



20. The Mariengarten²⁰⁷

On 20 January 1942 our founder took the far - reaching decision not to undertake any further actions to prevent him being sent to the concentration camp. This decision has set its stamp on the whole of Schoenstatt's history. In the run - up to this important event something happened in connection with Christmas Eve 1941: The origin of the "Mariengarten", (Garden of Mary).

In the text that follows, Fr Kentenich personally related how this ideal came into existence. Through a flash of insight that would have far - reaching significance, the founder discovered an ideal in the name of a letter writer, Sr Mariengard. The second part of the text interprets the dimensions of this ideal, although only in the form of a disposition. It is the Marian ideal of humankind that was laid down in Paradise and attained its perfect realization in the Blessed Mother. We have been commissioned through the covenant of love and our union with her to bring about the new person in the new community in our present times.

It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that after he returned from the concentration camp, the founder would proclaim this ideal with great warmth. Since, however, as this present text clearly reveals, it concerned a very personal process, it is also understandable that the Sisters wanted to keep it to themselves. They were not at all pleased when Fr Kentenich "published" it in a talk at the 1950 October Week. Although the founder considered that it was fitting that the ideal of the Mariengarten had arisen within the community of the Sisters of Mary, he also saw that it was valid far beyond that community – for the Schoenstatt Family, the Church and the whole world. In view of the present - day ecological problem, this and other dimensions have not yet been discovered even in Schoenstatt.

We may not overlook, however – and this is indicated in the text – that there was a rich tradition in theology, art and literature in the Middle Ages that made fruitful use of the symbolism of the garden in relation to the Church and the spiritual lives of the Faithful. They could cultivate the "little garden of their heart" through practicing many and varied virtues, for example, the rose of love, the lily of purity, the violet of humility, etc. So the ideal of the Mariengarten also takes up an ancient and rich tradition in the Church, which was already anticipated in Joseph Engling's "May Blossoms".

It should also be noted that the concept of the "miracle of the Holy Night", which first appeared on that Christmas Eve of 1941, continued to play a vital role in Schoenstatt's history. When Fr Kentenich had to go into exile in Milwaukee, the Schoenstatt Family was united in praying and sacrificing for another "miracle of

²⁰⁷ Analogous to *Kindergarten* – children's garden, or garden for children. Fr Kentenich used the possibility of the concept Mariengarten to signify "Mary's Garden" or "garden of little Marys".

the Holy Night". This longing was literally fulfilled when Fr Kantenich returned home to Schoenstatt on Christmas Eve 1965.

This text has been taken from the 15th Conference of the "October Week 1950", p. 308 - 321 (German edition).

First I must remove a feeling of defensiveness. When we talk about the Mariengarten, it sounds so flowery in a time that is extremely harsh. Please do not forget that the concept originated in a still harsher time. Please do not forget that it is a great tragedy for the education of our present times that people today, the young people of today, have lost the ability to understand symbols. People who are sound, as well as those who have grown up soundly, have a right to a number of symbols. If symbols are not used in education, especially in the education of women, something is sick. However, I don't want to talk about that at present.

I will talk about its history, its interpretation and deepen what has been said.

[1. The History of the Mariengarten]

Something about the history. How did it come into existence? Wholly and entirely through the law of the open door. There you have a classic proof that the law of the open door is decisive for us. The law of the open door! Borne by faith in Divine Providence, we interpret every tiny detail and ask what God is wanting to say to us through it.

1.1 The first period of the history!

You know that at that time the head of the Family was in prison, and that he managed relatively quickly to set aside all limitations to writing letters, and despite the danger kept in contact with outside – with Schoenstatt.

The hospital in Koblenz²⁰⁸ is the place where the historical Mariengarten originated. Shortly before Christmas, on 23 December 1941, one of our Sisters, her name was Mariengard, had the inner inspiration to write a letter to the Christ Child. Now you must be honest with yourselves, including those who are far, far above such things, and remember that from time to time the child in us cries out, also in men. So she wrote a letter to the Christ Child. Her intention was that the superior of the house should read it out to remind the Sisters to pray to the Christ Child for the miracle of the Holy Night. There was the strong urge that the Christ Child should free the head of the Family from his fetters at Christmas. A very childlike and simple idea! I think I should read it out to you as an expression of trust, but it is written in very childlike and airy terms.

„Dear Christ Child,

You will soon descend again to earth in the Holy Night, and I haven't written yet to tell you what to bring me. Each year you bring all good children many beautiful things. I would like to give them all up if only our father can come home again. This year I have a big request to make of you. Our dear father²⁰⁹ has been away from us for such a long time, and we are all homesick for him. When you come down to earth in the Holy Night, couldn't you send an angel to father? Then it would suddenly be very bright in his cell. The angel would tell him: Do not be afraid, because I bring you tidings of great joy. Today the Savior has been born in Schoenstatt. Hurry to the chapel. There you will find the Child in the arms of his Mother!

