

# "THE MAN OF DESIRE"

Olivier Maire, s.m.m.

*« There is nothing that the heart of man desires more than God, and nothing that God desires more than the heart of man. » (S 511)*

(English translation by Sr Hélène LeMay, DW, DPTh)

# INTRODUCTION

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Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716) is today commonly known as the apostle of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The motto of Pope John Paul II, *Totus Tuus*, finds its origin in this Marian spirituality<sup>1</sup>, which he proposed as a path of Christian life<sup>2</sup>. In this study we do not take into consideration the spirituality of Saint Louis Marie as a whole nor his obvious Marian aspect, but only the notion of desire, which appears in his writings. The subject may seem marginal, but it is not; the terms desire and to desire are found approximately 170 times in Montfort's works, with the invitation to be "*men of desire*» (LEW 183).

#### a. A double procedure

The study of the notion of desire introduces the spirituality of Saint Louis Marie through the affective path, which offers the possibility and the interest of an integration between spirituality and psychology. Certainly, the two domains must be distinguished, but not separated, nor opposed: he who desires is only one. It is a differentiated unity, so we must not reduce the *affectus spiritualis* to the *affectus carnalis*. Here we want to choose a psychology respectful of the integrity of the person, based on a Christian anthropology which does not isolate the person in the closed horizon of a purely human vocation or existence, but which opens to the infinite horizon of a divine vocation. Man is oriented towards God, and we can formulate the anthropological hypothesis with the words used by Montfort:

*“Your origin is from God, your goal is to return to God, your happiness is to enjoy God eternally. With the first you are all of God, with the second all for God, with the third God is all for you”* (S II, 791).

The text suggests that man is created with desire because God is for him; it also insinuates that man is created as desired because he is for God. Precisely because God desires man (anthropocentrism of God), man can desire God (theocentrism of man). We thus encounter theology, which deals with the anthropocentrism of God, and the human sciences, which deal with the theocentrism of man: a double path, descending and ascending.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Giovanni Paolo II, *Varcare la Soglia della Speranza*, (Crossing the threshold of hope,) Milano 1994, p. 231. This formula is found in Saint Louis Marie de Montfort in TD 216, 233, 266; cf SM 66, 68. Cf. also A. B. Calkins, *Totus tuus. John Paul II's Program of Marian Consecration and Entrustment*, Academy of the Immaculate, Libertyville, III. 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Giovanni Paolo II, *Redemptoris Mater*, Ed. Vaticana, 1987, pp. 104-105.

## b. Desire as suspicion

But couldn't emotional life be an irrational life? Couldn't desire, which is a passion, be too animal? John Damascene describes passion as a "movement of the irrational soul". As a movement of the soul, desire disrupts and perturbs<sup>3</sup>, it is ambiguous and seen negatively, as something frightening, uncontrollable, capable of leading beyond the limits of reason. The adjective "passionate" is often associated with murder or crime<sup>4</sup>. Desire casts the shadow of doubt on the spiritual path; the trouble then transforms into reluctance if we consider affectivity in a theological context, because "the theologian does not easily feel ready to face the analysis of the unstable and fluid world of affectivity"<sup>5</sup>.

Even in spiritual theology, we are uncomfortable with affectivity, but we must confront these 'desires' (for God, for union with God, etc.). Added to the uneasiness is a suspicion: the desire for God perhaps hides a 'pathological drift'<sup>6</sup>, against a background of dangerous pessimism; we think of the distortions of the imagination, of the illusion, of the dream, of the escape from reality<sup>7</sup>. Psychology then appears as an iconoclast of desire, since it wants to free man from the illusions born of desires. Of course, the image will always retain the temptation of the idol; therefore, desire hides suggestions carrying uncertainty, but also contains "the promise of a truth and a presence. (...) Desire, to be pure of all illusion, must not support the passion which animates it and in which we encounter dark roots and luminous signs, ancient voices accompanied by the call of Him who comes. Desire that controls itself too rigorously and does not trust the uncertain part of irrationality it contains will never be able to experience the

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<sup>3</sup> "Saint Augustine writes (Civ. Dei, 9.4): The movements of the soul that the Greeks call *pathè*, some of us, like Cicero, call disturbances (*perturbationes*); other illnesses or conditions; others finally, and with more rigor, they call them passions, like the Greeks" (S. Th, I-II, q. 22, a. 2, sed contra).

<sup>4</sup> "The word 'desire' evokes man. It has multiple and contradictory resonances. It has with it the violence of passion and the incomprehensible origin, with the mysterious attraction of the object, with the note of exquisite serenity which arises from its accomplishment" (Vasse, 1969, p. 9).

N.-B. Quotes that report only the name of an author refer to works reported in the Bibliography.

A. Manenti (1988, p. 59) describes the discomfort faced with desire whose spontaneous and arbitrary character leads to irresponsibility, whose instinctive aspect makes it an irrational, blind, mysterious, uncontrollable element which pushes one to act outside of the control of reason. Desire would be a blind push towards something irremediable, the cause of which is in the past, in unsatisfied needs; to desire would be to place oneself in an immediate opportunity to sin.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard, 1984, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cf A. Vergote, *Debt and desire, two Christian axes and pathological drift*, Paris 1978. A. Godin (1986) gives examples of 'pathological drift' of religious desire linked to hysteria (p. 73). In this case, desire, connected to unconscious drives, is seen according to a 'normality-pathology' axis in which the unconscious and deterministic aspect dominates. This is an excessive and reductive way of seeing, as could be the fact of considering desire according to a 'virtue-sin' axis, where it risks being judged 'morally bad' (cf. 5. Th., I-II, q. 24).

<sup>7</sup> Cf Godin, 1986, pp. 48, 182-186, 189, 203; Aletti, 1982, p. 56.

time of love and pleasure”<sup>8</sup>.

### c. A controversy

The writing of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort that we will examine in more detail is *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*. In this regard, it is necessary to note a controversy between the exegetes of this work, aligned with two different positions. There are those who see the LEW as a ‘capital book’<sup>9</sup> and a synthesis of Montfortian spirituality. This is the position also adopted by the publishers of the Complete Works (1966)<sup>10</sup>, which has become common in religious families inspired by Montfort. In recent years, numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of this work: in exegesis<sup>11</sup>, within the framework of the spirituality of the French school<sup>12</sup> and in spiritual theology<sup>13</sup>. Others, however, observe that Montfort in the LEW does not yet appear as a consolidated writer: the use of sources and the divisions are too scholastic, which makes the work appear more like an unfinished draft and we cannot therefore not speak of a ‘synthesis’ of the author’s thoughts<sup>14</sup>. Among them are those who make negative critical comments; starting from the fact that the LEW is the first writing of the author (the date commonly indicated is 1703-1704), and yielding to a psychological prejudice, we judge it ‘far from maturity’ and we see reflected in it a presumed emotional immaturity of the author<sup>15</sup>. Perouas sees the origin and cause of this emotional immaturity in the difficult family climate of young Louis-Marie: an authoritarian and feared father, who will mark him for life, a gentle and beloved mother<sup>16</sup>. In this environment, Louis-Marie is perceived as a child who has difficulty opening and this will always constitute a serious handicap for him. But all these readings are based on two short stories reported by the first

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<sup>8</sup> Vergote, 1978, p. 310-311. The study of desire must integrate two processes: an instance of participation or consecration which recognizes the presence of the divine in the various manifestations of human life, to make all that is human participate in the sphere of the divine; and an instance of purification which introduces a critical moment and leads to the detection of conditioning thanks to a psychological and social explanation. The first case, by itself, leads to spiritualism and the illusory interpretation of religious phenomena. The second, without the first, leads to a rationalist reductionism: it is the temptation to explain everything through psychological conditioning. (Imoda, 1992, p. 14).

<sup>9</sup> As H. Huré, in *Preface* of the detta Type edition, of 1929, p. 2; also Dayet, in the preface to the 1947 edition (Ed. françaises, Turcoing).

<sup>10</sup> Cf J.-P. Prévost, ‘Love of the Eternal Wisdom’, in *Montfortian Spirituality Dictionary* (éd. De Fiores), Novalis, Ottawa 1994, pp. 47-62.

<sup>11</sup> Cf M. Gilbert, *L'Exégèse spirituelle de Montfort*, NRT 104(1982) 678-691.

<sup>12</sup> Cf R. Deville, *L'Ecole Française de Spiritualité* (The French School of Spirituality), Paris 1987, pp. 139-155.

<sup>13</sup> Cf P. Humblet, *Il processo di trasformazione in "L'amore dell'Eterna Sapienza" di Grignon da Montfort*, Istituto Titus Brandsma, Nimega 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Cf Pérouas 1973, p. 67; 1976, p. 1075; 1990, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Id., 1990, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Id., 1966, pp. 11-12, 16; Id., 1973, p. 15; Id., 1990, pp. 28-32.

biographers. Blain describes seeing young Grignon, aged around eighteen or twenty, 'timid and almost trembling' as he waited for his father to return after throwing a dirty book into the fire. This fear of the father is explained as follows: "it is unthinkable that the difficulties of adolescence do not reflect, at least in part, the situation of childhood". We wonder if Louis-Marie fully experienced this stage of emotional maturation which is the age of "paternal identification and if, consequently, his Marian devotion (especially in his adolescence) was not influenced by it"<sup>17</sup> .

The second text is an indirect testimony from Grandet: because his maternal uncle says Louis Marie "showed from childhood obvious signs of what he would one day become: he spoke of God and approached his mother when he saw her suffer, to console her and exhort her to suffer with patience." The uncle adds that Montfort was only four or five years old. Lagueux comments thus: "It seems difficult to deny, on a psychological level, if not an emotional fixation of Louis Marie towards his mother, at least a greater attraction for her than for his father. (...) Grignon turns as if by instinct towards the Virgin in whom he finds the maternal image (...) There is practically no doubt that childhood played an important, even decisive, role"<sup>18</sup>. On these fragile data, Pérouas constructs an interpretation of Montfort's spirituality. His entire life is reduced to two episodes of childhood in a conditioned and deterministic manner and is schematized within the rigid framework of a linear development which proceeds from immaturity to maturity. Everything is reduced to the 'two poles': social integration and affectivity.

In the first biography on Montfort, we find the three phases of this thesis in Pérouas: 1° the cause of the tormented itinerary is seen in the ungratifying family climate; 2° hence the immaturity, which we find in the difficulties of integration, which go back to childhood; 3° the maturity phase, or the progression towards equilibrium as a laborious path<sup>19</sup>.

In the second biography, the thesis is amplified: the causes of family difficulties during childhood are explored in depth and the consequences are noted in 'a child who opens himself to evil', 'a lonely schoolboy' and 'contrary to

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<sup>17</sup> Lagueux, p. 107-108. You will notice the causal explanation given: from the effect (adolescence) we automatically go back to the cause (childhood) which would explain the effects on adolescence then on his Marian spirituality.

<sup>18</sup> Lagueux, pp. 107-108.

<sup>19</sup> Pérouas, 1966, first phase: pp. 9, 11; second phase: p. 35; third phase: pp. 40-41.

parents'<sup>20</sup>. The resulting immaturity is then seen in the difficulties of integration into the common life of the seminary, in the tendency towards solitude and in a Marian devotion which does not seem normal in a boy. The years 1700-1706 are called 'the years of crisis'. Finally, there is progress towards maturity, thanks to insertion in local Churches, where apostolic action makes him mature<sup>21</sup>.

In the last book, this interpretation is refined. The difficulties of youth (1673-1692) become a 'heavy handicap' and the author wonders if the young Grignon will be able to find a balance. Two phases of 'introduction difficulties' and 'a series of failures' followed one another between 1692 and 1706; these are the seminary years and the first six years of ministry. We then move on to the phase of 'search for the original path' (1706-1710), in which Montfort 'is no longer the same man', and finally, through more open social relationships, he reaches a balance, where 'psychological progress' led to 'profound changes'.

This reading of Louis-Marie's biography naturally leads to a consistent judgment on his writings, witnesses of a 'slow emotional evolution', where the possible difference between writing and writer is abolished. Certain expressions used to talk about God or the Blessed Virgin can be read immediately in relation to the experience lived with one's father or mother. However, any reference to the cultural and religious context of the time appears very secondary. The same goes when we treat certain feminine images, such as Mary, Wisdom, Providence.

A remark which particularly interests us here must be made concerning the Love of Eternal Wisdom. The writing therefore belongs to the 'crisis phase' (1700-1706), during which Montfort felt the need for maternal closeness and detachment from his mother: devotion to Mary and discovery of the companion with traits of Wisdom and conjugal love<sup>22</sup>. LEW would therefore only be a stage in an emotional process and a marital discovery, therefore not a mature synthesis. It is in fact an expression of the author's immaturity, particularly in matters of love, seen in its marital and possessive phase and not yet as a love that gives itself.

Psychologically speaking, we cannot easily accept the reductionism induced by

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<sup>20</sup> Id., 1973, pp. 15, 22, 28.

<sup>21</sup> The same plan stands out in the article 'Louis-Marie de Montfort' in *"Jesus Living in Mary, Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort"*.

<sup>22</sup> "It seems that the first dominant feminine image, Mary, good mother, gives way to another dominant feminine image, Wisdom, spouse. Through this crisis, Grignon discovers the female partner. This is an important step for this man whose emotional development had been delayed" (Pérouas, 1973, p. 67).



the following equations: God as paternal image and Mary as maternal image; the four elements (God and the father, Mary and the mother) cannot be confused or linked to each other, although this can happen<sup>23</sup>. This causality actually leads to an autonomous, totalitarian and restrictive model. This is why we do not want to deny the importance of childhood and the child's relationships with parents on the rest of the psycho-affective and spiritual development of the person, nor to insinuate that Montfort was in the perfection of the emotional maturity from a young age. However, we would like to avoid falling into the 'academic criticism' described by Barthes and instead correctly recognize 'interpretative criticism'<sup>24</sup>.

#### d. Desire and discernment: the search for a venue

The LEW was composed at a particular time in Louis-Marie's life. He is looking for his own place, his own style of life and work, but he does not seem to have found it yet. He is in limbo between Saint Sulpice, where he studied, and the field of the apostolic mission. Like the bride in the Song... she runs '*like a lost child*' (H 91.1) and moves from one place to another "*like a ball in a game of tennis*" (L 26). In this torment, desire appears for the first time in his writings.

We find it first in the Letters addressed to the spiritual director. The first (L 5, of December 6, 1700) speaks of disappointment. Ordained on June 5, 1700, Louis Marie was intended for the community of ecclesiastics of Nantes, engaged in parish missions. He goes there but doesn't find what he was looking for:

*"My intention was, as yours was too, to prepare for mission-work and especially for teaching catechism to the poor, since this is what attracts me most. But I am not doing that at all, and I do not think that I shall ever do it here."*

The desire of a young priest, his great aspiration, remains unanswered, without a venue, waiting, suspended.

From the breach opened by disappointment new desires emerge:

*"With conditions as they are, I find myself, as time goes on, torn by two apparently contradictory feelings. On one hand, I feel a secret attraction for a hidden life in which I can efface myself and combat my natural tendency to show off. On the other hand, 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."*

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Manenti, 1988, p. 39 ; Aletti, 1932, p. 125-132 ; Milanesi et Aletti, 1973, p. 101-119. "Ultimately, it seems difficult to assert that there is a deterministic continuity between the paternal image and the divine image" (Milanesi et Aletti, 1973, p. 116; ou Aletti, 1992, p. 129).

<sup>24</sup> Cf Barthes, 1981, p. 246 ss.

*(...) Though I find it difficult, I try to suppress these desires, good and persistent though they may be. I strive to forget them and self-effacingly place myself in the hands of divine Providence and submit entirely to your advice which will always have the force of law for me. I still harbour the desire I had in Paris to join Fr. Leuduger, (...) a great missionary and a man of wide experience. Another of my wishes would be to go to Rennes and, with a good priest I know there, work in seclusion at the general hospital, performing charitable services for the poor. But I put aside all these ideas, and always in submission to God's good pleasure I await your advice on whether I should stay here, in spite of having no inclination to do so, or go elsewhere."*

This letter is a beautiful example of discernment, based on desires and indifference, as understood in the Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Faced with desires, there is the desire to welcome them or reject them *"even if they are good"*. Two feelings seem to oppose each other: *"on the one hand I feel a secret love for retirement"* and *"on the other I feel a great desire to leave"*. There is a desire to satisfy such desires. Here again: I wish to *"retire to the hospital"* or *"join a missionary,"* and the intention is expressed to reject all these desires.

The first part of the two pairs of wishes is similar: liking to retire and retiring to the hospital. These are desires that retreat, like an army that retreats; they have a defensive character. Unconsciously, Montfort wishes to correct the inclination of his *"corrupt nature which likes to appear"*, and defends himself against appearing, perceived as unacceptable and negative, by hiding<sup>25</sup>. The vice is corrected by the opposite virtue. In the second pair of desires, the *"retirement to the hospital"* addresses the past, the already known and the already lived, in reference to the experience he had in Rennes, with *"a good priest"*, when he was a student of the city's Jesuits<sup>26</sup>. Faced with the uncertainty of the future, memories of rewarding past experiences present themselves. This second group of desires presents an inverted content compared to the first; they are desires directed towards a defined and closed place, a retreat, whereas previously desires were directed towards open spaces, such as the countryside and the mission. The opposition is between retreat and rapprochement, between closure and opening, between interior and exterior<sup>27</sup>. If the desires-feelings seem

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<sup>25</sup> In L 4, he uses similar pictures: "Would to God that I could be left in peace as the dead are left in their tombs, or the snail in its shell, which, when it is hidden, seems to be something of value, but when it comes out is wretched and disgusting".

<sup>26</sup> By analogy with defense mechanisms, we could say that this desire is of the order of regression, like a return to a previous stage of development, or functioning, to escape the anxiety that a new situation could on the contrary provoke.

<sup>27</sup> This situation can be compared with that described by Mr. Bergamo regarding Surin: cf. *L'esotismo mistico*, Bergamo 1992, pp. 125-160.)

opposed, it is because they are looking in two divergent directions. The attraction represented by the first group of desires is that of the house (retirement, hospital): it is the need for security and protection offered by the walls and the roof<sup>28</sup>. The desire for mission is a path towards, it is a project, which advances and comes up against the temptation of removal and withdrawal<sup>29</sup>.

As for the acceptance of desires or renunciation, "*even if they are good*", Montfort places himself in an indifference which is the suspension of desire in the face of the good will of reason, represented by the spiritual director. It is a widespread and very present spiritual attitude, for example in Saint-Jure, an author read by Louis-Marie: "To preserve the peace of the soul, one must pay particular attention to desires, given that the main sources anxiety and internal rebellion are the uncontrolled, overly ardent and continuous desires that we have, those to acquire a good that we do not have, or to free ourselves from an evil that makes us suffer (...) If you have any, make sure that it is moderate and without ties that could bind you. (...) This also applies to good desires and to the desires of the most holy things<sup>30</sup>. Later, Montfort would give similar advice to the Daughters of Wisdom:

*"Do not nourish in your soul incessant desires for things that you do not have, even if they seem useful to your neighbor and glorious to my Majesty"* (M 26).

*"These are the desires of pagans and worldlings, unworthy of the true wise, who desire no temporal good, even for pious works"* (RS 42)<sup>31</sup>.

The process of discernment continues in the following letters. L 6 shows a noticeable change. At the abbey of Fontevault, Louis-Marie meets Mrs. de Montespan, who offers him a canonism, but the missionary refuses, wanting to live "in Providence". Having then confessed to him the attraction he has "*of*

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<sup>28</sup> In metaphorical language, one returns home as if to one's mother's womb. We can also recall here that Montfort during the period of the seminary had putative mothers, who paid part of his studies, or obtained an ecclesiastical benefit, enough to live on, from Miss de Montigny to Miss Le Breton, from Miss d'Allègre to the Duchess of Mortemar (cf. OC, pp. 8-9).

<sup>29</sup> Using with great freedom the categories of the ideal and the actual (cf. Rulla, 1971, pp. 36-37; 1986, pp. 168-169), we can say that the desire for mission is to be linked to "the Ideal" (what Montfort wants to become: a missionary), while the desire for retirement belongs more to the current ego (what Montfort believes to be, with the need to appear, with its unconscious dynamics, the need for security and to serve the poorest in the hospital). We are talking about the ideal self, different from the ideal self of psychoanalysis, which generally has a narcissistic connotation, absent from the ideal self (cf. Rulla, 1986, p. 168, n. 1.).

<sup>30</sup> *L'homme spirituel*, Paris 1652, II, pp. 291-294.

<sup>31</sup> Cf also RS 89. Explaining your desires is an important part of discernment; their quality allows us to know by what spirit they were animated. "*Your letter tells me that your wishes are just as strong and eager and as persistent as ever. This is a sure sign that they are from God. So, you must put your trust in God. Be sure of this, that you will obtain from him even more than you think. Heaven and earth would pass away before God would break his promises and allow anyone who hoped in him to be frustrated in their hopes*" (L 16, to Marie-Louise Trichet).

*devoting himself to the salvation of the poor*”, Mrs. de Montespan suggests that he go to Poitiers to meet the bishop. Montfort later reported to the director that he felt “*no inclination whatever to satisfy Madame de Montespan's wishes, as much because of the twenty-eight leagues that I should have to travel as for many other reasons*” but he obeys “*yet blindly to do the holy will of God.*”

The last part of the letter testifies to a change compared to L 5; in fact, Montfort is no longer as attracted to retirement:

« *So, when the bishop spoke to me again, more cordially this time, he ordered me to write telling you this before I returned to Nantes, so that you can judge what I ought to do. I must tell you, Father, that I do wish most sincerely to work for the spiritual welfare of the poor in general, but I am not particularly anxious to settle down and be attached to a poorhouse. However, I will remain quite open-minded as I only want to do God's holy will. I am ready to sacrifice my time, my health and my life for the souls of the poor in this neglected house*».

