Chapter 1

1. The conception of John the Baptist, and of Christ. The visitation and canticle of the Blessed Virgin. The birth of the Baptist.

1 Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, 3 I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

5 In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years. 8 Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, 9 according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. 10 Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, 11 the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense.

12 Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of (the) Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, 16 and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord." 18 Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. 20 But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time." 21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. 23 Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home. 24 after this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, 25 "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others." 26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with
you." 29 But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, 33 and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" 35 And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. 36 And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; 37 for nothing will be impossible for God." 38 Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. 39 During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, 42 cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb 43 And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." 46 And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; 47 my spirit rejoices in God my savior. 48 For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. 49 The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 is mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. 51 He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. 52 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. 53 he hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, 55 according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." 56 Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home. 57 When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father. 60 but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." 61 But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." 62 So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. 63 He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. 65 Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him. 67 Then Zechariah his father, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and brought redemption to his people. 69 He has raised up a horn for our salvation within the house of David his servant, 70 even as he promised through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old: 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, 72 to show mercy
to our fathers and to be mindful of his holy covenant 73 and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father, and to grant us that, 74 rescued from the hand of enemies, without fear we might worship him 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us 79 to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” 80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

2. The Prologue

Saint Luke begins his Gospel with a brief prologue. He starts to explain why he writes and the criteria that guide his work. Many people, listening to the preaching of the Apostles, had taken notes to preserve the memory of them. They had written down some of the events, more or less detailed, on the life of Jesus, according to the witness of those who were present at the time, and had been commissioned to preach them. These notes and these stories, however, related to the public life of our Redeemer. They were not written with any plan in mind, so to speak, or for any historical purpose. They were single episodes, and those who did not know about them, could not have a clear understanding of these grandiose events.

The holy Evangelist—perhaps moved by his famous and most dear friend, Theophilous, a new convert to the Faith—started to conduct diligent research on the happenings from the very beginning, in order that his dear friend, and other pagans converted to the faith, would have a true story, obtained directly from its historical sources, precise and detailed, to confirm in their hearts the faith received by the apostolic preaching. It is evident that the Holy Spirit moved St. Luke above all to write, making use of human occurrences to confirm him in this work.

The action of God never excludes our cooperation; on the contrary, in some cases it almost seems that God takes it into consideration with loving respect. The inspired Author does his work, and becomes a free and active instrument in the hand of the Lord. The work and the human cooperation are certainly guided by the Spirit of the Lord, made easy by his grace; thus the inspired Author is as if gently moved in his search, and then fully enlightened by the divine inspiration to accomplish the work desired by God.

The Prologue of the Gospel of St. Luke is not without value for us, because it is a precise witness of the value of the tradition of the Church. Those words: Sicut TRADIDERUNT nobis qui ab initio ipsi viderunt et ministri fuerunt sermonis, are final words against those who deny the tradition, because it is evident that the Gospel has come to us in fact through the tradition and the living word. This tradition cannot be entrusted to everybody, but to those who guard it in the name of God, thus to the Catholic Church and to those who support it, commissioned by the Holy Spirit. Many may know the traditions of the Church, and many have attempted to draft the story of the evangelical events; but only the one who has the authority by God can determine the authenticity and the truth. A tradition left to one’s own fancy cannot be source of light and truth, nor could it give the certainty of what it teaches.

St. Luke conducted his historical research from the origin of the facts, and he
certainly did not only deal with the Apostles, but with the most Blessed Virgin Mary. The oriental tone of the canticles that he quotes, and their psychological characters, so well proportioned to Mary, to St. Zechariah and to the old holy Simeon, as we shall see, shows clearly that he drew them from the very lips of the most pure Virgin; he did not change a word of it, accustomed as he was to the scientific accuracy from his own medical profession. His memory was trained to hear from his sick patients the clinical account of their illnesses.

Many had written on the life of Jesus Christ and his works, and yet the holy Evangelist thought it useful that he too should write about it. The delicacy of his personality, as it appears by all his writing, meant that he refrained from making any judgment on what others had written. That he decided to start a work of diligent research shows that not all who had written about it had been accurate or precise; there is an indirect hint in those words to the apocryphal gospels, always rejected by the Church.

May our life be a living Gospel

To research, to know, and to practice the word of God: this is the main occupation of our Christian life. To reduce all our religious culture to a few facts, poorly assimilated, and to believe to know everything with few elements of faith means that the true program of our Christian life, that is to know, to love, and to serve God, is not understood.

If in everyday matters of life, which are of small importance, we seem never to learn enough, in spiritual matters the knowledge is inexhaustible, both in theory and in practice. It is necessary for us to meditate on the works of the Saints, and ponder upon these in depth, in order to give our soul a clear certainty of what is already known and leads to the holy life.

The reading and the meditation of holy books nourish our love towards God, and direct us to the practice of solid virtues. Only in this way, so to speak, can we write in our life a living Gospel, and be for others like an open book of grace and knowledge. This is the endless occupation of the Church, that searches in every age the history and the truth of her marvelous treasures of wisdom, and with the works that she does with her unceasing apostolate, gives to souls the bright light that, like a strong sunshine on plants, makes bloom a thousand shoots of goodness.

The world poisons the souls with its polluted publications that become like an endless flow of death. We must instead nourish the souls with celestial wisdom, contributing ourselves to propagate it, if we have this mission or the capacity, and promote with eagerness the good press.

This apostolate is not yet understood by all, but it must become part of the program of a good Christian life: to give a good book or a good newspaper or magazine means to enlighten, guide and save a soul. The apostolate of the word many times becomes sterile; the apostolate of the printed matter, on the contrary, remains like a lighted lamp and silently continues that of the word.

3. Gabriel announces the miraculous conception of John the Baptist.

At the time of Herod, king of Judea, St. Luke says, there lived two holy people,
righteous before God and irreproachable in all the commandments and the precepts of the Lord. Herod, called “the great” for the public works he had promoted in Judea, particularly in the restoration of the Temple, was the son of Antipatre, who, under the pontificate of Hyrcanus, was named by Julius Cesar procurator of Judea. Through plots and schemes, Herod succeeded his father, obtained through the Roman Senate the title of king, and reigned from 714 to 750 of the Roman calendar.  

Criminally bloodthirsty to an extreme, he reigned through slaughters, massacres and oppression of all kinds and he was the terror of his subjects. His life was an horror of vices and on the throne he was more a wild beast than a man; he had three of his children killed as well one of his brothers, and on the least suspicions sentenced to death many of his best friends. In contrast to this crowned monster, the sacred text portrays the peaceful couple of two Saints: Zechariah and Elizabeth.

David, in organizing the religious service of the Temple, divided the Priests in 24 classes, each called by the name of their leader. Each class served from one Saturday to the next, and in this weekly function, offered the incense and immolated the victims, staying in the living quarters of the Temple.

Zechariah was Priest of the eight classes, by the name of Abia; Elizabeth, his wife was also of priestly birth. They lived in a holy manner, and they did not have children, because Elizabeth was sterile. In those times to be sterile was the greatest disgrace, because every woman hoped to be the mother of the awaited Messiah. Being both old, notwithstanding all the prayers to God to conceive a son, now they had lost all hope. However, all those prayers were not in vain, and had their effect, overcoming all hopes. They were both just before God and irreproachable also before man, which makes us understand how deep was their interior holiness and how exemplary was their life. They did not blame God for their sterility that for them was a disability, but their life had a note of sadness, as plants without flowers.

Their house was lonely and silent, with thoughts of the death that would extinguish everything, and the rooms were dark with that fog of the inexorable passage of time, and they had no happy lights of new aspirations.

But what prayer is useless before God? Even when it seems not granted, even when it seems now an absurd to even think that it can be granted, is instead granted in a way far above any expectations, and blooms like a blooming tree in spring. St. Zechariah and St Elizabeth had prayed for very long time to God to have a child, but now old and having lost all hope, they continued to pray that God may grant soon the coming of the Messiah. Their prayer was doubly granted because they had a child and they saw the Messiah, who in fact was even in their kinship.

To avoid arguments among the Priests on call to the service of the Temple, the offices were assigned by lot every morning. The lot of Zechariah had been to offer the incense. The incense burned on the Altar of the perfumes before of the Holy of Holies, in the hours of public prayer, that is from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon. Only the assigned Priest entered the Sanctuary and the people remained praying outside, that is, in the porches or in the courtyards of the Israelites or the women areas. Probably it was the hour of the Vespers, and Zechariah entered the Sanctuary to offer the incense. The multitude of the people fervently prayed, asking to be freed, since they were

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1 Dionysius the minor, on calculating the pagan era, mistakenly put the birth of Jesus Christ in the year 754 of the Roman calendar; instead, Jesus Christ was certainly born when Herod was still living.
oppressed by the foreign domination. The glory of Israel had finished and everyday there were news of some oppressive abuse of power by the rulers. Maybe on that day the tribulations had been greater than usual, because usually it is during times of great afflictions that the prayers become more fervent, and hasten the hour of God.

Zechariah, on hearing the lamentations of his people, lifted with more eagerness his heart to the Lord, and considering his own affliction, deeply humiliated himself. He felt unworthy to do the sacred functions; he feared that God would reproach him, believing to be the least and the basest of the Priests. Certainly he was in one of those moments of self-abasement, because the Lord chooses these moments to reveal Him to a soul. The very fear, that overcame him in seeing the Angel, could be caused by this interior humility, believing that He had come to reproach him.

He put the incense on the flame, and in the solemnity of the moment, remained absorbed in deep prayer; the solemnity of the place, his faith in ministering the incense, diverted him from all the surrounding, and with deep respect he turned his heart to God, and his prayer, like the spiral of the perfumed smoke of the incense, rose highly. He was all absorbed in God, and in his service to Him, and was praying. When all in a sudden he startled with a mysterious fright that took hold of him: on the right side of the Altar, unexpectedly, a human figure had appeared, most beautiful, majestic, resplendent, adoring God with such a deep recollection as if all creation had come to a sudden standstill in that instant. The figure did not say a word in that moment, but all his appearance was like a living word: it was like as he were elevated, like a shining cloud, his eyes, the color of the sky, were sparkling bright, vividly reflecting the splendor of the eternal glory. The light wrapped around him, and it seemed that on his shoulders a regal mantle unfolded in two powerful wings. But they were not wings; they were the expression of his nature, swift like a flash of lightning, and fast to the commands of God. His hands were raised high, clasped in a gesture of immense love; but they were not hands, they were the expression of a serene and irresistible power that embroiders and disposes, and the heavens seemed mute to their command. His body was all light and radiance, showing his spirit, a candid halo that wrapped a life all-active in the Divine Will. Zechariah stayed in a daze, stopping, fearing, perturbed, while a deep peace flooded him, the peace of God.

The Angel spoke to him; his words were peaceful and penetrating, because they were not the articulation of syllables expressing a concept, but a shining concept, a life that seemed words and was truth.

