



Bank of the Republic of Colombia: Commemorative Coin of Holy Mother Laura Montoya Upegui and her Religious Legacy

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Abstract

Saint Laura Montoya was born in Jericho, Colombia, in 1874. From a young age she showed a deep faith and vocation of service, supporting her widowed mother as a teacher. Her devotion to the Eucharist and the Scriptures led her to found the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and St. Catherine of Siena in 1914. Committed to the evangelization and dignification of the indigenous peoples, she devoted herself to her mission with the motto “to become an Indian with the Indians to win them all for Christ”. She was the first Colombian saint and left behind a legacy of love, education and defense of the rights of the most vulnerable. In 2015, the Bank of the Republic of Colombia issued a commemorative coin in honor of Mother Laura Montoya Upegui, the first Colombian saint, in compliance with Law 1710 of 2014. This coin celebrates her social and spiritual contributions, especially her dedication to the evangelization of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. The coin's design features an obverse depicting Mother Laura, inspired by a photograph exhibited during her canonization in 2013 at the Vatican. The reverse features the Cathedral of Jericó, Antioquia, the saint's birthplace, and the place where she was baptized. The piece, made of cupronickel, weighs 21.75 grams, is 2.65 mm thick, and has a face value of 5,000 Colombian pesos. A total of 500,000 coins were minted, available to the public in two formats: one in an acrylic case for 5,000 pesos, and another in a special case with an informative brochure for 14,000 pesos. The



issuance of this coin underscores the importance of Mother Laura as a spiritual and cultural figure in Colombia and consolidates her legacy through a commemorative object of historical and devotional value. This initiative not only perpetuates her memory but also highlights the Banco de la República's commitment to the national heritage and religious identity of the nation.

Keywords: Commemorative coin, Santa Laura Montoya Upegui, Bank of the Republic, religious life, canonization, evangelization in Colombia.

Introduction

The issuance of commemorative coins is a common practice in various nations, used as a means to honor historical figures, significant events, and cultural heritage. In Colombia, this tradition was revitalized with the issuance of a commemorative coin honoring Mother Laura Montoya Upegui, the first Colombian saint, in 2015. This initiative not only seeks to celebrate the life and work of a woman who dedicated her life to evangelization and service to marginalized communities, but also to highlight her enduring legacy in Colombian society. Mother Laura, born in Jericó, Antioquia, in 1874, is recognized for her commitment to human dignity and her tireless work on behalf of Indigenous and Afro-descendant people in a context of social exclusion and poverty (Catholic Online, 2023). Founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena, her influence extends beyond her time, inspiring generations of faithful and leaders in the pursuit of justice and equity. Law 1710 of 2014, which authorized the minting of this coin, establishes a framework for the celebration of religious figures in Colombia, highlighting the importance of Mother Laura in the country's history.

This article examines the history of Mother Laura, her social and spiritual impact, and analyzes the meaning and symbolic value of the coin issued in her honor, reflecting on her contribution to the Colombian cultural and religious heritage (Banco de la República, 2015).

The commemorative coin of Saint Mother Laura Montoya Upegui was issued by the Banco de la República de Colombia in compliance with Law 1710 of 2014. On the obverse, it features the image of Mother Laura, based on the photograph exhibited at the Vatican during her canonization on May 12, 2013. On the reverse, it highlights the cathedral of Jericho, Antioquia, emblematic place of her hometown and site where she was baptized. This coin has a face value of \$5,000 pesos, is composed of cupronickel, with a diameter of 35 mm, thickness of 2.65 mm and an approximate weight of 21.75 grams. 500,000 pieces were minted, available to the public since December 16, 2015

