



31. Mary's Personal Character and Position in the Plan of Salvation

The most obvious difference between God's covenant in the Old and New Testament, and our Schoenstatt covenant of love, probably consists in the fact that the latter is explicitly entered into with the Blessed Mother.

As our founder often emphasised, the specific character of our covenant is its Marian modality, which is not an expression of the simple spirituality of ordinary believers, nor is it sentimental love for Mary; it is based on two objective, dogmatic reasons.

Firstly, Fr Kentenich understood the special initiative of the Blessed Mother in Schoenstatt against the background of our times, which are above all searching for the correct image of the human person. So the question is how people relate to God and what role they have to play in the event of salvation. God has answered these questions in the Blessed Mother.

Secondly, the Marian character of our covenant of love is based on the official position and role of the Blessed Mother in the event of salvation. God himself has given the Blessed Mother a special position, and conferred upon her a special mission to be Christ's companion and associate. Following its founder, Schoenstatt understands itself as a Movement that has taken up this truth in a special way and translated it into life.

The text presented here is our founder's explanation of the "personal character" and special position of the Blessed Mother. It is taken from of the Retreat Course, "Der Marianische Priester – the Marian Priest" (1941), pp. 35-39 and 40-46

The first main part [of this retreat] requires three questions to be answered:

A. What is meant *in genere*⁸⁷ by such a primal idea?

⁸⁷ In principle, in general.

B. How can we describe this primal idea of the Blessed Mother *in concreto*?⁸⁸

C. What is the effect of this primal idea? [Not discussed here]

A. What is meant *in genere* by such a primal idea?

This primal idea is synonymous with the personal ideal: *Idea exemplaris in mente divina praeexistens*.⁸⁹ You could speak instead of the “personal character”, which is a person’s characteristic quality. It differentiates this person from all other people, and offers us that element that is a key to an understanding of that person.

So the question is: What is the personal ideal of the Blessed Mother, what is her personal character?

Our theologians speak about the supernatural personal character of the Blessed Mother, and by it mean that the explanation of her personality is purely supernatural. I may also say of myself that my personal character is supernatural, because I have grown completely into the supernatural world. The explanation of my personality is not purely natural. However, as far as the Blessed Mother is concerned, the concept “supernatural personal character” has to be applied *per eminentiam*:⁹⁰ Her personality can only be explained in purely supernatural terms. In her the supernatural world is at work in such a way that Scheeben⁹¹ stated that she enters into the hypostatic⁹² order. We may at least say that she touches it. We envisage the God-Man, who as a divine Person took possession of and united to himself a human nature as a Person who is God and Man. There we have a world on its own that infinitely surpasses all other created beings. We envisage the Blessed Mother, who is so supernatural that she touches the hypostatic order with her whole being. This is what is meant when we talk about her supernatural personal character.

We may already draw a conclusion from this: This supernatural character can, therefore, never be merited under any circumstances. It is simply an act of *praedestinatio absoluta*.⁹³

B. How can we describe this mysterious, supernatural personal character of the Blessed Mother *in concreto*?

That is an important question, because we can only understand the personality of the Blessed Mother if we have clarity about her personal character, which explains the fundamental tendency of her whole being and life. Light will then fall from this personal character on the questions of Mariology that have not yet been resolved. Anyone who wants to promote Mariology will have to try to clarify her personal character.

⁸⁸ In practical terms.

⁸⁹ The exemplary idea, the model of a human being, that existed in God’s mind from all eternity.

⁹⁰ In an eminent sense, outstandingly.

⁹¹ Matthias Josef Scheeben (1835-1888), important Cologne theologian. Fr Kentenich repeatedly referred to his theological and Mariological teaching.

⁹² The Greek word means: Basis, substance, manifestation. In theology the concept “hypostatic union” is a technical term that denotes that human nature was essentially united with the divine Person, Christ, so that God appeared in it.

⁹³ An act of divine predestination.

The question is also important because, if I understand the personal character of the Blessed Mother, I can also understand people who live by looking at this personal character with faith, rather than through reflection.