Our word is the vibration of matter moved by the spirit; the words of the Angel were the radiance of the spirit that manifested the light of the Divine Will. The brilliant sight of the Messenger of God was full of goodness, a goodness that man cannot even conceive, and its rays are the warmth of the Christian charity. He reassured Zechariah with one word: *Do not fear:* he elevated him with good news; his prayer was granted and Elizabeth would have a son for their joy and happiness. In a few words he sketched the greatness of the son that God was giving to him, a greatness unknown to the world that rejoices in miseries and believes to be heights what instead are abysses.

He would be great *before God,* that is, he would have his soul filled with supernatural gifts, and as consequence he would be in contrast with the world. He would not drink wine nor strong drink, because the Holy Spirit would fill him, beginning from the womb of his mother. The strong drink—the *sicera*—was an intoxicating liquor
obtained through the fermentation of wheat, or barley, dates, millet, and so on, to make a kind of beer that people would drink to be more alert in their work. The strength of the Baptist, however, would be the Holy Spirit, marvelous rapture of the soul.

It does not strengthen the body, making it instrument of the soul, but rather it fortifies the soul, dominating the body and matter, lights a great interior fire, and instills an immense love to the heart. It does not simply move but enriches, and gives to its powers a spiritual vigor that transforms it, making it able to do great actions, according to the specific plans of God.

In material or human actions when the body is fortified, it becomes more ready; in the spiritual and the supernatural, the body is dominated by penance and temperance, which makes the soul a more docile instrument of the Holy Spirit, because it weakens its tension toward the material life. This is the very deep meaning of the word of the Angel that, after saying that the Baptist would not drink wine or strong drinks, adds that the Holy Spirit would fill him. He would do such a penance, to become a creature of pure spirit, completely strengthened and enraptured by the grace of God.

The fullness of grace would give to him power over the souls; he would dominate the spirits, converting many sinners to God. This is in fact the greatest manifestation of the spiritual power, because any power or any authority is useless, before the stubbornness of the heart; on the contrary it makes the highest power to subdue and convert without oppression.

Filled by the Holy Spirit, the Baptist would subdue and have power over many hearts, converting them to God; he would predispose the coming of the Messiah, “that he may turn the hearts of the fathers toward their children, and the unbelievers to the wisdom of the just,” making alive again, in his degenerated generation, filled with vices and unbelief, the great desires and the great aspiration of their fathers, and faith in the divine promises.

The Patriarchs, in fact, had become very much detached from the life of their descendants; the loosening of morals had made the people of Israel almost unrecognizable, thus making necessary a rebirth, to have people able to accept the imminent coming of the Redeemer.

Zechariah becomes mute

The program was marvelous, but Zechariah understood very little of it, as it becomes clear from his answer; he was all focused on the promise of a son, and he thought that the Angel’s promise was preposterous, because both he and his wife were now old; thus instead of exulting and thanking God, he said with great distrust and unbelief: “How shall I know this?” Also the B.V. Mary, at the annunciation asked a question of the same Angel, but there is an abyss of difference between Zechariah’s reaction and Mary’s. Zechariah’s was focused on himself: “How shall I know this?” Whereas the B.V. Mary was focused on the Divine Will: “How shall this be done?” Zechariah rejected the annunciation as absurd, Mary asked what God wanted from Her and in which way she would have accomplished his will.

“How shall I know this?” It was the manifestation of the “I”, the “I” that pretends to raise himself to be the judge in the plans of God; the “I” that chokes the most delicate germs of grace, assuming to want to evaluate everything with his own idea; it
was the word of his own mind in opposition to the word of God; it was a most wretched human word that dared to overcome the one of God; thus, and rightly so, Zechariah was deprived of his word and became mute. The Angel became stern, his majesty flashed like a thunderbolt. Zechariah had not considered in answering him that he was speaking with a superior being, and that he lacked prudence. Now the Angel called him up to reality, telling him: "I am Gabriel (which means the strong one of God), and I stand before God."

In pronouncing those words, it shined in him what his name meant, and a ray of divine majesty enveloped him. He was the strong one, the expression of the true strength, something immense, deep, large, towering, something gigantic and powerful, able to shake the hinges of the world: "I am Gabriel," it was a celestial word, that made its meaning known and by saying it, it made it alive. These words hit Zechariah like a thunderbolt of extraordinary power; they contracted his nerves and made him dumb, even before the Angel would tell him. He did not believe, his soul had been dumb, before his body would become dumb, and his dumbness became a sign of truth: he showed with a visible punishment that what he had heard, was not a deception.

In an unbeliever the spirit becomes dumb and prayer is silenced.

What a lesson for us, who are used to oppose with great ease the plan of God with our own plans and to search with our foolishness to appreciate the ways of the Lord! "How shall I know this?" Here our program comes before the grace that can touch and transport us; we stop and we want to evaluate everything in terms of our own "I"; thus our spirit faints and our prayer remains mute.

Oh if we only knew to let go of ourselves in the divine Will, and in the divine action! "How shall I know this?" Here is the foolishness of our human word before the mysteries of the eternal truth; here is the attitude of those who look into the abyss of their own powerlessness, and do not know to believe in the power of God!

Zechariah looked at his old age and the sterility of his wife, and claimed to evaluate with this dead light the promise of the Lord; for this he lost himself and remained dumb.

The unbeliever looks at the subject and the laws of the flesh, thus he is unable to accept the truth of Faith. He does not believe, and he remains spiritually dumb, since he does not have in himself any word of truth. There is no one more disheartening than an unbeliever; he does not speak with words of truth; almost, so to speak, we would say, that he speaks with signs, as Zechariah did, and his words are only materialistic, because he does not have the interior word of truth, and it is a true sign of the punishment of God.

We believe that is our graciousness to comply, and our condescension to believe and pray, instead it is all a gift of God. When we are not worthy of the Lord because of our pride, we cannot believe and speak to God. This is a truth that we must well ponder.

Our words of faith and the voice of our prayers are the measure of our soul; as
soon as our soul is mislead, by the proud misery of our “I” or by the degradation of our senses, we loose our word, the interior word that makes us to say “I believe” and the exterior words that can speak to God.

A Priest could measure his life from this, to ascertain how close he is to God. When he finds it difficult to pick up his breviary, and does not know how to speak, then it means that his faith has become weak and his heart impoverished by the life of the world.

When a faithful person does not know how to speak to God, he needs to purify or to renew himself, because his spiritual muteness is sign of an interior paralysis.

The people were surprised that Zechariah did not reappear from the Sanctuary, which means that he remained in it for long time after the Angel’s annunciation. To have become mute was indeed for him a very strong sign that the vision was not an illusion; he became full of sorrow because of his little faith, and stayed before God in an intimate prayer begging to be forgiven.

When finally he came out, it was clear to all that he had experienced strong interior emotions, and from this the people understood that something supernatural had happened. Many tried to ask him questions, because a vision in the Sanctuary could mean an announcement of future events or warnings from God to his people; but Zechariah could only make signs. Maybe he made gestures of repentance, striking his breast, maybe only exhorted the people to pray for him, maybe he tried to quiet them to calm their fears; it is not possible to know, but in fact he remained in deep recollection for the rest of his week.

Elizabeth becomes pregnant

When Zechariah came back home, he told to his wife, maybe in writing, the vision he had, and she, after a while, realized that she indeed had conceived. Her happiness was immense, because she was finally free from the ignominy of her sterility, that almost cut her off from the benediction given to Abraham by God (Gen 22:17, 30:23); the Lord showed to her that He had not sent her away from Him, as she had feared so many times. She remained in her house for five months, without being seen by anyone. Maybe she wanted to make sure that she was indeed pregnant, and also to avoid indiscreet questions on the illness of her husband. She quietly prayed in her home, and that voluntary seclusion was as if she communicated somehow to her son that love for the desert and silence that prepared him, later on, for his great mission. Elizabeth was a holy woman, faithful to the Lord and faultless, and nonetheless sterility had befallen her. However, this sorrow was in the plan of God, to make her humble and prayerful, and to prepare her later for this greatest grace. Her motherly seclusion was thus prepared, as if in a perfumed nest of self-sacrifice and when Jesus’ precursor was born, she clothed him in her humility.

How many spiritual souls seem to be barren when on the contrary God prepares them for a strong fertility! Sometimes they must form a generation of souls, able to glorify God and to announce His kingdom. These souls feel a need to yearn for the Lord with sighs of a burning love that seeks only Him and His glory. In this kind of love that seems dissatisfied, they are training themselves for heavenly desires, preparing for that spiritual maternity that one day shall make their life happy.
How to fight the spiritual sterility

Discouragement or desperation is not the way to fight spiritual sterility, but rather the way to fight is humbly praying. This is the way to reach the purpose for which God sends it or permits it. To believe that it is impossible to become free from it means the fall into the same lack faith that St. Zechariah had for the words of the Angel and thus become dumb and unable to utter any prayer.

When St. Zechariah was offering the incense, he received the great annunciation, and the Lord consoled him during his priestly functions; this should be the path followed by a hardened soul: to pray, to attempt to do some work of sacred zeal. This is the secret of interior fertility. Satan, on the other hand, tempts the soul by inspiring lack of confidence and spiritual inertia and even makes a person believe himself to be on the edge of perdition. Satan, most treacherously, wants to make it impossible for the soul to have a simple, sincere faith and that humble abandonment to God, which makes the soul to hope against hope. The Angel who speaks to the soul is the Priest, and it is necessary for it to accept his assurance, if it does not want to fall into an abyss of darkness, from which it cannot rise and thrive again. Pessimism, looking on the dark side, is always deadly for the life of the spirit. On the contrary hope and abandonment to the Divine Mercy is the secret of a great life.

Is not a plant pruned to make it flourish more richly? God prunes the souls with aridity, sinks then humility, makes them aware of their weaknesses and then, at the right moment, enriches them with grace and accomplishes in them His great designs. A plant is not restored uprooting it but fertilizing it; similarly the humility is the best compost for our interior powers, and when its degree is sufficient according to the plan of God, then these powers flourish all of a sudden, to give true fruits of holy life.

4. The Annunciation of the Angel to Mary.

In a small village, that was famous not for its greatness but for the proverbial scorn attached to it, lived a humble, holy young virgin married to a humble carpenter. When people wanted to give an epithet of scorn, they would say: “He is a fool like someone from Nazareth”, and that village was so humiliated that it did not believe it could ever give birth to something good. The Lord, who scoffs at human views and is pleased with humility, chose that very town as the place for His incarnation. Just as he gently puts the soft pod in the honeycomb and sends the fertilizing dew in the night, similarly he wanted to rest in humility and descend in a place most hidden to men.

Humility

Humility fascinates God, because it is the flame in which his light can reverberate and his greatness can be made manifest. He, who knowing himself generates the Word, does not find any other place where to place the Word, the flower of Jesse, but in humility, the knowing of one’s self, in littleness. The creature, knowing herself and humbling herself before the Creator, attracts Him; in the sublime void of humility, He
shines, because in lowering herself lovingly, the creature shows appreciation for God, and also has something of that eternal knowledge of the Eternal Word. It is a mystery of love unknown to the word.

