

## St. Louis Marie de Montfort on the End Times

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### MONTFORT'S CONCEPTION OF EARTHLY TIME

#### 1. Relationship between time and eternity

For Montfort, the primary term of reference for evaluating our time on earth is eternity. He often links time and eternity as two essential stages in the life of Christ wisdom (**LEW (The Love of Eternal Wisdom)** 13, 14, 19, 95, 223) and the life of humans (**LEW** 2, 51: **TD (True Devotion to Mary)** 265; **SM (The Secret of Mary)** 69). Eternity is the axis of reference, a lasting phase, while our time on earth is brief, and valuable only insofar as it prepares us for blissful eternity: *“Your momentary suffering will be changed into an eternity of happiness”* (**LEW** 180).

The value of worldly time is relative: it must be directed toward eternity. Montfort coins the phrase: *“in time and in eternity”* (**LEW** 2, 225; **FC (Letter to the Friends of the Cross)** 21; **TD** 265; **H (Hymns)** 20:18; 77:20), which he applies to the glorification of God, to the possession of Wisdom, and to the gift of oneself to Christ through the hands of Mary. By contrast, those who give absolute value to their time on earth rather than eternity are *“blind,” “imposters”* who *“to Heaven prefer the earth / . . . and time to eternity”*(**H**29:72).

#### 2. Appreciating the true value of time

For Montfort, earthly time is precious, *“of immense value”* (**H** 30:8), and not *“one single moment”* should be lost. He laments the time spent in the search for comfort and diversion (**LEW** 81) or the philosopher's stone (**LEW** 88), and in the useless company of others, even the devout (**LEW** 200). Montfort views time as a gift from God *“to acquire heaven / when our actions are just”* (**H** 30:7) and later as a totality that must be offered to God. Intermittent devotion to Mary, praying to her *“occasionally”* (**SM** 25) and serving her *“only for a time”* (**SM** 33), is not enough: we must consecrate ourselves *“to God through Mary”* as a slave of love, *“for life”* (**SM** 32-33, **TD** 71).

The time in which Montfort is interested has nothing to do with seasonal changes, even though he is admitting Wisdom when he expresses his *“wonderment at the changes we see in the seasons and the weather”*; they are the seasons of salvation. He is attentive to *“time marked for the redemption of men”* (**LEW** 33), which transforms time into a *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* and confers on it *“the price of Jesus' blood”* (**H** 30:8). When he dies, the sinner, like those who play with cards and dice, will have *“a thousand regrets / For having lost his time this way / In games and pastimes of today, / While never doing penance”* (**H** 30:8).

## II. MONTFORT AND THE END TIMES

### 3. Scenario of the end times

Comparative study of the three works in which Montfort speaks of the end times (**SM**, **PM**, **TD**) leads us to distinguish four successive and intersecting stages. Together they make up the scenario of the final days of the Church.

**a. First stage: tragic state of the Church.** In the eyes of a missionary and mystic like Montfort, the state of the Church and the society of his time offered scarce consolation. Although historians agree that conditions at the close of the seventeenth century improved as a result of the intense pastoral commitment of the French clergy, Montfort would disagree. In his converging texts, he refers to the “*universal failure*” of contemporary Christian practice (**TD** 127), to the “*corrupt kingdom of the world*” (**SM** 59) and the reign of the enemies of God (**PM** 4). The encroaching wave of sin takes on cosmic dimensions and does not spare even the Church herself: “*Your Gospel is thrown aside, torrents of iniquity flood the whole earth carrying away even your servants. The whole land is desolate, ungodliness reigns supreme, your sanctuary is desecrated and the abomination of desolation has even contaminated the holy place*” (**PM** 5; see also **PM** 14: “*the ever-swelling flood of iniquity*”). The Church herself has become a “*languishing heritage,*” “*so weakened and besmirched by the crimes of her children*” (**PM** 20). Behind the domination of sin, Montfort sees the work of the devil, which is “*daily increasing until the advent of the reign of anti-Christ*” (**TD** 51). Montfort is so dismayed that he invokes his own death if divine intervention does not bring a change: “*Send me your help from heaven or let me die*” (**PM** 14). Thus does he feel compelled to send up a cry of alarm when confronted with such a grave and imminent danger: “*The House of God is on fire! . . . Help!*” (**PM** 28).