However, it is also **a difficult task**, first of all because we cannot base ourselves on authoritative decisions of the Church in these matters, and also because the pointed emphasis of the question is something that has only arisen recently. In the past it was not possible to pose these questions with this reflected clarity because the dogma of the Immaculate Conception had not been defined. This highest privilege of the Blessed Mother had first to be clarified. From there it was possible to raise the question: What is the source of her greatness? The question is difficult, thirdly, also because it is so controversial.

Before we answer the question, let us summarise what theologians usually say about the personal character of the Blessed Mother. We will have to take a stand to the various answers by saying: The answer is correct, but it doesn't say everything and doesn't hit the nail on the head.

The first answer states that the words "*gratia plena*"⁹⁴ express the personal character of the Blessed Mother. They reflect the heart and centre of her personality, and hence also the whole of Mariology.

The formulation is Biblical. I can trace everything back to it and hear the whole of Mariology resounding in the *gratia plena*. However, I would have to describe and define the *gratia plena* correctly. So something will have to be added to this formulation if it is to get to the core of the matter. It is possible to read everything out of the *gratia plena* on its own, but not with academic certainty, and it will not be clearly defined.

A second answer: The statement *Mater Jesu* is often taken as the core of Mariology. There is no doubt that everything God intended for the Blessed Mother can resound in it, but the Protestants take it literally as it stands in the Bible, they only accept the *sensus obvius*.⁹⁵ She rendered the natural services of a mother to our Lord. However, this does not require her to be a virgin before, at and after the birth of our Lord.

Catholic thinking and feeling includes far more than is contained in the words *Mater Jesu*. When we call this to mind, we will understand the tasks faced by Catholic theologians. They have to express what has echoed and resonated from the beginning when Catholics speak of the Mother of Jesus. A whole world is included. In this context "Mother" means far more than if we were to speak, for example, of the mother of Pius X. Did the Mother of our Lord only render him the natural services of a mother, giving him all that she could, but then having nothing more to do with him and his task as Redeemer? Catholic thinking and feeling says more when it uses the words: Mother of Jesus. Duns Scotus and others tried to understand this fact, and he stated: It isn't adequate!⁹⁶ Catholic instinct acknowledges something imponderable: "God could well have created a greater world, but he could not have created a greater Mother", as St Bonaventure put it.

Using an image and expressing it in our way: We know a limited and a comprehensive form of our personal ideal. The limited form is correct, but it doesn't get to the heart of the matter in the same

⁹⁴ Full of grace.

⁹⁵ The obvious meaning. In this context it implies more the "superficial meaning".

⁹⁶ Latin: *non congruit, non decet* – It doesn't fit, it is not appropriate.

way as the comprehensive form does. The formulations of the personal character of the Blessed Mother mentioned so far are “limited”; they aren’t adequate to the subject, even if everything resonates in them for those who use them.

A third answer: The Blessed Mother is the second Eve. Without doubt it is a lovely idea. It is also polished and sharply defined academically. We won’t be able to bypass it if we want to express what is the essence of the Blessed Mother.

A fourth answer: Mary is the motherly Bride of God, or the bridal Mother of the Lord (Scheeben). This was the first attempt to express what the Catholic feeling about the Mother of Jesus really means. Recently they coined the expression: Divine Motherhood to reflect this.

Also these two formulations, the third and fourth answers, are inadequate, because we still have to ask what resonates in them.

So is it possible to discover the “comprehensive formulation”?

Let us attempt an answer. It is risky, but let us listen to it patiently.

The supernatural personal character of the Blessed Mother consists in her being **the uniquely worthy bride, and permanent companion and helpmate of Christ, the Head of the whole of creation, in his entire work of redemption**, and that we may invoke her as such.

In order to discuss this formulation somewhat, we could first of all compare it with the answers given above, and examine their relationship to one another. We could then test it out and ask: Where and in which words is the privilege of Virginité, the Motherhood of God, the Immaculate Conception, and sinlessness expressed in it? All these privileges are clearly contained in it. Of course, this formulation has been chosen to give greater emphasis to the unknown, the controversial elements in Mariology.

