

# To Jesus Through Mary

## Pastoral Letter, Addressed By His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, To the Clergy and Laity of the Archdiocese of Malines.

By Cardinal Mercier.

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.0938 (1948)

Introduction and biography of Cardinal Mercier by Marius McAuliffe, O.F.M.

### CARDINAL MERCIER.

During the 1914-18 war the name of Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines and Primate of Belgium, became, overnight, a household word in every country. It stood for the very highest peak of heroic courage and patriotic fervour in the face of overwhelming and unscrupulous aggression. It was said of him that "he seemed to be like another Saint Lupus of Troyes confronting Attila and successfully intimidating the terrible king of the Huns." In those grim days, he rallied his people and infused into them his own unshakable trust in the protection of God. When the last great German retreat began that was to mean the end of the war, the German Government, in a personal letter to the Cardinal, used these significant words, "You are to us the incarnation of Occupied Belgium and are her venerated Pastor to whom she hearkens." An Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Though the world knows him as a great National Leader thrown up by the calamity of war, it is as a Great Churchman that he is revered by the Catholic world. He was first and last that which he chose for his motto, "An Apostle of Jesus Christ." From the day of his ordination, which was Holy Saturday, 1874, right to January, 1926, when a king knelt at his dying bedside and a nation mourned outside, Cardinal Mercier, as a true Apostle, lived and worked for one thing only — to establish the Kingdom of God in his own heart and in the minds and hearts of his priests and people. Preparation for Apostleship.

The training of an apostle is long and arduous, no matter how splendid be the natural talents of the would-be apostle. If it were mere brilliance of intellect, genius for organisation, or capacity for leadership that were required, then the whole world would see an abundance of apostles. Natural gifts are, of course, to a certain extent, useful and necessary, but until they have been harnessed to a life of prayer and self-conquest, as well as to that life of inner union with God which is the fruit of a life of prayer, they can be a curse instead of a blessing, a hindrance rather than a help, in the work that is far above all human power. That is why the genuine apostle, the true spiritual leader, is comparatively rare. Human nature shrinks from the complete sacrifice involved.

Cardinal Mercier possessed many and great natural talents, but the power that sustained him, and brought heaven's fruitful blessings on his work, was the interior life of prayer and union with God. This life of prayer began at a pious mother's knee in an excellent Christian home, was developed during studious years in the seminary, and grew ever richer even during his years of many-sided activity as priest, Bishop and Cardinal. One has only to read the many writings and conferences he gave, particularly to his priests, to realise that here was a man who had learned the great secret of

apostleship — namely, walking alone with God while he poured out on a distracting and materialistic world the wealth of his spiritual communings.

The Catholic University of Louvain.

Apart from his spiritual work as priest, and later as Bishop and Cardinal, which, of course, like all true spiritual work, can never be adequately measured, perhaps the outstanding work of his life was his share in founding the renowned Catholic University of Louvain. Had he done nothing else it would have been the achievement of a life-time and would have earned the undying gratitude of every scholar, especially of those who, today, reap the rich fruits of that revival of Scholastic Philosophy which was centred chiefly at Louvain University.

His Devotion to Mary.

Like all great characters, Cardinal Mercier had the heart of a child and the faith of a peasant. His great mind was not dazzled by the little pebbles of truth which, in the words of the mighty Saint Augustine, we are forever picking up like little children on the sands of a boundless shore. So we are not surprised to learn that he had an extraordinary tender and child-like devotion to Our Blessed Lady. To her he dedicated his life and talents. Under her patronage and protection, he carried on the ever-widening apostolate of prayer and voice and pen.

Due to his leadership, the Belgian Bishops have the honour of being the first to petition the Holy Father for the special Office and Mass with which we honour Our Lady as Mediatrix of All Grace. Saint (Blessed) Grignon de Montfort.

His own devotion to Our Blessed Lady was influenced to a great extent by the writings of a French priest, Blessed (Louis) Grignon de Montfort, [canonized in 1947] who about two hundred years ago was an Apostle of Devotion to Mary. (He died on April 28, 1716, at the age of forty three — and now his cause of canonisation has been successfully concluded at Rome.) This great servant of God embodied all his teachings in a treatise which he called "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin." It has had a phenomenal success all over the Catholic world.

Like every good work, this book was immediately challenged by the less spiritually enlightened. It was the "object of special hatred to all those tainted in any degree with the heresy of Jansenism. It was said to be heretical, dangerous, exaggerated and all that kind of thing. However, in 1853, a formal examination of the work was held in Rome. The result of the examination was to declare that it contained "nothing contrary to faith or morals, or any new doctrine contrary to the Church's common sentiment and practice."

Since that time, Popes and Bishops have not merely commended it, but have made it the basis of their own spiritual lives. Pope Pius IX commended it as the best and most acceptable form of devotion to Mary. Pius X gave his Apostolic Benediction to anyone who would even read Blessed [Saint Louis] de Montfort's treatise. Benedict XV referred to the book as "small in size, but of what great authority and what great sweetness! May it be spread ever more and more, and rekindle the Christian spirit in souls in ever-growing numbers." Pope Pius XI told Cardinal Mercier that he not only approved of de Montfort's teachings, but that he had actually, from his earliest years, made it the very basis of his whole spiritual life.

The First English Translation.

We owe the first English translation to the celebrated Father Faber. In the preface, he wrote: "I have translated the whole treatise myself... I venture to warn the reader that one perusal will be far from making him master of it. If I may dare to say so, there is a growing feeling of something inspired and supernatural about it as we go on studying it; and with that we cannot help experiencing, after repeated readings of it, that its novelty never seems to wear off, nor its fulness to be diminished, nor the fresh fragrance and sensible fire of its unction ever to abate. Let a man but try it for himself, and his surprise at the graces it brings with it, and the transformations it causes in his soul, will soon convince him of its otherwise almost incredible efficacy as a means for the salvation of men, and for the coming of the kingdom of Christ." Cardinal Vaughan's Edition.

