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## TO KNOW SALVATION: MARIAN CONSECRATION AS ANTIDOTE TO NEW GNOSTICISMS

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*Maura Hearden Fehlner, PhD*

*In this essay, the author initiates a discussion about key ways in which the theology behind and practice of Marian consecration as developed by St. Louis de Montfort both refutes the errors of and fulfills the longing indicated by the emergence of strong gnostic currents in contemporary thought. To accommodate the parameters of this project, discussion is limited to three categories of “new Gnosticisms”—political, New Age, and technological—and key theological concepts.*

If we wish to have roots of immortality deeply embedded in our heart, we must have in our mind knowledge of eternal Wisdom. 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. (St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Louis Marie de Montfort, *Love of Eternal Wisdom* (Montfort Publications, 1987; Internet version, 2003), §11, p. 4. Internet version available online at [http://www.montfort.org/content/uploads/pdf/PDF\\_EN\\_25\\_1.pdf](http://www.montfort.org/content/uploads/pdf/PDF_EN_25_1.pdf) Accessed Sept. 12, 2015. Hereafter, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*.

## I. Introduction

Francis Bacon famously said, “Knowledge is power.” His oft-repeated statement straddles the realms of sublime truth and fatal falsehood, for there is a sense in which knowledge leads to salvation, and there is a sense in which knowledge is the fruit that tempts humanity into exile from paradise. The latter surfaces periodically under the title “Gnosticism,” an umbrella term for numerous belief systems that emphasize salvation by means of esoteric knowledge. Gnosticism has wrestled with Christianity for humanity’s immortal soul since Christianity’s beginning, reemerging in new forms during every century until and including the present day. In His book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope St. John Paul II noted that

Gnosticism never completely abandoned the realm of Christianity. Instead, it has always existed side by side with Christianity, sometimes taking the shape of a philosophical movement, but more often assuming the characteristics of a religion or para-religion in distinct, if not declared, conflict with all that is essentially Christian.<sup>2</sup>

What forms has Gnosticism taken during our time; what is its appeal; and how might we protect contemporary Catholics from falling into its errors? The purpose of this essay is to initiate the exploration of these questions and to suggest St. Louis de Montfort’s Marian consecration as a powerful antidote to the ever-present gnostic disease. De

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 90.

Montfort's theology provides an intellectual counter to the errors embedded in various new Gnosticisms and his Marian consecration puts this theology into practice, strengthening the soul against harm, while, at the same time, providing profound fulfillment to the human longing indicated by Gnostic trends.

### **A. "Gnosticism" Defined**

The term "gnosticism" can be applied to many different belief systems. Historically, however, there have been certain unifying, recurring themes. The themes that we will explore in this essay include the following: 1) an emphasis on knowledge as the means to salvation; 2) the tendency to blame a defective environment for evil and suffering, rather than personal sin; and 3) dualist anthropologies that divide the human being into a body that is part of the inferior material realm and an androgynous soul that is the true seat of personal identity and longs for liberation from its fleshly prison.

### **B. Target Audience for and Scope of this Essay**

Although, as St. John Paul II observed, Gnosticism is in "conflict with all that is essentially Christian," many Christians seem to be drawn to it. Indeed, elements of Gnosticism have crept into American popular culture in ways that could influence the worldview of well-meaning Christians without their realizing it. For example, Catholic critics have found gnostic assumptions in popular movies such as *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, *Interstellar*, and *Harry Potter*.<sup>3</sup> In addition, as will be discussed in this essay, certain

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<sup>3</sup> See Alfonso Aguilar, "Gnosticism and the Struggle for the World's Soul,"

political, self-help, spiritual, technological, and scientific trends that might interest unsuspecting Christians are also permeated with gnostic beliefs and attitudes. This essay was written specifically to benefit those who are working with Catholic populations who have not consciously left the faith, but are exposed to and may have unconsciously absorbed gnostic presuppositions.

I will limit my commentary to the gnostic characteristics of three categories of thought that have had an enormous impact on recent popular western culture. They are, in chronological order, 1) gnostic currents in political thought that began in the 1800s but stretch into contemporary times; 2) New Age Gnosticism; and 3) technological Gnosticism. I will provide descriptions of these “new Gnosticisms,” including brief analyses of their appeal and errors. Then I will present aspects of St. Louis de Montfort’s theology and Marian consecration as tools by which faithful Catholics can be strengthened against the errors of contemporary Gnosticisms while more effectively pursuing the fulfillment of the transcendent desires that seem to attract people to them.

## **II. Gnostic Currents in “Modern” Political Movements**

World-renowned political scientist, Eric Voegelin, devoted much of his academic career to the study of gnostic currents in modern political movements (that is, political

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in *National Catholic Register* (April, 2003). Available online at [http://www.ncregister.com/site/article/gnosticism\\_and\\_the\\_struggle\\_for\\_the\\_worlds\\_soul/](http://www.ncregister.com/site/article/gnosticism_and_the_struggle_for_the_worlds_soul/). Accessed Sept. 10, 2015; Robert Reed, “Gnosticism 2.0: *Interstellar* and the Religion of Science.” Available online at <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/12/gnosticism-20>. Accessed Sept. 11, 2015.

movements of the “Modern Era”), that are rooted in such philosophical systems as Positivism, Hegelianism, Marxism, and Nietzscheism. He, in fact, asserted that the “essence of modernity is Gnosticism.”<sup>4</sup> Voegelin outlined his arguments in the now classic work, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, which will serve as my primary source for this section of the essay.

In his introduction, Voegelin points out that Gnosticism seems to rise up when societies collapse. He states:

The collapse of the ancient empires of the East, the loss of independence for Israel and the Hellenic and Phoenician city-states, the population shifts, the deportations and enslavements, and the interpenetration of cultures reduce men who exercise no control over the proceedings of history to an extreme state of forlornness in the turmoil of the world, of intellectual disorientation, of material and spiritual insecurity. *The loss of meaning that results from the breakdown of institutions, civilizations, and ethnic cohesion evokes attempts to regain an understanding of the meaning of human existence in the given conditions of the world (p. 6 V's intro)....one of the most grandiose of the new formulations of the meaning of existence...[is] Gnosticism.*<sup>5</sup> (Emphasis is mine.)

