

Edited by Armata Bianca

**THE APOSTLES OF THE LAST TIMES
IN MONTFORT AND TODAY**

Taken from the thesis by:
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Translation of the Ecclesiastical Permission on the opposite page:

Diocese of Ibarra

According to can. 827 par. 3, the Reverend Father Andrea D'Ascanio ofm cap has submitted to my examination the book he has written "The apostles of the last times in Montfort and today". After carefully examining the content of this work, which was supervised by Prof. Stefano De Fiores, I do not find in it anything contrary to the faith and morals of the Catholic Church.

Moreover, I believe this work can help to effectively spread the devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin according to the writings of St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort and give a positive contribution on controversial topics of Mariology and eschatology concerning which there is often confusion among the faithful.

Regarding the above, I grant permission to publish this book.

Ibarra, 9 December 2004

Julio Teràn Dutari

Bishop of Ibarra

English translation of the third italian edition
2006 7th oct, feast of Our Lady of the Rosary



Diócesis de Ibarra

LICENCIA ECLESIASTICA

De acuerdo con el canon 827, §3, el Reverendo Padre Andrea D'Ascanio OFM.Cap. ha sometido a mi juicio el libro de su autoría: "Los apóstoles de los últimos tiempos en Montfort y en el día de hoy". Habiendo considerado atentamente el contenido de esta obra, supervisada por el Prof. Stefano De Fiore, no encuentro en ella nada contra la fe y la moral de la Iglesia Católica.

Creo, por otra parte, que la obra puede ayudar a difundir eficazmente la devoción a la Virgen Santísima según los escritos de San Luis María Grignon de Montfort, y dar un aporte positivo en temas controvertidos de la mariología y la escatología, sobre los que no pocas veces existe alguna confusión entre los fieles.

Por todo lo anterior, tengo a bien conceder el permiso para que pueda publicarse este libro.

Ibarra, 9 de Diciembre 2004.


+ Julio Terán Dutari
Obispo de Ibarra



*“And Mathathias cried out
in the city with a loud voice, saying:
Every one that has zeal for the law,
and maintains the testament,
let him follow me”.*

(From the First Book of Maccabees 2,27).

*“Let all those worthy priests
who are to be found throughout the world,
those still in the fight
and those who have withdrawn
to deserts and secluded places,
let them, I say, come and join us.
With the cross as our standard,
let us form a strongly disciplined army
drawn up in lines of battle.
Let us make a concerted attack
on the enemies of God
who have already sounded the alarm”.*

(St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort, FP 29)

Introduction

Saint Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716) is one of the few saints - if not the only one - who look to the future of the Church. No other saint, neither before nor after, has spoken about the apostles of the last times who prepare for the glorious return of Jesus by fighting the last apocalyptic battle which will precede the coming of the Kingdom which Jesus taught us to ask for in the Our Father.

We found it urgent to examine this subject in depth by rereading Montfort's works in the light of Scriptures in the passages that deal with the last times, comparing them with the events of Fatima and with the teachings of John Paul II, the most renowned advocate of Consecration to Christ through Mary.

From these reflections came forth a few wonderful and at the same time perturbing questions, which we have attempted to answer:

- Mary “*will crush the head of Satan and bring victory to Jesus Christ*” by means of her “*heel*”¹, that is, “*her humble servants and her poor children*”. The term used by Montfort is “*enfant*”, which can be translated as “*son*” or “*child*”: are children also included among these “*apostles of the last times*”?

¹ “...*her heel, that is, her humble servants and her poor children whom she will rouse to fight against him. In the eyes of the world they will be little and poor and, like the heel, lowly in the eyes of all, down-trodden and crushed as is the heel by the other parts of the body*” (TD 54).

- Are these times in which we are living the “*last times*” which Montfort mentions in his Treatise on true devotion when he talks about the “*last wicked persecutions of the devil*”²?

- According to Montfort at the end of times Jesus will return with power in “*a deluge of Fire*” of the Holy Spirit which will transform humanity's inner soul (FP 16); at the same time, though, he also speaks of another fire “*which will reduce the whole world to ashes*” (FP 17): are these two signs immediately following each other, one that creates souls and the other that destroys matter? Or will there be a further coming which will disintegrate the earth for good, as some theologians claim? Or will everything end in a single act of Mercy which will not destroy the earth, but rather renew it by creating “*new heavens and a new earth*” (Is 65,17; 2 Pt 3,13)?

My deepest thanks goes to Prof. Stefano De Fiores who had the patience to guide me in my research and reflections.

² “It is chiefly in reference to these last wicked persecutions of the devil, which will increase daily until the advent of the reign of the anti-Christ, that we should understand that first and well-known prophecy and curse of God uttered against the serpent in the garden of paradise” (TD 51).

Abbreviations

Abbreviations used to cite Montfort's works:

LCM	Letters to Members of the Company of Mary
LEW	The Love of Eternal Wisdom
L	Letters
LFC	Letters to the Friends of the Cross
FP	Fiery Prayer
RM	Rule for the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary
SR	The Secret of the Rosary
SM	The Secret of Mary
TD	Treatise on True Devotion to Mary
RHP	Rules for the Holy Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saumur

Chapter I

The “last times” according to Saint Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort

1. The “last times” in Monfort's works

In one of his works of 1919³ P. Lhomeau, commenting on the apostles of the last times according to Monfort, thus summarizes what the Church means by “last times”:

*“Christian language refers to the “last times” as a period of indeterminate length which can involve years or centuries, in which any kind of catastrophes or events, especially the misfortunes of the Church, its downfalls and victories, in the end, everything will be extreme and, so to speak, terminal in character, and will prepare for the second coming of Christ (...). That is what we call parousia. This return of Christ is the object of our faith; and the Master Himself ordered us to watch and wait (...). Its date is in the secret of God”.*⁴

³ A.LHOMEAU, *La Vierge Marie et les Apôtres des derniers temps d'après le B.Louis-Marie de Montfort*, Tours, Mame 1919.

⁴ *Ibid.*,10.

Montfort, the prophet with piercing eyes who reminds us of John the evangelist, “saw” and dramatically lived these events in spirit and made them the basis of his theological and apostolic approach: “*In these last times, God wishes therefore to reveal Mary, his masterpiece...*” (TD 50). Thus, in the Treatise on True Devotion, the section on Mary's action in preparation for the coming of Jesus' kingdom begins.

Just as Jesus brought his beloved apostles to the mountain of the transfiguration to open their spiritual horizons, so Mary leads her apostle to the top of the sublime Mountain which She herself is, in order to let him live out the transfiguring experience of the apostles of the last times⁵.

At the top of this “Mountain” Montfort enters into the dimension of Fire of the prophets of the Old and New Testament, in particular Daniel and John the apostle: just as the latter saw the battle of the Angels in heaven (Rev 12,7-9) so Montfort sees and lives, with dramatic reality, the battle of man on earth, “*the children of Belial*” and “*the children of Mary*” (FP 15). It is the last battle which Mary-Church fights against the “*dragon with seven heads and ten horns*” (Rev 12,3) which will end with the victory of Christ and Mary over the “*great adversary*” and with the establishment of the Father's kingdom.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. Saint Louis Mary Grignion, “through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary” (TD 257) in the last times prepares the way for the second coming of Jesus “*with much power*” (Mt 24): “*power*” is a specific attribute of God the Father and, in the Fiery Prayer, Montfort turns directly to Him, asking him to intervene on behalf of all creation:

⁵ “*On the meaning of the beatitudes. It is on this mountain that they will be transfigured as he was on Mount Tabor; that they will die with him as he died on Calvary, and from it, they will ascend to heaven as he did from the Mount of Olives*” (FP 25).

“Is it not true that your will must be done on earth as it is in heaven? Is it not true that your kingdom must come? Did you not give to some souls, dear to you, a vision of the future renewal of the Church? Are not the Jews to be converted to the truth and is this not what the Church is waiting for? All the blessed in heaven cry out for justice to be done: and the faithful on earth join in with them and cry out: Amen, Come, Lord. All creatures, even the most insensitive, lie groaning under the burden of Babylon's countless sins and plead with you to come and renew all things: we know well that the whole creation is groaning....” (FP 5).

2. Continuity and new prospects

The future prospect of the Church and the world isn't revealed to Montfort all at once, rather it is affirmed and explained gradually. In *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* (1703) Montfort doesn't speak at all about the last times or, consequently, about the role which the Spirit and Mary will perform, he only refers to Wisdom *“which will be preceded by the Cross and which will judge the world with it and by it”* (LEW 172). However, he already makes mention of the apostles. He speaks about them as those who are inhabited by Wisdom which *“sets them on fire, inspiring them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls (...) and to make them more worthy of himself, he permits them to engage in strenuous conflicts and in almost everything they undertake they encounter contradictions and disappointments”* (LEW 99 and 100).

In *The Secret of Mary* (1710?) Montfort speaks about a *“second coming of Christ”* to reign over all the earth and to judge the living and the dead, and he also speaks about *“great men filled with the Holy Spirit and with Mary”* who will destroy sin and set up the Kingdom of Christ (SM 58-59).

In the Fiery Prayer (1712-13) the saint doesn't mention the second coming of Jesus, but he emphasizes the spiritual dimension of the future times and the powerful apostolic action of the missionaries of the Company of Mary.

In the Treatise on True Devotion (1712) he speaks about it explicitly (TD 35,50,54,58) describing the work and spirituality of the apostles of the last times, the second coming of Christ and his kingdom in the world and the role of the Holy Spirit and Mary. The deluge of fire isn't mentioned at all, but it is interiorized and seen in its effects: the apostles are like a blazing fire and are possessed by the Spirit.

In other passages of the same work the outlook of the future reappears under different forms: he speaks about the difference between the first and second coming of Jesus (TD 1,13,22,158), he describes the participation of lay people, men and women, in the battle against the devil and in preparation for the kingdom of Christ (TD 113,144); he foresees a precious time in which Mary will reign in hearts to "*subject them to the dominion of her great and princely Son Jesus*" (TD 217)⁶.

3. Scenario of the last times

Montfort's vision of the last times is developed in four stages and their characteristics can be pointed out schematically; the beginning and end of each stage are not well-defined, but rather tend to evolve with reciprocal influence.

He is not interested in describing the chronological stages of this eschatological process, instead he wants to rouse his brothers to fight the evil which he sees ever more imminent and close at hand.

⁶ Cfr S. DE FIORES, "*Derniers temps*" in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité montfortaine, sous la direction de S. De Fiores*, Novalis, Ottawa, 1994, 346-367.

First stage: The saint sees the tragic situation of the Church and asks God to intervene before “*everything goes to ruins*”:

“Is it not true that nearly all Christians prove unfaithful to the promises made to Jesus in baptism? Where does this universal failure come from?” (TD 127). “It is indeed time to fulfil your promise. Your divine commandments are broken, your Gospel is thrown aside, torrents of iniquity flood the whole earth carrying away even your servants. The whole land is desolate, ungodliness reigns supreme, your sanctuary is desecrated and the abomination of desolation has even contaminated the holy place. God of Justice, God of Vengeance, will you let everything, then, go the same way? Will everything come to the same end as Sodom and Gomorrah? Will you never break your silence? Will you tolerate all this for ever?” (FP 5).

Second stage: he goes from the kingdom of sin to the kingdom of Jesus Christ by divine intervention. This is the main part of Montfort's vision which he speaks of at length in the Treatise on True Devotion: the kingdom of Jesus Christ will be fulfilled here, on earth, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, of Mary and of the apostles of the last times:

“But Mary's power over the evil spirits will especially shine forth in the latter times, when Satan will lie in wait for her heel, that is, for her humble servants and her poor children whom she will rouse to fight against him. They (...) will be rich in God's graces, which will be abundantly bestowed on them by Mary. They will be great and exalted before God in holiness. They will be superior to all creatures by their great zeal and so strongly will they be supported by divine assistance that, in union with Mary, they will crush the head of Satan with their heel, that is, their humility, and bring victory to Jesus Christ” (TD 54).

Third stage: the second coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ which - with Mary and through Mary - will essentially be fulfilled “*in the hearts*” and in the depths of all men:

“But as the kingdom of Jesus Christ exists primarily in the heart or interior of man, according to the words of the Gospel, “The kingdom of God is within you”, so the kingdom of the Blessed Virgin is principally in the interior of man, that is, in his soul” (TD 38); *“in the near or distant future the Blessed Virgin will have more children, servants and slaves of love than ever before, and that through them Jesus, my dear Lord, will reign more than ever in the hearts of men”* (TD 113); *“When will that happy day come, when God's Mother is enthroned in men's hearts as Queen, subjecting them to the dominion of her great and princely Son Jesus?”* (TD 217).

Fourth stage: two prospects on the last times are seen in Montfort's work:

- a Christological one, in the Secret of Mary and in the Treatise, in which the vision is of the coming of Christ “*to reign*” over all the earth “*and judge the living and the dead*”:

“Through the Most Blessed Mary, God will come a second time, as the whole Church expects him to come and reign over all the earth and to judge the living and the dead” (SM 58).

- a pneumatological one, in the Fiery Prayer, in which he speaks about Holy Spirit who will begin a “*deluge of fire and justice*”.

There has been much talk on the meaning of Montfort's expressions concerning the second and last coming of Jesus, which theologians have interpreted in different, and at times contrasting, ways.