Pride, by its own nature, obstructs and blinds; it is the refusal to recognize God; it is the appreciation of oneself and becomes the least suitable to receive the eternal light, because of its dullness, and it is anchored to its dumbness. The humility, indeed the humility, what a flavor of peace and fertility has this most sweet virtue! Every life, every precious richness of our world, bursts forth from humility: plants grow from seeds, always tiny and deep in the ground; the gem comes from the darkness of a mine; gold is deep within the earth or in the rushing waters of the rivers; the pearl is among the halves of a shellfish anchored to reefs in the depth of the sea. Life is not born if one creature is not humbled by another; it does not flourish in dazzling light but in the silent mystery of the gestation. Everything that appears conspicuously or makes too much noise is more the sign of death than of life.

Humility, indeed humility, how high is this ineffable lowness! It bends down to receive the embrace of God, and becomes power and wisdom and love! Humility, indeed humility, how beautiful you are in your hidden splendor, gem of most pure water that collects the ray of the divine Love and rejoices in silent contemplative adoration! Humility, indeed humility, the virtue that attracts the angelic hosts just as the mother’s tenderness is attracted to her baby sleeping in the crib. The heavenly Hosts, after the fall of Lucifer and his group, have a horror for pride and are attracted by the humility that made them eternally blissful!

The holy young Virgin of Nazareth

Humility attracted God to earth, because the young holy virgin chosen by Him as his living tabernacle was the humblest of all creatures. Mary, in the lineage of David, of royal origin, was in fact unknown to everybody and lived as a humble girl of the people in the modesty of her work. She had consecrated herself to the Lord since her childhood in the Temple, and offered to Him her immaculate virginity. However, who took care of her wanted her to marry a man of the same house of David, Joseph, and as the custom in those times, the marriage contract had been done without her knowledge. She obeyed, trusting to keep herself immaculate knowing that the man to whom she had been given was of extraordinary virtue. Maybe she spoke about it with him, but it is more probable that she trusted herself entirely to the Lord, waiting to be guided by Him in her mysterious journey of life. In her deep intuition of the divine Will, she understood that God had a plan in this chaste marriage and peacefully trusted in Him. This is not a holy supposition but what we can assume by her attitude toward St. Joseph, after the Incarnation of the Word, because she did not reveal to him, as we shall see, the mystery, but she awaited that God would reveal it to him.

The purity of the young holy virgin is ineffable. Nobody has ever delved into the depth of this mystery because she was completely pure.

Conceived immaculate, she was the only creature who bypassed original sin; her soul had descended from the highest Heaven, where God had created her, as a blossom full of grace. Her name, Mary, mirrored her greatness; she was noble as a great lady, in her virtue there was something immense; beauty was in her soul for the marvelous order
of her powers and in her body for the perfection of the most pure lines, through which shined her holiness. She did not have any sign of pretence in her great virtues, and her most beautiful veil was her humility and simplicity.

Nobody would have ever suspected that this humble silent girl, radiating goodness and peace, who everyday went to draw the water at the public fountain, and worked with the spindle and weaved, was greater than the Angels; she was the enclosed garden, the dwelling-place of the Most Holy Trinity, a fountain sealed, a sanctuary of divine love, where the prayers and offerings of her heart rose like the purest hosts.

Saint Joseph

St. Joseph was also a virgin like her. He was a simple man; he had married her and was her loving custodian, looking silently after her, and full of respect that this immaculate purity awoke in him. From the regal status of his ancestors he had become poor and worked as a humble carpenter. His place of work was not the one of a skilled cabinet-maker, because he made ploughs, doorjambs and so on, to take care of their daily needs. No home was ever more peaceful and greater than theirs, even though materially it was modest and poor. Even today, it is impossible to enter their little home that is still kept in Loreto, Italy, as it was transported there by the Angels, without the feeling of a deep emotion; after two thousands years still is perceived the perfume of the virtues of Mary and Joseph; here sings with immense gratitude: “Here the Word became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Mary was alone in her little house and prayed. She was alone, because St. Joseph had not yet legally brought her into his home, even though he was already married to her. God, in his infinite wisdom, had chosen him as custodian of the virginal and divine maternity of Mary - that before the world would remain hidden - and safeguarded the great mystery. God had chosen Joseph in order to give Jesus the legal paternity that made him descendant of David, however He did not want anyone to be present at the moment of the Incarnation of the Word, because Jesus had to be and appear completely apart.

It is possible, however, that at the moment of the Incarnation also St. Joseph was praying, because the Angel, as for St. Zechariah, chose the hour of prayer to accomplish the mission received by God. They were two hearts, far apart from each other, who were praying with ardent desire, united in the union of the love of God, filled with holy desires and fervid sighs, for the coming of the Redeemer. God, who is infinitely delicate in all His works, wanted that the two souls were united in Him and together be part of the accomplishment of the mystery. It was the highest union that was possible between two pure virginities.

The prayer of Mary

Mary prayed. We do not know the mystery of those prayers that attracted on earth the Word of God, but we can believe it by the context of the Gospel: the Angel greeted her full of grace, this was a surprise for him, so to speak, in seeing Her, because grace was very refulgent in Her; she was rapt in her deep humility, because it is written that God gives his grace to the humble. The Angel said: “The Lord is with you,” thus we can see that she was so deep in contemplation to be in intimate familiarity with the Lord, and
to host Him completely in the sanctuary of her heart. The Angel called her with a Hebrew superlative: blessed among women, that is blessed above all women. She was beseeching the Lord for the great blessing for all mankind, and was yearning for the blessed woman who would give birth to the Messiah, not knowing that in that moment she herself was the blessed, resplendent among all women for the virginal fertility that was going to make her become the Mother of God. According to the Jews, “woman” was almost a synonym of maternity and Mary had elevated herself among all creatures, with the wonderful miracle of a virgin fertility.

Mary prayed in an ecstasy of love, completely enriched by the Eternal love by the plentitude of his gifts, his fruits and his graces; therefore she was in a moment of extraordinary fervor, and also in a moment of extraordinary interior abasement, because the fervor, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, has always the flavor of a most profound humiliation. She was with the Lord, contemplating Him; she knew Him in a beatific vision, and consequently she could mirror her littleness. What was Mary before God? She was not only contemplating God as an elevation of faith, but God as He is, the Holy Trinity, and that is obvious, since He would reveal Himself in dazzling splendor to her, in this very moment, in which the greatest work of the Holy Trinity was going to be fulfilled: the Father was sending his Son, the Son was descending from his regal eternal seat, the Holy Spirit accomplished the mystery, giving Him, into Mary, a human body and a soul, shining of mysterious holiness. The heavens lowered upon the earth, and Mary saw Them in Their splendor, because They were lowering themselves to Her. Who ever can probe into the depth of this mysterious moment?

Mary prayed, contemplated, and meditated in silence. As she did, the earth disappeared for her, the walls of her little home became as if transparent; they no longer enclosed her within their confines. She flew through the Heavens. What a mysterious light! The Holy Trinity! The Eternal Origin of everything, infinite and all in Himself, the Father, the fire of eternal knowledge who eternally generates the Son and the fire of the eternal Love bursting forth from the Father and the Son, uniting the Father and the Son in personal Love, subsisting and eternal. What a spectacular sight!

Mary contemplated most of all His infinite Paternity. She saw His splendor most pure, most simple that defied all composition. She saw bursting forth, so to speak, from the Paternity, the Eternal Word and from the Word and for the Word, the splendor of the creation. It was the miracle of miracles, and with her immaculate soul she lowered herself adoring Him, motionless, in an incomparable happiness. She could see how far distant man was from God, and how faint his image was and his similitude with his Creator! She saw in the faraway distance the rotation of the stars; She saw the earth and on earth she saw man, a shoot rotting at his root, its branches withering and wasted, and filled, in fact, with the germs of death. She saw the miserable development of that life that had been created to glorify the Creator; She saw the passing of the human centuries, full of foolishness and crimes, in which the eternal ray of grace did not reach the creatures anymore, who instead were born as if on an icy summit, where the sun never rose anymore and emptiness and frost were endless. What sorrow for the immaculate heart of Mary to see that immense desolation with no hope for humanity!

She indeed saw the efforts of poor mankind to procure for themselves the light of wisdom and life, but this was even more sorrowful: here and there she could see small rays of wisdom. The creatures, with great effort, were trying to have more light by
gathering the runners of their dried plants, but the result was only flashes of light and smoke. Everywhere She could see shameful creations made by human hands, put high on precious pedestals, the idols, abhorrent caricatures of the divine, suggested by satan.

The life, that was meant to rise up to the heights to the conquest of happiness in God, was instead plunged into the mire of the senses, moaning in its great unhappiness; consuming itself relentlessly in useless pursuits. She saw the great human powers as haughty puffs of air that opened up ostentatiously, and were dispelled by storms. The empires, the armies, the wars, the miserable efforts to conquer the Heavens were reduced, by their own fault, to be collectors of rubbish, destined for the fire.

The blessed soul of Mary paused before this display of death, and remembering the sighs of the Patriarchs, cried to God with all her love: Come, save us, do not delay any longer, send the One that has to come, to come down as dew on our parched land, flood us with the rain of your mercy, give us the Just One.

Mary prayed. Her people, the chosen ones of God, still had the promise of this immense blessing, and this promise had come down from generation to generation to the house of David. Mary looked toward her people and moaned. The faith was languishing and her people were not waiting for the Redeemer but for a ruler. The words of the Prophets had been crushed by the violent persecution of wicked people, they were forgotten; the desolation had reached also the holy place, and the sacrifices and the oblations were only poor ceremonies without life.

Mary prayed that all those images that she saw would come soon to an end, and she offered herself as a perennial holocaust, renewing the consecration of her virginity to hasten the miraculous maternity that would bring the Messiah.

It was the most pure oblation attracting the fire of Heaven, the Eternal Flame, right on her, and accomplished the mystery.

It is the opinion of the Fathers, an opinion concurred upon and that mirrors the truth, that Mary hastened the moment of the descent of the Word of God among us; it was her prayer that opened the Heavens, and it is reasonable to suppose that this prayer reached its climax in the moment of the Annunciation. Therefore we do not make only pious guesses, but we reconstruct psychologically, even if faintly, the mysterious moments in which Mary became the Mother of God by the power and virtue of the Holy Spirit. The Eternal Love made her fruitful when She longed the most for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind.

She was absorbed in God, tending to Him in prayer. How beautiful She was! No painter ever had the possibility to paint this beauty, because nobody could ever paint the light of the spirit emanating from her body, purified by divine love. Mary was kneeling, in an attitude of deep humility; her hands were folded, her head veiled, her heart to God, and her eyes were half closed in most sweet modesty. Her large eyes filled with the light of God, were as if veiled by her eyelids, and were lowered, like the veil of the Temple, on the mystery of truth and love. Her purest forehead was serene and resplendent reflecting her great thoughts. Her pale cheeks, a light shade of rose, made her countenance like an open flower in mid-winter, waiting for the vivifying ray of sun. Her lips had a peaceful smile, a reflection of the interior happiness that enveloped her.