Thus, Gnosticism is a response to a genuine desire to make sense out of chaos, to find order, hope, and meaning in a world that is filled with apparently meaningless suffering. Like the Gnostics of past ages, those of whom Voegelin

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis Sandoz's introduction to Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Washington D.C.: Regency Publishing, 1968; Introduction, copyright 1997), vii. Hereafter, references from Sandoz's introduction will be cited as Sandoz and references from Voegelin's essays will be cited as Voegelin.

<sup>5</sup> Voegelin, 7.

writes come to believe that the world itself is evil and that salvation consists in its escape.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, like their predecessors, these modern Gnostics believe that salvation comes through the acquisition of knowledge reserved to an elite few.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike their predecessors, however, the new political Gnostics offer salvation in the form of earthly utopias. If humanity could only alter the evils of current social, economic and political systems, suffering could be eliminated. The atheistic materialism buttressing the political philosophies that Voegelin examines results in an exclusive reliance on human power, will, the expertise of human leaders, and the value of manmade systems. The fate of the world, they say, is in the hands of “the revolutionary elite ... who understand the path, process, and goal of history....”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Voegelin’s political Gnostics differ drastically from ancient peoples in their understanding of the term “knowledge” itself. Voegelin points out that the ancient Greek philosophers explored the objective truths of being, believing that God alone—the transcendent origin of being—possessed ‘actual knowledge.’ The human person was most accurately described as a “lover” of knowledge, *philosophos*, which was motivated by and ultimately enhanced a love of the transcendent source of knowledge, *theophilos*. Knowledge itself implied relationship and humility in the face of divine omniscience.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Voegelin, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Sandoz, xii.

<sup>8</sup> Sandoz, xii.

<sup>9</sup> Voegelin, 12-29.

In contrast, the political Gnostics of which Voegelin speaks understand knowledge in speculative rather than relational terms, and, instead of exploring the objective truths of being, they focus their efforts on acquiring the power to alter being.<sup>10</sup> Their goal, therefore, includes suppression of the truth about the origin of being in favor of manmade narratives—“dream worlds” offering alternative realities—that prove useful for achieving utopian ideals.<sup>11</sup> In fact, “The aim of parousiastic Gnosticism [as in Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger] is to destroy the order of being, which is experienced as defective and unjust, and through man’s creative power to replace it with a perfect and just order.”<sup>12</sup> The existence of any kind of Supreme Being or beings implies that the world has been *given* and is therefore outside of man’s control. Voegelin states,

In order, therefore, that the attempt to create a new world may seem to make sense, the givenness of the order of being must be obliterated; the order of being must be interpreted, rather, as essentially under man’s control. And taking control of being further requires...the decapitation of being—the murder of God.<sup>13</sup>

Voegelin notes that, the opposition to God found in political Gnosticism is rooted in more than intellectual error. It is rooted in a “spiritual disorder”<sup>14</sup> that has replaced love of the transcendent with the pursuit of power, and it protects

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<sup>10</sup> Voegelin, 59-60: see his “six characteristics that ... reveal the ... gnostic attitude.”

<sup>11</sup> Voegelin, 61-78.

<sup>12</sup> Voegelin, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Voegelin, 35-36.

<sup>14</sup> Voegelin, 13.

itself by prohibiting all philosophical and scientific questioning that might challenge its premises. Voegelin makes the ominous observation that “[I]f this prohibition can be made socially effective...*ratio* can no longer operate as a remedy for spiritual disorder.”<sup>15</sup> Reason itself is dismissed from public discourse.

Others have observed the gnostic elements recorded by Voegelin within contemporary American politics on both the conservative and liberal sides of the aisle. For example, Michael Federici contributed an article called “Progressivism,” to the online journal *First Principles*, in which he said that

progressivism has in it a gnostic element. That is, progressives believe that they possess the knowledge needed to transform society and human nature. They are greatly dissatisfied with the world as it is and are impatient with life and the very structure of reality, because these fall short of perfection or the progressive ideal.<sup>16</sup>

Theologian and frequent *First Things* contributor Peter Leithart wrote an essay titled “Invasive Gnosticism,” which commented on quietly but forcefully enacted gender legislation under the Obama administration that smacks of the old heresy. He provided, as an example, a description of new legislation in Washington state forbidding gender-specific public bathrooms, locker rooms, and showers as these would discriminate against the individual’s right to

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<sup>15</sup> Voegelin, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Federici, “Progressivism,” in *First Principles Journal* online (Sept. 25, 2011). Available online at <http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=669&theme=home&page=2&loc=b&type=cbtn>. Accessed March 30, 2016.

create his or her own gender reality.<sup>17</sup> Such anthropological dualism was reinforced nationwide when

The Obama administration...directed schools across the nation to provide transgender students with access to suitable facilities including bathrooms and locker rooms—that match their *chosen* gender identity. (Emphasis is mine.)<sup>18</sup>

Economics professor Gene Callahan has observed utopian strategies guided by an elite few with inside knowledge on the political right. In a discussion of foreign policies under George W. Bush’s administration, Callahan included a quote from one of Bush’s aides claiming that the elite few who were “history’s actors” had the power to create their own reality and impose it on the rest of the unsuspecting world.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note, at this point, that simply “googling” the phrase “political correctness on college campuses” results in scores of articles arguing that America has succumbed to a dictatorship of thought in the very places where thought ought to be freely explored.<sup>20</sup> If college

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Leithart, “Invasive Gnosticism,” in *First Things* online blog (Feb. 26, 2016). Available at <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2016/02/invasive-gnosticism>. Accessed March 30, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Juliet Eilperin and Emma Brown, “Obama Administration Directs Schools to Accommodate Transgender Students,” in *The Washington Post* (May 5, 2016). Available online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-administration-to-instruct-schools-to-accommodate-transgender-students/2016/05/12/0ed1c50e-18ab-11e6-aa55-670cabef46e0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-administration-to-instruct-schools-to-accommodate-transgender-students/2016/05/12/0ed1c50e-18ab-11e6-aa55-670cabef46e0_story.html). Accessed May 29, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Gene Callahan, “Know Your Gnostics: Eric Voegelin Diagnosed the Neoconservatives’ Disease,” in *The American Conservative* online (Feb. 20, 2012). Available at [www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/know-your-gnostics/](http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/know-your-gnostics/). Accessed March 30, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> An insightful article by Dr. Samuel Gregg, “Regensburg Revisited: 10

campuses could be considered a barometer for levels of mind-control throughout society, one could argue that limiting freedom of speech to that which is deemed “politically correct” has effectively prohibited philosophical questioning and rendered *ratio* ineffective in the public square. Like the political Gnostics that Voegelin describes, Americans seem to be in great need of a remedy that can circumvent society’s break with reason, one that speaks to the heart as well as the head—a remedy that could be provided by Marian doctrine and piety, which is well-known for having just such an all-encompassing appeal.