According to Montfort's most profound commentator⁷ there are two

⁷ Cfr S. DE FIORES, *Lo Spirito Santo e Maria negli ultimi tempi secondo S. Luigi Maria*

deluges, a “fiery deluge of pure love” which will convert all men and also a “divine fire of his anger” which “will reduce the whole world to ashes”:

“The reign especially attributed to God the Father lasted until the Flood and ended in a deluge of water. The reign of Jesus Christ ended in a deluge of blood, but your reign, Spirit of the Father and the Son, is still unended and will come to a close with a deluge of fire, love and justice. When will it happen, this fiery deluge of pure love with which you are to set the whole world ablaze and which is to come, so gently yet so forcefully, that all nations, Moslems, idolaters and even Jews, will be caught up in its flames and be converted? None can shield himself from the heat it gives, so let its flames rise. Rather let this divine fire which Jesus Christ came to bring on earth be enkindled before the all-consuming fire of your anger comes down and reduces the whole world to ashes” (FP 16-17).

In our opinion Montfort's words can be interpreted from a different point of view: “the divine fire of anger which will reduce the whole world to ashes” will be eliminated in the event that the apostles of the last times bring on “the fiery deluge” of pure Love. We will discuss this in detail later on.

4. The action of the Spirit and Mary in the final stage of history

Generally, contemporary theologians prefer not to dwell upon the themes that are typical of Montfort (end of times, tripartition of his-

Grignon de Montfort, in *Quaderni montfortani* 4, 1986, 33; ID., voce “*Ultimi tempi*”, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité montfortaine* cit., 350.

⁸ K. RAHNER, *Il Dio Trino come fondamento originario e trascendente della storia della salvezza*, in *Mysterium salutis*, vol.III, Brescia, 1969, p.414; K. BARTH, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I/8, München 1932, p.360; B. FORTE, *Trinità come storia*, Cinisello Balsamo, 1985; H. MÜLEN, *Una mystica persona. La Chiesa come il mistero dello Spirito Santo in Cristo e nei cristiani: una persona in molte persone*, Roma, 1968.

tory...): they do not consider eschatology as something that concerns the after death, the after judgement, rather they tend to discuss it in more up-to-date terms; however in this way they do not deal directly with the issue of the radical and extraordinary transformation of the Church and humanity accomplished by the Spirit and Mary which Montfort clearly described in the Fiery Prayer (PI 16) and in the Treatise (VD 217).

Mariologists⁹ generally do not deal with the subject of Mary in relation to the final stage of history but at the most, like Laurentin and others¹⁰ - considering Mary “*completely engaged in the dynamics of the history of salvation and in the eschatological rush of the Church*” - they conclude that She “*cannot be extraneous to final eschatology*”¹¹. And if Lumen Gentium 62 states that “*Mary's maternity lasts until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect*”, Montfort is more precise, specifying clearly that Mary will act exceptionally in the last times to such an extent that “*many chosen souls will become living copies of Mary*” (TD 217) thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit:

“God the Holy Spirit wishes to fashion his chosen ones in and through Mary. He tells her, “My well-beloved, my spouse, let all your virtues take root in my chosen ones that they may grow from strength to strength and from grace to grace. (...) Reproduce yourself then in my chosen ones, so that I may have the joy of seeing in them the roots of your invincible faith, profound humility, total mortification, sublime prayer, ardent charity, your firm hope and all your virtues” (TD 34).

⁹ R. LAURENTIN, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II*, Paris, 1957; A. FEUILLET, *Jésus et sa Mère d'après les récits lucanines de l'enfance et d'après saint Jean*, Paris 1974; X. PIKAZA, *El Espíritu Santo y María en la obra de s. Lucas*, in *Ephemerides mariologicae* 28 (1978); TOURON DEL PIE, *María en la escatología de Lucas*, in *Ephemerides mariologicae* 31 (1981); H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3: *Le persone del dramma*, Milano, 1983.

¹⁰ Cfr, *Etude mariales* 40 (1984) 35-90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 89

According to Montfort these “chosen ones” will be the Apostles of the last times who - thanks to the deluge of love of the Spirit, the fruits of their consecration to Mary - will improve the quality of life with a greater holiness and will spread the Gospel in all the earth. Thanks to them the kingdom of sin will be transformed into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

What “*signs*” will distinguish the “*last times*”? According to Scriptures the warning signs of parousia will be the growth of the Church (Mt 24,14), the conversion of Israel (Rm 11,25-26), the cooling of the faith (Lk 18,8) and the appearance of the Antichrist (2Tim 2,3-11).

Montfort, in particular in his “Treatise on True Devotion”, also counts among the signs the very special presence of two heavenly Protagonists, Mary and the Holy Spirit, as God's response to the violent influence of Satan. The earthly protagonists will be the apostles of the last times who, through their consecration to Mary, will receive the fullness of the fire of the Holy Spirit. In them Mary “*will be reproduced*” (TD 34) by expressing all her power which will crush evil.

Chapter II

The Holy Spirit and Mary heavenly protagonists in the last times

“The spirit of Mary is the Spirit of God” (TD 258), consequently their action in the last times is “one”. In order to understand Montfort's thoughts on the specific action of each protagonist it is necessary to examine how he describes them in his works, especially in the Treatise on True Devotion.

1. The Holy Spirit and his relationship with Mary in Montfort's work

Who is the Holy Spirit in Montfort's works? He is the author of the lofty holiness that will bring about the growth of the Church and will transform the world from a kingdom of sin to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, through his sons full of his fire whom he will bring forth through Mary.

Using an original term, Montfort speaks about the Holy Spirit who, *“fruitless in God”* - that is, who in God does not bring forth any divine person - through the Blessed Virgin became fruitful (TD 20 and 21) by bringing forth Jesus Christ, his *“masterpiece”*, God made man. The Holy Spirit, through Mary, also forms all the members of the Mystical Body (TD 140).

In order for men to be moulded by grace they must first of all recognize their weakness and unworthiness. This is only possible through the light of the Holy Spirit (TD 79) who works just as effectively as a soul is similar to the most humble Mary. The preciousness of the devotion to Mary consists in this:

“By the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, his faithful spouse, you will perceive the evil inclinations of your fallen nature and how incapable you are of any good. Finally, the humble Virgin Mary will share her humility with you so that you will despise yourself, you will not despise anyone and you will desire to be despised by others” (TD 213.1).

Insofar as man will acknowledge his own limitations, will the Holy Spirit, as he did with Mary, increase his profound and silent action in him, which will essentially form his inner life. Not everyone will be able to assimilate it in its most intimate fibres; the great majority will stop short at the threshold, at the *“first step”* (TD 119). Only those whom Jesus has chosen and called will reach the top of the holy Mountain and will set up their dwelling place there.

Jesus talks about the first apostle: *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona because flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but my Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 16,17). Only to him - and in him the first apostles of the Church - does the Father reveal the divine *“secret”* enclosed in his Son.

Monfort talks about the apostles of the last times: *“Only the one to whom the Spirit of Jesus reveals the secret (...)”*. The *“secret”* which the Spirit reveals to them is perfect devotion to Mary:

“The Holy Spirit himself will lead this faithful soul to this secret, so that he may advance from strength to strength, from

grace to grace, from light to light, until at length he attains transformation into Jesus in the fullness of his age on earth and of his glory in heaven” (TD 119).

Those who are fully obedient to the action of the Spirit will do everything through Mary, and will be led not by their own will but by the “*Holy Spirit of God*” (TD 258). These will be the new apostles in which always and only the will of the Father will be accomplished and who will be the living instruments of the powerful salvific action of the Holy Spirit.

2. Mary in Montfort's works

When Montfort speaks about Mary he cannot find words that reflect the ardour of his heart, therefore he often uses symbolic language, drawing on the titles and symbols of Scriptures and the Fathers and coining new ones: while speaking about her he uses more than 40 figurative images, which he repeats in variations as much as 102 times, “*however the general concept which distinguishes Mary is her incomprehensibility and ineffability, which are due above all to three factors: her dignity as the Mother of God, her consequent holiness and her increasingly important salvific role*”¹².

“*The creation of expressive symbols of spiritual life presumes the perception of an objective reality which goes beyond the possibility of conceptual expression and the movement toward this reality*”, C. Bernard writes¹³. The authors who deal with eschatology often use symbolism: the eschatological future is perceived intuitively starting from lived and experienced reality because the symbolic image

¹² S. DE FIORES, *La figura di Maria nel Trattato della Vera Devozione*, in MI 10 (1983), p.54.

¹³ BERNARD CH. A., “*Simboli spirituali*”, in *Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità* by Stefano De Fiores and Tullo Goffi, Edizioni Paoline, Roma, 1982, *ad vocem*, pp.1475.

evokes transcendent reality without reducing it to notions and concepts, but enriching it with human experience.

De Fiores groups the Marian symbols used by Montfort according to the “dominant features” of their functions:

“The symbols applied to Mary reveal that according to Montfort the Virgin carries out a manifold function: she is the mould and generating womb of God and God's children (cyclical feature), the maternal and protective environment of spiritual growth (nourishing feature), a consecrated and luminous space which rises up to God (verticality feature), dynamic intermediary toward the encounter with Christ (journey feature)”¹⁴.

Various images used by the Saint come from his pastoral experience, however he more often uses other images which belong to tradition, giving them a new force according to his personal insight: “*These are the thoughts and expressions of the Fathers*”, he himself says in *Love of Eternal Wisdom* (207).

Other symbols, taken with patience from his Notebook, come from medieval authors and are used to deal with popular culture without bothering to quote their source: “*Were I speaking to the so-called intellectuals of today, I would prove at great length all that I am now stating so simply (...). But I am speaking mainly for the poor and simple, (...) let me merely state the truth to them quite plainly without bothering to quote Latin passages which they would not understand*” (TD 26).

The various titles with which Montfort refers to Mary and the symbols he uses to outline her figure thus bear witness not only to the profound biblical and theological preparation of the Breton mission-

¹⁴ S. DE FIORES, *ibid*, 59-61.

ary, but above all his passionate love for the Virgin and his longing to make known the wonderful discovery of the grace contained in True Devotion, the source from which the power of Fire of the Spirit will spring.

Mary, “*relative only to God*” (TD 225), is “*the wonderful echo of God. When we say "Mary", she re-echoes "God"*. (SM 21). She transforms everything we give her into an offering of love toward the Holy Trinity, and our encounter with her becomes an encounter with God.

Following a very important and sound course in the history of the Church, which goes from Saint Irenaeus to Saint Bernard, to Saint Bonaventure, up until Bérulle, Montfort doesn't limit himself to explaining Mary's role in the historical coming of Christ, rather he wants to grasp the salvific meaning that her presence and her role imply in the history of the salvation of the world and of every single human being.

Salvation comes from Jesus, the “*way*” that leads to the Father; “*Mary is the safest, easiest, shortest and most perfect way of approaching Jesus*” (TD 55). This is the basic concept that is continuously taken up in the Treatise¹⁵.

Montfort persistently repeats that Mary is “*treasurer*” and thus “*mediatrix*” and “*dispenser of graces*”¹⁶: the fullness of grace

¹⁵ “*Mary is the way by which Jesus first came to us, and she is the sure means, the direct and immaculate way to Jesus and the perfect guide to him* (TD 50); *she is the way which leads to our Lord.* (TD 75), *Jesus chose her as the perfect means to unite himself to us and unite us to him.* (TD 125); *our proximate end, our mysterious intermediary and the easiest way of reaching him* (TD 265)”.

¹⁶ “*God the Father gathered all the waters together and called them the seas. He gathered all his graces together and called them Mary* (TD 23); *God the Son made her the treasurer of all his Father had given him as heritage. Mary is his mystical channel, his aqueduct, through which he causes his mercies to flow gently and abundantly* (TD 24); *God the Holy Spirit chose*

which God has poured into Her makes her also the avenger of God's laws and the leader of the “*predestined*” in the apocalyptic battle against the “*devil and the enemies of God*”¹⁷.

The image of temple and city of God¹⁸ had already been attributed to Mary by the Fathers of the Church and by the Liturgy in her three main figures: the closed Eastern gate, the symbol of her virginity; the Holy of Holies and the treasures contained in it, the symbols of her holiness and intimacy with God¹⁹; but Montfort once more takes up these images, reassesses them and makes them his own according to his original style, permeated with a moral rather than doctrinal point of view and whose aim is conversion²⁰.

Montfort gives ample room to the image of Mary as the Mother of the new creation and the garden of reconciliation²¹: “*God the Son*

her as the dispenser of all he possesses (TD 25); *she is keeper of his treasures, dispenser of his graces, worker of his wonders, restorer of the human race, mediatrix on behalf of men* (TD 28); *Mary is the Lord's treasury from whose fullness all men are made rich* (TD 23), *the guardian of all our possessions in the natural and supernatural sphere* (TD 173), *treasurer and universal dispenser of the merits and virtues of Jesus her Son* (TD 206); *treasurer and universal dispenser of the gifts and graces of the Almighty Father* (TD 207); *She is the treasury of the Lord*” (TD 216).

¹⁷ Mary is the “*leader of God's armies, destroyer of the enemies of God, and faithful associate in his great works and triumphs*” (TD 28); she is “*terrible as an army in battle array*” before the devil (TD 50 and 210); she is the most terrible enemy of the devil that God has ever created (TD 52).

