

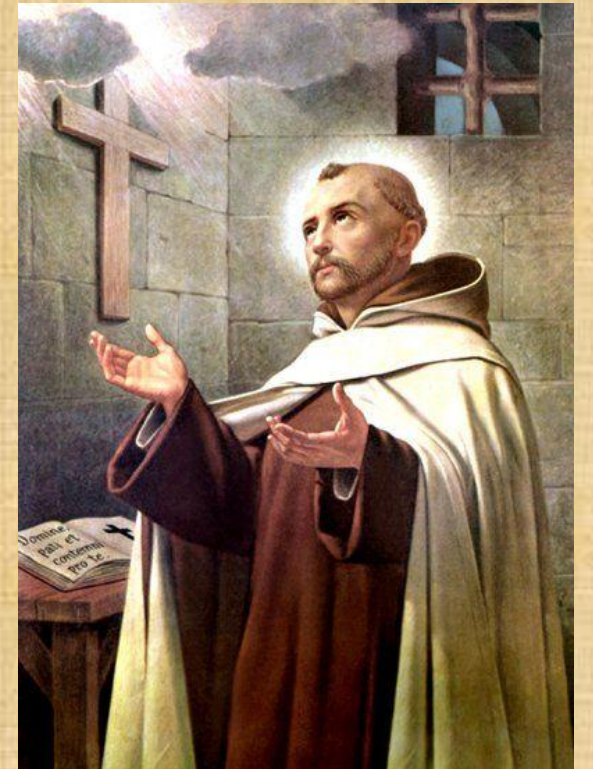
# **The Mariology of John of the Cross**



- ✧ The Virgin Mary in the life of St. John of the Cross.
- ✧ The Virgin Mary in the Writings of St. John of the Cross.
  - ✧ The Virgin Mary, Model of the Soul in Perfect Union with God.
- ✧ Devotion to the Virgin Mary.

## The Virgin Mary in the Life of Saint John of the Cross

- Many witnessed and attested to John of the Cross having a sincere, intense, and constant Marian devotion.
  - John of the Cross would pray the Office of Our Lady on his knees.
  - Conversations about the Blessed Sacrament or the Blessed Virgin.
  - Hymns to Our Lady.



There are anecdotes about John of the Cross being saved from the water three times by the Virgin Mary





While in prison in Toledo, he had visions and apparitions of Our Lady that brought him consolation.

After nine months of imprisonment, on August 14, 1578, John desired fervently to be able to celebrate Mass the following day, on Our Lady's feast day.

He requested it but he was denied. It was then that he planned to escape.

John tore a blanket, made a kind of rope out of it, and attached an iron hook to it.

The rope was not long enough and did not reach the ground.

John jumped and landed on a wall without getting hurt and then he had to jump again to get to the ground.

Many attribute John's decision to enter Carmel to his devotion to Mary.



He entered a Marian Order where he could entrust himself to Mary, his mother, and live under her patronage.

He certainly had other options.

He was familiar with the Society of Jesus and he could have easily become the chaplain at a hospital, but he chose the Order of Carmel.

## *The Virgin Mary in the writings of Saint John of the Cross*

### Sayings of Light and Love

A collection of poetic maxims, some of which capture John of the Cross's mystical experiences as short reflections and sayings that explore some themes.

In the section called "Prayer of a Soul Taken with Love", John writes:

Mine are the skies and mine is the earth, the just are mine, and mine are the sinners, the angels are mine and the Mother of God, and all things are mine, and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me.

- John recognizes with gratitude everything that God has given him and he embraces all that God has given, including God's own mother Mary.
- All that he possesses is to glorify God.
- Therefore, he glorifies God by embracing Mary, the Mother of God.

# Letter to a young lady of Narros del Castillo

As he is writing his goodbyes, he says:

Entrust it very much to God and take Our Lady and Saint Joseph as advocates in this matter.

John of the Cross sees Mary as an intercessor.