She was a monument of purity, and the clothes she wore emanated the perfume of the most fragrant lavender. She had not the faintest idea that she could be the elect of God.
She prayed.

And behold an Angel of God appeared.

And in that moment a great light engulfed the little room that startled her, and in that light shined even more brilliantly an Angel of God. Mary was not troubled or afraid, because she was used to be in the company of the Angels; but she saw that the heavenly messenger at that moment was not like the others. He did not have a majestic appearance, but looked like he was prostrated in reverent respect. He was refulgent of a stronger light because he was carrying the greatest message ever brought down from Heaven to earth; however his greatness was veiled by humility.

He paused for a moment, he bowed, admiring the masterpiece of God and exclaimed: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women.” And he stopped, adoring God who had created her so beautiful, because he saw in her the brightest reflections of his infinite sanctity.

Mary, the most humble, heard these great words of greeting and she did not comprehend the meaning of them; thus she became troubled because those words had no resonance in her heart, that was accustomed to becoming smaller; they were for her words of an unknown language, and wondered what was their meaning. She did not suspect them to be praise, so she feared that they were a reproach, a sign of disappointment from God. This appears clear from the words that the Angel added: “Fear not, for you have found grace with God.”

It seems it is the psychology of souls who are truly humble; they fear praise, because words of praise are absurd to them and lie heavily on their hearts, because they seem like they diminish in a way the glory of God.

Mary was not troubled by the vision of the Angel, as some people believe, but in his words, as it is clearly written in the Sacred Text, and since she did not understand their meaning, like someone hearing an unknown language, showed the extent of her humility. It was in that moment of interior abasement that the Angel foretold her to be Mother of God: “Behold you shall conceive in your womb, and shall bring forth a son; and you shall call him Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever.” The Angel said: “you shall conceive in your womb and shall give birth; thus she would truly become a mother; she would give her son the name Jesus, Savior; thus would be fulfilled the prophesies that announced the salvation of Israel and of the world; the Son would be called Son of the Most High and she would become the Mother of God. He would have the kingdom of David forever, the true kingdom promised to the holy king, the kingdom of grace and love that would last
eternally.

Mary remained pensive. She was married to Joseph, she had promised to God her virginity and she knew that she had made the same promise to Joseph; what should she do now? She only wished to do the Divine Will, and she wanted to know how to do it. Mary in that moment performed an act of virtue greater than that of Abraham, so instead of showing herself ready to immolate her son, she showed herself ready to renounce her virginal integrity, if it pleased God. It would not be correct to say that Mary would have renounced her divine Maternity in order to not renounce her virginity; this would not be fitting to the full submission of Mary to the will of God. The Virgin only expressed her particular condition, and implicitly Joseph’s: *She did not know man* and because of her vow, she could not know him; if God wanted her to have a virgin spouse, who for his consecration belonged only to God, how would the conception occur? She could not break the vow that St. Joseph had entered with God, and she was asking how the conception could happen. But the Angel immediately reassured her; She would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would remain intact.

The words of the Angel were not a simple affirmation; they were a great light, because he spoke in the name of God. Nobody can ever understand with what loving respect an Angel pronounces the name of God, from whom he receives everything and in whom he delights.

Gabriel, in pronouncing the name of the Holy Spirit, shined with a love benefiting from the Eternal Love; and in referring to the virtues of the Most High, he evinced his reverent awe of the Almighty. He was refulgent of love and prostrated in so deep an adoration as to make one appreciate the infinite distance that exists between the power of the creature and that of the Creator. Mary in that moment gazed on the power of God and she abandoned herself in an act of unbounded faith. She did not need to know anything else, she did not need to investigate; she did not want to think of the external consequences of a miraculous conception; she prostrated her intellect and believed, bent her will and offered herself, opened her heart and loved God with intense love.

The Angel added that also Elizabeth, even though she was sterile, miraculously had conceived a son, and she was already in her sixth month, because nothing is impossible to God. This was the human proof that he gave for Mary’s human reasoning, because God, in his great works and revelations, always has a delicate respect for human reason. Therefore faith in Him is in this way sustained, and it makes this leap much easier. The light of reason is like the boost of a catapult to an airplane that flies without motor, and thrusting it all at once into the blue sky.

**Faith and reason**

We believe first, and then we have the light of reason itself, because from the heights it is possible to contemplate the valleys and measure the height; but from the valley it is not possible to contemplate the horizon of the heights. This is something of great importance: one cannot arrive at faith through investigation; but it is possible to investigate, if one believes, to love all the more, to contemplate and to believe.

The efforts of the human reason before having faith are useful only if they push us towards God, to ask to Him for Faith; and this is a transcendent and vivifying light that cannot be found in the poor caves of reason, just barely illuminated. It is much more
beautiful to illuminate reason with the sun of faith, than to claim to shed light with the feeble light of reason. We do not ponder how narrow-minded our reason is before the sublime light of God; therefore we give it so much importance. The Saints simply abandoned themselves to the light of God, and always had their reason exceedingly lit, far more than those of the great thinkers of our poor earth.

Mary believed: “Here is the handmaid of the Lord…”

Mary believed the great mystery that was announced to her and believed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Her. She lowered her forehead with immense humility, she opened her heart with full dedication, and she pronounced the admirable words that

• ‘Miraculously’ in the sense that at her age was unconceivable to have the son she always desired but was unable to have until then; St. John Baptist was born as all children are born

would accomplish the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Word: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word. It was a solemn moment that my poor pen does not know how to express; it was the moment of the wedding of a creature with the Eternal Love, and the descent of the Word in her immaculate breast. It seems that this descent of love was like a huge weight that overwhelmed the scales of mercy and raised Mary up to where the Word had descended, up to eternal heights. Mary was absorbed in silence, rapt in God, offering herself entirely to Him, bowing down into the dust of her nothingness. In this act of most profound humility she almost disappeared, and she prayed ardently. She felt the deepest peace and perceived in her life a current of boundless purity.

Her body seemed to have become spirit, such was its brilliance, and ethereal in that great light overshadowing her. She was as a living canticle of love: her powers were singing in harmony with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, her intellect was refugent of divine wisdom, her will was refugent in complete union with God; an immense light of celestial knowledge inundated her making her able to converse in the Heavens, or better in the loving peace of the Most Holy Trinity, because from that moment God called her almost in the divine union: she was, in fact, the daughter, the spouse and the mother of God, having in herself the greatest image of the Most Holy Trinity, she was the generating principle of the Incarnate Word, she had him in her breast, united to her for the Eternal Love and she could echo the eternal words of the Eternal Father: Ex utero ante luciferum genui te (“From the womb, before the day star, I begot you”-- Ps 109:3) with the words of her maternal love: From my breast, in God’s light, I begot you. How marvelous! God speaking of the eternal generation of the Son makes a comparison between his eternal bosom to the virginal womb so that it would not seem strange that from a virgin one day could be conceived the Incarnate Word and Mary could compare her womb to the bosom of God the Father! •

And the Word became Flesh
The Angel was witness to the nuptials of Mary with the Holy Spirit and of the Incarnation of the Word; that was a moment of immense joy for his ardent spirit, and he stopped in adoration. The Eternal Love that unites the Son with the Father, united the Son to the divine Mother. He kindled in Her an immense love and wrapped her in his flame; he overshadowed her, and almost made her disappear in that flame, making her almost incandescent in Himself. That love was He becoming a flame in the Heart of Mary, in a way that Mary lived all through Him, and for Him in that moment. He burned like the flame of Sinai, and did not consume her, but gave her new life. Mary was as taken up in Him, although keeping her own being. A vital germ of her breast was penetrated by the life that the Holy Spirit made active, and the development was initiated. The germ was not contaminated, virginal, penetrated without a lesion not by a human germ but created by the virtue of God, and the life that made it active was the Eternal Love. Mary could tell him in all truth more than a creature says to the other: “Spouse of love you are for me.”

The grace of the Holy Spirit radiates in creatures and enriches them with gifts so that they may be able to give praise to God; in Mary the Holy Spirit did not radiate but gave new life to her, rendering her fertile with the Incarnate Word, to the substantial praise of God; Mary felt twice divinized, and the gratefulness she had for God made her able to feel the sublime tenderness of the divine Paternity. She closed her eyes, glorified the Lord in exultation, and in the silence of her heart, remained prostrated in adoration, more beautiful than all the Angels in Heaven. Gabriel looked at her astounded; he saw transpiring from her the very light of God, because in that moment the grandiose miracle became real: The woman enclosed and wrapped the man-God in her own life, she made him live of herself, and she lived of Him, so that her life for Him had something of the divine. The blood that flowed in the Son was hers, and in Him became divine Blood by the hypostatic union; this then flowed from the Son in Her as divine Blood, communicating Himself to her. The great and the small circulation flowed through the immaculate Heart of the Mother, but flowed back in the Heart of the Divine Son, and came back to the one of the Mother. It became saturated naturally of oxygen in the lungs of the Mother and of divine life in the Son, so that the divine Son unceasingly rejuvenated her maternal life.

This is the most significant marvel of the Incarnation of the Word in Mary, and it is the Communion that elevated her to the highest sanctity in each of those 20 or 30 seconds in which the blood completed the whole circuit of the arterial and venous system. The whole body of Mary was sanctified, and even into the smallest fibers where the capillary reach a diameter of five thousands of a millimeter, even into the organs furthest from the rational life, flowed the divine life, and sanctified all her activities, rendering them praises to God.

It was obvious that where the embodiment of Praise to God was living, everything would have to be praise, and the body that had given the temporal life to the Incarnate
Word would be a Body with voices of loving praise to God.

Even the physical beauty of Mary became mysterious, because all her features radiated something divine. Her muscles were sanctified; the shade of her complexion was as if shining of the divine palette; she was brilliant like the sun, in fact more than the sun in a placid morning azure sky; she had the radiance of the dawn, in her pigments the glittering of the stars, in her eyebrows the majesty of the arch of the firmament, on her mouth the serenity of a silent midday sky.

She was a marvel of supernatural beauty, because all her immaculate body was expression of a new art of love that no sculptor can give to his sculptures. The admirable proportions of her figure were more simple because of her purity, more spontaneous for

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• A brilliant and real observation that the blood of Mary that flowed nourishing the Heart of Jesus Christ afterwards flowed again in the heart of Mary… almost bringing a perfume of divinity.

her abandonment in God; exhaled a perfume of life, even though halted in one gesture and prone in an enraptured adoration. Hers was not a body; it was a living canticle, a diffuse soft melody that was like the sublime whisper of the closed garden and the fountain sealed by God.