¹⁸ “*The Oratory for the soul where we offer up our prayers to God without fear of being ignored; the Tower of David for us where we can seek safety from all our enemies; a burning lamp lighting up our inmost soul and inflaming us with love for God; a sacred place of repose where we can contemplate God in her company; finally Mary will be the only means we will use in going to God, and she will become our intercessor for everything we need*”. (SM 47.2)

¹⁹ Cf. G. Gharib, *Presentazione di Maria*, in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, edited by Stefano de Fiores and Salvatore Meo, ad vocem, Cinisello Balsamo, 1986, 1039-1045.

²⁰ “*Mary is the sanctuary of Divinity, the Resting-place of the Blessed Trinity, the Throne of God, the City of God, the Altar of God, the Temple of God, the World of God* (TD 5-7-262); *the temple of the true Solomon and the mystical city of God* (TD 48); *Eastern Gate, through which the High Priest, Jesus Christ, enters and goes out into the world* (TD 262); *the place of his repose and the ark of his sanctification* (TD 268); *the spiritual abode of all spiritual souls; the throne of honour for the greatest saints in heaven; a house of gold, a tower of David and a tower of ivory* (TD 178); *Mary's womb is, the house of the divine secrets* (TD 264); *the throne-room of God's mysteries, the seat of the mercy, the liberality, and the glory of God; the magnificence of God, the seat of glory for his Father*” (TD 248).

came into the Blessed Virgin's womb as a new Adam into his earthly paradise” (TD 18). Mary is the virginal and immaculate earth in which the genuine tree of life grows.

Mary, the “*mould of God*” is perhaps the image Montfort holds dearest, in which he himself takes delight (“*How beautiful and convincing is the comparison of the mould which I have used!*” (TD 221) because it appropriately expresses the action of the Holy Spirit who “*reproduces*” Mary in those who entrust themselves to her:

“She is forma Dei, the mould of God (TD 219): *the great, unique mould of God, designed to make living images of God at little expense and in a short time* (TD 260)”.

The urgent need for a new and higher sanctity for the Church and for the world comes from the action of the Holy Spirit who with Mary and through Mary will mould “in a short time” champions of holiness as never before, who will be able to accomplish humanly impossible tasks.

The analysis of Marian symbology in the Treatise on True Devotion shows that Montfort had a profound and personal experience of Mary which cannot be reduced to ideas or principles.

21 Mary is “*the earthly paradise of the new Adam, the world of God, magnificence of the Almighty, wonderful creature* (TD 6); *genuine tree the bears that Fruit of life* (TD 44); *earthly paradise, virgin and blessed land from which sinful Adam and Eve were expelled* (TD 45); *tree of life, holy place, a holy of holies, in which saints are formed and moulded* (TD 164 and 218); *true earthly paradise of the new Adam. In this divine place there are trees planted by the hand of God and watered by his divine unction which have borne and continue to bear fruit that is pleasing to him. There are flower-beds studded with a variety of beautiful flowers of virtue, diffusing a fragrance which delights even the angels. Here there are meadows verdant with hope, impregnable towers of fortitude, enchanting mansions of confidence... Only the Holy Spirit can teach us the truths that these material objects symbolise. In this place the air is perfectly pure. There is no night but only the brilliant day of the sacred humanity, the resplendent, spotless sun of the Divinity, the blazing furnace of love, melting all the base metal thrown into it and changing it into gold. There the river of humility gushes forth from the soil, divides into four branches and irrigates the whole of this enchanted place*” (TD 261).

3. The very special presence of Mary and the action of the Holy Spirit in the last times

Montfort, starting from the concept that Mary and the Holy Spirit collaborated intimately for the first coming of Jesus in the Incarnation, concludes that his second coming will come about in the same way: *“It was through the Blessed Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world”* (TD 1).

This is the fundamental theme of the Treatise (nos. 13, 22, 49, 157, 217, 262) and all of Montfort's works. John Paul II's *Redemptoris Mater* is along the same lines²².

The first time, Jesus came in humiliation and Mary gave her essential contribution by remaining in humility and hiddenness; in the second coming she will take part in the glorious manifestation of her Son and will shine forth *“in mercy, power and grace”* (TD 50) *“so that Jesus may be known, loved and served through her”* (TD 49).

The same Spirit, who hid the figure of Mary during her earthly life and during the beginning of the Church, now intends to glorify her without any reservation (TD 49). Mary magnified the Lord by humbly accepting his plan, now the Lord - according to his promise - looks on the humility of his handmaid, *“his masterpiece”* (TD 50) and exalts her by making her share in his own fruitfulness in bringing forth *“all the members of his mystical body”* (TD 17):

²² *“In the mystery of the Assumption is expressed the faith of the Church, according to which Mary is “united by a close and indissoluble bond” to Christ, for, if as Virgin and Mother she was singularly united with him in his first coming, so through her continued collaboration with him she will also be united with him in expectation of the second; “redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son,” she also has that specifically maternal role of mediatrix of mercy at his final coming, when all those who belong to Christ “shall be made alive,” when “the last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26) (John Paul II, Enc. Redemptoris Mater, n. 41).*

“Just as in natural and bodily generation there is a father and a mother, so in the supernatural and spiritual generation there is a father who is God and a mother who is Mary. All true children of God have God for their father and Mary for their mother; anyone who does not have Mary for his mother, does not have God for his father” (TD 30).

In the last times the Spirit will mould in her, with a *“fiery deluge of pure love”*, the champions of *“lofty holiness”* who will renew the face of the earth and reform the Church (FP 17). However, Mary's action does not consist only in generating, she also has a formative action on the apostles of the last times:

“The formation and the education of the great saints who will come at the end of the world are reserved to her, for only this singular and wondrous virgin can produce in union with the Holy Spirit singular and wondrous things” (TD 35); *“She is the mountain you have erected on the summit of the highest mountains. Blessed, a thousandfold blessed, are those priests whom you have chosen with such care to dwell with you on this divine mountain of all delights”* (FP 25).

“These holy men whom God will raise up towards the end of time” (SM 59) *“will crush the head of Satan”* (TD 54) in the last and decisive battle they will fight following the *“leader of God's armies”* (TD 28).

It is the agonal image of Mary (Song 6,4) who never before as in these last times is *“as an army in battle array”* to thwart the enemy's action; the latter, *“knowing that he has little time (Rev 12,12) to destroy souls, intensifies his efforts and his onslaughts every day stirring up savage persecutions and setting treacherous snares for Mary's faithful servants and children”* (TD 50).

The destruction of the kingdom of evil goes hand in hand with the construction of a new reality which Mary and the Holy Spirit will accomplish in these children: *“These great souls will fight with one hand, and with the other they will build the temple of the true Solomon and the mystical city of God”* (TD 48). Thus the growth of the Church will take place with the conversion of Muslims, pagans and Jews: *“Lord, send this all-consuming Spirit upon the earth to create priests who burn with this same fire and whose ministry will renew the face of the earth and reform your Church”* (FP 17).

Therefore it is appropriate to take a deeper look into the characteristics of these champions of the last times, the privileged instruments of a new and wonderful action of Grace.

Chapter III

The “apostles of the last times” according to Saint Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort

The general context for the need for the Apostles of the last times is the universal disorder which Montfort sees prevailing in the Church and in the world (FP 17) and which he tries to remedy by offering all his human and priestly reality. He knows well, however, that he cannot do it on his own and, with a “Fiery Prayer”, he asks for other apostles, who all belong to Mary: poor and free like Francis, powerful warriors like Ignatius, determined to fight the last great battle under the leadership of Mary who - *“terrible as an army in battle array”* (Song 6,4) - will lead her champions against *“the enemies of God”* (TD 50,6).

Thanks to these apostles the quality of the Church will be improved in an elevation of holiness (FP 5,17) and it will grow in numbers with the conversion of Jews, Schismatics, Muslims, etc. (FP 5, 17, 35; TD 48, 50, 59).

Their mission will be to destroy sin by bringing men to a radical conversion and by establishing the *“kingdom of Jesus”*. This destruction of evil and the building of the kingdom will not taken place suddenly, but will take place subsequently and quickly by *“these great souls filled with grace and zeal, (...) who will fight with one hand and build with the other”* (TD 48).

1. “Who will these servants, slaves and children of Mary be?”

They are those the Spirit has chosen so that “*his holy Mother may be known, honoured and loved as never before*” in the last times, at the conclusion of the ancient battle between the woman and the serpent, between her offspring and the serpent's offspring (Gen 3,15). At that time Mary's power will be revealed, right when Satan will try to strike her “*heel*”, that is “*ses humbles esclaves et ses pauvres enfants*” to whom she will convey her grace.

They will be the great saints of the last times who, “*in union with Mary, will crush the head of Satan with their heel, that is, their humility, and bring victory to Jesus Christ*” (TD 54).

Their main characteristic will be a profound inner life; following John's example they “*stay at home with their mother*” (TD 196) devoted to prayer, following the example and in the company of she who has always loved meditation and prayer. Their main concern must be their own interior perfection, “*compared to which all other work is mere child's play*” (TD 196).

They will live the first and only commandment of Love by seeking God with all their heart, with all their mind and with all their strength, like the first monks and hermits who abandoned the world in order to achieve complete unity with Him. From this profound vertical tension will spring forth the horizontal one, as a natural consequence: they will go out into the world only to carry out the duties of their status following the will of God their Father and Mary their Mother.

These apostles of the last times will thus possess a highly spiritual dimension and, by the power the Holy Spirit will convey to them, thanks to their consecration to Mary, they will destroy sin and will be the cornerstones of the new kingdom:

“We are given reason to believe that, towards the end of time and perhaps sooner than we expect, God will raise up great men filled with the Holy Spirit and imbued with the spirit of Mary. Through them Mary, Queen most powerful, will work great wonders in the world, destroying sin and setting up the kingdom of Jesus her Son upon the ruins of the corrupt kingdom of the world. These holy men will accomplish this by means of the devotion of which I only trace the main outlines and which suffers from my incompetence” (SM 59).

When Montfort speaks of the apostles of the last times, he sets off the volcano which burns in his heart, by resorting to symbols, as he did with Mary; we are amazed at their quantity (in one page he condenses more than 20), at their variety, at their significance and at the rapid succession with which he expresses them. Many of them have biblical foundations (arrows, perfume, thundering clouds, breath, rain, wings, two-edged sword...) which indicate the active presence of the heavenly protagonists (the Holy Spirit, Mary, the Angels) in the earthly protagonists (the Apostles of the last times), who are their concrete manifestation.

The first characteristic of these apostles, condition *sine qua non*, is that *“they will consecrate themselves entirely to this Queen’s (Mary) service as subjects and slaves of love, (...) and will surrender themselves to her, body and soul, without reserve”* (TD 55). In exchange Mary will give herself totally to these souls and the Holy Spirit, *“finding his dear Spouse present again in souls, will come down into them and fill them with his gifts, especially wisdom, by which they will produce wonders of grace”* (TD 217). The first gift of the Spirit will be a total purification: *“They will be as the children of Levi, thoroughly purified by the fire of great tribulations”*. Purified *“in a short time”* (TD 82, 156, 168, 219, 260) by the *“fire”* of suffering, with Mary living in them, the apostles themselves

become “fire”: *“They will be flaming fire (...)they will leave behind them nothing but the gold of love, which is the fulfilment of the whole law (...); they will carry the gold of love in their heart, the frankincense of prayer in their mind and the myrrh of mortification in their body”* (TD 55-59).

Without realizing it, Montfort takes a thorough interior x-ray of himself and, now perfectly moulded in Mary's mould, he acts as a model for the future apostles, in a verticalism without any reservation which can only set one free.

Interior freedom is the greatest longing which he forcefully expresses in the Fiery Prayer (FP 7-12). He now entrusts this utmost ideal, which the Saint has always remained faithful to, often paying dearly for it, to “his “ priests who will revive its spirit in the last times: *“LIBEROS!”*

“LIBEROS!”, without human responsibilities and interests: *“without gold or silver and, more important still... attached to nothing (...), their hearts will not be troubled, nor will they show favour to anyone; (...) without concern in the midst of other priests, ecclesiastics and clerics (...), they will not spare or heed or fear any man, however powerful he may be (...); surprised at nothing, troubled at nothing...”*

“LIBEROS!”, no longer having ties with the flesh, the blood or the world... renouncing themselves and brought to new life through Mary; totally united to God, *“true ministers of the Lord (...), true apostles of the last times (...) true disciples of Jesus Christ, imitating his poverty, his humility, his contempt of the world and his love”*, they will be able to hover in God's heavens in the total service of the Spirit who Mary will fill them with: *“They will be clouds in the sky (FP 9), thunder-clouds flying through the air at the slightest breath of the Holy Spirit (...) they will have the silver wings of*

the dove enabling them to go wherever the Holy Spirit calls them, filled as they are with the resolve to seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls” (TD 57-58).

Renewed through Mary and filled with the Holy Spirit, they will be able to convey to their brothers this great power of “*fire*” contained in their hearts and they will carry out their battle brandishing the “*two-edged sword of God's word*” (TD 57), the dreadful weapon which “the Lord of hosts” gives them and in which is contained “*the strength to work wonders and carry off glorious spoils from God's enemies*” (TD 58).

With this sword “*they will pierce through and through all those against whom they are sent by Almighty God*”, destroying the kingdom of Satan in men and at the same time building up in them the kingdom of God.

They will destroy the kingdom of Satan because “*they will thunder against sin, they will storm against the world, they will strike down the devil and his followers... they will be the odour of death to the great, the rich and the proud of this world*”; they will build up the kingdom of God because “*they will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love*”; they will bring to the poor and lowly everywhere the sweet fragrance of Jesus, they will shower down the rain of God's word and of eternal life (...).