## Romance on the Gospel text “*In principio erat Verbum*”

This is an expression of his Christian faith. He addresses the most profound theological mysteries and presents his vision of salvation from the beginning to its end.

- The Holy Trinity
- Intimate life and unity
- Communication of the Trinity
- Creation



- Salvation
- The Virgin Mary appears.
  - Everything is prepared. It is the Father's will, and the Son gratefully accepts it.
  - The Incarnation is about to happen, but for this mystery to become a reality, God asks a woman for her consent to dress the divine Son with flesh.

Then he called an archangel  
who went by Gabriel  
and sent him to a young maiden  
who was called **Mary**  
**from whose consent**  
**the mystery came to be;**  
in which the Trinity  
dresses the Word with flesh;  
and even though three were doing the work  
in the one it came to be;  
and the Word became incarnated  
in Mary's womb.

And he who had only a Father,  
now had also Mary  
but not like anyone  
who conceives by a man,  
as from her entrails  
he obtained his flesh;  
and thus, Son of God  
and man he called himself.

- The Incarnation is the highest point of the poem, and it is here where St. John of the Cross places Mary, whose consent is key to this great mystery.
- God, who has absolute dominion over creation, treats all creatures according to their nature, and since Mary is a rational creature, and therefore free, God subordinates, in a way, the fulfillment of his promise of salvation to her consent.

Now that the time had come  
for him to be born  
as well as being betrothed  
from the nuptial bed he came out  
embracing his spouse,  
who was carrying him in her arms  
the graceful **Mother**  
who laid him on the manger,  
among some animals  
that were there.

Men were singing songs  
The angels melodies  
Celebrating the betrothal  
Between those two.  
But God in the manger  
was crying and moaning  
which were jewels that the bride  
was bringing to the betrothal.  
And the **Mother** was in awe  
Of the exchange she was seeing,  
The crying of man in God,  
And in the man the joy  
to the one and the other  
So unusual it was

- Mary is a true mother.
- Motherly duties: she gives birth, carries her child, lays her child down, and is attentive to the crying of her newborn.
- Mary is, therefore, the true mother of God.
  - Mary possesses a certain infinite dignity from the infinite Good which is God.

## *The Virgin Mary, Model of a Soul in Perfect Union with God*

Ideal of every soul: To be in a state of perfect union with God.

Spiritual maturity.

- The soul experiences a kind of divinization, an elevation.
- God transforms the soul to resemble him, when there is a likeness in our love with God's love and when the person's will and God's will are conformed.
- The soul is absorbed in divine life, which makes the soul rejoice.
- This is the summit, and the ideal of the spiritual life.



The most glorious Virgin, Our Lady, who from the beginning was elevated to this state, never had printed on her soul the form of any creature, nor she was moved by any of them, but her motion was always by the Holy Spirit. 3 Ascent of Mount Carmel 2, 10.

- The Virgin Mary is a divinized soul: an exemplar of theological life, of the theological virtues.
  - She is the exemplar of the new perfect human being, but not on account of moral rectitude or psychological perfection.



- This is due to Mary's participation in the divine life and due to God's action.
- Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love, the kind of love that consecrates a human being to God.



- Mary's soul was disposed to receive God and that gave her the impulse to choose to act according to the Spirit.
- Mary allowed the Holy Spirit to be a divine motor or the main agent in her life.
- From the moment of the Annunciation and from the moment of Jesus' birth, Mary followed Jesus step by step in her maternal pilgrimage of faith throughout his life until his Passion.
- She cooperated with the Holy Spirit, to take her to the highest possible level for any soul.

- In John's perspective, Mary is at the highest level of grandeur and sanctity because God granted her this gift since the beginning of her existence.
- This points to her Immaculate Conception (centuries before the proclamation of this dogma).
- John of the Cross may not have had a problem grasping this mystery since it would have been part of his Carmelite tradition.



## 1 Kgs 18:41-45

- The prophet Elijah prays for rain after years of famine in Israel.
- He was with his servant on Mount Carmel.
- He prays and then sends his servant to see if there are any clouds.
- There is nothing.
- He does that seven times, and on the seventh time, the servant comes back and reports that he saw a little cloud like a man's hand rising from the sea.
  