So highly did the late Cardinal Vaughan rate it that when he was Bishop of Salford he caused a special edition to be brought out which he prefaced by a special letter to the Clergy, Secular and Regular, of his diocese, pointing out to them the need for such a devotion and the fruits that would follow its earnest practice.

A Chorus of Approval.

Before and since that time there have been Bishops, Theologians of the first rank such as August Lehmkuhl, S.J.; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., besides numberless others, who have rejoiced to add their testimony to the growing list of authoritative pronouncements.

All these should surely be more than enough to convince the most sceptical mind and help to dispel the fog of ignorance which has, unfortunately, at times, tended to cloud the real teaching of Blessed [Saint Louis] Grignon de Montfort. It is hoped that the following learned and tender pastoral from the gifted pen of Cardinal Mercier will help still further to make known to Australian and New Zealand readers just how wonderful is the teaching of the saintly Apostle of Mary in his treatise on "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin."

Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral Letter. SUMMARY.

1. General Introduction.
2. Complete Surrender of Oneself to God Through Christ, the Essence of Christian Vitality.
3. This Self-surrender to God and to Christ Through Mary, object of "True Devotion" Set Forth by Blessed [Saint Louis] de Montfort.

First Reason for This Devotion: The Will of Our Divine Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second Reason: Our Own Spiritual Welfare.

4. Development of Catholic Feeling in Grasping the Mystery of Love, as Displayed in the Incarnation and the Redemption.

5. Conclusion: Exhortation to the Practice of Holy Bondage.

6. The Meaning of Holy Bondage According to Montfort's Teaching.

7. An Amplification of This Self-surrender.

8. Act of Consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary, According to the Spirit of Blessed [Saint] Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort.

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

In the Gospel of Saint John, the Evangelist records the fact that at the time when the Divine Messiah worked His first miracle at Cana, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was there: "Et erat Mater Jesu tibi" — "And the Mother of Jesus was there." (John, 2:1.)

This fact is a law. In the mystery of the Redemption which Christ came to accomplish, Mary, His Mother, is always united with Him. She is at the crib; at the Presentation in the Temple; for thirty years she abides with her son at Nazareth; she is on the road to Calvary and on Calvary itself at the foot of the Cross at the hour of the closing tragedy; she is present in the Upper Room at the descent of the Holy Ghost and the foundation of the Church; she sits at the right hand of her Divine Son in the Kingdom of His glory, from whence she shields the Christian world under the mantle of her maternal protection.

During the war, we never wavered in acknowledging this heavenly patronage of the Mother of God. Clergy and faithful, the Catholic University, the religious Orders and the Belgian Hierarchy were unanimous in begging His Holiness Pope Benedict XV to deign to pronounce the universal Mediatorship of the Blessed Virgin as a dogma of Christian belief. The first answer to our petition came to us through the munificence of Pope Benedict XV., who deigned to grant to the dioceses of Belgium, and those dioceses of Christendom that might ask for them, a proper Office and Mass of Our Lady, under the title of Mediatrix of all graces.

Since January 12, 1921, a great number of diocesan churches and religious Orders have expressed their wish to unite with us in our devotion to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Universal Mediatrix.

Our present Holy Father Pope Pius XI deigned to go still further. In November, 1921, he established three theological commissions — one in Belgium, another in Spain, and a third in Rome — instructing each to make a thorough investigation of the doctrine of the Mediation of Mary and its definability. Both the Belgian and the Spanish commissions have finished their task, and it remains for the theologians in Rome to examine their conclusions and complete them before submitting them for the Holy Father's approval. It would seem, then, that the moment for a decision is not far off, whether the Holy Father postpone the definition of the dogma until the re-opening of the Vatican Council, [abruptly interrupted in 1870] or reserve to himself personally the privilege of acting as the authentic interpreter of the instinctive belief that the Catholic world entertains in the Mediation of Mary. We must hasten the arrival of that happy moment.

Once more, I make an appeal to your piety, to the prayers of the faithful and to the practice of self-denial by the more generous souls among them.

In 1913, a group of seminarists conceived the idea of forming a society of prayer and penance for the promotion of the devotion to Mary, our Mediatrix. This society has its statutes and can now count its members by thousands. It is anxious to multiply its numbers tenfold and I recommend it to your personal attention and fatherly care.

During the Marian Congress held in Brussels in 1921, a large number of papers were devoted to the study of Our Lady's mediation, and more recently, in Antwerp, the same topic called forth fresh investigations. These efforts have proved once more how closely the cultus of Mary's mediatorship is bound up with the devotion which the Blessed [Saint Louis] Grignon de Montfort calls "True devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary" or elsewhere "Devotion of holy bondage," and which is spreading throughout the whole world.

A Marist Father has written to me recently that pamphlets on this subject by the Blessed [Saint Louis] Grignion are being circulated abroad with remarkable success. The Flemish edition of "Mary's Secret," of which 40,000 copies were printed in October, 1922, is now exhausted. A fresh edition of the same pamphlet in French and in Flemish to the number of 120,000 copies will also be re-printed and widely circulated. During the splendid festivities, organised for August 14-22 this year by the people of Antwerp to celebrate at one and the same time three great anniversaries, I thought it a favourable occasion during the conference, I was invited to give on "Journee Mariale" (the Marian Day) in Antwerp, to show the connection between the cultus of Our lady as Mediatrix of all graces and the devotion to the Virgin Mother as advocated by the Blessed [Saint Louis] de Montfort. These two devotions are not an innovation in the Church, but are the evolution of beliefs as ancient as is our Faith. They are but a corollary to that which forms the very essence of Christian piety — the surrender of oneself to God through Jesus Christ.