I do not, however, wish to get ahead of myself. For now, let us note a few of the desires and errors of the political Gnosticism that Voegelin has identified. Political Gnostics long to escape the suffering of a broken world that has become devoid of meaning. This is, in the end, a faint glimmer of the human desire for transcendence, however truncated it may be by the denial of supernatural reality. The desire to fix what has been broken and the optimism that

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Years Later, a West Still in Denial,” published online by *Catholic World Report* (April 4, 2016), combines an analysis of Pope Benedict XVI’s Regensburg address with a commentary on western society’s failure to adequately employ reason. The following quotation is particularly relevant to this essay:

“That irrationality is loose and ravaging much of the West—especially in those institutions which are supposed to be temples of reason, i.e., universities—is hard to deny. Take, for instance, those presently trying to turn Western educational institutions into one gigantic ‘safe space.’ In this cocoon, those who maintain, for instance, that gender theory fails basic tests of logic, or that the welfare state has negative cultural effects, or that not all forms of inequality are in fact unjust (to name just some propositions which many today consider offensive), are regularly designated as ‘haters’ or some word to which the suffix ‘phobe’ is attached.” Available at [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/4686/regensburg\\_revisited\\_ten\\_years\\_later\\_a\\_west\\_still\\_in\\_denial.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/4686/regensburg_revisited_ten_years_later_a_west_still_in_denial.aspx). Accessed April 13, 2016.

drives the attempts forward would seem to veil hope for redemption and healing. Finally, there is a small grain of truth in the gnostic emphasis on salvation by knowledge in that, as we shall see later in this essay, a certain kind of knowledge is, indeed, part of the redemptive process.

The errors within political Gnosticism are, unfortunately, legion. Instead of opening humanity's arms to the reception of salvation as a gift, these political Gnostics turn in upon themselves, seeking salvation within the finitude of their own abilities. The concept of personal sin and responsibility is overshadowed by emphases on corrupt social, economic, and political systems. The intrinsic meaning, origin, and end of material reality is ignored and so misused, and the concept of knowledge itself is drastically distorted as the pursuit of objective truth is suppressed in favor of useful, man-made narratives. With that said, it is time to leave this brief examination of political Gnosticism and turn attention toward other recent gnostic developments.

### **III. New Age Gnosticism**

The utopian, gnostic philosophies that Voegelin studied arose, so he said, as the result of disillusionment in the face of the breakdown of institutions. Ironically, they were also a call to establish new, more all-encompassing, indeed, global forms of governance based on the enlightened theories of their elite members. Similarly, in the late 1970s, another movement arose that was a reaction to "The fact that what were once central elements in society...[were] now perceived as untrustworthy or lacking in genuine

authority.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, its proponents advocated a world government as well as global economic entities through which to implement the utopian theories of its spiritual elites (JCNA, §§ 2.1, 2.3.4.2).

This movement is alive and well today and is commonly called the “New Age Movement.” It is not a “movement” in the traditional sense of the term, “but rather a loose network of practitioners whose approach is to *think globally but act locally*” (JCNA, § 2). With this caveat in mind, I will continue to use the term “New Age Movement” because of its popular recognition.

Unlike the thought systems that Voegelin examined, New Age thought is a reaction against the dominance of materialist perspectives embraced by previous generations. It is first and foremost a spiritual “movement” that has made great inroads in many aspects of western culture, becoming “very popular among Catholics, even in retreat-houses, seminaries and institutes of formation for religious.”<sup>22</sup> In the 1990s, St. Pope John Paul II warned about its dangers:

A separate issue is the *return of ancient gnostic ideas under the guise of the so-called New Age*. We cannot delude ourselves that this will lead toward a renewal of religion. It is only a new way of

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<sup>21</sup> Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue, “Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life, a Christian Reflection on the New Age” (February 3, 2003), § 1.1. Available online at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_20030203\\_new-age\\_en.html#FOREWORD](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html#FOREWORD). Accessed, March 5, 2016. Hereafter, citations will be noted in the text as (JCNA, §\_).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.4. Widespread use of the Enneagram has been a particular concern. See Anna Abbott, “A Dangerous Practice: Catholic Interest in the Enneagram Persists,” in *Catholic World Report* (January 31, 2012). Available at [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/994/a\\_dangerous\\_practice.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/994/a_dangerous_practice.aspx). Accessed, March 17, 2016.

practicing Gnosticism—that attitude of the spirit that, in the name of a profound knowledge of God, results in distorting His Word and replacing it with purely human words.<sup>23</sup>

In response to New Age Gnosticism’s inroads into popular and particularly Catholic culture, the Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious dialogue produced a statement to help people who were engaged in pastoral work steer their flocks clear of New Age errors. The 2003 statement was called “Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life, a Christian Reflection on the New Age” (JCNA).<sup>24</sup> Because the New Age Movement is doctrinally and methodologically syncretistic, and because it avoids traditional organization, outlining its defining characteristics is challenging. However, the authors of the pontifical document were able to identify several.

New Age spirituality combines elements of Eastern and ancient pagan religions, astrology, alchemy, magic, and other occult practices with western concepts found in modern psychology, philosophy (e.g., evolutionism), ecology, science (especially medicine), and technology, often borrowing from Christian terminology, using phrases such as “Cosmic Christ” or “Christ consciousness” (JCNA, §§ 2.1, 2.3.2). The pontifical statement provides the following summary of its unifying themes:

- the cosmos is seen as an organic whole

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<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 90.