True followers of Christ, “*they will have the blood-stained standard of the Cross on their shoulders*”, that is they will work in the spirit of great sufferings which they will accept with dignity and strength, making it their only glory²³ and “*they will point out the narrow way to God in pure truth according to the holy Gospel, and not according to the maxims of the world*”. Their preaching will therefore be essential and practical²⁴, combined with a behaviour which will

²³ Gal 6,14: “*But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world*”.

reflect “*the simplicity and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ*”, testified also by “*the crucifix in their right hand and the rosary in their left*”, concrete signs which convey their great love for Jesus and Mary.

The apostles of the last times will be a summary of the manifold spiritualities which the saints have expressed throughout the history of the Church, in a way that has never been manifested before: “*especially towards the end of the world, and indeed soon, Almighty God and his holy Mother are to raise up great saints who will surpass in holiness most other saints as much as the cedars of Lebanon tower above little shrubs* (TD 47). *Such are the great men who are to come. By the will of God Mary is to prepare them to extend his rule over the impious and unbelievers. But when and how will this come about? ...Only God knows. For our part we must yearn and wait for it in silence and in prayer: “I have waited and waited”* (TD 59).

From the description Montfort gives of the apostles and their work, it clearly emerges that this battle will take place in the heart of man, a concept which Montfort had already expressed on other occasions (TD 38), without cosmic catastrophes.

2. The “secret” of such grace consists in consecration

The strength of the Apostles of the last times will consist precisely in their consecration to Jesus through Mary (SM 59):

“As all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus it naturally follows that the most perfect of all devotions is that which conforms, unites, and

²⁴ SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Rule 9: “*announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity of speech.*”

consecrates us most completely to Jesus. Now of all God's creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus. That is why perfect consecration to Jesus is but a perfect and complete consecration of oneself to the Blessed Virgin, which is the devotion I teach; or in other words, it is the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism” (TD 120).

Substantially, this devotion consists in giving the Blessed Virgin our body, our soul, our material and spiritual possessions, and even our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future, all that we possess in the order of nature and grace, without any reservation (TD 121). Consecration allows Mary to “*reproduce herself*” in souls in order to be an irresistible call for the Holy Spirit who “*will come down into them with great power. He will fill them with his gifts, especially wisdom, by which they will produce wonders of grace*” (TD 217).

In conclusion, consecration “*to the Blessed Virgin and to Jesus*” means allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our life in depth and in totality, until we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. “*The kingdom of the Father and the kingdom of Mary*” will come when this devotion is known and practiced by everyone, thus allowing Mary's spirit to take the place of ours in order to rejoice in God, her Saviour: “*May the soul of Mary be in each one of us to glorify the Lord! May the spirit of Mary be in each one of us to rejoice in God*” (TD 217).

Mary has done this and continues to do this in those who, following her “*Totus tuus*”, consecrate themselves to Her by opening wide the

door of their hearts to God²⁵. It is logical that the great adversary will unleash his anger against the “*holy race of Mary*”:

“By word and example they will draw all men to a true devotion to her and though this will make many enemies, it will also bring about many victories and much glory to God alone” (TD 48). *“True it is, indeed, great God, as you yourself have foretold, that the devil will lie in wait to attack the heel of this mysterious woman, that is, the little company of her children who will come towards the end of time”* (FP 13).

3. The establishment of the “Company”

Montfort is convinced that only with these new apostles can the Church obtain victory over the evil which devastates it more and more. In 1700, immediately after becoming a priest, he wrote to Leschassier, his spiritual director:

“I feel a tremendous urge to make our Lord and his holy Mother loved, to go in a humble and simple way to teach catechism to the poor in country places and to arouse in sinners a devotion to our Blessed Lady (...) I see the needs of the Church and I cannot help pleading continually for a small and poor band of good priests to do this work under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin” (L5).

He thus tries to form a “Company” with those who Providence puts along his way and he strives to convey to them his utmost ideals of battle and immolation. However, as much as he does his best, he isn't able to realize this project which he feels was entrusted to him;

²⁵ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, speech of 22 October 1978 “*Open wide the doors to Christ!*”. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998.

little by little his followers Peter de Bastières, Gabriel Francis Grignon, Peter Keating, Thomas Le Bourhis..., back out for various reasons:

“Louis' ideals are frightening: the more this obstinate missionary continues on his journey, the more his occasional auxiliaries... drift away from the scene”²⁶.

When he becomes aware of his helplessness, in order to accomplish this plan he directs all his remarkable interior energy toward the Trinity, so that this “company” may come forth directly from his heart. It is the “Fiery Prayer”, the agonizing cry of God's giant:

“Give free rein, then, O Lord, to your merciful intent and raise up men of your right hand (...) Ever keep this Congregation in mind, Almighty God! (...) by the power of your right arm which has lost nothing of its strength, make it a living reality and lead it to perfection. Renew the signs and perform other wonders; let us feel the help of your arm. Great God, who can change lifeless stones into sons of Abraham, say but one word and it will be enough to send good workers to gather in your harvest, and missionaries worthy of the name to work in your Church” (FP 2,3).

Up until the last moments of his life he will continue to ask God to raise up “men of his right hand”; for this purpose in March 1716 he organizes a holy pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saumur with 33 White Penitents “to obtain from God through Mary's intercession good missionaries, who will follow the example of the apostles by complete abandonment to divine Providence and the practice of virtue, under the protection of Our Lady” (RHP, 1).

²⁶ B. PAPÀSOGLI, *Montfort un uomo per l'ultima Chiesa*, Roma 1991, 39.

Will Montfort see the birth of “his” company of apostles during his lifetime? Not as he imagines it²⁷, because “*this will happen especially towards the end of the world*”; there is still time, even if he is convinced that it will be “*indeed soon*” (TD 47): in the spiritual world it is a standard feature to perceive the events seen in prophecy as very close at hand. Montfort, from the summit of the mountain on which the Spirit has placed him, sees the horde of incarnate demons which are spreading in the Church and he asks God for companions who may join the battle with him crying his “*Who is like God?*” But heaven seems to ignore him.

Is it possible that God won't grant Mary's heartbroken request for this prophet, in which she lives and fully identifies with?²⁸ The time has not come yet. Before the altar of the Trinity, Mary will keep alive this fiery cry which her servant raises up in the name of the Church and of humanity and its effects will be seen in the most difficult moments of the last Church.

Saint Louis Mary pays the high price of a prophet who spiritually lives the dramatic final battle between good and evil; he has realized that in order to accomplish his salvific plan “*Almighty God and his holy Mother are to raise up great saints who will surpass in holiness most other saints*” (TD 47) and he asks for its fulfilment with all the strength of his being.

This exasperated tension is the Gethsemane in which the Saint struggles and is on the verge of despair; his agony is “a thousand

²⁷ “*At the age of forty-three he died from the rhythm of his own apostolic race (...) in his bare hands he doesn't even bear the joy of a complete foundation (...) of that company of missionaries for which he wrote, in letters of blood, his “Fiery Prayer”, the only hope and longing of his existence, only its seed remains, that is a rule, a few brothers and two priests, to whom he bequeaths, on his death bed, a arid will without emotions, the instruments of his own missionary efforts*”, B. PAPASOGLI, *Introduzione Generale*, in *Opere di San Luigi Maria da Montfort*, vol. I, Roma, 1990, p. XXXVII.

²⁸ Cf. TD 216: “*she imparts to you her own virtues and clothes you in her own merits. So you will be able to say confidently to God: “Behold Mary, your handmaid, be it done unto me according to your word.”*”

times” worse than death: *“I would rather die a thousand deaths than endure such a fate. Send me your help from heaven or let me die”* (FP 14).

Just like Jesus in the garden, Saint Louis also overcomes human discouragement by an act of faith and hope in the Father's intervention:

“Were it not for the hope that I have that, sooner or later, the interests of your glory will prevail and that you will hear this poor sinner's prayer, as you have heard so many others: I would make mine the ultimate plea of your prophet: take away my life!” (FP 14).

Montfort wins his “agon”, that is his existential spiritual battle, by accepting the will of God; however, in his “Take away my life” we find his exhausted humanity.

It is man's eternal battle between life and death²⁹. If we prefer a psychological point of view, we should determine the two conflicting inclinations in man, or rather the very essence of man as the conflict of these two vital realities: man who biologically is inclined toward life, but who psychologically possesses a necrophilic potential which makes him desire the annihilation of himself as an alternative solution.

On a spiritual level, we can interpret it as the mighty duel between life and death that Jesus confronted and won for all of us and this inheritance belongs to those who follow him.

The Father, as he did with Jesus, bows down over his champion, helps him to drink the bitter cup of his “failure” and gives him new strength to continue fighting:

“Yet, my trust in you is so great that I am inspired to cry out like another of your prophets: I will live and proclaim the

²⁹ Cf E. FROMM, *“Anatomia della distruzione umana”*, Milano 1973.

Lord's mighty works. This I will do until the time comes when I can say with Simeon: Now, O Lord, you let your servant depart in peace because my eyes have seen your salvation” (FP 14).

The Saint is convinced that his “*fiery prayer*” has been answered and, with his unusual ability to materialize plans which he has spiritually conceived, he writes the Rule for the Missionary Priests of the Company and the letters to the Members of the Company of Mary with renewed conviction.

His goal is to outline the journey for the future apostles which is divided into two categories: the “Company”, made up of “*all those worthy priests who are to be found throughout the world*” (FP 29), which he fervently asked the Trinity for in the Fiery Prayer and the “*mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary*” (TD 114) made up of lay people, both men and women.

4. The priests of the “company of Mary”

When Montfort addresses his Fiery Prayer to the three divine Persons, he is thinking above all of the “*company*” of the religious who, inspired by his same spirit, will fight the last battle for Mary's final victory over the great adversary.

The Rule he wrote for the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary contains some original ideas which can only be understood as a mysterious prophecy, right from the first paragraph:

“1) Only priests who have already completed their seminary training are to be admitted to the Company; therefore clerics in minor orders are excluded until such time as they have been ordained priests.”

In no other religious order is such a rule found, in fact, all founders tend to have their own seminaries in which they can better shape vocations according to their own spirituality.

This strange clear and peremptory directive, placed precisely at the beginning, shows how much Montfort had this subject at heart.

For what reasons? We can make a few hypotheses:

- he sees the times close at hand, and there is no time for the numerous years of formation in the seminary;

- the priests who will form the “Company” must already be experts in spiritual battles and tempered by suffering, and already on their way to holiness;

- since we are dealing with priests who are already ordained, they must necessarily belong to a diocesan or religious group with which they are no longer able to identify themselves because they feel more binding and demanding spiritual needs.

Perhaps they are “*the stones which the builders rejected*” who are looking for a suitable arrangement along with others who have their same interior tension. Montfort's eagle's eye tries to locate others in God's heaven, himself being the great victim of persecution³⁰, who may resound the anxiety of his soul:

“Whoever is on the Lord's side, let him come to me! (Ex 32,36). Let all those worthy priests who are to be found throughout the world, those still in the fight and those who have withdrawn to deserts and secluded places, let them, I say, come and join us. In unity there is strength. With the

³⁰ Montfort received many sanctions and refusals by superiors and Bishops with the order not to return to various dioceses. Cf. B. PAPÀSOGLI, *op. cit.*

cross as our standard, let us form a strongly disciplined army drawn up in lines of battle. Let us make a concerted attack on the enemies of God who have already sounded the call to arms (...). Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Rise up! (Ps 44,24). Arise, Lord. Why is it you appear to be like one asleep? Arise in your might, your mercy and your justice and create this bodyguard of hand-picked men who will protect your house, defend your glory and save the souls that are yours. Thus, there will be but one sheepfold and one shepherd, and all will make your temple resound with their praise of your glory. Amen.” (FP 29-30).

The members of the Company must be free from any permanent occupation, and possess no worldly possessions (and if they do, they must get rid of them before joining the Company); they must be devoted only to evangelization, “*instabiles*” (with no fixed abode) and not “*habitatores quietis*” (sedentary people who don't like to fight), they must be in good health and must not be too old (under 60), with strong and obedient lay brothers who will support them.

In addition, every year they must renew their vows of poverty and obedience for five consecutive years. The saint is extremely demanding regarding these two vows: only genuine poverty makes one light and ready to run wherever the Spirit calls him by means of obedience.

Montfort builds his Rule by drawing from the essence of the foundations achieved by the saints he admires the most: the poverty of Saint Francis of Assisi; the missionary spirit of Saint Paul, Saint Vincent Ferrer and Saint Francis Xavier; the missionariety among the poorest “*like Monsieur Vincent's priests*”; the spirit of fighters of Ignatius of Loyola; above all they must be obedient: the formal or obdurate disobedience to a superior is the greatest offence that

can be committed in the Company and as perhaps the only one which merits exclusion from the community (RM 25).

We can well understand Montfort's resoluteness regarding obedience because it is the heart of consecration which consists in the total denial of one's own will.

The missionary's life is measured by intense prayer: not less than half an hour of mental prayer in the morning, recitation of the entire Rosary and of the small rosary of the Blessed Virgin, at least half an hour of thanksgiving after every holy Mass, the entire breviary recited in common, if possible, a quarter of an hour of examination of conscience before lunch, in a climate of continuous silence and modesty. Ample time is put aside to hearing confessions.

In this first stage there is no talk of penance - which was very popular in the eighteenth century - but of "fire" which works in the soul through suffering.