Her folded hands were as if singing in their abandonment to humility, her arms inclined to the Divine Will and her Body now Temple of God: like the archways soaring to the heights, raised high in empty space and triumphant over their weight delicate harmony drawn from the coarse matter; a singing gilded hidden archway, shining in the rays of the sun, like orbs of light in the tranquil depth of the nave; singing solid pillars of the apse, standing there like adoring cherubim and refined in the intricacies of their Corinthian capitals, and a singing an Altar that receives the divine Victim among the spirals of the most sublime incense. All her soul shined through her body veiled of mysterious modesty, and the canticle of her love echoed from all her immaculate being: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*, *(My soul magnifies the Lord).*

The Heart of Mary, tabernacle of the Everlasting

The Angel, accustomed to the canticles of Heaven, had a start of joy; accustomed to take the prayers of the Saints, he held out his adoring hands to receive those of Mary, because in her prayers were already the sighs of the Incarnate Word; accustomed to watch over the hearts of men like a strong prince, he lowered himself before the Heart of Mary, tabernacle of the Almighty. He did not dare to speak any other word; he did not greet her, but bowed before her, like a flower before the sun, adoring Jesus, the divine dew that had descended most placidly on this immaculate earth in the night of the world. Then he flew back to the Heavens, rich with the first offerings of the Altar of the holocaust and those of the *divine incense*, to present them to the throne of the Everlasting One: *Discessit ab illa Angelus.* (the Angel departed from her).

Mary remained alone; she did not move, all absorbed in prayer; she was wholly one with the Word of the Father, who had made himself smaller, silent, and prisoner of love. In that moment she was his word, and had to gather the Word from the depth of her heart and gushed it from her mouth, as a spring of water gushes forth from an abyss of
the earth.

She prayed. In her most intimate possession was the divine life, far more so than of any other soul who, after Holy Communion, prays, thanks and adores his Redeemer.

She prayed, and her fervor was like a threefold flame lit in her by the Holy Spirit, it was a flame that wanted to envelope everything in charity, because Love of God brings with it unfailing love of others.

She prayed.

The little house was an abode of peaceful silence; it seemed like a little woods in full bloom, shining in the sunshine with the gurgling of cool fountains. Even the walls of the room seemed happy and rejoicing, tinged with mystical incense, like the walls of a sanctuary after a solemn Mass. The sun entered from the open window, and traced out on the floor a golden band, almost to form a carpet of honor for the Queen of Heaven, rich of God. There was in these humble rooms a freshness of life, like a golden field of ripe corn, because it was there, in that blessed soil that had matured the wheat of the elect. And although poor, it was extraordinarily rich, because it was the fertile ground that contained the most beautiful jewel of the centuries and the most splendid diamond of the eternal mine.

Mary prayed for all men.

She felt all of them in her heart, and their miseries and their sufferings moved her. Her heart had expanded, and she felt Queen of graces. Her new charity gave to her a desire to donate: to donate graces first of all to the one who had to prepare the way of the divine mercy; this was her most profound desire. Inside her was Jesus himself who urged her, because he wanted to start the sanctification of men sanctifying his Precursor, since in that moment there was no one else who could start the accomplishment of his designs. This zeal inflamed her, and Mary left her house and set off in a hurry toward the Hebron mountains to reach one of the priestly cities were Zachariah and Elizabeth lived.

5. Mary meets with St. Elizabeth

Mary started her way toward the mountains and walked fast on the desert mountain roads. She sought solitude, because she had a great need to love in silence, and she ran because she was almost like spirit and did not feel the weight of her body.

Whoever has felt a moment of intimate union with God, knows how much life is imbued in the whole body, making it more subjugated to the soul and a more docile instrument of the spirit. This life must have been immense in Mary, so enveloped in the Flame of the Eternal Love. She almost did not touch the ground and, like a dove soaring through the air, raced along the way. She ran without effort, as if moved by the wind, since all creation bowed before her, and the air opened up before her, so as not to be a cause of the slightest opposition to her feet. She ran rejoicing in the spirit, with sure step and with no fear, because pure joy in the soul gives also to the body a new vigor and a stronger motivation to its movements. Her feelings can be deduced from those expressed to St. Elizabeth, sublime expressions of her blessed soul: she magnified God, rejoicing in Him her Savior who was living in her breast; she regarded herself as the lowliest and considering her great mission through the centuries attributed to the Lord all her greatness, pondering on the consequences of the mercy of God on earth, the scattering of
the proud, the abasing of the mighty and the lowly who would be exalted. Full of God, she conversed with Him, loving Him with an intense love, full of gratitude for the accomplishment of the promises given to Abraham and to his posterity; she sang in the exultation of her spirit and she poured forth the fullness of her love before her holy cousin.

The greeting of Mary.

Soon she arrived at the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth, as it is written in the Sacred Text. She greeted her with the words that were in use at the time, Peace be with you, or with similar words, and at the sound of her voice the babe in the womb of Elizabeth leapt for joy, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The blessed voice of Mary was the voice of the Redeeming Word in her, since he possessed her and exalted her whole life; it was a saintly and sanctifying voice that performed what it said in the greeting of peace, and at the same time sanctified the Baptist in the maternal womb and sanctified his mother filling her with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth saw Mary in the splendor of her superhuman beauty, and she was profoundly impressed. From walking at a fast pace, the face of Mary had brightened: she was like a most brilliant work of art, a mix of simplicity and great majesty, humility and glory, a harmony of profound joy and dignified unspoiled calm; she was far more beautiful than any creature that has ever existed and was most charming, because she radiated sanctity and peace from each movement and word.

Mary was still a young girl; she was about fifteen years old, and all her being had that chaste and fascinating candor proper to youth. She was a flower open to life and, because opened by the virtue of the Holy Spirit, in her was kept intact that candid wholeness that is proper to virgins. She seemed an Angel of Paradise, more than an Angel, in the splendid ray of the Divinity that rested in her, and radiated around her a most sublime anointing of grace that satisfied the spirit, and lovingly roused her to God. Her voice was not that of a human creature: it was something mysterious, penetrating grace into the heart, and very softly, giving a feeling of calmness; it was like a melody full of expressions drawn by a most sweet instrument.

The greeting of St. Elizabeth

St. Elizabeth, then, seeing her so great and so beautiful, moved by an interior inspiration of the Holy Spirit exclaimed: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. She hugged her, she embraced her to her heart with a motherly effusion, since she was already advanced in age; but in hugging her she felt something of the divine, she understood by grace the mystery of her divine Maternity, she felt she was hugging the Queen of Heaven and she added: And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord, that is of my God made man for the salvation of all, should come to me?

With these inspired words the testimony of the divine Maternity of Mary and her indescribable greatness was as if engraved for the centuries. Mary is not indifferent to those saved by the Redeemer, she brings Him to them, she offers Him to them, she
radiates her grace and her mercy, she offers joy, she is sanctified in his name and she is inseparable from Him in the work of salvation.

If she were only a channel through which the Redeemer passed, as the Protestants maintain, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, would not have turned to Her but to the Divine Son who was in her womb; but on the contrary she exalted her, blessed her among all women, and she called the Redeemer her fruit, fruit of the most pure plant that, truly, only She could give. A plant is a channel of the fruit, it begets it, nourishes it and matures it; it is necessary to go to the plant to have it, and without the plant it is impossible to pluck the fruit.

Elizabeth saw in her all that splendor of life and subconsciously contrasted it to the humiliating dejection in which her spouse, dumb and deaf\(^2\), had come to her after the vision of the Angel, and she understood that faith in the word of the Angel had accomplished in her the great mystery, and the unbelief of her husband resulted in his muteness and the deafness.

Psychologically, that infirmity of her husband had given not a few troubles in the governing of her household and thus she exclaimed: *And blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.*

The sublime canticle of Mary

Mary at those words of praise felt her soul all drawn into God; her humility gave to her a feeling of her nothingness before Him: her gratitude made her ascribe everything to his infinite mercy; the divine light that radiated in her made her consider his designs upon men and the triumph of His mercy in all ages until the end of the world; thus she raised her eyes to heaven and exclaimed: *My soul doth magnify the Lord.*

Never before had a more sublime canticle of joy come out from human lips; never before had the most profound humility been so sublimely harmonized with the truth, in such a way as to form a melody of annihilation and greatness, of a littleness and an immensity, and of a goodness and strength that delight the soul uniting it to the joy and feeling of Mary.

The scriptural allusions to the canticle of Anna, the Psalms and the Prophets that are found in the most sublime Canticle show not only the familiarity of Mary with the Sacred Scriptures, but they are like the light of prophecies and of the figures that become reality and the accomplishment of the promises of God; far from diminishing the originality of the Canticle, they make it in its concise simplicity more beautiful and sublime.

It is as the stem of the old covenant and the fruitful flowering gem of the new one; it is the accomplishment of past hopes and the hope of the new mercies; it is the synthesis of the accomplished aspiration of the past and a rapid view into the history of the future, until the end of time; the program of the life redeemed and the synthesis of her elevations of love; finally it is the shining flash on the life of the Redeemer and his Mother who had him in her breast. In the whole history of the Kingdom of God this canticle is a voice.

\(^2\) According to the Greek text, St. Zachariah became deaf and dumb. In fact when he was asked which name he wanted to give to his son, they asked him with gestures, according to verse 62, indicating that he could not speak or hear.
always alive. In all the development of the Church it is always the current program. In the ascension of all the Saints it is always the harmonious voice that can gather in one sound of love the marvelous harmonies of the grace in them; it is a fruitful and virginal canticle as the heart from which it welled up, rich of meaning and simple in its expression, that the Church sings and sings again everyday, without exhausting her joyful and bright source; it is the canticle of the pilgrims going toward the Eternal Home; of the Apostles that walked the earth spreading the good news; the Martyrs who bear witness to the truth with their own blood; the Confessors who disseminate it; the Virgins who live it; the contemplatives who relish it; the Angels who exult for it; all creatures in their echoes of love; and it is the high note of the eternal canticle in the eternal glory.

When it is recited it is a sublime prayer; when it is sung, it is a triumphant hymn that raises the spirit exulting in God; when it is meditated, it is as an orchard in bloom, rich of celestial perfumes. It has always new flavors, that the centuries have never been able to age because it is a canticle of life. What a joy, oh Holy Virgin, to receive the grace, to receive Jesus and to be able to sing with you: Magnificat anima mea Dominum! (My soul magnifies the Lord)! What a peace to be on the Calvary of our test of life and to be able to repeat, weeping, with the heart fully resigned, Magnificat anima mea Dominum! (My soul magnifies the Lord)! What an interior sweetness to rise above the joy of the world, to repeat to the Eternal Goodness in the flight of the soul: Magnificat anima mea Dominum! What a comfort for the aridity of the spirit, when our poor fountain is dried up and does not give a drop anymore, to revive the spring of the heart with this canticle and give life to the poor dried earth: Magnificat anima mea Dominum! Even at the expense of being lengthy, we cannot move on without at least giving a quick glance to these shining facets of the canticle of Mary and to rejoice in the multiple reflections of this most precious gem of the New Covenant.

We must comment on the deep meaning of this canticle of love, that was given to us so that we might sing to God the gratitude of our love, that in union with the virginal voice of our Mother, we may be less ungrateful towards the Love that came down from Heaven and for the love that redeemed us with His most precious Blood. St. Zechariah did not believe in the Angel, and he remained mute and deaf until the accomplishment of the promise; Mary believed and spoke, in fact she sang with a melody that embraced all the centuries. We, her children, sing with her, live of her great faith, partake of the beatitudes of her heart: Beata quae credidisti (Blessed are you who believed), and so we become more able to embrace the accomplishment of the plans of God in us.