- The servant did not think much of the little cloud.
- However, Elijah did.
- As soon as Elijah heard there was a cloud, he knew God had answered his prayer.



- The Carmelite tradition has seen the cloud as a prefiguration of Mary.
- This symbolism was already present in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- Like the emerging cloud, Mary was raised by God to the fullness of grace, free of the weight of sin and any imperfections.
- Thanks to Mary we received the rain of divine grace.



- She restored supernatural life to all of us and she distributed the graces of Christ to us.
- And she continues showering graces upon us through her intercession.

Carmelites always regarded Mary as immaculate from the beginning, and it is evident that so did John of the Cross.

- Mary's immaculate conception implies that she did not have to go through the gradual purification that everyone else needs to go through.
- However, we should not forget that it was also her faith that contributed to her blessedness.

“Mary's "yes" is for all Christians a lesson and example of obedience to the will of the Father, which is the way and means of one's own sanctification.” *Marialis cultus, 21.*



The recognition of Mary at the mystical heights points to Mary's whole life as a life of supernatural gifts. Abundant graces and privileges have been granted to her, including her divine motherhood.

## The highest mystical state

### *The Living Flame of Love*

- There are lamps of fire: God's attributes communicated to the soul to transform it.
- They generate splendors: graces that God communicates to transform the soul.
- These splendors are also called "overshadowings", which implies protection, favor, and gifts.

*The Living Flame of Love 3*



Mary is in union with God so perfectly, at the highest mystical state described by St. John of the Cross, that she has been transformed and has received abundant graces from God. The greatest gift is divine motherhood. Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and she now radiates splendor.

In this state of perfect union with God, Mary is loving God perfectly, particularly in two ways: in prayer and in sacrifice.

- A true spirit of prayer implies the conformity of our will with God's.
- God does not impose his will on us, but we agree with his, trusting that he wants the best for us.
- This conformity happens, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, in the soul of the one who prays sincerely.

The one who loves discreetly does not care to ask for what he is lacking or for what he wishes, but he presents his need so that the beloved does what is necessary, like when the Blessed Virgin approached the beloved Son at the wedding at Cana, not directly asking for wine, but by saying: they don't have wine. Spiritual Canticle 2, 8.



- The efficacy of Mary's prayer derives from her conformity with God, because when God is loved, with great ease he responds to his lover's request. Spiritual Canticle 1,13.
- With this, John praises Mary since he recognizes that she has devoted her whole heart to God.

- John of the Cross indicates that God may remove suffering in the highest state of transformation and union with him.



Sometimes and for some reasons God dispenses it -the soul from the privilege of not feeling sorrow- giving it things to feel and suffer so that the fervor of its love or other aspects grows; he did this with the Virgin Mother. Spiritual Canticle 20-21, 10

- Mary would have experienced suffering in a different way due to her conformity with Christ.
- Our Lady knew well the pain of the sword that Simeon warned her about, and she accepted this.
- Most likely her greatest suffering was seeing Jesus on the cross.
  - And even during this painful time, she faithfully preserved her union with Jesus.
- At the same time, going through these sufferings produced in her more intense charity, which increased her merits.

- John of the Cross has a high and insightful view of the greatness of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- He indicates with precision the richness of her initial grace, the perfection of her life, especially the perfect union of her will with God's.
- She is moved only by the Holy Spirit; her association and cooperation with God is, therefore, effective.
- This may not have come to John of the Cross only by theological or pious reflection.



A mystic, like John of the Cross, probably perceived Mary in this perfect union with God.

He, in fact, talks about a mystical way of seeing things in God, so he could have had some mystical knowledge about Mary being in this perfect union with God.

This is the great pleasure of this remembrance: to know the creatures through God, and not God through the creatures; which is knowing the effects through their cause and not the cause through the effects. Living Flame of Love 4, 5.

