

Theological titles of Rosa Mistica
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Introduction

In examining the doctrinal elements present in Pierina Gilli's diaries, Msgr. Galbiati, an eminent biblical scholar, wrote that the Virgin Mary presented herself as the Immaculate, Mary of Grace, mother of Jesus, and mother of the Mystical Body, the Church:

2) 3.10.1976, IV, p. 159. Mary's self-presentation: "I am the Immaculate Conception. I am the Mother of my divine Lord Son Jesus Christ. I am Mary of grace, Mother of the Mystical Body, the Church; with hosts of Angels I was assumed into Heaven [...], and now, as mediating Mother, I continue to be a dispenser of graces for you, my children."

This presentation alludes to co-redemption and Marian mediation in Christ's work of redemption:

3) 13.1.1951, II, p. 89. A symbolic vision is described, with three phrases in bright, capital letters: "*Fiat* of Creation; *Fiat* of Redemption; Mary of Co-Redemption." A voice explains those words: "The *Fiat* pronounced by Mary at the angel's invitation to become the Mother of God and Mother of all men is compared to the *Fiat* of Creation, because it was her *Fiat* that received all graces from God the Father."

We know that the title of co-redemptive is disputed, as a possible cause of misunderstanding. But in this context it only means that Mary's *Fiat* is among the causes of the Incarnation, and therefore of the Redemption.

4) The concept that her intercession stopped imminent divine punishment recurs several times in Our Lady's messages. This way of expressing herself is not popular with modern sensibilities, but it is traditional, can be based on Scripture (Abraham's intercession for Sodom, Genesis 18:22-32) and proposes in anthropomorphic terms (the wrath of God as in the Letter to the Romans) an indelible reality. Examples: 10.22.1947, I, p. 145: "I am placed as a mediator between men, particularly religious souls, and my divine Son who, tired of the continuous offenses he received, wanted to exercise his justice"; 11.16.1947, I, p. 163: "He would like to send a flood of punishments. I intervened so that he would still have mercy, therefore I ask for prayer and penance in reparation for these sins." And here we see that Mary does not want to be the only one to intercede; and this is the reason for her appearances on earth. This appears clearly expressed on August 6, 1966 (IV p. 3): "After I was assumed into Heaven, I have always acted as mediator between my divine Son Jesus Christ and all humanity. How many favours! How many chastisements I have stopped! How many conversations I have had with souls! How many visits I made on earth to bring messages!"

Finally, the Virgin Mary presents herself with a title that summarizes all the previous ones and interprets them in a unique and new way: Mystical Rose, which becomes the principal title by which this mariophany is known and which characterizes it throughout the world.

5) The explanation given for the title "Mystical Rose" contains an interesting theological vision: February 20, 1953, II, p. 252. Voice from the Crucifix: "They have not understood the great and important meaning of the name. 'Rose' means 'body'; 'Mystical', 'mystical', that is, 'Mystical Body of the Church', because she is my Mother. Then Mary of grace, that is, to her I have given the power to dispense all graces, because with her maternal love she obtains everything from me—and for this purpose I sent her to Montichiari." Modern theology insists that Mary is the eschatological icon of the Church, that is, of the Mystical Body. The rose, unique despite its many petals, is a symbol of the unity in the multiplicity of the Mystical Body. I think of the "rose" contemplated by Dante in Paradise.

In this report, I would like to delve deeper into this particular presentation that Our Lady gives of herself and of the mission she carries out in the Church, affirming that she also brings a new devotion starting from this ecclesiological meaning of her essence: Mystical Rose, Mother of the Church.

According to the Montichiari's mariophany, these are interconnected titles that can then be explained by also looking at the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, which makes her Mary of Grace.

1. Mystical Rose

In the first apparition of Our Lady to Pierina, on July 13, 1947, Mary says: "I am the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of all of you." In this apparition, she has swords thrust into her chest and also reveals another interesting insight into Cordimarian spirituality, also revealed at Fatima, as she herself would later say.

Pierina wrote in her diary that the Most Holy Virgin told her: "Our Lord sends me to bring a new Marian devotion to all religious institutes and congregations, both male and female, and also to secular priests." She added: "You will tell the Reverend Superiors that the title of the new devotion to the Virgin Mary is Mystical Rose, the true Madonna of religious souls."

During the apparition of February 20, 1953, Jesus himself explained the meaning of the name Mystical Rose, which Pierina, on the advice of several priests, attributed to the Litany of Loreto:

"Ah! It's not just for this reason; I mean, they haven't understood the great and important meaning of the Name." (here he made his voice sound as if spelling it out.) "Rose, it means body. Mystical, mystical, that is... Mystical Body of the Church! Because she is My Mother. Then Mary of grace, that is, to her I gave the power to dispense all graces, because with her maternal love she obtains everything from Me, and for this purpose I sent her to Montichiari to make her known through the interpretation of the Mystical Body and Mediator of the reconciliation of poor humanity with Me. Yes, this will happen."

The most comprehensive explanation, however, is from July 22, 1973.

The seer dared to ask the heavenly Mother why she had manifested herself as the "Mystical Rose" and what this name meant. The Blessed Virgin replied: "The Mystical Rose contains nothing new in itself. I was called the Mystical Rose at that moment when my divine Son Jesus became man. The Mystical Rose symbolizes the *Fiat* of redemption and the *Fiat* of my collaboration. I am the Immaculate Conception, the Mother of Jesus the Lord, the Mother of grace, the Mother of the Mystical Body: the Church! This is why my divine Son invited me to come to Montichiari in 1947, and I came then, placing my feet in the center of the cathedral, among so many of my children [...] and this to demonstrate that I am the Mother of the Mystical Body, the Church. That, then, was only a warning and an invitation to prayer addressed to all my children. Penance [...], atonement, I said in those days, because dark times were about to come, full of atheism and a weakening of love for the Lord and for this Mother of yours."

Pierina adds:

As the heavenly Mother spoke these words, her eyes filled with tears. She then added: "The grace of the Lord and His infinite mercy for the Church will cause the Mystical Rose to bloom once again! And if this maternal invitation is heeded, Montichiari will be the place from which the mystical light will radiate throughout the world. Yes, all this will come true!"