<sup>24</sup> See above, footnote 21.

- it is animated by an Energy, which is also identified as the divine Soul or Spirit
- much credence is given to the mediation of various spiritual entities
- humans are capable of ascending to invisible higher spheres, and of controlling their own lives beyond death
- there is held to be a ‘perennial knowledge’ which pre-dates and is superior to all religions and cultures; and
- people follow enlightened masters... (JCNA § 2.3.3).

Specifically, Gnostic elements include the notion that people “are born with a divine spark...[which] links them into the unity of the [Divine] Whole. So, they are essentially divine, although they participate in this cosmic divinity at different levels of consciousness” (JCNA, § 2.3.4.1). Salvation is attained through *gnosis*, as the individual gradually ascends to higher levels of consciousness through esoteric doctrines passed from spirit guide or master to disciple (JCNA, § 2.3.2). The goal is to let go of all individual differentiation and “sink into the great ocean of Being” (JCNA § 3.4, see also § 2.2.4).

There is no sin in New Age doctrine, only ignorance. One’s wellbeing in this life and throughout eternity depends entirely on the ability to master the relevant techniques and doctrines (JCNA, § 2.3.4.1). Each individual saves him or herself by seeking the divine within, often by using technology such as biofeedback, or other devices to alter states of consciousness. Each individual is truly considered

“the creative source of the universe” (JCNA, § 2.3.4.1) and highest spiritual authority (JCNA, § 2.2.1). It should be noted, however, that, in spite of these lofty notions regarding human potential, not everyone has access to the techniques that unleash the god within. They “are restricted to a privileged spiritual ‘aristocracy’” of masters or teachers (JCNA, § 3.4).

Interestingly, a New Age vision for the future development of the human person includes “a more androgynous self-understanding” (JCNA, § 2.1) that is in continuity with the dualist anthropology of ancient Gnosticism, which regarded the gendered body as a mere casing for the androgynous soul—the latter being the true bearer of personal identity. It is also consistent with religious doctrines that seek the individual’s eventual dissolution into the oneness of the universe. Clearly, the differentiation of gender, and any form of matter, would be an obstacle to such a goal.

New Age anthropology necessarily regards matter, and the human body in particular, as a sort of slave to the spirit that will eventually be discarded by those who have reached the zenith of illumination. There is a parallel here with the thinking behind the concept of “gender fluidity” that is so widely embraced in popular American culture. I am reminded of Bishop Robert Barron’s bold statement, “Until we realize that the lionization of Caitlyn Jenner amounts to an embracing of Gnosticism, we haven’t grasped the nettle of the issue.”<sup>25</sup> New age thinking includes belief in a

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Barron, “Bruce Jenner, the ‘Shadow Council,’ and St. Irenaeus,” *Word on Fire* (June 9, 2015). Available online at

radically autonomous human mind that promotes not only the re-creation of one's own body, but the re-creation of society in the form of population control policies and genetic engineering (JCNA, §2.3.4.1).

Belief in this sort of radical autonomy for the human mind and the desire to redesign human bodies and societies according to human preferences both harkens back to the political gnostics' dream worlds described in the previous section and leads naturally into the technological Gnosticism that will be discussed in the next section. Before moving on to the latter topic, however, let us take note of some of the legitimate human longing that is expressed through the New Age movement.

There is, within this movement, a reaction against the materialism of previous generations that bespeaks the perennial human desire for transcendence. According to the pontifical statement, New Age mysticism is also a response to feelings of "alienation" (JCNA, § 3.4) and attracts those "who experience the world as harsh and heartless" (JCNA, § 2.5). Furthermore, the document states that people who embrace New Age spirituality desire "Freedom, authenticity, [and] self-reliance" (JCNA, § 1.1).

Sadly, the New Age movement cannot provide that for which its adherents pine, for, in the end, the New Age goal is the nihilation of the self as everything that constitutes unique, individual identity is dissolved into the oneness of being. What do "freedom" and "self-reliance" mean when the self no longer exists? Furthermore, the New Age

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<http://www.wordonfire.org/resources/article/bruce-jenner-the-shadow-council-and-st-irenaeus/4785/>. Accessed March 17, 2016.

prioritization of knowledge over love makes it unlikely that those “who experience the world as harsh and heartless” will find the spiritual nourishment they seek. Finally, as Christians, we know that spiritual self-reliance is an illusion and the desire for absolute autonomy can only end in absolute alienation and isolation from the Source of Being.

#### **IV. Twenty-First Century Technological Gnosticism**

Now, it is time to provide an explanation of the last type of Gnosticism included in this essay. Rooted in science and atheistic materialism, it is often called “Technological Gnosticism.” Technological Gnosticism arrives in the popular arena somewhat later than the New Age Movement and includes parallels with its predecessor’s insistence on the absolute power of each individual over themselves (which is linked to the desire to re-create the human body) as well as its turn to technology as a means to achieve enlightenment and overall human advancement. In fact, it is built on several premises inherited from previous generations. Dr. Benjamin Wiker summarized them nicely in an article he wrote for *Catholic World Report* called “The New Gnosticism.” They are as follows:

1. “belief that *the* goal of science is not the discovery of truth itself but the relief of human suffering and the extension of human life”;
2. “the acceptance of an entirely materialist view of reality”;
3. “the Darwinian belief that things in nature are randomly rather than divinely contrived”; and

4. “an aggressive secularism rooted in atheism.”<sup>26</sup>

The similarities between technological Gnosticism and its ancient predecessors are as follows: 1) It arises from a thirst for meaning in a world that has shaken the population’s belief in traditional structures. In the case of technological Gnosticism, the insecurity comes from “centuries of skeptical philosophy, hardheaded materialism, and an increasingly nihilist culture...”<sup>27</sup> 2) “Salvation” (which, in an atheistic context, refers to the acquisition of some sort of earthly utopia) is attained by means of secret knowledge, in this case, possessed by a scientific elite.<sup>28</sup> 3) Material reality is faulty and the cause of suffering. (Please note that, once again, the concept of sin is replaced by the misfortune of a bad environment.) Thus, technological Gnosticism is characterized by a “dualist rejection of matter for the incorporeal possibilities of mind.”<sup>29</sup> 4) Finally, Technognostics seem to be motivated by feelings of alienation and estrangement to the world around them. Ironically, technology may have actually added to this problem. In the words of Erik Davis, author of *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*:

Space technologies do not just materialize the off world yearnings of those desperate to flee the grave. They also literalize the cosmic

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Wiker, “The New Gnosticism,” in *Catholic World Report* (Ignatius Press, 2010). Available online at CatholicCulture.org. Accessed 8.15.15.