Theoretical Framework

The Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena was established in 1914 in a Colombian context characterized by social inequality and the marginalization of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities (González, 2018). Saint Laura Montoya, perceiving the spiritual and material needs of these communities, was inspired by the Gospel mandate of love and service, emphasizing the importance of evangelizing those most in need (Matthew 25:40). The Congregation's mission is based on the Great Commission described in the Gospel of Matthew (28:19-20), which invites believers to bring the message of Christ to all nations. This missionary theology is reflected in the Missionaries' commitment to extending the Catholic faith to the most remote communities (Murillo, 2016). The spirituality



of Saint Laura Montoya is centered on the experience of God's love and service to others, characterized by a life of prayer and contemplation (Valencia, 2017). Her charisma is expressed in the desire for all to know the Father's love and in her search for a balance between an active and contemplative life (Calle, 2020). Education is a fundamental pillar of the Congregation's mission, which follows the Catholic Church's social teaching on human dignity and the right to education (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005). The Missionaries are dedicated to providing education in Christian values and empowering vulnerable communities through knowledge (Perez, 2019). The Missionaries' work in Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities has contributed to improving living conditions and promoting human dignity, aligning with the Church's mission to be a voice for the voiceless (Romero, 2018). Their work has fostered the social and spiritual development of these populations.

Mother Laura Montoya developed an exemplary missionary work among indigenous communities in Colombia, founding schools in regions to teach indigenous children and adults, respecting their languages and customs and contributing to a new knowledge of Spanish (Montoya, 1939). but applying concrete strategies to improve their living conditions and strengthen their dignity. Mother Laura additionally documented her missionary work through letters to the government and the Church, advocated for the legal protection of the native peoples and denounced the abuses they suffered in which she denounced the exploitation of the indigenous people and the lack of recognition of their rights (Montoya, 1916). In these communications, addressed to civil and ecclesiastical authorities, she advocated for the dignity and protection of these communities, showing her commitment to social justice. Mother Laura Montoya also founded the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Sena, integrating evangelization with health, food and housing assistance. In addition, she trained communities in agricultural techniques to strengthen their self-sufficiency and improve their quality of life (Montoya, 1924).

The Congregation operates within a framework of collaboration with the Church and other organizations, strengthening its missionary work (Cárdenas, 2020). This collaboration allows the Missionaries to work in synergy with the Church hierarchy and other lay movements, expanding their reach and effectiveness in serving the communities (Hernández, 2019).

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and descriptive approach, according to Martín (1983). It uses various sources and data collection methods to address the issue of the commemorative coin of Mother Laura Montoya Upegui. The research stages and techniques used are detailed below: A thorough review of the literature related to Mother Laura's life and work was conducted, as well as historical documents and academic sources that address her social and spiritual impact. Books, journal articles, and theses analyzing her legacy and contributions to the religious and social community in Colombia were consulted.

Official documents were collected and analyzed, such as Law 1710 of 2014, which authorizes the issuance of the coin, as well as communications from the Bank of the Republic regarding its minting. This stage also included an evaluation of informational materials provided to the public, which describe the coin's characteristics and symbolism. Content analysis was used to interpret and organize the collected information, seeking to identify recurring patterns and themes that demonstrate Mother Laura's impact on society and her representation through currency.



Results

An analysis of the life and work of Mother Laura Montoya Upegui reveals a figure deeply committed to missionary service and the well-being of Colombia's Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. From an early age, Laura faced adversity, such as the loss of her father in a civil war, which plunged her family into poverty and orphanhood. These experiences shaped her character and Christian perspective, which guided her actions and ideals of inclusion and mercy (Table, 1999). Throughout her life, Laura developed a special sensitivity toward marginalized populations, reflected in her writings and her missionary vocation.

One of the most revealing sources about her spirituality and aspirations is a 1930 writing in St. Peter's Basilica, in which Laura expresses her desire to have "a million lives" dedicated exclusively to the missions. In this reflection, Laura expresses an unquenchable thirst to serve and bring the Gospel to those she calls "infidels," referring to the indigenous communities who, in her time, were excluded and scorned. This devotion is reflected in her famous "pedagogy of love," an evangelizing methodology that combined cultural respect and a profound commitment to human dignity. This pedagogy allowed her to build a bridge of communication with indigenous communities, focusing on love and forgiveness, values she herself learned from her mother in difficult circumstances (de Ospina, 2024).

