

MONFORTIAN FAMILY

All his life Father of Montfort dreamed of a "Company of good priests" to continue the work of the parish missions to which he dedicated a great part of his time and strength.

On December 6th, 1700, six months after his priestly ordination, he was already writing to the Superior of St. Sulpice Seminary about the missions. "Truly, my dear Father, I am not worthy of this honorable service, but I cannot fail, in view of the needs of the Church, to ask continually, with wails for a small and poor company of good priests to exercise it under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin" (Letter No. 5, addressee: M. Leschassier).

In his mind, Father of Montfort saw in the mission, therefore, the answer to the needs of the Church and of the priests. In fact, things were going to happen differently than he had imagined... and he would wait until the last years of his life to write the Rules of the Company of Mary and the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom.

The Daughters of Wisdom will be born first

On February 2nd, 1703, at the General Hospital of Poitiers, Marie-Louise Trichet took the habit of Wisdom. From then on her name was Marie-Louise de Jésus.

Father of Montfort had met her in November 1701 when she appeared in his confessional.

- He asked her: "Who addressed you to me?"

- My Father, it was my sister," she answered.

- You're wrong, my child, it wasn't your sister, it was the Blessed Virgin."

From then on, for Maria Luisa a journey of life began and a radical change of life took place. She would leave her well-to-do family, settled in the upper part of the city in spite of her mother's opposition, to enter the General Hospital, in the lower part of the city, as a poor person and servant of the poor imprisoned. For ten years she lived there, waiting for the confirmation of her vocation.

At the beginning of 1715, Montfort asked Marie-Louise and Catherine Brunet to leave Poitiers to come and found the first school in La Rochelle (cf. Letter 27).

On August 1st, 1715, Bishop de Champflour approved the "primitive" Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom, written by Father of Montfort. August 22nd, 1715, Religious profession of Marie-Louise de Jésus and Catherine Brunet with the approval of Mon. de Champflour, Bishop of La Rochelle.

On April 28th 1716 Father of Montfort died in St Laurent-sur-Sèvre. Marie Louise was 32 years old.

In 1719 Marie-Louise leaves La Rochelle and returns to Poitiers. It is then that a layman, Jacques Goudeau, puts her in contact with Madame de Bouillé. Through them, the voice of Providence tells her that her place is near the tomb of the founder in Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre. So that's where she arrived and settled in 1720.

Marie-Louise, co-founder, thus begins a new stage of her life: installation of the Mother House, the novitiate and then the foundations, until her death on April 28th, 1759, 43 years after that of L.M. of Montfort.

Today, the Congregation continues to reinvent itself to be faithful to its "charism" in/by a continuous deepening of the wisdom spirituality (Wisdom), which is the person of Jesus Christ, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, and of its implications for the life and mission of the Congregation, which has become international. Paying attention to new forms of poverty: "O Daughters of Wisdom, help the poor, the perplexed, the sad, the crippled, the rejected. Those whom the world abandons must touch you more..." (Ct 149 to the Daughters of Wisdom). This call of Father of Montfort is still relevant today.

Since Marie-Louise, there have been some 17,000 Daughters of Wisdom from the different continents.

The “Montfortians”- officially the “Fathers and Brothers of the Company of Mary”

Their story is more hazardous.
Montfort dreamt of it.

One day in 1705, in the Church of the Penitents in Poitiers, he saw a young man, Mathurin Rangeard, praying his rosary. He spoke to him. The latter confided to him that he had just made a retreat in the Capuchins: "I intend to enter the Capuchins, it was by chance that I entered this church to pray".

Montfort answered: "No, it is not by chance, but providentially. Wouldn't you like to help the missionaries in their work? Follow me, because that is your sure vocation. »

Mathurin follows Montfort. He becomes the first Brother who will be faithful to the end, even though he never took religious vows.

After him, others followed him. All of them were Brothers at the service of the missions preached by Fr. Montfort (material tasks such as the maintenance of the house, but also catechism and the service of the charity schools).

It was much harder for the Fathers! Of course, many priests followed one another in the service of the missions as collaborators, but none of them stood for long.

However, in 1715 - only one year before his death - Montfort met Father Vatel in La Rochelle when he was about to embark, and invited him to accompany him. Then it was Father Mulot who came to ask Montfort, who was finishing the mission at Fontenay-le-Comte, to come later to preach a mission in the parish of St. Pompain where he lived with his brother, priest. Montfort replied that he would only accept this request if he agreed to follow him. The latter presented his reservations (health problems, not prepared to preach...); Montfort assured him that all this would be resolved if he agreed to follow him. He accepted, he became his confessor, he would be there to write Montfort's will on April 28th, 1716. After that, Mulot retired to the parish of St. Pompain.