The Blessed Mother is the wonder of wonders, the mystery of mysteries, and she has been given to us in Schoenstatt as the “treasure in the field”. How blunted we have become with regard to the supernatural! So I want to shrink back, like St Bernard, when I begin to lift the veil from this mystery. But I would also like to ask the Blessed Mother: Please help me! I want to ask her to visit us as she visited Elizabeth! Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to describe the greatness of the Mother of God: “You are blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

We are trying to recognise God’s original idea of the Blessed Mother, and have described it in the definition I gave you.

In the meantime the question may have arisen: Isn’t something essential in the formulation missing: the Motherhood of God?

This is **one** form, **one** effect, although the preeminent one, of being Christ’s unique, bridal companion and helpmate. The Blessed Mother performed the most perfect act of co-operation in the work of redemption at the incarnation. That is why we can understand why Scheeben remained with the expression: the bridal Mother of God or the motherly Bride of God.

We would also like to move between these two concepts: Bride and Mother, when we try 1.⁹⁷ to depict the **personal character of the Blessed Mother ontologically**. We distinguished between the personal character ontologically and in action, and found that the ontological dimension of the personal character is best rendered in the expression: bridal teammate and associate of Christ. However, when we use the concepts Bride and Mother, we don't want to overlook that motherhood is only one function, although the most important one, in her co-operation. It is only on account of simplicity and easier understanding that I want to allow the discussion to centre on the two words: Bride and Mother.

First of all, let us take her bridal character as a starting point, and from there explain her motherhood. Then we will start with her motherhood and from there explain her bridal character. Behind this we have to feel the struggle to clarify the profound two-in-oneness between Christ and his Mother, between Mother and Child. This is also what we repeatedly have to read out of our MTA picture. Yet isn't it an insurmountable contradiction to be God's Mother and Bride at the same time? This is what we will now have to explain.

a) **The Blessed Mother as Bride**

We are taking her bridal character as our starting point, because this is most clearly expressed in our definition.

How many types of bridal relationship are there? There are four. We will clarify, evaluate and apply each point to the Blessed Mother.

First form of bridal relationship: bride in the widest sense.

a) **Clarification:** This type of bridal relationship is suited to human nature as such. It includes the unbaptised and those who are in the state of serious sin. It is a favourite idea of the Church Fathers: that the *Verbum Divinum*⁹⁸ descended into the bridal chamber of the Blessed Mother and there took to himself our human nature. He did so to express that he wanted to take the whole of human nature to himself. The whole of humanity was to celebrate its marriage with the Son. It follows that human nature as a whole can be called the bride of Christ.

b) **Evaluation:** If we want to understand the mystery to some extent, we have to base ourselves on two statements: *Bonum est diffusivum sui. Deus quaerit condiligentes se.*⁹⁹

Why did the Second Person in the Godhead want to take human nature to himself? Why did God's Son want to become Man? Only in order to be a human being? No, it was because of the Triune God's unconquerable will to give himself. If we may put it this way, his desire to give himself caused the Triune God's ocean of love to break its banks and flow into creation. So, to remain with our human way of speaking, a divine Person had to break through the framework, taking our human nature to himself, so that he could be an immeasurable, inexhaustible vessel of divine love. We should pause here and meditate on what has been said. Notice how those two statements now resonate when we repeat them: *Bonum est diffusivum sui. Deus quaerit condiligentes se.* God

⁹⁷ The second point, which dealt with the personal character of the Blessed Mother in her activity, has not been included in this selection.

⁹⁸ The Divine Word.

