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#### **Abstract**

Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-57) was the founder of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, in Paris, and of the missionary congregation of priests that was based there. Olier's spiritual teaching belongs to what is loosely termed 'the French School'.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is a dominant figure in the teachings and reflections of Olier and the French School, and meditation on Mary in her mother's womb is a particular focus of their attention. This little excerpt is a reflection on that subject, which was chosen for its theological richness and depth.

The relationship of the Son of God to his Father is not at all like that of earthly children with regard to their fathers according to the flesh. Earthly fathers, once they have given us our being, have no further part in sustaining us; it is quite different with God the Father.

He communicates his essence to his Son by a perpetual outflow of this divine essence, which he pours into him; and the Son is as dependent on his Father as are creatures in their dependence on God, and in their need for his assistance. Thus, God the Son cannot operate, nor even live, without the person of his Father; he is all in the Father; he acts and operates in perpetual dependence upon the Father; only in him does he will; only in him does he think; everything that he has and everything that he does is from him. At the moment of the Incarnation, the Father alone, and not Mary, gave the substance of God to the Word, as Word; and, after the consummation of this mystery, the Father still continued thus on earth, communicating his substance to his Word in humanity, to his Word made flesh, to the man who is made God. He continually gave him all his knowledge and all his love, as he still communicates them to him, and will communicate them to him for all eternity.

The most blessed Virgin, clothed inwardly with the Father's divinity, imbued with his omnipotence, and completely animated by his virtue, was made a participant in all his outward works; and she felt in her soul her Spouse working all things since he gave her a visible role in the greatest of his works in the world, that is, to conceive and bear his Word. The sacred humanity of Jesus Christ carried in itself all the works of his divinity, and experienced them passing through himself, as it is said in one of the Gospels: 'I felt a power going out of me.' It was the same with Mary. For I cannot doubt that, in the union which she had with God the Father, who made her one with himself, and who dwelt in her to enliven her and to animate her with all of himself – I do not in any way doubt, I say – that the most blessed Virgin experienced in herself the works of God and all the great effects that he worked in her, throughout the world, to uphold and sustain it, as well as to conceive his Word.



Indeed, although Mary, in conceiving Jesus Christ, had not given him the substance of God, nevertheless, the Father – who had chosen this divine Virgin to be his outward aspect with regard to the incarnate Word, and had appointed her so as to express his position as Father in respect of him – availed himself of her for his outward conception, for his sustenance, his nourishment and his inner food. It is here that we find the marvel of the divine motherhood: for the Son receives nothing from his Father that he does not receive also from his Mother, in whom the Father resides to communicate himself to him. This residing of God the Father in Mary surpasses all thought. As God, in the depth of plants, is the principle of that fertile power that makes the flowers grow and breathes out scents, and which contains in itself, through eminence, the fertility of the plant, the beauty of the flowers, and the sweetness of the scents; so he was in Mary, deep down – the God who made her a participant in engendering and producing the tangible Word. He communicated himself to his Son through her to such an extent that she was made a participant in all his communications to his Son – however intimate, however sacred and however divine they might have been – with the result that she felt their effects in herself. God the Father was united intimately to her, communicating, in his position as Father, either his light or his love to his Son. Mary felt all these communications of the Father in herself, as if they were coming from herself; and it seemed to her that this was her own substance, which she was pouring into her Son. She poured into him lights that she did not know, and a substance that she did not understand, although in herself she felt excessive and extraordinary effects of these divine communications of the Father in his Son. The soul of Jesus Christ was in his divine Mother, as in an ocean where he was drowning in love, since he also had his substance and his life in Mary, who was the living throne of the Father. And through her the Father exercised his functions as Father with regard to his Son, and through her he governed and directed him. It was like water emerging from a vessel which is tipped into another, which the water pushes and moves at will, in such a way that the second vase shifts and stirs according to the water and the movement that it receives from the first. Thus, God the Father, in the Virgin, and the Virgin in God the Father, is the vessel which gives to the Son made man – who is the second vessel – its substance, its water and its movement.

From this august privilege – of co-operating in engendering the Son of God – it follows that the most blessed Virgin also participated in the second dignity – that of producing the

Holy Spirit. It is not that she gives him the substance of God, any more than she gives it to the Word in so far as he is the Word; but the Holy Spirit is produced in her: all the gifts, all the virtues, all the graces of this divine Spirit are administered through Mary's hands and in accordance with her will. For if the Son produces the Holy Spirit through a single spiration with the Father, he does not produce it outside himself, as do earthly mothers when they produce offspring. He produces it in himself, through an immanent action, which consequently is in Mary's very breast – where he himself is continually begotten of the Father – as well as in the fixed moment of eternity. And this occurs in such a way that, by their active love, the Father and the Son produce in the most blessed Virgin all their love – that is to say, the Holy Spirit. Now Mary participates in the first dignity – that of engendering the Word – in such a way that when Jesus is seated at his Father's throne, clothed with light and brilliance, before the creation of the universe, he is not greater or worthier than he is in his mother's womb (for it is certain that Jesus, as we have said, is not more truly called 'Son of God' than 'Son of Mary'); and it follows from this that, since she is truly Mother of the Son of God, who produces the Holy Spirit in her, the Holy Spirit, produced by the Son, gives himself to Mary and places himself at her disposal. Thus, through the divine motherhood, whereby Mary receives the divine Word within herself – which is the very height of fruitfulness – she obtains substantial charity, the Holy Spirit, and power in, and over, all the temporal processions and missions of this divine Spirit, so that no creature receives the least grace of God's virtue or blessing except in accordance with the disposition and will of this divine Mother.

So this ineffable dignity of being the Mother of God makes Mary incomprehensible to human beings and to angels, since the love of God the Father for Mary – which is the Spousal love that surpasses all other love – goes as far as to unite her with himself. It is this which causes her to be called the 'form of God', which is to say that we see all the divine perfections present and expressed in her, and that she is transformed into God, her soul being completely deified. Moreover, we are assured by St. Dionysius that he would have taken her for the godhead, if he had not had faith; and that is most true, because of the intimate unity of God dwelling in Mary's soul, which transforms her into him. Scripture says of the just who are still living on earth that they are 'transformed from glory to glory, by the spirit of the Lord' – what the Greek Fathers call *deification*. This, according to St. John and St. Paul, must be achieved in Heaven, in its final perfection, in all the blessed: 'in seeing God as he is, we shall be like



him', since all will be one with him. There is no way of explaining these things, nor of speaking about them: so what shall we say about the divine motherhood? This august dignity means that every act of bowing before Mary recognises, by a mute adoration and a religious silence, that she is above all imaginable praises and reverence.