

## Marie-Louise TRICHET, who are you?

I will highlight only a few traits of Marie-Louise's personality and of her spiritual journey, placing them in the project that Montfort had conceived for the Congregation of Wisdom, a project that she sought to carry out throughout her life, first with Montfort and then alone, after his death on April 28th, 1716.

### Who was Marie-Louise TRICHET ?

A woman who lived at a given time (1684-1759), according to the conditions of a woman of her time, in a specific social and family environment. A Christian, in a Church that did not have the same face as the Church of today.

If we want to try to understand Marie-Louise a little, we must take these facts into account.

Her social milieu: the petty bourgeoisie of Poitiers, a city that was very bourgeois at the time. Her father was a public prosecutor close to the headquarters of the city. The mother of Marie-Louise, a member of the Commercial Court, was quite energetic, firm, lively and jovial.

Her family background: a large family (8 children of which she was the fourth), a little affluent family, a Christian family, nourished by faith, faithful to prayer, attentive to the situation of the poor. Marie-Louise learned the practice of Christian virtues. According to the customs of her environment, she went to school with Les Filles de Notre-Dame where she was an external student. There she learned to read, write, "count", and everything that a future housewife should know. In her adolescence, she stayed at home and helped her mother and sister Elizabeth with the housework, as well as with the visits to the poor, especially in the general hospital, and dedicated to prayer.

At the heart of this family atmosphere, Marie-Louise showed a discreet, calm and balanced behavior. She was a quiet young woman. Her mother was upset because of this behavior. One day Mrs. Trichet said to her husband: "What are we going to do with this girl? She's stupid, just smile!" The father, instead, saw in his daughter hidden talents and reassured his wife saying: "No, no. You're wrong, God will do great things in her."

### Marie-Louise, disciple of Montfort

Let us consider, at this point, the particular situation of Marie-Louise, at least as far as the spirituality of Louis Marie is concerned.

When we speak today of Montfortian spirituality, when we study it in order to deepen it and live it, we have at our disposal various "Instruments": The complete works, various biographies; we have the fruit of research carried out especially in the last decades; we have the retrospective of three centuries and the experience of those who, before us, lived this spirituality.

But let us imagine the situation of Marie-Louise: not only did she have none of these instruments, but when she met Montfort in 1701 at the general hospital in Poitiers, her spiritual journey was not complete, and like every journey, it included trials and errors, periods of doubt, decisive stages. Marie-Louise had only a few letters, a few occasional interviews.

She witnessed certain choices, not always explicit and nuanced, of a continuous evolution of a self-seeking doctrine, of a life lived in instability. Therefore, she did not have to study Montfortian spirituality, she had to decipher, day by day, the deep intuition that animated Montfort's spiritual life and to find little by little the form that she could give, in her own life, as a woman and as a disciple, to this way of living the love of God.

In this sense, Marie-Louise is of great interest to us: for that is not what those who want to live their Christian life following Montfort should seek today: not to copy Montfort, but to appropriate his profound intuitions in order to live them according to our condition as men or women, in our milieu, today.

### **Some aspects of Marie-Louise's spiritual experience**

#### ***An experience immediately incarnated***

Since she had to build herself up, day after day, through events of all kinds, Marie-Louise's spiritual experience had to find its form immediately in her daily life, confronting her with what she perceived of Montfort's inspiration. She could not stick to the ideas or take the time to "reread" them.

The long wait of ten years in the hospital of Poitiers (despite the fact that Montfort wrote to her), the daily sharing of the life of the poor, were for her very rich in signs that illuminated her path. The apostolic choices of the beginning were inspired by what she perceived in the still hesitant doctrine of Montfort, and that was then the focus of her whole life: to give form, in the concrete, to the profound inspirations of the Founder. She did the work of a woman: she gave body.

#### ***Simplicity and requirement***

Immersed in the people of the poor, Marie-Louise was concerned not to be too "far" from them and, therefore, to offer them something easily understandable, a form of Christian life that was accessible to them. This led her on the path of simplicity. By living "Wisdom in daily life", through the simplest gestures and expressions, the most banal acts of life, she lived a "Wisdom of the heart".