Then many angels will come and open up the way for our father to the little shrine. There he will see the "miracle of the Holy Night". The Child will say: You may remain with me always and tell your children a lot about me, so that, led by my Mother, they will find their way to me. And all Schoenstatt children will be tremendously happy and praise you and your Mother the whole night through. And later on people will still talk about the miracle of the Holy Night.

²⁰⁸ Reference to the hospital of St. Joseph, which was staffed by the Sisters of Mary.

²⁰⁹ Before Fr. Kantenich's imprisonment he was never addressed as "father" in public. This is the first time it happened, thus bringing to the public awareness of the Sisters community what had developed over the years in private.

Dear Christ Child, I still have to sleep two more nights, then it will be Christmas. I trust as firmly as can be that you will do what I ask, because you are powerful and give presents to all good children. Now let me quickly tell you my name. I am *Maria Providentia*²¹⁰ and live in the children's house in Koblenz. Together with our mother there are 55 of us.

O dearest Child Jesus, please listen to our pleading,
And let us see our father again very soon.
Then like the angels in heaven we want to
Praise you and your Mother: Jesus and Mary!²¹¹

The superior managed to smuggle this letter into the prison and wrote, "The letter was written by Mariengard". I can still remember that I received it during the night. I sat up in bed and answered it.

I always do that; I always take up whatever God works in those he has given me. I could prove to you exactly what came into my work from this or that soul, from this or that spiritual current.

The Christ Child wrote an answer, which had to be adapted to the childlike language. Do you want to hear that letter? Now the child in all of us is awakened!

„My dear little Mariengard,

I will fulfil your wish when your heart and the heart of the whole Family has become a flourishing Mariengarten. So the answer to your request for the miracle of the Holy Night is placed in your hands and the hands of Schoenstatt children. Hurry, or you may be too late. Actually I have great plans, and I need your father for them. I am now preparing him. When you have laid out your garden beautifully, I will hurry up with the chiselling and polishing. To comfort you I would like to tell you that there is always light and warmth in father's cell. He has almost as much work as he had in Schoenstatt. He gets so many visitors every day.

With heartfelt greetings and my blessing from heaven ...“

Can you understand that because the letter - writer was called Mariengard, I baptized the Mariengarten?²¹² The miracle of the Holy Night would happen to me when it had happened in them. When will it take place in them? When they have become a flourishing Mariengarten, "When the heart of the whole Family has become a flourishing Mariengarten", that is, when they live the Inscriptio in earnest. Then I would be set free. There was no other ransom.

The point that was later taken up by the "Discipleship Act"²¹³ was this extraordinary sense of responsibility uniting the permanent head and his followers.

The effect of the letter followed later. Little Mariengard again wrote a letter. There are constant letters to the Christ Child.

„Dear Christ Child,

I have been allowed to answer your dear letter today. You can't believe how happy you made us all! I have to thank you with all my heart for that. Actually I would have loved to bring you this letter myself, but it is impossible, it is far too far and I am sure they wouldn't let me in. So I am sending you my thank you letter with heaven's post, and I can be sure it will arrive.

You know, I would never have dreamt that you would sit down on Christmas Eve, when you have so much else to do, and write little Mariengard a letter. It seems like a dream to me, and yet it really happened. Besides, you are so great, and clever, and know everything. When I think of how many people would be very happy just to see the first letters, and perhaps still a word, from you, I am reminded of the lovely saying which our father often used at the end of a talk: "The most stupid farmers have the fattest potatoes!"

²¹⁰ The letter had been written for the Sister's own house community, and the writer probably didn't want to be identified. So she used the name *Maria*, which is common to all the Sisters, and made it more specific by adding the name of the Province, *Providentia*.

²¹¹ Adaptation of a popular children's carol

²¹² In German the name Mariengard easily extended to become *Mariengarten*, similar to *Kindergarten*.

²¹³ German, *Gefolgschaftsakt*, also translated as "Followership Act".

So I am really happy that you answered my Christmas letter. I got it yesterday, the day after Christmas, in Schoenstatt. Then when I got home I went straight to our mother²¹⁴ and gave it to her. If only you could have seen how happy she was! We locked the door and read your letter word for word. You know, I could not decipher your writing so quickly, mother could do it far quicker. But she is bigger and perhaps you have had to write to her more often, because she is so alone now. Father is away. And to educate so many children to become "saints" is not so easy!

Sometimes mother's voice also faltered over a sentence, but it was out of pure joy. I could not really understand what you wrote about the chiselling and polishing. Mother explained it to me. Actually I haven't noticed any "corners" in our father, so I thought it could not apply to him. Because father was always kind to us. But I am sure I will understand it properly later when father has explained it to us.