⁹⁹ Goodness pours itself out, it spreads itself. – God looks for those who love him and love with him.

searches, God creates beings for himself whom he can love, and who with him love what he loves and how he loves. This divine current of love may not come to a halt with the human nature of the God-Man; it has to be continued through drawing all human nature into this alliance.

c) **Application to the Blessed Mother:** According to the Church Fathers she represented the whole human race at the Annunciation. The Son wanted to celebrate his nuptials with human nature. So he preceded it with bridal wooing for its 'Yes'. That is why God's messenger appeared as an ambassador. He wooed the Virgin to obtain her 'Yes', and at this point she represented human nature and human society as a whole. If every human nature is by disposition and destiny the Bride of Christ, it means that the Blessed Mother is the uniquely worthy Bride.

Second type of bridal relationship: bride in a wider sense.

a) **Clarification:** In the light of faith, all souls in the state of grace are called brides of Christ, and that is what they are. We maintain that it is the opinion of the Sacred Scriptures and the Liturgy that each graced soul is the bride of almighty God. "*Despondi enim vos uni viro virginem castam exhibere Christo*".¹⁰⁰ In this sense the Church is called bride *per eminentiam*.

b) **Evaluation:** Whoever suffers deeply under the de-valuation of the individual and the personality today, should repeatedly recall this great truth: that we are brides of God ontologically, and are justly given this title.

c) **Application to the Blessed Mother:** If every graced soul is God's bride, how much more the Blessed Mother, who is full of grace. If the Church is the bride of Christ, how much more the Blessed Mother, who is the prototype of the Church and its most eminent member. In addition, it has been the opinion of theologians down through the centuries that the Blessed Mother is prefigured in Eve; so Mary has also to be the Bride of Christ, just as Eve was the bride of Adam.

The Blessed Mother, the blessed among women, is not simply the most graced, but also the uniquely graced human being. Already at her conception she was graced as is no other created being or angel. Her state of grace grew at the Annunciation, so that many are of the opinion that at least from that moment on she was more graced than all angels and saints together. So Catholics believe that she is a world on its own, a globe on its own, a star system all on its own.

Third type of bridal relationship: in the narrowest sense.

a) **Clarification:** In the narrowest sense of the word, only the human nature of the God-Man can be called Bride: The human seed, which the *Verbum Divinum* freely chose for himself in the womb of the Blessed Mother, and united to his divine Person. That is a bridal relationship the like of which cannot be envisaged.

b) **Evaluation:** Here we will have to collate all that the Church Fathers have told us about the *Et Verbum caro factum est*.¹⁰¹ With what elemental force God intervened in creation! What a tremendously great retrieval of human nature's honour, elevation in value, elevation into the rank of the nobility, took place through this union! Whoever wants to work out a Christian anthropology will have to dwell on this at great length; they will have to pause here prayerfully, meditatively. I have been honoured! Each human being has been honoured, including woman's nature.

¹⁰⁰ "I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor 11,2).

¹⁰¹ Jn 1,14: And the Word became flesh.

c) **Application to the Blessed Mother:** *A unio hypostatica* – the Blessed Mother would never have been able to enter into such a profound marriage with a divine Person.

Fourth type of bridal relationship: in the narrow sense of the word.

What has been said until now gives rise to no difficulties. Of course, even in this light the Blessed Mother already stands far above us. Yet she is still ontologically on the same level as us, even if she is far above us. Has she not been elevated ontologically above us as well?

a) First statement: The Blessed Mother became God's Bride in a unique way at the moment of her conception, and this took place so profoundly that we are justified in speaking of a *Connubium Divinum*.¹⁰² Please note: At the moment of her conception, not of the conception of our Lord. At that time already, in her Immaculate Conception, she became the Bride of the Eternal Word.

b) Three proofs: The first proof reaches back to the Blessed Mother as the great and worthy opponent of Eve. The two sources of Mariology are the dignity of Eve and the dignity of the new head of humanity, Christ. When we look at Genesis we find that Eve was not envisaged as an individual, but as the helpmate of Adam. "It is not good that man should be alone. Let us make him a helpmate like himself."¹⁰³ Eve is always seen in two-in-oneness with Adam. That is how she is seen in God's plan of creation. She did not exist for a second without him. At the moment of her creation she became Adam's wife, they formed a human couple. She was led to the marriage altar at the moment she was formed from Adam's rib. That is why Adam said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."¹⁰⁴

The text continues, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."¹⁰⁵ This is the wonderful two-in-oneness envisaged by God from all eternity.