The founding of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena in 1914 marked a milestone in her life and in the history of missionary work in Latin America. The congregation, initially formed by Laura and five companions, challenged the traditional religious structures of its time, proposing a new way of missionary life in which women religious lived and worked alongside indigenous peoples, sharing their poverty and adapting to their culture. This "inculturation" was seen as a radical innovation in the religious sphere, as it promoted equality and respect at a time when racial and religious prejudices dominated missionary thought (Vatican, 2024). On February 24, 1916, the nascent missionary community led by Mother Laura Montoya established a branch in the Rioverde area, ten leagues from Dabeiba, in the heart of the tropical rainforest amidst an isolated and decimated tribe (Table, 1999). At the inaugural Mass, the chaplain, Father Carlos Duque, delivered an eloquent reflection on the motto "I thirst," recalling Christ's words at Calvary and evoking the spiritual thirst for souls and the sacrifice necessary for their evangelization.

From Rioverde, the missionaries undertook difficult forays through dense thickets, steep cliffs, and rushing torrents. They visited huts and gained the trust of initially suspicious communities. However, the need to establish a permanent presence in these territories soon became evident. Thus, new missionary foundations emerged, with temporary structures known as "ambulances," including in El Pital and Antadó. At first, the indigenous people received these initiatives with suspicion and even hostility. However, over time, and through the patience and kindness of the sisters, many of them surrendered to the teachings of the Christian faith (Ramirez, 2003).

In August 1918, Mother Laura embarked on a new mission with Father Elías, of the Carmelite Order, three missionary sisters, and a group of indigenous people. Their destination was Murrí, where a third community would be established. The journey required them to spend the night in adverse conditions, exposed to the cold and dangers of the jungle. Lacking the support promised by a local landowner, they were forced to settle in a makeshift ranch in a humid grassland called La Lejía. With effort, they adapted this space to serve as a residence, kitchen, school, and chapel. Over time, they managed to build a more stable structure, expanding their



missionary work with abundant results. However, the shortage of priests complicated the missionaries' work, and they were isolated in Murri, without a chaplain and with an empty tabernacle. It was in this challenging environment that Mother Laura formulated the famous "Pact of the Beasts," in which she implored divine protection so that wild animals would not harm the sisters, in exchange for their respect for their lives (de Ospina, 2024).

Later accounts indicate that some missionaries even prayed before the Blessed Sacrament with snakes peacefully coiled at their sides. Priestly support, although limited, was essential in the mission's early years. Among the priests who assisted the catechists were Father Duque, Father Peña, Jesús M. Rivera y Lopera, among others. However, the expansion of the work faced administrative and ecclesiastical challenges. With the arrival of Monsignor Francisco Cristóbal Toro to the episcopal see of Antioquia, the congregation came under his jurisdiction. Later, on March 4, 1918, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith established the Apostolic Prefecture of Urabá, entrusting it to the Discalced Carmelite Fathers of the Province of Navarre (Misioneras de María Inmaculada y Santa Catalina de Sena, s.f.)

The first apostolic prefect, the Most Reverend Father José Joaquín Arteaga, assumed leadership of the prefecture and exerted influence over Mother Laura's nascent congregation. However, from the moment he arrived, a rift was perceived between the two, as, according to testimonies, he had received negative reports about the foundress and her work. His view also reflected a certain reluctance toward the active participation of women in evangelization.

Although Mother Laura always recognized their virtues, temperamental differences and administrative disagreements generated tensions, to the point that, in 1925, with the support of several bishops gathered at the First Missionary Congress of Colombia in Bogotá, the foundress made the difficult decision to withdraw her congregation from the Prefecture of Urabá. This withdrawal meant the definitive abandonment of the place where the community had been born. The motherhouse in Dabeiba was sold for less than expected, and Sister Maria San Benito was charged with handing over the property with deep regret. In her writings, Mother Laura interpreted this renunciation as a divinely permitted sacrifice, comparing it to the humility of Christ, who did not retain the cave of Bethlehem as his own property. In her words: "O holy nakedness! O beautiful poverty: how we should love you!"

Her writings, including her Autobiography and "Mystical Voices," reflect her mystical depth and her ability to harmonize the contemplative life with her apostolic mission. In them, Laura describes her love for God and creation, and how she sought in nature the reflection of divinity, adapting to the conditions of life in the jungle and understanding the dignity and divine vocation of each individual. This mystical vision not only sustained her daily work but also profoundly influenced her Congregation, which grew to include 90 houses and 467 religious sisters by her death in 1949.