The object of discernment now appears more clearly. It is no longer a question of the type of activity, since Louis-Marie wishes to “*work for the salvation of the poor*”; instead, the location is up for debate: the hospital or not. This change of perspective in his desire perhaps comes from the recent new experience. After having made “*a short retreat in a small room*” (theme of retirement and returning home), he went to the General Hospital to pray and serve the poor. They had received him as one of their own: they had organized a collection to give him alms and wanted him to remain their director. A link is therefore born between him and the poor. He feels welcomed and recognized; he who came to the hospital to give and serve, experiences receiving (alms and affection)<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, the Poitiers hospital is considered “*as if abandoned*”.

The theme of abandonment is found again in L 8, about the Nantes countryside where Montfort goes on a small mission. The new experience therefore allows him to satisfy the desire for the mission, that of reaching out to others; the desire for countryside spaces, unlike in L 6, where the place is still the retirement home-hospital. But the observed abandonment adds an element to discernment: the diocese of Poitiers seems more abandoned than that of Nantes; Montfort writes this expressly in L 9: “*The bishopric of Poitiers has much more need of workers than this one; I witnessed it myself, and I was surprised.*”

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<sup>32</sup> The needs for care (helping and serving those who are abandoned, those who suffer) and relief (to be helped, supported, loved) are recognized: cf. Rulla, 1986, pp. 466-467.

In L 5, Montfort is sensitive to his feelings and his desires; in L 9, he is more sensitive to the needs and desires of others.

*The pressing and the repeated requests of the inmates of the poorhouse in Poitiers and the wishes of the Bishop of Poitiers and of Madame de Montespan, upon whom my sisters depend so much, oblige me to trouble you again and express my feelings to you in all simplicity and without any prejudice, as I wish to remain completely impartial to everything except what obedience requires of me. (...) Meanwhile the Bishop, like the poor of Poitiers, has written to ask me to work in his poorhouse. But I have no inclination at all to lead an enclosed life. (...) But I am not being asked to help in general ministry but only to do a specific work. The only thing that would make me want to go to the poorhouse at all would be the hope of being able to extend my work later into the town and the countryside and so be able to help more people. When I am teaching catechism to the poor in town and country, I am in my element. (...) This then is the state of my affairs, but I consider blind obedience to your wishes as my greatest duty and my greatest desire<sup>33</sup>.*

Finally, the two desires, his own and those of others<sup>34</sup>, illuminate the decision, the discernment:

*“The bishop, unable to resist the insistent appeals of the poor any longer, allowed me to go to them shortly after All Saints Day. I entered this poorhouse, or rather this poor Babylon (...) despite my own inclinations which have always been and still are for mission work.” (L 11).*

In a letter from the Bishop of Poitiers to Louis Marie we read: “Our poor continue, sir, to desire you. (...) I think I must tell you myself that their desires, combined with what Mr. Leschassier took the trouble to write to you to answer me, make me believe that God wants you among them”<sup>35</sup>.

The solution thus adopted leaves Montfort in a tense situation. The balance between desires that “*seem opposed*” (L 5) is fragile. He locks himself in a place, the hospital, with the keen hope of being able to open up to the outside world, the city and the countryside. Even in this case, the problem is not at the level of an accomplishment because, since he has been here, he has been “*on a continuous mission*” (L 11). The real conflict, which will lead to his departure,

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<sup>33</sup> The opposites inside-outside, house-mission, locking oneself in-going towards, are enriched by a new couple: individual-public. In L 6, this had the form of enclosing oneself, or of attaching oneself and opening oneself to the public.

<sup>34</sup> Thirteen years later, it will be Louis-Marie who will change in a process of discernment. Indeed, to invite Marie-Louise Trichet, first Daughter of Wisdom, to leave the Poitiers hospital for La Rochelle, he wrote: “*The bishop of La Rochelle (...) finds it appropriate that you come here to begin the work so desired*” (L 27). And to another future Daughter of Wisdom, Marie Régnier: “*The Bishop, to whom I spoke a few days ago, wants you to come here, to the Daughters of Wisdom, and I desire it and I beg you*” (L 30).)

<sup>35</sup> OC, p. 25, note 1. E Leschassier in turn responds: “I see no problem for you in supporting the wishes of the poor» (OC, p. 27).

lies at the level of the venue, the home. It is a divergence on the conception of community, a problem of community life model, a difficulty of integration. It is more a question of style in living together, and it is no coincidence that the breakup be generated by the rules.

The first crisis had already struck him in the community of St-Clément, in Nantes, which he then left for Poitiers. The community ideal, as a point of reference, remained the seminary, but in Nantes he had found nothing similar: *“There is not even half the organization and observance here as there was at St. Sulpice”* (L 5). Montfort is the man of regulations. His problem is not to integrate into a community that requires regulation<sup>36</sup>, but to have to live in a disordered place, in a *“Babylon”*. This is the great difficulty at the Poitiers hospital; the first surprise was to know that the poor *“did not eat together”* (L 6), in a *“house of trouble, where peace does not reign”* (L 10 and 11). His first work is therefore the establishment of a regulation and a common life, with *“times set for rising and retiring, for prayer together, for Rosary in common, for eating together, for singing hymns, even for mental prayer for those wanting it”* (L11). And when leaving, he emphasizes that he must *“abandon the service of these tables which contributed so much to the good order of this house”* (L 11). Thus, the project to transform the hospital into a sort of Saint-Sulpice hospital failed.

#### e. The figure of Wisdom emerges

We return to the search for a venue, which characterizes this period of uncertainty and precariousness (1700-1706). The insistence on the theme illuminates, even if it does not explain, the emergence of the enigmatic figure of Wisdom.

The historical context of France and Europe speaks of adventurers seeking their fortune in the colonies. This is the time when exoticism is fashionable, with stories of travel to distant lands that awaken desires and delicacies. You dream of setting sail. And the dream of young Grignon, who wishes to leave the family roof for adventure. So, he also wrote to Marie-Louise:

*« I know you are doing a great deal of good where you are, but you will do infinitely more away from home and we know that since the time of Abraham right up to the time of our Lord and even to our own day, God sends his greatest servants out of their own country. (...) If you don't take risks for God,*

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hymn 139: *Rules for a man converted at the mission*; an almost monastic lifestyle is presented. There are then the regulations for the Forty-four virgins (OC, pp. 815-816), for the White Penitents (OC, pp. 816-817), for the Pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Saumur (OC, pp. 817-822).

*you won't give anything worthwhile. (L 27).*

In 1700, having recently been ordained as a priest, Montfort dreamed of going to distant countries to bring the Gospel: it was the call from outside<sup>37</sup>. They detain him, wanting to arrest him in the vicinity of St-Sulpice, therefore in an interior, certainly to make him responsible. He is then allowed to leave, as his lure has taken him elsewhere<sup>38</sup>. He is sent to Nantes, which is not the place he is looking for. Neither will the Poitiers hospital<sup>39</sup>, which is still a reception and an elsewhere. To achieve this elsewhere, he repeated the identical gesture of nine years earlier, leaving Rennes, for Paris, he gives all his money to the poor (cf. L 11). In this undressing, which means a rupture, a new birth takes shape; it is the cutting of an umbilical cord. The place that will now welcome him, the hospital, carries within it the contradiction of life. And the desired elsewhere is the house that confines and limits; closer to death than to birth, the hospital is the elsewhere of the city in which the excluded, the waste of society, are locked up. The figure is doubly contradictory, antinomic and antithetical; it is the inverted mirror of the exoticism of the time, an anti-exoticism.

The exotic (external) space is a desired and idealized elsewhere; it is a different, new world, which offers a rebirth or a regression. It is a world constructed in opposition to everyone's usual (internal) world. It is outside the city and its laws, like something undifferentiated, closer to nature than to culture; a world that expresses nostalgia for origins, for lost innocence and for a paradise from which one has been expelled, but open to a possible return. It's a place to play rather than to work.

Thus, the hospital is an exotic space because it is different from the city: it is outside the walls, but also outside the law. In Letters 6, 10 and 11, Montfort characterizes it by the absence of what constitutes community: we do not eat together, there is no fixed director, peace does not reign there; rather, it is the presence of what should not be found in a community: disorder, unrest, and vice. It is a place of laziness.

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<sup>37</sup> In 1706, the end of our era, having left Poitiers definitively, Montfort went to Rome to offer himself to the Pope for foreign missions. He will return to France, named apostolic missionary. From now on his place will be the road and roaming: a non-place.

<sup>38</sup> The intention was to keep him in the community, so that he could work "*for the salvation of the ecclesiastics*" (L 9). They also promised him a "room" to retire to.

<sup>39</sup> During his first stay in Poitiers, Montfort felt the hospital outside, compared to the interior of the small room where he made a retreat: "*I made a small retreat in a small room, where I was locked in the middle of 'a big city, where I knew no one according to the flesh. However, I decided to go to the hospital*" (L 6). Also note the contrast between the small room and the big city, which corresponds to the interior - exterior.

But the hospital is also anti-exotic, because it represents the negative side of foreignness. This is not what makes us dream, but what scares us and threatens the good order of the city. It is a place of repression: unwanted, but condemned, escaped and rejected; it is the land of curses and not blessings; that's what we don't want to see, it's a shame; it is a "*poor Babylon*" (L 11), exotic because it is in the East, but anti-exotic because it is the place par excellence of disorder and perversion. The hospital is the inverted figure of exoticism<sup>40</sup>.

The difference between exoticism and anti-exoticism does not lie in the structure, but in the appreciation of the content: the best changes place; desire turns into rejection<sup>41</sup>. Thus, Louis-Marie upsets the order of things; he first attempts to open a hospital for the city's poor inmates, reintroducing daily begging on the city's streets, and participates in it himself. Upsetting the established order, the outside opens onto the inside: the borders of the peaceful world are threatened, reminding everyone of the existence of what they no longer wanted to see: the poor<sup>42</sup>. If exoticism offers the city the escape of dreams as a saving escape, anti-exoticism calls into question the foundations on which it rests. The reactions aroused can be understood. But Louis-Marie went even further: he founded the congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. By calling Marie-Louise Trichet, daughter of a municipal magistrate, to serve the poor in the hospital, he symbolically includes the inner world of the city in the outer world of exclusion. By introducing the community of Wisdom within the confines of the hospital, he transgresses the rules which govern the city: the city is interior, therefore wisdom, as opposed to the hospital, which is external, therefore madness. The codes of the world, which give it meaning, have been transgressed. Montfort therefore becomes insane; Marie-Louise's mother said to her daughter: "That crazy Montfort... you will go crazy like him!"

The Hymns are also the place where the transgression of exoticism presents

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<sup>40</sup> Montfort rarely addresses the theme of exoticism with allusions to colonial conquests. He is severe in his judgment (cf. many Hymns), because everything means waging war against God "under the banner and direction of the devil", for a "nothing" interest (PI 27).

<sup>41</sup> Exoticism is the place of unlimited desire whose internal law is the pleasure principle; it is the imagination that provides the scope for ghosts and is characterized by the loss of control of needs and instincts, such as the aggression and sexual gratification typical of the abuses perpetrated by the colonizers. Anti-exoticism places a limit on desire, with the reality principle: it prevents escape into the dream or invites us to transform the dream into reality.

<sup>42</sup> Poverty, begging and vagrancy threaten the image of the century of Louis XIV. Hence the repressive measures, such as the ban on begging (suppression), or imprisonment in general hospitals (expulsion). The poor are considered a threat to society, but we avoid talking about injustice; this policy is rather justified by the inactivity of poor beggars, which harms the economic system of production.



itself, where the rejected becomes an object of desire.

*O Daughters of Wisdom, Help the crippled poor,  
The overwhelmed with sadness, The maimed, the trash.  
Those whom the world rejects Ought to touch you the most. (H 149, 1)*

*You are well dressed, / You sleep on feather,  
We are almost naked / And hunger consumes us.  
And everyone blesses you, / Honours and accepts you,  
Everyone curses us, / Abuses us and despises us. (H 18, 3)*

H 18, *The cries of the poor*, bears witness in its own way to the transformation that concerns exoticism over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries: the land of the noble savage is transformed into a land of slavery, paradise into hell<sup>43</sup>.

The search for a venue is therefore for Montfort an upheaval of the codes of good society and the laws which impose the separation between inside and outside. Even the house, a place of inclusion, always has a corner of exclusion (waste). The reference is present in a letter from Louis-Marie (1701) to his sister, in a religious community of the Daughters of Saint Joseph:

*“God wants you to be separated from everything that is not himself, even if it means being deserted by everyone. But be glad and rejoice, you who are the servant and the spouse of Jesus, when you resemble your master and spouse. Jesus is poor; Jesus is abandoned; Jesus is despised and rejected as the refuse of the world. You are indeed happy, Louise Grignon, if you are poor in spirit, abandoned, despised and like refuse cast out from the house of St. Joseph”*  
L 7).

The game of inclusion and exclusion begins with a process of identification: being the equal of the poor, an excluded person like them; Jesus Christ himself identified himself with the poor, the abandoned, the despised, the rejected; it is an almost sacramental relationship:

*What is an indigent? / It is written / That he is the vivid image, /  
The lieutenant of Jesus Christ, / His most beautiful legacy. /  
But, to say it again even better, / They are Jesus Christ Himself. (H 17, 14).*

This identification is experienced by Louis Marie in Poitiers, where he participates in the exclusion of poor inmates, first by wearing clothes very similar to theirs, then in communion with Christ: « *For I am infinitely more impoverished, crucified and humiliated than ever* » (L 16). « *In my new family I have chosen to be wedded to Wisdom and the Cross* » (L 20). Even in Paris, in

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<sup>43</sup> This reality will be hidden, or justified, but it emerges as if implicitly in the recurring expressions: “they chain us”, or “the real lazy people” who must be forced to work... Cf H 107, 6: “Go away, rascal, work! »

1703, he had the same experience. After a few months spent at the Salpêtrière hospital, he went to live in a small room on du Pot-de-fer street, having not been hosted by his friends in St-Sulpice. The Jesuits have their house nearby and Montfort can benefit from their spiritual help and their library. There he met Father Descartes, already his spiritual director in Rennes. It was during this period that the missionary was sent on a mission to the hermits of Mont-Valérien, another place of exclusion. And it is in this context that the writing of the Love of Eternal Wisdom takes place.

#### f. A place for Wisdom

Louis-Marie experiences this period of crisis as one must experience the cross: “*I espoused Wisdom and the Cross*” (L 20). From a sign of curse and exclusion, the cross has become an instrument of salvation, horror and rejection for the world, but an object of desire for Montfort:

« *If Christians only knew the value of the cross, they would walk a hundred miles to obtain it, because enclosed in the beloved cross is true wisdom and that is what I am looking for night and day more eagerly than ever*” (L 13)<sup>44</sup>.

The cross is the desirable house, where Wisdom is confined as in a hotel-hospital; desirable because adorable; Montfort ardently seeks Wisdom there: “*You only dwell at Calvary*” (H 103, 16). In this desire we find the theme of the retirement home: the crosses, the humiliations, the poverty... are the crews and the necessary consequences of divine Wisdom, which she brings into the house of those where she wants to live.

« *Oh, when will I possess this loving and unknown Wisdom?  
When will she come to dwell with me* » (L16).  
*Wisdom, you are abandoned, / Come to me. /  
You are being called crazy, / Come to me.* » (H 103, 8).

From now on Montfort no longer seeks a place for himself, but a place for another: Wisdom. In fact, she is on the outside, “broken and despised” and needs an inside: a home, a refuge. External research is transformed into internal research: the border that separates the city from the hospital is now located in the heart of the person. Thus, is born in Louis-Marie the desire for Wisdom, in a dialogue and in a request, in which he becomes a beggar:

“*My dear child in Jesus Christ, do not fail to reply to my requests and fulfil my*

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<sup>44</sup> See the parallel text: “*Keep on praying, even increase your prayers for me; ask for extreme poverty, the weightiest cross, abjection and humiliations. I accept them all if only you will beg God to remain with me and not leave me for a moment because I am so weak. What wealth, what glory, what happiness would be mine if from all this I obtained divine Wisdom, which I long for day and night!*” (L 15, to Marie-Louise Trichet, early 1703).

*wishes. So, pray, entreat God, plead for me to obtain divine Wisdom. You will obtain it completely for me; of this I am quite convinced” (L 16).*

Montfort wishes to be a venue for Wisdom in H 103: *Desires of Incarnate Wisdom*, the chorus is: « *Come to me! I yearn for you a thousand times, Come to me* (v. 12). He offers himself as Wisdom’s house: *You are seeking a home, Come to me* (v. 19) (...) Paradoxically, the “*Come to me*” is also the notice of a departure (v. 28). The desire for Wisdom pushes him towards an elsewhere as unknown as Wisdom (v. 24), because it is Wisdom herself. The desire for Wisdom is a path that leads to ecstasy, in the house of Wisdom:

*Where is your dwelling? / Wisdom, tell me?  
I will fly there on the hour, / Love orders me to do so. (H 126, 3),*

*O Wisdom, come, an indigent begs you, /  
Why do you prolong my martyrdom for so long?  
I seek you night and day! Come, my soul desires you,  
Come, for I yearn for love! /  
My beloved, open, there's a knock on your door.  
Ah! It is not a stranger, It is a heart that is transported by love  
Who has only your home to live in! (H 124, 1-3)*

The search for a venue introduces a reciprocity in desire: Wisdom seeks and desires a place to rest; Montfort is looking for and wanting a place to rest. And he is the house of Wisdom and Wisdom is his house. This search of two beings who wish to meet and desire each other leads to a meeting, called the madness of the Cross.

#### **g. Wisdom and madness**

The 16th -18th centuries are crossed by the image of wisdom recognized in madness. The face of the savage has the features of the poor, the madman, the abandoned child, the lost woman, the incurable. These portraits contrast with the image of the adult man, rich and wise, cultured and “of quality”. The hospice hospital encloses the first series; they are the unproductive, who threaten good order, steal, beg; they tarnish the gentleman's self-image. This is the exclusion series. Montfort presents Wisdom, a crazy female, wandering because she has come from elsewhere and looking for a home. Wisdom as “rubbish of the world” is the image of the women who have crossed the history of the century of mystics, mad or possessed, like Marie des Vallées, the mad mystic of Coutance, who obtained numerous thanks from Saint John Eudes and taught so that he could acquire Wisdom, who was the interlocutor of the Jesuits Coton and Saint-Jure, of Blessed François de Montmorency-Laval, of Boudon, of Bernières-

Louvigny, of Baron Gaston de Renty<sup>45</sup>, of Sister Mathilde of the Holy Sacrament. Or like Louise du Néant (de Bellère du Tronchay), interned at Salpêtrière and interlocutor of the Jesuit Guilloire, one of the great spiritualists of the time<sup>46</sup>. The same can be said of Armelle Nicolas or Marie de Valence.

This image of Wisdom as “rubbish of the world” also recalls the figure of the idiot from an Egyptian convent, recounted in the Lausian History of Palladios. It is the story of a woman considered crazy in a convent where she performs all the most humble jobs, until the day a famous spiritual master reveals her wisdom. Montfort founded a small community inside the Poitiers hospital called La Sagesse and made up of clumsy girls. It is the same reversal: madness, or what appears to be such, reveals divine Wisdom. But not everyone can tolerate this revolution, or revelation: the idiot of the monastery, once recognized, will have to flee and the small community of Wisdom will be dispersed.

The discovery of Wisdom by Montfort also recalls Tauler's meeting<sup>47</sup> with a poor man, who will be presented as his teacher, or the young man of the stagecoach, rough and uneducated, whom Surin meets during a trip<sup>48</sup>. The poor layman and the uneducated youth are figures of the savage and represent him. Michel de Certeau lists the different tenants who have succeeded one another in the same place: the mystical subject, the savage, the poor<sup>49</sup>. Montfort also becomes poor, has his livery and lives in his house, while it is precisely the poor who takes the place of the mystic in the function of protest<sup>50</sup>. Louis-Marie

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<sup>45</sup> Montfort (TD 47) hints to the *Lifie of Marie des Vallées*, written by de Renty and left as a manuscript, that he must have read at St-Sulpice). Cf. de Renty, 1978, pp. 9-10, 142-144, 926-927.

<sup>46</sup> Bremond (1920, p. 354) says that Parisian high society visited the Salpêtrière hospital like one visits a menagerie. Behind this unhealthy curiosity lies the exoticism-anti-exoticism dimension. Louise du Néant complains to her spiritual director: “Elegant ladies and gentlemen come to make fun of us, poor imbeciles” (J. Maillard, 1987, p. 206). Cf M. Foucault, *History of madness in the classical era*, Gallimard, Paris 1976, p. 161; M. Bergamo, *The triumph of humiliations*, Marsilio, 1994.)

<sup>47</sup> Saint-Jure reports the episode of the poor beggar whom he calls “director of Tauler»: Cf. *Sur la connaissance et l'amour du Fils de Dieu*, I, III, ch. 8, § 5.

<sup>48</sup> Surin relates the event in a letter that Montfort read during his convalescence as a seminarian (cf. Blain 41). The letter published by M. de Certeau in *Correspondance* of J.-J. Surin, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966, pp. 140-143. Contrary to what L. Pérouas says (cf. Blain 42, note 38), there are many editions of this letter anterior to 1695) (cf. *Correspondance* of J.-J. Surin, o.c., 144-145).