The title Mystical Rose has ancient roots, beyond the Litany of Loreto, and is therefore not foreign to Christian tradition. In the Bible, the term "rose" is found in *Wisdom 2:7* and *Sir 50:8*. The rose is the sign of spring. But above all, in the *Song of Songs* we find the symbolism of the enclosed garden, of the flowers that adorn the bride, including the rose, which have always been interpreted in a Marian sense.

The groom contemplates his beloved and sings: "You are a garden enclosed, my sister, my bride, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed" (Song of Songs 4:12). The symbol of the "enclosed garden" has been interpreted in Christian tradition as:

Exclusivity of love: In the original context of the Song of Songs, the expression "enclosed garden" is a praise from the groom to the bride, indicating the exclusive and jealous intimacy of their love.

Fertility and purity: The image of the garden evokes fertility, but a enclosed garden is also an inviolate and virginal place.

There is also a Marian application, explicitly attested in the Fathers, especially in St. Ambrose. From this perspective, the symbolism of the enclosed garden alludes to the *Virginity of Mary*: Over the centuries, the

Church has interpreted this image to refer to Mary, emphasizing her virginity before, during, and after childbirth.

Intimacy with God: Mary's "enclosed garden" is also her inner world, the place of her thoughts, her secrets, and her profound relationship with God.

Work of the Holy Spirit: St. Louis M. Grignon de Montfort and others affirm that access to Mary's "enclosed garden," understood as the mystery of her spiritual life, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift that reveals a unique intimacy between Mary and God, a mystery "revealed to the little ones." This is also true of the Carmelite school, which interprets the symbolism as *flos carmeli*, meaning Mary is the most beautiful flower in this garden, translated as Carmel.

St. John of Damascus greets the Blessed Virgin with the words:

Hail, enclosed garden, whose fragrance is the sweet scent of the fertile field, Blessed by the same Lord whose mother you are. Hail, immortal rose, ever fragrant, your aroma has so enticed the Lord that he came to rest in you; Becoming a flower and himself in your bosom, he has perfumed the world.

Saint Bernard says that Mary is this closed garden where only the groom can enter, as if into his paradise of delights. In this mystical garden bloom the most beautiful flowers, including fragrant violets, lilies, and roses.

You are the enclosed garden Mary, Mother of God, but sin has used its sacrilegious hand there, stealing a single one of its flowers. You are the perfumed flowerbed, where the heavenly perfumer has gathered all the aromas of holiness, where he delights to make all the most beautiful flowers of every virtue bloom. Among these celestial flowers, there are three that we, above all others, admire and whose fragrance embalms the entire house of the Lord: they are the violets of our humility; they are the lilies of our chastity; they are the roses of our love. Oh, blessed is the Christian who strives to imitate these three virtues of Mary. It is they who made the Most Holy Virgin Mother of God, Mother of the Master of all virtues, as St. Bernard again attests when he says: the Virgin, already full of graces, found a new grace before God: with the fervour of her love, with the perfection of her virginity, with her profound humility, she became a mother while remaining a virgin: she brought her Jesus into the world without the pains of childbirth.¹

Honorius of Autun, who died around 1160, urged that his entire "ecclesial" interpretation of the Canticle be transferred to a Marian perspective: "Since Mary herself constitutes the type of the Church, everything said of the Church can equally be said of the Virgin herself as the bride and mother of the Bridegroom."

The Immaculate Conception is glimpsed in 4:7: "You are all beautiful, my companion, there is no flaw in you!", which became the famous *Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula non est in te*. Mary is invoked in the Litany of Loreto as the *turris davidica*, based on 4:4 ("your neck is like the tower of David").

The Assumption of Mary is seen in the question in 8:5: "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Or in the groom's appeal in 2:10, 13: "Arise, my companion, my lovely one, and come away!"

Mary's coronation as queen, however, is discovered in the Vulgate text of 4:8: "*Veni de Libano, sponsa, veni de Libano, coronaberis*" ("Come from Lebanon, bride, come from Lebanon and you will be crowned"; the original Hebrew does not contain this mention of the coronation).

Mary is celebrated as Queen of Heaven based on the rhetorical question in 6:10: "Who is this who appears like the dawn, lovely as the white moon, brilliant as the scorching sun, impressive as banners in full display?"

Mary's virtues are all traced in the symbols that describe the Shulammitte, the symbolic protagonist of the Song of Songs. Thus, Mary's purity and virginity are exalted through the image of the *hortus conclusus*, the "enclosed garden," and its sealed fountain (4:12), through the ivory tower to which the bride's neck is compared (7:5; ivory was considered a symbol of chastity), through the Tower of David, "built in perfect layers, from which hang a thousand shields" (4:4), through the image of the lily among the thorns (2:2).

The "paradisiacal" garden of 4:12-5:1 with its ten balsamic plant species becomes a compendium of all Mary's virtues, as is the many-seeded pomegranate, a fruit particularly dear to the Canticle because it is a sign of fertility and love.

Humility shines through in the declaration: "I am a narcissus of the plain, a lily of the valleys" (2:1). That Mary is the mother of the Eucharistic Christ appears from 7:3, where the woman's womb is described as "a heap of grain bordered with lilies" and reference is made earlier to the "cup of mixed wine". But 1:14 is also sometimes cited: "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna from the vineyards of Engeddi". The chorus of the woman in the *Song of Songs* becomes the chorus of the virgins who surround Mary (1:3), who in their turn are brides of Christ.

In modern times, we find several testimonies to this symbolism. For example, Saint John Henry Newman, a future Doctor of the Church, wrote a very interesting book entitled *Mystical Rose*. After addressing the question of the Immaculate Conception, proving the reality of the dogma also with reference to the writings of the Church Fathers and Saint Augustine, he highlights the Eve-Mary comparison, explaining how Mary manages to reconcile the world with God through her humility and obedience.

