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### Mary, the Virgin "Completely and Permanently Transformed by God's Grace": The Meaning and Implications of Luke 1:28 and the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception for Mary's Spiritual Life

Deyanira Flores  
*University of Dayton*

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**MARY, THE VIRGIN "COMPLETELY AND PERMANENTLY  
TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S GRACE": THE MEANING AND  
IMPLICATIONS OF LUKE 1:28 AND OF THE DOGMA OF THE  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION FOR MARY'S SPIRITUAL LIFE**

*Deyanira Flores, S.T.D.\**

**INTRODUCTION**

In every great soul, in every noble life, what is best and most exquisite is its innermost life . . . However glorious the works of a person may be, however wise and eloquent his words, more beautiful and perfect is what he carries in the depth of his soul, the secret source of his exterior life. Even in Jesus Christ, in Whom everything is great and divine, greater than His words of eternal life, greater than His stupendous prodigies, greater than His ineffable sacrifice, is His heart, whence sprang the Gospel, the Eucharist, and the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The same can be said of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After the human soul of Jesus Christ, of absolutely unsurpassable perfection, holiness, and splendor, Mary's Immaculate soul shines forth with the greatest purity and beauty possible in all of Creation. Therein is found what is most precious about her, and the secret to understand her greatness.

\*Deyanira Flores (Gonzalez) is a member of the MSA Council. She teaches at the Catholic University Anselmo Llorente y Lafuente and the Theological Institute of Central America in Costa Rica, the Servite Marian Center in Mexico and Guadalajara, and the International Marian Research Institute in Dayton, Ohio. In 1998, she received the "First Award" from the Pontifical Marian Academy for her dissertation, "The Virgin Mary at the Foot of the Cross in Rupert of Deutz" (Marianum, Rome).

<sup>1</sup> Luis María Martínez, "Prologue," in A. Dragón, *Vida íntima del Padre Pro*, trans. from the French by R. M. del Campo (5th. ed.; Mexico: Obra Nacional de la Buena Prensa, A.C., 1990), 5 (author's translation). Cf. idem, *Vida Espiritual* (Mexico: Editorial La Cruz, 1995), 163-170.

The interior life of Mary Immaculate . . . Who can describe it? Hers, says St. Andrew of Crete (†740), was a life "without spot or stain, all filled with purity and holiness, that the world cannot in anyway grasp or explain in words, because it is 'the King's mystery' (Tob.12:7)."<sup>2</sup> If any person's inner life cannot be known (cf. 1Cor. 2:11), what can we say about that of *the Mother of God*? The Virgin Mary, remarks St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (†1716), is "the vast and divine world of God where unutterable marvels and beauties are to be found"<sup>3</sup>; she is "the supreme masterpiece of Almighty God and he has reserved the knowledge and possession of her for himself."<sup>4</sup>

It is then with the utmost respect, fully aware of our total inadequacy in every sense, trusting only in God's grace, and moved alone by love and gratitude to the Immaculate One, that we shall dare to try to lift a little the veil and take a look at the spiritual life of the Virgin Mary, that a ray of its ineffable beauty may appear, to the glory of the Blessed Trinity and of the most Holy Mother herself. We shall do it basing ourselves on what Tradition through the centuries and the Magisterium of the Church have said on this subject; on what Theology teaches concerning the spiritual life—in particular the role of grace in this life—and on what the great mystics have experienced in their own lives and taught about the life of union with God. In order to show how this theme has always been present in a great number of authors, and how every century has offered most valuable contributions to it, we have chosen a few examples from different time periods to illustrate our points.

This year, 2004, the Mariological Society of America chose "The Immaculate Conception: Calling and Destiny" as its annual theme, because we are celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the proclamation of this very important dogma by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854. Now, when speaking about the Im-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *In Dormitionem S. Mariae* II: PG 97, 1076 B.

<sup>3</sup> St. Louis M. Grignion de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.6: *God alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis Mary de Montfort* (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1987), 292.

<sup>4</sup> Grignion de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.5: *God alone*, 292; cf. idem, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.11: *God alone*, 293; idem, *The Secret of Mary*, no.19: *God alone*, 268.

maculate Conception, two aspects indissolubly united to each other emerge: One is the fact that Mary was preserved from contracting original sin; the other is that she was filled with sanctifying grace from the first instant of her conception. As the Holy Father says in the Apostolic Constitution that defined the dogma, *Ineffabilis Deus*:

Above all creatures did God *so love her* that truly in her was the Father well pleased with singular delight. Therefore, far above all the angels and the saints so wondrously did God endow her with the abundance of all heavenly gifts poured from the treasury of his divinity that this mother, *ever absolutely free of all stain of sin*, all fair and perfect, would possess *that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity* than which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning these two aspects, we shall concentrate our attention only on the second one, namely, Mary's fullness of grace from the moment of her conception, and the bearing that this plenitude of grace has on her spiritual life.

In order to speak about something as sublime as the Blessed Virgin's interior life, we want to start from solid, biblical ground: Luke 1:28 (confirmed by Lk.1:30, 42), and, more specifically, one word in that verse: *κεχαριτωμένη*, which in itself says so much about Mary. Here is the key to enter Mary's Immaculate Heart. "This grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty of her whole being."<sup>6</sup> It explains why Mary is the supreme model of Christian life "in the Spirit" (cf. Rom.7:6, 8:4; Gal.5:25).

Together with Luke 1:28, the other torch that will illuminate our contemplation of the Virgin's spiritual life will be the Dogma

<sup>5</sup> Pope Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* (8-12-1854): *Apostolic Constitution of Pius IX Defining the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, n.d.), 3-4; cf. pp. 9, 14. Cf. also Pope Alexander VII, Apostolic Constitution *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum* (8-12-1661), no.4: Denzinger, no. 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25-3-1987), no.11: *Encyclical Letter of John Paul II. Mother of the Redeemer: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church*, Vatican Translation (3d. Prtng.; Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, n.d.), 16.

of the Immaculate Conception: Mary, all-pure and holy from the first instant of her conception. If she is the Immaculate Conception, the creature completely and permanently transformed by God's grace (Lk.1:28), how is her spiritual life going to be?

## **I. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY'S INTERIOR LIFE**

### **A. The Teachings of St. John of the Cross (+ 1591)**

Let us start from the very heights; from a grand picture magnificently depicted; from a sublime symphony superbly played, before we take a look at some of the strokes and colors, at some of the movements and chords that compose this "miracle of miracles of grace, nature and glory."<sup>7</sup> Let us start with one of the greatest masters of the spiritual life: St. John of the Cross (+ 1591), speaking about God's Masterpiece, in terms so clear and profound.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***1. Raised from the Beginning to the State of Union with God (Ascent III, 2, 10)***

St. John of the Cross has five important texts where he speaks about the Virgin Mary.<sup>9</sup> In the first one he underlines the importance of Mary's consent at the Annunciation, and affirms her Divine Maternity and Virginity.<sup>10</sup> The other four texts deal

<sup>7</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.12: *God alone*, 293.

<sup>8</sup> For St. John of the Cross, we have used the Spanish edition of his works found in: San Juan de la Cruz, Doctor de la Iglesia, *Obras Completas*. Edición crítica, notas y apéndices por Lucinio Ruano de la Iglesia, O.C.D., Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC 15) (11<sup>th</sup> ed.; Madrid, 1982); hereafter referred to as "BAC." The English quotations are taken from: *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodríguez, O.C.D., with revisions and introductions by Kieran Kavanaugh, Institute of Carmelite Studies (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991); hereafter referred to as "ICS."

<sup>9</sup> Other references to her are found in: *Letrillas*, 1: BAC, p.41; *Dichos de luz y amor*, 26: *Oración del alma enamorada*: BAC, p.45; ICS, pp.87-88; *Subida del Monte Carmelo* III, 36, 1: BAC, p.301; ICS, pp.333-334; *Carta* 12: BAC, p.883; ICS, p.746; and in *Cuatro Avisos a un religioso*: BAC, p.62; ICS, p.725; *Carta* 8: BAC, p.878; ICS, p.741; *Carta* 20: BAC, p.892; ICS, p.755.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Romance on the Gospel Text "In principio erat Verbum" regarding the Blessed Trinity*, 8-9: BAC, pp.21-22; ICS, pp.67-68.

with her spiritual life. The fundamental one is found in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*<sup>11</sup>; the other three, which reinforce it, are in *The Spiritual Canticle*<sup>12</sup> and *The Living Flame of Love*.<sup>13</sup>

There are other very significant texts where Our Lady is not explicitly mentioned, but that could be very well applied to her. We shall mention a few of them. In fact, the more deeply we study St. John of the Cross's doctrine, the more we discover how many of his teachings concerning the state of transforming union with God can be rightly referred to Mary, *a fortiori*, thereby obtaining much light about her person and her spiritual life. Let us start with the main text, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, III, 2, 10.

#### a) The Context

The purpose of this work, made clear by St. John of the Cross from the start, is to show "how to reach divine union quickly," indicating how beginners and proficients must "unburden themselves of all earthly things, avoid spiritual obstacles, and live in that complete nakedness and freedom of spirit necessary for divine union."<sup>14</sup> In order to attain this, the soul must "*ordinarily*" undergo two "purifications" which St. John of the Cross calls "nights," because in them the soul walks as if in darkness, deprived of everything.<sup>15</sup> The first "night," which pertains to beginners, is the active purification of the sensitive part of the soul (Book I).<sup>16</sup> The second, darker, "night" of those advanced in the spiritual life is the active purification of the

<sup>11</sup> Idem, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* III, 2, 10: BAC, p.240; ICS, p.271.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *The Spiritual Canticle* A 2, 8: BAC, p.450; *The Spiritual Canticle* B 2, 8: BAC, pp.584-585; ICS, p.489; *Canticle* A 29-30, 10: BAC, pp.535-536; *Canticle* B 20-21, 10: BAC, p.654; ICS, p.555-556. (*The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* includes only *Canticle* B.)

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *The Living Flame of Love* A 3, 12: BAC, p.808; *The Living Flame of Love* B 3, 12: BAC, p.808; ICS, p.678. (*The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* includes only *Flame* B.)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: BAC, p.87; ICS, p.113.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ascent* I, 1, 1: BAC, p.92; ICS, p.118; I, 2, 1.5: BAC, pp.94-95; ICS, pp.120-121; I, 3, 1-4: BAC, pp.95-96; ICS, pp.121-123.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ascent*, I: BAC, pp.92-126; ICS, pp.118-153.

spiritual part of the soul (Books II and III).<sup>17</sup> These purifications are indispensable in order to attain the perfect union with God to which we are all called.

In fact, God communicates Himself supernaturally to us through love and grace. Thus, "to the soul that is more advanced in love, more conformed to the divine will, God communicates himself more. A person who has reached complete conformity and likeness of will"—which is the case of the Blessed Virgin—"has attained total supernatural union and transformation in God."<sup>18</sup> "For to love is to labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God."<sup>19</sup> The spiritual union with God, which is "the most noble and sublime state attainable in this life," does not consist in "consolations, delights, and spiritual feelings, but in the living death of the cross, sensory and spiritual, exterior and interior."<sup>20</sup>

Now, once the state of union with God has been attained, the faculties of the soul "fail entirely in their natural operations and pass from these natural boundaries to those of God, which are supernatural."<sup>21</sup> The intellect becomes divine, because, uniting itself to God, it no longer understands with its natural light, but with Divine Wisdom; the will becomes divine, because, uniting itself with Divine Love, it no longer loves with its natural strength, but with the Holy Spirit; and the memory, likewise, is all intent on the eternal apprehensions of glory.<sup>22</sup> By reason of this supernatural transformation,

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Ascent* II: BAC, pp.127-235; ICS, pp.154-266; *Ascent*, III: BAC, pp.236-316; ICS, pp.267-349. In another work of his, *The Dark Night*, he explains the "passive" purifications of the soul: BAC, pp.317-419; ICS, pp.358-457.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ascent* II, 5, 4: BAC, pp.136-137: "... De donde a aquella alma se comunica Dios más que está más aventajada en el amor, *lo cual es tener más conforme su voluntad con la de Dios*"; ICS, pp.163-164; II, 9, 1: BAC, p.149; ICS, p.177. Italics here and throughout are ours.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ascent* II, 5, 7: BAC, pp.137-138; ICS, p.165.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ascent* II, 7, 11: BAC, p.145; ICS, p.172; also *Ascent* II, 5, 3-7: BAC, pp.135-138; ICS, pp.163-165.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ascent*, III, 2, 8: BAC, p.239; ICS, p.270.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gabriele di S. Maria Maddalena, O.C.D., "Aspetti e sviluppi della grazia in Maria Santissima secondo la dottrina di S. Giovanni della Croce," in *Alma Socia Christi* (13 vols.; Rome: Academia Mariana, 1951-1958), vol. 11 (1953), 43-57.

all the operations of the memory and other faculties in this state are divine. God now possesses the faculties as their complete Lord, because of their transformation in him. And consequently it is he who divinely moves and commands them according to his divine spirit and will. As a result the operations are not different from those of God; but those the soul performs are of God and are divine operations.<sup>23</sup>

That is why these souls "perform only fitting and reasonable works, and none that are not so." The Holy Spirit makes them know or ignore, remember or forget, love or not love according to His Will, and thus "all the first movements and operations of these faculties are divine . . . since they are transformed into divine being."<sup>24</sup> It is God alone who "moves these souls toward those works that are in harmony with his will and ordinance, and they cannot be moved toward others. Thus the works and prayers of these souls always produce their effect. *Such was the prayer and work of our Lady.*"<sup>25</sup>

#### b) The Text

At the very height of this extraordinary explanation of the effects of the state of transforming union in a person, St. John of the Cross introduces the Blessed Virgin: "*Such was her prayer and work.*" Let us examine his Marian text.

. . . God alone moves these souls toward those works that are in harmony with his will and ordinance, and they cannot be moved toward others. Thus the works and prayer of these souls always produce their effect.

*Such was the prayer and the work of our Lady, the most glorious Virgin. Raised from the very beginning to this high state, she never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any, for she was always moved by the Holy Spirit.*<sup>26</sup>

It is often said that St. John of the Cross spoke very little about the Virgin Mary; but this text suffices. He could not have

<sup>23</sup> *Ascent* III, 2, 8: BAC, p.239; ICS, p.270; cf. *Flame* B, I, 4: BAC, pp.747-748; ICS, p.642.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ascent* III, 2, 9: BAC, pp.239-240; ICS, p.271.

<sup>25</sup> *Ascent*, III, 2, 10: BAC, p.240; ICS, p.271.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



praised Mary more highly nor expounded her spiritual life better. What are his teachings?

**c) Such Was the Prayer and the Work of Our Lady**

*"Such was the prayer and the work of our Lady, the most glorious Virgin."* The great Spanish theologian and mystic places Mary as the supreme example of this state of perfect union with God. He had explained in Book II that in this state the person is transformed in God, and God communicates to her His supernatural being in such a fashion that "it will appear to be God himself and will possess what God himself possesses. When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation . . ." <sup>27</sup> Right before the Marian text he had likewise affirmed that "all the movements and operations of these souls are divine," <sup>28</sup> this being the reason why "their works and prayer always produce their effect." <sup>29</sup>

"*Such*" was the union that "*the most glorious Virgin Mary*" had with God. If the person who has attained the habit of union can be said to be "God by participation," how much more can we say this of the Mother of God! If the "works and prayers of these souls" are so effective, then Tradition is not wrong when it speaks about the Virgin Mary's "omnipotent intercession," an assertion perfectly understood within the context of those arrived to the summit of the spiritual life.

**d) Raised from the Beginning to This High State**

*"Raised from the beginning to this high state."* Here we have one of the most important and original affirmations of St. John of the Cross. Exalting Mary's holiness is nothing new. Tradition—starting with Origen (+ 253), St. Athanasius (+ 373), St. Ephraem of Syria (+ 373), and St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397), among many others—has always done it. St. John of the Cross's

<sup>27</sup> *Ascent* II, 5, 7: BAC, pp.137-138; ICS, p.165; cf. *Canticle* B 12, 7: BAC, p.614; ICS, pp.517-518; *Canticle* B 22, 3: BAC, pp.658-659; ICS, p.560-561.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ascent* III, 2, 9: BAC, p.239; ICS, p.271.

<sup>29</sup> *Ascent*, III, 2, 10: BAC, p.240; ICS, p.271.

great contribution lies in the fact that he has *specified explicitly* that Mary "was raised *from the beginning*" to the highest state possible of holiness. It is not just that Mary, at some point in her life, reached the state of transforming union, however perfectly she may have reached it in comparison to all others. What our author affirms very clearly is that "*from the beginning*" of her life Mary was raised by God to that state which the other saints attain *as their final goal at some point in their lives*. At the very beginning of her existence, her life of grace was already higher than that of all the saints at the end of their lives.<sup>30</sup> She did not have to go through the process of purification, through the "nights." She was "all pure" from the start. She started her "pilgrimage of faith"<sup>31</sup> already from the very summit.

