus in us. In self-consecration to Mary, the issue is the renunciation of self-will and the surrender of ourselves, which will lead us to our transformation into Christ. “It serves no other purpose than, by giving Mary ‘control’ over whole being, to afford her the opportunity to transform us in him, to give birth to Eternal Wisdom in us.” (Pierre Humblet, *The Mystical process of transformation in Grignion de Montfort’s LEW*, p. 62) Perfect devotion does not consist in merely renewing our consecration daily, but in our daily living through, with, in and for Mary. This is a Marian way of life and it is not meant for easy going people.

The Formula of Consecration to Jesus through Mary

223. “O Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom! O sweetest and most adorable Jesus! True God and True Man, only Son of the Eternal

Father and of Mary always Virgin! I adore You profoundly in the bosom and splendours of Your Father during eternity, and in the virginal womb of Mary, Your most worthy Mother, in the time of Your Incarnation.

I give You thanks that You have emptied yourself in taking the form of a slave in order to save me from the cruel slavery of the devil. I praise and glorify You that You have been pleased to submit yourself to Mary, your Holy Mother, in all things, in order to make me your faithful slave through her. But alas! Ungrateful and unfaithful as I have been, I have not kept the promises which I made so solemnly to You in my baptism. I have not fulfilled my obligations; I do not deserve to be called Your child nor Your slave; and as there is nothing in me which does not merit your anger and your rejection, I dare no longer come by myself before your Most Holy and August Majesty.

224. This is why I have recourse to the intercession of your Most Holy Mother, whom You have given me to mediate with You. It is through her that I hope to obtain of You contrition and the pardon of my sins, the acquisition and preservation of Wisdom.

Hail, then O Immaculate Mary, living tabernacle of the divinity, in which the Eternal Wisdom deigned to be hidden and to be adored by angels and by men. Hail, O Queen of Heaven and earth, to whose empire is subject everything that is under God! Hail, O sure Refuge of sinners, whose mercy fails no one! Grant the desire which I have to obtain the Divine Wisdom, and for this end, deign to accept the offering and promises which my lowliness presents to you.

225. I (N.N.), an unfaithful sinner, renew and ratify to-day in your hands the promises of my baptism; I renounce for ever Satan, his pomps and his works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life and to be more faithful to Him than I have been till now.

I choose you, this day, O Mary, in the presence of all the heavenly court, for my Mother and Queen. I deliver and consecrate to you, as your slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of my good actions, past, present and to come. I leave to you the full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservation, as you please, to the greater glory of God, in time and in eternity.

226. Receive, O gracious Virgin, this little offering of my slavery, in honour of and in union with that subjection which the Eternal Wisdom deigned to have to your motherhood, in homage to the power which both of you have over this little worm and miserable sinner, and in thanksgiving for the privileges with which the Holy Trinity has favoured you. I declare that henceforth I wish, as your true slave, to seek your honour and to obey you in all things.

O admirable Mother, present me to your dear Son as His eternal slave, so that as He has redeemed me by you, by you He may receive me.

227. O Mother of Mercy, grant that I may obtain the true Wisdom of God, and for this end, receive me among those whom you love and teach, whom you lead, nourish and protect as your children and your slaves.

O faithful Virgin, make me in all things so perfect a disciple, imitator and slave of the Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ your Son, that I may attain by your intercession and example to the fullness of His age on earth and of His glory in heaven. Amen.”



CHAPTER 21

MARY, THRONE OF WISDOM

Fr Maurice Gilbert says, “Montfort’s doctrine is radically and essentially Christo-centric. Jesus is Wisdom; and not Mary, his mother; she is the ‘throne of Wisdom’ (Ref. LEW 203, 208, 211). Montfort states categorically: ‘Mary is the Mistress of Divine Wisdom; not that she is higher than the Divine Wisdom Who is true God, nor even His equal - it would be blasphemous to think or say so’ (LEW 205). If then, from the beginning of his treatise, Montfort clearly indicates that he is writing about Jesus Christ, he mentions Mary only in her rightful place in the plan of salvation, at the time of the Incarnation (LEW 105-108)...”

“It is chiefly in the last pages of his treatise that Montfort gives Mary her place in the mystery of Salvation: a true devotion to Mary is ‘the greatest means of all ... for obtaining and keeping the Divine Wisdom’ (LEW 203). The reason for this is the Incarnation: Mary having become the Mother of Christ, he ‘gave her a maternal and natural power over him ... not only for the length of his life on earth, but also in heaven’ (LEW 205); in the mystery of the Incarnation. Mary became the throne of Wisdom (LEW 208). To which is added according the doctrine of the Fathers of Church, that ‘Mary, besides being the Mother of Jesus, the Head of the elect, is also the Mother of all His members; so that she begets them, bears them in her womb and brings them forth to the glory of heaven by the graces of God which she imparts to them’ (LEW 213). Then ‘let us, so to speak, take Mary into our house by consecrating ourselves unreservedly to her ... and then the Eternal Wisdom will come and dwell in

her' (LEW 211). Hence, the Marian devotion of Montfort is really Christo-centric and is based on the mystery of the Incarnation and of the Theotokos ...