The question of Marian mediation is very interesting, as, especially after the Assumption, it becomes very powerful in the life of the Church. Newman writes:

If, as St. Irenaeus says, Mary exercised the role of an advocate, of a friend in need even in her mortal life; If, as St. Jerome and St. Ambrose say, she was in this world the great model of virginity; If she had a share of merit in bringing about our redemption; If her motherhood was also a reward for her faith and her obedience; If her divine Son was subject to her and if she stood beneath the cross with a mother's heart, drinking to the last drop the cup of those sufferings that she was destined to endure, it is impossible for us not to associate these characteristics of her life on earth with the beatitude she now enjoys in heaven; And she certainly anticipated this when she said that all generations will call her blessed.²

Referring to the passage from *Revelation* 12, 1 he says that the vision of the woman speaks of the dignity of the Virgin as a doctrinal reality:

The Virgin and Child is certainly not a simple modern image, but is frequently depicted in the paintings of the catacombs of Rome. Mary is depicted holding her divine son on her lap, her hands in prayer as he blesses. No representation can more clearly express the doctrine of Mary's high dignity and her influence with her son, because the memory of the time when he was subject to her must have been so dear to Christians and so carefully preserved.³

Newman says that beneath the image of the woman in the vision of the apostle John is both the Church and the Virgin Mary, exalted in the heavens and an object of veneration for all the faithful.

No one doubts, he writes, that the male child is an allusion to our Lord: why then can't the woman be an allusion to his mother? This is certainly the obvious meaning of the words quoted; naturally, they also have another meaning that is specific to this image. Undoubtedly, the son represents the children of the Church, and undoubtedly the woman represents the Church; but the symbolic meaning is precisely that of the mother and son who, fighting against the serpent as in Genesis 3:15, or against the dragon as in Revelation, demonstrate precisely Mary's role as mother of God and mother of the Church.⁴

Regarding the mystical rose, Newman asks:

How did Mary become the Mystical Rose, the delicate, perfect, chosen flower of God's spiritual creation? It is because she found life, nourishment, and protection in the mystical garden of God's paradise. Scripture uses the image of a garden when speaking of heaven and its blessed inhabitants. A garden is a place set apart for trees and plants, all beautiful and varied, for things pleasing to the palate or fragrant to the smell, pleasing to the eye, or useful for nourishment? Similarly, in a spiritual sense, a garden means the abode where blessed spirits and holy souls dwell together, bearing flowers and fruits grown under God's loving care, flowers and fruits of grace, flowers more beautiful and more fragrant than any flower in our gardens; fruits more delicious and exquisite than those cultivated by any gardener in this world.⁵

Mary is the most beautiful flower that has ever blossomed in the spiritual world. It is by the power of divine grace that flowers of sanctity and glory could spring from this arid and desolate land, and Mary is their queen. She is the queen of spiritual flowers; and this is why she is called the rose, because the rose is rightly considered the most beautiful of all flowers, but this rose is also called the mystical, or hidden, rose.⁶

In the Montichiari Mariophany, the title "Mystical Rose" takes on an expressly ecclesiological meaning because, as it is evident from Mary's first apparition and from the explanation the Virgin herself offers in the apparition of July 22, 1973, the meaning of the title "Mystical Rose" is precisely Mary's inclusion in the mystery of redemption. Mary is called the "Mystical Rose" at the very moment of the Incarnation. Therefore, it is a theological-symbolic explanation of what happens in Mary when she pronounces her Fiat and thus adheres to God's plan, which in fact generates the Incarnate Word in her human nature. Mary says: the Mystical Rose symbolizes the *Fiat* of redemption, the *Fiat* of her collaboration in this plan of salvation, but this participation of hers is interpreted precisely from the point of view of her immaculate essence, and is therefore connected to the *Fiat* of Creation, since with Mary's creation, humanity, fallen in Adam and Eve, is renewed, and we return to the integrity of human nature, intact and inviolate, all holy and all beautiful, before original sin.

The Mystical Rose means that, in becoming the Mother of God, the Virgin Mother reveals herself as the most beautiful flower of redemption. This image encapsulates the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, by which Mary was prepared from the first moment of her conception to become the Mother of the Redeemer. We will then see more clearly in the other definition she gives: "I am Mary of grace," how she truly is a creature entirely generated by grace and experienced as the marvelous fruit of the redemptive power of Christ, who accomplished great things in her.

So the essence of Mary is precisely the Immaculate Conception, and in the apparitions of Montichiari, this is again highlighted by the Virgin herself in her appearance in a white robe. This truly expresses her purity and her essence, which is the triumph of grace. Not only that, but this served to prepare her to become the mother of Jesus and therefore the mother of grace, as she still says in the apparition of July 22, 1973. Hence the ecclesiological meaning of the Mariophany of Montichiari, which shows the theological development of Mary's condition at the beginning of her existence as Immaculate until she became the Mystical Rose, because this flower of grace blooms when she produces the incarnate Word.

Thanks to her *Fiat*, which unites creation and redemption, Mary participates in the saving work of Christ, which, with the Incarnation, also initiates the Church. And she becomes mother of the mystical body because she is the Mystical Rose. And we find the same expression of Saint Augustine, also reported in *Lumen Gentium*, which highlights how Mary, in giving birth to Christ through faith, also gave birth to the mystical body of Christ, what Augustine calls the *Christus totus*. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary also becomes the mother of grace, another title that is well-known in Christian tradition from the patristic period onward, whereby she is made the mediator of grace as the mother of God.

Therefore, Mary is the mother of the mystical body that is the Church. And therefore, she is the mother of grace. That is, the channel or mediator of Christ's grace because she brought the Redeemer into the world; she was the path through which Christ came into the world.

And therefore, she is the most beautiful image of the Church. Even St. Francis of Assisi, in his famous prayer to the Virgin, in the Latin lesson defines Mary as *Virgo ecclesia facta*.

What does this mean? That at the moment of the *Fiat*, thanks precisely to this "yes," which makes Mary a participant in the redemption on both a created and human level, the Virgin Mother of God becomes the Church, that is, the entire reality of the Church is present in embryo: indeed, there is the Trinity, as explained in the Luke pericope of the Annunciation: the Father overshadows her, the Spirit descends upon her, and the Word is conceived in her according to the flesh. And there is humanity, represented by Mary, who welcomes the Word precisely with her Fiat, *spoken* on behalf of the entire human race. Thus, there is the Church, even if only in embryo.

And here we also find the deepest meaning of the Immaculate Conception, as we can contemplate in a beautiful fresco by Fra Angelico preserved in the Prado Museum in Madrid.