Regarding her canonization, which formally began in 1963 and was completed in 2004, this process highlights the importance of her legacy in the Catholic Church (El Espectador, 2013). The beatification and eventual canonization of Mother Laura Montoya represent a recognition of her life of dedication and her pioneering role as the first Colombian saint. Through her congregation, her missionary spirit lives on, currently extending to 19 countries, and her teachings continue to inspire new generations of religious women committed to social justice and inclusion.

Figure 1. Laura Montoya with the Katío Indians,



Source: Archive of Santa Laura Montoya. Belencito, Medellín. Provided by the Laurita Missionary Sisters.

In compliance with Law 1710 of 2014, the Bank of the Republic minted a commemorative coin in honor of Mother Laura Montoya Upegui, the first Colombian saint. This coin, issued in December 2015, features the following distinctive features and technical specifications that highlight its cultural and religious value in Colombia:

Front and Back Design: On the obverse, the coin shows the image of Mother Laura, created from the photograph used in the Vatican on the day of her canonization (May 12, 2013), which gives the coin a great symbolic and devotional charge.

Figure 2. Commemorative Coin





On the reverse, there is an image of the cathedral of Jericho in Antioch, an emblematic site and the saint's birthplace. The cathedral is particularly significant as it was built on the site where Mother Laura was baptized, thus reinforcing the links between her life and her spiritual legacy in the region.

Figure 3. Commemorative Coin



Technical Specifications

Material: The coin was minted in cupronickel (an alloy of 75% copper and 25% nickel), which gives it strength and durability.

Dimensions and Weight: It weighs 21.75 grams and is 2.65 mm thick, attributes that contribute to the solidity of the piece.

Nominal Value: Its nominal value was set at 5,000 Colombian pesos.

Broadcasting and Distribution: Number of Coins Minted: A total of 500,000 coins were minted, allowing wide access to this collector's item.

Availability and Sale: The coin was available to the public at Banco de la República branches and cultural agencies starting December 16, 2015.

Presentation and Price Options: It was offered in two presentations: in acrylic packaging at a retail price of 5,000 pesos, and in a special case that included an informative brochure on the coin's characteristics, priced at 14,000 pesos. This diversified the purchasing options for different types of collectors and devotees.

The issuance of this coin in honor of Mother Laura Montoya Upegui represents an effort to recognize her influence and religious legacy in Colombia, while strengthening the country's cultural heritage through the creation of commemorative pieces of historical and spiritual value.

The life and work of Saint Laura Montoya Upegui can be interpreted through various passages and teachings from the Catholic Bible, which reflect her values and actions in evangelization and service to others. Here are some highlights:



Evangelization and Service to the Needy: Matthew 25:35-40 “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I needed clothes, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.” Saint Laura dedicated her life to serving marginalized communities, especially Indigenous and Afro-descendant people, thus fulfilling Jesus’ teaching about serving those most in need.

Love and Compassion: 1 John 4:7 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Mother Laura lived Christian love in action, promoting dignity and respect for the most disadvantaged, and showing compassion for those who did not know God’s love.

Call to Mission: Matthew 28:19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Mother Laura’s life was a response to this missionary mandate, as she dedicated her life to evangelizing and educating communities that lacked access to the Christian faith.

Unconditional love and service to the Church are distinctive traits of spiritually elevated souls. In Mother Laura Montoya’s case, this fervor manifested itself from an early age, strengthened by reading Abbé Gaume’s Catechism of Perseverance, through which she learned to value the Church and religious orders. Her testimony represents a significant lesson for those Catholics who, in her time, adopted anti-clerical stances. The strength of her faith was consolidated as a reaction to the context of ecclesiastical persecution that marked the 19th century in Colombia. During this period, the Church faced the exile of bishops, the imprisonment of priests, the confiscation of property, and the forced expulsion of religious communities, such as the case of the Discalced Carmelites of Medellín, ordered by General Mosquera. In this hostile environment, Mother Laura not only remained faithful to the Church, but also suffered for it and, at times, was even tested by the institution itself.