<sup>27</sup> Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism in the Age of Information*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015), xxiv. Hereafter, Davis.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, xix.

<sup>29</sup> Davis, 78.

homesickness that vibrates in so many human hearts, a longing for a transcendental level of authenticity, vision, and being reflected in the heavens. Many thoughtful moderns, religious and not, believe that this sense of estrangement cannot really be assuaged.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike their ancient predecessors, however, the new Technognostics do not try to remedy their suffering by escaping matter. Rather they remedy their suffering by conquering and transforming matter. Once again, Erik Davis observes that the “myth of an engineered utopia still propels the ideology of technological progress, with its perennial promises of freedom, prosperity, and release from disease and want.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, this new breed of Gnostics differs from their ancient predecessors in that they seem to equate knowledge—saving knowledge, to be precise—with the acquisition of information.<sup>32</sup> Knowledge is reduced to data intake.

In fact, the acquisition of information is, for Technognostics, the pillar upon which liberty rests, a liberty defined solely in terms of lack of constraint.<sup>33</sup> This belief is especially deeply rooted in the United States, which has a long history of prizing “rugged individualism” and self-sufficiency while distrusting traditional social institutions. Davis builds a strong case suggesting that the American boom in Internet and Cyberspace technology was fueled in large part by the desire to ride cowboy style into a new and free frontier—a virtual landscape of untapped and

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<sup>30</sup> Davis, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, xix.

<sup>32</sup> Davis, 82-97.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, “Techgnosis, American Style,” entire chapter.

unrestrained opportunity and power based on the acquisition and trading of information.<sup>34</sup> Davis describes this disembodied utopia as follows:

The Net has thus become a simulacrum of a possible libertarian world: an unregulated plenitude where technological wizardry and a clean hack can overcome the inertia of embodied history, where ossified political and economic structures will melt down into the liquid flow of bits, and where the New Atlantis of liberty appears as an evolutionary wave of digicash you either surf or suffer through.

The animating archetype of the information economy, its psychological spunk, lies in a gnostic flight from the heaviness and torpor of the material earth, a transition from the laboring body into the symbol-processing mind.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, it seems that many of today's atheistic Technagnostics have found a way to re-inject the eternal soul and so the dream of immortality into their worldview. Medical science has long striven to heal and extend human life, but the fight against mortality itself has, from a material point of view, always seemed a battle lost before it was begun. The dawn of cybernetics brought new hope in this regard. Within this materialist worldview, the mind is reduced to the brain, which consists of various feedback loops of symbols and information. Information is thought to be reducible to bursts of electrical energy. Thus,

if our minds and personalities do indeed boil down to patterns of information humming in the peculiar hardwiring of our nervous

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<sup>34</sup> Davis, "Techgnosis, American Style," entire chapter.

<sup>35</sup> Davis, 117.

systems, then it's really not *too* much of a leap to imagine replicating that unique architecture inside the bowels of some machine—and thus digitally restuffing the seat of the soul.<sup>36</sup>

These are the premises upon which Transhumanism, arguably the most extreme form of Technological Gnosticism, is based.

Ronald Cole-Turner, editor of the book *Transhumanism and Transcendence*, summarizes the Transhumanist intellectual movement and its goals.<sup>37</sup> The movement is regarded as an outgrowth of Enlightenment and secular philosophies that aspire to absolute human control over human being. It uses technology to transform biology, overcoming emotional, psychological and intellectual as well as physical limitations, even to the point of creating an entirely new species: the next step in human evolution. In Cole-Turner's words, "[T]he posthuman that lies ahead for transhumanism is not just a continuation of the self-governing individual but the individual set free of anything biological that interferes with this governing."<sup>38</sup>

Thus, we are met with the old Gnostic dualism in new window dressing. The self is a disembodied center of consciousness defined as patterns of information processing. We are also met with a heavy dose of Pelagianism, in that the Transhumanist wills him or herself to perfection. Finally, there is yet another rather disturbing note in this medley of heresies and philosophies. To quote Brent Waters, a

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<sup>36</sup> Davis, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald Cole-Turner, ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, 2011), 11-13. Hereafter, Cole-Turner.

<sup>38</sup> Cole-Turner, 13-14.

contributor to Cole-Turner's book, Transhumanists, whether they are promoting biological modifications or the full-blown merging of human consciousness with artificial life forms seem to agree that

that which remains imperfect or lacks the capability of being perfected should be eliminated or prevented. Alarmingly, Pelagians of every age often appeal to medical rhetoric to achieve the perfection they envision. Is it not a concern for public hygiene that inspires eugenic programs to sanitize the race and to inhibit the birth of those who would infect it?<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the above concern, Waters points out that, for all its proponents' talk of freedom, Transhumanism inevitably leads to a tyranny of the present over the future as those who live now work to shape and mold the future according to their own preferences and values.<sup>40</sup> Gerald McKenny, another contributor to Cole-Turner's book, adds to this concern about tyranny, pointing out that the Transhumanist concept of "the good" must necessarily be divorced from human nature, as human nature is regarded as a thing to be overcome and surpassed. He concludes,

[T]here is the problem that no account can be given of a good that has no relation to our human nature, and so the transhumanist conception of the good must necessarily be an empty one.... And if

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<sup>39</sup> Brent Waters, "Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as Contending Salvific Religions," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, 2011), 171. Hereafter, Waters.