At the moment of the Incarnation, precisely because of her acceptance of God's plan, announced by the angel Gabriel, Mary, with her yes—full of love, full of humility, full of faith, full of virginal candor, born of her

Immaculate Conception—reconciles the world with God and thus repairs Eve's refusal. In the fresco, on one side, we see Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden and God's nascent plan, blocked by the creature's refusal. However, this plan, symbolized by a ray of light, then continues, crossing the centuries and coming to rest on Mary, who becomes the emblem of the new creation, the emblem of a reconciled world, a world redeemed, a world transfigured by grace. And we also see the work of the Holy Spirit who descends upon her and the presence of the Word who becomes incarnate in her and who will then complete the work of redemption on the cross and with the resurrection. But, precisely, according to Franciscan theology, the Immaculate Conception already represents the triumph of redemption, because it is a preservative redemption, which anticipates the hour of redemption for the human race in view of Mary's singular mission to be the mother of God. Thus, in her, we can truly contemplate the development of the life of the Church; we can contemplate in her person all that the Church is called to be through its members, which are precisely the mystical body of Christ. Here is the Mystical Rose.

Here comes the other explanation given in the Montichiari Mariophanies, this time by Jesus himself regarding the theological title of the Mystical Rose. To Pierina, who, at the suggestion of others, believed this title was already known, as in the Litany of Loreto, Jesus instead says: No, that's not its true meaning, . But the meaning of this name is great and important, and here, then, there truly is a special revelation, because rose means body. I've long wondered what rose means; then I thought, but honestly, I still can't say if this is the correct interpretation, that since the rose is made of many petals, and Rosanna Bricchetti Messori also says this in her commentary on Galbiati's book, she represents the Church as a mystical body, because the body is made up of many members, united, however, as if it were a single person.

And in this sense we find ourselves with Paul's theology of the body, which is developed precisely in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, where Paul explains that the Church is like a body, the human body made up of many members, and therefore each has his or her own ministry or charism, that is, his or her particular vocation within the ecclesiastical structure. And this also explains the value of Mary's yes on an ecclesiological level, as all the great Mariologists affirm, from von Baltasar to Ratzinger, to Laurentin and so on. That is, Mary, in the moment she pronounces her yes, becomes the prototype of the Church.

And she inaugurates the participation of the entire Mystical Body in a ministerial, or rather constitutive, sense in the life of the Church, obviously linked to Christ its head, from whom emanates the sanctifying grace that unites all like the branches to the vine. Mary becomes mother of the Mystical Body because she is the mother of Christ and the mother of God. Thus, the Mystical Rose signifies the most beautiful image of the Church, manifesting the mystery of grace and, at the same time, humanity's participation in Christ's redemptive plan. In this way, the biblical meaning of the rose as a model of love is revived, for, in fact, in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter fourteen, after speaking of the charisms that enrich the life of the Mystical Body, Saint Paul says: I will show you the greatest gift, which is love, which unites all the members together with faith in Christ and, of course, with hope.

So, the Mystical Rose contains within itself all these characteristics that then become the characteristics of the mystical body. For this reason, Mary, as Jesus himself says, becomes the mother of the mystical body and therefore Mary of grace, because Jesus gives her the power to dispense all graces and because with her maternal love she obtains everything from him. This is why Mary often repeats, even in her apparitions to Pierina, that she is the mother of love, that she brings love to earth, that she desires that men be reconciled with God and open themselves to grace. The Virgin Mary, therefore, as Jesus also says, is once again presented as a mediator.

Mary herself adds that the Lord's grace and his infinite mercy for the Church will cause the Mystical Rose, the beautiful face of the Church, to bloom again. Here too, the theme of beauty is explored extensively in the apparitions of Montichiari and is linked to the Immaculate Conception, which is the creature entirely beautiful, entirely holy, entirely pure, and who becomes the image of the Church's holiness, its beauty, its virginity, its purity. Mary is a mother, and so with her motherhood, her tenderness, she invites everyone to reconciliation and conversion with God. This is why it is precisely from this beauty of Mary, from her supplicating power, that we can obtain intercession to return to God and to live in the Church, and to make the Church flourish

again in all its beauty. Indeed, Mary says: Montichiari will be the place from which the Mystical Rose will take root throughout the world and call humanity to a renewed moment of faith and love.

2. Immaculate conception

We are all familiar with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed by Pius IX on December 8, 1854, in St. Peter's Basilica. This dogma defined as a reality of faith the fact that Mary was redeemed in the first instant of her conception, in view of the future merits of Christ and also of her future role as Mother of God. In reference to the theology of Mystical Rose that has been just presented, we can say that the title of Immaculate Conception that Mary expressly expresses in the Mariophanies of Montichiari corresponds to this essence dominated by grace and sublimated by divine grace. Now this particular nature of hers becomes a model for the Church, as Stefano De Fiores also affirms.

If the image of the invisible God shines forth in all the redeemed, based on creation and redemption, this is realized in a particular and evident way in the Immaculate Mary, "redeemed in a sublime manner" (*Ineffabilis Deus*). Therefore, applying to her the divine plan revealed in Romans 8:28-30, we must affirm that the Father has imprinted in the Immaculate the features of Christ, "icon of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), that is, "the splendor of the divine image." This predestination is followed by the other three links in the golden chain of the plan of salvation: the call to faith, justification by grace including the forgiveness of sins and participation in divine sonship, and finally glorification in eternal life.

And we find all this sublimely realized in Mary: a model of faith, preserved by grace from sin and elevated to the Father's beloved daughter, and finally glorified body and soul in heaven. This biblical setting already helps us to overcome the isolation in which Mary places herself by insisting on the "privilege" of her immaculate conception. In reality, what happens in the Immaculate Conception essentially (albeit in different ways) happens in every Christian, conformed by the Redeemer to the divine image. Mary thus reveals to us "in a sublime way" our Christian identity and the work of Christ's grace in us.

This essentially Christological approach also becomes ecclesiological, as it places Mary Immaculate within, indeed at the center of, the divine plan of salvation for humanity. Pius IX's papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus* defines the Immaculate Conception as a creature full of innocence and holiness, "always adorned with the radiance of the most perfect sanctity." The Second Vatican Council followed precisely this line, presenting the Immaculate Conception not only as "free from every stain of sin," but also "formed by the Holy Spirit, as it were, and made into a new creature, adorned from the first instant of her conception with the splendors of a wholly singular sanctity" (LG 56).

Mary, all holy and immaculate, therefore represents the most perfect icon of the holy Church.