<sup>49</sup> “This character, the poor, the savage... the mystics dress him in a clown costume to find a way out of the society that created him. Ambiguous actor, he is a passing character. It seduces, distracts, but out of nostalgia he crosses but does not threaten the order he retains and acquires a symbolic value to the extent that he ceases to be a force, but if he is arrested and tried, it is for a crime. this world. The great socio-political struggles (the Fronde, the Jacqueries etc.) no longer pass through its mediation. It only plays a role in institutions relating to a politics of symbolism, in the Churches and in the Orders.) He belongs to two worlds: he lives a past reformism, in a new socio-political order He passes and attests the passage from one to the other” (M. de Certeau, 1982, p. 278). )

<sup>50</sup> “Where there was an opposition not only between the layman and the theologian-priest, but between a mystical science and bookish knowledge, the contrast touches the social side: poverty progressively occupies the place of

returns to an old conception of poverty, with the hospice-hospital as a place of institutional exclusion; it is still the medieval Hôtel-Dieu, a place of institutional and religious inclusion for poverty in the city. The poor then had the right to citizenship in the very heart of the city, generally in front of the cathedral: it was the mystical vision of poverty, identified with Christ; the house of the poor was the house of God. The young Grignion, who fell ill during his theology studies and was admitted to the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris, exclaimed: "*I am too happy to be in the house of God.*"

Wisdom is the mystical figure par excellence; she has the power of protest of the poor, or the savage, who opposes the madness of the world. She is a protester because she introduces into the symbolism what is exorcised from the city: mysticism. Montfort wrote the LEW at a time when antimystical repression officially prevailed. We are beyond the "twilight of the mystics" (Cognet); LEW is nocturnal writing; speaking when other voices are silent. It should therefore not be surprising that this work shocks or seems strange: it speaks the language of a deportee, it seems out of place.

In Poitiers, Louis Marie sculpts a mysterious statue of Wisdom which represents "*Wisdom as Solomon paints it in the book which bears his name*"<sup>51</sup>. Montfort revisits old images and is surprised by his ability to bring abandoned symbols back to life. Thus, the LEW uses the Books of Wisdom and goes against the grain of traditional exegesis; Wisdom is not expressed, Wisdom is not explained as an image of the Christ who will come, but the image of Wisdom is identified with the face of Christ. Montfort links Wisdom to Christ as the signifier and the signified are linked; he escapes the temptation to consider the pure concept, that is to say the meaning; on the contrary, promoting the image of Wisdom, the signifier, underlines the dimension of the sign in the solidarity between signifier and signified, the link between body and mind. In this revisited image, Montfort once again articulates the signifier and the signified, the body and the mind, the emotional and the rational: and he does this by highlighting the primary element of these couples, their forgotten aspect. A "*gentle and conquering*" woman (LEW 5), Wisdom, values the language of the body, as a body of desire. By assuming the language of the body, Wisdom opens the horizon of desire.

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mysticism; we see it assigning a function of protest in a society where wealth and culture cease to be Christian. Face to face, it is not a question of two types of religious knowledge, nor of two ecclesial categories, but of two social groups: the cultured become the rich and the libertines identify with the poor and the believer" (M. de Certeau, 1982, p. 326).

<sup>51</sup> Besnard, 1985, p. 353.

# 1. MAN DESIRES GOD

## 1.1 The path to speech

### 1.1.1 The desire to speak well

The LEW begins with a prayer to Eternal Wisdom which seems inspired by the opening prayer of the work on the *Knowledge and Love of the Son of God*, by Saint-Jure (1634). We find the same confession there: the audacity to dare to speak, while being “both sinners and ignorant”; the same request: accept the work, even if it is childish chatter; and the same thought for the readers. But Montfort's prayer is longer than his model and the addition seems significant. Concerning the “babbling”, Louis-Marie specifies:

*I am only a child, anxious to learn how to speak properly through my lisping, once I have attained the fullness of your age (LEW 1).*

In this double polarity between the child and the adult and between the stutterer and the good speaker, the desire to learn is inserted. Desire is, in temporality, the engine of growth and development; it is born from a lack and aspires to fulfillment. In this dynamic, desire does not demand satisfaction but pushes for transformation; it opens onto an infinity which will never be reached here on earth, since it is the “fullness of the century” of Christ<sup>52</sup>. This is the first paradox of this work: its ultimate meaning and its perfection will be achieved when the work is useless. The work invites us to go beyond; that's why it exists. In this double polarity between the child and the adult and between the stutterer and the good speaker, the desire to learn is inserted.

In the desire to learn, there is more than a simple and natural desire to know<sup>53</sup>. The desire to speak well would only be an aesthetic concern for beautiful speech. The mystic must fight against language<sup>54</sup> to say what it is not possible to say. “*No one can say it well*” (...) “*I cannot keep silent*” (H 55, 15-26). “*Is it necessary that I can't say what I taste and feel?* » (H 47.25). The infancy of the mystic, of all mystics, manifests itself in the need to speak. “It is something they stammered about. » Thus, the desire to learn to speak well reveals the loving dimension of writing. Writing is a path of Eros<sup>55</sup>. Wanting to know how to speak

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<sup>52</sup> Cf Ef 4, 13; (a text quoted often by Montfort): LEW 214, 227; SM67; TD 33, 119, 156, 164, 168.

<sup>53</sup> The writer's desire to learn to speak well corresponds in the reader to a “*living and natural desire to know the truth*” (SM 2). Montfort asks the reader to postpone the satisfaction of the desire to read, first spending time in prayer (cf. SM 2). On desire and knowledge: cf. LEW 4, 58, 92).

<sup>54</sup> Cf M. de Certeau, 1982, p. 158.

<sup>55</sup> Cf Barthes, 1981, p. 14.

well means wanting well-pronounced words to demonstrate to the reader that he or she is desired. Desire is relational.

### 1.1.2. From need to desire

The need to learn to speak well is felt from the birth of speech, but it is also in speech which, born of desire, detaches itself from need. In the emergence of speech, need is transformed into desire<sup>56</sup>. This is seen in this passage from the prayer to Wisdom:

*“There is in you so much beauty and delight; you have shielded me from so many evils and showered on me so many favours, (...) How can I remain silent? Not only justice and gratitude, but my own interests urge me to speak about you, even though it be so imperfectly”* (LEW 1).

Initially, Louis-Marie emphasizes the beauty and gentleness of Wisdom and thus introduces an important theme: the *via pulchritudinis*, the underlying theme of the work<sup>57</sup>. Subsequently, and in parallel form (“*You are so...*”), he highlights two other elements: “*you have preserved me from many evils and filled me with so many favours*”. The feeling of protection (“*preserved from many evils*”) and satisfaction (“*filled with many favours*”) are two fundamental needs of the child, which instill in him “*fundamental confidence*”<sup>58</sup>, essential to his development. It is the positive pole of the presence of the other, of the reassuring presence of the mother<sup>59</sup>. Here, speech breaks down what is egocentric and opens to otherness. Wisdom guarantees the satisfaction of basic needs, like a good mother, and with recognition, she becomes an object of desire (the bride). The word separates need from desire, recognizing the giver; need demands giving and desire focuses on the giver. The word emphasizes not so much protection or superabundant giving, but She who protects and gives. There is here a meeting between Montfort and Wisdom, which underlines the concern of the latter; it is Wisdom which initiates the desire she arouses.

The theme of childhood, introduced by the word perceived as stuttering, is taken up by Saint-Jure and makes it possible to situate desire in the dynamics of a growth process and therefore in a pedagogy. Since desire depends on the body, this pedagogy is above all the human development of the child, understood as fundamental confidence. But it is also a spiritual pedagogy, the stages of which

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<sup>56</sup> Cf Vasse, 1969, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ‘Beauty’ in *Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*.

<sup>58</sup> Cf Cameron (1985, p. 96) et Maddy (1989, pp. 294-295), who quotes works by Erikson.

<sup>59</sup> Cf Imoda, 1993, pp. 132-134, 307.



are marked by three terms: justice, interest, gratitude; they reveal the spiritual trilogy that we will talk about later: servile fear (justice), self-interested love (interest), pure love (gratitude).

### 1.1.3. The path to desire

"It seems that desiring has the same origin as considering. The original meaning would have been: to stop seeing, to note the absence of... Where it comes from: to seek, to desire. Desiring indicates the movement which frees one from astral astonishment and which transforms its opening into a journey of encounter."<sup>60</sup>

This definition of desire as search and journey is Montfort's experience with Wisdom. This is also where the LEW finds its origin and its purpose:

*"I know there seems to be neither order nor sense in what I write, but because I long so dearly to possess you, I am looking for you everywhere, like Solomon, wandering in all directions (Wisd. 8:18). If I am striving to make you known in this world, it is because you yourself have promised that all who explain you and make you known will have eternal life (cf. Sir. 8:18). Accept, then, my loving Lord, these humble words of mine as though they were a masterly discourse. Look upon the strokes of my pen as so many steps to find you and from your throne above bestow your blessings and your enlightenment on what I mean to say about you, so that those who read it may be filled with a fresh desire to love you and possess you, on earth as well as in heaven. » [LEW 2]*

At the end of the prayer, the chatter almost turns into a search and a journey. "Searching everywhere without method" corresponds to "chatter" in a speech. The couple search - find corresponds to the couple desire - possession, with the equivalence between desire - seek and possess - find. Desire finds death in satisfaction, like research when it achieves the desired object.

But when will the satisfaction of desire come? "In time and eternity", when Wisdom will have taken up residence in the man possessed by desire (cf. LEW 51), when this man will be possessed by Wisdom (cf. LEW 225). "*Let me always have the trouble / of looking for you without finding you*" (C 124, 4). Behind the infinite search for Wisdom, with accents dear to Saint Augustine, desire becomes research<sup>61</sup> and tends towards action; it is a tendency towards, as evidenced by the short prayer: "*May we always tend towards You alone, with all the ardor of our desires*" (SAR 39).

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<sup>60</sup> Vasse, 1988, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Cf C 125 e 126. Desire is often associated with research or to movement : cf TD 50; LAC 45; LEW 9, 10, 30, 47, 63, 66, 69, 73, 170, 181, 183, 220; C4 / 8, 16; 5 / 40; 19/11; 58/ 10; 103; 162/7.



The verb desire can therefore be considered a modal verb. In many texts, the emphasis is more on desire than on its objects; not that they are unimportant, but the fundamental attitude of man overcome by desire is underlined. Note the adjectives that accompany desire: great (L 5, 9; SAR 144; LEW 47), ardent (L 16; LEW 3, 101; RS 304; DPM 12), continuous (L 11; LEW 64, 65; SM 2; cf. LEW 170, 186), infinite (LEW 63, 170; cf. H 42/27), incessant (L 5, 9, 16), bold (H 8/35), immense (TD 139). Often the verb desire is followed ardently by the adverb (L 26; LEW 132; H 63/4; 127/76; 129/6; 132/5). Other times we speak of the ardor of desire (LEW 27, 30; SAR 39), or of its fullness (ASS 67, 171), or of desiring a thousand times (H 5/40; 112/1), or in a thousand ways (LEW 47).

On the path of desire, we can distinguish three stages: the origin of desire, the desire itself and its satisfaction. In LEW 2, we find the traits that ignite desire, the desire to love and the satisfaction of possessing Wisdom. In LEW 10 the progressive happiness of those who “listen”, of those who “desire and seek” and finally of those who “keep and taste” the infinite sweetness of Wisdom is described (see also LEW 69). In TD 50 we move from “knowing”, and “seeking and desiring”, to “finding”. In LAC 45, concerning the “science of taste”, there is the progression between desiring, seeking and finally savour.

*O Divine Wisdom, / I love you ardently!*

*You are my mistress / And I am your lover!*

*It is you alone here on earth / That I seek and that I love;*

*You have so many charms, / That I am as if I was out of myself! (H 126: 1)*

The attractions that Montfort uses to inflame his readers with desire are the Bible, and particularly the Books of Wisdom. Desire is not rooted in lack of, but in listening to Wisdom (LEW 10); it is not produced from within, but caused from without, thanks to the care of Wisdom. The word of Scripture is a provocative saying: it has the power to lead outside of itself, that is to say, to put us on the path. Thoughts are the stimuli: to desire, one must be affected. To arouse the desire for the Holy Rosary, Montfort resorts to the power of emotion:

*“Today people want things that strike and move them, that leave deep impressions on the soul. Now has there ever been anything in the history of the world more moving than the wonderful story of the life, death, and glory of our Saviour which is contained in the holy Rosary? In the fifteen tableaux, the principal scenes or mysteries of his life unfold before our eyes. How could there be any prayers more wonderful and sublime than the Lord's Prayer and the Ave of the angel? All our desires and all our needs are found expressed in these two*

*prayers.*” (SR 75-76).

By introducing the theme of emotion, it is possible to better situate what is underlying these texts<sup>62</sup>. First, we must consider the relationship between emotion and perception. Perception touches and strikes: these are the burning features, the words heard, etc. (cf. LEW 2, 10). It’s an object, or a person, or a situation that touches me; it is meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, or it is the care of Wisdom... that I can imagine, or that someone presents to me. Emotion, distinct from perception, presupposes a certain knowledge of the object: one must know to desire and love (cf. TD 50; LEW 8). In this plan, the author wants to “*simply portray eternal Wisdom before, during and after its incarnation*” (LEW 7). Not for an indifferent knowledge, but one that touches the person. What is known must be judged as pleasant or unpleasant, desirable or undesirable. This is why Montfort speaks of “*tasty science felt in experience*” (LFC 45), which involves the person. The experimental character of Wisdom, however, arises from both experience (*Erlebnis*) and the process of reflection (*Erfahrung*).

The path of desire opens with the search for the desired object; a search which includes: a cognitive element, that is - in this case - the knowledge that Wisdom is Christ; an affective element, of feeling and emotion, which is the knowledge of what Wisdom has done; and a gift element, of action and behavior, linked to the emotional: it is the search for Wisdom<sup>63</sup>. From a spiritual point of view, the search for the desired object shows that the desiring subject is both passive and active; passive because he is not at the origin of the desire (he is in fact touched by Wisdom), and active because he freely decides to seek Wisdom: the search becomes a response to the call.

## 1.2 Desire and fear

In LEW 5-6, after the long quotation from Wis 6, 1-27, Montfort makes two notes by which he introduces the binary happiness - misfortune:

*“How gentle, attractive and approachable is eternal Wisdom who possesses such splendour, excellence and grandeur. She invites men to come to her because she wants to teach them the way to happiness. She is for ever searching for them and always greets them with a smile. She bestows blessings on them many times over and forestalls their needs in a thousand different ways, and*

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Arnold’s phenomenological analysis, 1960, pp. 170-182.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Rulla, 1971, p. 39. On the three elements; cf. Mc Guire, 1969, pp. 155-157; Rokeach, 1968, pp. 112-114.

*even goes as far as to wait at their very doorstep to give them proofs of her friendship. Who could be so heartless as to refuse to love this gentle conqueror? How unfortunate are the rich and powerful if they do not love eternal Wisdom."*

The happiness – unhappiness couple corresponds to that of benefits – evils reported in LEW: Wisdom is full of benefits and protects from evils. The happiness - misfortune couple aims to inspire the desire for Wisdom with the attraction of happiness, and to instill the horror of evil with fear. You can only love what you like; you can only hate what you dislike. It is the center of the deepest human experience, both in the realm of the elemental and the primitive than in that of the universal.

The pedagogy which uses desire and fear, happiness and unhappiness, refers to the dynamism of emotions, defined as “the tendency felt towards something considered good or beneficial (attraction), or on the contrary the repulsion towards something considered bad or harmful”<sup>64</sup>. Louis Marie de Montfort, in his preaching as in the texts of the Hymns, knows how to arouse attraction for good and heaven (cf. H 116, 117, 152), and knows how to provoke aversion to evil and hell (cf. H118, 119, 120).

In the realm of emotions, desire is to fear what attraction is to aversion. It is not uncommon to see these two types of emotions classified into the concupiscible and irascible categories; the first is about desire and the second is about fear<sup>65</sup>. It seems impossible to desire evil, as evil, or to flee from good to get closer to evil. Such a perversion of desire would be a scandal. You can only seek the good: “*Who could be so heartless as to refuse to love this gentle conqueror?*”

(LEW 5). But there are those who turn away from good and take the path of misfortune: it is the reversal of fleeing desire, of love into hatred. Montfort observes that it can happen that we “*must beware of choosing a wrong wisdom*” (LEW 73) and choose unhappiness instead of happiness:

*“if, instead of listening to him, we turn a deaf ear; if, instead of searching, we flee; if, instead of honoring, of loving him, we spurn and offend him, what cruelty is ours, and what will be our punishment, even in this world! (...) But how unhappy they will be at the door of death when, despite themselves, they hear Wisdom reproach them, “I called you and you did not answer (Prov. 1:24). All day long I held out my hands to you and you spurned me. If we are not touched by the eager desires, the loving searches and the testimonies of*

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<sup>64</sup> “The felt tendency toward anything intuitively appraised as good (beneficial) or away from anything intuitively appraised as bad (harmful).” (Arnold, 1960. p. 182).

<sup>65</sup> Cf Bernard, 1986, p. 184; Malaval, 1993, p. 101; Arnold, 1960, p. 196.

*friendship of this amiable Wisdom, what is our hardness and our ingratitude? (...) How great will be their misery in hell! Read what the Holy Spirit himself has to say about the miseries, the wailings, the regrets and the despair of the fools in hell who, all too late, realise their folly and misfortune in rejecting the eternal Wisdom of God. "They are now beginning to speak sensibly - but they are in hell" (LEW 72).*

As we can see, the author constructs a series of oppositions at the level of concupiscible passions: listen and shut one's ear, seek and flee, honor and despise, love and offend, reward and punishment, joy and sadness, happiness and misfortune. And the text ends with the couple wisdom - madness, introducing the passions of the irascible in the form of an enumeration: complaints, regrets, despair. In these irascible passions, hope, fear and audacity are lacking. Why this omission if not to arouse them in the reader? Isn't this perhaps the hope that Montfort wants to give birth to by always speaking to us about desire? Is it not the fear of misfortune that he wants to put in us, to have the audacity to confront evil and seek good with ardor? Despair occupies a particular place in hymns about hell or death (cf. H 120). The despair of the moment when everything is over, when there is nothing left to hope for, to desire. Despair says the end of desire:

*"Despair and rage / And gnashing of teeth / Are my only language / In the midst of my torments. (...) / Rage, despair, blasphemy, / Since one must always suffer, / Since one must stay the same / Without ever being able to die!" (H 118, 15 et 20)*

### 1.3 Desire and Wisdom

#### 1.3.1. Taste : from need to want

Placing himself in a long tradition<sup>66</sup>, Montfort defines wisdom with Latin etymology: *"In the general sense of the term wisdom means a delectable knowledge 'sapida scientia', a taste for God and his truth.» (LEW 13 ; cf. LAC 45 ; H 141/11).*

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<sup>66</sup> Tradition goes back to saint Augustine (De Trinitate, VII, 1, 156-157, CCL 50, p. 249, ou PL 42, 936) and is characteristic of the 17th Century mystical and 'emotional' theology: cf. Saint-Bernard (SuperCam. 1, 3 ; 85, 8, PL 183, 816, 1191) ; Ghigo le Chartreux, 1980, pp. 92, 184); Gueric d'Igny, 1970, p. 284 ; Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, 1962, pp. 236, 250 ; 1982, p. 144, 152 ; 1985, p. 342, 374); Hugues de San Vittore, 1969, p. 118. During the 17th Century, the definition of wisdom as « *sapida scientia* » is actual: cf. Champion, 1694, p. 37; Lallemant, 1694, p. 208, 239, 263, 278, in reference to Isidore of Séville (Etymologies) : 1694, pp. 219, 221 ; wisdom as 'experimental knowledge': pp. 204, 231, 247; Saint-Jure, 1652, p. 331, 414-431, in reference to Saint Bernard, Serm. in Cam. 85; Malaval, 1993, p. 182, 183, 249, 276 ; L. van Hecke, in a study on Saint Bernard, 1990, pp. 79-89, where he proposes and comments other texts on wisdom as '*sapida scientia*' in relation to the knowledge of contemplation.)

Taste takes us from need to desire and “makes desire resonate”<sup>67</sup>. Tasting or savoring implies going beyond the need towards something more, not linked to dietary needs, but of the order of gratuity, abundance and pleasure. To taste is to eat with pleasure; the difference is not quantitative, but qualitative. Taste (desire) is to nutrition (need) as play is to work:

« *Finally, She says, "I was with God and I disposed everything with such perfect precision and such pleasing variety that it was like playing a game to entertain my Father and myself"»* (LEW 32).

Variety, abundance and pleasure are part of desire, not need. Montfort clarifies this relationship of taste with desire:

*“If we knew what is the pleasure that a soul tastes which knows the beauty of Wisdom, which sucks the milk from this breast of the Father, [we] would cry out with the Bride: "the milk of your breasts is sweeter than delicious wine and than all the sweetness of creatures";*

particularly when she makes the souls who contemplate her hear these words:

*"Taste and see, eat and drink, be filled with my eternal sweetness, for you will discover that conversing with me is in no way distasteful, that my companionship is never tedious and in me only will you find joy and contentment" (LEW 10).*

The desire is towards abundance and the pleasure of intoxication: the intoxication of the party, of the banquet, of conviviality, which goes beyond eating and drinking, understood as a strict need. This is the typical excess of desire<sup>68</sup>.

### 1.3.2 The three levels of desire

By analyzing the text of LEW 10, desire-taste is expressed at three levels: there is a reference to food (milk and wine, eating, drinking, sucking, getting drunk), then interpersonal relationships emerge (conversation, company) and finally a relationship plus the intellectual level appears (see, be aware, know, enjoy beauty). There are three levels that can be linked to the dimension of psychic life<sup>69</sup>.

The first level has a psycho-physiological character. These are the basic needs of

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<sup>67</sup> Vasse, 1991, p. 194.

<sup>68</sup> Cf Vassé, 1983, p. 147. Excess and drunkenness are very present in Louis-Marie's writings and indicate the vehemence of love. "Excess": cf LEW 45, 64, 108, 155, 166; SA/? 67, 73; C 27 / 2, 40 / 12, 41 / 1 e 9, 42 / 14, 128 / 6, 132 / 2, 137 / 8, 158 / 5 e 13. "intoxication": cf LEW 10, 62; C40/22, 112/5, 129/4e7, 158/9.