Two questions may arise. The first one is this: Does this mean that Mary did not experience progress in her spiritual life? Being from her Immaculate Conception already in the state of union with God, was hers a kind of "static" life, without growth? The answer is that she certainly continued growing unceasingly, throughout her life, in grace and love. St. John of the Cross's doctrine itself guarantees this. We know from theology that the progress in grace and love of a person under the habitual motion of the Holy Spirit, who moves to ever more fervent and perfect acts, is most certain. Theology also teaches that a person who performs good works with all his heart—as someone moved by the Holy Spirit certainly does—earns an immediate increase of grace and charity, and his spiritual life grows in intensity.<sup>32</sup> As we shall see, St. John of the Cross says that Mary "*was always moved by the Holy Spirit*." How much, then, must her grace and love have grown and multiplied with every single act of her life!

<sup>30</sup> On Mary's "plenitude of grace," cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1993), Part I, chaps. 2, 3, and 4, pp. 41-151.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (21-11-1964), no. 58: *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. A. Flannery (New Revised Ed.; U.S.A.: Dominican Publications, E.J. Dwyer Pty. Ltd, 1992), 417.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour*, 86-97; Gabriele di S. Maria Maddalena, "Aspetti e sviluppi della grazia in Maria Santissima," 55-57.

The Spanish mystic also teaches, in *The Living Flame of Love*, that, although the transformation in God is "the highest degree of perfection one can reach in this life," it is possible to speak of a love "deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation," because, even though "all is one state of transformation, and as such one cannot pass beyond it; yet, with time and practice love can grow deeper in quality, . . . and become more ardent."<sup>33</sup>

The state of transforming union is reached, our author teaches elsewhere, when love has become perfect.<sup>34</sup> If Mary was in the state of union "from the beginning," that means that the love of her Immaculate Heart was perfect from the beginning of her life. From the first moment of her existence "she belonged to Christ, sharing in the salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the 'Beloved,' the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son."<sup>35</sup> And if this love can continue growing, we cannot but wonder in awe at the intensity and perfection of her love at the end of her life, when her Son assumed her body and soul into heaven! The Triune God gave Himself totally to her from the instant He created her, all pure and beautiful, and Mary surrendered herself totally to God from that moment onwards, growing ever more in her love for Him. The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity attains the maximum perfection possible on earth when the soul reaches the state of transforming union, and Mary was always in this state. What the mutual union between the Blessed Trinity and the Virgin must have been, then, is simply beyond words!

The second question that we may ask is this: If the Virgin Mary did not have to go through the process of purification or "nights," can we speak about a "transformation" in her? This question is similar to another, very important one: Was Mary redeemed by Christ? The answer is clear: Yes. "In a more sublime fashion," teaches the Magisterium of the Church,<sup>36</sup> be-

<sup>33</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Flame, Prologue*, 3: BAC, pp.742-743; ICS, p.639.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Ascent* I, 2, 4: BAC, pp.94-95; ICS, p.121.

<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no.10.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, n.d.), 11; *Lumen Gentium*, no.53.

cause it is a *preservative redemption*. Christ redeemed her by *preserving* her from contracting original sin, and granting her the very special grace necessary never to commit a sin in her life. In like manner, we may speak of a "preservative purification" of Mary. Hers is the most perfect of all transformations in God, because it was brought about by God's direct intervention *in the first instant of her life*. From that very moment, He transformed her into Himself.

Moreover, Immaculate Conception and transforming union are indissolubly linked together; one posits the other. If she is the Immaculate Conception, then she is ready for the transforming union from the first moment of her life, because she is all-pure, all filled with grace, totally open to God's love. And if she "was raised from the beginning to this high state," it is because she was Immaculate and therefore had no need to go first through the process of purification, because "from the beginning" she was conceived without original sin and filled with grace to such a degree, which continued growing at such a constant, unceasing pace, that with the Divine assistance she never committed a sin in her entire life, but was daily a perfect and loving "Yes" to God's Will.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps to some modern ears St. John of the Cross's profound teachings may appear at first sight a bit "surprising." But the Magisterium of the Church and Sacred Scripture, indissolubly united, proclaim the same truth. Mary, teaches the Church, "by virtue of the foreseen merits of Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, *was never subject to original sin*, but was completely preserved from the original taint, and hence she was redeemed in a manner more sublime," "*ever resplendent with the glory of most sublime holiness* and so completely free from all taint of original sin that she would triumph utterly over the ancient serpent."<sup>38</sup> Mary, says the Spanish mystic, was raised to the highest state possible in this life, the state of union with God or spiritual marriage, "*from the beginning*."

Thanks to her Immaculate Conception, Mary was "enriched from the first instant of her conception *with the splendor of*

<sup>37</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent*, I, 11, 2-3: BAC, pp.116-117; ICS, pp.142-143.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, n.d.), 4, 11. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, nos.10, 11.

*an entirely unique holiness,*" that "raised her *from the beginning*" to a permanent state of profound and indissoluble union of love with God. This is confirmed by Scripture itself, where "the Virgin of Nazareth is hailed by the heralding angel, by divine command, as 'full of grace' (Lk.1:28)."<sup>39</sup> The biblical "κεχαριτωμένη," the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, are the solid foundations that explain the absolute singularity of Mary's spiritual life which St. John of the Cross affirms.

Speaking about the wonders that God grants to holy souls in general, our author mentions a fundamental reason for them: God's sovereign Will.

*Who can express how much God exalts the soul that pleases him? It is impossible to do so, nor can this even be imagined, for after all, he does this as God, to show who he is. One can only explain something of it through that characteristic God has of giving more to whoever has more. And his gifts are multiplied in proportion to what the soul possesses . . . (cf. Mt.13:12) . . .*

God gathers together in the one who is his closest friend the best and principal goods of his house [the Church] . . . He makes arrangements so that these goods will give more honor and glory to his friends. . . .<sup>40</sup>

How well can we apply this text to the Virgin Mary—not only God's "friend," but His own Mother as well! Who can express how much He has magnified her, how much He has given to her, to whom He has given to the utmost; how He multiplied in her all the graces that He granted to her from her Immaculate Conception? St. John of the Cross is clear: When we speak about the greatness of a saint, and first and foremost of the Mother of God, we are in reality speaking about the ineffable gifts that God bestows liberally on those He loves, who have known how to love Him back.

### **e) She Never Had the Form of Any Creature nor Was She Moved by Any**

Because Our Lady was raised by God to the state of transforming union from the beginning of her life, "*she never had*

<sup>39</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no.56.

<sup>40</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Canticle B*, 33, 8: BAC, p.704; ICS, p.604.

*the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any.*" In order to understand better this statement, let us remember that by "first movements" are intended all those "impressions" or "forms" which we receive through our senses, and by "second movement" the reaction of our free will towards them. If both first and second movements are guided and controlled by God, so that He controls the "forms" that are impressed in our soul, and the soul allows itself to be wholly moved by God alone without any resistance, then the soul acts by divine and not natural motion. Only then are we able to attain perfection and be transformed in God. Moreover, this operation of God in us in no way coerces our freedom; on the contrary, perfect freedom is obtained precisely when our human will is totally conformed to God's Will.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, according to St. John of the Cross, the state of transforming union consists in a "transformation of the human will into the Divine Will," a perfect union and total identification of our will with God's Will. And in order to attain this union, two conditions are indispensable: That in the human will there be nothing that is contrary to the Will of God, and that it be always and in everything moved by God's Will alone. This explains the need of emptying our soul of all that is not God, and putting ourselves totally at the disposal of God, allowing Him to do with us as He pleases. Such was the case of the Immaculate Virgin's will, where there was *never* anything contrary to God's Will—"she never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul"—and she was *never* moved by anything that was not God. She was *always* all God's, in thoughts, words, and actions.

#### **f) She Was Always Moved by the Holy Spirit**

How is it possible that in Mary there was never anything that was not God, and that she was never moved by anything that was not God? The answer is very simple: "*For she was always moved by the Holy Spirit.*" Except for the Human Soul of Jesus

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ildefonso de la Inmaculada, "Nuevo principio místico de la Mariología," *Miriam* 15 (1963): 115-118.

Christ, Mary is the only human person *who has always been moved by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning*. She is "all holy and free from every stain of sin, *as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit* and formed as a new creature," says Vatican II following Tradition.<sup>42</sup> This explains "the absence of any creature, the full possession of the Creator, her divinization, and the divine character of all her works."<sup>43</sup>

St. John of the Cross admits that "although it is true that a soul will hardly be found whose union with God is so continuous that the faculties, without any form, are always divinely moved, nevertheless there are those who are habitually moved by God and not by themselves in their operations" to perform divine works.<sup>44</sup> In fact, St. Paul teaches that "the children of God *are those who are led by the Spirit of God*" (Rom. 8:14), and that "he who is united to the Lord *becomes one spirit with Him*" (1Cor.6:17). This was perfectly fulfilled in the Immaculate Mary.

The spiritual life may be defined as "life in the Holy Spirit" (cf. Rom.8:4; Gal.5:25). Mary's spiritual life is so perfect because it was *always* "a life in the Holy Spirit." We can say that the Holy Spirit "took the absolute lead" in the possession of her soul, making her all His from the very first instant of her Immaculate Conception, when she was "entrusted eternally to the Spirit of holiness" by her Son,<sup>45</sup> and ever after, becoming "the permanent dwelling of the Spirit of God."<sup>46</sup> He was *always* in her and with her, filling her to overflowing with all His graces, virtues, gifts, and fruits—with all that this entails—illuminating her,<sup>47</sup> guiding her, transforming her ever more in God. It is a constant presence and action on His part, with its sublime mo-

<sup>42</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no.56.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. I. Bengoechea, "El Espíritu Santo y la Virgen María según San Juan de la Cruz," *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 31 (1981): 51-70, esp.58.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent* III, 2, 16: BAC, p.241; ICS, p.273.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no.8.

<sup>46</sup> Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Martialis Cultus* (2-2-1974), no.26: *Apostolic Exhortation: For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Official Vatican Translation (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, n.d.), 24.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent* III, 2, 12: BAC, p.240; ICS, p.271.

ments, like the Annunciation, Calvary, and Pentecost, and a constant, faithful collaboration with His action on the part of the perfectly humble and docile Virgin.<sup>48</sup> This mutual possession of the Holy Spirit and the soul, ever more perfect and intense, is what characterizes the lives of the saints, what they aim for and progressively attain, each one according to the wonders that God's wisdom and love has in store for them.<sup>49</sup> It is the characteristic of Mary's life *from the beginning!*

St. John of the Cross's exact principle: "*Raised from the beginning to this high state . . . always moved by the Holy Spirit,*" does not only illuminate Mary's spiritual life. It is a principle that we should bear in mind when doing exegesis. In every single act of her life, from her "Fiat" at the Annunciation to her presence in the Cenacle with the Apostles, the Virgin was *always* guided and moved by the Holy Spirit. Nothing is by chance. Everything is worthy of the One who moves her, the Holy Spirit. All her actions are divine. How much light does this truth shed, then, on her entire life, her mission, and her greatness!<sup>50</sup>

### g) God Loves in a Manner Worthy of Who He Is (*Flame, Prologue, 2; Song III, 6*)

Great indeed are the things that the Spanish theologian and mystic teaches, directly or indirectly, about the Virgin Mary! To our possible wonderment, due in part to a loss of clarity in our day on the principles that govern the spiritual life, so well taught and lived by the Fathers of the Church and Medieval authors, St. John of the Cross himself gives us a forceful argument in the prologue to *The Living Flame of Love*:

*There is no reason to marvel at God's granting such sublime and strange gifts to souls he decides to favor. If we consider that he is God and that he bestows them as God, with infinite love and goodness, it does not seem unreasonable. For he declared that the Father, the Son, and the*

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no.13.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Luis María Martínez, *The Sanctifier*, trans. by Sr. M. Aquinas, O.S.U. (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1985), 67-78.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ildefonso de la Inmaculada, "Los misterios de Nuestra Señora a la luz de San Juan de la Cruz," *Estudios Marianos* 38 (1974): 127-145.



Holy Spirit would take up their abode in those who love him by making them live the life of God and dwell in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Jn.14:23].<sup>51</sup>

Further on he reminds us of something very true: "when individuals love and do good to others, they love and do good to them *in the measure of their own nature and properties*." And thus, the Divine Spouse,

dwelling within you, *grants you favors according to his nature*. Since he is omnipotent, he omnipotently loves and does good to you; since he is wise, you feel that he loves and does good to you with wisdom; since he is infinitely good, you feel that he loves you with goodness; since he is holy, you feel that with holiness he loves and favors you. . . .<sup>52</sup>

No wonder, then, that Jesus Christ loves Mary, and demonstrates this love for her, whom He has chosen to be His Mother and Associate in the Work of Redemption, in a manner worthy of who He is, the Son of God, Love Himself!

Mary—Immaculate, Ever-Virgin, Mother of God, all-holy, Co-operatrix in the Work of Redemption, assumed bodily into heaven, merciful Mediatrix—shows better than anybody else the power of God's love, and the heights to which He is pleased to elevate those who humbly believe in Him and obey Him in everything out of love.

## **2. Consequences**

Besides explaining very clearly the process of purification that leads to the state of transforming union—a process that the Virgin Mary did not have to undergo, because she was raised by God to this state from the beginning of her life, St. John of the Cross also describes very well the different characteristics of this perfect union with God, which can be found in the Mother of God to the utmost degree. Although he does not mention Mary explicitly when speaking about certain important aspects

<sup>51</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Flame, Prologue*, 2: BAC, p.742; ICS, pp.638–639.

<sup>52</sup> *Flame* B, 3, 6: BAC, pp.803–804; ICS, pp.675–676.

of this state<sup>53</sup> like the "death of love,"<sup>54</sup> from what he teaches about them in general, we can assume that he would see them present in her most perfectly. In his three other important Marian texts, he does refer to three characteristics of the state of transforming union. We shall examine them briefly.

**a) The Prayer of the Discreet Lover (*Canticle* A 2, 8; B 2, 8)**

*The Spiritual Canticle* is dedicated to sing the love between the soul and Christ, the Divine Spouse. In the second song, St. John of the Cross explains how the soul, when the Beloved is absent, has recourse to others to let her Beloved know how much she is suffering, and how she hopes that the time has arrived for her entreaties for perfect union of love to be fulfilled by God.<sup>55</sup> By this "absence" St. John of the Cross means the desire that the soul has of the beatific vision, of the total, eternal possession of the Beloved that is only obtained in heaven, and thus longs "to be freed from mortal flesh" to be able to enjoy him "in the glory of eternity."<sup>56</sup>

He specifies that he is speaking here of *perfect love*. The soul loves God "more than all things," and "nothing intimidates her in doing and suffering for love of him whatever is for his

<sup>53</sup> For example, the possibility of the beatific vision in this life. Cf. *Flame* 1, 14: BAC, p.754; ICS, pp.645-646; *Ascent* II, 24, 3: BAC, p.211; ICS, p.241; *Canticle* B 14-15, 15: BAC, p.628; ICS, pp.531-532; I. Bengoechea, "El Espíritu Santo y la Virgen María según San Juan de la Cruz," 63-64.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Flame* B 1, 27-36: BAC, pp.763-772; ICS, pp.652-657; I. Bengoechea, "El Espíritu Santo y la Virgen María según San Juan de la Cruz," 64-66; Gregorio de Jesús Crucificado, "La muerte de amor de María a la luz de San Juan de la Cruz," *Estudios Marianos* 9 (1950): 260-267. Cf. also St. Francis de Sales, "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary" [his sermon of August 15, 1602], in *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales on Our Lady*, ed. Lewis S. Fiorelli, O.S.F.S.; trans. Nuns of the Visitation (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1985), 4-16.

<sup>55</sup> *Canticle* A 2, 1; 4: BAC, pp.447, 448-449; *Canticle* B 2, 1; 4: BAC, pp.582-583; ICS, pp.486-488. Medieval authors speak about Mary "languishing with love" after Christ's Ascension. Cf. for example: Bl. Guerric of Igny (+ 1157), *In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Sermo I*, in *Sources Chrétiennes* (SC) 202, pp.414-427; Oglierius of Loredio (+ 1214), *Tractatus in laudibus S. Deiparae*: G. B. Adriani, *Beati Oglierii de Tridino opera quae supersunt* (Turin, 1873), 93-94.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Canticle* B 1, 2: BAC, p.442; ICS, p.478; also *Canticle* B 1, 14-19: BAC, pp.444-446; ICS, pp.483-485.

service.”<sup>57</sup> The other point that our author makes is that “in this verse the soul does no more than disclose to the Beloved her need and suffering,” because “the discreet lover does not care to ask for what she lacks and desires, but only indicates this need so the Beloved may do what he pleases.” As an example of this attitude, he introduces Mary:

When the Blessed Virgin spoke to her beloved Son at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee, she did not ask directly for the wine, but merely remarked: *They have no wine* (Jn.2:3).<sup>58</sup>

He also mentions the example of the sisters of Lazarus (cf. Jn.11:3), and gives three reasons for this attitude:

First, the Lord knows what is suitable for us better than we do; second, the Beloved has more compassion when he beholds the need and resignation of a soul that loves him; third, the soul is better safeguarded against self-love and possessiveness by indicating its lack, rather than asking for what in its opinion is wanting.<sup>59</sup>

As we can see, here our author places the Virgin Mary among those who truly love God above all things, are ready to do anything for Him, and are most humble and discreet in the way they present to Him their needs.