And here we can reread in an ecclesiological sense the biblical icon of Genesis 3:15 rightly defined as the proto-evangelium because it announces the coming of the Redeemer which is also one of the fundamental biblical passages for the theology of the Immaculate Conception as Pius IX also tells us. In this passage we find that God announces the coming of Christ through the woman, eternal enemy of the serpent because she is Immaculate, from whom will be born the one who will crush its head and who will therefore triumph over the devil, evil and death.

It is interesting to note that the prophecy could only concern the Redeemer, yet God inserts the figure of this woman, as he does in other messianic prophecies. Mary's role is therefore important and central, for she participates not merely as an instrument, as the Second Vatican Council also affirms, but as a person and as a woman in all the fullness of her decision-making autonomy and personal dedication. Mary Immaculate is therefore the mother of the Redeemer. That is, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, and therefore of the grace that endows Mary to such an extent that she is defined as the enemy of the devil because she is not even for an instant under his dominion, is the essential requirement that defines her participation in God's plan of salvation. Precisely because of her holiness and her beauty, the Immaculate Conception was chosen to become the mother of the Word. Indeed, in the most ancient iconography, the Immaculate Conception is always depicted with the Baby Jesus holding a cross-shaped rod with which he crushes the serpent's head.

Mary Immaculate then participates in Christ's victory over the devil, as we will also see in *Revelation* 12:1, where we find this woman this time clothed with the sun because she is assumed into heaven, therefore already in glory, who once again participates in the struggle with the offspring of God. Here, then, Mary is Mother of the Church already from her Immaculate Conception because she has a fundamental role in the divine plan of salvation as mother of the Redeemer and therefore as Mother of the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his *Angelus* on December 8, wrote:

Every year on December 8, the Church solemnly celebrates the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. As early as the second century, Saint Irenaeus hailed Mary as the "New Eve." It was the first foreshadowing of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which Pope Pius IX would solemnly define in 1854, with these words: "The Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, was, by a grace and privilege of almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved and free from all stain of original sin: this doctrine is revealed by God and consequently must be firmly and inviolably believed by all the faithful." Indeed, Mother of the new humanity, Mary was created by God "full of graces." In her person, Christ's victory over Satan is complete: it is by a grace already flowing from the death and merits of her Son that Mary was thus preserved from all stain. God also wanted, with this, to prepare for His Son a dwelling worthy of Him. Mary is the anticipated image of the Church: in Her, God "prefigured the Church, the bride without wrinkle, without blemish, resplendent with beauty" (cf. Preface of the day), "holy and immaculate" (Eph. 5:27). In her, the Church admires and exalts the fruit of the Redemption, and, as in a most pure image, joyfully contemplates what she herself desires and hopes to be fully. Mary thus appears as the personification of the people of God.

After the Fall, God did not abandon the man without hope; rather, he promised him a Saviour who would come to reunite the humanity shattered by sin. It is in Mary that He will realize the ideal of this saved humanity. The cult of Mary, therefore, is vitally grafted onto the celebration of the mysteries of Christ; therefore, Mary is not venerated for herself, but in relation to Christ and the Church. However, a singular devotion is due to Mary: She is the holiest and most humble of creatures, the most powerful before God, and the common mother of all men, members of the Body of which Jesus is the Head. For this reason, Saint Bernard exhorts us to invoke Mary in every danger, pain, and fear, and to always have her name on our lips and in our hearts. But he also warns us that to obtain the help of her prayers, we must follow the example of her life. To help us better understand Mary's role, the Church reminds us, in the first reading, of the sin of Adam and Eve and God's promise (Protoevangelium): the woman's descendants will triumph over evil by crushing the serpent's head. The Church has always seen this woman as Mary, the Mother of the Saviour and our Mother. Jesus gave her to us as our Mother at the foot of the Cross.

The second reading reveals that if God chose Mary from all eternity to be preserved from all sin, he also chooses us to be saved by Christ. Paul then invites us to the blessing of God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to eternal thanksgiving. In the Gospel text, we admire Mary's gentleness, her shyness before the Angel, but also her docility to God. Her "yes" to God is for life. She is the quintessential model of fidelity: we must all look to her and imitate her to give proper meaning to our lives. The key to her success is obedience in faith. Far from being a forced constraint and a passive submission (slave-like submission), obedience in faith is a free adherence to God's plan and an outburst of love. For us, in reality, it means being attentive to God's word at all times and welcoming it wholeheartedly, even if it disrupts our plans.

"Full of grace," you, Mary, are filled with divine love from the first moment of your existence, providentially predestined to be the Mother of the Redeemer, and intimately associated with Him in the mystery of salvation. In your Immaculate Conception shines forth the vocation of Christ's disciples, called to become, with His grace, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4). In you shines the dignity of every human being, who is always precious in the eyes of the Creator. Whoever turns his gaze to you, O All-Holy Mother, does not lose serenity, however harsh the trials of life. Even though the experience of sin, which disfigures the dignity of God's children, is sad, those who turn to you rediscover the beauty of truth and love, and rediscover the path that leads to the Father's house.

“Full of grace,” you, Mary, who, by accepting the Creator's plans with your “yes,” opened the way to salvation for us. In your school, teach us to also pronounce our own “yes” to the Lord's will. A “yes” that unites with your “yes,” without reservations or hesitation, which the heavenly Father willed to be necessary to generate the new Man, Christ, the only Saviour of the world and of history. Give us the courage to say “no” to the deceptions of power, money, and pleasure; to dishonest gain, to corruption and hypocrisy, to selfishness and violence. “No” to the Evil One, the deceitful prince of this world. “Yes” to Christ, who destroys the power of evil with the omnipotence of love. We know that only hearts converted to the Love that is God can build a better future for all.

“Full of grace,” you are, Mary! Your name is a pledge of sure hope for all generations. Yes! Because, as the great poet Dante writes, for us mortals, you “are a living fountain of hope” (Par., XXXIII, 12). To this source, to the wellspring of your Immaculate Heart, we come once again as trusting pilgrims to draw faith and consolation, joy and love, security and peace.

Still a simple theologian J. Ratzinger wrote:

The Church grows from within: this is what the expression "body of Christ" tells us; however, it also immediately implies this other element: Christ has built a body for himself; if I want to find it and make it mine, I am called to be part of it as a humble member but completely, since I have become a member, an organ in this world and consequently for eternity. The idea of liberal theology that Jesus is interesting, while the Church is a miserable reality, differs completely from this awareness. Christ gives himself only in his body and never in a mere ideal. This means: he gives himself together with others, in the uninterrupted communion that spans time, which is his body.⁷

Mary is *typos* of the Church because she is called by God to become *Theotokos*, and therefore to be uniquely and singularly united to His life and His plan of salvation.