<sup>69</sup> 76 Cf Rulla, 1971, pp. 29-30; 1986, p. 127; Kiely, 1987, pp. 207-208; J. Nuttin, *Psychoanalysis and personality*, New York 1962.

the body, which arise from a deficiency and invite consumption, destroying the object that ensures their satisfaction. The second level has a psychosocial dimension and concerns the need for a life of relationship with others; it is different from the previous one and includes the category of pleasure, leading to different feelings, such as love (loving and being loved), hatred, feeling of inferiority, etc. The third level has a spiritual and rational dimension. It is the domain of intelligence and concepts, but also of morality and spiritual life. And the transcendent dimension of the search for meaning and freedom. The desire for God belongs to this level. The difference between the three levels is qualitative; they cannot be confused or reduced to one another without compromising the existential unity of the person.

It is not uncommon to see the desire for God expressed with first-level categories: “God, you are my God, at dawn I seek you, my soul thirsts for you” (Wis 62). It's a kind of metonymy: the higher desire is expressed with the lower desire. The desire for thirst, the most basic, has the capacity to express the totality of desires: the elementary expressing the universal. We find examples in Louis-Marie:

*“A thousand times my heart desires you, (...) To be without you is martyrdom, Come, then, O my dear Spouse! (...) I desire you, O bread of life, / I am so hungry, give me some bread”.* (H 112: 1.4).

There is a parallel here between the lack of bread and the absence of Jesus. “*The object that nourishes is, in itself, inseparable from the presence that speaks; it is more a sign of presence than a source of satisfaction*”<sup>70</sup>. The Eucharist is the paradoxical need which does not destroy the assimilated Object, but makes it present in the most intimate, in a relationship of interiority. The object is not consumed: on the contrary, it is he who consumes:

*“I have my soul / All in flame, / I have my Savior In the middle of my heart”* (H 112 / 12).

In this need the shadow of death appears, since the lack of food exposes one to death (cf. H 112/1, 4 and 8). Need, like necessity, is the original wound, always open, which reminds the living being that it cannot be sufficient for itself<sup>71</sup>. Need thirsts and disposes to otherness; but in the satisfaction of the need, once satisfied, the other is not destroyed, if we do not confuse the one who gives with what is given, or the one who nourishes with food.

<sup>70</sup> Vasse, 1969, p. 19; cf anche p. 22.

<sup>71</sup> The non-sufficiency is expressed in the search for the Other: “*Lord, I am knocking at your door / I have a great need / I am dying of poverty*” (H 112/9).

### 1.3.2.1 *Desire and science*

#### 1.3.2.1.a Two types of sciences

*“I know there seems to be neither order nor sense in what I write, but because I long so dearly to possess you, I am looking for you everywhere, like Solomon, wandering in all directions”* (LEW 2).

This is an admission that resembles false modesty, since in LEW there is no lack of method. Behind the confession lies the demand for a method and the right to write following the example of Solomon. He opposes the method to the non-method. Two writings and two sciences are thus compared<sup>72</sup>. On one side is placed Wisdom, like Solomon, and on the other side science, spirit, order, method. Or rather, two types of science are compared: one which is “*common, dry and superficial*”, and the other “*extraordinary, holy and profound*” (LEW 8).

*“From this infinite source of light, the great Doctors of the Church, like St Thomas (as he himself testifies) drew that eminent knowledge for which they are renowned. Note that this enlightened understanding given by eternal Wisdom is not dry, barren and unspiritual, but radiating splendour, unction, vigour and devotion. It moves and satisfies the heart at the same time as it enlightens the mind.”* (LEW 94).

Saint Augustine distinguishes between wisdom and science by affirming that the first contemplates eternal realities and the second temporal realities<sup>73</sup>. The distinction became more controversial in the 17th century, in the opposition between mysticism and scholasticism, considered as two opposing types of knowledge. The first is experimental, emotional and practical, the second is considered barren<sup>74</sup>.

But there are also authors who combine scholastic theology and mysticism: “Theology must not be purely speculative, but speculative and practical, (...) it must be affective to make people better, so that through it “God be known” by the spirit and by the will; by the mind, capable of knowing, by the will which tastes and savors God by loving him in its own way; since tasting and savoring

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<sup>72</sup> Montfort rejects the “*beautiful and magnificent words of orators*” who deceive (LEW 12). He speaks and writes according to the “abundance” communicated by Wisdom (*ex abundantia cordis*) and according to what Wisdom made us feel (*ex exisientia*); cf. LEW 97, RM 60). Only Wisdom communicates the science of speaking well (cf. LEW 95), words that start from the heart and reach the heart (cf. LEW 96).

<sup>73</sup> Cf *De Trinitate*, XII, 14, 22.

<sup>74</sup> Cf Bergame, 1992, p. 91-93, 99. “It is not a notion, but a taste, not a thought but an experience, not a significant term but a satisfying feeling, a knowledge that is luminous and effective and affective, invigorating, not dry and scholastic” (Malaval, 1992, p. 178.)



means both knowing him and looking at him (...) Indeed, there is. They are those who are content to see and consider the attributes of God, satisfied to be able to speak and discuss them, without being inflamed by any feeling of affection towards Him. Others, however, only ask to love him without worrying about knowing the slightest nobility and particular perfections. Thus, one sees without tasting and the other tastes without seeing, and both lack something... But there are others who willingly unite the two things, through a mystical and affective theology, which gives a double knowledge of God, with the illumination of the spirit and the taste of the will<sup>75</sup>.

Montfort does not develop a theology comparable to other sciences, but a Wisdom linked to the sciences in a different way. This method includes the commentary of science in a speculative way, with the effort and intellectual work of man, in an ascending movement, but it also includes ‘anointing’, knowing how to taste the lights and graces dispensed by the Holy Spirit, in a downward movement. The relationship between the different sciences is not horizontal, since there would be competition, but vertical, in a hierarchy which depends on the nature of the object considered.

#### 1.3.2.1.b The only science, the only desire

Montfort therefore opposes two sciences: that of Wisdom, the “wise science”, and that of the world, the natural wisdom of philosophers, whose subtleties can deceive (cf. LEW 12, 84-85). The opposition is not to condemn philosophy or the sciences, but to indicate their limits:

*«It is true that scholastic philosophy, when studied in a truly Christian way, develops the mind and enables it to understand the higher sciences, but it will never confer that so-called natural wisdom which the ancients prided themselves on possessing. » (LEW 85).*

There is a difference of order between the sciences and they are relative; wisdom has an absolute character. Affective theology is *«the supreme science of Jesus, (...) is the most noble, the most consoling, the most useful and the most vital of all sciences and subjects in heaven and on earth » (LEW 8)*. This character of absolute and totality gives Wisdom the privilege of uniqueness:

*"Jesus Christ, eternal Wisdom, is everything that you can and should wish for. Long for him, seek for him, because he is that unique and precious pearl for which you should be ready to sell everything you possess."*  
(LEW 9 ; cf. also 73-74).

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<sup>75</sup> Bail, 1651, Preface.



The unique character of “wise science”, and of the desire for Wisdom which accompanies it, comes from the fact that it is found at the summit of all sciences and all knowledge, and this is due to the very nature of its object, Jesus. Christ: “Of all sciences because its subject is the most noble and the most sublime: Wisdom uncreated and incarnate.” (ibid., see also 12). In this sense, the relationship thus introduced between wisdom, as a science, and the other sciences is vertical: it is a plus in relation to a minus.

To clarify better, what Father Bourgoing writes in the Preface to the Complete Works of Pierre de Bérulle can be enlightening: “As an introduction to this great work, great not by the number of volumes, but by the abundance of light and truth, three types of theology should be noted: positive, scholastic and mystical. Its object is the interpretation of the Scriptures, which must be done with the same Spirit who dictated them (...) The scholasticism illuminates the truths of faith, inserting human reasoning into them. Mysticism applies these truths and uses them to elevate the soul towards God (...) It should be noted that this type of theology takes more from wisdom than science, treating high and divine things, highly and divinely, and with the deepest principles of faith, without relying on human science, nor on philosophical reasoning soaring like an eagle which, with its flight, approaches the sky, contemplates the truths with its subtle eternal vision in the splendor and light of their sun, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the true science of the saints, the science of salvation and an emanation of divine Wisdom and Science, of which Jesus possesses the treasures, of which he is the one and only Master”<sup>76</sup>.

From a theological point of view, the more relationship there is between Creator and creature; in Bérullian terms: everything – nothing. So Montfort: « *To know Jesus Christ incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need. To presume to know everything and not know him is to know nothing at all.* » (LEW 11)<sup>77</sup>. The passage from everything to nothingness speaks of the nothingness of the creature before its Creator: « *O Almighty Lord, before whom everything is nothing,* » (H 24 / 33). Faced with the “wise science” of Wisdom, all human

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<sup>76</sup> Bérulle, 1664, pp. VI-VIII. On the “Science of Salvation”, necessary for superiors, Bérulle writes: “This art is a science not of memory, but of spirit; not of study, but of prayer; not of speech, but of practice; not of discussion, but of humility; not of speculation, but of love, and of love of Jesus. (...) Science, which is part of the science of the saints, as the Scripture says: spiritual science emanating from the Father of spirits, (...) a science which suits the saints, which makes saints and which guides the saints in everlasting ways. (...) We must all love this truly spiritual science, this science which has Jesus as its end, object and origin; Jesus” (ibid., pp. 625-626.)

<sup>77</sup> Restored from Saint-Jure (*Of the knowledge...*, 1. I, c. 3), inspired by saint Augustine (*Confessions*, book V, c. 4).

knowledge is vain.

#### 1.3.2.1.c Emotional desire and rational desire

Emotional desire can be linked to the psycho-physiological and psycho-social levels, while rational desire is linked to the spiritual sphere. Emotional desire is characterized by intuitive judgment (or *sensory judgment*); the rational gives a considered judgment.

We speak of intuitive judgment when an object is evaluated as desirable (or undesirable) here and now, and this object is seen as capable of satisfying (or not satisfying) a need. If the object is considered desirable, therefore good, a movement towards this object appears; it is desire as a tendency towards... However, desire can also arise from a reflective judgment, from an intellectual evaluation which transcends the influence, here and now, of different stimuli. This belongs to the level of conceptual knowledge; it is a deliberate act and involves a free will that can move away from the strictly emotional level, that is, from the pleasant – not from the pleasant.

The distinction between intuitive and reflective judgment and between emotional and rational desire can help us better understand the distinction between “sapient science,” or loving knowledge, or the affective theology of Wisdom, and “dry, speculative science.” If we identify affective theology with emotional desire (intuitive judgment), we fall into devout sentimentalism. “Dry and speculative science” is in fact an intellectual judgment that eliminates any emotional or affective element. On the contrary, the science of Wisdom is a reflective and intellectual judgment, which follows the emotion produced by the intuitive judgment and provokes a second emotion, hence a rational desire; thus, the person is touched or affected (by grace, by the anointing of the Spirit). The two desires, emotional and rational, and the two corresponding emotions can contrast; Montfort gives a good example in the following text:

*. (...) You may, and should, pray for the wisdom of the cross, that knowledge of the truth which we experience within ourselves and which by the light of faith deepens our knowledge of the most hidden mysteries, including that of the cross. (...) If you stand in need of this strengthening spirit which enables us to carry the heaviest crosses courageously; of this gracious and consoling spirit, which enables us, in the higher part of the soul, to take delight in things that are bitter and repulsive; (...) pray for Wisdom, (...) Then you will clearly understand from your own experience how it is possible to desire, seek and find joy in the cross.» (LFC 45).*

Rational desire, the taste for the cross, is opposed to emotional non-desire, to disgust for the cross. “Tasteful science” is therefore located at the level of rational and spiritual desire.

#### 1.3.2.1.d The structure of the soul

The distinction between emotional desire and rational desire presupposes a particular vision of the structure of the soul, an “anatomy of the soul”<sup>78</sup>.

Emotional desire does not lead to love of the cross, because sensitive love of the cross is “impossible by nature” (LFC 50). Louis-Marie then distinguishes three parts of the soul corresponding to three types of love:

*“emotional love, rational love, and the supernatural love of faith. In other words, the love that resides in the lower part of man, in his body; the love in the higher part, his reason; and the love in the highest part of man, in the summit of the soul, that is, the intelligence enlightened by faith.”* (LFC 50)<sup>79</sup>.

Love of the cross cannot be born from the “will of the flesh” (LFC 51); it is rational love, which has its seat in the upper part of the soul, which is reason.

Spiritual love is a kind of emotion that derives from knowledge:

*“This love is entirely spiritual; it springs from the knowledge of how happy we can be in suffering for God, and so it can be experienced by the soul, to which it gives interior joy and strength.”* (LFC 52).

Montfort adds that rational desire can also be lacking; then love comes from the top, or the “tip” of the soul:

*“But although this rational and perceptible joy is good, in fact, excellent, it is not always necessary to suffer joyfully for God's sake. And so there is a third kind of love, which is called by the masters of the spiritual life the love of the summit of the soul, and which is known to philosophers as the love of the intellect. In this, without any feeling of joy in the senses or pleasure in the mind, we love the cross we are carrying, by the light of pure faith, and take delight in it, even though the lower part of our nature may be in a state of conflict and disturbance, groaning and complaining, weeping and longing for relief. In this case, we can say with our Lord, “Father, let your will be done, not mine;” or with our Lady, “I am the slave of the Lord: let what you have said be done to me.” It is with one of these two higher loves that we should love and accept the cross.”* (LFC 52-53).

The non-correspondence between the sensitive love of the lower part of the soul and the rational and spiritual love (and desire) of the upper part is thus

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<sup>78</sup> C'est le titre d'un ouvrage posthume de M. Bergamo (1994) ; cf la première partie ; Structure de l'âme.

<sup>79</sup> The tripartition of the soul is of Rhineland-Flemish origin: lower part, sensitive faculties; middle part, rational faculties; supreme part, essence of the soul. The Aristotelian-Thomist model is different: lower part, sensitive faculty; upper part, rational faculties Cf. Bergame, 1994, p. 55.

underlined. The lower part is significantly affected (here are terms such as: war, alarms, moaning, complaint, cry...); while the higher transcends the emotional state and can lead to "suffering for God". There is therefore a tension between the lower part and the upper part, due to human nature, marked by sin (cf. LAC 47), or simply to nature as such:

*"God does not ask you to love the cross with the will of the flesh. Since the flesh is subject to sin and corruption, all that proceeds from it is perverted and, of itself, cannot be submissive to the will of God and his crucifying law. It was this human will our Lord referred to in the Garden of Olives when he cried out, "Father, let your will be done, not mine." If the lower part of Christ's human nature, although so holy, could not love the cross continuously, then with still greater reason will our tainted nature reject it."* (LFC 51).

In certain cases of mystical experience, it can happen that a joy located at a higher level is reflected on the lower level, without falling into masochism. Montfort alludes to this:

*"It is true that we may sometimes experience even a sensible joy in our sufferings, as many of the saints have done; but that joy does not come from the body, even though it is experienced in the body. It comes from the soul, which is so overwhelmed with the divine joy of the Holy Spirit that it overflows into the body. In that way, someone who is suffering greatly can say with the psalmist, "My heart and my flesh ring out their joy to God, the living God."»* (ibid.).

Suffering leads to the tendency to react with complaints. The forms of lamentation also correspond to the different levels of the soul and Louis-Marie notes:

*"There are three kinds of complaints we may make in times of distress. The first is natural and spontaneous, as when the body groans and complains, weeps and laments. There is no fault in this, provided, as I have said, that the heart is resigned to the will of God. The second kind of complaint is that of the mind, as when we make known our ills to someone who can give us some relief, such as a doctor or a superior. There may be some imperfection in this if we are too eager to tell our troubles, but there is no sin in it. The third kind is sinful: that is when we criticize our neighbour either to get rid of an evil which afflicts us or to take revenge on him; or when we wilfully complain of what we suffer with impatience and murmuring."* (LFC 59).

#### 1.3.2.1.e. Two types of language

Wisdom, understood as "wise science", reconciles two types of language, one evocative and the other propositional<sup>80</sup>. Body language is evocative in its affective and emotional dimension; it is the "savory" aspect of the experience,

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<sup>80</sup> Cf Stierling, 1969, pp. 61-74; Imoda, 1993, pp. 158-159.

with its emotional dimensions, which lead to the subjective appropriation of the experience. This language is expressed in warmth, spontaneity, impulsiveness and "the power of regeneration or vital wealth"<sup>81</sup> and plays a well-known role, both in dreams or in neurotic and psychotic symptoms, as well as in religious and poetic inspiration.

The language of proposition is primarily conceptual and abstract and represents the objective side of experience, expressing rational desires.

Sentimentalism is then an evocative language, devoid of a propositional component; "dry and sterile" science is a propositional language, devoid of an evocative component; "wise science" integrates and reconciles the two components, being both affective and rational: it is not only linked to the vital (bios), or to the logical (logos), but integrates the two dimensions into a pathos.<sup>82</sup>

We also find this integration in Louis-Marie in the way he combines knowledge and love: "*Can we love someone we do not even know? Can we love ardently someone we know only vaguely? Why is Jesus, the adorable, eternal and incarnate Wisdom loved so little?*" (LEW 8). Love is not enough: knowledge is necessary. There is no emotional dimension without a rational dimension. It is a difficult balance, since we can know God without loving him, and it is only in the other life that knowledge will necessarily and always produce love.

For Saint Thomas, the measure of love as an affective power does not depend on knowledge, linked to reason, since we can love perfectly without knowing deeply<sup>83</sup>. However, there is a tension between the two elements: wisdom, the *sapida scientia*, the affection for the seasons, which includes the enjoyment of spiritual joys and sweetness, since it depends on the charity and intelligence which are the seat.

Finally, in Pseudo-Denys<sup>84</sup>, we find the possibility of reconciling the emotional dimension with the intellectual dimension in pathos: we are perfect, in divine things, not only when we know them, but also when we enjoy them (*non solum discens , sedet patiens divina*).

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<sup>81</sup> Imoda, 1993, pp. 158-159.

<sup>82</sup> Imoda, 1993, p. 163.

<sup>83</sup> Cf *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 27, a. 3, ad 2; II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Nomi divini*, c. 2.

## 2. GOD DESIRES MAN

### 2.1 God desires

#### 2.1.1 To be desired, to be what he desires

After man, God also desires, and desires man. Man desires and is desired. The anthropological side, the desire of man, must be complemented by the theological side, the desire of God. Ontologically the two aspects are united: there is no anthropology without theology, if we want to respect the entirety of the human person. Man cannot be taken in himself, for he is only a relation.

A person desires and loves another person to be desired and loved in turn. Only the man who desires knows that he is desired. Diseases of desire and love arise from the refusal or incomprehension of being desired and loved. Narcissism arises from not seeing yourself loved or not accepting being loved<sup>85</sup>. Love dies when it does not let itself be loved. It is not possible to desire if we reject the desire of the other. Being desired opens a breach in the constant temptation to close oneself and describes the origin and existence in the desire of the other: if I exist, I am or I have been desired. In this consciousness, man is born to desire.

In the beginning there was the Word... and Desire. The origin of man lies in God's desire for him. Desire which can be read as objective and subjective genitive: God desires man, man desires God. Man, in the desire to exist, is created in the image of the Being of God<sup>86</sup>. Man is desire of God: he is desired by God and he desires him; it is the echo of a desire which cannot be thought, but of which it is the testimony<sup>87</sup>.

Louis Marie de Montfort describes in the LEW the man who is desired and who desires. The very title of the work speaks of mutuality, of reciprocity of desire and love: loving Wisdom and being loved by Wisdom; loving Wisdom and beloved Wisdom. This Wisdom initiates desire and man is desired, before desiring in his turn; he knows that he is in the desire of Wisdom.

#### 2.1.2. To search and to be searched for

We love God because he first loved. God initiated the meeting.

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<sup>85</sup> Cf Cencini, 1994a, pp. 143-144.

<sup>86</sup> Cf Vasse, 1969, p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Cf Id., p. 86.

*« Wisdom ... anticipates those who desire her and makes herself known first to them. He who rises early to look for her will not be disappointed, for she will be found sitting at his gate. » (LEW 4).*

This biblical quote is commented as follows :

*“How gentle, attractive and approachable is eternal Wisdom (...) She invites men (...) She is for ever searching for them and always greets them with a smile. She bestows blessings on them many times over and forestalls their needs in a thousand different ways, and even goes as far as to wait at their very doorstep to give them proofs of her friendship” (LEW 5).*

Wisdom's care is a sign of her desire for man, since God desires to have us close. Not only does he love without measure, but he ardently desires:

*“I ardently longed / To have you, my beloved,  
So boldly approach, / (...) I give myself entirely to you /  
Come then forever into me, (H 127, 76 / 77).*

In the opening prayer, quoting Wisdom 8, 18, Montfort says to Wisdom: *« I am looking for you everywhere, like Solomon, wandering in all directions »* (LEW 2). The same verse is taken again in chapter XV, on desire, first means of obtaining Wisdom (LEW 181-183):

*“Solomon, the model given us by the Holy Spirit in the acquiring of Wisdom, only received this gift after he had desired it, sought after it and prayed for it for a long time. "I desired Wisdom and it was given to me. (...) Like Solomon and Daniel, we must be men of desire if we are to acquire this great treasure which is wisdom. » (LEW 183).*

Man is described as desiring and seeking Wisdom. Desire and search from the text of Wis 8, 18: *“Circuibam quærens”*. The same terms appear, two chapters earlier, to describe the desire of Wisdom towards man: *“Circuit quærens”* (Wis 6, 16). Montfort takes them up to indicate the same desire: Eternal Wisdom, during all the time that passed before her incarnation, testified to men, in a thousand ways, the friendship that she had for them, and the great desire that she had to communicate her favors to them and to converse with them: She says: *“My delight is to be with the children of men. She went about seeking those worthy of her”* (LEW 47). These are therefore the same words used for the man who desires Wisdom and for the man desired by Wisdom. In both texts we find the same joy of companionship: *“my delight is to be with the children of men”* (LEW 47), *“my companionship is never tedious”* (LEW 10). There is therefore the same desire which unites man and Wisdom, like two hands which try to intertwine: I desire you, you desire me... I love you, you love me... Reciprocity



of desire emphasizes exchange and communication; communicate in the sense of giving and granting, of giving and granting oneself. The desire of wisdom is to communicate itself to men, it finds its greatest pleasure in communicating itself to them. In *The admirable Secret of the Holy Rosary*, is found God's desire: "*God the Father's most ardent desire for us is to communicate to us these healing waters of grace and mercy*" (SAR 144).