We can also apply to this text other principles that St. John of the Cross develops elsewhere in his works. One of them is the great power of intercession that those who have reached the state of transforming union have before God. We shall mention two reasons for this.

One is that *it is God Himself who moves those who are in this state to make their petitions to Him*, obviously with the intention of granting them. We saw it in our main text:

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Canticle A* 2, 5-6: BAC, p.449; *Canticle B* 2, 5-6: BAC, pp.583-584; ICS, p.488.

<sup>58</sup> *Canticle A* 2, 8: BAC, p.450; *Canticle B* 2, 8: BAC, pp.584-585; ICS, p.489.

<sup>59</sup> *Canticle A* 2, 8: BAC, p.450; *Canticle B* 2, 8: BAC, p.585; ICS, p.489.

God alone moves these souls toward those works that are in harmony with his will and ordinance, and they cannot be moved toward others. *Thus the works and prayer of these souls always produce their effect.*<sup>60</sup>

Speaking specifically about the Blessed Virgin, he affirms that "*such*" was her case, and that "she was *always* moved by the Holy Spirit."<sup>61</sup> This guarantees that Mary's intervention at the wedding feast at Cana was not inopportune or rash, nor was the Lord annoyed by it, since it was God Himself who moved her to act, and would be pleased to comply with her wishes. This is clear by the fact that Jesus did intervene, and performed His first miracle at her request.

God delights in the confidence that souls in transforming union have in Him, and is happy to elicit and grant all the petitions of those who have abandoned themselves completely to His love. What can we say, then, of the petitions of His most loving Mother, who always did His Will, at all times and under all circumstances, no matter how painful and difficult they were?

The second reason for the power of intercession that those arrived to the spiritual marriage have is love. Explaining the first Song of his *Spiritual Canticle*, our author affirms that the soul calls the Son of God "Beloved," in order to "move him more to answer her prayer. *When God is loved he very readily answers the requests of his lover,*" as He Himself taught us in John 15:7. The soul can truly call Him "Beloved" "when she is wholly with him, does not allow her heart attachment to anything outside him, and thereby ordinarily centers her mind on him." On the other hand, those who call Him "Beloved," but their heart is not wholly set on him, do not truly love Him, and "as a result their petition is not of much value in his sight" and they do not obtain their request until they have grown in their love and given their hearts totally to Him, because "*nothing is obtained from God except by love.*"<sup>62</sup>

St. John of the Cross calls Jesus Christ Mary's "*beloved Son.*"<sup>63</sup> Beloved indeed! Who can describe the Immaculate Virgin's

<sup>60</sup> *Ascent* III, 2, 10: BAC, p.240; ICS, p.271 (with author's emphasis).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Canticle* A 1, 13: BAC, p.444; B 1, 13: BAC, p.578; ICS, p.483.

<sup>63</sup> *Canticle* A 2, 8: BAC, p.450; *Canticle* B 2, 8: BAC, p.585; ICS, p.489.

love for her Son and Spouse? How pleased, then, was the Word to grant her always all her humble, loving, and discreet petitions! How pleased is He now to grant her all she asks in heaven on behalf of her children on earth!

### **b) Suffering in the State of Spiritual Marriage**

**(Canticle A 29–30, 10; B 20–21, 10)**

The second Marian text found in *The Spiritual Canticle* is of great importance, because it *reaffirms* very clearly the teaching of our main text: That the Virgin Mary was in the state of transforming union or spiritual matrimony. St. John of the Cross is explaining two things: How the soul has reached the delightful state of spiritual marriage, so ardently desired, and what the qualities of this state are.<sup>64</sup> He defines it thus:

A total transformation in the Beloved, in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life. . . . When the spiritual marriage between God and the soul is consummated, there are two natures in one spirit and love . . . [1Cor.6:17].<sup>65</sup>

Transformation into the Beloved, “to be Jesus,” so that, in the words of St. Paul, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal.2:20); mutual total surrender and permanent union of love, with confirmation in grace, is what constitutes this state, “the highest possible in this life.” Who can doubt that all this is perfectly fulfilled in the Virgin Mother of God, and from the very beginning of her life?

The main characteristic of this state is that the soul attains perfect serenity and peace, because “the soul lives in this state a life as happy and glorious as is God’s.” “Just as God is incapable of feeling any distaste, neither does she feel any, for the delight of God’s glory is experienced and enjoyed in the substance of the soul now transformed in him.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Canticle A* 27, 2–8: BAC, pp.527–530; *Canticle B* 22, 2–8: BAC, pp.658–661; ICS, pp.560–563.

<sup>65</sup> *Canticle A* 27, 3: BAC, p.528; *Canticle B* 22, 3: BAC, p.659; ICS, pp.560–561.

<sup>66</sup> *Canticle A* 27, 6: BAC, p.529; *Canticle B* 22, 6: BAC, p.660; B, 22, 5: ICS, p.562.

In the spiritual marriage "the soul kisses God without contempt or disturbance from anyone. For in this state neither the devil, the flesh, the world, nor the appetites molest her."<sup>67</sup> The Bridegroom "conjures and commands" all the powers and faculties, so that "disturbing activities and movements cease by means of the immense delight and sweetness and strength received in the spiritual communication and surrender he makes of himself at this time. Because God vitally transforms the soul into himself, *all these faculties, appetites, and movements lose their natural imperfection and are changed to divine.*"<sup>68</sup> That is why the soul in this state should no longer experience sorrow.<sup>69</sup>

When we read this outstanding explanation of the happiness that, even in this life, God in His infinite love wants to grant to those whom He has raised so high in their union with Him, the excruciating sufferings of the saints, and in particular of the Sorrowful Mother, come to mind, and we wonder how they can be harmonized with these teachings of St. John of the Cross. He himself gives us the answer:

Sometimes, however, and at certain periods, God allows her to feel things and to suffer from them so she might gain more merit and grow in the fervor of love, or for other reasons, *as he did with the Virgin Mother*; St. Paul and others. Yet in itself this state does not include this feeling of sorrow.<sup>70</sup>

This is perfect love: God wants the soul to share in His eternal happiness; the soul wants to suffer for Him. Thus, God allows her to suffer, so that she can "gain more merit," "grow in the fervor of love," or "for other reasons" which His wisdom and love dictate. *This is the case of the Virgin Mother*, St. Paul, and others. The importance of this affirmation is clear: St. John

<sup>67</sup> *Canticle A* 27, 8: BAC, p.530; *Canticle B* 22, 8: BAC, p.661; *Canticle B* 22, 7: ICS, p.563.

<sup>68</sup> *Canticle A* 29-30, 4: BAC, pp.532-533; *Canticle B* 20-21, 4: BAC, pp.650-651; ICS, pp.552-553.

<sup>69</sup> *Canticle A* 29-30, 10: BAC, pp.535-536; *Canticle B*, 20-21, 10: BAC, p.654; ICS, pp.555-556.

<sup>70</sup> *Canticle A* 29-30, 10: BAC, p.536; *Canticle B*, 20-21, 10: BAC, p.654; ICS, p.556.

of the Cross includes Mary, in the first place, among those who are in the state of spiritual matrimony, reaffirming what he had said in the main text. At times, *God makes an exception, as He did in her case*, so that, even in this state, she could suffer. The Virgin was in the state of spiritual marriage, and she likewise suffered greatly.

Among "the other reasons" why God allowed her to suffer are: To be fully conformed in everything to her Son,<sup>71</sup> who, being God, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb.12:2); to cooperate with Him in the Work of Redemption as His most faithful and intimate *Socia* on behalf of the entire human race<sup>72</sup>; to be for all of us the best example after her Son; to be in solidarity with us in our sufferings. According to God's Economy of Salvation, and just like her Son, it was necessary for Our Lady's mission as Mother of the Redeemer and of all the redeemed that she, the Immaculate One, should bear the cruelest torments that any human person will ever be asked by God to endure out of love of Him and us.

Another characteristic of the state of spiritual marriage which St. John of the Cross mentions which will help us to understand better both the Virgin Mary's ineffable joys and indescribable sufferings, as well as her unique collaboration in her Son's Work of Redemption, is that:

In this high state of spiritual marriage the Bridegroom reveals his wonderful secrets to the soul as to his faithful consort, with remarkable ease and frequency, for true and perfect love knows not how to keep anything hidden from the beloved. He mainly communicates to her sweet mysteries of his Incarnation and the ways of the redemption of humankind, one of the loftiest of his works and thus more delightful to the soul.<sup>73</sup>

If the Divine Spouse delights in revealing His secrets to those who love Him truly, and asks them to cooperate in His

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no.59.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 61, 63, 65.

<sup>73</sup> *Canticle A* 28, 1: BAC, p.531: "En este alto estado de el matrimonio espiritual con gran facilidad y frecuencia descubre el Esposo al alma sus maravillosos secretos, y la da parte de sus obras . . ."; *Canticle B* 23, 1: BAC, pp.661-662; ICS, p.563; cf. *Ascent III*, 2, 12: BAC, p.240; ICS, pp.271-272.

works, what can we say about His own Mother? If the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption are those He discloses more, who can imagine the clarity and depth of Mary's knowledge of those Mysteries, in which she was called to participate in such a unique manner? God asked for her consent at the Annunciation; in her own virginal womb the Incarnation took place; at the foot of the Cross she stood, "associating herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her."<sup>74</sup> To the degree of her love and of her participation in her Son's Mysteries, rightly corresponds the degree of her profound knowledge of them.

**c) Light and Love in God's Communications**  
(*Flame* A 3, 12; B 3, 12)

In *The Living Flame of Love*, St. John of the Cross deals with "a very intimate and elevated union and transformation of the soul in God."<sup>75</sup> In "this enkindled degree," the soul "is so inwardly transformed in the fire of love and elevated by it that it is not merely united to this fire but produces within it a living flame."<sup>76</sup>

In the third *Song*, the soul thanks the Divine Spouse "for the admirable favors it receives from its union with him." In fact, through this union, the soul receives "abundant and lofty knowledge of God, which is all loving and communicates light and love to its faculties and feeling," enabling it "to give forth light and love" to Him who illuminated and filled it with love.<sup>77</sup>

This "knowledge" that our author is talking about is the infused knowledge of the Divine attributes that God grants to the soul in the state of transforming union. St. John of the Cross compares it to so many lamps because, just as the lamps have the twofold property of transmitting light and giving off warmth, the revelation of these attributes does not only illuminate the soul, but also gives it the warmth of love.<sup>78</sup> "All

<sup>74</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no.58.

<sup>75</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Flame*: BAC, p.741; ICS, p.638.

<sup>76</sup> *Flame*, Prologue 4: BAC, p.743; ICS, p.639.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Flame* A and B 3, 1: BAC, p.799; *Flame* B 3, 1: ICS, p.673.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Flame* A and B 3, 2: BAC, pp.799-800; *Flame* B 3, 2: ICS, pp.673-674.



these lamps are one lamp, which according to its powers and attributes shines and burns like many lamps," because all these attributes are one being and God is all these things. "In this communication and manifestation of himself to the soul . . . the greatest possible in this life, he is to it innumerable lamps giving forth knowledge and love of himself."<sup>79</sup>

Our author goes on to speak about the "splendors" of these lamps, which are "the loving knowledge that the lamps of God's attributes give forth from themselves to the soul," and to affirm that, in the mysterious correspondence which love longs for and brings about, the soul, "united with them in its faculties . . . is also resplendent like them, transformed in loving splendors."<sup>80</sup> True lovers are only content when they employ all they are or have in the beloved. In this state the soul rejoices because "from the splendors and love it receives, *it can shine brightly in the presence of its Bridegroom and give him love.*"<sup>81</sup>

St. John of the Cross praises highly the "excellency of the splendors of these lamps," and calls them also "overshadowings," which he defines thus:

. . . an overshadowing is the equivalent of casting a shadow; and casting a shadow is similar to protecting, favoring, and granting graces. For when a person is covered by a shadow, it is a sign that someone else is nearby to protect and favor.<sup>82</sup>

Here our author introduces the Virgin Mary, linking the "overshadowings" he is talking about with Luke (1:35):

*As a result the Angel Gabriel called the conception of the Son of God, that favor granted to the Virgin Mary, an overshadowing of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk.1:35).*<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Flame A* and *B 3*, 3: BAC, pp.800–801; *Flame B 3*, 3: ICS, p.674.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Flame A* and *B 3*, 9: BAC, p.806; *Flame B 3*, 9: ICS, p.677.

<sup>81</sup> *Flame A* and *B 3*, 1: BAC, p.799; *Flame B 3*, 1: ICS, p.673.

<sup>82</sup> *Flame A* and *B 3*, 12: BAC, p.808; *Flame B 3*, 12: ICS, p.678.

<sup>83</sup> *Flame A 3*, 12: BAC, p.808: "Y por eso aquella gran merced que hizo Dios a la Virgen María en la concepción de el Hijo de Dios la llamó el ángel san Gabriel obum-

According to our author, and taking into consideration the slight difference in wording between what he says in *Flame A* and *Flame B*, Luke 1:35 speaks about the “overshadowing” of the Holy Spirit because the conception of the Son of God is “a great favor”—we may add, the greatest favor ever granted by God to a human person—and because “*the Holy Spirit was going to come so near her, that He would come upon her.*”

“Casting a shadow is similar to protecting, favoring, and granting graces.” Then the Virgin Mary is the person over whom God “has cast the greatest shadow”: She was “*protected*” by God from the first instant of her Immaculate Conception. She was “*favored*” with the ineffable gifts of the Divine Maternity; perpetual Virginity; intimate, active cooperation in the Economy of Salvation; powerful Mediation; and glorious Assumption. She was “*inundated*” with God’s graces from the very beginning of her life in a way unparalleled. And, at the same time, she is the human person who has “shone brightly in the presence of the Bridegroom and given Him love” more than anybody else.

“Everything has and makes a shadow according to its size and its properties . . . As a result the shadow that the lamp of God’s beauty casts over the soul will be another beauty according to the measure and property of God’s beauty,” and so on with all His other attributes. “Since the shadow is so formed by God’s size and properties that it is God himself in shadow, the soul knows well the excellence of God.”<sup>84</sup>

What, then, will be the shadows of the grandeurs of his virtues and attributes that the Holy Spirit casts on the soul? For he is so close to it that his shadows not only touch but unite it with these grandeurs in their shadows and splendors, so that it understands and enjoys God according to his property and measure in each of the shadows.<sup>85</sup>

bración de el Espíritu Santo, diciendo: el Espíritu Santo vendrá sobre ti y la virtud del Altísimo te hará sombra”; *Flame B* 3, 12: BAC, p.808: “Y por eso se le dijo a la Virgen que la virtud del Altísimo la haría sombra, porque había de llegar tan cerca della el Espíritu Santo, que había de venir sobre ella”; *Flame B* 3, 12: ICS, p.678.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Flame A* and *B* 3, 13–14: BAC, pp.808–809; *Flame B* 3, 13–14: ICS, pp.678–679.

<sup>85</sup> *Flame A* and *B* 3, 15: BAC pp.809–810; *Flame A* 3, 15: ICS p.679.

St. John of the Cross is speaking of souls in transforming union in general. "What will be the shadows of the grandeurs of his virtues and attributes that the Holy Spirit casts" *on the soul of the Mother of God?* What light and what love did she receive from them? This infusion of Divine knowledge brings about in the soul a real participation, even though it be "in shadow," of the Divine attributes. What degree of perfection did this participation attain in the Blessed Virgin? God alone knows!

One last thing. As we mentioned before, these communications of God also enable the soul to correspond to them with all delicacy, love, praise, and gratitude. The Annunciation is the greatest communication that God has ever granted to a creature. To whom better than Mary, then, are we to apply these teachings? An expert in St. John of the Cross, Ildefonso de la Inmaculada, makes one such application in relation to the Magnificat.<sup>86</sup> The teachings of the great Spanish mystic offer us what he calls a "psychological proof" of the authorship of the Magnificat: Only the Virgin Mary could have proclaimed it. It does not only harmonize perfectly with her "Fiat," pronounced shortly before, but also with her psychological state at the moment of the Visitation. In it we can find all that St. John of the Cross teaches concerning the soul's reaction to one of God's communications: The Virgin Mary receives the most sublime of all Divine Revelations; she is filled with light, the very special light that she needed in order to give her free, responsible, ardent consent to the unique mission to which God was calling her; she is filled with immense love; and in her Magnificat she breaks forth with delicacy, praise, love and gratitude towards Him who has so loved her.