## 2. THE SURRENDER OF ONESELF TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST; THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Do we not acknowledge, we priests, this our absolute dependence upon God and the fundamental law of entire surrender of ourselves to Him through Jesus Christ when in the morning at the altar, during the Canon of the Mass, we compress our devotion into one act of love and filial abandonment to the Divine Majesty, as we hold in our trembling hands the Body of Our Saviour over the chalice of His Most Precious Blood? And, then, lifting up the Body and Blood of the Victim towards the Holy Trinity, we say, in the name of the entire Christian world: "Through Our Saviour Jesus Christ, with Him and in Him, to God the Father Almighty in the unity of the Holy Ghost all honour and glory for ever."

The Apostle, Saint Peter, in similar phrasing, sets forth the fundamental law of religious worship which ascends both from the sacred humanity of Christ and from our Christian souls towards the divine majesty when he asks that "In all things God alone may be honoured through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter, 4:2.)

The Son of God, Eternal Word of the Father, belongs to Him from whom originates all the interior life of the Divinity; this relationship with the Father "ad Patrem" is the characteristic of His Personality. Therefore, the Apostle Saint Paul points out Christ on His coming into the world as communicating to His sacred Humanity this transport of love for His Eternal Father and revealing to us the essential law of His earthly mission by this token of adoration and submission: "Father, behold I come to do Your Will." "When He comes into the world He says: Behold I come to do Your Will, O God." (Hebrews 10:9.)

Now Christ is the supernatural vine whereof we are the branches. He and we form one body of which He is the head and we the members. The divine life which He has received from the Father and which flowed in all its fulness into His sacred Humanity is poured into our souls by His Holy Spirit, giving life thereby to the charity which directs our hearts, penetrated, as it is, with filial love towards our Father, Who is in heaven, and it inspires us to bring all our life to bear on this one object: to love our Heavenly Father above all things and to love ourselves and our neighbour, all our neighbours, for love of Him.

Thus to deliver ourselves up with all that we are and all that we have to God, our supreme and only End, is the essence of religion.

To give ourselves up to God through His Christ, united with Christ, living His life and acting under the influence of the charity which His Divine Spirit gives to our souls, this is the very essence of Christian vitality.

### 3. THE SURRENDER OF OURSELVES TO GOD AND TO CHRIST THROUGH MARY, OUR MOTHER: THE OBJECT OF THE TRUE DEVOTION RECOMMENDED BY THE BLESSED [Saint Louis] DE MONTFORT.

First Reason for the Devotion: The Desire of Our Divine Redeemer, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

If this be so, if the ultimate aim of the plans formed by the love of God in our regard be to win our souls for Christ that He may give them back to His Father and enable them to find peace and happiness "in the bosom of the Father" (John, 1:18), we must expect Divine Providence to insist on our opening our hearts to Divine Love.

In truth, He Who with power and sweetness uses created things for the accomplishment of His designs, by a wondrous blending of nature and grace, has known how to make the purest, strongest and sweetest instincts of the heart of man mount up to his supreme destiny.

In the natural order, the whole fabric of life rests on the family, the father gives it its authority, the mother its tenderness; and the child is the fruit of their love, giving a filial love in return.

These deep-seated instincts the Sovereign Master has deigned to imprint on the organisation of the supernatural life. Infinite love shall pour itself forth into the Word of God made man, but the sacred Humanity of Christ shall not be called forth out of nothingness, as was the flesh of the father of our race, but shall be born of woman. Jesus shall have a Mother, Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Jesus shall be our Saviour and the Author of our spiritual life. "You have killed the author of life" (Acts, 3:15), Saint Peter can say to the people who crucified our Divine Redeemer. But the work of redemption shall not be accomplished until Mary has given her consent to the conception in her virginal womb of the God-man Who is to become our Saviour. He, then, is to be the meriting cause of our participation in a new life, in the very life of God, but Mary is to be its moral cause in our regard by her free co-operation in the economy of divine love.

Henceforth, becoming the children of God, we shall belong by right to the Eternal Father, having as the fundamental law (of our being) the surrender of ourselves to Him that He may reign over us as our King; we shall belong, too, to Christ, the Mediator chosen by God to give Himself to us and to lead us back to Him; but we shall belong also to Mary, who has, in a spiritual sense, brought us forth to the life which her Son bestows upon us, and we should have recourse to her with all those feelings of reverence, submission and affection which make up that delicate and tender sentiment which we call filial love.

Better than all others after Saint Bernard, Saint Antonius, Saint Ephrem, Saint Irenaeus and many other ardent champions of devotion to Our Lady, the Blessed [Saint Louis] Grignon de Montfort has devoted himself to this aspect of the economy of the Redemption namely, to bringing into the light, into the atmosphere, as it were, of family life, the roles of the father, the eldest brother, Jesus, "first-born among many brethren" (Romans, 8:39), the Mother, and, finally, the spiritual children admitted to the intimate privacy of the family circle. We must lay stress upon this general consideration and follow up its applications.

Everything in this world has for its goal the glory of God. For us, our last end lies in the divine love taking complete possession of our souls. For it is by love that God wishes to reign. He has said: "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke, 17:21.) He wishes our inmost being to be His even to the very core. Thus, it is through the heart that He tries to capture us.