For Ch. Journet, therefore, the Church is attracted to the Virgin, without ever being able to identify with her. In Mary, therefore, the collective grace of the entire Church is condensed and intensified. In the Church, Mary is more Mother than the Church, more Bride than the Church, more Virgin than the Church.

Journet anticipates, in some ways, the theology expressed by the Council, which devotes the final chapter of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* to reflection on the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Mariology is, indeed, distinct but not separate from ecclesiology.

The final chapter of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church, without claiming to propose a complete doctrine on the Blessed Virgin, recalls her role in the mystery of Christ and the Church: her presence in the Old Testament as Mother of the awaited Messiah, her virginal motherhood, her Immaculate Conception, and her Assumption into heaven. Because of the part she played in the drama of the world's Redemption, she became our Mother according to the order of grace and continues to intercede for us in heaven as Advocate, Helper, Aid, and Mediator. She is the first fruits of the future Church and the sign of hope for the present one.

Benedict XVI, in his Angelus of December 8, 2005, stated:

Forty years ago, on December 8, 1965, in the square before this Basilica of St. Peter, Pope Paul VI solemnly concluded the Second Vatican Council. It had been inaugurated, according to the wishes of John XXIII, on October 11, 1962, then the feast of the Motherhood of Mary, and concluded on the day of the Immaculate Conception. A Marian framework surrounds the Council. In reality, it is much more than a framework: it is a guideline for its entire journey. It reminds us, as it reminded the Council Fathers, of the image of the Virgin who listens, who lives in the Word of God, who treasures in her heart the words that come to her from God and, piecing them together as in a mosaic, learns to understand them (cf. Luke 2:19, 51); it reminds us of the great Believer who, full of trust, places herself in God's hands, abandoning herself to His will; it reminds us of the humble Mother who, when her Son's mission demands it, steps aside, and, at the same time, of the courageous woman who, while the disciples flee, stands beneath the cross. Paul VI, in his speech on the occasion of the promulgation of the Conciliar Constitution on the Church, had described Mary as "*tutrix huius Concilii*" – "protector of this Council" (cf. *Oecumenic Concilium Vaticanum II, Constitutiones Decreta*

Declarationes, Vatican City 1966, p. 983) and, with an unmistakable allusion to the story of Pentecost handed down by Luke (Acts 1:12-14), had said that the Fathers had gathered in the Council hall "*cum Maria, Matre Iesu*" and, also in her name, would now leave it (p. 985).

I still remember the moment when, hearing his words: "*Mariam Sanctissimam declaramus Matrem Ecclesiae*" – "We declare Mary Most Holy Mother of the Church," the Fathers spontaneously leaped from their chairs and applauded, paying homage to the Mother of God, our Mother, the Mother of the Church. In fact, with this title the Pope summarized the Marian doctrine of the Council and provided the key to understanding it. Mary not only enjoys a unique relationship with Christ, the Son of God who, as a man, chose to become her son. Being totally united to Christ, she also belongs totally to us. Yes, we can say that Mary is closer to us than any other human being, because Christ is a man for humanity, and his entire being is a "being there for us." Christ, the Fathers say, as Head is inseparable from his Body, which is the Church, forming together with it, so to speak, a single living entity. The Mother of the Head is also the Mother of the entire Church; she is, so to speak, totally expropriated from herself; she has given herself entirely to Christ and, with Him, is given as a gift to all of us. Indeed, the more the human person gives himself, the more he finds himself.

The Council wanted to tell us this: Mary is so intertwined in the great mystery of the Church that she and the Church are inseparable, as she and Christ are inseparable. Mary reflects the Church, anticipates it in her person, and, in all the turbulence that afflicts the suffering and struggling Church, she always remains its star of salvation. She is its true centre, in which we trust, even if its periphery so often weighs on our souls. Pope Paul VI, in the context of the promulgation of the Constitution on the Church, highlighted all this with a new title deeply rooted in Tradition, precisely with the aim of illuminating the internal structure of the teaching on the Church developed in the Council. Vatican II was to express itself on the institutional components of the Church: on the Bishops and the Pontiff, on the priests, the laity and the religious in their communion and in their relationships; it was to describe the Church on the move, "embracing sinners in her bosom, yet at the same time holy and always in need of purification..." (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). But this "Petrine" aspect of the Church is included in the "Marian" one. In Mary, the Immaculate Conception, we encounter the essence of the Church in an undistorted way. From her we must learn to become "ecclesial souls" ourselves, as the Fathers put it, so that we too, in the words of St. Paul, can present ourselves "immaculate" before the Lord, as He desired us from the beginning (*Col 1:21; Eph 1:4*).

3. Mary of Grace

To understand the expression "Mary of grace," we need to delve into the meaning of the term "grace" and its genitive. Otherwise, the expression could be interpreted as if the Virgin Mary were a constitutive element of grace or belong to grace in an ontological sense.

The term "grace," according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, indicates God's favor or free assistance in becoming his children, participants in the divine nature and eternal life. Specifically, it states:

grace is a *participation* in the life of God; it introduces us to the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. Through Baptism, the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an "adopted son," he can now call God "Father," in union with the only-begotten Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who infuses charity in him and forms the Church.

This vocation to eternal life is *supernatural*. It depends entirely on God's free initiative, for he alone can reveal himself and give himself. It surpasses the capacity of intelligence and the strength of will of man, as of every creature. ²³³

The grace of Christ is the free gift that God makes to us of his life, infused into our soul by the Holy Spirit to heal it from sin and sanctify it. It is the *sanctifying or deifying* grace received in Baptism. It is the source of the work of sanctification in us: ²³⁴ "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come. But all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor 5:17-18). ⁹

A. Royo Marin, in his book: *Theology of Christian Perfection*, confirms this definition, emphasizing that, in spiritual theology, grace can be defined as a supernatural quality, inherent in our soul, which confers on us a physical and formal participation – albeit analogous and accidental – in the nature of God as God's own, elevates us in a certain way to His plan, deifies us through a formal participation in His divine nature. The effects of sanctifying grace are divine adoptive sonship, supernatural life, connaturality with God, which makes us just and pleasing to God, gives us the capacity for supernatural merit, unites us intimately to God, transforms us into living temples of the Holy Trinity.