## **B. Mary's Uniqueness**

### **1. *The Virgin Mary Is Unique***

*The Virgin Mary is a unique case.* The teachings of St. John of the Cross have shown this fact very clearly. We must not be

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Ildefonso de la Inmaculada, "Los misterios de Nuestra Señora a la luz de San Juan de la Cruz," in *San Juan de la Cruz y la Virgen*, ed. I. Bengoechea (Sevilla: Miriam, 1990), 145-166, esp. 159-161 (also published in *Estudios Marianos* 38 [1974]: 127-145).

afraid to proclaim this truth. After the most sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, Mary is the creature who towers above all the others because of the unique gifts that she has received from God. Proclaiming this we glorify God for His great masterpiece, we do justice to Our Holy Mother, and we also acknowledge our own dignity before God, so well exemplified in Mary of Nazareth. Neither should we be afraid that, by extolling those graces which she has received from God and render her unique, we are thereby removing Mary, one of our race, far away from us, placing her in an inaccessible and inimitable height. As Vatican II has taught, Mary "occupies a place in the Church *which is the highest after Christ and also the closest to us.*"<sup>87</sup>

Tradition recognized this uniqueness from the very beginning. Be it because of her Divine Maternity, her mission in the Work of Redemption, or her unparalleled holiness, the Fathers of the Church and ecclesial writers wondered greatly at this woman. With great admiration and love they sang her praises, insisting, at the same time, on her merciful and loving closeness to us as our Mediatrix and Mother, and on our duty to imitate her. Let us see just a few among numerous examples.

St. Germanus of Constantinople (+ 733), who developed so well Marian doctrine, links Mary's greatness precisely with Luke 1:28; he writes:

. . . Gabriel . . . who has been sent to announce the most mysterious and secret conception of the Virgin, *has revealed her august greatness with a single word, saying: "Full of grace" (Lk. 1:28)*, meaning that she is completely filled with the Divine grace, and with the splendors that she receives little is wanting for her own nature to disappear. Gabriel, in fact, has proclaimed that the Lord is with her, certainly not like He was with one of those of the past who were holy and obtained familiarity with God, but like one who has placed his dwelling in her holy womb by the power of the Holy Spirit in an ineffable and inconceivable manner.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 54; cf. no. 53.

<sup>88</sup> St. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Liberation of Constantinople*, 6: *Révue des Études Byzantines* 16 (1958): 192-193; cf. St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (+ 638), *Oratio II In SS. Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 18: PG 87/3, 3237 C-D; St. Theodore the Studite (+ 826), *In Dormitionem Deiparae*, 5: PG 99, 728 D.

Paschasius Radbert (+ 865), in his famous *Letter on the Assumption*, for a long time attributed to St. Jerome (+ 419), says something similar:

Who she is and how great she is *was divinely declared by the angel himself*, when he said: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you . . ." [Lk. 1:28]

. . . That is the reason why I confess myself unworthy of speaking about such and so great a woman; in fact, I believe that nobody can presume to do it, *unless he ignore completely how great are the things that have been announced*.<sup>89</sup>

Further on he specifies that this greatness is the fruit of grace, and is based on her Divine Maternity:

She has been exalted above the angelic choirs *by the grace of Christ*.<sup>90</sup>

Her greatness is indescribable; *God made her so great in order to be born of her*.<sup>91</sup>

St. Anselm of Canterbury (+ 1109), in one of his beautiful Marian *Prayers*, has a very famous text:

O woman, uniquely to be wondered at,  
and to be wondered at for your uniqueness,

.....  
At what a height do I behold the place of Mary!  
*Nothing equals Mary,*  
*nothing, but God is greater than Mary*.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Paschasius Radbert, *De Assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis* V, 26 and 34, in Paschasii Radberti, *De Assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis*, cura et studio A. Ripberger (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontifici, 1985): Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis [CCCM] LVI C, pp.120, 124.

<sup>90</sup> Idem, *De Assumptione* VII, 43: CCCM LVI C, pp.127-128.

<sup>91</sup> Idem, *De Assumptione* XV, 95: CCCM LVI C, p.153.

<sup>92</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio 7 ad sanctam Mariam pro impetrando eius et Christi amore*, in *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F.-S. Schmitt (6 vols.; Nelson, 1938-1961), 3:21, lines 82-83; 93-94: Eng. trans. in B. Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1973), 119-120, lines 152-153; 176-178; cf. *De conceptu virginali* 18: PL 158, 451. Cf. also Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne (+ 1159), *Homilia VII* in Sources Chrétiennes (SC) 72, pp.188-190; *Homilia VIII*: SC 72, p.206.

St. Thomas Aquinas (+ 1274) offers the theological explanation:

The Humanity of Christ since it is united to God, the beatitude of the elect since it is the possession of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary since she is the Mother of God—all these have a certain infinite dignity from their relation to God Himself, and under that respect there can be nothing more perfect than them since there can be nothing more perfect than God.<sup>93</sup>

As Juliana of Norwich (+ ca.1420) specifies, “nothing among created things, except for the holy humanity of Christ, *is above her*.”<sup>94</sup> And Christ her Son is the reason, as St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) insists:

“Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has the heart of man understood” [1Cor. 2:9] the beauty, the grandeur, the excellence of Mary, who is indeed a miracle of miracles of grace, nature, and glory. “*If you wish to understand the mother, . . . then understand the Son. She is a worthy Mother of God. . . . Here let every tongue be silent.*”<sup>95</sup>

He also stresses the superiority of her *interior* beauty:

Moreover, we should repeat after the Holy Spirit, “All the glory of the king’s daughter is within” [Ps.44:14], meaning that all the external glory which heaven and earth vie with each other to give her *is nothing compared to what she received interiorly from her Creator*, namely, a glory unknown to insignificant creatures like us, who cannot penetrate the secrets of the king [Tob.12:7].<sup>96</sup>

St. Maximilian Kolbe (+ 1941) has a similar text:

Human words have not the power to relate what She is who has become the real Mother of God. In reality, She is only a creature, but in God She

<sup>93</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.25, a.6, ad 4; Eng. version taken from Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, 31.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Juliana of Norwich, *Revelations*, 4, in Juliana of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. from the critical text with an introduction by E. College and J. Walsh; Preface by J. Leclercq (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 131 (short text), 182 (long text).

<sup>95</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no. 12: *God alone*, 293; cf. *ibid.*, no. 115: *God alone*, 324: “Honoring her . . . as the masterpiece of grace and the foremost in holiness after Jesus Christ.”

<sup>96</sup> *Idem*, *True Devotion*, no.11: *God alone*..., p.293.

is such a sublime being that *one would have to grasp what God is, in order to understand who the Mother of God is.*<sup>97</sup>

The great Polish martyr distinguished himself for his profound understanding of the Immaculate Conception. The following text bears some resemblance to St. John of the Cross, and also underlines our call to imitate Mary:

Immaculate . . . The summit of perfection of a creature, Mother of God, the most God-like of creatures . . .

The purpose of the creature, the purpose of man, is the progressive growth in likeness to the Creator, a constantly more perfect Godliness. "God becomes man so that man might become God," says St. Augustine.

We imitate good, virtuous, holy people, but none of these is without imperfection. Only She, Immaculate from the first moment of Her existence, knows no fault, not the least. It is She whom one should imitate and come close to. We should become Hers, become *Her*: Behold the peak of perfection in man.<sup>98</sup>

The Magisterium of the Church has corroborated all this. Let us see just one text taken from Vatican II:

Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. *Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth.*<sup>99</sup>

## ***2. The Reasons for Mary's Unparalleled Greatness***

There are four main reasons why Mary, our sister, holds at the same time, and without doubt, a wholly singular place. Let us see them briefly.

*The first one is her Immaculate Conception.* This alone makes her unique. Except for Christ, her Son, only Mary was

<sup>97</sup> M. Kolbe, *Aim Higher: Marian Thoughts of Blessed Maximilian Mary Kolbe, O.F.M. Conv.*, gathered by ELFI; a translation from the Polish *pro manuscripto* (Ndola, Zambia: Mission Press, 1976), 3-4: chap. 1, no. 5.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: chap. 1, no. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no.53; cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no.9.

conceived without original sin. From the first moment of her existence "she belonged to Christ, sharing in the salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the 'Beloved', the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son."<sup>100</sup> What is it like to be the Immaculate Conception? This sole fact undoubtedly marked her whole life, but precisely *how* is more difficult for us to say, because, as St. Ephraem (+ 373) put it:

You Lord and your Mother *are the only two who are perfectly beautiful under every respect*. In you there is no fault, and in your Mother there is no stain. All other children of God are far from such beauty.<sup>101</sup>

*The second*, a direct consequence of the first, *is her sinless life*. Because she was preserved from contracting original sin, Mary was also preserved from two of its fruits: concupiscence and darkness of understanding. She was never subject to concupiscence in any sense, and so "her sensibility was always fully subject to her rational powers, and thereby to God's Will." Likewise, "Mary was never subject to error or illusion. Her judgment was always enlightened and correct. If she did not understand a thing fully she suspended her judgment upon it, and thus avoided the precipitation which might have been the cause of error."<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, because of "a special privilege" granted to her by God and recognized by the Magisterium of the Church,<sup>103</sup> Mary never committed any sin, mortal or venial, during her entire life, being free even from the slightest shortcoming. St. Thomas Aquinas (+ 1274) explains it thus:

God so prepares and endows those, whom He chooses for some particular office, that they are rendered capable of fulfilling it . . . Now the Blessed Virgin was chosen by God to be His Mother. Therefore there can be no doubt that God, by His grace, made her worthy of that office . . . But she would not have been worthy to be the Mother of God, if she had

<sup>100</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no.10.

<sup>101</sup> St. Ephraem, *Carmina Nisibena* 27, 8: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO), vol. 219, p.76 (Scriptores Syri, t. 93).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour*, 57.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Council of Trent (1545-1563), Sess. VI, Can.23: Denzinger, no.1575.



ever sinned . . . Because of the singular affinity between her and Christ . . . Because of the singular manner in which the Son of God, Who is the Divine Wisdom, dwelled in her, not only in her soul but in her womb; and it is written (Wis. 1:4): "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins." *We must therefore confess simply that the Blessed Virgin committed no actual sin, neither mortal nor venial*; so that what is written (Ct. 4:7) is fulfilled: "Thou are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in thee."<sup>104</sup>

Mary enjoyed "a special assistance of Divine Providence" which "preserved all her faculties from faults and kept her soul in a state of the most complete generosity" which, "far from diminishing her liberty or free will," conferred on her "full liberty in the order of moral goodness, with no inclination to evil, just as her mind never tended to error. Hence her liberty, following the example of that of Jesus, was a faithful and most pure image of God's liberty, which is at once sovereign and incapable of sin."<sup>105</sup>

*The third reason why Mary is unique is her Divine Maternity*, and we can see very clearly why this, the greatest of all the graces ever granted to a human being, which places her in such an intimate and incomparable relationship with the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, necessarily distinguishes her from the rest of humanity, and is the foundation of all else that is said about her.

Finally, *the fourth reason for her singularity is the mission that God entrusted to her*, of being the Mother of the Total Christ, Head and members, the faithful associate of Christ in the Work of Redemption, and the universal Mediatrix of all His graces to humankind.

Now, the reason why we have mentioned Mary's incomparable greatness, and shown a few examples from Tradition and the Magisterium where it is affirmed, is that we believe that in order to "understand," as far as such a thing is possible, Mary's spiri-

<sup>104</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 27, a. 4. English version taken from: *The "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Part III (QQ. 27-59). Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (2nd rev. ed.; London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1926), 12.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour*, 65-66.

tual life better, we must always bear in mind about whom we are talking. The Blessed Virgin is, without doubt, our best model after Christ. But she is not our model because she went through the same struggles and fights against sins, the same doubts and failings we all go through, since she was always most holy from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, and never experienced sin. If we are called to imitate her it is because she always loved God "with her whole heart, her whole soul, her whole mind and her whole strength" (Dt.6:4-5); because she always believed in, loved and served Christ, following Him everywhere; because she always walked "according to the Spirit" (Rom.7:6, 8:4; Gal.5:25). Pope Paul VI teaches in his *Marialis Cultus* the reasons why Mary should be imitated. What he says about her life in general, can be applied to her spiritual life in particular:

The Virgin Mary has always been proposed to the faithful by the Church as an example to be imitated, not precisely in the type of life she led, and much less for the socio-cultural background in which she lived and which today scarcely exists anywhere. She is held up as an example to the faithful rather for the way in which, *in her own particular life*, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God (cf. Lk.1:38), because she heard the word of God and acted on it, and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples. All of this has permanent and universal exemplary value.<sup>106</sup>

Some aspects of Mary's spiritual life are unique to her, others she shares with us but in a more eminent degree. But the Blessed Virgin is our best model in the spiritual life because, *in her concrete situation as the Immaculate, Virgin Mother of God, and Associate of the Redeemer*, she followed God's Will in everything, and corresponded fully to the special graces that He granted to her. Moreover, in our own way, we are also called to be all that she is: holy, virgin mothers of Christ, loving spouses, faithful disciples, courageous collaborators in His work of Redemption, sharers of His glory in heaven.

<sup>106</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, no.35.

### C. The Virgin Mary's Interior Life in Tradition

Interest in the interior life of the Blessed Virgin Mary is as old as the Gospel of St. Luke. In fact, it is there that we find the first most luminous references to this theme: "Rejoice, *full of grace*, the Lord is with you" (Lk.1:28); "you *have found grace* with God" (Lk.1:30); "*the Holy Spirit* will come upon you . . ." (Lk.1:35); "*blessed* are you among women" (Lk.1:42); "blessed is she who *believed*" (Lk.1:45); "and *a sword will pierce* through your own soul also" (Lk.2:35). There we see the humble Mary "considering in her mind what sort of greeting this might be" (Lk.1:29); the Virgin asking a question (Lk.1:34); the obedient handmaid pronouncing her joyful and courageous "Fiat" (Lk.1:38); the bearer of God hastening to give Him to others (Lk.1:39-44); the singular spouse exploding in her canticle of love (Lk.1:46-55); the faithful disciple "keeping all the things which concerned her Son, pondering them in her heart" (cf. Lk.2:19, 51); the loving Mother and Teacher praying in communion with the Apostles and the other disciples (Acts 1:14).

St. John joins St. Luke, proclaiming the intimate union of the Associate of the Redeemer in His compassion for needy humankind (cf. Jn.2:1-12), and in His supreme sacrifice on the Cross (Jn.19:25-27). What a treasure of insights is there to be found in the New Testament alone! Tradition will take up this treasury and continue developing it through the centuries. Sometimes we find just short but significant references like the following:

You have always before your eyes the conduct of Mary, *who is the type and image of the life proper of heaven*.<sup>107</sup>

Mary's life is "*the perfect goal and the norm of heavenly life*."<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Alexander of Alexandria (+ 328), quoted by St. Athanasius in *Epistula ad virgines*: CSCO 151, 72.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. St. Athanasius (+ 373), *De virginitate*: CSCO 151, 72 (Scriptores Coptici, t.20); also Antipater of Bostra (c. 457), *In Annuntiationem*, 11: PG 85, 1784 A-B.

This Virgin, having been so-to-speak saturated with virtues since she was in swaddling clothes, and having grown together with these virtues, while on earth, *dedicated herself to a life in the spirit*. . . <sup>109</sup>

Other authors develop it more at length. St. Germanus of Constantinople (+ 733), for example, offers several interesting insights into Mary's spiritual life. A very important one is found at the beginning of his *II Homily on the Assumption*:

If you were not our guide, nobody would lead a spiritual life and nobody would adore God in spirit (Jn.4:24). Man, in fact, became spiritual, when you, Oh Mother of God, were constituted the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. If it were not for you, Oh most holy one, nobody would be filled with the knowledge of God. . . <sup>110</sup>

In this extraordinary text St. Germanus affirms several things: Mary has both preceded us and she guides us (προηγέομαι) in our spiritual life; it is thanks to Mary that we can lead to fulfillment (ἀποτελέω) a spiritual life or "become spiritual" and adore God in spirit; she was the first one to become the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and she opened the door for the rest of us. In other words, it is thanks to Mary's consent at the Annunciation and her Divine Maternity that we can lead a spiritual life; she was the first one to live it, and she helps us now in our own spiritual life.<sup>111</sup>

In two other texts, probably inspired in Colossians 3:1-4 and Philipians 3:20, St. Germanus remarks how Mary, when she was on earth, was not alien to the things of heaven, but

<sup>109</sup> Photius (+ c.897), *In Annuntiationem* II, 4: B. Laourdas, *Photiou homiliat* (Thessalonike, 1959), 76-77.

<sup>110</sup> St. Germanus of Constantinople, *In Dormitionem B.Mariae* II: PG 98, 349 B-C.