<sup>40</sup> Waters, 173.

not in principle then at least in practice, this seems inevitably to subordinate the pursuit of the good to the pursuit of power.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in this final form of contemporary Gnosticism, we see once again, the familiar desire for meaning, immortality, and freedom from suffering and alienation. Tragically, the very premises and methods employed by Technognostics compound rather than alleviate their difficulties. Their use of technology seems to add to rather than relieve feelings of estrangement and alienation to the world around them<sup>42</sup>; their quest for absolute autonomy actually leads them to tyranny, and their quest for immortality ultimately involves the dissolution of personal identity as the current species is surpassed in the evolutionary process. It is time, now, to look at a real solution to the problems oppressing contemporary Gnostics.

## **V. Key Considerations from St. Louis de Montfort's Theology**

Clearly, the parameters of this essay do not allow for a full treatment of de Montfort's theology. I will concentrate on presenting a few relevant points under the following subheads: 1) "Knowledge as a Means to Salvation," 2) "Matter," and 3) "Virtue, Freedom and Power." I will then proceed to a brief discussion of Marian consecration as the fulfillment of the Gnostic quest for saving knowledge.

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<sup>41</sup> Gerald McKenny, "Transcendence, Technological Enhancement, and Christian Theology," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, 2011), 187. Hereafter, McKenny.

<sup>42</sup> See footnote 21.

## **A. Knowledge as a Means to Salvation**

Gnosticism prizes knowledge above all other treasures, for it is knowledge that brings salvation. Interestingly, there are certain commonalities uniting the concept of knowledge as understood in all three of the forms of Gnosticism that we have discussed. Whether we are speaking of Voegelin's political Gnostic, who creates a useful narrative and then suppresses any attempt at gaining knowledge that might conflict with said narrative; the knowledge sought within the "divine self" of the New Age; or the mastery over biology pursued by today's Technognostics, we are speaking of something that is 1) the source of saving power; 2) a product of the self---either the mind or the divine inner reality; 3) appropriately harnessed and manipulated by the human will; and 4) a secret reserved only for intellectual or spiritual elites. Additionally, for the political Gnostic, knowledge is reduced to speculation, and for the Technognostic, it is reduced even further to information. Finally, for all three groups, the journey to salvation by means of knowledge is ultimately a solitary journey, as each individual or select political entity must rely on the human prowess of said individuals or political entities to attain the goal.

The biblical concept of knowledge has more in common with that of the ancient Greek philosophers mentioned previously than these contemporary Gnostics. It is a decidedly relational concept involving the head, heart and entire being of the human person.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, from a

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<sup>43</sup> Xavier Léon-Dufour, "Know," in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, updated 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. under the direction of P. Joseph Cahill SJ; revisions and new articles trans. E. M. Stewart (Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 1988), 296-297. Hereafter Léon-Dufour.

biblical perspective, “Religious knowledge begins with God’s initiative. Before knowing God, man is known to God.”<sup>44</sup> True knowledge resides with God as the transcendent source of Being and is a gift to humanity. In the New Testament, we are told that this gift of knowledge culminates in the Person of Christ and is attributed specifically to the Holy Spirit:

Christ’s enemies...as well as His disciples had closed minds.... Only when He had poured out the blood of the new covenant (Lk 22,20) did the fullness of light finally dawn: “Then He opened their minds” (Lk 24, 45) and gave the Holy Spirit (Acts 2,33). Thus, the final age began, the age of genuine knowledge of God.<sup>45</sup>

In his book *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, St. Louis de Montfort builds upon this traditional Christian notion, warning his readers to acknowledge “that Jesus is the abyss of all knowledge so that you do not let yourself be deceived by the fine, glowing words of orators or by the specious subtleties of philosophers.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Christ is Eternal Wisdom incarnate and so the focus of all saving knowledge:

This knowledge of eternal Wisdom is not only the most noble and the most consoling of all, it is also the most useful and the most necessary since eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus

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<sup>44</sup> Léon-Dufour, 296.

<sup>45</sup> Léon-Dufour, 298.

<sup>46</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §6. De Montfort is speaking of faithless academics and religious teachers; however, I believe that applying his words to this essay’s critique of Gnosticism is well within the spirit of his message.

Christ, his Son (Jn. 17:3) .... If we really want to have eternal life let us learn all there is to know about eternal Wisdom.<sup>47</sup>

For de Montfort, knowledge is indeed saving, because knowledge of God is the prerequisite to love of God. De Montfort scholar, Joseph Raja Rao Thelagathoti observes:

In Montfort's treatise as in mysticism in general, the verbs "to know" and "to love" are frequently used in interrelationship.... once the reader has come to know Wisdom, he or she will be "awakened" to a response of reciprocal love.<sup>48</sup>

It is useful, at this point, to note that traditionally, Catholics have distinguished between knowledge and wisdom in the following manner. Knowledge is the gift of the Holy Spirit that enables a person to judge the spiritual value and usefulness of created things in light of what is necessary for salvation. Knowledge of God, the most important kind of knowledge, is obtained by means of God's self-revelation in creation and history. Wisdom, on the other hand, is the goal of knowledge, the supernatural gift that makes a person responsive to God, enabling him or her to contemplate divine things and love what God loves. Obtaining Wisdom implies a reciprocal love between God and creature that enlightens the mind and heart regarding heavenly and earthly realities. Thus, de Montfort asserts "If

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<sup>47</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §5.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Raja Rao Thelagathoti, "The Mystical Experience and Doctrine of St. Louis -Marie Grignon de Montfort," *Tesi Gregoriana, Serie Spiritualità*, 10 (Rome: Editrice Pontifica Università Gregoriana, 2005), 240. Hereafter, Thelagathoti.

anyone desires to possess a deep, holy and special knowledge of the treasures of grace and nature, and not merely dry, common and superficial knowledge, he must make every effort to acquire Wisdom.”<sup>49</sup>

In de Montfort’s work, the concept of “knowledge”—a gift rooted in and oriented toward building the divine-human relationship—flows naturally into the concept of “wisdom”—a gift rooted in and oriented toward participation in divine love. It is no accident that Jesus Christ, who is the incarnation of Divine Love in human history, is also the incarnation of Eternal Wisdom in human history, as the two concepts are intimately related. Throughout *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, de Montfort states that Eternal Wisdom, who is conceived by the Father and the object of His love, loves us and beckons us to love Him. It is Wisdom who will unite humanity with the divine life and love of the Trinity, and so it is Wisdom who saves. What’s more, love of Eternal Wisdom redounds to others: “He [Wisdom] sets them [devotees] on fire, inspiring them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”<sup>50</sup>

De Montfort’s theology does indeed propose knowledge as a means to salvation, but it is far from a Gnostic, self-absorbed and solitary enterprise. For de Montfort, such knowledge and creaturely wisdom are initiated by, sustained in, and flow toward Infinite, Divine Love. What’s more, they build loving human relationships. It would seem that this relational doctrine would appeal to those suffering from

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<sup>49</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §58.