A form of prayer that is "simple and united", which distrusts the extraordinary in its expression, which does not prevent it from being demanding and profound. She maintained this simplicity throughout her life in her relationship with the poor, with the laity who helped her in her work, and with her sisters.

Above all, this demand was fidelity. A fidelity to Montfort's project, not a meticulous submission to the details: she knew how to modify the form if the original meaning was no longer legible. One example: in 1739, the Bishop of Poitiers, Mgr de Foudras, wanted the Daughters of Wisdom to take charge of the work of the Penitents. But one of the conditions was that the sisters should live within the cloister, like the previous rulers. The work was in the apostolic preferences of Marie-Louise, but this condition was unacceptable, since Louis Marie did not want the sisters to be confined. Neither the insistence of the bishop nor the pressing advice of Father Mulet, then Superior General, made her change, despite the respect she usually had for those she considered her superiors. Finally, the bishop gave in and the Daughters of Wisdom entered the service of the Penitents without cloister.

### *Humility and obedience*

At the school of Louis Marie, Marie-Louise allowed herself to be kneaded into humility and radical obedience: a humility that is expressed with discretion. Her life went unnoticed by those great public humiliations which require an exceptional and somewhat excessive temperament in order not to be crushed by them. It was rather the interior and silent attitude of someone who lives under the gaze of God, aware of her limitations and possibilities, that she put into practice without complexes and without pride, someone who keeps herself in her right place, whether this be high or very humble.

**Her obedience:** the following of Jesus Wisdom incarnate among men. This strong and enterprising woman experienced the art of disappearing when her presence and her word did not seem necessary to her.

Wherever she was and in any situation, her obedience knew how to unite, with intelligence, the will of the Lord when she saw clearly that this way was hers.

### *Action and Contemplation*

Following Montfort's example, the opposition between action and contemplation did not exist for her, since everything in her life was the contemplation of Jesus Christ under the appearance of Wisdom. A woman of prayer, she lived by assiduous and prolonged prayer, whatever her concerns and her sometimes very heavy tasks: had she not tried in her youth the monastic life to which she aspired? She also liked solitude, a taste she shared with Montfort, but she had neither a grotto at Mervent, nor a hermitage of St. Eloi or St. Lazarus... to retreat to. At most, at the height of his apostolic activities, he took a few moments of solitary prayer on Wednesdays in the attic of the hospital. But, now involved in the apostolic life, she usually kept to the time of prayer foreseen for the community..., she was not a nun who had deviated from her apostolic life...

She contemplated the face of the Lord in the face of his neighbor, especially the poor and the little ones, and, looking at the poor, she contemplated the face of God. We can speak of a "coming and going": in prayer she drew out the spiritual energy that enabled her to commit herself fully to apostolic tasks, and the encounter with her neighbor, the face of Christ, even when it was disfigured by suffering or sin, she gave him the full love that nourished her prayer. This double movement is in fact the sign of a beautiful spiritual balance.

This explains why she always refused - and this is surprising - to establish perpetual adoration at the Mother House: first of all, she feared that this would, in time, produce two categories of sisters, the contemplative ones and the active ones, and above all, she felt that the sisters were called to live contemplation in these two forms, which is the mark of the contemplation of the apostolic worker. Montfort had wanted us to be missionaries in this way; she saw to it that this was done.

Contemplation and action, not an opposition, but rather a fruitful tension, a source of life for the sisters and for those to whom they would go.

### **The Montfortian traits in Marie-Louise's spiritual life**

Naturally, we find in Marie-Louise's spiritual experience, the fundamental traits of Louis Marie's spirituality, which she lived in her own way, without reproducing his choices to the letter.