<sup>111</sup> For more on this text, cf. D. Flores, "El Espíritu Santo y la Virgen María en San Germán de Constantinopla (733) y San Andrés de Creta (740)," in *Con María hacia el Tercer Milenio*, Actas del IV Simposio Mariológico Internacional, México D.F., 28-30 de julio de 1998, ed. M.A. Delgado (Mexico D.F.: Centro Mariano de Difusión Cultural, A.C., 1999), 37-108, esp. 79-105.

already led a heavenly life, in intimate union with God; and now that she is in heaven, she has not abandoned her children who are on earth, but continues taking care of them.<sup>112</sup>

Many authors apply to the Virgin Mary different characteristics of the spiritual life. Bruno of Asti (+ 1123), for example, following Origen's (+ 253) spiritual interpretation of the Visitation,<sup>113</sup> affirms that "the Virgin, full of God, went up to the mountain region (cf. Lk.1:39) in search of higher realities, because with her mind she no longer dwelt on earth, but in heaven, and her conversation was with the Spirit."<sup>114</sup>

Henry of Marcy (+ 1189), pursuing the Eve-Mary parallel, describes how Mary abandoned the left side that Eve had chosen, and turned totally to the right; "scorning earthly and carnal delights, putting aside the image of the earthly man, choosing the heavenly and eternal things, she put on the image of the heavenly man. The Holy Spirit having renewed in her the same justice and fully established an upright spirit, she remodeled in herself that likeness of God that the first just man, created by a just God, had received in justice."<sup>115</sup>

Egidio Romano (+ 1312) reminds us of the etymology of the Greek word for "holy," ἅγιος, which means "without earth" (i.e., pure). Mary is rightly called by the Church "holy," "without earth," because she always lived above the things of the earth, far away from the attachment to earthly realities. She was truly "a citizen of heaven," as St. Paul teaches in Philippians 3:20 of the just who still live on earth.<sup>116</sup>

St. Teresa of Avila (+ 1582) highly praises Mary's wisdom, faith, and humility, and indicates how well we can under-

<sup>112</sup> Cf. St. Germanus of Constantinople, *In Dormitionem B. Mariae* I: PG 98, 344 B-D; also 344 D-345 C; *In Dormitionem* II: PG 98, 357 A-B.

<sup>113</sup> Origen, *In Lucam Homilia* VII: PG 13, 1817 A-C.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Bruno of Asti, *Commentaria in Lucam* IV: PL 165, 344 B; cf. Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne (+ 1159), *Homilia* III: SC 72, p. 98; *Homilia* IV: SC 72, pp. 128-136.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Henry of Marcy, *Tractatus De peregrinante civitate Dei*, XII: PL 204, 343 B-C; St. Martin of Leon (+ 1203), *Sermo IV, II In Nativitate Sanctae Mariae*: PL 209, 25 A-30 C (the entire sermon deals with this theme).

<sup>116</sup> Egidio Romano, *Expositio in salutationem angelicam: Bibliotheca virginis sive Mariae mare magnum*, Vol. III (Madrid, 1648), 499-500.

stand the bride of the Canticle by contemplating the Blessed Virgin.<sup>117</sup>

St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) has a text similar to the one we saw in St. Germanus of Constantinople:

Ever since God personally hid himself with all his perfections in this vessel, it has become *completely spiritual*, and spiritual abode of all spiritual souls.<sup>118</sup>

All these examples are but quick flashes. Many of these and other authors will go into great detail examining the Blessed Virgin's spiritual life, developing at length its different aspects.

## II. THE MEANING OF LUKE 1:28

In order to understand better what it means for the Virgin Mary's spiritual life, the fact that she was full of grace (Lk. 1:28) from the very beginning of her life on earth (Dogma of the Immaculate Conception), it would be good to review briefly what grace is, and the fundamental importance that it has in our spiritual life.

### A. The Life of Grace

"The good of grace in one is greater than the good of nature in the whole universe," teaches St. Thomas Aquinas (+ 1274).<sup>119</sup> What can we say, then, of "the good of grace" in the Virgin Mary, who received grace as no other human person will ever receive it?

The "spiritual" or "interior life" is also called "the life of grace," because it presupposes the state of grace, and grace is both the principle of a true spiritual life and the germ of

<sup>117</sup> Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, *Meditaciones sobre los Cantares*, chap. 6, 7-8: *Santa Teresa de Jesús. Obras Completas*; transcripción, introducciones y notas de Efrén de la Madre de Dios y Otger Steggink (7<sup>th</sup> ed.; Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos [BAC 212], 1982, c1977), 356.

<sup>118</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion*, no. 178: *God alone*, 346. Cf. St. Alphonsus Liguori (+ 1787), *Le glorie di Maria*, III. *Delle virtù di Maria SS.*, 5 (Napoli: Valsele Tipografica, 1987), 539-540.

<sup>119</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia IIae, q. 113, a. 9 ad 2um.

eternal life, the so-called *semen gloriae* that we receive in Baptism and, like a seed, has to grow in us everyday more until this grace is consummated and inamissible, and is then called "glory."<sup>120</sup> The life of grace is eternal life begun; it is the same life in its essence; the same divine life exists as a seed in the Christian on earth, and as fully developed in the saints in heaven.<sup>121</sup> That is why, from the "fullness of grace" that the Virgin Mary enjoyed throughout her life on earth, we can infer the perfection of her spiritual life and the "fullness of glory" that she now enjoys in heaven. And conversely, contemplating her, perfectly glorified in body and soul in heaven, we can deduce how faithfully she corresponded to God's grace, and what an unparalleled "fullness of grace" she had at the moment of her Assumption.

*Sanctifying grace*, which is received in the Sacrament of Baptism, is essentially a participation in the Divine Nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). The Blessed Virgin Mary received sanctifying grace from the very first instant of her existence, and she never lost it through sin, because she never sinned. Her participation in the Divine Nature is the most perfect that a human person will ever attain. All the other effects of sanctifying grace also find in her their most perfect fulfillment: Mary is the most dearly beloved *daughter of the Eternal Father*, who already enjoys in heaven most perfectly *the eternal inheritance*, in the company of Jesus Christ, who is not only her *brother and co-heir*, but her own Son, at whose right hand she sits, *reigning with Him* in glory. Mary lived her *supernatural life of grace* to the utmost degree possible; she was always *just and pleasing to God* in every single thought, word, and action of her life, and her *supernatural merits* have no equal. Who can describe her *intimate union with God*? Who can praise this unique *living temple of the Blessed Trinity*, who carried the Son of God for nine months in her own virginal womb, and who became "the *permanent dwelling of the Spirit of God*?"<sup>122</sup> Here all words utterly fail!

<sup>120</sup> Cf. idem, *Summa Theologiae* IIa IIae., q.24, a.3 ad 2um.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (2 vols.; Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1989, c1947), 1:29-30, 33-37.

<sup>122</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Mariæ cultus*, no.26. Cf. A. Royo Marín and J. Aumann, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1962), 29-41.

Mary constantly received many *actual graces*, which in her case always produced their effect, making her act ever more perfectly in a manner becoming the children of God. The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul of *the just* is one of the most ineffable truths of our Christian faith. All three purposes of this indwelling—(1) to make us share in the divine life, 2) to make God the mover and ruler of our actions, and 3) to make God the object of fruition by an ineffable experience<sup>123</sup>—were perfectly fulfilled in the Blessed Virgin.

Together with, and inseparably from sanctifying grace, God infuses in our soul *the infused virtues*, both theological and moral, and *the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit*.<sup>124</sup> Who can doubt that in Mary, the “Full of grace,” these infused virtues were most perfectly present? The New Testament itself gives witness to her unparalleled faith, hope, charity, temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude.

The great Mexican mystic, the Servant of God Archbishop Luis María Martínez (1881-1956), explains extremely well the nature and importance of *the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*. He compares the Holy Spirit to a divine artist whose work it is to reproduce in the canvas of our souls Jesus Christ; and he compares our reason, “assisted by God’s light and enriched with the supernatural virtues,” with a pupil in the divine art. “Both the Master and the disciple have their own instruments of work. For the disciple, they are the virtues; for the Master, the seven gifts.” The virtues are exercised under the direction of reason; the gifts under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit. “Without the gifts the work of perfection is impossible,” because “the human faculties could not receive the motion of the Spirit without the gifts that He Himself places at the fountainhead of our activity to receive His sanctifying motion, His divine inspirations, His vivifying breath . . .”<sup>125</sup>

St. John of the Cross teaches that Mary “was always moved by the Holy Spirit”; the Mexican mystic explains how “in the

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Royo Marín and Aumann, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, 45-53, esp. 45, 47-48.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-72, 73-103.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Martínez, *The Sanctifier*, 36-43.



exercise of the infused virtues, the soul is fully active; in the exercise of the gifts, *the soul is moved by the Holy Spirit*, but "the soul does not remain idle. Its activity is more intense and complete under the impulse of the gifts than when it is exercising the virtues."<sup>126</sup>

The Spanish mystic describes the peace that the soul attains in the state of spiritual marriage, and indicates that Mary was raised to this state "from the beginning." Archbishop Martínez also describes this peace. Eliminating "the cleansing action," which does not apply to the Immaculate, his description of the final result is best exemplified in Mary:

. . . One after another the gifts by their cleansing action will take away from the soul the impurities characteristic of human misery. The gentle brilliance of heavenly light will descend upon the purified soul and the pale outlines of the ideal [Jesus] will begin to appear, as the stars come out in the quiet splendor of twilight. Then all is harmony in the soul; all desires are fused in the oneness of a conquered love; all the scattered lights are unified in the gloriously divine theme. The work is about to appear in its magnificent beauty. The realization of the ideal in the soul is but the image of the Father, the created yet supernatural reproduction, full of light and truth, of that unique, infinite and consubstantial image of the Father, the Word . . .

By a miracle of love, the ideal and the work of art seem to be one . . . The Father and the Son, uniting in their eternal kiss of love, join the soul to their embrace. . . .<sup>127</sup>

Who can imagine the "magnificent beauty" of the work that this Divine Artist accomplished in the Blessed Virgin, always so perfectly docile to Him, who had no need of any cleansing, who grew in the likeness of Jesus more and more every single day?

The work of the Holy Spirit in us, sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, actual graces—all these are not abstract definitions for the intellectual exercise of the theologian alone. They are very real things, that touch us directly, and that it is a real tragedy to ignore or set aside as *passé*. All of them are present, in the most perfect and sublime manner, in the Immaculate soul of the

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

Blessed Virgin Mary. If we want to penetrate a little the unique wonders of Mary's interior life, it is indispensable to keep them well in mind.

## B. The Meaning of Κεχαριτωμένη

The angel Gabriel's greeting to the Virgin Mary (Lk.1:28) comprises two words: χαῖρε and κεχαριτωμένη. The meaning of the first word, χαῖρε, a present active imperative, second person singular of the verb χαίρω, was extremely clear and constant in the Greek Tradition from the beginning: "Rejoice." In this article we shall refer ourselves only to the second word, κεχαριτωμένη.

### 1. The Contribution of Modern Exegesis

Modern exegesis has done much to clarify the meaning of "χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη" (Lk.1:28), and bring out its philological and exegetical richness.<sup>128</sup> It has demonstrated that the best possible translation of κεχαριτωμένη is probably "completely and permanently transformed by God's grace." There are several reasons for this.

Κεχαριτωμένη is a perfect passive participle, feminine singular, of the Greek verb χαριτόω (χαριτοῦν). The verb χαριτόω is a *causative verb*, which means that it describes the change or transformation that takes place in the person who receives the action of the verb. In our case, it indicates the effect that the χάρις (grace) produces in Mary, how she has been "graced," and how this effect is permanent.

There are other contract verbs ending in *ω*, like χαριτόω, that also exemplify this total transformation of the subject, for example: λευκώω, "to whiten," τυφλώω, "to blind," κακώω, "to pervert" (literally, "to make bad"), κρυγώω, "to gild"; χαριτόω belongs to this type of verb.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. among others: E. Della Corte, "Κεχαριτωμένη (Lc 1, 28). *Crux interpretum*," *Marianum* 52 (1990): 101-148; I. de La Potterie, "Κεχαριτωμένη; en Luc 1,28. Étude philologique," *Biblica* 68 (1987): 357-382, and "Κεχαριτωμένη en Luc 1,28. Étude exégétique et théologique," *Biblica* 68 (1987): 480-508; R. Laurentin, *Les évangiles de l'Enfance du Christ. Vérité de Noël au-delà des mythes* (Paris: Desclée, 1982); S. Lyonnet, "Χαίρε κεχαριτωμένη," *Biblica* 20 (1939): 131-141.

In Greek, the perfect tense indicates an action that *was completed in the past*, but its effects *persist in the present*. It underlines the result of an action or the present state of the person in question. It indicates that Mary has been “perfectly” and “permanently” transformed by grace. That she possesses grace in a habitual manner. That at the time of the Annunciation she is already full of grace, already fully prepared for the mission that God is about to ask of her. The passive voice indicates that Mary is the recipient of the action. Her transformation by grace or “fullness of grace” is the result of *God’s* most loving, powerful, and merciful action upon her.

It seems likely that the participle κεχαριτωμένη retains here its verbal character, because it is preceded by the Imperative of a verb of emotion, and in Greek, verbs denoting a frame of mind or a sentiment (*verba affectum*), in order to express the cause or attendant circumstance of the emotion, often take a participle with predicative value. Thus the translation could be: “Rejoice, *you who have been transformed by God’s grace*.”<sup>129</sup>

All this philological information is very important, because it proves that Mary had already been “completely and permanently transformed by God’s grace” when the angel came to her. In other words, that this “fullness of grace” had started before the Annunciation. When? All indicates that we should go as far back as her conception, as in fact was defined by the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It is from the very first instant of her existence that she has been “completely and permanently transformed by God’s grace.” What this means for Mary’s spiritual life we can barely glimpse!

In the correct interpretation of κεχαριτωμένη, then, we find a solid foundation upon which we can build our notions about Mary’s spiritual life. We shall do it with the help of Tradition, examining how different ecclesial writers have understood κεχαριτωμένη, and what conclusions they have drawn from it *with regard to the Blessed Virgin’s interior life*.

<sup>129</sup> I. de La Potterie translates: “Réjouis-toi d’être (d’avoir été) transformée par la grace”: “Κεχαριτωμένη en Luc 1,28,” 382.

## 2. From the Beginning, Tradition Wonders . . .

The meaning and importance of the archangel Gabriel's greeting to the Virgin Mary has attracted the attention of authors through the centuries. The first one to notice how unusual this greeting is was none other than Origen (+ 253), the great Alexandrian exegete.<sup>130</sup> In his famous text are already contained several of the ideas concerning Luke 1:28 that Tradition will continue exploring: How the angel greeted Mary with *a new address*, with *a strange greeting*; that is *not found anywhere else in Sacred Scripture*, and *was not addressed to anybody else*, but was reserved for Mary alone.<sup>131</sup> Mary knew the Law, was holy, and had learned the writings of the prophets by meditating on them daily. And yet she was frightened by the greeting, because *she realized that it had not been addressed to anybody else* before her. Origen does not go beyond that; the notions of holiness and Divine Maternity are present in his text, but without further explanation.

St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397) is one of the first authors who tried to interpret to *what* the grace that the angel mentions refers. He identified Mary's "fullness of grace" with the grace, granted to her alone, *of receiving the Author of grace*.<sup>132</sup> In other words, he identifies it with her Divine Maternity, as many others will do in the future.

In fact, Tradition often relates κεχαριτωμένη to *Mary's Divine Maternity*, looked at from several angles. Some refer it to *the grace of the Divine and Virginal Maternity itself*, the most

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Origen, *In Lucam Homilia* VI: PG 13, 1815 D-1816 A.

<sup>131</sup> Concerning *the newness and exclusiveness* of the angel's greeting, cf. St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397), *In Lucam* II, 9: PL 15, 1636 B; St. Bede (+ 735), *Homilia I In Festo Annuntiationis B.M.*: PL 94, 11 A; Paul Deacon Varnefried (+ c.799), *Homilia I In Assumptione B.M.V.*: PL 95, 1567 A; Rupert of Deutz (+ 1130), *De glorificatione Sanctissimae Trinitatis et processione Spiritus Sancti*, 9: SC 131, pp. 84-86; Baldwin of Ford (+ 1190), *Tractatus septimus De Salutatione Angelica*: PL 204, 467 D. Some observe that *it is not an ordinary greeting like "hello"*: cf. St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo 140 De Annuntiatione D.M.V.*: PL 52, 576 A-B; others underline its theological importance: cf. Severian of Gabala (+ a. 408), *De mundi creatione Oratio* VI: PG 56, 497; St. Andrew of Crete (+ 740), *In Dormitionem S. Mariae* II: PG 97, 1072 C.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* II, 9: PL 15, 1636 B.

sublime grace that God can grant to a human person.<sup>133</sup> Others, like St. Ambrose,<sup>134</sup> interpret it as *the grace of conceiving the Author of Grace*: How would she not be full of grace, if she is the Mother of the One who is "full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:14; cf. 1:16-17)? Another common interpretation is that *the fullness of grace was needed in order to become the Mother of God*. Such an absolutely sublime calling is not only an ineffable grace in itself, but it also requires a very special grace from God in order for Mary to be able to carry it out.<sup>135</sup> Finally, other authors point out that *grace and not nature makes her the Mother of God*. It is a wholly Divine operation, which evidences very clearly God's infinite wisdom, power, and love, and for which, nevertheless, He asked Mary's consent and maternal cooperation.<sup>136</sup>

St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (+ 638) offers an interesting Patristic elaboration on the meaning of this grace which stresses the theme of the Divine Maternity, but also introduces that of being personally "transformed by grace." In his first text, after

<sup>133</sup> Cf. St. Jerome (+ 419), *Epistola 65 Ad Principiam*, 9: PL 22, 628; St. Peter Chrysologus (+ c.450), *Sermo 143 De Annuntiatione D.M.V.*: PL 52, 583 C, 584 A; Basil of Seleucia (+ a.468), *Oratio 39 In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*: PG 85, 444 B-C; St. Sophronius (+ 638), *Oratio II In SS. Deiparae Annuntiationem*: PG 87/3, 3240 A-3241 B, 3245 B-C; St. Maximus the Confessor (+ 662), *Life of Mary*, 21, in *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio*, vol. 2: *Padri e altri autori Bizantini (VI-XI sec.)*, ed. G. Gharib, E.M. Toniolo, L. Gambero, and G. Di Nola (4 vols.; Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1989), 2:199.