To accomplish this, He sends us His Own Son, "For God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son: that whosoever believes in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John, 3:16), but He wishes His Son to have a Mother, and for Him to come to us from her womb, "Born in the world from a Mother's substance," the Athanasian creed expresses it. Yes, God's Son made man shall have a Mother who will bestow upon Him all the love, all the devotion, all the magnanimity of the holiest of mothers. And this, the Mother of Jesus, is to be our Mother also. Thus will there be established between Her and ourselves, Her and her Son and God, those relations which are at once the sweetest, the most intimate and the most enduring of which man's heart is capable.

Jesus knew all the beauty of a mother's heart. Mary loved Him from the moment she conceived and bore Him in her virginal womb, when she gave Him to the world and nourished Him at her breast, when she guided and brought Him up, even to the moment when she sacrificed herself with Him by "compassion" on Calvary.

And the Son has so loved His Mother as to wish to subject himself to her with that humility, tenderness and depth of filial love to which the proud have to yield and by which all unruly thoughts are curbed. "And He was subject to them" (Luke, 2:51), says the Evangelist very simply when he wishes to describe how the Infant God acted towards His Mother and the divinely appointed guardian of the home at Nazareth. What has our Divine Jesus not done for her and what has she not done for Him? Where shall we find an intimacy that can be compared with the union of these two lives?

For the woman destined to give birth to His sacred Humanity, the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father, and the Holy Ghost — the most Holy Trinity — conceives a plan whereby Mary appears as in a world apart, above all worlds, the masterpiece of creation. Alone among the children of men, she shall escape the curse of our race — never shall she, even for an instant, be at enmity with her God. At the moment of her conception, she shall receive grace in all its plenitude. And by her faultless fidelity, she shall cause that grace to fructify so abundantly that to her alone belongs a glory and a supernatural beauty surpassing in its splendour that of all the angels and saints of heaven. She is the Queen of Heaven. Placed beside the peerless throne of God, she stands above all creatures in the Kingdom of Glory.

Having come into this world, Mary's Son associates His Mother with His mission of Redemption in a way He would associate no other human creature. From the moment when the angel Gabriel told her that she was predestined to become the Mother of Jesus and she uttered her 'fiat' of acquiescence, Mary knew that the Son she was to bear in her womb was a victim destined for sacrifice; that she herself would go and offer Him to God in the temple where she was to hear the aged Simeon foretell her own heart's share in the holocaust which He was to consummate on Calvary. And when her Son breathes forth His soul, she, His Mother, is there at the foot of the Cross — she stands there like a priest at the altar. Her Son offers Himself to the God of justice and mercy for the redemption of the world — Mary does so with Him and in the same spirit. And in giving her Son, she also immolates something of herself; for that mangled frame torn like the earth by the

ploughshare, that blood that gushes forth from the wounds and heart of the Lamb of God were taken from the flesh and the blood of the most holy Virgin Mary.

When the Divine Redeemer was about to die and return to His Father, thinking of the mystical body that was to prolong His life on earth and to prepare by suffering the kingdom of the elect, He saw at the foot of His Cross His Mother and the Apostle who had rested on His breast in the Supper Room; the predestined herald of divine love, the prophet of the Church's struggles and conquests as we see them in the Apocalypse. In the person of Saint John, He looks with pity upon helpless man whom He loves even to the shedding of the last drop of blood of His Sacred Heart. He sees love shine forth from the compassionate heart of His Mother towards those countless children who are to be born again to the life of grace. He is their Redeemer, she their co-Redeemer. "Woman," He said to His Mother, "behold your son," and to Saint John, "Behold your mother." (John, 19:26-27.)

That warm atmosphere in which souls must henceforth blossom has been created. Mary is to bestow her motherly care on all the children of God. She has been made a helper in acquiring the graces necessary for salvation — henceforth she is to help in distributing them. She has been the Mother of Sorrows; she shall become the Queen of all Saints.

And, as for us, His adopted brethren, Jesus asks us to love His Mother with a filial devotion — to show towards her that submission, reverence and affection which He Himself had, and which, even in the kingdom of His glory, He faithfully maintains. Without doubt, Christ remains the one, only Mediator between God and man. The Apostle, Saint Paul, is emphatic on this point, and none of Mary's most devoted children and servants think of disputing it: "There is but one Mediator of God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim, 2:5.)

But if there is, strictly speaking, only one principal mediator for all, including the Blessed Virgin Mary herself, it is none the less true that Christ has wished to associate His Mother with Him in the work of redemption and that, in theological parlance, what He by Himself alone merited in strict justice "ex condigno", she has merited, dependently upon Him — by His Own Will, "ex congruo" — that is, by virtue of a befitting gift of His overflowing bounty. He alone — the Son of God made man — is the source of sanctifying grace, the author of our supernatural life.

Nevertheless, if the Apostle, Saint Paul, because of having preached the Gospel to the faithful of Corinth, bringing them thus under the life-giving power of the Blood of the Redemption, can declare that he has begotten them in spirit, "For in Christ Jesus, by the Gospel, I have begotten you" (1 Corinth, 4:15), in that he was the remote moral cause of their birth to the life of Faith, with how much greater reason cannot Mary utter this, she who was in her virginal womb the moral cause of the Incarnation of Him Who was to become our Redeemer, and, further, the principle of life to all the adopted children of God — with how much greater reason, I repeat, has not Mary the right to say that she has begotten us all in theory to the spiritual life? And when, throughout the centuries, even till now she obtains God's graces for us by her all-powerful intercession, when by her sweet and constant solicitude she disposes our souls to correspond with these graces, to live on them and to make them fruitful, what else does she do but perform in our regard the duties of that spiritual maternity towards the Mystical Body of her Divine Son which were entrusted to her on Calvary?