The reciprocity of desire from man and Wisdom arises from the mutual belonging that Montfort establishes at two levels: the first is essential, ontological, and the second existential, at the level of desire. The first is being-for; the second is equivalent to cherishing:

*"After reading such powerful but tender words which the Holy Spirit uses to show the beauty, the excellence and the treasures of eternal Wisdom, who is man who would not love her and search for her with all his strength. All the more so since she is an infinite treasure for man that was made for him. (...) The bond of friendship between eternal Wisdom and man is so close as to be beyond our understanding. Wisdom is for man and man is for Wisdom."* (LEW 63-64).

### 2.1.3. Desire to be desired

Wisdom "*has an infinite desire to give herself to man*" and man desires Wisdom because she is desirable; indeed, she desires to be desired. Man's desire for Wisdom does not come from him, but from elsewhere, from Wisdom herself. It is therefore not a question of a desire which depends on a lack, nor of a desire which is born from a need, but rather linked to a call. The call can awaken or provoke a lack, but it does not have first place; the origin of this desire is in God. God desires our love and manifests it with attentions that satisfy all needs:

*If God takes such care of us, If He provides for all our needs,  
It is for virtue herself; Day and night he strikes our heart  
To bring us to his love, It is his supreme desire,  
It is the great goal to which he strives. It is from us all that he expects.* (H 4 /5).

God desires to be desired; this double desire, of God and of man, establishes a relationship between the two. Desire as a happy medium between two, therefore as a relationship. It is from this perspective that the LEW must be read. The author adopts an exhortative and laudatory style; the presentation of Wisdom is attractive and reaches the senses, emotions, thoughts and imagination, awakening desire in the reader. Desire creates a new need, which demands to be satisfied.

*Why do you not turn your eyes and your hearts towards divine Wisdom who is supremely desirable and who, to attract our love, makes known her origin, shows her beauty, displays her riches, and testifies in a thousand ways how*



*eager she is that we should desire her and seek her? "Be desirous, therefore, of hearing my words," (...). "Wisdom anticipates those who want her. (Wis 6.14) The desire of Wisdom leads to the everlasting kingdom." (LEW 181).*

The second part of the LEW presents the means of acquiring Wisdom and in a certain sense summarizes the previous part, also constituting a key to its interpretation. The author does not demonstrate but shows and discovers the beauties of Wisdom with attractive colors and images. The context is that of almost modern advertising: Wisdom is in the public square and in busy places, where the consumer society places its posters:

*In her pursuit of man, She hastens along the highways, or scales the loftiest mountain peaks, or waits at the city gates, or goes into the public squares and among the gatherings of people, proclaiming at the top of her voice, "You children of men, it is you I have been calling so persistently; it is you I am addressing; it is you I desire and seek; it is you I am claiming. Listen, draw close to me, for I want to make you happy" (LEW 66).*

## 2.2 Writing and desire

By writing the LEW, Montfort clearly shows that there is a link between writing and desire. "Writing is a path of Eros". Words are like steps towards your loved one; writing has a loving dimension, as testimony, declaration and research. Here is a significant and revealing LEW text:

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

Note the recurring terms: desire and need.

Desire is expressed in the form of a letter from a lover to his beloved. Wisdom is presented not only as a "kind queen," but as "needing" to be loved and desired by man. It is a desire felt and communicated, open to the dialogue of love; a desire "so thoughtful" and characterized by excess, which brings Wisdom out of herself and opens it to questions "so tender", to voices "so loving", that the author, conscious of the audacity of the language used brings desire back to the level of need: "it seems like she needs men to be happy". Once again, the roles are reversed.

These excesses are not due to anthropomorphism, as if Montfort projected human, all too human feelings onto Wisdom. Rather, they are due to an anthropocentrism of God, forcefully expressed by the power of his desire. It is eros, the vehemence of amorous desire. The author does not hesitate to attribute to Wisdom a desire marked by necessity and egocentrism: two elements used as a sign of immaturity.

Of course, there is a bit of rhetoric, but it is at this level that the romantic dimension of writing is expressed: “*What you write must prove that you desire me*”<sup>88</sup>. Rhetoric is not a literary device, but goes beyond writing, eclipses it and allows it to reach the reader; it is an effect of writing and reading, and arises from the writer's desire to arouse desire in the reader. Montfort says about Solomon: « *his example and writings have moved so many who came after him to desire and seek Wisdom* » (LEW 220). The origin of Scripture therefore lies in man's desire for Wisdom; and its goal is the desire of the man of Wisdom. Scripture is desire.

“*Wisdom says: desire my words, strive for them*” (Wis 6, 11, quoted in LEW 3). Writing, like a call from Wisdom, awaits man's response, which can be positive or negative, grateful or ungrateful. Written Wisdom is given and abandoned to man. Writing is a proposition to which the answer is unknown<sup>89</sup>; it's giving the other the last word. And what Montfort underlines when he insists on man's response to the propositions of Wisdom. All the question marks that dot the text are intended to pose questions to provoke a response to Wisdom.

## 2.3 Incarnation, fruit of Wisdom's desire

### 2.3.1. Desire and ecstasy

Wisdom desires man excessively: before the incarnation, the desire manifested itself in testimonies of friendship of Wisdom “in a thousand ways”. The pinnacle is incarnation, defined as « *excess of love* » [ASE 64), « *prodigious excess of the love of God* » (LEW 108). « *The excess of love* » is also the cross (LEW 155). Now, the excessive desire of Wisdom must be followed by the excessive desire of man: “*Who will not love her and seek with wholesome energy ?*” (LEW 63). (...) *If only we could realise what the infinite treasure that Wisdom is made for man (...) we would be longing for her night and day. We*

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<sup>88</sup> Id., 1973, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Id., 1981, p. 276.

would fly as fast as we could to the ends of the earth, we would cheerfully endure fire and sword, if need be, to merit this infinite treasure. (LEW 73)

Wisdom herself “flies” to meet men lost by Adam's sin to help them. This is the first aspect put forward as the reason for the incarnation. Here also arises the logic of emotions, of the concupiscible and the irascible: « Eternal Wisdom was deeply moved by the plight of poor Adam and all his descendants. She was profoundly distressed at seeing her vessel of honour shattered, her image torn to pieces, her masterpiece destroyed, her representative in this world overthrown» (LEW 41). Faced with the discontent caused by sin, Wisdom reacts by entering the sphere of the irascible. Boldness and zeal lead to the scene of debate within the Trinity: “*I seem to see that (...) we can picture a kind of contest going on in this grand council between eternal Wisdom and God's justice.*” (LEW 42). To oppose herself to the loss of man, Wisdom decides to become man: “*Wonder of wonders! With boundless and incomprehensible love that goes to excess!*” (LEW 45).

Montfort will later use the logic of desire to present the incarnation: it will not be because of sin, but only because of the desire for Wisdom. During the time preceding the incarnation, Eternal Wisdom demonstrated to men in a thousand ways her friendship towards them and her great desire to send them her favors and to be with them: « *My delight is to be with the children of men*” (Prov. 8:31). *She went about seeking those worthy of her* » (LEW 47). Montfort uses the law of desire both for the incarnation and for the earthly life of Wisdom incarnate. In this perspective are presented: the choice of Mary, that of the Cross and the “invention” of the Eucharist.

### 2.3.2 The Holy Virgin desired

Desire moves towards the desired object. When possessed, it becomes complacency and pleasure<sup>90</sup>. In the mystery of the incarnation, God takes

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<sup>90</sup> It is the love of pleasure. This love is by nature self-centered and self-serving. There was a great debate in the 17th century about the quietist crisis. Francis de Sales had dealt with the delight and love of benevolence (cf. *Treatise on the Love of God*, 1. 5, c. 6). Benevolent love (1, 1, c. 13) is “the love by which we love someone for their own good”; it is God's love for us and for Mary. Mary possessing the gifts that God gave her, she is loved with a love of complacency because she unites and adds joy to pleasure. Fully possessing the love of God, Mary's love is called friendship, because it presupposes mutual correspondence. Friends love each other, they know that they love each other, and they have contact with each other, in freedom and familiarity. The love with which God loves Mary and the love of Mary are a love of predilection, because a love of choice, where nothing is preferred to the loved one. The love of complacency is ecstatic it brings one out of oneself and elevates it, makes one “stand up”: love makes one “walk”. We find something similar in Montfort: God chooses Mary (stands up), becomes incarnate out of love (goes towards men); the love of complacency characterizes permanence in Mary's womb, as a transitory stage of rest, before being among men to benefit them; redemption is seen as a love of benevolence

pleasure in Mary, night and day. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit want to continue to rejoice in Mary who lives in the souls of the faithful (cf. TD 34, 266). Wisdom is pleased with Mary, because she took pleasure in creating her. The desire for Wisdom is looking for a home, a place, as already mentioned previously.

*« Eternal Wisdom built herself a house worthy to be her dwelling- place. She created the most holy Virgin, forming her in the womb of St Anne with even greater delight than she had derived from creating the universe (LEW 105).*

Faced with such a source, Mary will fully respond to God's call:

*“It is impossible on the one hand to put into words the gifts with which the Blessed Trinity endowed this most fair creature, or on the other hand to describe the faithful care with which she corresponded to the graces of her Creator.” (ibid).*

Pleasure and complacency recall the desire described by Montfort as “attraction”. The terms are those of the language of love:

*“During the first fourteen years of her life the most holy Virgin Mary grew so marvellously in the grace and wisdom of God and responded so faithfully to his love that the angels and even God himself were filled with rapturous admiration for her. Her humility, deep as an abyss, delighted him. Her purity so other-worldly drew him down to her. Wisdom ... was lovingly conquered by her appeals of love” (LEW 107).*

The desire for this attraction is not seen as a selfish pleasure in the beauties of Mary but is indicated as the reason for the incarnation of the Word and his gift of himself to humanity. The author does not provide rational reasons for the choice of Mary, but only reasons of affection: Wisdom “wanted to become man in Mary” (ibid.). The road is made of affection and beauty, a *via pulchritudinis* : *« You have ravished God, you made him come down; / Attracted by your beauty, He took our humanity, / He could not resist it. (H 63 / 5).*

For Louis-Marie, desire-attraction does not stop at pleasure; this is determined by the satisfaction of the desiring subject rather than by the interest of the desired object. The emphasis is on the subject having pleasure, rather than the object giving pleasure. God appears as a God of Desire, as a Being of Desire, who nevertheless does not lock himself into selfish enjoyment, but is led elsewhere, towards humanity: therefore, if he desires, he becomes incarnate.

By choosing Mary to incarnate, while desiring her, does she therefore become necessary? If he wants it, does he need it? Isn't desire a need? Montfort, aware of the objection, answers no: *“This great Lord, who is ever independent and*

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and complacency.

*self-sufficient, never had and does not now have any absolute need of the Blessed Virgin for the accomplishment of his will and the manifestation of his glory.*” (TD 14). Montfort safeguards the absolute transcendence of God, not subject to needs (cf. LEW 65); he emphasizes his self-sufficiency and yet, consistent with classical theology, he also asserts that God wants to need Mary. Elsewhere he will write that the Holy Spirit loves to use Mary, even without absolutely needing her (cf. TD 21). In more rigorous terms, he will say that Mary “*being necessary to God by a necessity which is called "hypothetical", that is, because God so willed it.*” (TD 39).

Paradoxically, necessity and need, linked to desire, underline the disinterested gratuity of God's choice; in fact, he is not subject to a logical or rational necessity which obliges him from the outside: his desire is the freedom of grace and gift; a desire that is free freedom. He chooses Mary because “he found grace” (Le 1, 30 ; cf. LEW 203 ; SM7 ; TD 16).

### 2.3.3. The desired Cross

Also for the mystery of the Cross, Louis-Marie follows the same *via pulchritudinis*:

« *God could not defend himself / From its rare beauty, /  
The Cross made Him come down / To our humanity.* » (H 19 / 9 et 102 / 10).  
« *And the cross seemed so beautiful to me,  
That in order to adorn myself with it,  
I came down from heaven to incarnate.* (H 123 / 2).

The choice of the cross is surprising, incomprehensible, inexplicable; there is no logic in the choice:

*“But O wonder! He perceives something which is a source of scandal and horror to Jews and an object of foolishness to pagans. (cf 1 Cor 1.23) He sees a piece of vile and contemptible wood which is used to humiliate and torture the most wicked and the most wretched of men, called a gibbet, a gallows, a cross. It is upon this cross that he casts his eyes; he takes his delight in it; he cherishes it more than all that is great and resplendent in heaven and on earth. He decides that that will be the instrument of his conquests, the adornment of his royal state. He will make it the wealth and joy of his empire, the friend and spouse of his heart”* (LEW 168 ; cf. 169-170).

The beauty of the cross is not desired in itself; Jesus does not incarnate for the cross, but chooses the cross as a means, an instrument to testify to his love for men; it is the proof by which God showed his love for man (LEW 176; cf. 154-

155)<sup>91</sup>. Even on the part of man, the choice of the cross is to demonstrate his love to God. The cross is presented as a bride, in the typical language of romantic desire.

*“He found it so beautiful / That he made it his honour,  
His eternal companion, / The spouse of his heart.  
From his earliest childhood, / When his heart sighed,  
It was towards the presence / Of the cross that he loved.  
He has, since his youth, / Sought it eagerly.  
He died of tenderness / And love in its arms.  
I desire a baptism, / He exclaimed one day,  
The dear cross I love, / The object of my love.”*  
(H 19 / 10-11; cf. 102 / 12. 14. 15; 164/13).

A parallel text is the following:

*“Throughout his life he eagerly sought after the Cross. If, like a thirsting deer, he hastened from village to village, from town to town; if with giant strides he pursued his way towards Calvary; if he spoke so frequently of his sufferings and death to his apostles and disciples, and even to his prophets during his Transfiguration; if he so often exclaimed, “I have longed for it with an infinite desire” (LEW 170).*

The theme of desire recalls that of thirst, expressing its strength and urgency. The image of the thirsty deer (Wis 41 and 61) is a type of man's desire for God. Montfort applies this desire to Jesus: it is the Lord who desires man and thirsts for him. The desire of man is also the desire of God: “he loved us so much, he exclaimed: « *“I thirst.” For what was he thirsting? (...) He was thirsting for us, thirsting to give himself to us and suffer for us.*” (LEW 165).

In desire there is “a dimension of otherness that makes us thirsty”<sup>92</sup>. Thirst, a metaphor for desire, is desire for the other; this other is the man desired by God. Otherness is also an alteration of the person who desires, who becomes suffering until death: “The incorporeal water which makes one live until death is the metaphor of an incarnate word which makes desire come to life in the subject of the other, of a desire which demands it in life, through suffering and until death”<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> The desire for the cross does not have as its object a need (masochistic form) but a value. As a value, in turn, it is not terminal (redemption) but only instrumental (cf. Rulla, 1971, p. 70; 1986, pp. 310-370). The terminal values are theocentric for man: they lead to union with God and following Christ. For God, values are anthropocentric: they lead to union with man and to the gift of self with incarnation and divinization.

<sup>92</sup> Vasse, 1983, p. 42.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

The cross, as the matrix of new life, is a conception in pain. It paradoxically testifies that only a body in suffering is a body of desire. The desire for the cross is not a desire to suffer, but a wound of love, a suffering of separation. In every desire there is this suffering. Jesus Christ carries within himself, in the flesh, the infinite weight and the abyss that separates God from the sinner. Montfort seems to transform the cry of abandonment on the cross, the suffering of separation, into a cry of desire. Desiring the cross, the object of rejection, Jesus upsets the order of things: the anguish of separation becomes a desire for presence, the desperate cry becomes confident abandonment in the Other; by dying he destroys death and gives life. In the cross, the language of desire speaks of the mystery hidden and revealed. The beauty of the cross and the desire to have one has a mysterious dimension. If we can only desire the desirable, how is it possible to desire the cross? Because dying to yourself is a source of true life, just as losing life becomes gaining it. Jesus lost his life to gain ours.

#### 2.3.4. The Eucharist: venue of desire

The Eucharist is for Louis-Marie the sign par excellence of God's excessive love: «*O eternal Wisdom,*" (...) "*O God who is truly lavish with himself in his desire to be with man.*"» (LEW 71). The desire of Christ is a prodigality that overturns nature. If the cross demonstrates Christ's love for men, the Eucharist testifies to his desire to remain with them:

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

Wisdom's desire is to find a home, a theme already encountered. Wisdom seeks a house to rest, an oratory. It is the bosom of the Father in eternity and the bosom of Mary in the Incarnation (cf. LEW 223). In the first case, the Father finds pleasure in the Son; in the second, the Son takes pleasure in the Mother. The breast is a place of pleasure and delight, that is, the pleasure of being with someone. In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ Wisdom seeks another place to take his delights and his pleasures: the heart of man. If by eating you fill a need, by communicating you respond to the desire of Christ:

*"She hides herself under the appearance of a small piece of bread - man's ordinary nourishment - so that when received she might enter the heart of man and there take his delight."* (LEW 71).



In addition to the search for pleasure, the desire is also to please. It is the desire to exalt God because, in the Eucharist, Jesus is the model and example of the worshiper. This is the theocentric dimension of Christ's desire, typical of Bérulle's thought:

*“He is in his presence / In adoration, / Filled with reverence  
And love for his name. / This is where at every moment  
His Sacred Heart desires / That God be everywhere exalted,  
And that everything be, in truth, / Subject to his empire.”* (H 128 / 4).

But above all it is the desire to give oneself to man, the anthropocentric dimension:

*“All his treasures are in his Heart, / It is their tabernacles,  
To spread them gently / If no obstacle is placed there;  
He burns with an ardent desire / To give, to spread,  
He calls us incessantly, / But who wants to hear him?”* (H 129 / 6)

Jesus gives himself without reserve in the Eucharist and also finds great pleasure there:

*“There he gives everything he is / Absolutely  
And even to such an excess. / That he cannot do more.  
He gives to all without getting poorer, / Without excluding anyone.  
Giving is his greatest pleasure. / He is happy if he gives.”* (C 129 / 3).

Excessive pleasure exceeds our desires:

*“O Christians, come far from the world / In this heart where all good abounds,  
He is in the Blessed Sacrament. / Come taste inside this faithful heart  
More sweetness, more pleasures / Than yours will have desires,  
Fear nothing, he calls you.”* (H 131 / 4).

The desire of Jesus becomes effusive fire, a symbol of love:

*“I am called a consuming fire I burn with an ardent desire /  
To set your souls aflame / I have only come down from heaven  
But to take it back everywhere”* (H 132 / 5; cf 134 / 7, 135 / 5).

And finally, desire reveals intention: the union of God with men:

*“If his power, at all times, / Performs there very great wonders /  
By changing nature, / Love is no less astonishing /  
Since it unites him closely / With his creature. /  
Jesus and the soul are there but as one. / All between them becomes common. /  
Praise be the Holy Sacrament. / He loves without measure.”*  
(H 132 / 4; cf. 134 / 8).

From the hymns on the Eucharist emerge the man desired by Christ as an object of complacency and generosity. God tastes man and man tastes God in mutual



love. In the Hymns on the Sacred Heart, where we find references to the Eucharist, Montfort returns to the theme of thirst. Christ's desire becomes an imperative need, a cry launched towards man:

*“My heart feels a burning thirst, / It says: “I am thirsty” incessantly; / With you, dear penitent soul, / It seeks relief.” (H 42 / 2).*

Christ manifests not only the desire but also the need to be loved, just as thirst demands to be satisfied. Desire is linked to a need that makes him suffer. It is still a rhetoric, which uses the anthropomorphic register of need. God desires us and suffers for our separation:

*“My Heart loves you and desires you, / It is for you that it is pierced, / After your heart it sighs, / And what! will I be forsaken?” (H 43 / 38)*

### 3. THE TRANSFORMATION OF DESIRE

#### 3.1 Desire and limit

##### 3.1.1. Infinite desires

Wisdom is an “*infinite treasure*” with “*infinite desires*” to give herself to man (cf. LEW 63, 170). Louis-Marie de Montfort discovers in God the infinite world of desire; it is characteristic of the desire to be infinite: in it everything is possible.

But the infinite world of desire plays an educational role in Montfort's writings; it is the first element of spiritual growth. Wisdom provokes man by making all desires arise and awaken in him. First, the fundamental thing of being happy; then those of friendship, tenderness, pleasure, joy, immortality, wealth, honors, power, knowledge, virtue (cf. LEW 5, 10, 11, 57, 58, 66, 67). In the list are a certain number of needs belonging to the deepest part of man: social acceptance, fulfillment, purchase, affiliation, help, change, knowledge, emotional dependence, domination, avoidance of danger and inferiority, exhibitionism, sexual gratification, play, order, reaction<sup>94</sup>.

The aim of the awakening of desires is to give man the possibility of expressing his own desires and feeling them, and not just knowing them intelligently<sup>95</sup>. Desires must therefore emerge from the unconscious, from the forbidden zone, where they are kept in the shadows. Montfort's spiritual strategy consists of freeing the person from a moralism which prevents awareness of their desires, especially if they are unspeakable. It frees speech in the expression of desires with a game of regression in which the person presents himself defenseless. Spiritual pedagogy which is a real therapy: recognizing and accepting needs and impulses. Then we will have to put our desires in order and transform them.

The awakening of desires, even the wildest, is accentuated by the promise that they will be satisfied. There is no point in expressing or becoming aware of desires if it is then impossible to satisfy them. In the process of spiritual growth, we arrive at a very humble stage where frustration seems impossible. Indeed, Wisdom promises to fulfill all desires, the good ones like solid pleasures and

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<sup>94</sup> It is Murray's list of needs (*Exploration in Personality*, Oxford University Press, New York 1938, pp. 152-226). For the definition of these needs, cf. Rulla-Imoda-Ridick (1978), Rulla (1971; 1986).

