

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

The False and True Devotion to Mary (1st part)

By Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort

False Devotion to Our Lady

It is very important, first, to recognise false devotions to our Blessed Lady so as to avoid them, and to recognise true devotion in order to practise it. Second, among so many different forms of true devotion to our Blessed Lady we should choose the one most perfect and the most pleasing to her, the one that gives greater glory to God and is most sanctifying for us.

There are, I find, seven kinds of false devotion to Mary, namely, the devotion of (1) the critical, (2) the scrupulous, (3) the superficial, (4) the presumptuous, (5) the inconstant, (6) the hypocritical, (7) the self-interested.

Critical devotees

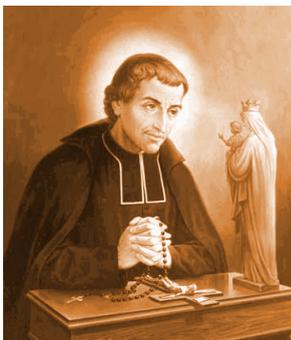
Critical devotees are for the most part proud scholars, people

of independent and self-satisfied minds, who deep down in their hearts have a vague sort of devotion to Mary. However, they criticise nearly all those forms of devotion to her which simple and pious people use to honour their good Mother just because such practices do not appeal to them. They question all miracles and stories which testify to the mercy and power of the Blessed Virgin, even those recorded by trustworthy authors or taken from the chronicles of religious orders. They cannot bear to see simple and humble people on their knees before

an altar or statue of our Lady, or at prayer before some outdoor shrine. They even accuse them of idolatry as if they were adoring the wood or the stone. They say that as far as they are concerned they do not care for such outward display of devotion and that they are not so gullible as to believe all the fairy tales and stories told of our Blessed Lady. When you tell them how admirably the Fathers of the Church praised our Lady, they reply that the Fathers were exaggerating as orators do, or that their words are misrepresented. These false devotees, these proud worldly

Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort

Born poor. Studied in Paris, France, and ordained in 1700. Under Mary's inspiration, he founded the Daughters of Divine Wisdom, a religious institute of women devoted to the care of the desititute, and a brother organization, the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. During this work, he began his apostolate of preaching the Rosary and authentic Marian devotion. He preached Mary everywhere and to everyone. A member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, Saint Louis was one of the greatest apostles of the Rosary in his day, and by means his miraculously



inspiring book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, he is still so today; the most common manner of reciting the Rosary is the method that originated with Saint Louis's preaching. In 1715, he founded the missionaries known as the Company of Mary or Montfort Missionaries.

His greatest contribution to the Church and world is Total Consecration to the Blessed Virgin. He propagated this in his day by preaching and after his own death by his other famous book *True Devotion to Mary*.

people are greatly to be feared. They do untold harm to devotion to our Lady. While pretending to correct abuses, they succeed only too well in turning people away from this devotion.

Scrupulous devotees

Scrupulous devotees are those who imagine they are slighting the Son by honouring the Mother. They fear that by exalting Mary they are belittling Jesus. They cannot bear to see people giving to our Lady the praises due to her and which the Fathers of the Church have lavished upon her. It annoys them to see more people kneeling before Mary's altar than before the Blessed Sacrament, as if these acts were at variance with each other, or as if those who were praying to our Lady were not praying through her to Jesus. They do not want us to speak too often of her or to pray so often to her.

Here are some of the things they say: "What is the good of all these rosaries, confraternities and exterior

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devotions to our Lady? There is a great deal of ignorance in all this. It is making a mockery of religion. Tell us about those who are devoted to Jesus (and they often pronounce his name without uncovering their heads). We should go directly to

Jesus, since he is our sole Mediator. We must preach Jesus; that is sound devotion."

There is some truth in what they say, but the inference they draw to prevent devotion to our Lady is very insidious. It is a subtle snare of the evil one under the pretext of promoting a greater good. For we never give more honour to Jesus than when we honour his Mother, and we honour her simply and solely to honour him

all the more perfectly. We go to her only as a way leading to the goal we seek - Jesus, her Son.

The Church, with the Holy Spirit, blesses our Lady first, then Jesus, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Not that Mary is greater than Jesus, or even equal to him - that would be an intolerable heresy. But

in order to bless Jesus more perfectly we should first bless Mary. Let us say with all those truly devoted to her, despite these false and scrupulous devotees: "O Mary, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

Superficial devotees

Superficial devotees are people whose entire devotion to our Lady consists in exterior practices. Only the externals of devotion appeal to them because they have no interior spirit. They say many rosaries with great haste and assist at many Masses distractedly. They take part in processions of our Lady without inner fervour. They join her confraternities without reforming their lives or restraining their passions or imitating Mary's virtues. All that appeals to them is the emotional aspect of this devotion, but the substance of it has no appeal at all. If they do not feel a warmth in their devotions, they think they are doing nothing; they become upset, and give up everything, or else do things only when they feel like it. The world is full of these shallow devotees, and there are none more critical of men of prayer who regard the interior devotion as the essential aspect and strive to acquire

it without, however, neglecting a reasonable external expression which always accompanies true devotion.