Undoubtedly, the Son of God could very well have come to us without passing through the heart and womb of a Mother. He might have been formed, as was our first parent, Adam, by a direct act of creation, but, in truth, He wished to be born of a Mother, to be formed from her substance, and

thus to become Man-God ("and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man").

If He had derived His sacred Humanity from the Creator only, His duties as man would have been exclusively and immediately directed towards His Father, and in the same way, He would have directed our souls and wills towards His Father exclusively. But, because Divine Providence has been pleased to take into consideration the most profound emotions of our hearts in order to make them susceptible of the knowledge and love we owe to God, because God deigned to give us in Jesus Christ an elder brother and a guide who, even as we, should have a mother, is it not natural that this same Jesus should inspire us with that two-fold interior life which animated His own soul? Would He not draw us to His Father and lead us to His Mother, subject us to His Father and to His Mother also, and not acknowledge the image of His Own Soul in ours save in the measure with which we, as faithful children of God and of Mary, find, like our Divine Model, Jesus, our joy and happiness in glorifying His Father and honouring His Mother?

In view of Christ's attitude towards His Mother and in view of what He has done for her, it is quite inconceivable for Him to expect us to do aught else than join Him in all outward tokens of His filial love. It is impossible to imagine that He would approve of Christians imposing limits to the reverence, the admiration and the devotion they should show to His Mother, who has become their Mother also. In the Church's liturgy, Mary has her cycle of feasts, even as Christ the King has His. In the Divine Office, under the rubrics of Saint Pius V, which priests and religious chant or recite daily, each hour of the day begins and ends with homage to Mary.

Innumerable are the churches dedicated to Our Lady; religious congregations, cities and kingdoms are placed under her patronage. Pilgrimages to Mary's privileged shrines are ever increasing and signs of heaven's favour are abundant in these hallowed spots. Already Christianity had its month of May, which it called the month of Mary, and the great Pope Leo XIII dedicated to her also, in the European autumn, the month of the Holy Rosary. Is this all? Have we done enough to exalt our Mother? No, answers the Blessed [Saint Louis] de Montfort; it is right to offer Mary our homage, but far better to offer ourselves up entirely to her, that she may exercise to the full in our regard the offices of her spiritual motherhood and prepare our souls for the impress of the image of her Divine Son. This is what the "Real Devotion" or "holy bondage" exacts. She opens our hearts to the calls of divine grace, helps us to be responsive to them and encourages us to persevere.

You, my brethren, were filled with joy, as we were, when our Holy Father, Benedict XV, deigned to insert the following declaration in the Office of Our Lady, Mediatrix of all graces, making his own that expressive saying of Saint Bernard: "It is God's plan that everything in the spiritual order should come to us through Mary."

Note it well: "Totum — all" says the Holy Doctor, "totum" repeats the Sovereign Pontiff: everything in the working out of our salvation comes from God through the mediation of Mary. All this which comes to us through Mary is Christ Himself, He Who is par excellence the gift of God of which He Himself spoke to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well, and speaks to each one of us when He says: "If you did know the gift of God!" (John, 4:10.) Yes, He, the Son of God, the Son of Mary, is the gift of God, with all the supernatural riches whereof He is the meriting cause and overflowing source.

The plan of the Christian economy is unfolded: Jesus, the Son of God, has offered Himself to God with His Mother. He comes to us with her. Let us go to Him also and through Him to God under the

protection and care of our Mother. Mary deigns to ask a place in our affection — let us offer it to her unstintingly, without limit and without conditions. She has but one ambition: to capture our hearts and inspire them with filial love in order to bear them to her Divine Son, Who is the sole end of her very existence and of her motherhood, and through Him and with Him and in Him to lead us even to the throne of the Blessed Trinity.

The devotion, such as de Montfort understands it, is none other than this childlike giving of oneself without reserve to God and His Christ, through the hands of Mary.

"With Mary," with her as guide and protectress, sheltered under her maternal mantle against the perils of this life's journey, against enemies from without and within.

"In Mary," in that blessed heart, in which is concentrated all the purity of a virgin, ever burning with all the love of a mother. Our intentions, our yearnings are blended with hers, our desires are hers; from her we receive our spiritual formation in its beginnings, in its progress, and in its accomplishment. We are humble little ones, nourished and reared by an all-wise, all-loving and all-holy Mother.

"By Mary, with Mary, in Mary," to Christ and God: such, in brief, is what is meant by "the true devotion to Mary" and of "holy bondage."

Thus falls to the ground of itself the objection which we are so often tempted to raise: why pass through Mary? Why not go straight to our chief Mediator Jesus Christ Himself? Why? For two reasons.

First, because such is God's wish and the wish of His Divine Son, the eternal Son of God and, on earth, the Son of Mary. We have, we think, made it superabundantly clear. And, secondly, as a sequel to this, because it is to our interest. Second Reason for "True Devotion to Mary": Our Spiritual Welfare.

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," says our Saviour in the Apocalypse, "the Monarch Who was, Who is and Who is to come." (Apocalypse, 1:8.) To acknowledge this kingship is one of the principles of elementary justice; to give one-self back to God of one's own free will is the very essence of the moral virtue of religion. A Christian gives himself back to God through the mediation of our Saviour Jesus Christ: that is why all his prayers end with this invocation: "Through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But there are two ways of going to God and of giving ourselves to Him through His Christ: two roads, two methods — one that I would call that of philosophers, the other that of little children. The first is more flattering to our self-love because in it we are conscious of a greater control over our plans, more confident in our own efforts, more inclined to attribute the merit of our actions to ourselves; and man loves to be someone and for others to know it. The second is unknown to the world — one at which the mere philosopher (in the rationalistic "lay" sense of the word) shrugs his shoulders. It is at the very opposite pole to self-glorification, so dear to the spirit of our days. But it has the unrivalled advantage of being inspired by the Gospels, supported by the teaching and the example of Christ and His Mother, and of the most glorious among the elect. We mentioned the first method not so long ago, when having occasion to speak of the part that prayer should take in our private life and in our work for souls, we said: Too often, we look upon prayer as a refuge to which we have recourse only in times of distress. We do not regard it sufficiently as the source of all our

activity, bound up with it as it should be at all times and be also the pledge of our unwavering perseverance.