- All things are in God, and consequently, when the soul mystically contemplates God, it sees all things in him.
- Among all creatures, there is none as deeply immersed in God as the Blessed Virgin Mary, because none is at the level of mother and spouse of the Divine Persons as Mary is.
- The soul who has reached the fulfillment of spiritual marriage is then able to contemplate Mary as she is in God.



## The cult of the Virgin Mary

- In *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John of the Cross warns against inappropriate displays of religiosity to Our Lady and the saints.

### Images

- John of the Cross says that truly devout persons direct their devotion to the invisible, using few images.
  - He is not an iconoclast.
  - He recognizes that images are helpful to remember God and the saints and to move the will to devotion.
- He warns against incorrect devotions.
  - Granting the greatest importance to the image, the clothes that are going to dress the image, and attaching our hearts to the images.
- He speaks against people who adorn statues with jewelry, motivated by their vanity, degrading their devotion to mere doll-dressing.





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- People who are attracted to an image only because they find it prettier.
- People may call themselves devoted to Our Lady, but this is only to the image in their hometown or home parish.
  - In this case, people are not in love with the Virgin Mary, but in love with a portrait or statue, or even with a pretty face.

- John of the Cross considers foolish to think that God will answer people's prayers more readily through a specific image.
  - At the same time, he admits that if God bestows more favors through one particular image, it is not because the image has the ability to produce that effect but because true devotion in people has been awakened by means of that particular image.
    - These people would still express this same devotion in different circumstances.

- St. John of the Cross comments that a truly devout person, since they do not have their heart attached to an image, will not suffer when the image is not accessible because they hold the living image within them.



## Sanctuaries and Pilgrimages

- It is true that God and Our Lady have chosen specific places to be honored.
- The problem is when people attach their affection and devotion to the place and not the person.
- Likewise, people may develop an attachment to pilgrimages as social occasions.
- St. John of the Cross would even suggest that people should do their pilgrimages when other people are not going.



- This is to avoid distractions, and it would help the person discover whether their participation in pilgrimages is more for recreation than out of devotion.
- The most important thing in pilgrimages is that devotion increases; it is not the visited image, the place, nor the favors granted.

## The Rosary



There are people who care more about the design of the rosary, the metal it is made of, the skill with which it was made, the color, the decorations, or any other things, thinking that God will hear the prayers better with a beautiful rosary, instead of having a humble truthful heart.

True devotion should not consist of fruitless and passing emotion.

What does true devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary look like?

Since Mary is the model of a soul in perfect union with God, and the exemplar of spiritual life, it seems that true devotion would be to imitate her.

It is our duty to imitate in a reverent spirit the examples of goodness she left to us.

The exemplarity of this model and how we are to imitate her may take various forms.

- Disposition
- Her will, perfectly united with God's
- Faith, hope, and charity
- Divinized life in union with God.



As we seek to imitate Mary, we can also approach her to intercede for us.

We can trust that she will present our needs to God, discreetly, but effectively, like in Cana, especially so that we can reach the perfect union with God.

Our piety should always highlight the indissoluble bond and essential relationship of Mary to Jesus Christ.



## Conclusion

- The Virgin Mary was consistently present in John's life, experience, and doctrine.
- In his writings, her presence is subtle but meaningful.
- John of the Cross had great appreciation for her.

## The Mariology of St. John of the Cross:

- Consists in recognizing the Virgin Mary as the immaculate mother of God, who inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit, responded with a fully positive answer, contributing to God's salvific plan.
- She was elevated to the state of divinized life and perfect union with God from the beginning.
- She was born and raised at the top, but from the top, she advocates for, encourages, and helps those who are climbing the mountain, Christ our Lord, as she went through the path and the experience of the cross along with her son.



- The correct devotion to Mary is imitating her as the model of all theological virtues and of full acceptance of God's love.
- We can also go to her so that she can intercede for us, so that like her, we can unite our will to God and consent to God in our journey to the divinized life. Thus, we can be transformed and divinized as we reach perfect union with God.