6. The Flower of the Old Covenant

The Magnificat

After the fall of man, for four thousand years, mankind yearned for the Redeemer, and yearning for him were his chosen people, put here by God as the brain and the heart of the human family. All nations may glory as much as they want in their great philosophers, poets, men of letters, artists and the ascension of their civilizations; however, it is undeniable that no one had the truth and the true love with the exception of
Israel. God gave to it the truth; those people had in Him the thinker, He gave to them the Law and in Him it had the legislator; He gave to it the songs of the soul making them flow from the Eternal Love and for Him it had the true poetry that transcended all human forms. The Jewish people did not remain theocratic for weakness or for infancy of their civilization; it remained thus because it had reached the summit of true civilization.

To reject its admirable fruits, that are divine, would be far more senseless and sacrilegious than those who would rip apart the masterpieces of the human civilizations, and demolish the most exquisite pieces of art.

The Jewish people

The Jewish people without doubt strayed and, rejecting the Christ, dreamed of a human kingdom, to the conquest of which, they resorted to any methods to be able to succeed. We do not dwell, however, on its decadence, but rather in the admirable constitutions that the Lord gave to them, and to whom they shall return, uniting themselves in the one sheepfold of the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church. Their very aberration and decline is a sign of the divine civilization of its past, because the fulfillment of the authentic prophecies of its inspired Prophets, and its unimpaired survival as a people, in the midst of so many ups and downs through the centuries, shows that the seed, that originated such a vigorous and hardy fruit, is a seed blessed by God. Instead of persecuting them so cruelly •, the nations should have and must call them back through charity and for the Church, they should give back to them the Scriptures which they replaced with the Talmud. In truth their falling into decline started precisely when they wanted to shape a human civilization, rejecting their divine constitution. They ran after and were attracted by the phantasmagorias of a global political kingdom, when instead it would have been sufficient for them to live of the Christ in the Church, thus finding themselves triumphantly at the head of all peoples, just as a patriarch is at the head of his descendants, who are enriched by him.

Mary announces the Savior

The sighs of the Jewish people that spread throughout the peoples of the world, should have culminated in the Christ, like the plant in the flower, and for this reason the awaited Redeemer was compared by the Prophet as a flower from the root of Jesse. So here is Mary, virginal plant of this flower, who has Him in her breast like a tiny bulb and gathering the sighs of the centuries announces the fulfillment exclaiming: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. It is the answer to all the prophetic voices; the fulfillment of all types and all figures; it is the annunciation of the Savior from his own Mother; it is an annunciation of the truth confirmed by the virginal splendor of this Mother. It is enough in the illumination that she received from the Word that is in her breast, to say with absolute certainty: He has come and then to repeat with her: *Magnificat anima mea Domini et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

He had to be born by a Virgin and She is the unblemished virgin; He had to descend as *dew on the fleece* (Jgs 6:36-38), and here he came in the deepest darkness in her most pure breast; he had to be enveloped by the woman, *mulier circundabit virum,*
and she gave to him the mortal body and enveloped him with her own life; he had to come as utmost condescension in human lowness, and She is the most humble of the creatures, a lowness all bejeweled with graces: *He has regarded the humility of his handmaid... hath done great things to me...and his mercy is from generation unto generation to them that fear him.*

Fulfilling his promises, God has shown the might of his arm; He has put down the *proud* by antonomasia, the demons in their designs of perdition; He has scattered the pride of the peoples in the tyranny of their short-lived civilizations; destroyed the thrones of the human wickedness, one after the other, and established the kingdom of love among the humble and those that hunger for eternal goodness. Here is scattered the pagan civilization, based on the proud tyranny, and here is the kingdom of the humble, filled with the peace of divine grace and divine mercy.

Nothing anymore has value with the exception of the Christ and his Church; darkness is defeated, the shadows have disappeared, the prophecies of the centuries have been fulfilled, the flower of Jesse is risen: *My soul magnifies the Lord.*

7. The fertile gem of the New Covenant.

What is this life that our Redeemer brings to us? He himself says it with a divine synthesis: *I glorify the Father.* This glorification that he gives eternally as Word of God, He gives to the Father as Redeemer, he gives it to the men that he unites to himself as his mystical body. *Magnificat,* here is the splendid light of the Word; *Magnificat,* here is the illuminating adoration of the Redeemer; *Magnificat,* here are the acclaiming voices of the Catholic Church in all her life glorifying God. The Word exults in the Eternal Love loving the Father; the Man-God exults in his humiliated filiation out of love; the Church exults in the exuberant richness of its adoring life.

The fulfillment of the divine promises that develops in this immense redemptive work, is therefore the glory of God, the exultation of love, the condescension of mercy, the elevation of man, the destruction of sin, the fulfillment of the poor, the defeat of pride, the life that goes on from age to age until the end of time, the fullness of glory and the eternal happiness in Heaven. Mary could not sing with more noble words.

8. Synthesis and program of the Church.

Mary conceiving the Redeemer started the life of the Church in the greatest way, for the intimate union that existed between Her and the Redeemer. The cornerstone of the new building was in her full possession, and her soul rose upon it like the gable wall of a
living temple. The pilgrim Church in the centuries, suffers tribulations and continues in Herself the Passion of the Redeemer; it permeates it in the hearts of the faithful and applies it with immense love; however notwithstanding the trial of her tribulations she is a canticle of life.

Persecuted, she does not bend; knocked down, she does not fall; despised, she does not disappear; deprived of everything and bloodstained, she does not become poor, but the blood of her martyrs become for Her a waterfall of gems. Nothing can silence her, because she is like the crystal sound of an organ that resounds even through her old pipes, and it is always resonant among the walls that contain it. *Magnificat anima mea Domini*, *My soul magnifies the Lord*, here is the melodic sound of all her life, until the end of time, *exultation of love in her Redeemer*, here is the reflection of all her tears; *the gaze of God upon Her*, here is the certainty of all her life; her spiritual *greatness*, fruit of the power of God; her *sanctity*, fruit of the Holy Spirit, here are her riches; the steadfast victory over all the proud that persecute her, who fall one after the other from their heights into the mud; here is her triumph that no one ever could rival; the reality of her goods that appease the spirit, this is her full happiness that raises human littleness to the eternal heights. Her glorious history is all in the canticle of Mary, which the Church repeats everyday at the Vespers, when the day is setting, because her light never dims and her sun is always eternal is in her. Her martyrdom is praise to God, who is infinite truth: *My soul magnifies the Lord*; in her sanctity she exults in God her Savior; in humiliation she grows and rejoices with her impassioned King and in exultation she shows the power of God that conquers and reveals his sanctity that forgives.

The Church wants to save, must save.

In her activities the Church does not seek a kingdom in the world, but rather goes through the nations to spread the mercy of God and to save souls. The world does not understand and never shall understand the anxious desire of the Church to save, and for this reason it mistakes her apostolate as politics. The Church wants to save, must save, because it has been given this mission by her Redeemer; she does not want to dominate but to save, and when clashes with human powers occur, it is when they have become perdition for souls. It is then that she rises, fights, agonizes; she does not compromise, she becomes like an unshakable rock and she wins and she shall always win. The world has not yet learned, it shall never learn it, because it flatters itself to prevail over her, but it is always overcome, it is scattered in its proud thoughts, it sees its mighty thrones overthrown, it is sent away empty and hungry and in misery comes back begging from the Church a bit of life. It is the history of the centuries, and it is the future of those that shall follow until the end of the world.

The Church rises in the world magnifying the Lord, and in this way indicates to the poor the eternal fountain of all goodness that truly satiates and of every treasure that is true richness. It is such a shame to see those who hunger for worldly things believing to be satiated, as well as the miserable rich people of the world who have empty hands, believing to have them full.

The Church does not weep over the poverty of the poor, but over the poverty of
the wealthy; she does not weep over starving people but over the greed of those who satiate themselves with trifles!

An example from history.

We report here a couple of examples from history to make it clearer for us to appreciate the truth. When Jonker found in the field the famous diamond that was to bear his name, he really believed to have found a treasure. He put it in a sock and tied it around his wife’s neck and all night long he stayed awake with loaded pistols in his hands. He sold the diamond for $350.000. When it was time for the diamond to be cut, as diamonds have grains like wood, the best cutter, Lazarre Kaplan, was chosen, because any error in the grain would have ruined it. Kaplan studied the stone for one year before the dropping hammer that would split it. Another great cutter, I.J.Asscher, who cut the famous Cullinan diamond, feared he would have a stroke because of the stress, and he asked to be assisted by a doctor and two nurses. Splitting successfully the stone, he fell on a chair and had to be assisted by the doctor because of the great tension he had suffered. Afterwards he was in a clinic for three months for a nervous breakdown.

All this is frightening, and is even more frightening to think that for the ownership of these most vile stones often blood was shed, and many dreadful crimes have been committed.

Who is more ravenous and miserable than those who cling to such mere nothings? *Magnificat anima mea Domini*, My soul magnifies the Lord, shout out the Church with her Magisterium of love, *Exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo*, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, pointing out the way to the true fulfillment of the heart, and she raises life as a lighthouse that never goes dark. If the world persecutes her, she raises her shout of praise; if it makes her bleed, she increases the exultation of her spirit; if it humiliates her, she multiplies the light of her glory; if it tears her children from her breast, making them Martyrs she is rendered blessed in her glorious Saints; if the world exudes evil to pollute her, she hastens her merciful attention toward souls; if it conjures up storms to shatter her, they only break upon the tetragonal rock, so experiencing the power of God; if it enslaves her in the idolatry of state-worshippers, it finds its crown broken by social catastrophes; if it steals her possessions to suffocate her, it sees her riches in her poverty without stopping her song of love, the eternal praise to God One and Triune, *Magnificat anima mea Domini*. My soul magnifies the Lord.

9. The canticle of the loving soul.

Mary sang in the fullness of her love, and with her song she traced the path of love for all the souls who live of God and search for Him above all else. The true life of the spirit, in fact, is in the search for the glory of God, because the creature is an effusion of the divine goodness, it is the work of the hands of the Lord, and cannot truly live without glorifying Him in everything and above everything.

The words of St. Paul: *Do everything for the glory of God*, find the most brilliant expression in our life when we bless the Lord, exalting his power, his wisdom and his love: *Magnificat anima mea Domini*. My soul magnifies the Lord.