We have no intention of condemning those who use this method. Their habitual aim is correct, their endeavours are faultless, their achievements in general irreproachable. But how far greater, surer, and more fruitful is the much simpler method of little children!

One day, says the Evangelist, the seventy-two disciples returned, joyous and triumphant, to their Divine Master and said to Him: "Master, even the devils are subject to us, we drive them out." "It is not the power of casting out devils that matters," answered Our Lord, "but what matters is that your names be written in the book of life." Then, Saint Luke continues, the Divine Messiah, under the thrilling influence of the Holy Ghost, said: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I declare here in Your sight, that You have hidden this mystery (that of the predestination of the elect) from the wise ones of this world and revealed it to little ones. Yes, Father, for so it has seemed good in Your sight." (Luke, 10:21, and Matthew, 2:25.) This discourse, one of the Evangelist's masterpieces, is, so to speak, our Divine Teacher's syllabus. To those who throng at His Feet and ask for a rule of life He answers: Become as little children; forget yourselves, root out all your own ideas, cease your striving after new ideas and the satisfying of self-love, die to yourself, and on the ruins of your pride and egoism I will build up the edifice of your sanctification.

The true motto of a Christian and an Apostle is not the development of our own interests. Saint Paul puts it as follows: "It is not a question of individual will, nor of natural eagerness, but the essential feature is to place one's trust in the mercy of God." "So, then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." (Romans, 9:16.) Humility — the admission of our absolute poverty and innate powerlessness — must be set at the very foundation of our moral and religious life. Ah, yes, but then there soon rise up in the soul natural temptations to unrest, fears for the morrow, and discouragement. From the depths of our misery, we cry out to God in the words of the Psalmist. "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains: whence shall help come to me?" The answer from on high is prompt: "My help is from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 120:1-2 in the Vulgate or Psalm 121:1-2 in the Hebrew.) Now, no better means can be found for imparting this spirit of simplicity and dependence which the holy Gospels breathe, than a filial abandonment to her who, in the order of grace, is our Mother, our good Mother, all-powerful in her intercession, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We, poor children of Eve, exiled in this valley of tears, wish from the depths of our heart to belong to God and to His Christ irrevocably and without reserve. But nature protests and rivets us down to helplessness. Then, behold a mother with her gracious smile advances towards us opening wide her arms and her heart to us. She is the gate of heaven ever open to our hopes: "Heaven's ever open gate." She offers to guide our footsteps, sustain our courage and soothe our sorrows: "Hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope." We need tremble no more — Mary is the Mother of compassion. She knows what is good for us and what are our needs. She loves us far more than we can love ourselves, because her love for us is that same love which she has for her Divine Son to Whom she ardently desires to consecrate us: "Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy... Turn then, O most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy towards us." Let us entrust to her the office of dedicating us for ever to her Son and the Eternal Father according to that touching prayer of the Mass of Mary our Mediatrix: "We beseech You, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary our Mediatrix, grant that the oblation of these sacrificial elements may transform us, by the action of Your merciful grace, into an offering whole and entire to belong to You for ever." Did we not have good reason for saying that

devotion for Mary understood in this way is no more than a consequence of all that is most essential in the Christian life? No, Montfort has made no innovation; he has but developed tradition.

#### 4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC FEELING IN GRASPING THE MYSTERY OF LOVE AS DISPLAYED IN THE INCARNATION AND REDEMPTION.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century, following on the revelations made by Our Lord to a Visitandine of Paray-le-Monial, many faithful souls were seized with a keen and haunting dread. They were afraid that the confidante of the Sacred Heart was the victim of an unhealthy imagination such as prudence prompted them to distrust. We are apt to lose sight of the truth that in Catholic tradition, progress keeps pace with continuity. Devotions, like dogmas, remain identical in substance, but develop gradually at the same pace as Christian piety.

It is undeniable that our Saviour's revelations to Saint Margaret Mary have given to the Church a more concrete and penetrating insight into the Mystery of Love embodied in the Incarnation and Redemption. As we view this doctrine, which is as old as Christianity itself, and is displayed in the symbol of the human heart of Our Lord, we realise better that the Redemption of the world by Christ is a work of love, that it is the outpouring of divine love carried so far as to impel the heart of a God made man to shed His Blood over the world to cleanse it from its stains and transform it into a mystical body fit to be united to the holiness of the Godhead, as a spouse all-pure, all-chaste, all-beautiful and ever-youthful, is united to the bridegroom who has won her at the price of his sacrifice.

It would seem that the time has come for another aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption to be set in bolder relief before the Christian mind.

It is an evident and absolute certainty that Jesus Christ is, in strict justice, the one Mediator between God and man, according to the Apostle, Saint Paul: "For there is one God: and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim, 2:5.) But with ever-increasing fervour do theology and the piety of the faithful delight in placing Mary at the side of Christ, He being the sole mediator by principal title, and she co-Mediatrix by a subordinate one.

The universal, meritorious cause of the Redemption is, in strict justice, Christ alone. But Mary, in giving her consent to the Incarnation of Him Who was to become our Redeemer, has shared, in a subordinate degree, in the work of Redemption.

God alone is the productive cause of grace; but Mary, by the acquiescence of her will in the Incarnation of the Word in her virginal womb, has become the moral cause.