<sup>95</sup> Not only an *intellectual perception*, but also an *emotional perception*.

true virtues, and the less good ones like riches, glory, honors, dignity (cf. LEW 67). And you are invited to satisfy your desires (cf. H 58/9). Furthermore, it is shown how the promised pleasure surpasses all desire:

«*With you more pleasures / Than our heart has desires.*»

(H 103 / 6; cf. H 131 / 4).

«*Finding in God more charms / Than my heart desires.*» (H 94 / 1).

Montfort opens the world of desires to the infinite. God meets all needs, or rather all needs can be told to him. This is the strength of the message transmitted by the admirable *Secret of the Holy Rosary*. Indeed, the «*Our Father holds the requests and the spiritual and material needs*» (SAR 36) ; here you can find all that you need and all that you want; in him «*all the desires and all the needs are contained*» (SAR 75) ; in this prayer «*Jesus-Christ teaches us to ask God all that is necessary to the life of the body and the soul*» (SAR 40).

We insist on emphasizing the totality of desires, by repeating everything and everyone; desires which are then oriented: from egocentric, they become theocentric, “*when we desire to sanctify his Name, (...) when we sincerely ask for the goods desired for ourselves for our neighbor*” (SAR 43).

Full satisfaction of desires is also promised in the New Hymn to *Our Lady of Gifts* (H 151). The title evokes the good Mother who gives. Indeed:

“*We find in her all things, Goods, pleasures, honours and health,*” (v. 5). *The wine growers can hope, through her "abundance of grapes... and quality wine"* (v. 6) and “*the poor peasants, abundance in your fields*” (v. 7). *In Her is found « your sweet hope, assistance to the afflicted and the unfortunate»* (v. 8), as “*the greatest gift, grace, mercy and forgiveness*» (v. 9). *The image of the good Mother is an invitation to go back in time: « Children, come to her breasts / Suck a mild full of sweetness; / Come to rest, faithful, on her heart; / Come all under her wings to keep the fervour.*” (v. 10)<sup>96</sup>.

The image of a good mother is the moment of presence in which kindness, abundance, but also the satisfaction of needs are expressed. It is the positive moment of the reassuring presence of the mother who satisfies all needs. The breast is the symbol par excellence of its gratifying presence which brings well-being, nourishment, warmth and security. The incorporated milk contains the very goodness of the mother which is assimilated. The oral character of the moment of presence is the satisfaction of physical and emotional needs. In this good experience, the child experiences a subjective paradise which is recreation

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<sup>96</sup> The following verse corrects the regressive side of it: it is not enough to receive; it is also necessary to give.

and establishes hope (cf. H 7/1, 4, 12, 17, 18, 26, 40). The timing of reward is essential to child development; if it is missing, the start in life will not be good. Without this fundamental trust in the mother's rewarding presence, there is no room for other desires or questions, and it is not possible to gain the confidence to confront situations of need and lack. The good mother is an experience of spiritual consolation and pleasure lived with God<sup>97</sup>.

It is a pedagogical moment essential to spiritual growth, but it is only a moment, a step, to be integrated and balanced with the moment of absence. A spiritual experience that is only a gratifying and consoling presence would be neither healthy nor holy. Indeed, the total satisfaction of the needs, characteristic of the moment of presence, and vital in the symbiotic phase where the child is totally dependent on the mother, maintains the person in a relationship of fusion with the mother. The other, God or the mother, is seen only as the one who satisfies the need, and the person perceives himself illusorily, as omnipotent, since all desires are satisfied. Taken in itself, the moment of presence prevents us from recognizing the other as other, before us, as different. The other has no place because there are no limits to the satisfaction of desire. It is therefore essential that presence is counterbalanced by absence and rewarded by frustration. Distance allows us to become aware of ourselves and others and opens a space of recognition. The infinite world of desire must confront the world of limits; pleasure with reality. The educational moment of gratifying presence therefore necessarily recalls the moment of absence and limit, becoming an instance of purification.

### 3.1.2. Desire and renunciation

Man's infinite desire is a paradox: in fact, it is the infinite desire of a finite being, which collides with finitude. The infinite world of desire cannot walk without encountering the world of limits. Desire evokes the maternal image, the limit evokes the paternal image<sup>98</sup>. The mother's moment of presence and gratification must be balanced with the moment of absence which characterizes the limit, frustration, distancing, absence. The father is the symbol of the necessary break with the mother, frustrating the child's desire for omnipotence.

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<sup>97</sup> In the mother-child relationship, the needs met concern the child but also the mother. Montfort shows how in the God-man relationship the desires of man and those of God are satisfied: he desires to be desired; desires to have joy in us, etc. Despite the disproportion, the two desires are complementary.

<sup>98</sup> Cf Aletti, 1992, pp. 126-128; Milanesi-Aletti, 1973, pp. 101 ss.

In the life of deep and true faith, the human desire for omnipotence certainly encounters divine omnipotence. Man's desire for God, based on the dynamism of eros, is the maternal axis of religiosity which must be saved from the sense of measure, of concreteness, of commitment and of limit represented by the father figure. The desire for God, based on the gratifying presence of the mother and on the pleasure principle, which is expressed in the immediate search for satisfaction of the impulses, must be counterbalanced by the reality principle, i.e. through the ability to take reality into account, counts and postpones the satisfaction of impulses, symbolized by the law of the father<sup>99</sup>. We must in fact unite the principle of pleasure with that of reality, in a constant and evolving tension. The tension between presence and absence, gratification and frustration, the infinite world of desire and the world of limits, must be safeguarded. Without limits, desire is an illusion, the illusion of omnipotence, and it becomes an escape into the unreal world of fantasy. Without desire, the world of limits would remain empty and still.

### 3.1.3. Desire and the law

Man's desire inevitably meets God's desire. Man can desire anything, but he comes into conflict with God's desire for him. Desire comes from the desire of the Other, which limits, but which also gives the true dimension. In spiritual growth, it is not enough to know your own desires, but also those of God. This is the meaning of Solomon's prayer to obtain Wisdom (Wis 9:1-6; quoted from LEW 191.192; cf. SM 66). We need to know what pleases God, that is, His desires and to what extent.

Montfort offers some examples of God's desires: “*to obey*” is what God desires (H 10/3); Jesus wants them to “*remember*” his benefits (SAR 68). But the desire of the Father is manifested above all in the Law, a set of concrete precepts and commandments<sup>100</sup>. In the LEW we move from desire to law: while the first part tends to give a taste for wisdom by showing her beauty and awakening desire, the second part indicates the means of acquiring and retaining Wisdom. From the moment of gratification and presence, we move to the moment of absence

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<sup>99</sup> Cf Keily, 1987, p. 184.

<sup>100</sup> If the desired good is vague, the desire is an illusion: “Illusory projections and unconscious projective operation: the more vague, distant, idealized, mysterious or silent a thought and a desired object are, the more capable they are of being invested with subjective expectations. , covered with imaginary features; the more it becomes capable of mobilizing individual or collective energies, without modifying its egocentric or sociocentric character; the more it succeeds in filling the gaps in an emotional system, especially if it functions in an anxious, defensive, infantile, regressive manner” (Godin, 1986, p. 186). The true good, born of true desire, is always concrete (cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, London 1973, p. 36).

and frustration. The transition takes place with chapter XII, which presents “*the principal oracles of Wisdom*”, and with chapters XIII and XIV, where the cross is discussed<sup>101</sup>.

We must believe and put into practice the “oracles” of Wisdom. Man's desire is compared to God's law which calls us to operate and face reality. Desire combined with law becomes a transformative force. Desire is therefore educated and regulated: a concrete commitment is required, and the transformation affects the person in concrete reality. Elsewhere, Montfort explains that the love of the one who truly loves is not “*only emotional, but efficient and effective*” (TD 175), and that true love is “*active and industrious*” (TD 202). Desire and law, the emotional and the effective: the two levels must confront reality, without eliminating each other.

#### 3.1.4. Desire and mortification

The example of purification is equivalent to mortification. However, it does not have a passive character, but it is an active renunciation. Every desire presupposes a choice, and every choice presupposes a renunciation. Renunciation is the very act of desire<sup>102</sup>. Wanting and giving up are correlative. The infinite desire for God must also be total renunciation. The totality of renunciation corresponds to the everything of God. Montfort states it with a concise formula:

*“Everything I have just said is contained in the great advice:  
Leave everything, and you will find everything, by finding Jesus Christ,  
Wisdom incarnate”* (LEW 202).

The renunciation of everything has its positive implication in the total gift of oneself to God, and expresses the infinity of desire, but also the totality of the limit. Faced with the infinity of God, who is All, man recognizes his finite being and allows himself to be nothing. This is the radical nature of worshiping and serving God in spirit and truth:

*« Let us serve God, but without reserve, / For a divided heart perishes. /  
All or nothing is God's language. / Any little bit is fine with me, says Satan. /  
Give all, It is God who demands it: / I am the absolute master of everything. /*

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<sup>101</sup> The cross is presented as an object of desire and rapture. This is the paradox and the scandal of the cross. As a testimony to the love of Jesus, it is a reason to strengthen the desire and love for Jesus (cf. LEW 154-166). In charity of which it is an excess, the cross implements (infinitely) the integration of the two moments not presented as purification or frustration, but as desires; the displeasure of suffering is expressed in terms of pleasure, aversion with those of desire, which does not mean that displeasure and suffering are on the level of pleasure. At the end of chapter XIV (LEW 172-180) we are invited to follow Christ on the cross.

<sup>102</sup> Cf Vasse, 1969, p. 62.

*The whole heart, the whole mind, the whole soul, /  
Give all or give me nothing. / ...  
Let us put the whole mind to know, / The whole heart to love ardently, /  
The whole body to serve this great Master, But unceasingly and unsparingly.  
(H 153 / 1; cf also v. 2, 6, 20).*

“*Leaving everything*” has its negative side in the renunciation caused by mortification. You have to lose yourself to find yourself; lose everything to find everything again. To unite with the Creator, you have to detach yourself from creatures. A radical choice corresponds to a radical renunciation. However, it is not an end in itself and must be understood in the dynamic of hope and infinite desire. Mortification cannot be understood without a union with the crucified Christ:

*« All those who belong to Christ, incarnate Wisdom, have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. They always bear about in their bodies the dying of Jesus. They continually do violence to themselves, carry their cross daily. They are dead and indeed buried with Christ. » (LEW 194).*

*« The Holy Spirit tells us that Wisdom is not found in the land of those who live in comfort, gratifying their passions and bodily desires, because "they who are of the flesh cannot please God» (ibid.).*

Renunciation takes place in the tension between God and the flesh, between that which tends towards the Creator and that which leans towards the creature. It is the dialectical tension between the Self as transcendent tending towards God and the Self as transcended, opposed to theocentric transcendence. Renunciation concerns the desires linked to the self as transcended, that is to say the needs, and not those which affect the self as transcendent, that is to say the values. This tension cannot be eliminated here on earth therefore the renunciation must be continuous (cf. LEW 196).

Mortification targets the egocentric elements of the person, that is, what is considered by the person to be important to them (needs), and directs energies towards what is important in themselves (theocentric values)<sup>103</sup>. Renunciation purifies desires in their ambivalence and can serve both (egocentric) needs and (theocentric) values, transforming desire and opening it to transcendence.

The first to be attacked by renunciation are the pleasures of the senses (cf. LEW 195), a cliché of ascetics. Pleasure is opposed to the desire of Christ, as

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<sup>103</sup> On this dialectic of what is important for oneself and what is important in oneself, cf. Rulla, 1986, pp. 124-125.

expressed in the Christmas carol:

*“Come, socialite, and contemplate / This child in your turn.  
Your life and your example / Fight his love.  
Jesus in his suffering / Satisfies his desires,  
But you, in abundance / You take all your pleasures.”* (C 62 / 5).

One must displease the body to please Jesus; one must renounce desires and the satisfaction of needs that do not conform to spiritual values in order to accommodate the desires of the Other. One must renounce money, pleasures, honors, goods and the desire for goods and not do like the rich who satisfies his pleasures and desires every day (cf. H 108 / 10).

Another text (ACM 6-9) places the renunciation of goods in the context of the all-nothing which is part of the earth-sky relationship. In heaven “*we need nothing*” of what exists on earth: by possessing God, “*we possess everything*”; therefore the “*poor volunteer*” has made a “*good sale*” and needs nothing: he has abandoned everything, but he lacks nothing, because he possesses God who is All; he is poor in riches and devoid of “*earthly and carnal sweetness*,” but he is rich in divine consolations.

We are talking about voluntary poverty. Without the voluntary aspect of a free choice, therefore no defense, renunciation is a frustration. The difference is fundamental<sup>104</sup>. Renunciation is a free and active acceptance of deprivation; frustration, or non-gratification, is the result of the deprivation suffered and leads to resentment, or to a displaced and hidden satisfaction.

*« If we would possess Wisdom, we must mortify the body, not only by enduring patiently our bodily ailments, the inconveniences of the weather and the difficulties arising from other people's actions, but also by deliberately undertaking some penances and mortifications, such as fasts, vigils and other austerities practised by holy penitents. It requires courage to do that because the body naturally idolises itself, and the world considers all bodily penances as pointless and rejects them. (LEW 201).*

There is a passive aspect of mortification; it is “*to suffer with patience*”, to accept our own limits, which cannot be modified because they do not depend on us and do not make us suffer<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> Renunciation is taken at the level of the first dimension (virtue-vice); frustration belongs, dominantly, to the second (real good-apparent good) or the third (normal-pathological). On the difference between renunciation and frustration, cf. Rulla, 1971, pp. 106-109, 143-145. The tension of frustration provokes anger against God: “*But the wicked, the wicked / who does not have what he wants / curses, murmurs and cries*” (H 100/17). Later, envy and anger combine (cf. str. 31).

<sup>105</sup> Cf Frankl, 1967, pp. 14-15 e 1986, pp. 43-44, 105-106; Rulla, 1971, p. 234. There are three types of values: 1) creative values, given to life; 2) experiential values, the fruit of experience and received from the world; 3)



« *My dear Friends of the Cross, make the resolution to suffer any kind of cross without excluding or choosing any: any poverty, injustice, loss, illness, humiliation, contradiction, slander, spiritual dryness, desolation, interior and exterior trials*» (LFC 54).

And there is an active aspect of mortification: "*procuring some punishment and mortification*", where mortification is not only accepted, but also sought. This is the typical mortification of asceticism: fasting, vigils and austerity<sup>106</sup>.

Asceticism has the function of creating a healthy state of tension in man, deliberately renouncing the needs of a society of well-being and comfort, more inclined to satisfy needs and reduce tensions than to create requirements<sup>107</sup>. A life without ascetic demands creates an existential void in man and deprives him of meaning. Mortification maintains the balance between presence and absence, between gratification and frustration, and between participation and purification. With renunciation, the natural tendency toward rewards is corrected, purifying emotional desires with rational desires. Without this renunciation which distinguishes true desires, the desire for God is in vain:

*"This desire for Wisdom must be holy and sincere, and fostered by faithful adherence to the commandments of God. There are indeed an infinite number of fools and sluggards moved to be good by countless desires, or rather would-be desires, which, by not bringing them to renounce sin and do violence to themselves, are but spurious and deceitful desires which are fatal and lead to damnation"* (LEW 182).

True desire carries within it a dynamism of change and progress; it transforms itself and leads on the path of divine will and law. Active or passive, mortification involves suffering and the cross. It has a maturation function<sup>108</sup>. With the help of the prior grace of union with Christ crucified, the tension of reconciliation, which inevitably involves suffering, increases man's freedom to transcend himself, to surpass himself and to open himself to theocentric transcendence. Montfort repeatedly links love and the cross (cf. LEW 154, 155, 165, 168, 169, 176).

Mortification is only a means of serving the love of God and proceeds from a rational or spiritual desire. In cases of immaturity, it can happen that mortification is considered an end in itself; this then comes from emotional desire. The distinction between the two mortifications is difficult for the person

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behavioral values, that is, attitudes towards the limited factors of life.

<sup>106</sup> Cf the Hymns : *The power of fasting* (H 16), *The cure to lukewarmness* (H 161).

<sup>107</sup> Cf Frankl, 1969, pp. 44-45.

<sup>108</sup> *The sense of development*; cf. Rulla, 1986, 327 and 375.

to make, due to the role of unconscious dynamics, such as self-punishment, linked to pathological guilt. Montfort offers two aids to discernment: the first is the advice of a wise man, in order to combine the mortification of judgment and that of the will (cf. LEW 202); the second is the choice of mortifications (cf. LAC 49), where “*small and hidden*” crosses are better, because “*pride can ask, seek and even choose and embrace visible and large crosses*”. Pride and self-esteem use mortification for their purposes, putting it at the service of “*that unobtrusive seeking for sympathy,*” and of “*that keen satisfaction you feel on considering your troubles,*” (LFC 48). Montfort adds a note which demonstrates his sensitivity to the unconscious search for the self: “*I should never finish if I were to describe here all the twists and turns of human nature, even in suffering*» (LFC 48).

### 3.1.5. The aridities

The tension between gratifying presence and absence of renunciation can also be verified at the level of prayer. “Prayer bears witness to union in disunity, to presence in absence, to absence in presence”<sup>109</sup>. Montfort underlines in prayer the educational moment of purifying absence in spiritual aridity. It is the path of pure faith, defined as a detachment from spiritual tastes and a serene and strong acceptance of spiritual disgusts. Desire, linked to taste and pleasure, must be purified in the crucible of the cross. It is the faith of growth, both human and spiritual.

The first step ensures that we do not get attached to the moment of gratification:

*“We must pray for it with a pure faith, not counting on consolations, visions or special revelations. Although such things may be good and true, as they have been in some saints, it is always dangerous to rely on them.”* (LEW 186).

Detachment from gratifications implies that they are not sought and that one is content to remain in ordinary ways. It is the renunciation of the desire for omnipotence:

*“The wise man does not ask to see extraordinary things such as saints have seen, nor to experience sensible sweetness in his prayers”* (LEW 187).

The second step makes us accept the state of non-satisfaction, equivalent to a path of denial: “*The just or the wise live only by faith without seeing, without hearing, without tasting and without wavering*” (LEW 187; cf TD 273, C 6/54). It is better to fully accept the dislikes and leave the likes for the afterlife:

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<sup>109</sup> Vasse, 1969, p. 38.

*« Be careful not to force yourself to feel and enjoy what you say or do. Always speak and act with the pure faith that Mary had on earth, and this will also communicate to you over time. O poor and little slave! Leave to your Queen the open contemplation of God, the impulses, the joys, the delights, the riches, and be content with a pure faith, full of apathy, distractions, boredom and aridity» (SM 51; cf. also 69).*

It is the negative moment of absence, in which spiritual disgust, the silence of God and desolation are experienced, which provoke in man the painful feeling of abandonment by God, like an anxiety of separation. God who hides himself is felt like a bad mother. But, as in the psychological development of the child, the good mother (gratification) is integrated by the bad mother (frustration); it is thus in the two images of God: the God of consolations and tastes, and the God of aridities and disgusts:

*« It naturally seems that God has no eyes to see his misery, no ears to listen to his requests, no arms to strike down his enemies, nor hands to give him help. » (LEW 187; cf. C 100 et 101).*

The integration of the moment of taste with that of disgust allows for a more intimate and true relationship with God. If the moment of pleasure and satisfaction builds the relationship with God, that of the aridity and silence of God allows it to differentiate itself, structure itself internally and stand before God. The alternation of taste and disgust makes man understand that he is distinct from God and recognizes him as God, and not as a projection of needs, nor as the satisfaction of omnipotent desires. The distinction between us and God is not without suffering, because of the detachment it implies. The happy integration of the two dimensions allows for a mature relationship with God, without the need for continuous trials:

*« What the Holy Spirit declares to us about the grandeur and beauty of Wisdom, about God's desire to give it to us, and the needs we have for it, are motives powerful enough to make us desire it and ask for it with all kinds of faith and eagerness. (...) "God said it or promised it", this is the fundamental stone of all his prayers. » (LEW 186-187).*

The terms desire and speech recur in this text. Man's desire for God, which is a necessity and a vital need in the order of nature, grace and salvation, is based on God's desire for man. In the happy meeting of the two desires, the true relationship of mutual love, union, occurs. The word, the Word of God entrusted to Scripture, "*the Holy Spirit says...*", becomes a promise. The truth of love for God is not based on external evidence, but on the words of the Other: "*God said it or promised it...*", which presupposes confidence in the Other. Relationship

with God and surrendering to Him are interdependent. To trust the Word of the Other is to launch into the void, like Peter's path on the waters of the lake.

The balance between presence and absence is difficult. Abundant gratification leads to enormous emotional dependence on prayer, but that is spiritual infantilism. So, even excessive frustration is equally harmful; this applies to spiritual growth as well as psychological development. The proof of negation and absence must therefore be proportionate to the person's assets. The abundance of rewards is corrected by renunciation, just as excess frustration is corrected by presence. The role of the Blessed Virgin finds its place in this spiritual pedagogy, with her maternal presence:

*« It is quite true that we can attain to divine union by other roads, but these involve many more crosses and exceptional setbacks and many difficulties that we cannot easily overcome. We would have to pass through spiritual darkness, engage in struggles for which we are not prepared, endure bitter agonies, scale precipitous mountains, tread upon painful thorns, and cross frightful deserts. But when we take the path of Mary, we walk smoothly and calmly. It is true that on our way we have hard battles to fight and serious obstacles to overcome, but Mary, our Mother and Queen, stays close to her faithful servants. She is always at hand to brighten their darkness, clear away their doubts, strengthen them in their fears, sustain them in their combats and trials. Truly, in comparison with other ways, this virgin road to Jesus is a path of roses and sweet delights. »*  
TD 152; cf. 154 e SM 22).