In contemplation, through which the soul raises itself in the divine greatness, is the exultation of spirit in the divine light, it is the joy of relishing the fruits of
Redemption, a dash of love for God for his infinite beauty and goodness. The soul grows in the ways of love when it humiliates itself, recognizing its lowliness; it is then that God lowers himself to the soul and is pleased in it, working miracles of grace. To see God and to be seen by God, this is the synthesis of the highest elevation of love: Respexit. Regards it. The Faith regards it, Hope and Charity regard it, and He turns to us, illuminating us, raising and embracing us; the tormented soul regards Him, wandering and crying in this vale of tears, and He radiates His mercy. Love can only grow in the sphere of the divine mercies, because all spiritual and mystical life is a mercy of God. It is mercy that forgives us, mercy has pity on us that enriches, rises, and transforms us. If we could only realize that all our spiritual life is an effusion of mercy, we would aspire only to that, never desiring any high glory, but we would abase ourselves in the last place. The life of love is a banquet to which God invites us, and those who put themselves at the last place, are the ones who will rise the highest. If, instead of invoking love, we would invoke mercy, we would plant in our heart true love, in the depth of our heart, and we would see it blooming from our own very miseries, like a plant is fertilized by the manure that feeds and enriches the soil.

The complex work of grace in a heart that wants to love comes down to only these words: Misericordia ejus, His mercy. Our relation to this work comes down to just this expression: To recognize our own lowliness and have a reverent fear of the Lord. The victory of the grace in us is in the scattering away of our thoughts of pride, in devaluing our poor strength, and in the appreciation of humility. The power of our dashes of love is in proportion to the firm belief in our own foolishness and poverty. The one who believes to be already at the height of sanctity will fall down: He has put down the mighty from their seats; those who are satisfied with their own virtues and do not thirst and hunger for justice, remain with empty hands: He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.

Oh love, oh love, how much you grow in the soil of humility, and in the rays of God’s mercy! Those people lamenting not to possess You must realize that they have in themselves such a dose of pride as to render parched the roots of their soul, and vomit such vanity to darken the rays of mercy. If the soul does not sing the Magnificat of humbleness, it does not sing Love. The great and highest contemplatives were all very humble people, because it is with humble people that God reasons and converses.

10. The Magnificat of humility.

Rise, then, my soul, lower yourself and descend into the depths of your nothingness, that you may be filled with the goodness of divine mercy. Humility that does not abandon itself to mercy is not humility, it is spite of its own misery. Humility that does not turn its glance to God in trust, is not a true realization of its own incapacity but is an agitation of the spirit, in the disliking of ugliness that diminishes its own soul before its own eyes of pride. It is not desiring of God, but a yearning of its spiritual vanity. He who falls into the waves and tosses, drowns; who abandons himself shouting and begging for help, floats and is rescued ashore. O my Lord, I am not surprised to be a sinner, because my soul is only capable of this. It is not a surprise for me to be powerless to do good, because without You I am nothing. Yet I rejoice to be nothing, so that my soul may shine more in the light of your greatness: Magnificat anima mea Domini. My
soul magnifies the Lord! My sin makes me sorrowful, and you know how much I cried to have offended You, but You redeemed me with your Blood, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. I would be happy right now to expose all my lowliness and contemplate You, singing in all the modes: I am nothing and full of sins, and You are everything and infinite sanctity. Everything in which my soul rejoiced that is outside your Law is for me a disgrace; instead my repentance turned this satisfaction into loving regret, attracted Your glance, and filled me with peace.

O what a great beatitude to recognize myself a sinner and to cry for having offended You! But why am I so glad? Because You look at me with mercy. Many small flowers bloom in my soul from the mud of my filth, because the Eternal Sun shined on me and in the stench of my iniquities, opened perfumed buds, because You are mercy: Magnificat anima mea Domini. My soul magnifies the Lord! O how the power of your grace shines so much before my nothingness, and how rejoices my sinful soul in the splendid sanctity of your Name! You did a great thing inside me; You purified, strengthened me, nourished me, forgave me and You sanctified my life in your Name, O Most Holy Trinity: He has done great things for me and holy is his Name. You gave me an ardent desire to make amends for my faults and have aroused in me a strong zeal to be good; in this way your mercy goes from You to my heart and from my repentant heart to those who fear You. I am a sinner, and you conquered me with the power of your grace, shattering the useless plans of my pride; I was rebelling against your love, losing my temper, and you humiliated me, but in my humiliation you raised me up again by your grace.

I thirst for you, o my God quench my thirst; I am ashamed of all those miseries that I used to consider as riches of life; oh empty me of these. Take me into the arms of your merciful love, remembering your goodness, and let me rest in your love, according to your promises, now and forever. Amen.

11. A shining picture of the life of the Redeemer and of Mary.

Mary Most Holy, filled with the Holy Spirit and Mother of the Redeemer, expressed, so to speak, with the light of her love, the mysterious beauty of the Divine Son in her womb. He was the Son of God, the living praise of the Father, the voice that exalted his perfections: My soul magnifies the Lord. Clothed in human flesh he was the Savior, the exultation of the world; humiliated in the maternal womb, he was like the seed that was going to donate to us the flower and the fruit of eternal beatitude. He had assumed human flesh to save us, and God would look at his willing abasement in order to raise us and to spread his mercy on every generation. That abasement was the secret of greatness, and that cloth of sin, wrapped around him, had to rout out human pride and build our sanctity in us. He had to conquer satan and put him down from his ephemeral seat; he had to break those pestiferous illusions, and He had to be the bread of life, the fulfillment of all his faithful.

No one could ever describe the Redeemer in a more brilliant way: praise to God, exaltation of redemption, abased and therefore the delight of the Father, wrapped of greatness in his humiliation and sanctity in his immolation, mercy that embraces all those who fear the Lord, power that breaks the pride of satan, victory that destroys his throne,
light that overcomes darkness, bread of life for the hungry of God, accomplishment of the
divine promises.

This is not a spiritual application of the canticle of Mary; it is the truth, because
Mary, in speaking, reflected the Son living in her as King, like children reflect in their
words and gestures the personality of their parents; actually even more, because the life
of the Redeemer, as we said beforehand, raised, vivified and sanctified all her life.

Mary in her canticle expressed also, I would say, the character of her spirit; but
first of all she manifested the character of her Son, living in her, who in those blessed
moments was predominant in her life. She was, in fact, praise to God for Him, and her
spirit rejoiced in the magnificence of the grace, because He had redeemed her
beforehand. She was the delight of God because of Him, who elevated her to the dignity
of being the Mother of God, and the Redeemer performed great things in Her, done by
the power and the sanctity of God. It was He who dispersed pride, satan, and kept her
immaculate; He did not allow her to be dominated by him one single instant, and exalted
her from an humble handmaid of God to Queen of Heaven; He filled her with graces,
filling her with sanctity and elevating her as the greatest of all creatures and blessed
among all women.

This was therefore the character of the Mother of God: She was a praise of glory,
an exultation of love, an abasement of humiliation and immense greatness of graces; she
was a miracle of the magnificent and glorious synthesis of the greatest works of God, the
channel of his mercy; she was the victorious woman over satan of whom she crushed the
head, and the conqueress of human pride because she showed in herself the apex that
could be reached with the humility; she was the celestial giver of the Bread of Life and
the perfumed flower of all the promises given to Abraham and his descendants by God.
The heresy that attempts to distort Mary Most Holy giving to her other attributes, and
pretending to remove from Her the crown that God put on her head, did not succeed,
because She remains the eternal canticle of all ages, and nobody is able to change the
harmonies that burst from her great soul.

12. A perpetual voice in the Kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God covers two moments: its development on earth and its
crowning in Heaven. Every kingdom has a triumphant march, as well as a flag. The flag
unfurls in the wind, symbol of the nation, and the march raises its notes as a paean of
victory and life. We dare say that, in the kingdom of God the Cross is the banner and the
Magnificat is the triumphant song.

It was sung, in fact, at the entry of the immortal King on earth, hailing his first
victory in the sanctification of the Precursor. Brought by Mary, He went forth and, with
the sound of Her voice, he enveloped, so to speak, the babe of Elizabeth; He freed him
from original sin and made him exult in her maternal womb. Grace magnified God in a
soul, and the soul exulted in its Savior.

From that time on, all souls became glorification to God because of the Redeemer
who called them to Himself, through Mary. There is no spreading of grace without the
mediation of Mary, and there is no exultation of supernatural life without the voice of her
maternal love that brings Jesus to us and brings us to Jesus.

On earth, the Kingdom of God is above all in the heart, as Jesus said, because it is
love that glorifies God, it is exultation in his mercy that raises the human lowness to supernatural life, it is his manifestation of power and sanctity, because it is his victory over human frailties, it is his sanctification of all human powers, adoration of God in the filial humiliation of the spirit, and it is fullness of love, in seeking Him as our last end.

In Heaven, the Kingdom of God is the contemplation of his glory that brings our souls to issue forth perpetual hymns of praise; it is exultation in the eternal happiness acquired by the merits of our Savior; it is an intimate familiarity of love with God and hymns of everlasting beatitude in the eternal nuptials with Him; it is the full revelation of his greatness and his sanctity that became richness and beauty of the elected souls; it is the kingdom of glorified humility and represents the eternal victory over pride wiped out by the eternal justice; it is the full accomplishment of all the aspirations of the spirit and a fullness transcending all goodness. While singing, Mary led the new song of the pilgrims of the Kingdom and brought to earth the echo of the song of Heaven: *Magnificat anima mea Domini! My soul magnifies the Lord!*


The militant Church is, like her Redeemer, eternally immolated. It cannot change herself for if she did she would not be anymore the mystical Body of the Savior, as are not the churches of the heretics. To dream for her a political or human triumph would be to diminish her, and would be a fall into the error of Israel, which was expecting a political Messiah.

The Church is the kingdom of truth and love and cannot become a kingdom of selfishness and egoism, like kingdoms are in every political reality. She triumphs in the light of the Most Holy Trinity, not in our vale of tears: she exists, redeems and loves. Her glory is in never ending, and in raising souls to love only God above all else. The Church suffers in her members, without doubt, and her life is the Passion, but her suffering is full of peace and she advances in the world like a crystal-clear, warm current flowing through frozen slush. She has the joy of maternity in bearing labor-pangs, the exultation of true glory in humiliating persecutions, the transcendent greatness in the simplicity of her life, the splendor of sanctity in the face of contemptuous impiety, the irresistible expansion of the apostolate in the face of the obstacles aroused by the world, the spiritual dominion in the face of opposition that is heavily marked against her by human pride; the riches of Providence amidst the plundering of the thieves of the world and her immolated life is all resplendent of light.

Mary, His most precious gem, reflects all of this in her most sublime canticle. Let’s look at it in a brief summary: The people are converted, and like harmonious waves, sing in their primitive desolation the song of the new life that glorifies God: *Magnificat anima mea Domini! My soul magnifies the Lord!* Conversion becomes sanctification because of grace, and elevation for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, shining in the Church the marvels of the miracles, the prophecies, the heroism, the joyful exultation of her life: *Exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salute meo, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* The Saints of the Church are such a glory and a marvel that a soul remains ecstatic contemplating such greatness. They are human nothingness raised to the splendor of the divine; they are the glorious expression of the full beatitude and even the admiration of evildoers cannot undervalue this greatness: *Respectit humilitatem ancillae*
suae, ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes. (Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.) The Saints are not idle during their life, they do great things in the name of God, and they only represent the true and complete civilization of the spirit. They are the true heroes: the blood shed by the Martyrs, the luminaries of truth in the Doctors of the Church and the Apostles, custodians of the true science, the propagators of justice in the Confessors, the delicate purity in the pure virgins, the glorification of life also here on earth in the married people, great and true demographers of the world, who do not increase the population for slaughtering them later because of wars, but just the opposite, they each increase the family of the Blessed in the Heavens: Fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen ejus. (Because he who is mighty has done great things to me and holy is his name).