At the Mariological level, the theology of grace concerns the person of Mary, as full of grace and as mediator of grace, as we read in the New Testament and throughout Catholic Mariological literature. Also in *Lumen Gentium* 53, the Second Vatican Council reiterates that: "She is invested with the supreme office and dignity of Mother of the Son, and therefore the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit; and because of this gift of outstanding grace she far surpasses all other creatures, heavenly and earthly."

Thus, the Virgin Mary's relationship with God indicates a special relationship with grace, understood as a relationship with God and a connaturality that makes us pleasing to Him and holy. Mary is, in fact, the recipient of a gift of the highest order, as she is the Father's beloved daughter, chosen by Him for the plan of divine motherhood, in view of the Incarnation of the Word, of whom she becomes mother. This operation is possible thanks to the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell within her as in a temple. The Virgin Mary is, therefore, a creature entirely dependent on God, without excluding her freedom and her human autonomy, but we know that, from the first instant of her conception, she was sanctified by Him, so much so that she appeared totally holy and "as if fashioned by the Spirit and made a new creature,"¹¹ as exegetes and theologians have also attested throughout the centuries. Saint Ambrose of Milan, for example, states that "She alone is called 'full of grace,' because she alone received the grace, merited by no other, to be filled with him who is the author of grace."¹² And Saint Cyril of Alexandria addresses Mary with these words: "Hail, O Mother of God, through you ineffable grace entered the world."¹³ As can be seen, the Virgin Mary demonstrates the power of grace in the world through her divine motherhood. Being completely penetrated by divine grace, she allows it to enter the world. Therefore, it is legitimate to say that she is full of grace, or even that she is almost shaped by grace, in that she displays a fullness that touches her being as a person, raising her to a unique and singular relationship with the three divine Persons. This, even on an anthropological level, demonstrates an incredible archetypal paradigm, as I have been able to explore in some of my scientific publications.

In particular, I quote R. Laurentin, who, in his *Breve trattato sulla Vergine Maria*, explains how Mary's divine motherhood implies a special relationship with divine grace, which not only makes her God's daughter but also his mother. Therefore, to the meaning of grace as a favor, or divine help, is added that of a relationship that allows for an intimate relationship with God, which, in this case, corresponds to a particular influence of God on Mary, also witnessed by the Gospels, due to her unique and singular vocation to be called to become the Mother of God, which makes her a source of grace on a soteriological and social level.¹⁴

R. Laurentin states that "divine motherhood, like character, is not a simple relationship with God, but rather engages an ontological reality, fundamentally structures Mary's supernatural condition, and requires a vital development. The Virgin Mary, through the effect of grace, is not only a daughter of God, like every baptized person, but is also the mother of God." This seemingly contradictory fact opens up a paradoxical and dizzying relationship, because divine motherhood is involved in the very realization of the mystery of divine sonship. The French Mariologist maintains, in fact, that "character configures the baptized to the Son of God through grace, with a view to divinization, while Mary's motherhood configures Christ to our humanity. Character integrates us into God's race, while divine motherhood integrated God into the human race, and this humanization of God conditions the divinization of man."¹⁵

Thus, the expression "Mary of grace" indicates Mary's belonging to grace, not in a constitutive, or ontological, sense, as if Mary were part of grace, but in a relational sense, through her singular union with God. The Virgin Mary indicates the primacy of God in her life, from the first instant of her conception and, in particular, through her divine motherhood. Mary demonstrates a particular state of grace because, while she herself is a daughter of God, she also becomes his mother and thus collaborates with God to configure Christ to our humanity, thus Mary of grace indicates the character of her personality. Having participated in the Incarnation of the Word,

giving human nature to Christ Jesus, our savior and mediator, she is fully inserted, albeit at the creaturely level, into the dynamism of the sanctifying grace that Jesus brought to earth. And this mystery makes her an icon of grace, a model of holiness through her relationality with God, mother of grace and mediator of grace.

Even more explicit is C. Adamantini, who, in his work entitled: *Il Mistero di Maria*, describes the Virgin Mary's state of grace, especially because of her divine motherhood, as an intimate relationship with the Triune God and as a singular participation in his divine life. Her belonging to grace indicates Mary's unique participation in the work of the Incarnation of the Word and, consequently, in the work of salvation begun with this event in history. Mary of grace essentially indicates her special bond with Christ, to whom she belongs and to whom she is linked as mother:

The grace that Mary was fortunate enough to encounter from God, which was also the source of her immeasurable merit, was unique and unlimited in every respect. Although the Virgin's grace must also be considered *gratia Christi*, it nevertheless possesses a very different formality from that shared by other men. Mary's grace, in fact, is sustained by the natural bond with the most holy humanity of the Son of God and by His essential merits, not by those subsequently acquired by Him in fulfilling the Father's will as a man. Just as the humanity assumed by the Word was sanctified directly and substantially by the hypostatic union, so Mary, too, was sanctified thanks to the natural propinquity that she also acquired, albeit not to the same degree, with the Word, without the need for other greater causes. God made her infinitely grateful and acceptable to Himself when, in His mind and with an eternal decree, He associated her with His Only Begotten Son made man with that natural bond which is the most vivid expression of the bond within His divine life.¹⁶

4. Mother of the Church

For this reason, Paul VI, at the end of the Second Vatican Council, proclaimed the Virgin Mary "Mother of the Church." Indeed, he stated: "Being the mother of Him who, from the first instant of the Incarnation in her virginal womb, united to Himself as Head his Mystical Body, which is the Church. Mary, therefore, as the mother of Christ, is also the mother of all the faithful and of all Pastors, that is, of the Church."¹⁷

Finally, John Paul II, in the Marian encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, writes:

The Church knows and teaches that "every salutary influence of the Blessed Virgin on humanity... springs from God's good pleasure and flows from the superabundance of Christ's merits. It is founded on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power. It in no way impedes the immediate contact of believers with Christ, but rather facilitates it." This salutary influence is sustained by the Holy Spirit, who, just as he overshadowed the Virgin Mary, initiating in her the divine motherhood, so he continually sustains her solicitude for the brothers and sisters of her Son. Indeed, Mary's mediation is closely linked to her motherhood; it possesses a specifically maternal character, which distinguishes it from that of other creatures who, in various and always subordinate ways, participate in the unique mediation of Christ, while hers also remains a shared mediation. Indeed, if "no creature can ever be placed on a par with the incarnate and redeeming Word," at the same time "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather inspires in creatures a varied cooperation, shared from a single source"; and thus "the one goodness of God is truly diffused in various ways among creatures". The teaching of the Second Vatican Council presents the truth about Mary's mediation as a participation in this unique source which is the mediation of Christ himself. In fact, we read: "The Church does not hesitate to openly acknowledge this subordinate role of Mary, she constantly experiences it and recommends it to the love of the faithful, so that, supported by this maternal help, they may be more intimately united with the Mediator and Savior." This function is, at the same time, special and extraordinary. It flows from her divine motherhood and can be understood and lived in faith only on the basis of the full truth of this motherhood. Since Mary, by virtue of divine election, is the Mother of the Son, consubstantial with the Father and a "generous companion" in the work of redemption, "she was a mother to us in the order of grace." This function constitutes a real dimension of her presence in the salvific mystery of Christ and the Church.¹⁸

That said, we are faced with an original statement, which indicates Mary's state as a creature entirely clothed in grace, full of grace, or even as the Immaculate Conception, as the herald of the new order of divine creation,

through grace, by which she represents the return to the original state of humanity redeemed by Christ, her son. From her singular participation in the Christological mystery arises her role in the Church, as Mother of grace and mediator of grace.

This definition, as Saint John Paul II also aptly explains, demonstrates Mary's capacity for mediation, always secondary and subordinate to that of Christ, but equally effective and desired by God himself in that he chose Mary as the Mother of the Redeemer. The Mystical Rose, then, also implies Mary's mediation in the Church and for the Church.

Rosa Mystica means, as Paul VI said in *Signum magnum*, that

Mary is Mother of the Church not only because she is the Mother of Jesus Christ and his most intimate partner in the new economy, when the Son of God assumed from her human nature, to free man from sin with the mysteries of his flesh (19), but also because she shines as a model of virtue before the whole community of the elect (20). In fact, just as every human mother cannot limit her task to the generation of a new man, but must extend it to the functions of nourishment and education of her offspring, so does the Blessed Virgin Mary. After having participated in the redemptive sacrifice of her Son, and in such an intimate way as to deserve to be proclaimed by him as mother not only of the disciple John, but - let us be allowed to affirm it - of the human race which he in some way represents (21), she continues now from heaven to carry out her maternal function as cooperator in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed men. And this is a most comforting truth, which by the free will of the all-wise God is an integral part of the mystery of human salvation; therefore, it must be held by faith by all Christians.

Mary is the Mystical Rose, Mother of the Church, as the sublime beauty of the holiness of the Church to which we are all called. And she fulfills this plan with her maternal protection and powerful intercession. For this reason, she asks for prayer, penance, and purification. She asks us to return to the source of life, which is grace. She herself, a creature of grace, full of grace, and Mother of grace, shows us the way and cooperates with her maternal mediation so that we can recover this constitutive dimension of Christian life and of the entire Church. Paul VI adds:

But how does Mary cooperate in the growth of the members of the mystical body in the life of grace? First of all through her incessant prayer, inspired by a most ardent charity. The holy Virgin, in fact, although rejoiced by the vision of the august Trinity, does not forget her children who, like herself one day, advance in the pilgrimage of faith (22); rather, contemplating them in God and clearly seeing their needs, in communion with Jesus Christ who is always alive so as to be able to intercede for us (23), she becomes their Advocate, Helper, Rescuer, Mediator (24). The Church has been persuaded of this uninterrupted intercession of hers with the Son for the people of God from the first centuries, as is testified by this very ancient antiphon which, with some slight differences, is part of the liturgical prayer both in the East and in the West: We take refuge under the protection of your mercies, O Mother of God; do not reject our supplications in times of need, but save us from perdition, O (you) who alone (are) blessed.

At this point, it seems that Paul VI makes his own Mary's message at Montichiari, which invites prayer and penance, when he states:

A message of the utmost usefulness seems to reach the faithful today from her who is the Immaculate, the all-holy, the cooperator of the Son in the work of restoring supernatural life in souls (45). Indeed, by devoutly contemplating Mary, they draw from her an incitement to confident prayer, a spur to the practice of penance, a stimulus to the holy fear of God. And it is likewise in this Marian elevation that they hear more often the words with which Jesus Christ, announcing the coming of the kingdom of heaven, said: Do penance and believe in the Gospel (46); and his severe warning: If you do not do penance, you will all likewise perish (47). Driven, therefore, by love and by the intention of appeasing God for the offenses committed against his holiness and his justice, and at the same time animated by trust in his infinite mercy, we must bear the sufferings of the spirit and of the body, so that we may atone for our own sins and those of our neighbour and

thus avoid the double punishment: of damage and of sense, that is, the loss of God, the supreme Good, and eternal fire (48).

Conclusion

I conclude by reporting another important invitation that the Mystical Rose makes in Montichiari: to return to God, through Her, through grace, also through the symbolic source of the grace of Baptism and the purification and sanctification brought about by the Sacraments.

"How many favors have I bestowed during this time!... How many graces have been distributed! Now... and always... But the most evident miracle will be the return of my children to true Faith, to true Love for the Lord... which will be followed by Unity, Peace... throughout the entire world!! Tell your Spiritual Father that his presence, his words and counsel, is now much more necessary." ... Raising her eyes to Heaven, she said: "I invoke the Lord's blessings upon him, upon all the children who strive to make me loved and known, and who work courageously to fulfill my expressed desires; to all, the promise of my maternal love, along with the Lord's graces."

Yes, the theological message of Montichiari is encapsulated in this desire to make us love, know, and experience the mystery of Christ that Mary, as his Mother and our Mother, came to bring us. This is the heart of the Montichiari apparitions and the theological significance of the titles Mary presents: Mystical Rose, Immaculate, Mary of Grace, and Mother of the Church. These titles represent the unfolding of Mary's life, which, in a particular way, from the *Fiat* she pronounced to the angel Gabriel, sealed her participation in her Son's redemptive work, becoming a mediator of grace and a witness to God's love for every creature.