This is the spirituality of Mary's "Fiat" which She conveys and continues to live in her "*servants, slaves and children*": complete abandonment to God, accepting "great tribulations" with joy and leaving the way open to the "fire" of the Spirit, the only author of our sanctification.

Since they are consecrated to Mary, these champions give Her the offering of their priesthood and become, like John the apostle, her priests and witnesses:

" (...) et ex illa hora accepit eam discipulus in sua"³¹. In his life and in his possessions which saint John called «in sua» (with him), he placed above all his priesthood, which he gave to Mary and placed at her service. In short, he became Mary's priest"³²

³¹ "(...) and from that hour the disciple took her to his house" (Jn 19,27).

Are these fiery priests the members of Montfort's congregation (whose foundations he lay) which was created according to his spirituality? Or perhaps do they refer to a new ecclesiastic group who is totally consecrated to Mary, in line with the "Montfortian" John Paul II's *totus tuus*? This hypothesis seems more consistent with the strong prophetic and ecclesiastic figure of Saint Louis Mary:

"Montfort's spiritual posterity is broader than his religious foundations (...) and it encourages devotees of Mary and her doctors not to place themselves at the margins of history, but rather to project themselves toward the renewal of the Church and of the world, under the influence of the creative Spirit. When the Church becomes "Mary", Jesus will be born again and will reign in the world".³³

5. "Other priests who will join them"

Together with this first group, which constitutes the "full-time" Company of Mary, Montfort sees other priests who, without joining it permanently, will totally embrace its ideal of battle. A second Saint Michael, in these times of general confusion and rebellion to God, he spiritually takes over the reins of Christianity, dismayed by the enemy's violence. There is no time to organize a counterattack according to customary schemes; he gathers all the hidden forces which Mary has prepared.

With the spirit of the great biblical fighters³⁴, he begins the counter-attack with a general call to arms:

³² A. LHOMEAU, *op.cit.*, p.78.

³³ S. DE FIORES, "*Lo Spirito Santo e Maria*", p.48.

³⁴ "*And Mathathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: Every one that has zeal for the law, and maintains the testament, let him follow me*" (1 Mac 2,27)..

“Let all those worthy priests who are to be found throughout the world, (that is in the universal Church), those still in the fight and those who have withdrawn to deserts and secluded places, let them, I say, come and join us. With the cross as our standard, let us form a strongly disciplined army drawn up in lines of battle. Let us make a concerted attack on the enemies of God who have already sounded the call to arms” (FP 29).

These are the “fiery priests” who will fight the battle of the last times and lead the Church to victory.

6. The “mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary”

Next to the priests of the Company and “*other priests who will join them*” Montfort places a third category of lay people who will however live their membership to the Company of Mary with the same intensity.

At first glance it might seem to be a third order like other existing ones; but this “legion” goes well beyond a small group; it involves all humanity. It deals with lay people who have consecrated themselves to Mary according to the directives of the “*Treatise on True Devotion*”, the “*little book*” which forms and transforms the chosen ones. These, together with the “*fiery priests*”, will destroy the devil who will hurl himself against them to “tear them to pieces with his diabolic teeth” (cf. Rev 12,4):

“I clearly foresee that raging beasts will come in fury to tear to pieces with their diabolical teeth this little book and the one the Holy Spirit made use of to write it, or they will cause

it at least to lie hidden in the darkness and silence of a chest and so prevent it from seeing the light of day. They will even attack and persecute those who read it and put into practice what it contains. But no matter! So much the better! It even gives me encouragement to hope for great success at the prospect of a mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women, who will fight the devil, the world, and corrupt nature in the perilous times that are sure to come. "Let the reader understand. Let him accept this teaching who can" (TD 114).

Redemption will be accomplished when the Father's will is done in all men; only then will the heavenly Jerusalem come down upon the earth and take the place of the present Babylon. When will this happen?

"My dear friend, when will that happy time come, that age of Mary, when many souls, chosen by Mary and given her by the most High God, will hide themselves completely in the depths of her soul, becoming living copies of her loving and glorifying Jesus? That day will dawn only when the devotion I teach is understood and put into practice. "Lord, that your kingdom may come, may the reign of Mary come" (TD 217).

Today more than ever, Montfort's prophetic words are being carried out in mysterious ways. The power of grace contained in the Treatise is being manifested in its marvellous propagation³⁵ thanks to this "legion" whose members can no longer be counted.

³⁵ "From Europe to Africa, from the Americas to Asia, to Oceania: we often discover the presence of people or groups that live out the consecration to Jesus Christ through Mary according to the method taught by Montfort, even before a missionary arrives in that area or the Church is organized in that place. It is the vanguard of the Gospel, it is the Spirit who encourages its Church, it is Mary who carries Jesus in her womb, still hidden, but destined to then reveal himself as the light of the peoples and the salvation of the world", B. CORTI-NOVIS, *Presentazione delle Opere di S. Luigi Maria da Montfort*, Roma 1990.

Even in this aspect the “prophet” Montfort is ahead of his times when he grants lay people an active participation in the salvific action of the Spirit which will be endorsed and made official by the Church in Vatican Council II³⁶.

³⁶ *“To intensify the apostolic activity of the people of God, the most holy synod earnestly addresses itself to the laity...”* Decree on the APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY, 1..

Chapter IV

The updating of Montfort's teachings on the last times

The second coming of Jesus, therefore, will not take place with exterior phenomena, but in our hearts thanks to the work of the Company of priests and of the mighty legion of lay people who are totally united to Mary “*her humble servants and her poor children*” who will crush the head of the serpent.

The “*humble servants*” are the “Company” of priests who have voluntarily denied their own freedom, according to the spirit of “True Devotion”. The “*poor children*” are the “mighty legion” of lay people, the “heel” of Mary, that is the category of the weakest: all those who suffer and the children “*infirmi mundi*” as Pope Benedict XV called them³⁷, who have consecrated themselves totally to Mary.

The salvific value of suffering is an expected and fundamental theme of Catholic spirituality, from Saint Paul's “*in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions*” (Col 1,24) to John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris*³⁸.

Instead, the inclusion of children in the great plan of redemption is something new, even though various passages of Scriptures are indicative in this respect. When we say “children” we mean adults

³⁷ Osservatore Romano, 30 July 1916.

³⁸ Apostolic Letter, 11 February 1984.

who have denied themselves³⁹, by dying⁴⁰ and being reborn in spirit⁴¹, and children in age⁴²: only children are allowed to enter into the kingdom of heaven, that is in the dimension of the spirit.

1. Children in spirit

These are all those who have followed Jesus and who must obey the conditions laid down by the Master: *“Unless you are converted and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 18,3). They are adults to whom Mary gives new life and who Montfort refers to with the word *“enfant”*, which appears several times in his works (TD 31, 37; SR 57; LFC 4) and which means *“donner le jour à un enfant”*, *“mettre au monde”*⁴³, that is *“to give birth”* and it expresses the action of Mary who brings forth to supernatural life and then nourishes and rears.

We have a confirmation of this in other passages of Montfort's work in which there is a better explanation of the life-giving action of Mary whom the Father wanted as the mother of his Only begotten son and of all men, even though in different ways: with Jesus, her function of giving birth didn't involve pain (*“Blessed is the fruit of your womb (...) which you bore without suffering and which you brought forth without pain”* SMR 57); on the other hand, with men (*“children of pain and of the law, brought forth in her sorrowful heart”*) (LAC 4).

³⁹ *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself”* (Mt 16,24).

⁴⁰ *“For he that will save his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it”* (Mt 16,25).

⁴¹ *“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a children will not enter it at all”* (Lk 18,17).

⁴² *“Let the children come to me, and do not keep them away, for of such is the kingdom of heaven”* (Lk 18,16).

⁴³ Grande Larousse, *ad vocem*, Paris 1863

Thus Mary has received a very special grace to bring forth (“*enfant*”) to the life of the spirit the “*predestined*” as well. They can be born only by means of Her, by becoming children (“*enfant*”) who draw life and nourishment from their Mother (SM 14. 8, TD 31). In them She can “*take up her abode*” (TD 29); she can “*form them in Jesus and Jesus in them*” (TD 37), by collaborating with the Holy Spirit in an indissoluble way. God the Father, having given her power over his own Son, also gave her power over these “*children*” (TD 37) whom she rears - and in them the whole Church - in a binding and heroic, and at the same time liberating, holiness because she shows them the true face of the Father⁴⁴.

The “*Treatise on true devotion*” is the forge of this ultimate holiness in which Mary shapes, in the fire of the Holy Spirit, “*her poor children*” with whom she leads humanity toward salvation, toward the Father, the “*fold*” into which she enters through the “*door*” which is Jesus (Jn 10,9).

Catholic tradition has always pointed out Mary's function of giving new life. What is new is the inclusion of children in the list of fighters: could their decisive inclusion in the battle be the “*manner least expected by men*” by which the mysterious plan of God, carried out by Mary, will be fulfilled (SM 58)⁴⁵?

Montfort speaks of “*a short time*” (TD 152 and following); he contemplates the action of the Spirit in adults who, before “*receiving*

⁴⁴ “*The Mother of fair love will rid your heart of all scruples and inordinate servile fear. She will open and enlarge it to obey the commandments of her Son with alacrity and with the holy freedom of the children of God. She will fill your heart with pure love of which she is the treasury. You will then cease to act as you did before, out of fear of the God who is love, but rather out of pure love. You will look upon him as a loving Father and endeavour to please him at all times. You will speak trustfully to him as a child does to its father*”. (TD 215).

⁴⁵ “*But I do know that God, whose thoughts are further from ours than heaven is from earth, will come at a time and in a manner least expected, even by the most scholarly of men and those most versed in Holy Scripture, which gives no clear guidance on this subject*” (SM 58).

new life”, must die to themselves; this can take place only after they have been destroyed in an act of purification which involves its own times, even if they are shortened compared to the past.

Thanks to their innocence, children are already in the world of the spirit (Mt 19,14) and this work of purification, although necessary⁴⁶, is much quicker and easier.

The ecclesiastic events which have given these times a clearly Marian impression help us to glimpse a flash of light in this “obscure” plan of God by directing us precisely toward children.

2. The “manner least expected by men”

After studying his writings, the first censors of Montfort's work remained perplexed about his way of describing the action of Mary in the “*last times*”. Today, strengthened by the events of the XX century, Montfort's vision has continued to emerge in a more precise manner:

“Today we must affirm - on more sound bases than those of Roman censors in 1853 and father Lhomeau in 1919 - that history runs in the direction which Montfort anticipated. The charismatic renewal in the Spirit and the discovery of pneumatology in the present Catholic theology, together with the mariaphanies and the promotion of the Marian cult in the Church are “signs of the times and spaces” in tune with Monfort's perspectives and on the progressive revelation of Mary in the age of the Spirit”⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ At the school of the Angel of Portugal (saint Michael, the patron of this nation), the children carried out this purification by much prayer and voluntary sacrifices, as Lucia clearly describes in her Memoirs (*Memorias de Sor Lucia*, cit., 63-65).

⁴⁷ S. DE FIORES, *ibid.*, 33.

Never before in history has Mary made herself so present in the world as in our times, in which there has been a succession of Marian manifestations in an endless crescendo which doesn't show signs of decreasing:

“Paradoxically, while theologians and authors of spirituality had relegated the visions among the adiaphora⁴⁸, the age of the great apparitions has begun, which will arouse a great deal of interest in the Church (...) If we consult the bibliography on apparitions, we can note that the multiplication of the apparitions and the increase in their studies go hand in hand. From the list established by B. Billet, who has counted 232 extraordinary phenomena, true or estimated, from 1928 to 1975 in 32 nations, it emerges that they reach the highest peak between 1947-1954 with a total of 105. (...) In the 1980's, especially with the massive presence of the apparitions of Medjugorje, the figures of the previous periods are widely exceeded, reaching the record of a few thousands of visions”⁴⁹.

The majority of the Marian apparitions of the last two centuries are directed toward children (La Salette 1846, Lourdes 1854, Pontmain 1871, Fatima 1917, Beauring 1932, Banneux 1933, Tre Fontane Rome 1944, Medjugorje 1980, Civitavecchia 1994...) some of whom were later proclaimed saints by the Church.

Montfort couldn't have imagined this massive involvement of children from Heaven, which had never taken place before in the history of the Church.

⁴⁸ “Adiaphora”: what a wise person considers insignificant, of no importance.

⁴⁹ S. DE FIORES, *Le apparizioni all'incrocio degli studi teologico-interdisciplinari. Stato della questione nell'odierna riflessione culturale*, in *Actas do Congresso Internacional de Fátima (9-12 de Outubro de 1997), Fenomenologia e teologia das Aparições*, Santuário de Fátima 1998, 31.

Even the prophetic words of the most recent Popes and saints direct us toward children as a fount of salvation.

Looking back at Scriptures, this doesn't surprise us: God, in the most dramatic moments of the history of Israel, has always come to his people's aid by using “children”, that is humanly fragile means: *“From the mouth of infants and nursing babes you have established strength because of your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease”* (Psalm 8).

Montfort himself receives some insight on God's “*obscure*” style when he compares his apostles to “*second Davids*”:

“(...) carry out your will to the full and, like David of old, lay low all your enemies, with the Cross for their staff and the Rosary for their sling” (FP 8)⁵⁰.

Goliath is the symbolic figure of Satan who enslaves God's people on earth and whom no human force can thwart.

He plans to strike and humiliate God in men, but God humiliates him by using a child to whom he gives his strength (1 Sam 17,42-46).