**b. Second stage: divine intervention within salvation history.** This intermediary stage is the most dynamic and active, because during this stage we pass from the reign of sin to the reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts of men and women. Montfort is convinced that the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ should not be projected into the hereafter but must come into existence on earth, in this world: “*Is it not true that your kingdom must come?*” (**PM** 5). This is the leitmotif of **TD** from its first sentence: “*It was through the blessed Virgin Mary that Jesus Christ came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world*” (**TD** 1; cf. 13, 22, 49, 157, 217, 262). Who will be able to transform the world? For Montfort there is no doubt: God alone can accomplish such a task. He will intervene with “*a deluge of fire, love and justice*” through the mediation of the Spirit and the manifold acts of Mary (**PM** 13, 15, 24-25; **TD** 49-56). This divine intervention will be through and in mankind, especially through the “*apostles of the end times*” (**TD** 58). Their task will be twofold: “*destroying sin and setting up the kingdom of Jesus*” (**SM** 59).

**c. Third stage: the Second Coming and reign of Jesus Christ.** There is no doubt that “the whole Church expect[s] him [God] to come and reign over all the earth and to judge the living and the dead” (SM 58). This Second Coming of Jesus will lead successively to the reign of Jesus in the world and to the Last Judgment, although not in tandem. Here we see the characteristic vision of Montfort: the universal and stable reign of Jesus (PM 4) anticipated in time as an effect of his coming. Jesus “comes in glory once again to reign upon earth” (TD 158), “the knowledge and the kingdom of Jesus Christ must come into the world” (TD 13), “you yourself will ask of Jesus, together with Mary, that he come with his kingdom on earth.” It is not a visible and personal advent of Jesus and a temporal kingdom, as millenarians would hope for; Montfort insists that the kingdom of Jesus is “in the hearts” (TD 113) or “in our soul” (TD 68). In other words, Jesus will reign when by the intervention of Mary, he is known, loved, and served (TD 49). In TD 217, we have the logical and perhaps even chronological steps: reign of Mary, coming of the Spirit, reign of Jesus Christ. We also see here how Montfort spirituality has as its goal the establishment of the kingdom of Christ: “When will that happy day come . . . when God’s Mother is enthroned in men’s hearts as Queen, subjecting them to the dominion of her great and princely Son?” (TD 217).

**d. Fourth stage: the deluge of the fire of justice and the Last Judgment.** Montfort describes the end of time and the world from a pneumatological and then a Christological perspective. In the first, the deluge of the fire of love will be followed by the deluge of the fire of justice, an expression of divine anger, which “reduces the whole world to ashes” (PM 16-17). In the Christological version, the reign of Christ in the world is followed, as if in continuation of his Second Coming or the Parousia, by the universal judgment: God will “come and reign over all the earth and to judge the living and the dead” (SM 58). Then the end times themselves will end, and the true eschatology—will begin.

#### 4. The protagonists

In the four stages (tragedy, drama, happiness, and finally destruction and judgment) of the end times, various personages will play a role.

**a. The Trinity.** This is the principal and final Agent, Who is the origin of the plan for salvation and on Whom the glory of what has taken place in time reflects (TD 22; 50,6).

The three Divine Persons display Their efficacious works in the end times, beginning with God the Father, to Whom Montfort attributes “merciful plans” (PM 2); the selection, dispatch, and formation of the great saints at the end of time (TD 47-48, 57); the revelation of Mary (TD 50, 55); the enmity between Mary and her children and the devil and his children (TD 52, 54); and the knowledge of time and of how the end times will unfold (TD 59; SM 58).

The protagonist of salvation is Jesus Christ. His Second Coming on earth becomes real, and he once again reigns over men and judges them (**SM** 58-59; **TD** 48, 217); the purpose of the time of revelation is to lead us to know, love, and serve him (**TD** 49). The apostles of the end times will be “the true disciples of Jesus Christ” (**TD** 59). The Lord Jesus will again assume the power to give to Mary “*this new company so that you may renew all things through her*” (**PM** 6). The missionaries will be established on Mary, the mountain of God, and “*Jesus Christ, who dwells there forever, will teach them in his own words the meaning of the eight beatitudes*” (**PM** 25).

The work of the Spirit is preponderant and efficacious. The Spirit intervenes in the end times with a “deluge of fire, love and justice” (**PM** 16-17), like a new Pentecost. The Spirit will “*create priests who burn with this same fire and whose ministry will renew the face of the earth*” and renew the world (**PM** 17); the Spirit will sanctify them (**PM** 15), assemble them (**PM** 20-21), and send them on their mission (**PM** 9; **TD** 57)

**b. Mary.** She is one of the principal protagonists and supports, acting in many ways in the end times and in collaboration with the three Divine Persons. With the Most High and by His will, Mary forms the apostles and the great saints (**TD** 47, 59). With Christ, she does battle with the proud Satan (**TD** 52, 54; **PM** 12-13) and brings the years of grace to an end with the new company of missionaries that the Son, dying on the Cross, entrusted to her (**PM** 1, 6). With the Holy Spirit, Mary is entrusted with begetting the sons of God and forming the saints of the end times (**PM** 11, 15). The end times bring the full revelation of Mary, not in the sense of a deeper abstract knowledge, but insofar as we will experience her presence. She will be revealed in her merciful love toward sinners, in her battle against the enemies of God, and in her support of the faithful disciples of Christ: “*In these end times Mary must shine forth more than ever in mercy, power and grace*” (**TD** 50, 6). The Mother of God is a spiritual leader and teacher for the apostles of the end times, particularly the Missionaries of the Company of Mary. Montfort affirms this by applying to Mary the symbolism of the mountain: those who live in her grow in holiness and learn of contemplation and intercession. They are introduced to the logic of the evangelical beatitudes and participate in the mysteries of Christ that took place on the mountain: the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, and the Ascension (**PM** 25).