The fruits of the Redemption and their distribution belong by right to Christ alone, but it has pleased God to associate Mary universally in the office of dispenser. Saint Bernard and Benedict XV could, therefore, justly declare that, in fact, Divine Providence wishes everything to come to us through Mary: "Such is His Will, that we should have everything through Mary."

#### 5. CONCLUSION: AN EXHORTATION TO THE PRACTICE OF HOLY BONDAGE.

Go, therefore, with loving confidence to Mary, all ye Christians, and especially you who aim at a life of perfection. "Unless you become as little children," said Our Lord, "you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The little child has not the use of his liberty; he is incapable of personal initiative; he can do nothing for his own livelihood or welfare; in all things and for everything, he depends on his father and

mother. And this dependence is a benefit to him: Providence has arranged it so, for the father and mother, whose love for their child is innate, devote themselves all the more readily to it, the greater is his weakness and dependence upon them.

That which the little child is by nature, Christ asks us to become by an act of our free will. He wishes us to make ourselves the children of a Father Whose Heart overflows with love for us. Far better than we do, He knows what is good for us, and His mercy will with perfect wisdom accomplish fully the designs of His love.

It is left to us to choose between weakness and omnipotence, ignorance and omniscience, the whims of self-love and the guidance of the all-sovereign Wisdom.

Which shall we have? Which should we reasonably choose?

Christ has pointed out to us the better choice. Become as little children, He has told us; abase yourselves to voluntary helplessness, love to be subordinate, to be the slaves of My love, and I will open wide the gates of My Kingdom to you. There will you grow up; and the day will come when I shall place you with My Apostles upon thrones beside Me as supreme judges of the world.

And here, brethren, I am constrained to remind you of those wonderful words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: "It has pleased God to choose," says the Apostle, "the weak ones of the world in order to confound the strong. That which in the world is of no account is chosen to utterly destroy what is considered of great value. Does it not follow, then, that before God no human power can glory in its personal achievements?" We hold from God our origin in Christ Jesus, Who has become for us, on the part of God, a principle of wisdom and justice, of holiness, of sanctity, and of freedom: so that, as the Scriptures say, "man cannot glory except in the Lord." (1 Corinth, 1:30-31.) We always come back to the same fundamental doctrine: what is essential is that honour and glory be offered to God alone: "To the only God be honour and glory for ever and ever." (1 Tim, 1:17.) As for us, we are useless servants: "We are unprofitable servants." (Luke, 17:10.) Not that God does not look for some effective and useful co-operation from us, but in the sense that He has no need of us, for did He wish it, His creative omnipotence could produce in an instant whole legions of servants better and more docile than we are.

The humility, upon which all the ethics of evangelical perfection rest, is truth. But the truth is that the primitive relationship of the creature with his Creator is that of nothingness with that of Being, of nothing with that of everything. "Let man glory, then," says Saint Paul, "but let him derive all his glory from his supreme Master in Whom he lives, and moves, and is." "He that glories let him glory in the Lord." (2 Corinth, 10:17.) "For in Him we live and move and are." (Acts, 17:28.)

In order to make it easy for us to acquire this spirit of dependence, impregnated as it is, with childlike love, conformable to the Gospel, the Blessed [Saint Louis] de Montfort recommends us to dedicate ourselves to Mary our Mother in what he calls the "Devotion of holy bondage."

## 6. "HOLY BONDAGE" AS UNDERSTOOD BY MONTFORT.

The word "bondage" sometimes alarms ill-informed souls. I frankly admit that at one time it shocked me also. The reason is that slavery or bondage generally awakens thoughts of pagan despotism under which the slave was regarded as his master's property and to whose will and whims he was obliged to submit. It recalls also the idea of the hideous market-places of Africa where women and children are sold like cattle by public auction. Hence, the tendency to imagine that, to make oneself a slave of one's own accord, means to renounce that liberty of the sons of God

of which we are so justly proud, to give up our moral personality, to debase ourselves. No one, it is true, dares to come to this definite conclusion. A secret voice warns us that the servant of God whose writings the Church has judged as irreproachable, whose public worship she sanctions and who is followed by legions of fervent and holy disciples, could not be the author of a doctrine that would lead to spiritual degradation. But, nevertheless, it is certain that the word "bondage," understood in a wrong sense, would frighten some souls, would check their pious emotions, and would paralyse in many the desire to devote themselves entirely to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

There are bondsmen who are such by force and who are exploited and cruelly treated by their masters. There are others who become slaves of their own accord and to whom their masters guarantee a secure livelihood, protection, and enduring guardianship.

A religious surrenders the free disposal of his property in order by withdrawing himself from worldly cares to give himself up more entirely to the service of God. The religious thus makes himself a slave, in the canonical sense of the word, but, spiritually, he becomes freer; his apparent slavery turns to his profit.

In a more general sense, a conscious and willing bondsman is he who, mistrusting his own weakness, seeks to lean upon a stronger arm than his own in order to walk with a firmer and surer step. And when that arm is the arm of a father or mother, the bondage is one of love.

It is of this bondage of love that Grignon de Montfort speaks.

His aim is to drag us away from our miseries, to apply a remedy to our state of weakness, to lead us to the attainment of security and freedom in the heart and in the arms of a mother who is all-powerful with the Heart of God.

It is an irrevocable enlistment in God's service without any mercenary motive, springing alone from filial love: it is that and that only. By it, the soul ties itself down to the surrender of itself to the spirit of God: it is "spiritual." It is prompted by the most perfect charity: and, therefore, is "holy." It frees the heart from the chains of egoism: it is voluntary and possesses the most favourable features of true liberty.