God uses this style in choosing Mary precisely for her “*humility*” (Lk 1,48). Therefore, wouldn't it be consistent with this biblical logic if God - “*with Mary, in Mary and for Mary*” (TD 257) - intervened against modern man's excessive pride by using his smallest children?

⁵⁰ We must keep in mind that in all six apparitions of Fatima the Blessed Virgin urged the children to pray the Rosary, and Lucia dos Santos later declared: *“there is no problem, whether it be personal, familiar, national or international, that we cannot resolve by the prayer of the Holy Rosary”*.

3. Mary's "heel" includes children as well

"But Mary's power over the evil spirits will especially shine forth in the latter times, when Satan will lie in wait for her heel, that is, for her humble servants and her poor children whom she will rouse to fight against him" (TD 54).

Children who consecrate themselves to Mary are the first to be included among these *"mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women, who, united with priests and lead by them, will fight the devil, the world, and corrupt nature in the perilous times that are sure to come"* (TD 114).

Montfort doesn't speak explicitly about children being the protagonists of the last battle. As we have already noted, he couldn't have foreseen what Our Lady would manifest to three children two centuries later at Fatima, on 13 May 1917, summarizing in this first encounter all the elements he outlines in his "True Devotion":

1. Consecration meant as the offering of one's life (*"Do you wish to offer yourselves to God..."*);
2. The acceptance of suffering, a fundamental element of True Devotion (*"... to bear all the suffering He will send you..."*);
3. The victory of the apostles of the last times who overcome the great adversary hidden in men (*"... in an act of reparation for the conversion of sinners..."*);
4. The universality of this battle which will lead to the complete freedom of humanity and to a new creation (*"... for peace in the world?"*).

In a flash, in an encounter which lasted a few minutes, the three children pronounce their "yes" and are immersed in the *"divine mould"* of Mary and are totally renewed by the fire of the Holy

Spirit which comes forth from Mary (*“The Lady opened her hands, and from them came a most intense light which (...) penetrated us in the innermost part of our souls. We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. That light was God...”*⁵¹).

Saint Pio of Pietralcina, who received the stigmata in 1918, immediately after the apparitions at Fatima, and who lived his priesthood in the purest spirit of *“offering himself”*, *“sees”* this mysterious plan of God and he often repeats: *«children will save the world!»*.

His Holiness Benedict XVI, in making his theological Commentary on the Message of Fatima, while he was still Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, thus declared:

*“Perhaps this explains why children tend to be the ones to receive these apparitions: their souls are as yet little disturbed, their interior powers of perception are still not impaired. “On the lips of children and of babes you have found praise”, replies Jesus with a phrase of Psalm 8 (v. 3) to the criticism of the High Priests and elders, who had judged the children’s cries of “hosanna” inappropriate (cf. Mt 21:16).”*⁵²

Montfort understands that there is something mysterious in God's plan which he can't figure out: *“No one knows how and when this will come to pass, but we do know that God, whose thoughts are further from ours than heaven is from earth, will come at a time and in a manner least expected, even by the most scholarly of men and those most versed in Holy Scripture, which gives no clear guidance on this subject”* (SM 58).

⁵¹ *Memorie di Suor Lucia*, cit., 162.

⁵² CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH , *The Message of Fatima, Theological Commentary*, Rome 2000.

Today, in light of the Gospel, of Mary's numerous apparitions to children and of the recent teachings of the Church, we can include children as the forerunners of this marvellous army of Mary which will fight the last apocalyptic battle against evil in order to free all humanity⁵³.

4. “Children will save the world”

Mary has pointed out this “*manner least expected by men*” in her numerous apparitions to children during the past two centuries. John Paul II acknowledges this:

*“The words of the message were addressed to children aged from seven to ten. Children, like Bernadette of Lourdes, are particularly privileged in these apparitions of the Mother of God”*⁵⁴.

*“The humble Servant of God entrusts her evangelical and, at the same time, maternal message with pleasure to simple and pure souls: three poor children. This took place precisely at Fatima. The same thing happened at Lourdes: “because the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19,14), according to the Lord's words. How can we not be amazed?”*⁵⁵

There is an evolution and a crescendo in Mary's requests: at La Salette (1846) she asks for prayers; at Lourdes (1854) she asks for prayers and penance; at Fatima (1917) she asks for the most, inviting the children to consecrate themselves to the Father by offering their own lives.

⁵³ In his Rule for the Priests of the Company of Mary, Monfort, ahead of his times, puts much emphasis on the evangelization of children (“*The catechist has the most important function of the whole mission*” RM 79).

⁵⁴ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily*, 13/05/1982, Fatima (Portugal).

⁵⁵ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *General Audience*, 15 May 1991, Vatican City.

With Bernadette she gives spiritual renewal to France, attacked by positivism; with Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, she transforms Masonic Portugal into “her” land, she preserves it from World War II and from the “error” of communism and initiates a long possibility of peace for all humanity.

At Fatima the Blessed Virgin promises the three shepherd children who welcomed her that she will save their homeland from World War II. And that is what happened.

If with these children's “yes” Mary was able to save a Nation from war and communism, what will she be able to do with multitudes of children who, just as She did, will say their total “yes” to the Father? She will save the world, as Saint Pio of Pietralcina repeatedly foretold.

The Spirit has been guiding the Popes in this direction since the beginning of the XX century:

With his “Quam Singulari” Decree in 1910, Saint Pius X anticipates the age of children's First Communion at the first use of reason, stating that “*there will be saints among the children*”.

Benedict XV, who became Pope right after Saint Pius X, fully accepts the spirit of the Decree Quam Singulari and, in July 1916, addresses all the children in Europe, inviting them to offer their First Communion so that the terrible war in progress might come to an end; he defines their prayer as “all-powerful”: “*We have trusted in such omnipotence, o children (...)*”⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ “*Trembling, therefore, on the welfare of humanity, but not despairing of the compassion of He who healed the peoples, We seek refuge in a thought and in a wish; that it may be pleasing to the tolerant goodness of the Divine Father to look after the innocence of children rather than the penance of adults. And therefore We have turned to you, o children; just as you receive all the affection of your parents, you relieve their affliction and make up their future, thus you receive the special affection of the Father of the Faithful, you sweeten his bitterness and make up his hopes. Looking at you, dear children, and in you all children, who today in some parts of the world have received the Holy Eucharist, We see God's very image in a thousand faces, reflected in the pure mirror of your pure souls, and marked by that same omnipotence, which is typical of your imploring lips. An omnipotence, in the first place, which is the*

Pius XII, on 15 April 1945⁵⁷ addresses children: “(...) we again exhort all - but especially the very young and innocent children - to humbly entreat the divine Redeemer, through the intercession of Mary, that the peoples who have been forced into discord, contention, and all kinds of misery, may be able to breathe again after their long-lasting distress and sorrow” and on 18 December 1947⁵⁸ he insists: “During the present difficulties, We place much trust in the prayers of innocent children for whom the Divine Redeemer cherishes a special love”.

On 17 February 1968⁵⁹ Paul VI said: “If you children pray, the Lord will surely listen to you. Your innocent voices are more powerful than those of adults”.

In a 1989 audience to 10,000 children from the Armata Bianca John Paul II said:

“I am very happy to see that you are so numerous and joyful and I greet you all with great affection. You belong to that special association of prayer and apostolate which is called Armata Bianca, because you are consecrated to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (...) You know the obligations of your association: to consecrate yourselves to God the Father and Mary, by committing yourselves to the recitation of the

child of your innocence, since in the presence of God the accent of a pure heart is much more effective than that of a penitent and purified heart. An omnipotence, secondly, which is the companion of your weakness, since the Author of every power chooses only infirma mundi to confound the vain strength of the world (...) We have trusted in such omnipotence, o children, when on an anniversary of such mournful memories we have addressed this invitation to approach the Heavenly Altar (...) Therefore, as at the table in a shipwreck, We have resolved to have recourse to the invocation of divine assistance with the all-powerful means of your innocence.” From Osservatore Romano of 30 July 1916

⁵⁷ H.H. PIUS XII, Epist. Enc. *Communium interpretes*.

⁵⁸ H.H. PIUS XII, Epist. Enc. *Optatissima pax*.

⁵⁹ H.H. PAUL VI, *To the children, winners of the award for the best crib*, 17/2/1968, Vatican City (Rome).

Rosary, with the particular intention of reparation and prayer for the conversion of many to the Christian message(...) Help the Church in its mission of Teacher of the Truth, of Mother of grace. Help it also to spread the faith. Be valid apostles of Jesus (...)"⁶⁰.

And:

"We cannot neglect the role of children in the Church. (...) Actually, already in the Old Testament we can find traces of the importance given to children. In the first book of Samuel (1Sam 1-3) there is the calling of the child to whom God entrusts a message and a mission on behalf of his people. Children take part in worship and in the prayers of the assembly of the people. As we read in the prophet Joel (Jl 2,16): "Gather the children and the nursing infants". (...) In the book of Judith (Jd 4,10-11) we find the penitent supplication made by all "with their wives and their children". (...) In this catechesis addressed to the "apostolate of laity", it is instinctive to conclude with an incisive expression of my predecessor St. Pius X. In explaining the motivations for anticipating the age of First Communion, he said: "There will be saints among the children". And there actually have been saints. But we can now add: "There will be apostles among the children".⁶¹

This theme is repeated once again in his "Letter to children" of Christmas 1994, the first pontifical document personally addressed to children:

"It is absolutely true: Jesus and his Mother often choose children and give them important tasks for the life of the Church

⁶⁰ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Special Audience for the children of the Armata Bianca*, 27/5/89, Vatican City (Rome).

⁶¹ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *General audience* 17/8/1994, Vatican City (Rome).

and of humanity. (...)He eagerly awaits their prayers. What enormous power the prayer of children has! (...) it is to your prayers that I want to entrust the problems of your own families and of all the families in the world. And not only this: the Pope counts very much on your prayers. We must pray together and pray hard, that humanity, made up of billions of human beings, may become more and more the family of God and able to live in peace. (...)I decided to ask you, dear boys and girls, to take upon yourselves the duty of praying for peace.”⁶²

And in 2002, in the Angelus of the Epiphany, John Paul II gives children a specific mandate: *“Today the Church entrusts the mission of evangelization in a special way to children”*⁶³. It is the same task that Jesus gave his apostles when he ascended into Heaven (Mt 28,19; Mk 16,15).

What must children do in order to allow the Spirit to carry out his plan in them? First and foremost they must consecrate themselves to the Father *“in Mary, with Mary and for Mary”*.

5. Consecration

In his *“Treatise on True Devotion”* Montfort presents consecration in the following way:

“This devotion consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. It requires us to give: (1) Our body with its senses and members; (2) Our soul with its faculties; (3) Our present material possessions and

⁶² H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to children in the Year of the Family*, 13/12/1994, Vatican City (Rome).

⁶³ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, 6 January 2002, Vatican City (Rome).

all we shall acquire in the future; (4) Our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future.... This we do without any reservation” (TD 121).

All this is fully simplified in Mary's invitation to the three children to “*offer themselves*” to the Heavenly Father without any reservation.

In his encyclical “Redemptoris Mater” John Paul II refers implicitly to the “Treatise on True Devotion”:

“I would like to recall, among the many witnesses and teachers of this spirituality, the figure of Saint Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort, who proposes consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary, as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments” (n.48).

He had already mentioned it in his speeches at Fatima on 12 and 13 May 1982; the speeches he made during these two days, with ample autobiographical profiles, are a lively account of his personal consecration to Mary which he lived “*without any reservation*”.

Exactly one year had gone by since the assassination attempt which brought him on the verge of death, but which opened up for him an

⁶⁴ From *Sister Lucia's Memoirs*, cit., 111 and following: “*One day (as Lucia writes) we went to spend the siesta hours near my parents' well. Jacinta sat down on the slabs of the well. (...) After a while Jacinta called me. “Didn't you see the Holy Father?” “No!” “I don't know how it happened! I saw the Holy Father in a very big house, kneeling in front of a table, crying with his face between his hands. Outside the house there were a lot of people, some threw stones, others cursed and said many bad words. Poor Holy Father! We must pray for him very much!”*”.

⁶⁵ FP 28: “*Help! our brother is being murdered!... Help! our children are being massacred!... Help! our kind father is being stabbed to death!...*”

endless horizon of light: “*he saw*” - as he repeats on 13 May 2000 - in his person, the “stricken” Pope which Jacinta Marto⁶⁴ and Montfort⁶⁵ described; “*he saw*” and believed that the “*Woman clothed with the sun*” had come on earth and therefore the time for her manifestation had come; “*he saw*” the present power and urgency of consecration according to Montfort, focused on the perspective of the message of Fatima:

“Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means drawing near, through the Mother’s intercession, to the very Fountain of life that sprang from Golgotha. (...) Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning beneath the Cross of the Son. It means consecrating this world to the pierced Heart of the Saviour, bringing it back to the very source of its Redemption. (...) Consecrating ourselves to Mary means accepting Her help to offer ourselves and the whole of mankind to “Him who is Holy”, infinitely Holy; it means accepting Her help - by having recourse to Her motherly Heart, which beneath the Cross was opened to love for every human being, for the whole world - in order to offer the world, the individual human being, mankind as a whole, and all the nations to Him who is infinitely Holy. (...) The Mother of Christ calls us, invites us to join with the Church of the living God in the consecration of the world. In this act mankind as a whole, the nations and each individual person are presented to the Eternal Father with the power of the redemption won by Christ. They are offered in the Heart of the Redeemer which was pierced on the Cross. The appeal of the Lady of the Message of Fatima is so deeply rooted in the Gospel and the whole of Tradition that the Church feels that the Message imposes a commitment on her.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily*, 13/05/1982 Fatima (Portugal).