The spiritually mature person will be constant in prayer, in times of consolation as well as in times of desolation. Constancy is a sign of true devotion and therefore of the true devotee; on the contrary, inconsistency is characteristic of false devotion:

*« Inconstant devotees are those whose devotion to our Lady is practised in fits and starts. Sometimes they are fervent and sometimes they are lukewarm. Sometimes they appear ready to do anything to please our Lady, and then shortly afterwards they have completely changed. They start by embracing every devotion to our Lady. They join her confraternities, but they do not faithfully observe the rules. They are as changeable as the moon»* (TD 101).

The signs of immaturity are recognizable<sup>110</sup>. The instability and exaggeration of unreal and unlimited desires in relation to the person's capabilities; they are desires which have no basis in reality and which are exhausted in research. In fact, these people are always looking for "*new things*", in endless anxiety for a place to rest; Without wanting or knowing it, they flee the real world of limits,

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<sup>110</sup> The description of fickle devotees suggests analogy with certain criteria which define personality disorganization; cf. Rulla, 1986, pp. 182-185.

to throw themselves into the infinite and perverse world of their desires, encountering only emptiness. Instead:

*“true devotion to our Lady is constant. It strengthens us in our desire to do good and prevents us from giving up our devotional practices too easily. It gives us the courage to oppose the fashions and maxims of the world, the vexations and unruly inclinations of the flesh and the temptations of the devil. Thus a person truly devoted to our Blessed Lady is not changeable, fretful, scrupulous or timid. We do not say however that such a person never sins or that his sensible feelings of devotion never change. When he has fallen, he stretches out his hand to his Blessed Mother and rises again. If he loses all taste and feeling for devotion, he is not at all upset because a good and faithful servant of Mary is guided in his life by faith in Jesus and Mary, and not by feelings” (TD 109).*

Montfort repeatedly emphasizes perseverance and stability in prayer. And the biggest tip:

*“Faith must be strong and constant, that is to say, we must not seek in the practice of the Holy Rosary only its sensitive taste and its spiritual consolation, that is to say, we must not abandon it because we have a host of involuntary distractions in the mind, a strange disgust in the soul, an overwhelming boredom and an almost continual drowsiness in the body; there is no need for taste or consolation, nor sighs, nor impulses, nor tears, nor continual application of the imagination, to recite the Rosary well. Pure faith and good intention are enough” (SAR 35).*

*“Be careful to give in the extraordinary and to ask for and even desire extraordinary knowledge, visions, revelations and other miraculous graces that God has sometimes communicated to a few saints in the recitation of their beads and Rosary. Faith alone is sufficient now that the Gospel and all devotions and practices of piety are sufficiently established. Never omit the smallest part of your Rosary in your interior dryness, disgust and neglect; it would be a mark of pride and infidelity; but like a brave champion of Jesus and Mary, without seeing, feeling, or tasting anything, say your Pater and Ave dryly, looking at the mysteries as best you can. Do not desire children's sweets and jams to eat your daily bread; but to imitate Jesus Christ more perfectly in his agony, sometimes prolong your Rosary, when you feel more difficulty to recite it: you must say of yourself what is said of Jesus Christ, when he was in the agony of prayer: He prayed even longer” (SAR 143)<sup>111</sup>.*

To the Daughters of Wisdom, still on the theme of gratification and frustration, he suggests:

*“Be careful not to neglect meditation just because you are distracted, upset, bored; or because you have the impression of accomplishing nothing, that you*

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<sup>111</sup> Cf also: C 15, 30-32 et C 101, 33-36. The words from *Pange lingua « sola fides sufficit »* are equally present in L 19, in the same context.

*are too good-natured to do it, that you do not feel called to achieve it and that you have a vocation for manual work and activity and certainly not contemplation and meditation. These are temptations of the evil spirit. In all your prayers, feed yourself as much as possible on pure faith, without relying on visible and sensible things. Have respect for spiritual tastes, but do not have a higher self-esteem, if you have them, and do not think that all is lost when you no longer feel them” (RS 135-136).*

### 3.1.6. Desire and perseverance

By delaying satisfaction, aridity puts desire to the test; and an immature desire cannot tolerate delays and invents new desires or seeks satisfaction elsewhere. On the contrary, it is time that deepens and strengthens true desires: they are the fundamental restlessness of the human heart which tends towards God, the thirst which knows that it can only be quenched at the end of life:

*« The soul thirsts for God, the living Fountain (Ps. 41, 3). Until then, Lord, I will not rest, I will long for love, my heart will beat incessantly in my chest, because you did it for yourself, it will always be restless until I rest perfectly in you » (DBM).*

Augustinian anxiety, taken up by Louis-Marie in *Preparation for a Good Death*, directs desire towards death. It is the tension of an aspiration that knows it will only be satisfied when limits are abolished. Desire always exceeds the limits. In perseverance, desire comes up against the limit that resists its satisfaction, like the friend of the Gospel who strikes in the middle of the night (cf. Luke 11:5-8; LEW 189). Desire is tenacious and importunate (cf. LEW 189-190). To desire Wisdom is to desire an “infinite treasure” (LEW 188). To satisfy this desire, one must cross the threshold of the limit: die to live, lose oneself to find oneself. Only an infinite being can receive an infinite treasure. How will the finite man welcome an infinite man? It is desire that expands the heart wounded by dissatisfaction, but open to the promise of the pleasure offered, because God “always listens to prayers” (ibid.).

Desire is a tiring path, and man has his whole life to follow it:

*« Whoever therefore wants to obtain Wisdom must ask for it day and night, without tiring or being discouraged. Blessed a thousand times will he be, if he obtains it after ten, twenty, thirty years of prayer, and even an hour before dying. And, if he receives it after having spent his whole life seeking it and asking for it and meriting it by all kinds of works and crosses, let him be well convinced that it is not given to him out of justice as a reward, but out of pure mercy like alms» (LEW 188).*

Constancy, or perseverance, recalls the notion of consistency<sup>112</sup>. We speak of incoherence when there is a lack of self-transcendence, when we persist in the search for gratification, daydreaming, emotional dependence, etc. The inconsistency can be conscious or unconscious; it can be social, when the need is in dissonance with the values, but not with the corresponding attitude, it can be psychological if the dissonance concerns the needs, the values and the corresponding attitude. Perseverance and effectiveness in action are linked to the predominance of inconsistencies over circumstances in the psychodynamics of the person.

From this perspective, Montfort speaks of non-fidelity or spiritual laziness:

*« For there are an infinity of fools and lazy people who have a thousand desires or rather a thousand desires for good; but which, not making them leave sin or do violence to themselves, are false and deceptive desires »* (LEW 182).

It is the weak internalization which reinforces the imbalance between the prevalence of inconsistencies and that of consistencies. Other times, it is a non-perseverance due to discouragement or lack of prayer (cf. LEW 188).

Frustration then reinforces the imbalance in the prevalence of inconsistencies over consistencies: the greater the unreal expectations, the greater the frustration when expectations are not met.

## 3.2 Desire between truth and falsehood

### 3.2.1 The Appearance

Mortification purifies the desire from the egocentrism of need satisfaction and directs it towards theocentrism. But the path to conversion is full of resistance to renunciation. For Montfort, it is not a question of a conscious and fully voluntary resistance to conversion; it assumes that there is a firm intention to follow Jesus Christ. Nor is it a question of psychopathology which would make favorable decisions difficult and limit personal freedom. According to Montfort, it is rather located in an intermediate space, neither entirely conscious nor entirely unconscious, like the dialectic between real good and apparent good. Space allocated to people of the world, described as follows:

*“It is true that they do not openly lie; but they disguise their lies under the appearance of truth; they do not believe they are lying, but they do lie nonetheless. They do not ordinarily teach sin openly, but they treat it either as*

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<sup>112</sup> On surpassing oneself in coherence (*self-transcendence consistency*), cf. Rulla, 1971; Rulla-Imoda-Ridick, 1976, 1987 et 1989.

*virtue, or as honesty, or as something indifferent and of little consequence. It is in this finesse, which the world has learned from the devil to convert the ugliness of sin and lies, that this malignity consists” (LEW 199).*

The falsehood-truth relationship is sheltered by appearance. What is perceived as truth, in good faith, “*they do not believe they are lying*”, is in reality a lie disguised as truth, a good which is only apparent. The simulation is subtle, with finesse, Montfort likes to say. And so, discernment is necessary. The distinction is made first between true and false wisdom:

*“There are several kinds of wisdom. (...) First, they are distinguished into true and false wisdom: the genuine is the taste for the truth without lies or disguise; the false is the taste for lies, covered with the appearance of truth” (LEW 13).*

That the false is masked by the appearance of truth is possible because it is difficult to choose evil in itself. Evil must hide under the appearance of good; the forbidden fruit of Genesis was “beautiful in appearance” and seemed “good to eat.” And what Saint Thomas thinks: “Evil is only ever loved because it is seen as good, that is to say as a relative good, taken for pure and simple good. So, such love is evil because it tends towards what is not true good. In this sense, man loves iniquity: because it is thanks to it that he obtains certain goods such as pleasure, wealth, etc.”<sup>113</sup> .

The apparent good is a misunderstanding: the partial good of the person, like wealth or pleasure, is confused with the integral good. The explosion of desire that follows is a factor of dispersion and not of union. The person gets lost, exhausts himself searching for a thousand goods considered as the Unique Good.

### 3.2.2. Conformism and libertinism

Louis Marie de Montfort also distinguishes three other types of false wisdom: “*This false wisdom is worldly wisdom or prudence that the Holy Spirit distinguishes into three: Sapientia terrena, animalis, diabolica: earthly, animal and diabolical wisdom.*” (LEW 13). Later in the LEW we return at length to James 3:15 for a detailed exposition of the wisdom of the world. It is defined as conformism, as opposed to libertinism:

*“This wisdom of the world is a perfect conformity to the maxims and fashions of the world; it is a continual tendency towards greatness and esteem; it is a continual and secret search for one's pleasure and interest, not in a crude and blatant way, by committing some scandalous sin, but in a fine, deceptive and*

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<sup>113</sup> S. Th., II-II, q. 27, a. 1, ad 1.



*political way; otherwise it would no longer be wisdom according to the world, but libertinism..” (LEW 75).*

We must believe that there is more than a simple analogy between the conformism-libertinism binary and the couple designated by the terms *uniformists and rebels*<sup>114</sup>. Rebels satisfy needs that are in dissonance with Christian values (*social incoherence*); Montfort calls this libertinism. The libertine has an aggressive attitude towards the law which can take the form of provocation and scandal. The worldly wise man avoids such an extreme position. He is somewhere between conformist and rebel. He is conformist because of the attitude consistent with the values he proclaims, “*to keep up appearances,*” but he is in difficulty because of the dissonant needs he cannot openly satisfy. The strategy will therefore consist of changing values, bringing them closer to dissonant needs; so that they can satisfy themselves peacefully and without a guilty conscience. He is therefore rebellious, because of the fatal agreement of the true-false, denounced by Montfort:

*“In the opinion of the world, a wise man is one with a keen eye to business, who knows how to turn everything to his personal profit without appearing to do so. He excels in the art of duplicity and well-concealed fraud without arousing suspicion. He thinks one thing and says or does another. Nothing concerning the graces and manners of the world is unknown to him. He accommodates himself to everyone to suit his own end, completely ignoring the honour and interests of God. He manages to make a secret but fatal reconciliation of truth and falsehood, of the gospel and the world, of virtue and sin, of Christ and Belial. He wishes to be considered an honest man but not a devout man, and most readily scorns, distorts and condemns devotions He does not personally approve of. In short, a man is worldly-wise who, following solely the lead of his senses and human reasoning, poses as a good Christian and a man of integrity, but makes little effort to please God or atone by penance for the sins He has committed against him.” (LEW 76).*

Beneath the conformist lies the rebel. In the wisdom of the world, there is a dissonance between Christian values, true wisdom, and the needs that oppose it. The person naturally tends to reduce dissonance; but the way may be different. The path to Christian conversion, asceticism, consists of changing one's attitude to live according to values and not according to gratifying needs. But conversion can be difficult due to the very strong emotional charge of the needs. It will be easier to change not attitudes, but values by changing reference standards. If evangelical values oppose needs, we adapt them to the less demanding values of

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<sup>114</sup> Cf Rulla, 1971, pp. 134-143.

the world<sup>115</sup>. To prevent false coherence from being disrupted from the outside by bad conscience,

*“they look for the least scrupulous confessor (this is what they call lax confessors who do not do their duty), in order to have from him, cheaply, peace in their weak and effeminate lives and indulgence plenary of all their sins. I say: cheap; for these wise according to the flesh ordinarily want only a few prayers or a few alms as penance, hating what can afflict the body.”* (LEW 81; cf. also 39, 130-132, 143).

### 3.2.3. Fashion and complacency

In conformity there is the desire to be approved by others, to maintain good relationships, and not to be rejected. It is a “*continuous tendency towards esteem*” (LEW 75), the desire to make friends (cf. LEW 78), to seek “*the esteem and praise of men*”, not supporting “to be despised and blamed” (LEW 82). To conformism, also called human respect, Montfort devotes 6 Hymns (H 34-39), in the series *Traps of the world* (H 29-39), counting 2,512 verses.

In H 34, we find two reasons for changing evangelical values into worldly values, two reasons for not changing one's attitude: the first is fear of others, the second is approval of others:

*« I would serve God well, you say, But I fear sir or madam;  
I would embrace virtue well, But I fear that people will blame me;  
Lord, I would be your friend Without the world, your enemy. (...)  
I will serve you, my Jesus, I will follow you everywhere,  
As long as I am no longer treated As a devotee or as a hypocrite;  
If I am approved by all, I want to willingly be yours. (H 34, 11.13)*

Desire for esteem and approval and fear of blame: this is what we call complacency, the acceptance of external influence with a view to reward, or to obtain satisfaction. approval of others, or to avoid punishment or rejection<sup>116</sup>. Others then exercise power of control over the person. Two other possibilities can also be identified: identification and internalization. Identification occurs when, in a strong desire for a relationship, the person adopts the behavior of the reference group (here it is the world), because it is associated with an enriching relationship between person and group:

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<sup>115</sup> Cf Record-Backman, 1964, pp. 108-119.

<sup>116</sup> Cf Kelman, 1961 e 1967. Rulla observes (cf. 1986, p. 350) that it is not necessary for an external influence to be exerted through complacency, but that it is enough for the person to try to reduce the feeling of guilt sometimes produced by the inconsistency itself. The person is unconsciously driven, out of frustration, to seek out potential sources of approval, acceptance, or reward and to avoid sources of disapproval, rejection, or punishment. (cf. 1971, p. 317).

*« It is that to live in fashion is wanted / As well as to follow the latest trends,  
For fear of being an inconvenient person / Or to displease someone. »*  
(H 33 / 100).

Complacency and identification do not help conversion but lock the person into inconsistencies and internal contradictions. Identification, or internalization, on the contrary, opens up to conversion, to a profound change of attitude and to living according to the values of the Gospel and of Christ<sup>117</sup>. For Montfort, internalization takes on a theocentric aspect: pleasing God, and not egocentric, pleasing oneself:

*« Practice the good boldly, But for God alone and to please him,  
Without cowardly fleeing What can be thought, said or done,  
In order to be the good odor Of Jesus Christ, your Saviour. »* (C 37 / 107).

The internalization of evangelical values supposes a double liberation: from internal, or intrapsychic, conditioning, and from external, or interpersonal, conditioning, with the possibility therefore of moving from egocentrism and sociocentrism to theocentrism. The person who thus internalizes evangelical values can renew a new relationship, without complacency and without identification which implies a search for oneself, but with an identification open to interiorization, with a view to helping others also make this path of internalization, a superior and integral good, and not for a partial good:

*« I want to be all things to all Without any cowardly indulgence,  
To try to win them all To Jesus by penance,  
All to all, without any sin, Without the good being prevented. »* (H 38 / 122).

The conformism of human respect, complacency and identification are only an “*appearance of reason*” (H 38/114, 117, 128), a “*simulation*” and a “*subtlety*” (cf. H 38/119). The conformity of human respect and worldly wisdom also has a defensive aspect, due to unconscious inconsistencies and defensive consistencies, and caused by dissonant needs<sup>118</sup>. These defensive consistencies are the “*apparent reason*” which would justify the satisfaction of a dissonant need which one neither wants nor can renounce; it is the “*subtle way*” in which the world uses “*virtues and also crimes*” (H 38/129):

*“It will cover the impurity / With a fine pleasantry, / The luxury of vanity, /  
Of cleanliness, of modesty; The greed and the pride of the heart /  
Of a good home and point of honour ... ”* (C 29 / 34).

Instead of being progressive symbols which help to surpass oneself

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<sup>117</sup> Kelman speaks of subjective values, to be corrected when indicating objective values (cf. Rulla, 1986, pp. 348-353).

<sup>118</sup> Cf Rulla, 1986, pp. 221-225, 315-325.

(theocentrism) in the search for real good, the inconsistencies (and consistencies of defense) are regressive symbols which, not only cause evangelical values to stagnate, but lead them to regress:

*“One climbed with giant steps To the most sublime virtue.  
So as not to displease nothingness, Alas! One fell into crime,  
Or one fell imperceptibly Into the greatest laxity.” (C 34 / 18).*

#### 3.2.4. Desire and illusion

Illusion is an error: it mistakes apparent good for reality. H 29, *Contempt of the world* draws a long list of these blunders : the truth opposed to « *friends of falsehood* » for whom « *all their riches are but a dream* » (v. 3), « *The world is a transvestite Satan / In order to make itself pleasant,* » (v. 8). « *The world is in blindness / And the wretched believes himself wise,* » (v. 24) : « *O! Big blind person, oh! impostor:/ To heaven he prefers earth / The creature to the Creator, / To the peace of his God, war, / Lying to the truth, / And time to eternity./* » (v. 72).

Illusion is a dream and a deceptive chimera (cf. H 28/34), vain and false jewels (H 4/13, 15, 30); it covers and masks with a ravishing falsehood (H 10/19, 31). If true wisdom leads to immortality, false wisdom presents the illusion of immortality in deceptive goods (cf. H 20/28). The false wise man misjudges things:

*“Does he not take evil for good, The useful for the harmful,  
For happiness, what is nothing, / And for false real good  
So much did his mistakes blind him, / So did his sins upset him” (H 29 / 25).*

Earthly wisdom, the love of earthly goods, riches and possessions delude themselves into existing (cf. LEW 80). Carnal wisdom, the love for the pleasure of the senses of those who love to eat, drink, play, laugh, have fun, gives the illusion of living a frenzied activity of consumption as resistance to what is dying and cannot be stopped. (cf. LEW 81). The diabolical wisdom, “*the love and esteem of honors*”, is that of those who seek to show themselves, esteemed, praised, applauded; of those who, without esteeming themselves, seek the esteem of others; illusion of those who believe that to exist means to emerge from the masses, that being depends on success in action (cf. LEW 82). The world in its wisdom:

*“It promises its spectators / Honours, pleasures, perishable goods  
That are at the bottom of fake goods, / That only make people miserable.  
O vanity of vanities! / The greatest of truths” (H 29/37).*

The appearance of good is a “*formidable trap*” (H 20 / 25), a “*cruel illusion*” (H 32 / 3), a “*poisoned hook*” under bait (H 29 / 33; 33 / 103; 34 / 5), a “*serpent under the flowers*” (H 32/8). It promises “*false pleasures*” (H 107/12), “*false treasures, vain honors*” (H 108/6). But he does not keep his promise because everything is an illusion; the appearance of reality is not the same as reality. The promised good has “*value only in the idea*” (H 20/40); the promised pleasure is “*the pleasure of the figure*” (H 29 / 89), while honour is but: « *a slumber, a bubble / A smoke, a vapour, / A brilliant and pompous radiance / Which deceives hearts and eyes* ” (H 29 / 67).

Illusion and apparent good cannot satisfy. The desire that seeks it sinks deeper and deeper as it is satisfied and becomes more and more unsatisfied. Such is the fate of dissonant desires: they cannot be satisfied because they are based on the emptiness of illusion, of the fleeting image and the mirage which disappears the very moment it seems fulfilled; it is the horizon of a threatening infinity:

« *This is what is the vanity / Of the goods that the world presents,  
That it greedily searches for / Without any to ever content him,  
But their pleasures are also fake / And cause him so much woes. / (...)  
The greatest pleasures are deceptive, / They are pleasures in pictures  
That do not satisfy hearts, / Who starve for them even more,  
That at the end make you feel / Remorse, boredom, sorrow* » (H 29 / 57-58).

Desires that have apparent goods as their object are insatiable because the apparent good is an illusion that locks desire into a vicious circle:

« *The more the rich has, the more he wants, / Goods only increase his desire,  
And this desire is his agony / Which leaves him no pleasure.  
He is a miserable starving person / Who never says, "It is enough",  
An insatiable hellfire / That says, "Bring, pile up."* (C 20 / 34).

It's the vicious circle of having and knowing:

“*I hide myself from the rich and learned, / I show myself to the poor ignorant,  
To the truly humble. / A good poor person is always satisfied,  
The miser is always unhappy, / The more he has, the more he wants to have, /  
The more he knows, the more he wants to know, He is insatiable*” (H 108 / 5).

Montfort places great emphasis on this incessant search for apparent goods which do not calm the deep aspirations of the person. The desire for an apparent good makes us oscillate constantly between the abyss of gratification and the abyss of frustration and deprivation. A desire caused by a dissonant need cannot be satisfied because it is a desperate struggle against inevitable frustration. It is only temptation, a failed attempt to fill the void that characterizes finite man with a desire for the infinite. This is a false answer to man's fundamental

question about God. Desire and illusion are idolatry.