Her profound love for the Church, conceived as the Corpus Mysticum of Christ, drove her to extend the Kingdom of God among unevangelized peoples. With great sensitivity, she reflected on the situation of those whom the work of redemption had not yet reached, identifying distinct groups of infidels: pagans, Jews, Brahmins, and Muslims. However, she emphasized that the most complex challenge was the savage infidels, whom Pope Benedict XV described as the most difficult group to convert. Despite missionary efforts since apostolic times, the evangelization of these communities had been limited, with the exception of historical moments such as the colonization of America. Convinced that the evangelization of indigenous peoples required an innovative approach, Mother Laura understood that only feminine tenderness and sacrifice could overcome the distrust of indigenous peoples, marked by experiences of violence and exploitation. Her vision was that, through the closeness and dedication of the nuns, the way would be opened for the sacramental work of priests. Thus arose her idea of forming what she called “goat nuns,” that is, women willing to travel through the most inhospitable territories, temporarily renouncing their cloisters and, in some cases, even direct contact with the tabernacle, with the sole purpose of bringing Christ to those most in need.

Mother Laura also conceived the idea of establishing a congregation of priests and missionaries specifically dedicated to the evangelization of Native Americans. She corresponded about this project with the Apostolic Nuncio and with Bishop Miguel Ángel Builes, who shared the same concern. It was the latter who ultimately led to the founding of the Institute



of the Missionaries of Saint Francis Xavier (Javieres), a congregation in which Mother Laura directly influenced by preparing several vocations, including that of the future Apostolic Vicar of Itsmina, Monsignor Gustavo Posada.

In recognition of her profound love for the Church, the Congregation founded by Mother Laura instituted November 9 as the Feast of the Church, a celebration established by the foundress herself. In one of her circulars, she expressed her vision of the Church as the place where God's wisdom resides and the center of the noblest spiritual warfare, equipped with merciful weapons such as the sacraments, prayer, indulgences, and preaching. For her, preaching was a burning flame that spread the light of truth, generating admiration even among angels.

As a sign of his devotion, he included in his Manual of Prayers a special supplication for the Church and the clergy, accompanied by a litany in which he asked for ecclesial triumph and the fervor of the hierarchy in divine charity, taking the Immaculate Heart of Mary as his intercessor. His love and respect for the Pontificate were evident in his speeches and writings. According to witnesses from his community, at the time of Pope Pius XII's election, he devoted an entire week to giving lectures on the Church and the role of the Supreme Pontiff. In one of his most significant statements, he expressed his desire to continue, even after his death, assisting the Pope from heaven in carrying the burden of the Church.

Faith and Perseverance: Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Despite the adversity and misunderstanding she faced, Saint Laura maintained a profound faith in God and persevered in her mission to bring the Gospel message to those most in need.

Example of Life: Philippians 2:5-7: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant.” Mother Laura stripped herself of her comforts and privileges to live among the poor, imitating Christ's example of humility and service.

Community and Union: Acts 2:44-47 “And all who believed were together, and had all things in common.” The founding of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena reflects the desire to form a community united in faith and service, modeled after the early Christian community. Throughout her life, Saint Laura Montoya Upegui embodied many of the principles and values of Christianity, reflecting her deep connection to the Bible and her commitment to Christ's mission.

Mother Laura's famous quotes

“Two thirsty ones, my Jesus, You for souls and I for quenching your thirst, what then stops us?”

“I am pleased not to understand this so that I can adore you in the sweet darkness of faith, which shows me your designs so far beyond my miserable understanding!”

Why, I ask again, is there such great mercy towards me, the most miserable of all, while, without ceasing to be merciful, you have denied your knowledge for so many centuries to the poor infidels?

The life and work of Saint Laura Montoya Upegui can be understood from a theological perspective that highlights her commitment to Christian love and the evangelizing mission.



Spiritual formation begins in the family, like a learning manual; it represents the first space where a child becomes familiar with the principles of Christianity, as Urs von Balthasar points out. (Hans Urs von Balthasar, citado en Humanitas, s.f.), This precept was faithfully reflected in the life of Laura Montoya, who grew up in a home with strong religious values. Her mother instilled virtuous habits through example and teaching, while her father lived his Christian faith fully. Her family upbringing, marked by rigorous traditional discipline, led her to nourish her spirit with edifying reading from an early age. Among the works that shaped her formation were *The Christian Year*, *The Genius of Christianity*, the writings of Father Granada, and Gaume's Catechism, among others. In her home, reading the New Testament was an unwavering rule, complemented by religious poetry, but with no space for fiction (U.E. Colegio Madre Laura, s.f.).

