
SOR JUANA INES DE LA CRUZ

Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana was born at San Miguel Nepantla, in what is now Mexico, on November 12 of 1648 or 1651. Her mother was Creole and her father, who soon deserted, was in the Spanish armed forces. Juana's baptismal record obliquely alluded to her unmarried parents by calling her a "daughter of the Church."

Juana learned to read by age three. She devoured the library at her grandfather's estate. Later she learned Latin well enough to teach it to other children. As a teenager, Juana had enough of a reputation that the Spanish viceroy invited her to attend a salon with scholars from a variety of fields. Juana held her own in argument, solidifying her fame as a prodigy. Since women could not attend university, Juana also asked her family if she could disguise herself as a boy and seek admission. They refused, so she continued her self-tutoring.

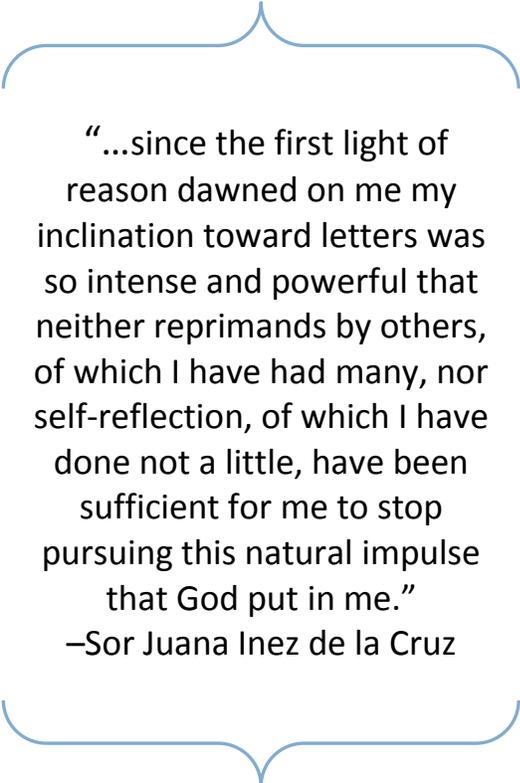
In 1667 Juana entered convent life, quickly switching from the Discalced Carmelites to the Order of St. Jerome. The St. Jerome nuns allowed Sor (Sister) Juana her own personal quarters, with space for her library and for holding her own salons. As a woman and an intellectual in a seventeenth-century Catholic context, Sor Juana was in a unique, liberated, and dangerous position. She thrived under the protection of friendly viceroys. But after a succession of regime changes, the attitude of colonial authorities cooled toward her and she became vulnerable.

In 1690, the bishop of Puebla, evidently seeking to trip her up, praised Sor Juana for her incisive critique of a Jesuit's homily. He encouraged her to expand on her points in a private letter. When she did just that, the bishop leaked the letter to the public and hit back with one of his own.

Written under the pseudonym Sor Filotea, it attacked Sor Juana for pursuing an intellectual career as a woman.

Sor Juana met him head on, responding in 1691 with one of her most famous pieces, Reply to Sor Filotea, which eloquently defended women's right to an education. But now the Catholic Church involved itself officially, censuring Sor Juana and ordering her to cease and desist from writing and keeping books. Backed into a corner, she complied.

Not very long after, Sor Juana was nursing fellow sisters who had the plague when she caught the disease herself. She died April 17, 1695. But her light did not. Her life continues to inspire Catholics across the globe.



“...since the first light of reason dawned on me my inclination toward letters was so intense and powerful that neither reprimands by others, of which I have had many, nor self-reflection, of which I have done not a little, have been sufficient for me to stop pursuing this natural impulse that God put in me.”
–Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz

PRAY

Wisdom teaches her children and admonishes all who can understand her. Those who love her love life; those who seek her out win the LORD's favor. Those who hold her fast will attain glory, and they shall abide in the blessing of the LORD. Those who serve her serve the Holy One; those who love her the Lord loves. (Sirach 4:11-14)