Why does consecration have this irreplaceable value, already grasped and described by Montfort and repeated by the Virgin at Fatima?

Because consecration renews Mary's "yes" at the Annunciation which allows her to continue being a mother to those who consecrate themselves to Her, and allows the Holy Spirit to "*renew the face of the earth*" by means of them:

"If you are faithful to the practices of this devotion, the soul of Mary will be in each one of you to glorify the Lord, the spirit of Mary will be in each one of you to rejoice in God, her Saviour (...) When that time comes wonderful things will happen on earth, because the Holy Spirit, finding his dear Spouse present again in souls, will come down into them with great power. He will fill them with his gifts, especially wisdom, by which they will produce wonders of grace. (...) That day will dawn only when the devotion I teach is understood and put into practice: "Lord, that your kingdom may come, may the reign of Mary come" (TD 217).

For adults, consecration requires a long and demanding preparation of at least a month ; for children everything is very quick; Mary can renew the miracle of Nazareth in them in a few words, as she manifested at Fatima - on 13 May 1917, by unveiling God's "obscure" plan and manifesting the divine dynamics which can bring the whole Church to a total and quick rebirth.

In order to point out the affinities between the two miraculous events, let us make a brief analogy between Luke's account and Lucia dos Santos' account:

⁶⁷ TD 227: "*Those who desire to take up this special devotion (...) should spend at least twelve days in emptying themselves of the spirit of the world (...) then spend three weeks imbuing themselves with the spirit of Jesus through the most Blessed Virgin*".

***The Angel and Mary
in Luke's Gospel***
(Lk 1, 26-38)

***Mary and the children
in the description of the first
apparition of Fatima*** ⁶⁸

A messenger from heaven appears to an earthly creature

The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin (...) whose name was Mary.

When we were near a small holm oak, we saw another flash of lightning and, after a few steps, we saw on a holm oak a Lady all dressed in white, more brilliant than the sun.

The creature's fear

She was very troubled (...)

We stopped astounded by the apparition.

The messenger from heaven reassures the creature

The angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God."

Our Lady said "Please don't be afraid of me, I'm not going to harm you."

God's proposal

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High (...) The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God".

"Do you wish to offer yourselves to God, ready to accept all the sufferings He wishes to send you, in reparation for the sins with which He is offended, and as a supplication for the conversion of sinners?"

The creature's response

And Mary said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word".

"Yes, we do".

The action of the Spirit

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God:(...) nothing is impossible with God".

"The Lady opened her hands, and from them came a most intense light like a reflection which penetrated us in the innermost part of our souls. We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. That light was God".

⁶⁹ Narration of the Blessed Virgin's first apparition at Fatima (13 May 1917) taken from: *Memorie di Suor Lucia*, cit., 160.

At Nazareth an Angel goes to Mary and invites her to give herself to God so that God can become man. Mary says her “yes”, the Holy Spirit “overshadows her” and the Son of God becomes the Son of Man.

At Fatima the Virgin Mary goes to Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta and invites them to give themselves to God just as She did. The three children respond with a complete “yes” and, through Mary, the Holy Spirit penetrates them: it is the second motherhood of Mary described by Montfort which the Holy Spirit brings about in those consecrated to her:

“The Holy Spirit chose to make use of our Blessed Lady, although he had no absolute need of her, in order to become actively fruitful in producing Jesus Christ and his members in her and by her.” (TD 21)

John Paul II - in line with Montfort - clearly speaks of the two motherhoods of Mary, the divine one and the spiritual one:

*“In giving birth to the Son of God made man, Mary is called, in a certain sense, to another motherhood, or rather to give birth to the sons of man as the adoptive sons of God”.*⁶⁹

6. Saints “in a short time” in the divine “mould” of Mary

“Please note that I say that saints are moulded in Mary. There is a vast difference between carving a statue by blows of hammer and chisel and making a statue by using a mould. Sculptors and statue-makers work hard and need plenty of time to make statues by the first method. But the second

⁶⁹ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Speech*, 06/02/1996, Ciudad de Guatemala (Guatemala).

method does not involve much work and takes very little time. St. Augustine speaking to our Blessed Lady says, "You are worthy to be called the mould of God." Mary is a mould capable of forming people into the image of the God-man. Anyone who is cast into this divine mould is quickly shaped and moulded into Jesus and Jesus into him. At little cost and in a short time he will become Christ-like since he is cast into the very same mould that fashioned a God-man" (TD 219).

Francisco and Jacinta Marto are examples of this. In less than two years in the school of Mary, they attained the fullness of holiness. The Holy Father himself speaks about this at Fatima on 13 May 2000, referring also to the "Treatise":

*"My last words are for the children: Dear boys and girls, (...) Ask your parents and teachers to enrol you in the "school" of Our Lady, so that she can teach you to be like the little shepherds, who tried to do whatever she asked them. I tell you that "we advance more in a brief period of submission to Mary and dependence on her than in whole years of self-will and self-reliance" (TD 155). Devoting themselves with total generosity to the direction of such a good Teacher, Jacinta and Francisco soon reached the heights of perfection."*⁷⁰

The Holy Father mentions some concrete examples:

"A transformation takes place in Francisco Marto's life, one we could call radical: a transformation certainly uncommon for children of his age. He devotes himself to an intense spiritual life, expressed in assiduous and fervent prayer, and attains a true form of mystical union with the Lord. This spurs

⁷¹ H.H. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily*, 13 May 2000, Fatima (Portugal).

him to a progressive purification of the spirit through the renunciation of his own pleasures and even of innocent childhood games. Francisco bore without complaining the great sufferings caused by the illness from which he died. It all seemed to him so little to console Jesus: he died with a smile on his lips. Little Francisco had a great desire to atone for the offences of sinners by striving to be good and by offering his sacrifices and prayers. The life of Jacinta, his younger sister by almost two years, was motivated by these same sentiments. (...) Little Jacinta felt and personally experienced Our Lady's anguish, offering herself heroically as a victim for sinners. One day, when she and Francisco had already contracted the illness that forced them to bed, the Virgin Mary came to visit them at home, as the little one recounts: "Our Lady came to see us and said that soon she would come and take Francisco to heaven. And she asked me if I still wanted to convert more sinners. I told her yes". And when the time came for Francisco to leave, the little girl tells him: "Give my greetings to Our Lord and to Our Lady and tell them that I am enduring everything they want for the conversion of sinners". Jacinta had been so deeply moved by the vision of hell during the apparition of 13 July that no mortification or penance seemed too great to save sinners. She could well exclaim with St Paul: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24). (...) A woman who gave hospitality to Jacinta in Lisbon, on hearing the very beautiful and wise advice that the little girl gave, asked who taught it to her. "It was Our Lady", she replied. Devoting themselves with total generosity to the direction of such a good Teacher, Jacinta and Francisco soon reached the heights of perfection."⁷¹

⁷¹ Ibid.

In 1997 Saint Therese of the Child Jesus was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. Her doctrine is the “*little way*”, which the Spirit indicates to those who follow Mary in order to become “*ses pauvres enfants*”. It is symptomatic that the Holy Father has pointed out little Therese's spirituality as a light for our times:

“Being children, becoming like little children, means entering into the heart itself of the greatest mission to which Christ has called man, a mission which penetrates man's very heart. Therese knew this very well”⁷²(...) “This young Carmelite, without any particular theological training, but illumined by the light of the Gospel, feels she is being taught by the divine Teacher who, as she says, is “the Doctor of Doctors” (Ms A, 83v), and from him she receives “divine teachings” (Ms B, 1r). She feels that the words of Scripture are fulfilled in her: “Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.... For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown” (Ms B, 1v; cf. Prv 9:4; Wis 6:6) and she knows she is being instructed in the science of love, hidden from the wise and prudent, which the divine Teacher deigned to reveal to her, as to babes (Ms A, 49r; cf. Lk 10:21-22).”⁷³

The proclamation of Saint Therese as a Doctor of the Church, the beatification of the first holy children in history, Mary who more and more often appears to children, the teachings of the most recent Popes and Montfort's prophecies are the “star” that is clearly leading us toward children, in age and in spirit: the “*wine of the last hour*” which the Father has set aside to set off the light of His Mercy in the darkness of these times.

⁷² H.H. JOHN PAUL II, Homily 02/06/1980 Lisieux (France).

⁷³ H.H. JOHN PAUL II., Apostolic Letter “*Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is proclaimed a doctor of the Universal Church*” 19/10/1997.

If more than a century ago Domenico Savio's age (15) seemed an insurmountable obstacle for his canonization, which only took place in 1954, now the age of holy children is gradually decreasing:

Antonietta Meo, known as Nennolina⁷⁴, 6 and a half, was declared a Servant of God in 1972; Laura Vicuña⁷⁵, 12, was beatified in 1988; Mari Carmen González Valerio⁷⁶, 9, became the Servant of God in 1996; Jacinta and Francisco Marto, 9 and 11, were beatified in 2000.

All these children offered their own lives for God and for their brothers, giving a demonstration of extraordinary strength inversely proportional to their age. There are many witnesses of other children who, although still not included in the roll of saints, have given remarkable manifestations of grace by putting into practice the prophetic words of Saint Pius X and John Paul II.

The result of the knowledge of these frequent manifestations of grace in children is an increasing interest in current theology and psychological sciences⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ (1930-1937) Italian, at the age of five she is diagnosed with cancer in her knee. She writes "letters" to Jesus, God the Father and the Holy Spirit which are then collected and published. Her leg is amputated and she offers all her suffering so that there may be an end to the war in Abyssinia: two days after her death, the hostilities end. L. BORRIELLO, *Con occhi semplici. Antonietta Meo, Nennolina*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2001.

⁷⁵ (1891-1902) Chilean. Her mother lived with a rich Argentinean farmer. Her educator, Sister Rosa, left this witness: "*the first time I explained the sacrament of matrimony, Laura fainted, because she then discovered that her mother was living in a state of sin*". She offers her life for her mother's conversion. After her death, her mother returned to her town and the Salesian Father Zaccaria Genghini, her confessor, said about her: "*only in heaven will we be able to value the merits of this woman*" and her other daughter Amanda said: "*I always believed that my mother was a saint*". J. AUBRY, *Laura Vicuña*, Elledici, Collana Testimoni, Leumann Torino 2004.

⁷⁶ (1930-1939) Spanish, her father is killed during the Spanish Civil War under the order of Manuel Diaz Azaña, the head of the Communist government. The young girl is just six and as soon as she hears the news she asks her mother: "*Mommy, will Azaña go to Heaven?*" Her mother answers: "*If you make sacrifices and pray for him, yes, he will be saved.*". The young girl offers her life to God for this intention. She undergoes great sufferings which end with her death three years later on 17 July 1939. A year later Manuel Azana dies in exile in France, assisted by a priest who gave this witness: "*Azaña expired at peace with God after receiving with lucidity the sacraments.*" His Holiness John Paul II proclaimed her "venerable" on 12 January 1996. P. RISSO, *Mari Carmen, figlia di un martire e vittima* in *Messaggero di Gesù Bambino di Praga*, Anno XCVIII (2002), n.1.

⁷⁷ There are many publications on this topic, to cite a few: K. RAINER, *Per una teologia del-*

l'infanzia, in *Presenza Pastorale* 39, (1969) 3; A. FROSSARD, *Non ci sono che i bambini che siano dei veri metafisici*, in *Le Figaro* 10 agosto 1970; M. MONTESSORI, *I bambini viventi nella Chiesa*, Morano, Napoli 1922; S. GALLO, *Genesi del sentimento religioso nell'infanzia*, ed. Paoline, Roma 1955; J.M. ARAGO-MIJANS, *Psicologia religiosa e morale del bambino e del fanciullo*, LDC, Torino Leumann 1970; P. ALBEROA AGARRA, *Una esperienza educativo-religiosa en niños de cero a cinco años*, degree thesis discussed at the Salesian University of Rome, in 1971; R. VIANELLO, *La religiosità infantile*, Giunti Barbera, Firenze 1976; R. COLES, *La vita spirituale dei bambini, Il senso religioso nell'esperienza infantile*, Milano 1992; M. ALETTI, *La religiosità del bambino*, Leumann (TO) 1993.

Chapter V

The “last times” in Montfort and in Scriptures

Could the two perspectives which are seen in Montfort's work - the pneumatological one in which “*the divine anger will reduce the whole world to ashes*” (FP 16-17) and the Christological one in which “*God will come and reign over all the earth and judge the living and the dead*” (SM 58) - be summarized in a single manifestation of fiery love by the Holy Spirit?

Montfort, in repeating often that the final battle will take place above all in man's inner soul, points out an interpretation which we also try to apply to other passages of Scripture which deal with the last times. From this perspective let us briefly examine Matthew 24 and the second Letter of Peter in order to have a complete overview of the subject.

1. The last times in Matthew's Gospel and in Montfort

“And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light and

⁷⁸ Cfr.S. DE FIORES, “*Dernier temps*” in *Dictionnaire cit.*, 346-367.

the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of heaven shall be moved. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. And then shall all tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty. And he shall send his angels with a trumpet and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them.” (Mt 24,29-31).