During her school years in Medellín, she developed a self-taught inclination for reading, taking every opportunity to delve into texts such as those of Father Faber. However, her greatest discovery was the Bible, which became an inexhaustible source of intellectual and spiritual inspiration. Each verse represented a revelation of wisdom for her, so much so that, in her later years, she focused her meditation exclusively on the Gospels. Her writings reflect this influence, with constant biblical references interpreted with great depth.

From childhood, she experienced a natural attraction to prayer, which led her to consult various priests about the practice of mental prayer. In busy times, her communication with God was summed up in a state of joy and absolute trust in Him. Already in her role as director of the Colegio de la Inmaculada, she sacrificed hours of rest to dedicate herself to contemplation. Her life of prayer reached a mystical level, as Francisco Juberías CMF points out in his study "Mother Laura in the Heights of Mysticism." According to this analysis, her prayer was infused, that is, guided directly by the Holy Spirit, without the need for structured methods. In fact, once she learned the conventional rules of prayer, she found them unnecessary, since her connection with the divine transcended any established technique (Juberías, 1973).

The testimony of those who knew her confirms her profound life of prayer. One nun affirmed that she dedicated countless hours to dialogue with God, both day and night (Misioneras Lauritas, s.f.). Likewise, Father Toro, SJ, who was her spiritual director, certified that although she did not set aside specific times for prayer outside of community gatherings, she lived in continual communion with God, seeing His presence in every aspect of her life. In her later years, already physically limited, she expressed her longing to visit the Blessed Sacrament, although she recognized that her being was fully united with God.

Throughout her life, she practiced spiritual exercises following the Ignatian method, dedicating a volume of her work, *Lamos*, to the first week of these exercises. Her monthly retreat included an examination of conscience based on aspects such as indifference to health and illness, the administration of her possessions, the formation of her disciples, the practice of mortification, her readings, and time management. In 1909, she established the goal of evaluating her thoughts four times a day, which gave rise to her method of examination called "coup de vie," which she later taught and recommended to her missionaries.

The most eloquent testimony of her intense spiritual life is found in the book "Propósitos y Luces espirituales de la Madre Laura," published in Medellín in 1974, in commemoration of the centenary of her birth. This work, based on her autobiography and other writings compiled by her missionary sisters, constitutes a valuable resource for understanding her spiritual thought, her profound relationship with God, and her missionary fervor. Her reflections reveal divine



action in her life and her committed response to the call of grace. In short, her writings not only represent a spiritual legacy but also a guide for those seeking to deepen their life of prayer and missionary dedication (Juberías, 1973)

Mother Laura Montoya, destined by divine providence to bring the light of faith to those in spiritual darkness, cultivated and strengthened this virtue in her life in an exceptional way. To this end, she used the means recommended by spiritual masters, such as prayer, reading religious texts, and studying theology. However, she also received an infused knowledge from God, evident in her reflections, dialogues, and mystical experiences derived from reading the Bible. A particularly significant concept in her thought is that of "the two lines," where she establishes a distinction between the human being and God. In her interpretation, the "black line" represents the individual self, while the "white line" symbolizes the divine essence. For Mother Laura, the human being comes into existence over time by the will of God, while divinity is eternal and immutable. This profound concept introduces her Autobiography, written at the behest of her confessor (Misioneras Lauritas. s.f.)

Her life was guided by faith, reflected in her profound reverence for religious mysteries, the Virgin Mary, the saints, the Holy Scriptures, ecclesiastical ministers, and the directives of the Holy See. On one occasion, she expressed that she did not need faith in the conventional sense, as she lived with absolute certainty of supernatural realities. For her, the Eucharist was not hidden under a veil of mystery, but was revealed to her with spiritual clarity. From childhood, she experienced a mystical knowledge of God, the product of a sudden illumination and an intense spiritual experience (Kučerková, 2020; John, 2021). Despite years dedicated to study and meditation, she claimed that she never achieved a deeper or more enlightening understanding than that received in her childhood. This perception influenced her absolute trust in God, manifested in her constant repetition of the Fiat, referring to the full acceptance of divine will, like Mary at the Annunciation and Christ in Gethsemane. She also shared the attitude of Saint Ignatius of Loyola when he proclaimed: "Do with me what you will, Lord, for I know that you love me." (Montoya Upegui, 1971).