"Do you know," asks Saint Theresa, "what it means to be truly spiritual? It is to make oneself one of God's slaves and, as such, to bear His brand, which is that of the Cross; it means giving up our liberty to Him so completely that He may even sell us, as He Himself was sold, for the salvation of the world. It means believing that His dealing with us in this wise not only does us no harm, but, on the contrary, bestows a great favour upon us."

So let us not be frightened by the sound of the word. Let us aim at reality and grasp the meaning of the Gospel. Let us value ourselves at our proper worth: weak and, after all, always destitute.

Let us resolutely become "the slaves of God, the slaves of Mary." Let us give ourselves up wholeheartedly to our Mother's care. In our spiritual life, let us surrender to her our initial efforts, our progress; the present and future. In our labours and in our trials, let us keep under the mantle of her maternal protection. As for us — priests of the Lord — let us be disciples and, at the same time, propagators of "true devotion"; our personal holiness and also the success of our work for souls depend upon it. Once given wholly to Mary, let us live in peace; let nothing from without or from within trouble our serenity. We shall then be under the care of the most powerful and the most loving of Mothers now and at the hour of our death.

## 7. THE EXTENT OF OUR SELF-SURRENDER AS UNDERSTOOD BY DE MONTFORT.

I know of no act comprising more fully all that the soul can dedicate to God and to Christ than this act of renunciation or of "bondage" such as it is understood by the Blessed [Saint Louis] de Montfort. The dominion of charity increases in the measure that egoism decreases.

The evangelical counsels, as they are generally practised, entail the surrender of worldly goods, the pleasures of the senses, and the independence of one's own will.

But the devotion of the Servant of God goes further: it renounces even the free disposal of whatever in our spiritual life can be given up. Without doubt, our merit in the strict sense of the word entitling us in justice to eternal glory is inalienable and strictly personal. But those merits which give us a right to the remission of the penalties for the expiation of our forgiven sins — and our intercessory merits which will enable us to gain heavenly favours or temporal ones for ourselves or for others, are not so personal that they cannot be renounced. If I can renounce them, says de Montfort, I do so, convinced that the less of self I bring into the working out of my salvation the more I help the full effective action of Him Who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Ah, yes, that abandonment which the Servant of God advocates, and of which he sets the example, goes very far, even, it would seem, to an unlimited degree. God alone measures for each soul the extent; God alone will give it effect according to His plans for each one of His elect provided they abandon themselves to His love and guidance.

Now is it not precisely this for which generous souls in our own day are striving? As the true followers of Christ become rarer and rarer, does it not seem that those who desire to remain irrevocably faithful to Him should feel the growing necessity of giving and sacrificing all to Him?

## 8. ACT OF CONSECRATION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

[To Cardinal Mercier's stirring words, we now append an Act of Consecration, taken from the writings of Saint Louis de Montfort.] O Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom! O sweetest and most adorable Jesus! True God and true man, only Son of the Eternal Father, and of Mary, always virgin! I adore You profoundly in the bosom and splendours of Your Father during eternity; and I adore You also in the virginal bosom of Mary, Your most worthy Mother, in the time of Your Incarnation. I give You thanks for that You have annihilated Yourself, taking the form of a slave in order to rescue me from the cruel slavery of the devil. I praise and glorify You for that You have been pleased to submit Yourself to Mary, Your holy Mother, in all things, in order to make me Your faithful slave through her. But, alas! Ungrateful and faithless as I have been, I have not kept the promises which I made so solemnly to You in my Baptism; I have not fulfilled my obligations; I do not deserve to be called Your child, nor even Your slave; and as there is nothing in me which does not merit Your anger and Your repulse, I dare not come by myself before Your most holy and august Majesty. It is on this account that I have recourse to the intercession of Your most holy Mother, whom You have given me for a mediatrix with You. It is through her that I hope to attain of You contrition, the pardon of my sins, and the acquisition and preservation of wisdom.

Hail, then, O Immaculate Mary, living tabernacle of the Divinity, where the Eternal Wisdom willed to be hidden and to be adored by angels and by men! Hail, O Queen of Heaven and earth, to whose empire everything is subject which is under God. Hail, O sure refuge of sinners, whose mercy fails no one. Hear the desires which I have of the Divine Wisdom; and for that end receive the vows and offerings which in my lowliness I present to you. I, (Name your self), a faithless sinner, renew and

ratify today in your hands the vows of my Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his pomps and works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before. In the presence of all the heavenly court, I choose you this day for my Mother and Mistress. I deliver and consecrate to you, as your slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past, present and future; leaving to you the entire and full right of disposing of me, and all that belongs to me, without exception, according to your good pleasure, for the greater glory of God, in time and in eternity.

Receive, O benignant Virgin, this little offering of my slavery, in honour of, and in union with, that subjection which the Eternal Wisdom deigned to have to your maternity, in homage to the power which both of you have over this poor sinner, and in thanksgiving for the privileges with which the Holy Trinity has favoured you. I declare that I wish henceforth, as your true slave, to seek your honour and to obey you in all things. O admirable Mother, present me to your dear Son as His eternal slave, so that as He has redeemed me by you, by you He may receive me! O mother of Mercy, grant me the grace to obtain the true Wisdom of God; and for that end receive me among those whom you love and teach, whom you lead, nourish, and protect as your children and your slaves. O faithful Virgin, make me in all things so perfect a disciple, imitator and slave of the Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ your Son, that I may attain, by your intercession and by your example, to the fullness of His age on earth and of His glory in Heaven. Amen.

Source: True Devotion to Mary (Saint Louis Marie De Montfort).

True Devotion to Mary by Saint Louis Marie De Montfort had its first English translation by Father Faber.

---