Presumptuous devotees

Presumptuous devotees are sinners who give full rein to their passions or their love of the world, and who, under the fair name of Christian and servant of our Lady, conceal pride, avarice, lust, drunkenness, anger, swearing, slandering, injustice and other vices. They sleep peacefully in their wicked habits, without making any great effort to correct them, believing that their devotion to our Lady gives them this sort of liberty. They convince themselves that God will forgive them, that they will not die without confession, that they will not be lost for all eternity. They take all this for granted because they say the Rosary, fast on Saturdays, are enrolled in the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary or the Scapular, or a sodality of our Lady, wear the medal or the little chain of our Lady.

When you tell them that such a devotion is only an illusion of the devil and a dangerous presumption which may well ruin them, they refuse to believe you. God is good and merciful, they reply, and he has not made us to damn us. No man is without sin. We will not die

without confession, and a good act of contrition at death is all that is needed. Moreover, they say they have devotion to our Lady; that they wear the scapular; that they recite faithfully and humbly every day the seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys in her honour; that sometimes they even say the Rosary and the Office of our Lady, as well as fasting and performing other good works.

Blinding themselves still more, they quote stories they have heard or read - whether true or false does not bother them - which relate how people who had died in mortal sin were brought back to life again to go to confession, or how their soul was miraculously retained in their bodies until confession, because in their lifetime they said a few prayers or performed

a few pious acts, in honour of our Lady. Others are supposed to have obtained from God at the moment of death, through the merciful intercession of the Blessed Virgin, sorrow and pardon for their sins, and so were saved. Accordingly,

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these people expect the same thing to happen to them.

Nothing in our Christian religion is so deserving of condemnation as this diabolical presumption. How can we truthfully claim to love and honour the Blessed Virgin when by our sins we pitilessly wound, pierce, crucify and outrage her Son? If Mary made it a rule to save by her mercy this sort of person, she would be condoning wickedness and helping to outrage and crucify her Son. Who would even dare to think of such a thing?

I declare that such an abuse

of devotion to her is a horrible sacrilege and, next to an unworthy Communion, is the greatest and the least pardonable sin, because devotion to our Lady is the holiest and best after devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

I admit that to be truly devoted to our Lady, it is not absolutely necessary to be so holy as to avoid all sin, although this is desirable. But at least it is necessary (note what I am going to say), (1) to be

genuinely determined to avoid at least all mortal sin, which outrages the Mother as well as the Son; (2) to practise self-restraint in order to avoid sin; (3) to join her confraternities, say the Rosary and other prayers, fast on Saturdays, and so on.

Such means are surprisingly effective in converting even the hardened sinner. Should you be such a sinner, with one foot in the abyss, I advise you to do as I



have said. But there is an essential condition. You must perform these good works solely to obtain from God, through the intercession of our Lady, the grace to regret your sins, obtain pardon for them and overcome your evil habits, and not to live complacently in the state of sin, disregarding the warning voice of conscience, the example of our Lord and the saints, and the teaching of the holy gospel.

Inconstant devotees

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, and like the moon Mary puts them under her feet. Because of their fickleness they are unworthy to be included among the servants of the Virgin most faithful, because faithfulness and constancy are the hallmarks of Mary's servants. It is better not to

burden ourselves with a multitude of prayers and pious practices but rather adopt only a few and perform them with love and perseverance in spite of opposition from the devil the world and the flesh.

Hypocritical devotees

There is another category of false devotees of our Lady, - hypocritical ones. These hide their sins and evil habits under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin so as to appear to their fellow-men different from what they are.

Self-interested devotees

Then there are the self-interested devotees who turn to her only to win a court-case, 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. Such people are acceptable neither to God not to his Mother.

We must, then, carefully avoid joining the critical devotees, who believe nothing and find fault with everything; the scrupulous ones who, out of respect for our Lord, are afraid of having too much devotion to his Mother; the exterior devotees whose devotion consists

entirely in outward practices; the presumptuous devotees who under cover of a fictitious devotion to our Lady wallow in their sins; the inconstant devotees who, being unstable, change their devotional practices or abandon them altogether at the slightest

temptation; the hypocritical ones who join confraternities and wear emblems of our Lady only to be thought of as good people; finally, the self-interested devotees who pray to our Lady only to be rid of bodily ills or to obtain material benefits.



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