<sup>134</sup> St. Ambrose (+ 397), *In Lucam II*, 9: PL 15, 1636 B. Cf. Gottschalk of Limburg (+ 1098), *Sequentiae*, in *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, ed. G. M. Dreves, Cl. Blume, H. M. Bannister (55 vols.; Leipzig, 1886-1922), 50:363-364; St. Thomas Aquinas (+ 1274), *Summa Theologiae* IIIa., q.27, a.5; Bl. Raymond Lull (+ 1315), *Book on the Hail Mary*, II Sermon: "Full of Grace," I, in *Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, Vol. 4: *Autori medievali dell'Occidente secoli XIII-XV* (8 vols.; Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1996), 4:480.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. St. Augustine (+ 430), *Enchiridion ad Laurentium I*, 36, 11: PL 40, 250. Cf. also Fausto of Rietz (+ 490/95), *Epistula XVII*, 20: PL 65, 476 B-477 A: To man also is infused the gift of grace in his heart, "so that he may begin to form Christ in himself through faith"; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIIa., q.27, a.4; a.5, corp. et ad 2; III, q.7, a.10; Bl. Raymond Lull (+ 1315), *Book on the Hail Mary*, II Sermon: "Full of Grace," I, in *Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:481.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. St. Peter Chrysologus (+ c.450), *Sermo 142 De Annuntiatione D.M.V.*: PL 52, 581 A; Fausto of Rietz (+ 490/95), *Epistula XVII*, 20: PL 65, 476 C-D.

underlining the great "joy" that the angel's message brings, he affirms that he greets Mary: "χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη," because "*she has been transformed by grace more than all creatures*" (ἐπειδὴ; καὶ πάσης πλέον ἐχαριτώθης τῆς κτίσεως).<sup>137</sup> He knows well the reason for this joy and this grace: The fact that "the Lord is with her" (Lk.1:28). It is interesting to note that he uses the verb χαρίτω—something which is not common—here in the Aorist passive, with Mary as subject. But the emphasis seems to be on the grace of the Divine Maternity or the transformation by grace needed to become the Mother of God. Further on he repeats the same idea: "What can be more excellent or above this grace *which only Mary has obtained from God,*" namely, that "the Lord is with her"?<sup>138</sup>

Explaining Luke 1:30—"You have found grace with God"—he describes this grace using eight Greek adjectives: Mary found before God a grace that "shines above all others" (ὑπέρλαμπρον), "ardently desired" (πολύευκτον), "most splendid" (ὑπέρφωτον), "that is not exhausted" (ἀκλόνητον), "saving" (σωτήριον), "not agitated" (ἀσάλευτον), "unconquerable" (ἀνίκητον), and "eternal" (αἰδίων).<sup>139</sup>

The following affirmation is the most interesting one. Again he uses the verb χαρίτω, this time clearly with the meaning of "having been transformed by grace":

Before you there were many saints, *but none has been transformed by grace* (κεχαρίτωται) like you.

It comes accompanied by seven other Greek verbs in the perfect tense, passive voice, which refer to the Divine Maternity, and repeating each time "none like you": "None has been deemed blessed (μεμακάρισται;), adorned with holiness (καθηγίασται), exalted (μεμεγάλυνται), purified in advance (προκεκάθαρται), surrounded by a splendid light (περιηύγασται),

<sup>137</sup> St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Oratio II In SS. Delparae Annuntiationem*: PG 87/3, 3240 A.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3241 A.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3245 B.

has shone with heavenly light (ἐκπεφώτισται), attained such greatness (ὑπερύψωται) like you."<sup>140</sup>

The reason for all this is that no one like her was brought so close to God (Θεῷ προσεπέλασε), no one has been enriched (πεπλούτηκεν) with God's gifts and received God's grace (Θεοῦ χάριν ἐδέξατο) like her. Indeed, she is richer than everybody else, because she possesses God, dwelling in her, and enjoys His presence as nobody else ever will.<sup>141</sup> This is the grace she found, "a grace that was never found by any woman."<sup>142</sup> She, "the κεχαριτωμένη and divine Virgin," certainly has reason to rejoice over the gifts with which God has "graced" (κεχάρισται) her.<sup>143</sup>

Prevalent among many authors is the interpretation of κεχαριτωμένη as the "new name" given to Mary by God.<sup>144</sup> St. Maximilian Kolbe (+ 1941) makes an interesting parallel between God's revelation of His name to Moses in Exodus 3:14, and the revelation that Our Lady made of her name during her apparition to St. Bernadette (+ 1879) at Lourdes (1858):

She is the Mother of God, but calls herself the Immaculate. God, manifesting Himself to Moses, said of Himself: "I am Who am," that is, the existence itself. The most Holy Mother, asked by Bernadette what was her name, answered: "I am the Immaculate Conception."<sup>145</sup>

She does not say, "I am immaculately conceived," but "the Immaculate Conception." Hence it follows that She is Immaculateness itself. Truly Conception, for Her existence began in time, but "Immaculate Conception."

This name must be dear to Her, because it signifies the first grace She received in the first moment of Her existence. The first gift is the dearest one. This name is ratified by Her life, because She was always unspotted.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3248 A-B.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3249 D-3252 A.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3277 A.

<sup>144</sup> Cf., for example, St. Maximus the Confessor (+ 662), *The Life of Mary*, 103, in *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio*, 2:265; Nicholas of Siena (+ 1349), *III Sermon on the Annunciation*, in *Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:545-546.

<sup>145</sup> St. Maximilian Kolbe, *Conferenza 26-7-1939*, in *Conferenze del P. Massimiliano M. Kolbe* (orig. in Polish), ed. A. Wedrowski, I. Wójcik (2 vols.; Niepokalanów, Poland, 1964), 2:155. (Cited in E. Piacentini, "L'Immacolata nel pensiero di P. Kolbe," *Marianum* 33 (1971): 129-191, esp. 134).

Hence She was also full of grace and God was always with Her, even to the degree that She became the Mother of the Son of God.<sup>146</sup>

The proper name that Mary revealed at Lourdes: "I am *the Immaculate Conception*," goes very well with the new name that the angel gave to her at the Annunciation: κεχαριτωμένη. She is the creature "perfectly and permanently transformed by God's grace" from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, which was "an immaculate conception" precisely because God's grace was superabundantly acting in her and being bestowed upon her. And, likewise, the Immaculate Conception is the creature totally transformed by God's grace from the very beginning of her life.

### 3. Fullness of Grace and Holiness

Another interpretation of κεχαριτωμένη found in Tradition relates it to Mary's holiness. This interpretation, which becomes more accentuated in the East from the Byzantine period, and in the West from Carolingian times, is very interesting for us, because it sheds much light on Mary's spiritual life.

Theodotus of Ancyra (+ c. 446), for example, after stating that "a virgin is filled with grace," adds that she is "an innocent virgin, without spot . . . holy in her body and her soul."<sup>147</sup>

Joseph the Hymnographer (+ 883), who greatly exalts Mary's holiness in his works, is one of the first Greek authors to relate very clearly κεχαριτωμένη with the Virgin's holiness, at least twelve times in his poetic output. In a very important text, the verb χαριτώ appears in the perfect passive:

Behold, you chaste one, *you have been transformed by divine grace* (κεχαρίτωσαι) above all women, *you have surpassed all in your holiness*.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> *Aim Higher: Marian Thoughts of Blessed Maximilian*, no. 5, p.4; *ibid.*, "Explanation of the Act of Consecration," pp. 137-138.

<sup>147</sup> Theodotus of Ancyra, *Homilia VI In S. Deiparam et in Nativitatem Domini*: PG 77, 1427 A; cf. 1427 A-C. Cf. Ps. Gregory the Wonderworker (VI-VII), *Homilia I In Annuntiatione Sanctae Virginis Mariae*: PG 10, 1150 C-D; St. Maximus the Confessor (+ 622), *The Life of Mary*, 7, 11-12, in *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio*, 2:189-190, 192-193.

<sup>148</sup> Joseph the Hymnographer, *Martiale*: PG 105, 1132 A: "Ἰδοὺ σὺ ὑπὲρ πάσας ἀγνή, κεχαρίτωσαι, ὑπερέβης πάσας τῇ ἀγιότητι. . ."



He uses twice the term “κεχαριτωμένη” together with “πανάγια” (most holy),<sup>149</sup> once with “ἀγνή” (chaste),<sup>150</sup> and twice with “εὐλογημένη” (blessed).<sup>151</sup> At least five times, often quoting Luke 1:38, to κεχαριτωμένη is added the article ἡ, thus making it like her proper name.<sup>152</sup> Another thing worthy of notice is that one of his favorite titles for addressing Mary is “Θεοχαρίτωτε,” a term in which the concept of Divine grace is expressed with even greater force than in κεχαριτωμένη.<sup>153</sup>

In the West, Paul Deacon Varnefried (+ c.799) wonders:

What virtue could be lacking in Mary, *since she was full with the charisms of every grace?* Of what justice, of what holiness was Mary in need, *she who had received the plenitude of grace* with such efficacious divine mercy? What place could vices have in her?<sup>154</sup>

Commenting on Luke 1:28 or the entire Hail Mary, many authors—like Conrad of Saxony (+ 1279), Richard of St. Laurent (+ after 1245), or Denis the Carthusian (+ 1471)—offer lengthy elaborations on Mary’s virtues.

### C. Fullness of Grace and the Spiritual Life

The first step towards speaking about Mary’s interior life is to inquire about her grace. And Sacred Scripture offers us a very clear answer: The Blessed Virgin was not simply “full of

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1008 D: “δοξάζωμεν; τὴν παναγίαν κόρην τὴν κεχαριτωμένην”; 1353 A: “παναγία, παρθένε, κεχαριτωμένη.”

<sup>150</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1333 C: “παρθένε ἀγνή Θεοχαρίτωτε, χαριτώσασα τὸν νοῦν μου.”

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 1221 B: “καίρε σοι, κρίζομεν αἰεὶ, εὐλογημένη καὶ κεχαριτωμένη”; cf. 1252 C: “μόνη ὑπερευλογημένη καὶ κεχαριτωμένη.”

<sup>152</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1008 D: “τὴν παναγίαν κόρην τὴν κεχαριτωμένην”; 1073 C: “χαίρε, βοῶμένη σοι, ἡ κεχαριτωμένη”; 1212 B: “καίρε, ἡ κεχαριτωμένη”; 1324 C: “τὴν κεχαριτωμένην ὑμνήσωμεν Παρθένον”; 1373 C: “χαίρε, ἡ κεχαριτωμένη”; cf. also 1308 A: “ἡ τὸ γένος ἡμῶν χαριτώσασα”; 1333 C: “παρθένε ἀγνή Θεοχαρίτωτε, χαριτώσασα τὸν νοῦν μου τοῦ σκοτασμοῦ τῆς ἀγνοίας τελείως ἐλευθέρωσον”; 1313 C: “χαίρε, δέσποινα, ἡ τοὺς βροτοὺς θεώσασα θεικὴ κιοφορία.”

<sup>153</sup> Cf. F. Marchisano, “L’interpretazione di κεχαριτωμένη (Lc.1, 28) fino alla metà del secolo XIII. Contributo alla mariologia biblica” (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1968), 66–68 (extract, doctoral dissertation).

<sup>154</sup> Paul Deacon Varnefried, *Homilia I In Assumptione B.M.V.*: PL 95, 1567 A-B. Cf. St. Fulbert of Chartres (+ 1028), *Sermo IV De Nativitate Beatissimae Mariae Virginis*: PL 141, 322 C-323 B.

grace" (πλήρης χάριτος), like St. Stephen (Acts 6:8), but she was "completely and permanently transformed by God's grace" (κεχαριτωμένη) (Lk. 1:28). The implications that arise from this fact are mentioned by Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter *Fulgens Corona*, written for the 100th Anniversary of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception:

Moreover, *since* the same holy Virgin is saluted "full of grace" and "blessed among women" (Lk. 1:28, 42), *by these words, as Catholic tradition has always interpreted*, it is plainly indicated that "by this singular and solemn salutation, otherwise unheard of, it is shown that the Mother of God *was the abode of all Divine graces, adorned with all the charisms of the Holy Spirit*, yeah, the treasury well nigh infinite and abyss inexhaustible of these charisms, *so that she was never subjected to the one accursed*" (citing *Ineffabilis Deus*).<sup>155</sup>

If the spiritual life is the life of grace, we can very well understand the importance of saying that Mary was so perfectly and permanently transformed by grace from the first instant of her existence. To a unique fullness of grace must necessarily correspond a unique spiritual life. Let us see how Tradition affirms that Mary was "completely," and "permanently," "transformed by God's grace."

### 1. Completely . . .

Based on Luke 1:28, the entire Tradition of the Church affirms that the Virgin Mary is "*full of grace*."<sup>156</sup> St. Augustine (+ 430), comparing Zacariah's doubt with Mary's faith, exclaims:

Oh *truly* full of grace! Precisely that is how she was greeted by the angel: "Hail, full of grace" (Lk. 1:28). Who is in a position to manifest *such* grace? Who is capable of giving thanks adequately for it?<sup>157</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Fulgens Corona* (8-9-1953), no.8: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 45 (1953): 581ff. English version taken from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_08091953\\_fulgens-corona\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_08091953_fulgens-corona_en.html).

<sup>156</sup> Cf. St. Epiphanius (+ 407), *Adversus haereses* III, 78, 25: PG 42, 738 C; St. Jerome (+ 419), *Epistola* 78, 2: PL 22, 700.

<sup>157</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermo* 290, 5; cf. 6: PL 38, 1315. Cf. also St. Maximus the Confessor (+ 662), *The Life of Mary*, 7, 26, 110: *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio*,

St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) indicates how,

The torrential outpouring of God's infinite goodness, which had been rudely stemmed by the sins of men since the beginning of the world, was now released *precipitately and in full flood* into the heart of Mary. Eternal Wisdom gave to her *all the graces* which Adam and all his descendants would have received so liberally from him had they remained in their original state of justice.<sup>158</sup>

He specifies how "the fullness of God . . . was poured into Mary, *insofar as a mere creature is capable of receiving it*," making Our Lady "*an abyss of grace*," such that "only the God who created [her] knows *the height, the breadth and the depth of the grace he has conferred on [her]*."<sup>159</sup>

*Quite common is the parallel with Eve.* Baldwin of Ford (+ 1190), for example, wonders:

What place can be left to wrath, where there is plenitude of grace? The first woman was condemned; now the female sex is *filled with grace* in the person of Mary. Who is capable of imagining *with what kind of grace and how much grace* was filled the one that before everybody else was alone called full of grace, Mother of the One who is full of grace and truth?<sup>160</sup>

*Tradition is also clear that Mary received more grace than anybody else.* St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397) already affirms this: "To whom did God grant *more graces* than to His Mother?"<sup>161</sup> The same thing is said by St. Sophronius of

2:189-190, 203-204, 269-270; St. Germanus of Constantinople (+ 733), *In Praesentationem SS. Deiparae II*: PG 98, 316 C; St. Andrew of Crete (+ 740), *In Nativitatem B. Marie IV*: PG 97, 864 B-C; Pope Honorius III (+ 1227), *Sermo II In Annuntiatione: Medii Aevi Bibliotheca Patristica*, ed. A. Horoy (6 vols.; Paris, 1879-1882), 2:49-50; Bl. Raymond Lull (+ 1315), *Book on the Hail Mary*, II Sermon: "Full of Grace," I: *Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:480-481.

<sup>158</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, no. 106: *God alone*, 79. Cf. St. Alphonsus Liguori (+ 1787), *Le Glorie di Maria, Discorso II. Della nascita di Maria II* (Naples: Valsele Tipografica, 1987), 338-339.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Grignon de Montfort, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, no. 106: *God alone*, 79.

<sup>160</sup> Baldwin of Ford, *Tractatus VII De Salutatione Angelica*: PL 204, 469 A.