“Two texts deserve our attention; ‘If we bear the mark of her faithful servants who keep her ways (Prov 8:32) we shall soon and at little cost possess the Divine Wisdom’ (LEW 212). Moreover God has decreed that Mary should dwell in Jacob, take her inheritance in Israel and place the roots of her virtues in the elect (Sir 24:13(8)’ (LEW 213). It must immediately be said that Montfort does not say that Mary is the Wisdom referred to in these texts. He has already quoted and commented upon these texts in applying them to Eternal Wisdom (LEW 10, 20-30, 68) Montfort is in line with tradition, and especially with liturgical tradition. Prov. 8:22-23 and Sir. 24:5(3)-16(12) were used as readings in the Roman Liturgy, the first one from the Xth century for the Mass of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the second one towards the middle of the VIIth century for the feast of the Assumption... In each of these two cases Mary is seen in relationship with the mystery of Incarnate Wisdom to whom she is irrevocably linked as Mother of God.” (M. Gilbert, s.j., *Nouvelle Revue*, pp. 688-690)

Montfort's Marian devotion goes beyond being Christ centred, it is God centred. “You never think of Mary without Mary thinking of God in your stead; you never praise or honour Mary without Mary praising and honouring God with you. Mary is altogether relative to God; indeed, I would call her the relation to God, who exists only because of God; she is the echo of God, who speaks and repeats only God; if you say ‘Mary’, she says ‘God’ (TD 225). TD 265 ends with the words, Glory be to God alone. Montfort's motto was God alone. Montfort's wisdom spirituality too is aimed at the same goal. Fr Rene Laurentin, in his book on Montfort entitled “God Alone is my tenderness” says, “Montfort's theology is a theology of the history of salvation, rooted in the Bible and projected towards

the future in God, which he felt called to promote. Montfort does not impose anything, he only shares with others the light he has received.” (p. 22)

Fr Stefano de Fiores, smm, in his article on Montfort Spirituality says, “In order that the act of ‘consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, by the hands of Mary’ (LEW 223-227) may not be reduced to a simple formula without influencing one’s life, it must be prepared for by serious reflection and prolonged prayer. This is the reason that Montfort prescribes a month of preparation for a formal commitment to the Consecration: at least twelve days to empty oneself of the ‘spirit of the world which is contrary to that of Jesus Christ’ (TD 227), a first week ‘to ask for knowledge of themselves and contrition for their sins’ (TD 228), the second week to ‘know the Blessed Virgin Mary’ (TD 229), and the third to ‘know Jesus Christ’ (TD 230). Even though the act of Consecration is a personal act, Montfort does not separate it from the liturgy: he prescribes that it be done after sacramental confession and Holy Communion (TD 231). The directives given by Montfort are quite valuable because they urge us to free ourselves, by a spiritual exodus, from the vain wisdom of this world and to know man, Mary, and Christ more profoundly. What must be avoided, however, is a nonchalant repetition of this Montfort Consecration formula.” (De Fiores, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 831)



CHAPTER 22

APOSTOLIC DIMENSION OF WISDOM SPIRITUALITY

Montfort's goal in life was to catechize and to preach missions. Fr Maurice Gilbert, sj tells us that Montfort wrote "The Love of Eternal Wisdom" not only for himself but also to help others, He wants "Those who read it to be filled with a fresh desire to love you (Wisdom) and possess you, on earth as well as in heaven," (LEW 2) and "finally seek to acquire the light and unction you need to inspire others with that love for Wisdom which will lead them to eternal life." (LEW 30) Montfort again tells us, "Blessed are those who understand these eternal truths. Still more blessed are those who believe them. Most blessed of all are those who believe them, put them into practice and teach them to others; for they will shine in heaven like stars for all eternity." (LEW 153) Montfort remained an apostle all throughout his life. His book as well as his spirituality has a missionary character. "Finally, as noting is more active than Wisdom, Wisdom does not leave those who enjoy his friendship to languish in mediocrity and negligence. He sets them on fire inspiring them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." (LEW 100) A spiritual person should love others and work for their welfare, hence apostolate is the natural outcome of his spirituality.

"Faced with the evil use of scientific discoveries and the accumulation of nuclear arms, contemporary man wonders about the future of the world. Apocalyptic visions slip into his soul. Montfort is not unmindful of such preoccupations; he responds to them not to satisfy vain curiosity but, rather, to lift the veil that covers the final phase of

human history. He foresees a tomorrow of battles between diabolical and salvific forces. The latter are those of the Holy Spirit, Christ, Mary, and their kin, whose number includes the apostles of the end times. These forces prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. They consist in his reign within hearts and the world, and are accomplished without marvels or spectacular events. Marian spirituality itself is entirely oriented toward the reign of Christ, for which it is the best and most perfect preparation. Montfort spirituality is thus seen as rooted in the past, immersed in the present, and projected toward the future. It proves to be, therefore, a spirituality entirely prepared to confront and to accompany history. Like Christianity, of which it is only a particular facet, it is not fearful of encountering the challenge of different cultures; it penetrates them in order to purify, promote, and elevate them.” (Stefano de Fiores, *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 839) Being united to Christ as a branch to the vine, we need to produce good fruits.