### *The quest of the Wisdom*

Montfort's "God alone", the cornerstone of the whole itinerary of this passionate follower of Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, strongly colored the spiritual life of Marie-Louise. Seeker of God, she denounced, first in her own life, and then in her apostolic activities, what Louis-Marie called "false Wisdom": honors, duplicity, pretending..., to live simply the realities, without attaching herself to them, assuming all the conditions she had to live, which allowed her at the end of her life to bear, in the purest charity, the criticisms and even the severe attacks: she wanted to be free to welcome Wisdom. We do not know if she had knowledge of the Consecration to Jesus Christ Incarnate Wisdom, but we do know that she said every day a prayer to Wisdom that Montfort had taught her, even though he himself had forgotten it a long time ago.

### *Devotion to Mary*

Marie-Louise entered with all naturalness into the inescapable path that is Mary, to follow Jesus Christ and to seek Wisdom. She considered Mary as the first superior of the Congregation, a reference of tenderness, the image of the servant of the Lord that she wanted to be. She tried to live the "interior practices" that Montfort defended and prayed faithfully to the Virgin Mary.

### *The encounter with the Cross of Christ*

"The cross is wisdom and wisdom is the cross," said Montfort. Since Marie-Louise joined the first Wisdom community in 1701, she was placed in front of a cross that Montfort had enriched with inscriptions that left no doubt about the presence of the Cross in Christian life. For her, as for Montfort, contrary to what is sometimes suggested, it was not a question of something painful, but of a coherence in the following of Christ, in the communion with the suffering Christ, in her concrete life.

### *Abandon to Providence*

Without carrying out excessive acts like Montfort, who could live without a penny and give his habit to the first poor person he would meet, Marie-Louise was more measured, but no less daring, in trusting in

Providence: the foundation of La Rochelle, the arrival in Saint-Laurent, the long years of precariousness are some examples.

This trust was neither negligent nor unrealistic: first of all, she would do everything possible to find safe solutions, then, without naivety but with faith, she would lean on God: "His arm is not shortened," she said.

### *Her relation with the poor*

In the case of Marie-Louise, as in that of Montfort, love for the poor cannot be confused with mere compassion in the face of misery and suffering, nor with an apparent philanthropy. She saw in every man, and especially in the poorest, the most abandoned, the most overwhelmed, even in the most strayed, the face of Christ. Her relationship was not only the service to the poor, but she came to share the very condition of the poor in her daily life (as when she went to live in the hospital in Poitiers among them). Everything that affected them concerned her personally: she had "gone over to the side of the poor", definitely. Witnessing this comment during the terrible winter of 1709, she said: *"I would like to be cloth to dress them all"*, or one of her last recommendations: *"Take good care of the poor"*.

### **In conclusion**

This brief presentation is only an approach: one must read Marie-Louise's life to find the concrete manifestations of the few traits gathered here; one must know a little more about how she gave content to all these intuitions and proposed them to the Daughters of Wisdom of that time and to those to come.

As for the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom, we can say that Montfort, the first inspirer of the project, is its founder, and Marie-Louise, after having appropriated its spirituality, gave body to this project, according to her personal charisma: we can say that she was co-founder. She was not the "feminine complement" of Louis-Marie, she brought in her original and faithful mark, she "instituted" the Congregation, which was necessary, but that was not Montfort's charism.

Missionaries with an itinerant and pastoral character, missionaries more inserted in an institution: two forms of the same mission, as necessary for the Church one as the other. Moreover, in the course of history, there have been, even within the institutes founded by Montfort, these two types of missionary commitment.

Montfort and Marie-Louise, two different temperaments animated by the same zeal, burning with the same flame, with the same apostolic audacity,

although more discreet and reserved in Marie-Louise. Two apostles with a heart of fire, taking on all the risks for the proclamation of love, for themselves and for those who would take the same path.

For me, Louis Marie and Marie Louise lived a true spiritual friendship in the manner of great saints such as Francis of Assisi and St. Clare or St. Francis de Salle and St. Jeanne de Chantal, helping each other in the mission to the poor.

I will conclude with this testimony that Mon. de Champflour, Bishop of La Rochelle, gave in 1715 about Marie-Louise:

"A woman of good judgment and common sense, who united with ingenuity, the rare talent of knowing how to use it. without trying to make it look like it."

Sister Chantal RABIER  
Daughter of Wisdom