And when we had read your letter right through, we said a little prayer of gratitude, then we started all over again. – How happy we were! I am sure you saw it from heaven. And then right in the middle there was a knock. I was so sorry, because it was so nice ...

Then I set to work immediately, because I wanted to start with the "Mariengarten" right away, and "the most faithful fulfilment of our duties" is part of it. But you will never believe it, I couldn't forget your letter. Again and again I heard those words: My dear little Mariengard!"

When you hear that you would think it was a fairy tale from the "Arabian Nights". It was, but against a very dark background. Just think of the danger! The Christ Child answered, but that was the end of it!

„My dear little Mariengard,

You have understood me well! In the past you used to think that you would have to remain an orphan all your life. Are you now convinced of the opposite?

Now set to work soon with your other little sisters and lay out the *Mariengarten* carefully. I will come soon... And when I am satisfied with all the flowerbeds, I will carry out your wish and send your father back to you – well prepared for new work and new battles..."

That also happened. There you see the first period. Do you know what came alive after that? The key thought is this: an extraordinarily strong reciprocal interweaving of destinies, and an extraordinarily strong sense of responsibility. We usually say that this is a vital, deep and effective covenant of love with one another.

Now I have to tell you how much strength this awakened. It was not just a covenant of love with the Blessed Mother, between heaven and earth, but also a covenant of love between the permanent head and his followers, a covenant of love between the followers themselves. They really worked heroically all those years because of the one thought: The miracle of the Holy Night must first happen in us, then it will also happen for the head.

1.2 The second period!

Later, in 1945, when I had come home, the thought lived in our *Mariengarten*: We have to keep what we have been given. What motivated us so strongly was not just the covenant of love with the Blessed Mother, but also with each other and with the head of the Family. The head is no longer in danger, so it doesn't motivate us so much. So they asked: How can we re - orientate it? The idea came alive: We want to be his deacons, his helpers, to an extraordinary degree, so that wherever he goes he can educate little Mary's. As his deacons, his helpers, we want to help him wherever he is working to form as many people as possible into little Mary's.

1.3 The third period.

After this the whole Sisters' Family gradually developed until it could be taken into the *Mariengarten*. All did so using a symbol – here they used the symbol of a flower, there some other symbol – so that by now the whole Sisters' Family has been taken into the *Mariengarten*.

²¹⁴ The superior.

By the way, the women's Institute of our Lady of Schoenstatt has united to form a *hortus conclusus*.²¹⁵ There you find the same tendency to have some sort of symbol. When times are hard, the use of symbols is important for a family of women.

[2. Interpretation of the Mariengarten]

Now let me give you a brief interpretation of the Mariengarten. Let me say something about the nature of the covenant symbolized here, then something about the degree, and then about the form. This is a very objective list, but it reflects bubbling life.

2.1 The nature of the covenant. It is

- 1 a covenant of love between heaven and earth, between us and the Blessed Mother;
- 2 a distinctive covenant of love between the permanent head and his followers, and between the superiors and members;
- 3 a covenant of love between the members;
- 4 a covenant of love between the Family and Vincent Pallotti.

2.2 Something about the degree. It is

- 1 a perfect covenant of love as an attitude,
- 2 a perfect covenant of love in action.

I would have to prove to you how this covenant of love awakened the highest idealism, especially a sense of responsibility for one another and for the endangered head of the Family. So it was a perfect covenant of love not merely as an attitude, but also in action. You will come across it again when the leaders of our priests and our women undertook the Discipleship Act. There is the same clarity and objectivity. It has nothing to do with developing an attitude; it transforms the attitude into action.

2.3 The form of the covenant:

That too is original – it took on a community form. The Sisters were not embarrassed to awaken the awareness in themselves: We belong to one another, and together we belong to the head of the Family. This was later called the “Act of a Child”. So leave behind the dungeon of individualism! I don't want to experience this all on my own; as a community we all have to experience it with the head of the Family. These things are far more far-reaching than the words convey. So whoever is taken into the Mariengarten must naturally strive in such a way that the individual courses, the sections of the Movement, also grow to these heights. They have to be united with it and assimilated into it.

Does this give you an answer to the question as to how to describe the covenant of love? Notice that you have here the heart and centre of the new community before you, that is, this very deep sense of responsibility for one another and for the head of the Family? It is a sense of responsibility that urges and drives us on to actions – actions of sisterly love, actions of self-discipline. It is an Inscriptio covenant in every respect.

[3. Deepening]

If I may now deepen the thoughts a little, you will have to allow me to pause and reflect on the concept “Mariengarten”. Two thoughts! On the one hand, let me tell you that the Blessed Mother herself is a garden, and secondly, from here bright light is shed on the symbol of the Mariengarten. It is a light we have often captured in these days.

