Culture



Rosalía attends the Christian Dior Spring/Summer 2025 collection presented Sept. 24, 2024 in Paris. (AP photo/Invision/Vianney Le Caer)



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Might a gob of spit expelled on Fifth Avenue be a metaphor for all creation, same as the hazelnut in Julian of Norwich's mystical vision of the Divine?

Yes, says genre-defying sensation Rosalía in one song off her chart-busting new album, "Lux."

"I fit in the world. And the world fits in me," she philosophizes in Spanish on the track "*La Yugular*." "The entire galaxy fits in a drop of saliva."

On every level — literal, allegorical, moral and mystical — "Lux" (translated as "light") shines with unapologetic religious devotion, exploring themes that seem plucked directly from Catholic mystics and doctors of the church. For a new generation of believers, who broke Spotify's record of most streams in a single day of a Spanish-language album (42 million on Nov. 7), Julian of Norwich could not have said it better than this visionary from Barcelona.

Akin the women she honors across the opus' 18 tracks, Rosalía lives and shares a bold, embodied faith on this, her fourth studio album. Though never formally baptized Catholic, she professes a calling grounded in what she calls her "very personal relationship with God." "Sometimes I have a desire that I know this world will not be able to satisfy," she said on a Catalonian podcast. "Perhaps only God can fill this space."

The lushly orchestrated masterwork is the result of three years immersed in Christian theology, hagiographic research and exploration of Catholic traditions. She wrote lyrics in 13 languages, blended classical, electronic and flamenco styles, and collaborated with the London Symphony Orchestra and Icelandic experimental artist Björk.

"God has given me so much," the 33-year-old, two-time Grammy winner told Le Monde. "The least I could do is make an album for him."

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A global audience has taken notice — including the Vatican. Soon after the launch, Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, praised Rosalía as an ally with the church "in the search for the meaning

of life," one who "grasps a deep need in contemporary culture … to value religious experience."

Evidence of that need abounds online. TikToks about St. Hildegard of Bingen (inspiration for "*Berghain*," the first single) proliferate, while Reddit threads map songs to holy women from Catholic, Jewish and Eastern traditions. Debates rage over whether "*Reliquia*" was inspired by St. Rose of Lima or St. Teresa of Ávila. Most remarkable are fans embracing Rosalía's untrendy stances on obedience, humility, anti-materialism, transcendence and even modesty: "I dress up for God / not for you or anyone / I only dress up for my God" ("*Novia Robot*").

How is this possible? Sampling even a few measures of any track — though the album is arranged in four movements for holistic listening — her classically trained, string-backed vocals, alternately raw and soaring, prove that holy honesty requires no translation. "Lux" is devotion of the highest order, best experienced as what mystics called prayer without words.

Like a cantor's Hebrew chant, a monk's Latin Divine Office or a soprano's Italian aria, Rosalía's renditions guide listeners along an emotional rollercoaster even without understanding the tongues she speaks in: righteously indignant one moment (earning the album an explicit label), on the verge of tears the next. Her confident range is always up to the challenge of dizzying diversity: classical symphony, electronic distortion, gilded choirs, spoken word (including Patti Smith via archival tape), rap, fiery flamenco claps, Portuguese fado, sudden silences, droning drum machines and symphonic kettle booms. Dramatic, yes, but never insincere.

As a listener, total surrender is the only viable option. That means turning off the lyrics screen, forgoing translations and entering the "cloud of unknowing" that mystics understood so well.

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Sit with strains as discordant as life's complexity ("*Sexo, Violencia Y Llantas*"). Allow crests and troughs of fear wash over intellectual understanding ("Porcelana"). Savor the sweet love of Jesus ("*Mio Cristo Piange Diamante*"). Skip along a coastal beach with Rosalía's joy and giggles ("*La Perla*"). Sway your hips ("*De Madrugá*," "*La*

Rumba del Perdón," "*Dios Es Un Stalker*"), even if vaguely aware you are celebrating mortification, forgiveness and God's relentlessness. Become convinced you once shared wine with your divine lover ("*Sauvignon Blanc*"). Ponder verses alternating between French and Spanish that might be dialogue between St. Joan of Arc and God ("*Jeanne*"). Allow laments and angelic choirs to stir soul-level sorrow ("*Memória* "). End by joining Rosalía in the bittersweet refrain "*Tírame Magnolias*" as her final dirge trails heavenward.

Concede all you think you know about popular music and simply whisper, amen.

Six and a half centuries after Julian of Norwich became the first woman to write a book in English, translating her lived spiritual wisdom into the vernacular, Rosalía has done the same. In any language, "Lux" is a prayer for our age, complete and transcendent. As Julian reminds us, you, me, a pop star and a humble hazelnut are unified in love and mystery, all part of infinite Creation. "[The hazelnut] lasteth," Julian wrote, "and ever shall [last], for that God loveth it."

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