<sup>50</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §100.

feelings of isolation and estrangement, especially those “who experience the world as harsh and heartless.”

In addition, there is a kind of order in de Montfort’s system that provides a sense of meaning transcending any kind of worldly chaos. There is a single goal: a Divine Being who has an eternal plan for every creature that cannot be thwarted even by evil and suffering: “The Cross is precious because it enlightens the mind and gives it an understanding which no book in the world can give. ‘He who has not been tried, what can he know?’ (Sir 34.9).”<sup>51</sup>

But what is the best way to gain knowledge and pursue Eternal Wisdom? Is it by escaping that which is corporeal for that which is pure spirit? Hardly. St. Louis de Montfort recommends embracing matter, especially the corporeal reality of Christ’s mother, as the very best way to come to know Eternal Wisdom.

## **B. Matter**

Rather than acknowledge the reality of sin, Gnostics typically place the origins of evil in their environment, and thus try to escape it. As we have seen, there are variations on this theme. Ancient Gnostics blamed an evil demi-god for creating an evil world. Voegelin’s political Gnostics try to invent systems that are impervious to corruption; New Agers try to transcend the individuation of material reality (which, they believe, is the cause of competition and suffering) and dissolve into the oneness of Being. Finally, Technognostics try to conquer evolutionary imperfections with science and technology.

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<sup>51</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §176.

Without denying its need for transformation, Christian theology has always embraced the material reality that was embraced by the Incarnate Son. De Montfort's intensely relational understanding of knowledge, Wisdom, and salvation amplifies his appreciation of the Incarnation so that he recommends consecration to the Incarnation's Mother, the source of Christ's humanity and His link to the material world, as the single most effective way to *know* and possess Eternal Wisdom. In fact, he states emphatically, "*Only* through Mary, then, can we possess divine Wisdom."<sup>52</sup> (Emphasis is mine.) I would argue that it is precisely Mary's bodily nature joined to her earthly role that so qualifies her in de Montfort's theology.

The key to understanding the emphasis that de Montfort places on Marian consecration is in understanding that de Montfort believed that the Son became incarnate specifically to redeem man, and so he believed that the Incarnation was itself redemptive: "The sacrifice of the Cross is then the culmination of the sacrifice of Christ begun in the womb of Mary and not only begun, but contained virtually..."<sup>53</sup> In fact, de Montfort scholar, Patrick J. Gaffney once observed,

For Montfort, ...the Incarnation of Eternal Wisdom...contains what follows and it is the never-repealed law which governs everything in salvation history. [It]...transcends and... makes immanent all the

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<sup>52</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*. §209.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Gaffney, SMM, *Mary's Spiritual Maternity according to St. Louis de Montfort* (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1976), 65. Hereafter, *Mary's Spiritual Maternity*.

mysteries which flow from it and, therefore...contains them and is the eternal model which governs all which flows from it.<sup>54</sup>

From this emphasis on the redeeming value of the Incarnation, naturally comes an emphasis on Mary's redemptive, albeit subordinate, cooperation. It is in Mary's womb that the Holy Spirit becomes fruitful and it is by means of her body (as well as her spirit) that the Head of the Mystical Body of Christ enters human history so as to gain more members<sup>55</sup>: "In this mystery [the Incarnation], in the womb of Mary...and together with her, Jesus chose all the elect."<sup>56</sup> Thus our salvation entered human history through Mary's body, the material dimension of her motherhood.

De Montfort insists that the many facets of Mary's mediatorial responsibilities, given her during her earthly motherhood, continue into her heavenly life for "glory does not destroy nature but makes it perfect."<sup>57</sup> Thus, Jesus continues to come to us through Mary. Thelagathi makes an interesting assertion regarding Mary's mystical presence in the hearts of believers. He cites evidence from de Montfort's work indicating Mary's presence through her love and her activity in the soul, but says that these forms of presence are

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<sup>54</sup> Patrick J. Gaffney, "St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort and the Marian Consecration," *Marian Studies* 35 (1984): 127 [Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth National Convention of The Mariological Society of America, held in Washington, D.C.]. Hereafter, "St. Louis and Consecration."

<sup>55</sup> *Mary's Spiritual Maternity*, 68-79.

<sup>56</sup> St. Louis de Montfort, *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (Charlotte, NC: St. Benedict Press in association with Baronius Press, 2006), §248. Hereafter, *True Devotion*.

<sup>57</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §205.

not sufficient.... for presence cannot be reduced to mere activity. The experience of the saints supposes a *personal* presence that takes seriously the glorified state of Mary implied in the dogma of the Assumption. In the biblical instances of risen bodies starting with the glorified body of Jesus Himself, the glorified body is described in terms of ‘presence’ and ‘communication of life,’ in an incredibly free manner, conditioned by neither matter nor the laws of time and space. Through grace and the effects of her Son’s resurrection, Mary participates in the glorified condition of the body of her Son, which makes possible a true and personal presence in places and in persons, without being limited in any way.<sup>58</sup>

Thelagathoti maintains that, although de Montfort did not speak of Mary’s glorified body in so many terms, allusions to the experience of and insights gained by her personal mystical presence in his life can be found throughout his work. These experiences and insights would suggest that de Montfort enjoyed a mystical connection with her glorified body.<sup>59</sup>

### **C. Virtue, Freedom, and Power**

The saving knowledge pursued by Gnostics is secret, passed along solely through spiritual and/or intellectual elites. De Montfort also speaks of the “secrets of God.” These secrets are, however, only hidden in the sense that God’s vast superiority is unobtainable without divine assistance. The secrets of which de Montfort speaks are intended for universal revelation:

Eternal Wisdom alone enlightens every man that comes into this world (Jn. 1:9). He alone came from heaven to teach the secrets of

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<sup>58</sup> Thelagathoti, 213.