3.1 The Blessed Mother herself is a garden. St Evodius once called her “the Garden of Delight for God and man”.²¹⁶ Let me arrange the material for those who want to fall in love with these thoughts.

3.1.1 The Blessed Mother is God's Garden of Delight.

You need to start with the thought that it has been a general custom in world history that when the great came to power – the nobles, the kings, the leaders – they built great buildings and palaces, but also gardens of delight in which they could walk up and down. God did the same! We are even told in the Old Testament

²¹⁵ Garden Enclosed.

²¹⁶ Cf. Ludwig Gemminger, *Der Marienprediger*, Regensburg 1863, 253.

that at midday he walked up and down in Paradise.²¹⁷ We are told that Solomon, for example, erected great buildings once he had come to power, but he also laid out a garden of delight. Then we are told which flowers grew in this garden.²¹⁸

So we call the Blessed Mother a garden, God's Garden of Delight. The Song of Songs applies the same idea to the soul. The bridegroom calls out, "My sister, my bride, come into my garden!" And the bride calls out that he, the bridegroom, should come into his garden.²¹⁹

Can you understand what is meant when we say the Blessed Mother is God's garden? We have to admit that the living God laid out three gardens. The first is creation as a whole. It is a garden, God's garden. Secondly, the Sacred Scriptures are called God's garden; and thirdly, there was Paradise. Of course, they are also God's garden of delight, because they are works through which the living God has glorified himself, and God has to find pleasure in his creation. But if we look at it more closely, they are mainly gardens of delight in which human beings can take pleasure.

God's garden of delight, in the truest sense of the word – as we are told in the Bible – is the Blessed Mother. "My sister, my bride, you are a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed."²²⁰

With St Bernard the whole of mysticism finds a voice. If someone knows how to take up such images, the whole heart is engaged. St Bernard knew how to interpret the image as though God, our Lord, was saying to the Blessed Mother: You alone are my bride, you alone the garden in which I find my joy. I created the whole world for human beings, but you are the chosen work of my power, kindness and wisdom. You are mine, I find my joy in you; you are my garden of delight.²²¹

If you want to know why the Blessed Mother is God's garden of Delight to such an extraordinary degree, you will have to open the Scriptures again. There you will read how the Holy Spirit spoke through Elizabeth, "You are blessed among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus!"²²² What does that imply? Why is the Blessed Mother simply the garden of delight for God? Because this garden brought forth God. That is the line of thought that returns to the great ideas we have discussed. We may rejoice with all our hearts in the content of the symbols, but not remain on the surface. It doesn't matter where I start, I must always draw out the ultimate meaning. Why is the Blessed Mother God's Garden of Delight in the actual sense of the word? Because she is the garden that gave birth to Christ. "And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus."²²³

3.1.2 Now we are also told, "a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed!" What does that imply? We have said that the Blessed Mother is not just God's garden of delight, she is also our garden.

We are told that a Roman patrician of old laid out a wonderful garden and then had those words written over the entrance, "Only for me and my friends!"²²⁴ That gives you the transition.

The Blessed Mother is God's garden of delight, but she is not just there for God; she is there for all who give themselves to her, for all whom she has taken into her heart. She wants to be a garden of delight for them as well. What does that mean? She wants to present them to God and mediate the ability to become a garden of delights for God, a Mariengarten.

3.2 With that we have touched upon the second thought. What do the words "Mariengarten" mean? It is a garden of little Marys who bear Christ, who give birth to Christ, and who in and with Christ constantly

²¹⁷ Cf. Gen 3,8.

²¹⁸ Cf. Eccl 2,5.

²¹⁹ Cf. Cant 2ff.

²²⁰ Cant 4, 12.

²²¹ Cf. Gemminger, 254.

²²² Lk 1,42.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Cf. Gemminger, 256.

centre on the Father. There you have the whole metaphysical reality, there you have all the great ideas placed into an image: a garden in which little Marys flourish, but these little Marys, as we have just got to know them, bear Christ, give birth to Christ, and in and with Christ centre constantly on the Father.

Now we would have to make each word the subject of a course, so that the whole world can be saturated with value, in the same way as our ideals. If you have an ideal, it has to be filled with value.

What is particularly important for us here? Two thoughts.

3.2.1 The little Mary has to be connected with Christ. The great reality we have discussed together in these days has been the dynamism in the heart of the Blessed Mother, which flows powerfully towards Christ. The little Mary must also possess this quality. If she doesn't, if she only turns her face towards people, she is not the Mary who gave birth to Christ and bears Christ.

3.2.2 Secondly, we may not think that we have absorbed Christianity in its fullness if we do not go with Christ and in Christ to the Father. We have to centre on the Father. The Father is the ultimate. In Schoenstatt we have been given the great task, the great mission – among many others – to save the Father. What is attacked by the times has to be emphasized in a special way!