Mother Laura's evangelizing mission to the indigenous communities responded solely to the desire to glorify God. Her purpose was not only to spread the faith but also to demonstrate His greatness to those who doubted the success of her work (Kučerková, 2020). She also experienced a special understanding of the mystery of divine Paternity. In her moments of prayer, she felt a profound identification with this concept, which strengthened her maternal vocation toward non-believers. This experience led her to perceive the indigenous people as spiritual children, whom she called "my wound," reflecting her intense commitment to their conversion.

With the firm conviction that her missionary work was not her own, but God's, Mother Laura never doubted that her congregation responded to a divine purpose. She expressed this to her confessor and reaffirmed it to Bishop Vicentini, assuring him that if it were proven to her that her mission did not come from God, she would dissolve it immediately. Her firmness and determination in defending her congregation are explained by her perspective of faith: she considered her work to be an instrument of salvation for the indigenous people, who, in turn, were a sacred treasure for God (John, 2021). Her dedication to marginalized communities, especially Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, reflects the praxis of love for one's neighbor found in the Gospels, especially in Matthew 25:35-40, where Jesus calls his followers to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable. Theologically, this aligns with the notion of the incarnation, where God's love is made present in service to others. Likewise, her missionary



life is sustained by the mandate of Matthew 28:19-20, which invites us to take the Gospel to all nations, emphasizing the importance of evangelization as a response to the divine call. Mother Laura's perseverance in her faith, despite adversity, can be understood as a reflection of the grace and strength that Christian theology attributes to those in communion with God. Finally, her community life in founding the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena embodies the theological principle of the ecclesial community, in which believers come together to live their faith and serve others, as illustrated by the early Christian community of Acts 2:44-47. Thus, Saint Laura's life is not only a testimony to lived faith but also a tangible manifestation of Christian theology in action.

“Laura was canonized by Pope Francis on May 12, 2013. The canonization miracle involves the healing of Dr. Carlos Eduardo Restrepo, who was suffering from lupus, kidney damage and muscular degeneration. After praying to Blessed Laura, the doctor was said to be completely cured” (All Saints & Martyrs, 2014).

Conclusions

Mother Laura Montoya was a visionary and pioneer of the mission in Latin America, driven by a profound sense of compassion and love for the Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples of Colombia. In her work, she sought to bring them closer to God's love, recognizing in them a divine dignity and vocation. The founding of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena in 1914 in Dabeiba, Antioquia, marked a milestone in the history of the Church in Latin America. This community, conceived with a missionary spirit and courage, broke the mold of its time by including women who lived on equal terms with the communities they served, bearing witness to Christian life in the midst of the jungle. Laura Montoya was born into a deeply Christian family and from a young age was marked by poverty and suffering. However, these challenges forged in her a resilient character, a contemplative spirituality, and a vocation for service that would later manifest in her evangelical mission. Through her pedagogy of love, Mother Laura immersed herself in the culture of indigenous peoples, recognizing their dignity and divine aspirations, and working to eliminate the barriers of racial discrimination. John (2021), asserts that her life of dedication serves as a cornerstone of her great legacy teaching all that they have a responsibility to help others to improve their lives.

Her methodology of cultural immersion and experiential catechesis allowed her to connect with these communities in a genuine and effective way. Her missionary work and her life were marked by suffering, misunderstanding, and opposition, both from civilians and members of the Church. However, these trials strengthened her and allowed her to consolidate her spirituality and commitment to evangelization. She left an enduring legacy: her Congregation, which at the time of her death in 1949 had 90 houses in three countries and continues its mission today in 21 nations. This legacy reflects the strength, fortitude, and missionary zeal that drove her throughout her life. Recognized as the first Colombian saint, Mother Laura was beatified in 2004 and canonized in 2013, in recognition of her life of dedication, sacrifice, and love for marginalized and unknown peoples. Her life and work continue to inspire the Church and the world, especially in her dedication to the poorest and her inclusive vision of evangelization. Her dedicated Missionary Sisters work in 19 countries in America, Africa and also in Europe.



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