### 3.2.5. The desire to be loved

In the long Hymn on *Luxury* (H 33, de 118 strophes), Montfort demonstrates the mechanism of the illusory good. Luxury is « *a vain parade and a foolish vanity* » (v. 2); it is « *in its finery, in its clothes* » (v. 3), because it is only at the level of the showing and not of its being: it is a « *vain desire to appear* » (v. 48), to give a « *good impression* » (RS 97). Luxury bridges the distance of being with an excess of appearance: « *luxury is what surpasses moderate maintenance* » (v. 4) ; *he swells with vanity: the wind and vanity are not close only by assonance; luxury remains empty and without substance*. Quantity gives only illusion and gratification: « *... a thousand pipe dreams, / A thousand little misleading goods, / A thousand unnecessary cares, / Constitute the objects of our hearts.* » (v. 47). The appearing-being opposition is divided into two others: illness-health (cf. v. 2) and crazy-wise (v. 4 ; cf. C 34 / 39). Luxury as an illusory good is a sign « *of a superficial soul / And of a proud spirit.* » (v. 29). It is about the escape from renunciation and the search for gratification: « *It destroys temperance / Which moderates pleasures / It inspires the abundance / Of pleasures and of desires.* » (v. 33) The simulation is betrayed by an excess of having and by extravagance, by an “*always more*” and by a greed which tries to fill a void. Women's clothing is an example<sup>119</sup> : « *They pile on themselves / The gold, the silver and the fine sheets, / The silk and the rich laces, / The velvets and the satins. / According to their bizarre fashion / And their proud procession, / Nothing seems to them rare enough, / Rich and precious enough* » (v. 53-54). The illusory good is partial and is sought to the detriment of the integral good, but also to the detriment of the good of others. Luxury is a theft; the « *unhappy socialite ladies / with their silk and fine linen / are almost all thieves, / but their theft is so clever* » (v. 55): « *They will do a hundred purchases / To adorn themselves to envy, / Instead of paying their debts / And returning the property of others. / For their ridiculous outfits, / Fashionable and high-priced, / They rob unscrupulously / Their children and their husbands.* » (v. 56-57). Appearance and showing-off also affect the desire to be loved which, with the medium of exchange of money, becomes “*having lovers*”: « *Their desires, their burning thirst / To have new attires, / Have put their modesty on sale / With their foolish*

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<sup>119</sup> The ecclesiastical authors of the 17th century are not gentle on this question. Olier (1672, pp. 204-205; L 87) tells a court lady that his sister's scar on her cheek is a punishment from God "for having often worn on her cheeks instruments of vanity, lies and of sin. How much lipstick? How much white? For Montfort, cf. H 33/71-84).

loves.» (v. 58). Luxury serves seduction and constitutes a poor response to the fundamental need to be loved and esteemed: “*Where does this common evil come from? / It is of a wish to be valued, / It is of a desire to please, / It is of a need to be loved.*” (v. 98).

The illusory good is a mask with which we cover ourselves:

“*Everything makes its own character there, By good or pleasure.  
The old man in his household Thinks only of getting rich,  
And the young man, at his age, Seeks nothing but amusement.*

(H 150/ 5)

*So many unhappy women Under an air of gaiety!  
So many scandalous girls Under an air of holiness!  
So many proud heads Under a borrowed habit!”*

(H 150/ 7)

The satisfaction of dissonant needs, such as pride and disordered affections, is therefore highlighted under an exteriority “*as appropriate*”. The apparent good is “*a borrowed dress*”; the joyful outward appearance barely hides the dissatisfaction of being loved: “*the unhappy women*”. You are only deceived when you seek pleasure. The existential void cannot be filled by external compensations. A well-groomed appearance is a sign of a restless desire to exist in front of others.

Comic or tragic: here is the photo of the flirtatious woman who comes to church to be admired:

“*See, but while weeping, see on the other hand  
A shameless woman, swollen in her brocade,  
On her cute shoes, with a crest three layers high,  
Coming to our holy places to show off a character.  
We often see this beautiful wind balloon move  
To the foot of the altars near a living God,  
Or at least on a bench, in order to be seen,  
And to launch her features in the heart by sight.  
Her dog, her fan, her gloves, her ornaments,  
Often her Adonis amuse themselves;  
She sometimes reads, then she primps,  
By searching to see if someone is looking at her*” (H 136 / 12, 13, 15).

### 3.2.6. The idol

In the Hymn *The vanities of the world* (H 156), Montfort underlines the limits of man inasmuch as a creature, considered as a « *vain illusion* » (v. 2) and « *a bit of hay* » (v. 3). «*His pleasures are a pile of rubbish, / His treasures, a bit of tin, /*



*His rest, a job; / His glory, impure smoke.» (v. 4). / It is too little that a perishable good, / That an asset null and void and mortal; / For my immortal heart, / He wants something that is lasting. / It is you alone, sovereign kindness, / Who can fill my heart; / You are its happiness, / Without you it is always in pain. / (v. 8-9)''.*

Man's desire is infinite and only the Infinite can fulfill it : « *It is you alone, sovereign kindness, / Who can fill my heart; / You are its happiness, / Without you it is always in pain.* » (v. 9). But in the desire for infinite happiness, which is only found in God, man can seek it elsewhere, outside of God<sup>120</sup>; but he will find finite and illusory happiness. The object of happiness, taken for God, is not God, but an idol. And the apostasy (H 33/10). Wealth is « *the deity to which the world sacrifices* », gold is a god (cf. H 29/52-53), *The body becomes an idol / too flattered;*» (H 33/ 14). « *To make of one's rotten flesh / One's idol and one's incense, / What horrible idolatry, / What insult to the Almighty!* » (H 33 / 15).

The times when apparent goods are classified as idols are innumerable (cf. H 33/16, 18, 21, 112; 34/8; 43/23; 156/7). There is therefore a close connection between symbols of immortality and idolatry<sup>121</sup>. An idol is that which is necessary to satisfy the person and that which gives him pleasure, where God is exchanged for the creature, the truth for the lie. Apparent good is a means taken as an end, a means diverted from the end. For example, mortification which, from a means of union with the suffering Christ, becomes an end in itself, a source of unhealthy pleasure, of self-satisfaction - punishment and self-mutilation. Apparent good takes different forms: money, earthly goods, pleasure in all its forms, honors, honorary positions, virtue itself, etc. Everything that man possesses and manipulates in his own service, even self-love itself, can be masked by these “*fine subtleties*” as “*pure love*” (H 5/20).

### 3.3. Pure Love

#### 3.3.1. Interest and disinterest

##### 3.3.1.a. True and false wisdom

Louis Marie de Montfort qualifies worldly wisdom as “*subtle and endless pursuit of pleasure and self-interest*» (LEW 75). It is opposed to true wisdom

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<sup>120</sup> True happiness is Wisdom (cf H 125/1-2); here we find “a real pleasure, a permanent happiness» (C 62/7; 54/2). Close to the thought of Montfort is the spiritual doctrine of Lallemant) (cf Champion, 1694, pp. 47-52).

<sup>121</sup> Cf Kiely, 1986, pp. 196-200, 207-211.



*which is not self-seeking, not found in the world nor in the heart of those who lead a comfortable life” (LEW 83).*

The distinction between false and true wisdom is given by the presence of interest or gratuity. We have already seen how interest is the satisfaction of dissonant needs, obtained by the search for an apparent good; there is a self-centered dimension to this. True wisdom lies in seeking real good, renouncing the rewards of dissonant goods; it is a surpassing of oneself, a theocentrism. By inviting us to “*hate and condemn*” false wisdom (ibid.), Montfort opens himself to the dialectic between the transcended Self and the transcendent Self. The first is interested, because he seeks the satisfaction of his needs, the second is disinterested, because he welcomes renunciation and lives according to values. It is not a question of abandoning all desire, but of reorganizing desires. In this commitment lies spiritual growth.

Man, before and after original sin, is a symbol of it. Before the fall, he is “*regulated, without disorder*”, in perfect knowledge (LEW 38); after the fall, “*undisciplined passions arise over which he loses control*” (LEW 39) and which distort desires. After the fall, desires turn towards the symbols of immortality, without comparison with the world of limits of which death is the most radical and absolute expression. Before sin, man had no need of the symbols of immortality, because “*he had immortality in the body,*” and because he was “*free from the fear of death.*” (...) *Before, he had in his heart the pure love of God, (...) loved with a pure love for God himself*” (LEW 38).

The relationship between false and true wisdom does not constitute a dualism, but a bipolarity: between the two there is a tension and a dialectic, which corresponds to the dialectic between the Self as transcended and the Self as transcendent. So a dynamic relationship. Spiritual growth is the transition from one to the other, the reorganization of passions and desires, and the shift from love of self to love of God. Once the *ordo amoris* is re-established, we will find ourselves “*without passions to overcome*” (ibid.), because they are all oriented towards God and heaven.

#### *3.3.1.b. Four types of desires*

Four types of desire can then be indicated: two related to false wisdom, namely fear, and self-love, or interest; and two related to true wisdom, that is, knowledge and pure love. The four functions of attitudes described by D. Katz

are recognizable here<sup>122</sup>.

The first function of attitudes and corresponding desires is utilitarian and consists in the search for rewards, or satisfaction of needs, and the escape from punishment or frustration. It is based on the pleasure – displeasure couple. The object is therefore desired in view of its usefulness for the person.

The second function is called defensive of the ego and consists of the defense and protection of the ego against impulses deemed unacceptable and against the knowledge of what could threaten the person from the outside, with the aim of reducing the anxiety produced by both elements. The person thus avoids facing reality, seen as a limitation of their imaginary omnipotence. This allows us to face internal conflicts which can generate great insecurity, and therefore to protect our self-image, to safeguard our self-esteem.

The third function is the expression of values. If the first two functions prevented the individual from revealing himself as he really is, since they served a partial good and not the whole person; on the contrary, the function of expressing values is at the service of the vocation of the whole person. Different levels of this function can be distinguished: knowing who I am, how much I would like to be, how much God wants me to be.

The fourth function is knowledge. The person cannot be satisfied with satisfying needs but wants to give meaning to life and the world around him. This function brings out the feeling of chaos and comes from the need to distinguish and separate, to define and call. There is an analogy with the situation revealed by God in creation: the creature emerges from chaos with a work of separation and calling through the divine Word. Wisdom creates and gives meaning.

#### *3.3.1.c. Two types of religion*

Concretely, the egocentric and theocentric dimensions mix in each person, but in different proportions, depending on the psychological dynamics of each person. Bipolarity is an expression of the fundamental dialectic between the transcended Ego and the transcendent Ego; This existential and essential tension corresponds to a tension at the level of content: needs and values. We have seen how Montfort presents bipolarity as an opposition between true and false wisdom.

It's not rare to see bipolarity defined in terms of a dichotomy. We then have two

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<sup>122</sup> Cf Katz, 1967.

types of religion and of religious people: a functional religious person and a personal, or revealed<sup>123</sup>, religious person. Functional religion is expressed in beliefs, prayers, mythical stories, conduct regulated by religious institutions... which satisfy desires, fill deficiencies, calm anxieties, in personal or group life. Personal and revealed religion, to distinguish itself from functional religion, introduces a divinity who makes himself known personally. Psychologically, it is a God who reveals himself, speaks (directly or through prophets) and announces desires that are psychologically differentiable or differentiated from human desires typical of spontaneous religiosity.

The difference between the two religions lies in desire. The functional satisfies desires, which are needs, and is egocentric. Personal exposure transforms human desire by comparing it to divine desire. Desire is then an expression of theocentric values and not of needs.

#### *3.2.1.d. True and false devotion*

Louis Marie de Montfort distinguishes on several occasions a true devotion to the Blessed Virgin from a false one (cf. LEW 216-217; PE 12; TD 92-110). Among the characteristics of both, we have already spoken of constancy and inconstancy, holiness and presumption. Here we draw attention to the aspects of interest and disinterest.

The self-interested devotees are those

*“who turn to her only in difficulty, to escape some danger, to be cured of some ailment, or have some similar need satisfied. Except when in need they never think of her (...) they are the false devotees who hold no value in front of God and his holy Mother; the self-interested devotees who pray to our Lady only to be rid of bodily ills or to obtain material benefits”* (TD 103-104, cf. LEW 217).

One can easily recognize in self-interested devotion the egocentric, utilitarian and instrumental character of a functional religion, an external orientation and a pre-rational structure.

We will note how the dialectical opposition between egocentrism and theocentrism, between the search for oneself and the search for God, is found in a synthetic way, between important for me and important in oneself, between loving him because he brings good and love because he is lovable. The integration between the moment of presence, indicated by “sweetness”,

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<sup>123</sup> Cf Godin, 1986, p. 7.

“sensible fervor” and “the wedding at Cana”, and the moment of absence, that is to say “cold and dryness” and “Calvary”, is also underlined.

### 3.4. Pure Love

#### 3.4.1. Eros and agape

The problem of pure love is only addressed in the writings of Louis-Marie. Let us recall what has just been said about disinterested devotion, characterized by the search for God in complete gratuity; this immediately makes us think of love understood as agape. When we speak instead of interested devotion, characterized by a search for self and interest, we think of the notion of eros. In the first part, it has already been illustrated how the desire of the man who desires is strongly marked by the dimension of eros, manifested in the desire for possession.

Is there a contradiction between agape and eros? Not if you don't give eros a very negative meaning. In fact, interested love should not be confused with eros<sup>124</sup>. Left to itself, eros, the love of desire, truly becomes an interested, hoarding or appropriating love, but integrated into agape, it becomes a vehement force. We could say that Eros, in the encounter with agape, is transformed, just as man's desire is transformed in relation to that of God. Eros opens to agape in the encounter with the Other. Montfort evokes this integration by writing that he who loves with a disinterested love loves in consolations as well as in aridity, at Calvary as at Cana (cf. TD 110). The love of desire and the love of self-giving as self-giving unite in the reciprocity of the relationship. The eros – agape relationship is the greatest path imaginable to intimacy with God. What would happen to a love devoid of desire?

#### 3.4.2. Conflict on pure love

The second half of the 17th century in France saw the “twilight of the mystics”<sup>125</sup>. But in the first half of the century, there was a defense of pure love<sup>126</sup>. Antimysticism hunts down quietists and all kinds of enlightened people,

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<sup>124</sup> Numerous writers think that the two dimensions of love can be integrated; cf Bernard, 1984, pp. 309-337; Id., 1994, pp. 111-115; Browing, 1987, pp. 57, 148-156; Cencini, 1994b, pp. 258-266; Godin, 1986, p. 238; Vergole, 1978, pp. 178-179.

<sup>125</sup> Cognet, 1991.

<sup>126</sup> Camus, bishop of Belley, great propagator of the thought of François de Sales, published the *Defense of Pure Love*. On these debates, and in particular on the dispute between Bossuet and Fénelon, see Papasogli, 1983 and Bergame, 1992, pp. 163-167.

but it also attacks the truly spiritual. With *Pastor Cælestis* (1687), Innocent Argentan, read by him, etc. The reasons for the conviction are complex, a sign of a confused spiritual climate.

Pure love was the subject of almost every spiritual and theological dispute of the 17th century. The culmination of this controversy lies in the condemnation of Fénelon's book, *The Explanation of the Maxims of the Saints* (1697), carried out by Innocent XII (*Cum altis*, 1699). Montfort is very close to the center of this dispute, because one of the arbiters of the sad battle is Tronson, superior of St-Sulpice, “renowned for his exceptional prudence and remarkable holiness” (TD 244); Montfort met and consulted him when he was a seminarian. At the same time (1693-1695) the Issy Conferences took place, in the house of the Sulpicians, whose protagonists were: Bossuet, Fénelon, Madame Guyon, Tronson, etc. We do not want to go into details here<sup>127</sup>, but only to emphasize the spatial and temporal proximity to Montfort.

The fact that Louis-Marie often uses the expression ‘amour pur’, or pure love, common in the 17th century, does not indicate his position<sup>128</sup>, but underlines the fundamental importance of disinterest, but not in the sense used by quietism, for which disinterest had been total to the point of annihilation of all power, and to the point of labeling as sin the desire for salvation, hope, knowledge, prayer of petition and thanksgiving, considered as a withdrawal on yourself. Being selfless simply means serving God for God's sake and not for one's own sake. This is the thought of Louis-Marie, which does not border on the excess of quietism, but which is also radical when it warns against the dangers of spiritual interest (cf. TD 110)<sup>129</sup>. The pure love understood by Montfort is that experienced in the “*holy slavery of love*”.

An in-depth study of the thought of Malebranche, whose work is contemporary with the LEW, would demonstrate how the notion of desire, analyzed in Montfort, is a possible key to understanding the interest-disinterest relationship. Beyond the different classifications of love, an important point is underlined by Malebranche: interested, or egocentric, love is bad because it takes the means as the end, and the effect as the final cause. The self-interested love rejected by

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. In the *Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, the articles : charity, quietism, disinterest, Bossuet, Fénelon, Guilleré, Lamy, Malebranche, Piny, etc.

<sup>128</sup> Cf Dupuy, 1994, p. 42.

<sup>129</sup> " We must serve God for God and not for ourselves. The majority values its own spiritual self-interest too much. (...) An agitated and interested self-esteem... They go backwards instead of progressing. Cf Dupuy, 1994, p. 307.

quietists is the theory that makes happiness an end in itself. The error of the quietists is to condemn happiness, given by God, to purify love in all its imperfect and interested aspects. For Malebranche, happiness is a by-product of pure love<sup>130</sup>. Happiness, whose dimensions of pleasure and desire touch and interest the person, is a gift to free love, which only motivates love as a means. It becomes interesting, and therefore condemnable, if it is taken as an end in itself.

A modern answer to the quietist problem could be (*Theory of self transcendent consistency*). Coherence is the harmony obtained by integrating needs (*actual* self - the real self - the Ego as transcended) with values (*ideal* self - the ideal self - the Ego as transcendent), for self-transcendence and gift of self to God in free love.

Quietists, in the name of gratuity, rejected interest (egocentrism), desires, pleasures and even, ultimately, love. Quietist disinterestedness is only indifference, not in the sense of Saint Ignatius, but as the opposite of love; it is a dispensation of love, of the will of non-desire, of independence and self-sufficiency; it therefore remains only imaginary, like a secret desire for omnipotence<sup>131</sup>.

### 3.4.3. The slavery of love

The “*slavery of love*”, the perfect expression of true devotion, is a consecration, a total gift of oneself made to God (cf. LEW 219, 225; SM 28-29; TD 121). Paradoxically, the LEW begins with the desire to possess Wisdom and ends with the desire to be possessed by Wisdom in total self-giving. The reciprocity of desire becomes the reciprocity of gift: God gives himself to us, and it is therefore right to give ourselves to him. We must empty ourselves to be filled with God (cf. TD 82, 227). To empty oneself means to die to oneself, to renounce self-love, one's own will, the action of the powers of the soul and the senses (cf. TD 81). This therefore means radically accepting the world of limits. Man knows that he can only be fulfilled by God; only God can satisfy infinite desire.

However, to satisfy this infinite desire, there are two possibilities. The first is

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<sup>130</sup> This is the thought of Frankl (1967, p. 8) for whom self-actualization and self-realization are secondary effects that cannot be sought as an end in themselves.

<sup>131</sup> Cf Rulla-Imoda-Ridick, 1978, p. 41; Rulla, 1986, p. 359.

that of Adam, that of not accepting the limit of being a creature. Non-acceptance is a frustration that is poorly tolerated. Man is nothing, but he desires to be All, that is to say, God; he wants to fill himself with God, with the infinite desire which leads to rejecting the limit. The result is death. To live, all that remains are the symbols of immortality. Disordered love rejects the constitutive limit. It is self-sufficiency as an illusion of omnipotence.

The second possibility is that of Jesus Christ. Unlike Adam, he does not claim to be treated like God; he does not desire the infinite, but the limit and he incarnates by annihilating himself; of All that was, he becomes nothingness, accepts the limit of the creature, suffering and death on the cross. From being independent, he becomes obedient. For Montfort, independence is characteristic of the Divinity, while dependence marks the creature, but also the incarnate Christ: he wants to depend on the Mother, he is submissive, he takes the form of a slave: it is a maximum dependence.

The slavery of love consists of uniting oneself with Christ (Christocentrism) in the movement of kenosis, lowering and self-emptying. Divination, which has incarnation as its matrix, is a movement of kenosis: man must say yes to the world of limits and to his own limit. He descends into the depths of nothingness to be received by God, giving Himself to God to be received by God, possessing Wisdom and being possessed by Wisdom: these are the two movements of Montfortian spirituality; not one without the other, but one with the other.

It is a paradox, but the satisfaction of man's infinite desire is accomplished in the most total renunciation. Renouncing the imaginary desire to be All, accepting limits to the point of nothingness, is also recognizing sin (cf. TD 79-80, 213, 228; H 34/7-8; 114/13; 121/5), and the nothing of the creature (cf. PE 1; H 8/13, 27; 27/1,3; 51/1; 149/3).

The Holy Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfect model of acceptance (cf. LEW 107; TD 25); she accepts being nothing in order to be entirely God's:

*“Mary is entirely relative to God. Indeed, I would say that she was relative only to God, because she exists uniquely in reference to him”* (TD 225).

The relationship between dependence and independence sees three types of slavery (cf. SM 32; TD 70): natural, forced and voluntary. In relation to desire, the slavery of nature, typical of every creature before God, implies an ontological need and therefore a radical dependence on the Creator; the forced one, of the damned and demons who radically reject God, implies a total

independence which, as we have seen, is the claim to be treated by God and to be God. Voluntary slavery is a new dependence on God and a new relationship with the Blessed Virgin, spiritual Mother (cf. TD 31, 37; SM 14). The paradox of the Christian mystery is that spiritual perfection is a new childhood. The Kingdom of God is promised to these children.

Montfort carefully distinguishes between the servant and the slave: the servant, the mercenary (cf. H 28 / 25, 28) has the characteristic of interested love, while the slave of love experiences gratuitous love, it is that is to say, pure love (cf. SM 33; TD 69, 71, 73, 151). Pure love that eliminates servile fear and self-interested love:

*“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”* (TD 215 ; cf. TD 145, 169, 214 ; H 5/27, 46 ; C 45).



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