**c. The apostles of the end times.** They are the necessary instruments for the realization of God’s plan, as will be detailed below.

**d. Satan.** Satan establishes his own plan in opposition to God’s plan. He will plot dire attacks on the heel of Mary (**TD** 54; **PM** 13), he will redouble his attacks (**TD** 50), and he will instigate wicked persecutions that will increase until the reign of the Antichrist (**TD** 51). The devil will lead the battle with the enemies of God, who will be his active intermediaries in the end times; trembling with rage, they are ready to break out in every direction, rebelling, uniting, and sounding the alarm (**TD** 48, 50; **PM** 5, 27, 28).

### III. THE APOSTLES OF THE END TIMES

Although this phrase, (TD 58) of Montfort, is used only once, it summarizes his thought on the end times. He describes at length the condition, activity, and spirituality of these apostles.

#### 1. Who are they?

Their identity gradually becomes clear. Montfort speaks first of *“great saints”* (TD 47), *“great souls filled with grace and zeal”* (TD 48). He then refers to them as *“the valiant soldiers and loyal servants of Jesus Christ . . . the true children and servants of the Blessed Virgin”* (TD 50,6; 52; 54), *“the elect”* (TD 55), *“these servants, these slaves, these children of Mary”* (TD 56). Finally he refers to their sacerdotal character: *“ministers of the Lord . . . the children of Levi”* (TD 56), *“true apostles of the end times . . . in the midst of other priests, ecclesiastics and clerics”* (TD 58). In his ardent prayer for vocations to the Company of Mary, he speaks of *“missionaries”* (PM 3, 20, 21, 25) and of *“priests”* (PM 2, 18, 25, 29). His proposed congregation of missionary priests forms the core of these apostles. But the activity and the mighty battles of the end times must not be reserved to them alone. In two other prophetic texts, Montfort speaks more generally of *“chosen souls”* in whom Mary will reign sovereign (TD 217), and he enlarges the horizon to embrace *“a mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women”* (TD 114).

#### 2. Their activity

The work of the apostles of the end times swings essentially around two poles, one negative, the other positive: *“destroying sin and establishing the reign of Jesus Christ”* (SM 59). The first pole involves a series of aggressive actions against the forces of evil: they *“will give battle, overthrowing and crushing”* (TD 48), they *“will thunder against sin, they will storm against the world, they will strike down the devil and his followers”* (TD 57), they *“will be the odor of death to the great, the rich and the proud of this world”* (TD 56). In the PM, along the same lines, Montfort foresees missionaries who will attack and overthrow the *“enemies of God”* (PM 8, 29), who will *“crush the head of the serpent”* (PM 12), *“address their ardent prayers to heaven, turning them into the weapons which will overcome or convert their enemies”* (PM 25). The positive pole, which is described in more detail, consists of actions directed at the reform of the Church and its extension into the world: their *“ministry will renew the face of the earth and reform your Church”* (PM 17). With this objective, the apostles of the end times will carry out sanctifying apostolic work: they *“will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love”* (TD 56); *“wherever they preach, they will leave behind them nothing but the gold of love”* (TD 58); they will be the *“sweet fragrance of Jesus”* (TD 56). They will *“build the temple of the true Solomon and the mystical city of God”* (TD 48), and they will *“shower down the rain of God’s word and of eternal life”* (TD 57). Moreover, they will work to extend the Lord’s empire *“over the impious, the idolaters and Muslims”* (TD 49), receiving the deluge of fire that will empower them to convert *“Muslims, idolaters and even Jews”* (PM 17).

### 3. Their spirituality

**c. The Marian experience.** Montfort describes this with enthusiasm: “*these great souls . . . will be exceptionally devoted to the Blessed Virgin. Illumined by her light, nourished at her breast, guided by her spirit, supported by her arm, sheltered under her protection*” (TD 48; cf. also 55). They are “those who belong to the Blessed Virgin,” her “*true children and servants,*” “*her humble slaves and children,*” “*her heel,*” who will crush the head of the serpent (TD 54).