<sup>59</sup> Thelagathoti, 213.

God (Cf. Jn. 1:18; Mt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:10). We have no real teacher (Mt. 23:8,10) except the incarnate Wisdom, whose name is Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup>

Mary's efficacy as God's instrument of salvation is directly linked to her virtues, which stand in stark contrast to those prized in the Gnosticisms previously discussed. All three types of Gnosticism discussed emphasize absolute individual autonomy and pursue salvation by either becoming master of one's own fate, as in political Gnosticism and Technognosticism, or discovering the god within as in New Age Gnosticism. They are all focused selfishly inward, intent upon the acquisition of power and self-glorification. The tragic irony of their enterprise is the fact that, by their own admission, the most that any of the Gnostics we have discussed can hope for is the eventual utter annihilation of the self. The atheistic political Gnostics may conquer the world, but in the end will simply cease to exist. The New Age Gnostics will lose their personal identities in the impersonal ocean of Being, and the Technognostics will eventually evolve into an entirely different species that has very little if anything in common with its ancestor.

The Blessed Virgin is, on the other hand, the supreme channel of divine power, precisely because of her willingness to humbly offer herself in love to the Divine Other.<sup>61</sup> Mary lives the Christian paradox of Matthew 16:25: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." The self-forgetfulness of the handmaid results in her eternal glorification, which

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<sup>60</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, §56.

<sup>61</sup> *True Devotion*, §53. Also, see *Mary's Spiritual Maternity*, 32-35.

includes even the body that she possessed on earth. She enjoys the perfect freedom and happiness of one who is entirely fulfilled, unafraid, and secure in the infinite power of the One who is truly Good.

Similarly, de Montfort wholeheartedly recommends the loving “slavery” of consecration to Jesus through Mary.<sup>62</sup> He tells his readers, “we must give her all we have in the order of nature and in the order of grace and all that may become ours in the future in the orders of nature, grace and glory,”<sup>63</sup> not to lose them, but to see them transformed and perfected. Gaffney has observed that,

In the *Act of Consecration*, man finds his identity not in the pride of posing as being-in-itself but in the humility of a loving, lived out relationship with THE OTHER, the source of all being, Love itself. The formula of consecration itself speaks of this total emptying so that we may share fully in the power of the redemption, the life of Divine Wisdom....<sup>64</sup>

De Montfort promises true liberty to the person who consecrates him or herself to Jesus through Mary, particularly interior liberty. For consecration “delivers us from all such scruples and servile fear as would narrow, imprison, and perplex our soul....”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, he calls on the witness of St. Cecilia, whom he quotes ““Happy are the faithful slaves of the Queen of Heaven, because they shall enjoy true liberty.””<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *True Devotion*, §68-77.

<sup>63</sup> *True Devotion*, §121.

<sup>64</sup> “St. Louis and Consecration,” 151.

<sup>65</sup> *True Devotion*, §169.

<sup>66</sup> *True Devotion*, §169.

## VI. Marian Consecration and the Quest for Saving Knowledge

De Montfort insists that consecration to Jesus through Mary is the surest, fastest way to the saving knowledge of (in other words, relationship with) Christ, because Mary is the means by which God chose to enter the world:

If we wish to go to him, seeking union with him, we must use the same means which he used in coming down from heaven to assume our human nature and to impart his graces to us. That means was a complete dependence on Mary his Mother, which is true devotion to her.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, de Montfort says that “performing all your actions through the Blessed Virgin...you abandon your own intentions...and lose yourself, so to speak, in those of Our Blessed Lady.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, the process guards against the egotism of Gnostic methods. Knowledge is, however, key to the entire process, for knowledge of that which is loveable is the bridge to love itself.<sup>69</sup>

For those who have never gone through his Marian consecration, de Montfort recommends a preliminary period of twelve days during which devotees may rid “themselves of the spirit of the world,”<sup>70</sup> so they might be free of obstacles to spiritual growth. Then the real preparation for

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<sup>67</sup> St. Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of Mary*, §23. Available online at <https://www.ewtn.com/library/Montfort/SECRET.HTM>. Accessed March, 29, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> *True Devotion*, §222.

<sup>69</sup> De Montfort’s process for Marian consecration is summarized by Thelagathoti, pp. 333-334.

<sup>70</sup> *True Devotion*, §227.

consecration begins. For one week, the devotee engages in spiritual exercises designed to help him know himself. Contrary to gnostic methods, the devotee is asked to face his sin and failings head on so that he might repent and be healed. Awareness of sin and the need for God is itself a gift of enlightenment. For a second week, the devotee gains knowledge of the Blessed Virgin, growing in love and dependence on her, learning to give him- or herself to her, and to be molded and transformed by her into someone more receptive of Christ. For a third week, with the help of Mary, the devotee gains “knowledge of Jesus Christ in whom and through whom by the power of the Spirit it is possible to become One with God Alone.”<sup>71</sup>

## **VII. Conclusion**

The new Gnosticisms discussed in this essay are merely retreads of a very old sin, the desire to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in other words, the desire to be God. It is an alluring prospect in that it promises eternal life, the security of autonomy, freedom from all constraint, and happiness. It cannot deliver because it ignores the objective truth about human dependence on God, but it continues to entice each new generation who must face the age-old choices of the garden for themselves. Even those who would never consciously submit to Gnosticism’s false promises may unconsciously absorb them as they are subtly slipped into the self-help manuals, retreat practices, political ventures, entertainment venues, and healthcare options to which they subscribe.

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<sup>71</sup> Thelagathoti, 334.

St. Louis de Montfort's Marian consecration and the theology behind it provide direct counters to Gnosticism's errors and constructive methods for achieving the delights that Gnosticism falsely promises. Promotion of de Montfort's consecration is, therefore, a powerful means for strengthening Catholic minds and hearts against Gnosticism and combatting whatever inroads it may have already made. In the words of de Montfort, "Jesus is everywhere and always the Fruit and the Son of Mary and Mary is everywhere the genuine tree which bears the Fruit of Life...."<sup>72</sup>

### **Author Biography**

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<sup>72</sup> *True Devotion*, §44.