<sup>161</sup> St. Ambrose, *Liber de institutione virginis*, V, 33-34: PL 16, 328 A-B.

Jerusalem (+ 638): "The angel greeted her 'full of grace,' because she has been transformed by grace *more than any other creature*."<sup>162</sup> Many writers insist on the idea that *what others received in part, Mary received in full*.<sup>163</sup> Some specify that *everything in her was grace*.<sup>164</sup>

In the Middle Ages, many authors—like Paschasius Radbert (+ 865), Peter of Celle (+ after 1183), Baldwin of Ford (+ 1190), St. Anthony of Padua (+ 1231), Richard of St. Laurent (+ after 1245), St. Bonaventure (+ 1274), St. Thomas Aquinas (+ 1274), Conrad of Saxony (+ 1279), Egidio Romano (+ 1312), and Bl. Raymond Lull (+ 1316)—meditated on the meaning of Mary's fullness of grace, some of them writing commentaries on the "Hail Mary" itself. These works offer a real mine of ideas about the nature of her grace, her spiritual life, and her personal practice of all the virtues.

## 2. And Permanently . . .

The passive participle κεχαριτωμένη, being in the perfect tense, indicates that the Virgin Mary was not only "*completely*," but also "*permanently*" transformed by God's grace. This, also, is clear in Tradition from the beginning.

In fact, although the ecclesial writers of the first centuries did not agree as to the moment when Mary obtained her fullness of grace (as we do now with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception), whether it was at the Annunciation with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon her (Lk.1:35), already from her mother's womb, or at the first instant of her conception, all of

<sup>162</sup> St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Oratio II In SS. Deiparae Annuntiationem*: PG 87/3, 3240 A. Cf. Henry of Marcy (+ 1189), *Tractatus De peregrinante civitate Dei*, XII: PL 204, 341 D-342 A.

<sup>163</sup> St. Peter Chrysologus (+ c.450), *Sermo 140 De Annuntiatione D.M.V.*: PL 52, 576 B. Cf. Paschasius Radbert (+ 865) *De Assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis*, V, 28, 32; XV, 92-97: CCCM LVI C, pp.121, 123, 151-154; St. Alphonsus Liguori (+ 1787), *Le Glorie di Maria, Discorso II. Della nascita di Maria I* (Naples: Valsele Tipografica, 1987), 327-336.

<sup>164</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux (+ 1153), *In laudibus Virginis Matris, Homilia II, 1: Sentenze e altri testi*, Opere di San Bernardo, no. 2 (Ed. critica latina: Romae: Editiones Cistercenses, 1957; sgg. Ed. italiana: Milan: Scriptorium Claravallense. Fondazione di Studi Cistercensi; Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1990), 62, lines 16-18.

them affirm that this fullness of grace that the angel Gabriel proclaims was not temporary, but ever present thereafter. Some affirm that Mary was *confirmed in grace*.

According to St. Bonaventure (+ 1274), Mary's plenitude of grace has three characteristics: It is such that a greater one cannot be imagined; no good is lacking to it; it flowed in her in such a way that it filled her completely and made her *steadily full*.<sup>165</sup>

Matthew of Acquasparta (+ 1302), applying to Mary Proverbs 8:22: "The Lord possessed me from the beginning of His works," describes this possession as being "quiet, peaceful, and tranquil," because Mary enjoyed "divine protection and *confirmation in grace*." In fact, no malign spirit, no temptation could harm her; God protected her completely. "*Confirmed in grace*," in her there was never any movement of rebellion against reason; she was not disturbed by any passion or disorderly appetite. All her movements and faculties were perfectly subordinated to superior reason, so that in her there is no disobedience or resistance.<sup>166</sup>

Denis the Carthusian (+ 1471) teaches that John the Baptist was confirmed in grace in his mother's womb; the Apostles were confirmed in grace at Pentecost, so that they could not commit mortal sins, and Mary was confirmed in grace in her mother's womb, so that she could not commit even venial sins.<sup>167</sup>

St. Francis of Sales (+ 1622) speaks about three privileges that the Blessed Virgin has above all pure creatures. The first one is that:

she was always most obedient to the will of God, that is to say, to His word, and this from the very instant of her Conception, without any vari-

<sup>165</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Sermo VI De Assumptione B.V.M.*: his *Opera omnia* (10 vols.; Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882-1902), 9:700-706; cf. *Sermo V De Assumptione*: 9:677-682; *Sermo II In Nativitatem B.V.M.*: 9:708-712. Cf. also Absalon of Sprinckerbach (+ 1205), *Sermo 44 In Assumptione gloriosae V.M.*: PL 211, 255 C-D.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Matthew of Acquasparta, *Second Sermon on the Nativity of Mary: Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:421-424. (*Sermones de B.M.V.*, in *Bibliotheca Franciscana Medii Aevi* 9, ed. C. Piana [Quaracchi, 1962]).

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Denis the Carthusian, *Expo. in Genesim* 3, 27: his *Opera omnia* (Montreuil, 1896-1935), 1:118 D.

ation or interruption, not even for a single moment. She was never subject to change and could never sever this first union and adherence which she then made of her will to God's will. This favor was not accorded to any other pure creature, not even to the angels. . . .<sup>168</sup>

He explains that Our Lady "could never fall from the first grace which she received from the Sovereign Majesty" because "she always adhered to the divine will, so that she merited new graces without ceasing. The more she received them, so much the more was her soul rendered capable of adhering to God, so that she was ever more united and rooted in her first union with Him." Change in her consisted only in "a closer union and further growth in all kinds of virtues in order to render invariable the resolution which she had made of belonging wholly to God."<sup>169</sup>

### 3. Transformed by God's Grace

As we have seen, the type of verb used in Luke 1:28 (causative), and the tense and voice that it is in: the perfect passive, indicates that Mary was not simply "full of grace," but totally and permanently *transformed* by grace. References to this are already found in the Patristic period. We already saw how St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (+ 638) speaks about Mary "being transformed by grace."<sup>170</sup>

Joseph the Hymnographer (+ 886) is interesting because he applies *to Mary herself* the action of transforming *us* by grace (understood that it is by reason of her Divine Maternity):

O all blessed and only glorious one, *you who have transformed with grace* (χαριτώσασα) our humankind . . . Rejoice, O Queen, you who have deified mortal men.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>168</sup> St. Francis de Sales, Sermon 6. "The Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple": *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales on Our Lady*, 76; cf. Sermon 7. "The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary": *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>169</sup> *Idem*, Sermon 6. "The Presentation": *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales*, 76-77.

<sup>170</sup> St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Oratio II In SS. Deiparae Annuntiationem*: PG 87/3, 3240 A; 3248 A.

<sup>171</sup> Joseph the Hymnographer, *Martale*: PG 105, 1308 A: "ἡ τὸ γένος ἡμῶν χαριτώσασα"; 1313 C: "ὅθεν βοῶμέν σοι χαῖρε, Δέσποινα, ἡ τοὺς βροτοὺς θεώσασα θεικῇ κυοφορίᾳ." Cf. *Akathistos*, ode 6: PG 105, 1021 D-1024 A.

Centuries later, St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) continues affirming the same thing:

Lord you are always with Mary and Mary is always with you. She can never be without you because then she would cease to be what she is. *She is so completely transformed into you by grace* that she no longer lives, she no longer exists, because you alone, dear Jesus, live and reign in her more perfectly than in all the angels and saints.<sup>172</sup>

Our Lady's unique "transformation," as we already saw when we examined the teachings of St. John of the Cross, includes constant growth. She did not have to advance from imperfection into perfection, but she certainly had to advance from perfection to an ever greater degree of perfection. In her own unique circumstances, the Blessed Virgin had to respond daily to God's will in a most heroic manner.

Mary could advance in holiness and grow in grace "for grace, being a participation in the divine nature, can always increase though still remaining finite."<sup>173</sup> While in the case of Jesus Christ, "the absolute fullness of Our Saviour knew no increase, for it was sovereignly perfect from the first instant of His conception by reason of the personal union with the Word, for from the first instant the *lumen gloriae* and the beatific vision were communicated to Jesus' soul . . . Mary's fullness of grace, however, did not cease to increase up to the time of her death."<sup>174</sup> Moreover, her growth was most rapid, because "the rate at which it commenced was determined by Mary's initial fullness of grace," which surpassed that of all the saints, and because it encountered no obstacle, "nothing held her back, neither the consequences of original sin, nor any venial sin, neither negligence, nor distraction, nor imperfection."<sup>175</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.63: *God alone*, 308; cf. idem, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.164: *God alone*, 341; idem, *The Secret of Mary*, no.21: *God alone*, 268; also, idem, *True Devotion to Mary*, nos.120, 165: *God alone*, 327, 341.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour*, 75.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 45-46. Cf. II Council of Constantinople (553): Denzinger, no.434.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour*, 87-90.

Many authors in Tradition have spoken about this.<sup>176</sup> Conrad of Saxony (+ 1279), inspired in Canticles 6:10, calls Mary "dawn," because "just as the light of dawn advances growing in luminosity, so Mary, in the splendor of grace and the holiness of life, advanced progressing in all virtues, so that in their luminosity she was 'like the dawn rising' (Ct.6:10)."<sup>177</sup>

St. Francis de Sales (+ 1622) speaks in terms of love: "By a perpetual advance she [Mary] rose from love to love," "for there was no change or delay in her progress in love." "She never experienced any conflict within the sensual appetite, and therefore her love . . . reigned peaceably in her heart and performed all its acts at will."<sup>178</sup>

St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) speaks about this growth before and after the Annunciation:

During the first fourteen years of her life the most holy Virgin Mary grew so marvelously in the grace and wisdom of God and responded so faithfully to his love that the angels and even God himself were filled with rapturous admiration for her.<sup>179</sup>

She was full of grace when she was greeted by the Archangel Gabriel and was filled with grace to overflowing by the Holy Spirit when he so mysteriously overshadowed her. From day to day, from moment to

<sup>176</sup> Cf. St. Athanasius (+ 373), *De Virginitate*: CSCO 151, 58-62; St. Ambrose (+ 397), *In Lucam* II, 19: PL 15, 1640 C-D; Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne (+ 1159), *Homilia II*: SC 72, pp.68-70; Geoffrey of Auxerre (+ after 1188), *Mariale*: J. M. Canal, "El Marial inédito de Gaufredo de Auxerre (+ c. 1178)," *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 19 (1969): 217-277, esp. 237-242, 242-247, 247-248.

<sup>177</sup> Conrad of Saxony, *Speculum seu Salutatio Beatae Mariae Virginis ac Sermones Mariani*: *Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi*, vol.11, ed. P. de Alcantara Martínez (Rome: Grottaferrata, 1975). We translated from the Italian version in Corrado di Sassonia, *Commento all'Ave Maria*, Introduction by F. Accrocca (ed.), trans. M. Cerra (Casale Monferrato: Edizioni Piemme, 1998), chap. 9, 149-150; cf. chap. 11, 177.

<sup>178</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God* (Vol. I, Books 1-6), Book 3, chap.8: "On the Incomparable Love of the Mother of God, Our Lady," in his *Treatise on the Love of God*, translated with an introduction and notes by J. K. Ryan (2 vols.; Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1975), 1:183. Cf. also Sermon 6. "The Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple": *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales*, 76-77.

<sup>179</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, no.107: *God alone*, 79.



moment, *she increased so much in this two-fold plenitude* that she attained an immense and inconceivable degree of grace.<sup>180</sup>

Mary continually grew in grace because she *always corresponded* faithfully to God's grace. It is "impossible on the one hand to put into words the gifts with which the Blessed Trinity endowed this most fair creature, or on the other hand to describe *the faithful care with which she corresponded to the graces of her Creator.*"<sup>181</sup>

### III. THE IMPLICATIONS OF LUKE 1:28

From Mary's unique plenitude of grace, Tradition has drawn many implications for her spiritual life. We shall mention just three: her relationship with the Holy Spirit, her love, and her final glory in heaven.

#### A. The Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary

What can we say about the ineffable relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary? The Holy Spirit was the "Conquistador" of her soul from the very first instant of her existence. She was absolutely His from the beginning of her life. He truly became "the soul of her soul and the life of her life." Who can describe the Blessed Virgin's spiritual life? Archbishop Martínez wrote:

The Holy Spirit lives in the center of the soul, in that profound region of the will where He Himself has diffused charity; and from that center He pours Himself out, so to speak, over the whole man with a divine unction. . . .

Like the victor who, on taking possession of a kingdom, places in each city men to execute his orders . . . so the Holy Spirit, the loving Con-

<sup>180</sup> Grignion de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.44: *God alone*, 301; cf. *True Devotion to Mary*, no.222: *God alone*, 362; St. Alphonsus Liguori (+ 1787), *Le Glorie di Maria, Discorso II. Della nascita di Maria I* (Naples: Valsele Tipografica, 1987), 336-337.

<sup>181</sup> Grignion de Montfort, *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, no.105: *God alone*, 79. Cf. St. Alphonsus Liguori (+ 1787), *Le Glorie di Maria, Discorso II. Della nascita di Maria II* (Naples: Valsele Tipografica, 1987), 327, 336-340; Martínez, *Vida Espiritual*, 165-166.

quistador of souls, places some divine gifts in each of the human faculties, that through his holy inspirations the whole man may receive his vivifying influence . . . By means of these gifts the Holy Spirit moves the whole man, becomes Director of the supernatural life, and more—becomes the very soul of our soul and life of our life.

This intimate direction of our souls accomplished by the Holy Spirit is something profoundly bound up with the mystery of the spiritual life; it is something which that life demands essentially. . . .<sup>182</sup>

### 1. *Perfectly Docile to the Motions of the Holy Spirit*

The Virgin Mary was always perfectly docile to every motion of the Holy Spirit. Origen (+ 253) already offers an interesting reference to this. Explaining Luke 1:39, he affirms that Mary “was eager, and not slothful (Rom.12:11); thus it was right for her to hasten on eagerly. *She was filled with the Holy Spirit*; it was appropriate for her *to be led to the higher regions* and have God’s power protecting her, for that power had already overshadowed her.”<sup>183</sup>

Germanus II of Constantinople (+ 1240) says that Canticles 2:10: “Arise, my dove, my fair one” fits Mary, the κεχαριτωμένη, very well. In fact, Mary is κεχαριτωμένη “because *she always acted following the dictates of the Holy Spirit*, that became in her like her second nature.”<sup>184</sup> Peter John Olivi (+ 1298) teaches that, in the Virgin, “*the principal mover was the Holy Spirit*” and “His motion and His impulse were for her sweet and joyful.”<sup>185</sup> St. Bernardine of Siena (+ 1444) compares Mary with a wheel, “*which was easily turned by every inspiration of the Holy Spirit*.”<sup>186</sup>

St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) affirms that “the spirit of Mary is the spirit of God, *because she was never led by her own spirit, but always by the spirit of God*, who made himself master of her to such an extent that *he became her very spirit*.”<sup>187</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Martínez, *The Sanctifier*, 14, 19.

<sup>183</sup> Origen, *In Lucam VII*: PG 13, 1817 A-C.

<sup>184</sup> Germanus II of Constantinople (+ 1240), *In Annuntiationem B.M.*: PG 140, 721 B.

<sup>185</sup> Peter John Olivi, “Mary’s Sorrow during Christ’s Passion”: *Testi Martiani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:381-382.

<sup>186</sup> St. Bernardine of Siena, *Sermon 12*: cited in St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary* (Brooklyn: Redemptionist Fathers, 1931), 579.

<sup>187</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.258: *God alone*, 371-372.

## 2. Filled with All His Graces, Virtues, Gifts, and Charisms

Many authors teach that the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the Virgin Mary all His graces, virtues, gifts and charisms in a way surpassed only by the most Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ. To express this, Theodotus of Ancyra (+ a.446) uses a very original image: the bucket of water:

And just as he who receives a bucket of water on top of his head is drenched all through, so we believe that the divine Mother also *was entirely anointed with the holiness of the Holy Spirit*, who came down upon her.<sup>188</sup>

Inspired by Psalm 44:14, St. Maximus the Confessor (+ 662) points out that this Psalm

shows not only the interior richness of her beauty, but above all the indescribable abundance and beauty *of the graces of the Holy Spirit* that surpass all thought. Just like all the different colors are united in one dress, so in Mary the graces are multiple, *but all are given and prepared by the one Holy Spirit*.<sup>189</sup>

Different Scriptural images—like the lamp stand with seven lamps (Zech.4:2) or the house of Wisdom with seven columns (Prov.9:1), among others—have been used to describe how perfectly Mary received the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Conrad of Saxony (+ 1279) synthesizes this theme very well: With *the gift of wisdom*, the Blessed Virgin “had the most sublime contemplation of the eternal joys.” *The gift of counsel* “allowed her to have a most accurate foresight of the things to avoid.” With *the gift of understanding* “she had a most sound knowledge of the truths to be believed.” *The gift of knowledge* “allowed her a most rigorous discernment in the actions that

<sup>188</sup> Theodotus of Ancyra, *Homilia IV In S. Deiparam et Simeonem VI*: PG 77, 1397 C; cf. 1397 B-1400 A.