In “heaven”, that is in the dimension of the spirit, the “sun” which is God “*will be darkened*”: this is the result of a century of theoretical and practical atheism in which man has wanted to banish God, renewing on earth the “*non serviam*” which already resounded in heaven. It is the dreadful “silence of God” dreaded by Israel.

As a result “*the moon shall not give her light*”: the Church, which reflects the light of the sun which is God, will enter into a profound crisis whose most visible sign will be “*the stars which will fall from heaven*”. In God's heaven the “stars” are the priests (“*You are the light of the world*” Mt 5,14): from post Vatican II until today about 100,000 priests have abandoned their ministry, and this exodus doesn't show signs of coming to an end.

“*The powers of heaven shall be moved*”: The heavens are the souls of men who, having become orphans because they have lost their Father and Mother, will find themselves in a profound moral and spiritual chaos. This situation is already clear as well.

“*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. And then shall all tribes of the earth mourn*”.

The only sign of the Son of man is the Cross. This sign will appear impressed with fire in every soul. In suffering, all souls will com-

prehend their ingratitude and neglect for this crucified Love, they will mourn and they will be saved.

In “Dives in Misericordia” we read: “*That son, who receives from the father the portion of the inheritance that is due to him and leaves home to squander it in a far country "in loose living," in a certain sense is the man of every period*”⁷⁹ who, in despair, decides to return to his Father's house.

The last times are those of the greatest moral decay in which we are living and of which Montfort prophesies. This vision makes his great supplication to God the Almighty Father spring from his heart:

“Be mindful, Lord, of your Congregation, when you come to dispense your justice. (...) Will everything come to the same end as Sodom and Gomorrah? Is it not true that your will must be done on earth as it is in heaven? Is it not true that your kingdom must come? Did you not give to some souls, dear to you, a vision of the future renewal of the Church? Are not the Jews to be converted to the truth and is this not what the Church is waiting for? All the blessed in heaven cry out for justice to be done. And the faithful on earth join in with them and cry out: Amen come, Lord!” (FP 5).

“And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty”. The coming of the Son “with power” is the response of the Father who will come with His own power: a creative and renewing power, a power of love, a power of light... He will certainly not come to destroy, because the Father creates, and doesn't destroy; He will not come to punish, because He is a Father of Mercy; He will not come to add darkness to darkness, because He is a Father of Light who generates and gives Light.

⁷⁹ S.S. JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in Misericordia*, n.5.

He will come and “*will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations*” (Is 25,7) and which prevented men from seeing him and thus loving him. The Son of man will reveal himself with the fiery “power” of his Spirit which is Mercy (“*that Love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil*”⁸⁰) and will enkindle in every man the fire of his love.

“And he shall send his angels with a trumpet and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them.” Could these “angels” be the priests Montfort speaks about, “*men as free as the clouds that sail high above the earth, filled with the dew of heaven, and moving, without let or hindrance, according to the inspiration of the Spirit*” (FP 9)?

Will these be the angel-priests, “*ministers of the Lord who, like a flaming fire, will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love*” (TD 56) who will gather “*his elect from the four winds*” which the gospel of Matthew speaks about? From what is mentioned in the Fiery Prayer it would appear so: “*Muster your chosen men from every corner of your dominions. Call them and gather them together. Mobilise them and make of them an army to fight against your enemies.*” (FP 26).

2. Montfort's “deluge of fire” and the “rain of fire” in the second letter of Peter

Montfort's deluge of fire calls to mind the rain of fire in the second letter of Peter (2Pt 3,7-10):

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* VIII,15.

“The reign especially attributed to God the Father lasted until the Flood and ended in a deluge of water. The reign of Jesus Christ ended in a deluge of blood, but your reign, Spirit of the Father and the Son, is still unended and will come to a close with a deluge of fire, love and justice (...) None can shield himself from the heat it gives, so let its flames rise. Rather let this divine fire which Jesus Christ came to bring on earth be enkindled before the all-consuming fire of your anger comes down and reduces the whole world to ashes. When you breathe your Spirit into them, they are restored and the face of the earth is renewed. Send this all-consuming Spirit upon the earth to create priests who burn with this same fire and whose ministry will renew the face of the earth and reform your Church.” (FP 16, 17).

This *“before the all-consuming fire of your anger comes down and reduces the whole world to ashes”* justly leads us to believe that Montfort foresaw a catastrophic end of the world, a cosmic Sodom and Gomorrah. But couldn't this *“before”* be understood as the *“if”* we often find in Scriptures when a great calamity is threatened, conditional however on man's response, as, for example, in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah⁸¹, Nineveh⁸² and in the Gospel of Luke 13⁸³, etc.?

In this case, if the predestined accepted Mary's invitation to consecrate themselves totally to God, the earth wouldn't be reduced to ashes because of man, but rather it would be renewed by the Fire of the Holy Spirit which would spring from Mary's champions. The *“end of the world”* would only be *“the end of the world of evil”* and everything would end in a positive horizon of light and life.

⁸¹ *“If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account”* (Gen 18,26)..

⁸² Cf. Jonah 3.

⁸³ *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (Lk 13,3).

The description, full of hope and joy, which Montfort establishes as the result of the “*deluge of fire*” in the last times recalls the “*rain of fire*” which Saint Peter speaks about in his second Letter:

“Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of the ungodly men. But of this one thing be not ignorant, my beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord delays not his promise, as some imagine, but deals patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance. But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence and the elements shall be melted with heat and the earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up” (2 Pt 3,7-10).

We are under the impression that Montfort and Saint Peter are expressing the same message of life, by describing with different words the powerful action which, in the last times, the Holy Spirit will express in an unimaginable Pentecost.

Various elements allow us to catch a glimpse of the blaze of this Pentecost in Peter's wording, first of all the word “promise”: a “promise” of destruction, literally and biblically speaking, is unconceivable. To promise, according to the dictionary, means “to lead one to expect, to give hope of”; in Scriptures a “promise” always bears with it hope - which in God is certitude - of beautiful things, of life and of joy. Negative things, like death and suffering, aren't announced as a promise, but as a threat.

In order to convince ourselves of this reality, let us examine some of the most well-known “promises”.

- God promises redemption after Adam and Eve's sin (Gen 3,14-15);
- He promises to protect Cain even after Abel's murder (Gen 4,15);
- He promises a childless Abraham to multiply his seed like the dust of the earth and the stars of heaven (Gen 12,2 following; Gen 15,5);
- He makes the same promise to Hagar, to console her for the abuse she received from Sarai (Gen 16,10);
- He promises the Jews, through Moses, that He will lead them to "*a land that flows with milk and honey*" (Ex 3,17), namely the "promised" land;
- God promises the prophets the Redeemer, the utmost sign of his faithfulness, his covenant and his love.
- When Jesus is about to return to his Father, and he sees his apostles saddened and bewildered, he consoles them with a promise: "*I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you... the Father will give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of Truth*" (Jn 14,15-18).

Scriptures are made up of a progression of shining promises, all kept by God who is "faithful": Egypt's liberation from slavery; the promised land; the Messiah and the freedom from sin and the bondage of hell; God with us, God in us... these are all signs of the powerful action of the Father who proceeds to win back the love of His sons, of His creatures, of the whole universe.

The "promise" of a fire of destruction seems inconsistent with this description of an ever comprehensive love.

This "rain of fire" will take place, but it will be the one the Church asks for: "*Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur, et renovabis faciem terrae*".

And Saint Peter, who well knows the action of the Holy Spirit, given the "promise" of a universal Pentecost, can confidently guarantee its effects:

“But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to his promises, in which justice dwells” (2 Pt 3,13).

This universal Pentecost couldn't have taken place at the time Peter wrote his letters, because all men had to be ready to receive it first, because God *“deals patiently for our sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance” (2 Pt 3,9).*

This is what Montfort sees and asks for:

“But your reign, Spirit of the Father and the Son, is still unended and will come to a close with a deluge of fire, love and justice. When will it happen, this fiery deluge of pure love with which you are to set the whole world ablaze and which is to come, so gently yet so forcefully, that all nations, Moslems, idolaters and even Jews, will be caught up in its flames and be converted?” (FP 16, 17)

We are aware of the Holy Spirit's effect on the first disciples: the fire of the Spirit pierces them and transforms them; it drives away fear, human respect, the fog of ignorance and they don't hesitate to face scourging and imprisonment in order to bear witness to the Truth.

It will have a more transfiguring effect on the men of the last times described by Montfort, after they are totally renewed in body and soul (“heaven and earth”) by the Divine Fire:

“These followers of the Apostles will preach with great power and effect. So powerful will their impact be that they will stir the minds and hearts of all who hear them. It is to them that you will give your word; the very words of your own mouth and wisdom, and none of their enemies will be able to withstand them” (FP 22-24).

It may also help to examine the minor Pentecost which we read about in the Acts of the Apostles:

“And when they had prayed, the place was moved wherein they were assembled: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost: and they spoke the word of God with confidence. And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul...”
(Acts 4,31-32).

Acts 4,32: *“The multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul”*.

2 Pt 3,12: *“On the day of the Lord the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat”*.

The fusion of metals is characteristic of fire, which alone can melt them, purify them and amalgamate them. The “fusion” of men is characteristic of the “fire” of the Holy Spirit: the multitude who had *“but one heart and one soul”* is just a foretaste of the “Unum sint” for which Jesus prayed and offered himself: *“Father, that they may be one, as we also are”* (Jn 17,11).

When the “day of the Lord” comes, thanks to the action of the last apostles seen and requested by Montfort, such a great power of Fire will be poured upon humanity that all men will form a perfect unity among themselves and with God, and they will be *“but one heart and one soul”* (Acts 4,32).

It will be the triumph of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary which St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort saw and hoped for:

“When will that happy day come, when God's Mother is enthroned in men's hearts as Queen, subjecting them to the dominion of her great and princely Son?” (TD 217)

It will be the fulfilment of Saint Peter's great promise:

“Seeing then that all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of people ought you to be in holy conversation and godliness? Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of the Lord, by which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat? But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to his promises, in which justice dwells” (2 Pt 3,11-13).

It will be the kingdom of Jesus Christ preconized by Montfort:

“Our loving Jesus will certainly come in glory once again to reign upon earth, (...) The difference between his first and his second coming is that the first was secret and hidden, but the second will be glorious and resplendent. Both are perfect because both are through Mary” (TD 158).

It will be the fulfilment of the “promise” made by the Virgin at Fatima:

“In the end a long period of peace will be granted to the world... my Immaculate Heart will triumph!”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ *Memorie di Suor Lucia*, cit. 168.

Conclusion

These reflections attempt to interpret our times in light of the freedom of man who can change the course of history by his choices:

“Consider that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand death and evil (...) I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; choose therefore life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Dt 30,15 following.)

Along these lines, John Paul II, after illustrating the evil in action and the great dangers to which humanity is exposed, gave us the Dives in Misericordia.

Montfort also prophetically “saw” and described the evil of our times, its “negative” diagnosis is completely up-to-date; we now wait for a “positive” confirmation of his prophecies, that is the birth of the “Company” of fiery priests and of the “legion” of new apostles who, *“in union with Mary, will crush the head of Satan with their heel, that is, their humility, and bring victory to Jesus Christ”* (TD 54).

In the spiritual dreariness in which we are living this will be the most unprecedented manifestation of the Spirit, it will be the triumph of Mary and her *“humble esclave et pauvre enfant”* which She, Mother and Queen, will establish among the greatest prophets of Christianity.

The apostles of the last times will be the new wine of the wedding at Cana which Mary will let spring from the Father's Heart when today in the Church the Light of the Spirit is fading away⁸⁵. They *“will surpass in holiness most other saints as much as the cedars of Lebanon tower above little shrubs... they will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love... they will extend the rule of the Almighty One over that of the impious, idolaters and Moslems... “in union with Mary, they will crush the head of Satan with their heel, that is, their humility, and bring victory to Jesus Christ...”*

Will their action be able to stop *“the anger which will reduce the whole world to ashes”*? We don't have Saint Michael's scales to be able to quantify the action of Grace, however the *“victory of Jesus Christ”* which Montfort speaks about cannot coexist with his *“anger which will reduce the whole world to ashes”*; these are two antithetic realities which we can only interpret as an ultimatum: either the deluge of Fire of Mercy which transforms and renews or the rain of fire of anger which destroys and reduces to ashes. Just like at Sodom and Gomorrah, in a global dimension.

It's not up to us to emphasize God's Mercy, but it is our duty as obedient sons of the Church to believe in the official word of the Pope and put it into practice:

“The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word “mercy,” moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy “with loud cries.” These “loud cries” should be the mark of the Church of our times, cries uttered to God to implore His mercy, the certain manifestation of which she professes and proclaims as having already come in Jesus crucified and risen, that is, in the Paschal Mystery. It is this mystery which bears within itself the most complete revelation of mercy, that is, of that love which is

⁸⁶ *“However, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* (Lk 18,8)

more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threats” (Dives in Misericordia, VIII, 15).

Let us do away with all sterile controversies and raise up “loud cries” so that, in these last times, Mary may give the Church the “Company” and the “Mighty Legion” which Montfort prophesied. Who will belong to it? The Holy Father's exhortation is addressed to everyone: each one of us - by obeying the Shepherd's words - is invited to carry out the Father's kingdom by becoming an Apostle of Mercy.

*“With our eyes fixed on Christ,
sustained by the hope which never disappoints,
let us walk together
at the beginning of the new millennium:
Rise, let us be on our way!”*

(John Paul II)

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