**d. The experience of the Cross.** There are various reasons for this experience: the need to be “*thoroughly purified by the fire of Great Tribulations*” and to carry “*the myrrh of mortification in their body*” (TD 56); the fact that they will be preaching devotion to Mary, which “*will make many enemies*” (TD 48); the description of the “*heel*” of Mary, which implies that they will be “*down-trodden and crushed*” (TD 54).

These four elements are found in the spirituality of the apostolic men whom Montfort describes in the PM. These apostles will be united with God, because they are “*enriched by the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth*” (PM 25); “*entirely dependent on Providence, who will feast to their heart’s content on the spiritual delights you provide*” (PM 21); and endowed with “*their great love for Jesus Christ which enables them to carry his cross*” (PM 24); uniquely preoccupied with the “*glory*” of the Holy Spirit (PM 23), whose breath urges them forward to their mission (PM 9). In addition, they will burn with “*holy anger*” and “*ardent zeal*” (PM 21), because the Holy Spirit will create “*priests who burn with the same fire*” (PM 17) and who will have a “*perfect love . . . for their neighbor*” (PM 24). They will do battle against the enemies of God “*with the Cross for their staff and the Rosary for their sling*” (PM 8) and with an irresistible wisdom (PM 22, 25), and “*they will crush the head of the serpent wherever they go*” (PM 12). They will thus become the “*true children . . . true servants of the Blessed Virgin*” (PM 11, 12), characterized by “*their true devotion to Mary*” (PM 12) and her maternal solicitude (PM 11, 25). Finally, they will experience persecutions and crosses, because “*the devil will lie in wait to attack the heel of this mysterious woman, that is, the little company of her children*” (PM 13).

Montfort expresses the spirituality of these missionaries using meteorological symbols (rain, snow: PM 20, 25), cosmic symbols (fire, sun: PM 12), and animals (dogs, lambs, doves, eagles, bees, deer, lions: PM 13), especially those of the four evangelists (man, lion, ox, eagle: PM 21). The key word that embodies this spirituality and that Montfort repeats six times, each time in a way that gives it new meaning, is *liberos*, in the twofold etymological sense of “free” and “son”: the missionaries of the “*special reign*” of the Spirit are free of all human ties (PM 7). They will accomplish God’s plans with a total availability; their means will be poverty (PM 8), always open to the breath of the Spirit (PM 9) and “*to the voice of authority*” (PM 10), “*true children . . . and servants of the Blessed Virgin*” (PM 11, 12).

## V. CONSEQUENCES FOR MONTFORT SPIRITUALITY

The whole of Montfort's doctrine on time is precious for Montfort spirituality. Montfort compels us to recall the past, to value the present in view of eternity, and above all to prepare for the future of the world. Montfort's coherent outline on the end times has consequences both for a correct understanding of Saint Louis Marie and for the Marian devotion that he taught.

### 1. The future: a key to the life of Montfort

Saint Louis Marie de Montfort's determination to become an itinerant missionary has often been explained as an expression of his desire to live the life of the early apostles. This explanation remains true, but it should be complemented with Montfort's projection toward the future. The prodigious activity that the missionary accomplished in his brief life was also due to the urgency he experienced in proclaiming the reign of Jesus Christ. This purpose is intrinsic to both his preaching and his writing. Although undoubtedly guided by the example of Christ Wisdom and the Apostles living in poverty, Montfort's existence is energized by the urgent need of transforming the reign of sin into the reign of Jesus Christ. The saint opens himself, therefore, to the breath of the Spirit and the maternal action of Mary, becoming a priest full of fire to reform the Church and renew the face of the earth.

### 2. Devotion to Mary

To read **TD** without the perspective of the end times—which for Montfort means the present time (*“these end times,”* **TD** 50)—gives the impression that Montfort is simply attempting to introduce his readers to *“the interior and perfect practice”* of Marian devotion. But there is one dimension of Montfort's Marian teaching that is often forgotten: his thought is eschatological and therefore Spirit-related and apostolic.

By indissolubly uniting Mary and the Holy Spirit as the begetters of Christ and Christians (**TD** 34-36), and by locating this action in the special reign of the Spirit, of the Father, and of the Son (**PM** 15-17), Montfort avoids the danger of Christomonism.

Moreover, this Marian spirituality cannot fall back on itself, because in Montfort's view it is projected toward the future and the kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is finalized and dynamically outstretched toward the fulfillment in history. Those who are consecrated to Christ through the hands of Mary will be bound to destroy the kingdom of evil, to establish the reign of God, and to spread His kingdom throughout the entire world. When they breathe Mary as the body breathes air, becoming living copies of her, then Jesus will be loved and glorified (**TD** 217). In other words, only when the Church becomes Mary will Jesus be “born” a second time and return to establish in the Spirit the fullness of the reign of the Father.