<sup>189</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *The Life of Mary*, no. 9: *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio*, 2:191; cf. *ibid.*, no. 7, 2:189-190. Cf. Peter Abelard (+ 1142), *Sermo I In Annuntiatione B.V.M.*: PL 178, 385 B-C; Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne (+ 1159), *Homilia III*: SC 72, pp.104-106.

were to be accomplished." With *the gift of fortitude* "she resisted the devil with strenuous firmness." With *the gift of piety* "she acted with the most serene amiability towards her neighbor." With *the gift of fear* "she showed God great devotion and respect."<sup>190</sup>

Henry of Marcy (+ 1189) identifies the twelve stars of Apocalypse 12:1 with the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Mary (cf. Gal.5:22-23).<sup>191</sup> If we were to mention all the authors from Patristic times to our day who speak about Mary's virtues, we would never finish. As St. Thomas of Villanova (+ 1555) says:

It is useless to try to declare one by one the virtues of the Virgin, her graces and excellencies, pondering and praising each one in particular; it is more than enough praise of her excellence and greatness to say this: "of whom was born Jesus, called Christ." This short phrase says everything.<sup>192</sup>

Bl. Raymond Lull (+ 1315) explains how the Holy Spirit came down upon Mary, "the Divine Person to the person of Mary," in order to make her adequately holy so that the Son of God could take the human nature from her, and to empower all her faculties so that they could be somewhat proportionate to those of her Son, and serve Him fittingly. The Holy Spirit raised to the summit of perfection Mary's nature.<sup>193</sup>

### 3. Faithful Spouse and Collaborator

As we already saw when examining St. John of the Cross, intimate collaboration with the Beloved is one of the characteristics of the state of transforming union. The Virgin Mary's

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Conrad of Saxony, *Commento all'Ave Maria*, chap. 6, 96-98.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Henry of Marcy, *De peregrinante civitate Dei*, XII: PL 204, 345. Cf. also Pope Honorius III (+ 1227), *Sermo I In Annuntiatione: Medii Aevi Bibliotheca Patristica*, ed. A. Horoy (6 vols.; Paris, 1879), 2:56; Matthew of Acquasparta (+ 1302), *Sermo II In Nativitate B.V.M.: Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:419-420.

<sup>192</sup> St. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermón III En la Natividad de la B.V.M.: Obras de Santo Tomás de Villanueva. Sermones de la Virgen y Obras Castellanas*, Introducción biográfica, versión y notas de Santos Santamarta, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (Madrid, 1952), 206-207.

<sup>193</sup> Bl. Raymond Lull, *Book on the Hail Mary*, VI Sermon: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you," I and II: *Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:490, 491.

collaboration was entirely unique. St. Louis de Montfort (+ 1716) explains very well how in her case, not only did Jesus choose her "as his inseparable associate in his life, death, glory and power in heaven and on earth,"<sup>194</sup> but the Holy Spirit also "chose to make use of our Blessed Lady, although he had no absolute need of her, in order to become actively fruitful in producing Jesus Christ and his members in her and by her."<sup>195</sup>

The Mexican mystic, the Servant of God Luis María Martínez (+ 1956), explains it thus: "Christian life is the reproduction of Jesus in souls, and perfection, the most faithful and perfect reproduction, consists in the transformation of souls into Jesus." This reproduction of Jesus in souls takes place in the same way in which Jesus was brought into the world, "for God gives a wonderful mark of unity to all His works." Jesus "is always the fruit of heaven and earth. *Two artisans must concur in this work . . . the Holy Spirit and the most holy Virgin Mary.*"<sup>196</sup>

Jesus can be reproduced in our souls thanks to the Mystery of the Incarnation, which Mary cooperated to make possible. She fully cooperated in the formation of Jesus in her most precious soul and in her virginal womb, and she continues cooperating with the same Holy Spirit in the formation of Jesus in each one of us. Such unique union and collaboration between the two is totally unparalleled.

## B. Love

The spiritual life consists essentially in charity; and Christian perfection is nothing else but the plenitude of charity. Now, charity has two aspects: love of God and love of the neighbor. Hence the interior life consists . . . principally in love of God and secondarily in love of the neighbor. Therefore to live the spiritual life is to love God above all things and the neighbor as ourselves.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>194</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.74: *God alone*, 312.

<sup>195</sup> Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.21: *God alone*, 295-296; cf. *ibid.*, no.20: *God alone*, 295; *idem*, *The Secret of Mary*, no.13: *God alone*, 266.

<sup>196</sup> Martínez, *The Sanctifier*, 5, 6.

<sup>197</sup> Luis María Martínez, *Secrets of the Interior Life* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2003), 107-108.

From this double aspect of charity . . . flow the two forms of the spiritual life: the contemplative life and the active life. The contemplative life embraces all our relations with God, which consist essentially in knowing and loving Him. The active life embraces everything that has a relationship with our neighbor.<sup>198</sup>

"With respect to God . . . we have only to contemplate and to love Him; for contemplation and love merge into one single divine effect: union with the divine. Hence, the interior life at its apex is the contemplative life," and true apostolic life is always an overflowing of the contemplative life into the active life.<sup>199</sup>

From Patristic times, Tradition has always affirmed the perfection of Mary's love for God and neighbor, of her active and contemplative life, and of her concern for the Church. Space permits to mention very briefly just some aspects of her love of God. For the Fathers of the Church, virginity of soul and body is the greatest expression of true love and total surrender to Christ, the virgin Spouse. They had no doubt that the Virgin Mary is the best model of virginal love, and most of them wrote about this important theme. St. Athanasius (+ 373), St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397), and St. Augustine (+ 430) provide some of the finest examples.

Paschasius Radbert (+ 865) often speaks about Mary's love for her Son. He is convinced that we are wholly incapable of understanding "what great and incessant ardor of devoted love inflamed the Blessed Virgin," who "*was full of the Holy Spirit.*" "*The grace of the Holy Spirit had filled her completely, and divine love had totally ignited her,* to the point that there was nothing in her that could be taken by an earthly affection."<sup>200</sup> This love explains her suffering on Calvary: Mary is "more than a martyr," because "it is evident that *she who loved more than all others, on that account she also suffered more,* and, to the extent that the force of her grief completely pierced through and possessed her soul, *as a testimony of her exceptional love.*"<sup>201</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Paschasius Radbert, *De Assumptione* XIII, 83: CCCM LVI C, pp.146-147.

<sup>201</sup> Idem., *De Assumptione* XIV, 90: CCCM LVI C, p.151.

This love also explains her pain after her Son's Ascension, and her desire to join Him in heaven.<sup>202</sup>

Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne (+ 1159) reminds us of the Mystery of the Mother of God, in whom "two loves had come together into one and from the two loves was made a single love, when the virgin mother gave to her Son the love she gave to God and showed her love for her son in loving God."<sup>203</sup>

Richard of St. Laurent (+ after 1245) explains very well how the Commandment to love God "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk.12:30; cf. Dt.6:5) is perfectly fulfilled by Mary. That is why "her love constitutes the form and model of love for all the saints to follow and imitate."<sup>204</sup>

Matthew of Acquasparta (+ 1302), inspired by Proverbs 8:22: "The Lord has possessed me," speaks of love in terms of perfect possession, possession being precisely one of the main characteristics of love. The glorious Virgin may say: "the Lord has possessed me" because God dwelt in her with grace and claimed her as totally His. The Lord chose her for His possession (Ps.134:4) because she pleased Him, but He created her such that she could please Him, having endowed her with grace, adopted her, and kept her for Himself.

He describes this possession as *complete*, because the Lord asked everything for Himself, and the glorious Virgin did not, in the very least, admit other lords, neither in her thoughts, affections or behavior, but with all the impetus of her love she was always directed towards God alone. It is *continuous and without interruption*; in fact, from the beginning, the Lord held her constantly under His possession, and the Virgin never offended Him or moved away from Him. It is a *perpetual* possession as well, prolonged forever in the plenitude of heavenly glory.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Idem., *De Assumptione* XIII, 82-86: CCCM LVI C, pp.146-148. Cf. note 55 above.

<sup>203</sup> Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne, *Homilia V* SC 72, p.152.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Richard of St. Laurent, *De laudibus beatae Mariae Virginitis*, 4, 17, 1-2: *B. Alberti Magni opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet (38 vols.; Paris: Vivés, 1890-1899), 36:214-216.

<sup>205</sup> Matthew of Acquasparta, *Sermo II In Nativitatem B.V.M.: Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, 4:418, 422-424.

St. Alphonsus Liguori (+ 1787) mentions Mary's preparedness to love:

God, who is love, came on earth to enkindle in the hearts of all the flame of his divine love; but in no heart did He enkindle so much as in that of His Mother; *for her heart was entirely pure from all earthly affections, and fully prepared to burn with this blessed flame.*<sup>206</sup>

The Servant of God Luis María Martínez (+ 1956) stresses the relationship between love and contemplation.

The interior life is the intimate union of the soul with God, the heavenly prodigy that makes the soul live in God and God in her . . . Two elements compose this sublime life: *contemplation and love*. Contemplation, through which the illumined eyes of the heart submerge themselves into the abysses of God, and love, that fuses in an ineffable unity God and the creature. Contemplation that ignites love, and love that vivifies contemplation; the light that warms and the warmth that illumines.<sup>207</sup>

From the beginning of her life, Mary "touched the summit of contemplation." "How did the sweet Virgin contemplate God? What were like the words of light and love" that God and Mary interchanged, the "mysterious dialogue" that went on constantly between them? This heavenly dialogue, "which is the secret of her interior life," is "the most exquisite, beautiful, and prodigious thing about Mary, even though in her life there are so many prodigious and beautiful things."<sup>208</sup>

Proportionate to her contemplation was without doubt her love, because these two things have an intimate relationship in the spiritual life.

Not even the seraphim in heaven can compete with this volcano of love that Mary carried from the beginning of her life. Free from all earthly things . . . knowing God as nobody else has known Him except for the

<sup>206</sup> St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Le glorie di Maria*, III. *Delle virtù di Maria SS.*, 2: *Della carità di Maria verso Dio* (Napoli: Valsele Tipografica, 1987), 528-529. St. Francis de Sales greatly developed this theme. Cf., for example, his Sermon 4. "The Visitation"; Sermon 10. "The Annunciation": *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales*, 48-52, 135-141.

<sup>207</sup> Martínez, *Vida Espiritual*, 163.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 165, 166, 163.



soul of Jesus, Mary's heart, immense because it is immaculate, wonderfully made for loving, and enriched with an abundant torrent of charity, must have tended towards God with a potent, exquisite, ardent, triumphant love. Like the mysterious bush in the desert, her heart burnt all her life with incredible fires of love without consuming itself.<sup>209</sup>

Monsignor Martínez believes that Mary's love "from the beginning of her life already had Jesus as its center," because "she knew the Scriptures, and she knew that the Messiah was going to come," and so the Holy Spirit "must have moved her to place in Him who was to come, not only her hope, but also the center of her love." When the Word became flesh in her womb, "Mary possessed in a new and ineffable way her Beloved . . . From that most sacred day onwards, Mary's interior life was divinely transfigured and it elevated itself to sublime heights, which no creature will ever touch, and our spirit is unable to fathom." Nobody will ever know or love Jesus as Mary did. "Nobody like her has felt, in an ineffable plenitude, the heavenly fruition of the divine presence, of the joyous possession of Jesus." "So intense, so deep, so delicious was Mary's interior life, that . . . a miracle was necessary for her to be able to bear the light of Heaven, the sovereign love, the weight of the glory of her Divine Son."<sup>210</sup>

On earth, love and suffering are inseparable. Many authors indicate how Mary's sufferings were proportionate to her love. We quote only one text from Bl. Henry Suso (+ 1366), who puts on Mary's lips this moving description of her love and suffering:

Alas, where on earth was a more gentle person ever born, a more lovely one beheld, than my only-born lovely beloved, by whom and in whom I fully possessed everything which this world can produce? I had long since died to myself and lived in him, but when my fair love was slain I became completely benumbed. As my only love was unique and cherished above all other loves, so also my lonely sorrow was more intense than all other sorrows which have ever been described.

His fair, most gracious humanity was a joy for me to behold; his worthy divinity was sweet rapture for my eyes; to think of him was delight

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 166-167, 68.

for my heart, to speak of him was my pastime; to hear his charming conversation was silvery music in my ears. He was my heart's mirror, my soul's ecstasy. When in his presence I possessed heaven and earth and everything in them.

When I beheld my only and entire love hanging in death's agony before me, alas, what a sorrowful sight, what a moment!<sup>211</sup>

How Mary longed to embrace her dear crucified Son.

### C. Glory

Grace and glory are intimately related, grace being glory begun on earth. That is why, as Paschasius Radbert (+ 865) says, "the one who is full of grace, full of God, full of virtues, cannot fail to possess more fully the glory of the eternal splendor, which she received most fully in order to become the Mother of the Savior."<sup>212</sup> To Mary's fullness of grace on earth corresponds her perfect glory in heaven. We mention only two testimonies.

St. Germanus of Constantinople (+ 733) puts these words in Christ's mouth, as He comes to take His Mother to heaven.

When you lived in the world of corruptible things, I revealed my power to you in visions; now that you are passing from that life, I will show myself to you face to face . . . Your soul, full of divine power, will see the glory of my Father. Your immaculate body will see the glory of his only Son. Your pure spirit will see the glory of the all-holy Spirit.<sup>213</sup>

Bl. Gueric of Igny (+ 1157) wonderfully summarizes all that we have been saying in the following text:

Come then, my Chosen One, and I will place my throne in you . . . No one ministered to me more in my lowliness; there is no one I want to

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Bl. Henry Suso, *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, 17: *The Exemplar: Life and Writings of Blessed Henry Suso*, O.P. Complete ed. based on manuscripts, with a critical introduction and explanatory notes by Nicholas Heller, translated from the German by Sister M. Ann Edward, O.P. (3 vols.; Dubuque, IA: Priory Press, 1962), 2:70-73.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Paschasius Radbert, *De Assumptione* XV, 94-95: CCCM LVI C, pp.152-153.

<sup>213</sup> St. Germanus of Constantinople, *In Dormitionem B. Mariae III*: PG 98, 361 B. English version taken from: *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, translation and introduction by Brian E. Daley (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 171.

minister to more plentifully in my glory. You imparted to me, besides other things, what makes me a man; I will impart to you what makes me God. You implored the kiss of my mouth; rather the whole of you will be kissed by the whole of me. I will not press my lips to your lips, but my spirit to your spirit in an everlasting and indissoluble kiss. Because I have desired your beauty (Ps. 44:12) with greater longing even than you have desired mine. I shall not regard myself as sufficiently glorified until you are glorified in me.<sup>214</sup>

### CONCLUSION

*"Prius mente quam ventre concipiens."* These famous words by St. Augustine (+ 430)<sup>215</sup> synthesize well the importance of the Blessed Virgin's spiritual life. In fact, Mary's interior life is not something accessory to Mariology, but central to it, because what we are and do springs from our heart, from our inner life, and the Mother of God is no exception. In order to "understand" ever more the Immaculate One, the Mother of God, the ever-Virgin, the faithful collaborator and disciple, the universal Mother and Mediatrix, the human person perfectly glorified in heaven, it is necessary to deepen more and more, as far as this is possible, the unique spiritual life of the Blessed Mary.

Luke 1:28 and the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception have proven to be valid and solid foundations upon which to build our reflections on Mary's life of grace and its bearing on all the other aspects of her life. It is from here that we have to start.

Tradition comes to corroborate Scripture. We have seen how, from Patristic times, the importance of Mary's "fullness of grace" has been recognized, and many authors have referred to her spiritual life in different ways and highly laudatory terms. The course that we have traveled with the help of but a few chosen examples from Tradition has demonstrated that the testimony of St. John of the Cross was not a lonely voice, but an outstanding synthesizer of the teachings of the Church.

<sup>214</sup> Bl. Gueric of Igny, *In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Sermo II*: SC 202, p. 440.

<sup>215</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermo* 215, 4: PL 38, 1074; cf. *De virginitate* 3, 3: PL 40, 397-398; *Sermo* 72 A, 7: PL 46, 937-938; cf. also *In Johannem* 10, 3: PL 35, 1468.

A real treasury of insights awaits the scholar who wants to study and make known the reflections on Mary's interior life that have been set down by great Saints and Ecclesiastical writers of all times.

If we want to follow our own great calling to holiness, we have *to look up* and have recourse to the Virgin Mary, the human person who has attained the most perfect personal realization possible, precisely because she is the human person most perfectly transformed in God. Our poor, stammering words will never be able to render justice to the sublime beauty of this unique soul. That is why we pray that, "one day, on the day without setting of eternity, we shall receive from Mary's own lips her intimate confidences, and, peeping into the Divine Mystery, we shall contemplate enraptured the ineffable wonder of Mary's interior life."<sup>216</sup>

<sup>216</sup> Martínez, *Vida Espiritual*, 170.