On September 27th, 1720, in response to the request that Marie-Louise de Jésus made to Mgr de Champflour, the latter appointed Fr. Mulot superior of the community of the Daughters of Wisdom in Saint-Laurent.

1722 acquisition of a building in St Laurent-sur-Sèvre. The group of missionaries (Mulot, Jacques Le Vallois, Mathurin...) was able to form a stable community with Fr. Mulot as superior.

1748 Oral approval of the Rule of the Company of Mary by Pope Benedict XIV

Today the "Montfort Fathers and Brothers" are present on the different continents, continue to proclaim the Wisdom of Jesus Christ incarnate in their own style, in the different cultural environments, seeking also the language to touch the hearts of our contemporaries.

Brothers of Saint Gabriel

They are descendants of the Company of Mary. They were the brothers of teaching: the brothers of the Holy Spirit, as they were called. They lived until 1835 with the Fathers and other Brothers in charge of temporal work or participating in the missions. With the election in 1821 of Father Gabriel Deshayes as Superior General of the two Montfortian congregations (Montfortians and Daughters of Wisdom), a change took place for the Brothers who taught. The rural school is a project that Gabriel Deshayes has been carrying out for some years in a friendly relationship with Father Jean-Marie de Laménais.

If the missions and retreats begin again, the group of educator Brothers will increase notably. In 1835, 33 Brothers and novices moved to the present entrance of the Saint Gabriel Institution, to a house called Maison Supiot, which Fr Deshayes had just bought from the Daughters of Wisdom. The house will be called "St. Gabriel". Among them was Brother Augustine, who had also come from Brittany and whose clearly expressed desire was that the group of "School Brothers" should be autonomous. This is what will happen after the death of Fr. Deshayes. Thus was born a new congregation, with specific statutes,

destined to the education of children in the countryside and of the deaf (the first brothers were sent by Deshayes to be trained in the education of the deaf, with the Daughters of Wisdom of Auray) - and to the education of the blind after the death of Fr. Deshayes .

The Rule of Life of the Brothers of Saint Gabriel was not written by Father of Montfort, but it is imbued with the fundamental points of Montfortian spirituality.

Today, they are also on the different continents, working in the wide and varied field of education and human promotion. Almost 60% of the congregation is Asian.

Beyond the three Montfortian Institutes

Beyond the three Institutes of Montfortians, direct heirs of Father of Montfort, a number of people with different vocations and groups claim him and his spirituality.

We can distinguish two major categories of groups

I- Groups directly/structurally linked to the three Montfortian Institutes

- **Company of Mary**

- **Montfortian Hospitality** that brings together about 2500 men and women in the structure of the Montfortian pilgrimage of Lourdes. It is a flexible structure, which welcomes both "people on a journey of faith, scholars" and "convinced and consecrated Christians".

- **The Montfortian Marian Fraternity** that was born in 1899 as a confraternity. It brings together people who have made their consecration according to the spirit of St. L. M. of Montfort.

- **The Montfortian Secular Institute (M.S.I.)**, founded in 1963 by Father Pierre BARAT. They are women who live in secular life with private vows, in temporary and ecclesial commitments. They depend on the Superior General of the Company of Mary. Other secular institutes: Burundi, Italy

- **Daughters of Wisdom**

- **Lay people involved** in education in the network of schools (who propose the discovery and formation in the spirituality of Wisdom).

- **Friends of Wisdom**, people who are friends of the sisters and the communities. Wishing to live their spirituality in their daily life as lay people, these persons commit themselves to discover it and deepen it through an appropriate itinerary of formation.

- **The Oblate Sisters of Wisdom**, founded in 1857 in Poitiers. With hearing impairment, they live in their own way the same spirituality as the Daughters of Wisdom. They bear witness to their charism at the heart of the world.

- **Brothers of St. Gabriel**

- **Lay people involved in the field of education in the school network (Associates and collaborators)**. Those who wish can discover and deepen the life of the founders and the Montfortian spirituality through formation modules and visits to Montfortian places.

When we speak of the "Montfortian Family" we must think not only of the three Institutes but also of the groups that we have just mentioned.

II- Individuals and groups who claim to be part of Montfortian spirituality.

Only for France.

- The Legion of Mary
- The Foyers de Charité

Also..,

- There are a whole series of people throughout the world and along different paths who have discovered something of Montfortian spirituality and who live at least some aspects of it, not to mention those who have made their consecration to Jesus through the hands of Mary according to Montfort and who live according to it.

Conclusion

The spirituality of St. L.M. of Montfort does not belong to us as a Montfortian Family. It is a good of the Church, even at the risk of being "distorted" by the interpretation made by certain groups.

It is a richness that must be known, that must be deepened in order to live it, so that it continues to bear fruit today.

F. Maurice Hérault from a text of Fr. Bernard Pourthier (SMM)