The Church is attacked, but she does not know any other way to react except with mercy, which she spreads with full hands, glorifying God who mercifully gives, and exulting in the Savior who merits it. Her initiation is complete forgiveness, a wash that restores the soul whiter than snow. Her arms bring gifts of love from the Eternal Love. Her courts of justice are peaceful oases of reconciliation and peace. Her table has food in exultation that overflows the soul with happiness; her nuptials are sanctified by the Love of the Redeemer; her power is the paternity, or better the maternity of immense goodness, and death itself is illuminated by mercy and peace: Misericordia ejus a progenies timentibus eum (His mercy is from generation to generation, to those that fear him.)

She has power, which does not come from violence but from her solidity, because it is a rock erected on rock. The Lord looks after her; He sustains her with his omnipotence, and whoever bumps against her, shatters.

How great it is to see the infernal powers proudly advance like waves, mounting like swarms only to crumble into a thousand pieces while the rock of God stands firm! It is a shameful sight to see the army of evildoers, united in a single group, a single block, a single council, an army, only to start new faiths, new religions, new uncivilized states, disguising them as civilizations, and yet they die under the hammer of the power of God: Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui. (He has showed might in his arm: he has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.) Here they are, the powerful people who make the earth tremble, and for the Church they are only mere stick figures. She knows where they shall go, she knows where they shall fall: Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles (He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble.) The abyss is awaiting them, already it swallowed them and shall swallow also those still living and those that shall come till the end of time. A wave of hunger shall pass over the earth, and all the riches of the world shall be of no use because they do not nourish. The world will hunger for wisdom but it cannot be satisfied because its gaudy thoughts are like the bubbles of bragging children. It hungers for truth, but its store of knowledge is full of errors, none of it explaining the reality of life. It swallows errors, and its hunger increases, because it is a hunger that leaves one empty in the trials of reality.

It hungers for justice and fills itself with torments and crimes; it hungers for love and fills itself with hate; it hungers for peace and fills itself with wars, remaining always empty, awfully empty. Only the Church satiates with true goodness, and walks in her exile with her heart and mind filled with peace and love: Esurientes implevit bonis, et
divites, dimisit inanes. (He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent empty away.)

It is true that souls living in the Church are subject to tests, and even the most devoted souls fall in the aridity which gives them anguish, sometimes even believing themselves to be lost; however, they know that these tests are a mean to receive a much richer gain, and uniting themselves to the divine Will, they sing with the heroism of complete faith in the promises of God: Magnificat anima mea Domini! My soul magnifies the Lord! They already know the ways of immolation and the agony of death because the Redeemer in the Garden of Gethsemane traced the path for them, and with Him they know to find again the ways of peace in one only leap: Not mine, but your will be done, Magnificat anima mea Domini!

O Mary, o Mary! Your song is inexhaustible, because it is the song of a heart rich in the Word of God! The soul is astounded before this immense fecundity of thought, and does not know better than to repeat the words of the Angel and St. Elizabeth: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

14. The birth of John the Baptist.

Mary remained with St. Elizabeth about three months, that is, through the remaining time of St. Elizabeth’s pregnancy. During this time she helped her saintly cousin with house chores and especially continued to sanctify and prepare the Precursor of Jesus in the mission that he had to accomplish. Her immaculate voice made him exult in the womb of his mother and sanctified him for Jesus Christ from his original sin; her voice of continuous prayer transfused in him the gift of interior solitude and of highest prayer.

They were three months of graces for the house of Zechariah, because Mary was like a fire lit by God, that shed the warmth of her interior life. Her presence was enchanting; it was not possible to converse with Her without feeling to be beautifully anointed with graces.

When the Most Holy Virgin saw that the time of her cousin’s delivery was approaching, she left, because of her virginal discretion and also because she did not want to be in the midst of a multitude of people, that she foresaw would be at the birth of a baby born to woman who had reached an advanced age. Her help would become unnecessary among such a large number of people.

Shortly after Mary left, the time of delivery for St. Elizabeth arrived and she happily gave birth to a baby boy.

The neighborhood heard of it and in great numbers people ran to congratulate her, not only for the birth of her son, but especially because that miraculous fruit was a sure sign of the distinctive benevolence of God toward her.

The neighborhood, in fact, had believed until then that God had rejected Elizabeth. The number of people increased when, after eight days, in accordance with the prescription of the Law, the baby was circumcised. The circumcision occurred in the house, as is evident by the fact that Elizabeth was present at the event, since she could not leave her house for forty days. Being in a city and in a priestly home, many important
people came around her, believing that they should take the initiative and impose a name to the newborn. They wanted to call him Zechariah, which was the name of his father. From a psychological point of view, perhaps they chose this name because Zechariah was old, and it seemed right to them to perpetuate his memory, since he was close to death.

His name is John.

St. Elizabeth, however, on hearing what they were saying, intervened and said that his name would be John. It was customary with the Jews to give the name of a close or distant relative to the newborn, and it seemed odd to everyone to choose a name unrelated to the family; therefore they made signs to Zechariah for him to make the decision. He asked for a small board coated with wax, as was in use at the time to write on, and he wrote: His name is John. Everyone was surprised and moreover remained surprised and even shocked when he, all of a sudden, reacquired his speech and hearing, and he started blessing God.

He had become unable to speak for lack of faith, and he regained it when, with an act of faith, imposed on his son the name that the Angel had announced to him.

That name was not an indifferent name, and in the plans of God it meant the present accomplishment of the promises of God in the Messiah. John, in fact, means grace that we have, and the Precursor, in his very name, had to announce the grace that the world would receive; in this way was completed in this little family the announcement of the benediction expressed in their very names: Elizabeth: God that vows, Zechariah, God who remembers, John, Grace that we have. God vowed his promise to the Patriarchs; he remembered in the fullness of time, and in the miraculous birth of John announced the grace that already was given to the world in the Redeemer. It was one of those delicate channels of the divine goodness thorough which the Lord manifests his mercy; John, son of Elizabeth and Zechariah was, thus, in his name the remembrance of the mystery that was accomplished; it was like a shining announcement in his great sanctity, and he said in his name: The grace is given to the world in accordance to the vow made to our fathers, because He remembered of his mercy. To give another name to John would have altered the delicate harmony of those three names.

The occurrence of the birth of John clearly disclosed for those people present that a design of God had been accomplished; therefore, they were taken by a reverential fear toward the Lord, that is, a feeling of adoration and waiting. As the news spread by word of mouth throughout the region, all the people thought that the little baby was destined to great things, even though they could not understand them. In fact, according to the Sacred Scriptures the hand of the Lord was upon him, that is, John was truly informed and sustained by a singular grace; even before the age of reason, he announced with his birth the accomplishment of something extraordinary, and prepared hearts for the imminent coming of the Messiah.

The canticle of Zechariah.

St. Zechariah, his father, welcomed this announcement and being filled by the
Holy Spirit, for a particular prophetic inspiration developed a canticle of gratitude exclaiming: 

_Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; because he has visited and brought redemption to his people._

The redemption was not yet accomplished, but the promise of God was accomplished, passing from generation to generation and came to rest upon the house of David; the Eternal Word already had descended upon the earth, in the Immaculate womb of Mary, of David’s family, and therefore, the power that would redeem the world was set on its throne, according to what the prophets had announced. This regal power had come to save us men from our enemies, _the demons_, and from all who hate us, that is, those who sow evil and who are the fiercest snares of our well-being.

St. Zechariah said his canticle without interruption and without stopping, intertwining one concept after another, because he was inflamed with love, and because after a long stretch of dumbness his tongue almost could not restrain itself for the joy to be loosened.

God had kept the promise received from the Angel, and He had accomplished the mercy announced since the long past times of Abraham. St. Zechariah, enlightened by God, defined immediately the real nature of these mercies and the fruit that they would bring to his people renewed; it was not a temporal benefit nor a political deliverance, but a spiritual benefit and above all a freedom from the enemies of the soul in order to serve God in holiness and justice, that is with a perfect life, _holiness_, and with a regime of order and honesty, _justice_. St. Zechariah had a glimpse of the Catholic Church, true kingdom of holiness and justice, and considered its triumph on earth, when, having overcome the attacks against her by evildoers, She would finally obtain victory and peace.

In the second part of the canticle of St. Zechariah, he turned to his little son and foretold his mission, according to what the Angel had announced to him: he would be called Prophet of the Most High because he would prepare the way of the Redeemer, teaching people penance, and disposing them to receive the great promise of mercy, that like the sun from above, would radiate on everybody, guiding them on the way to the eternal peace.

**John the Baptist withdraws in the desert.**

After this solemn declaration of the accomplishment of the divine promises, silence fell on the house of Zachariah. The little boy, fortified by grace, withdrew into the desert, where he lived praying and doing penance until the day he started his public mission.

It is possible that the real motive that convinced his parents to bring him to the desert was the persecution of Herod against firstborns; because, when they heard of it they must have feared that their child also could be killed by the hatred of this tyrant against the Redeemer; however, whatever the reason was, it was a particular inspiration that the boy could come to lead a life completely devoted to God, and under the most severe austerity and penance.

The grace of God is not received without an appropriate preparation, because God does not grant a grace to those who lead a dissolute life in the world. The holy thoughts that God sends us are the precursors of grace, and we must receive them with sincere
faith, that they may produce abundant fruit in us. Those people who receive these inspirations and believe them to be fruits of their fantasy remain deaf to the voices of God and dumb to the expressions of love. The grace, then, does not make them fertile and does not renew them.

The sufferings of life, borne with patience in union with the divine will are precursors of the divine mercy; they are the way that prepares us for the great effusions of the divine Goodness.

Let us answer God’s calls, and not remain deaf to His voice, that we too, together with the apostolate of Catholic Action **, become the workmen preparing the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

** In the years in which Don Dolindo was writing, Catholic Action carried on an intense and large apostolic activity. In our times there are many movements and lay groups engaged in the apostolate, directed to every social levels.

The world lies in the darkness and shadow of death; it needs the light of the Savior, and this light must reach the souls who are already predisposed, so that their life will not be useless. Let us come first of all to the desert of our interior life, and then in the activity of the apostolate, announcing the kingdom of Jesus Christ and cooperating with the salvation that He comes to bring to souls; without deep introspection our religious activity would be only apparent and our mission would be fruitless. To walk before the Lord, then, and to prepare His ways, teaching the people to recognize salvation for the remission of their sins: this is the program of Catholic Action in this time of spiritual confusion. O that soon might arrive the day of the great triumph of God, when we too may sing with St. Zechariah the accomplishment of the divine mercies: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel because he has visited and brought redemption to his people*, raising in the Church the power of salvation and giving to Her the triumph over all the kingdoms of the earth. Amen.

END CHAPTER 1