Let us apply these thoughts courageously to the second Eve. The application is no longer so daring now that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception has been proclaimed. So this is how we see the Blessed Mother: From all eternity she was drawn into the decision that brought about the incarnation of the Son of God. From the beginning Mary was envisaged and created as the Associate and Helpmate of Christ. From the first moment of her conception she was united as Bride to the Eternal Word, just as Eve was the helpmate and bride of Adam.

To deepen these thoughts we connect our argument to the thoughts of the Church Fathers. To start with theirs was still a *sensus accomodativus*.¹⁰⁶ Since 1854,¹⁰⁷ however, it is more than that. Since then the Church teaches that Eve is a type of Mary.

¹⁰² Marital union with God.

¹⁰³ Gen. 2,18.

¹⁰⁴ Gen 2,23.

¹⁰⁵ Gen 2,24.

¹⁰⁶ In the interpretation of the Bible, in particular the Old Testament, exegetes distinguish between a number of interpretations: the literal sense (*sensus literalis*), the allegorical, the typological and the anagogical interpretation of Scripture. The *sensus accomodativus* (accommodation) is based on the attempt to create a correspondence between the Old and New Testaments. It corresponds with the allegorical and typological interpretations.

¹⁰⁷ The year when the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception was proclaimed.

What we now add is, however, only a *sensus accomodativus*: Eve was formed from the rib of the sleeping Adam. How was the Blessed Mother formed? By the Holy Spirit. She is called the *Costa Spiritus Sanctus*.¹⁰⁸ Eve was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam. Who merited the grace that drew the Blessed Mother into such a marriage right at the beginning of her life? The Blessed Mother is a fruit of the redemptive death of the “sleeping Adam on the Cross”.

The second proof is based on the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. From the first moment of her conception the Blessed Mother was in the state of grace, that is, from the first moment of her conception the *Verbum Divinum* united her to himself as his Bride; he withdrew her totally from earthly use and united her most wonderfully and profoundly to himself. It was a *matrimonium ratum*,¹⁰⁹ a marriage between the Blessed Mother and the Godhead.

The third proof is more the proof of appropriateness. Don't we take it for granted that God had to see to it that the God-Man came into the world in an honourable way? This would not have been the case unless it was preceded by a true *Connubium*, a marriage. This could not have taken place at any other moment than the moment of the Immaculate Conception. That is when a divine, uniquely profound marriage took place.

All this is orientated to the motherhood of Mary. *Virtualiter*¹¹⁰ together with the grace of marriage she was given the grace of motherhood.

Metaphysically, what is primary: the Immaculate Conception or the grace of espousal and motherhood? The grace of espousal and motherhood for the sake of which she was given the grace of Immaculate Conception.

The *Matrimonium ratum* became a *matrimonium consummatum*¹¹¹ at the Annunciation. At the moment the *Verbum incarnatum*¹¹² was conceived, the Blessed Mother, by her own free choice and volition, offered the maternal human seed, and the *Verbum Divinum* descended, and entered into this seed. From whom, then, did God's Son get this motherly seed? From Mary, from the maternal womb of the Blessed Mother. So it is here that the consummation of the marriage was celebrated. The *Verbum Divinum* and the Blessed Mother begot the God-Man together. How deeply must not the human person, who by free choice and volition offered the maternal seed with which the *Verbum Divinum* united itself, be united with this *Verbum Divinum*!

A play on words: And the Word became Flesh. It is true to say that at the same moment the Bride of God became the Mother of God.

On other occasions when a child is conceived, the embryo is implanted into the maternal womb. Here, at the same moment [of conception] it is implanted and united with the *Verbum Divinum* in a wonderfully profound way. Hence, the Blessed Mother is, firstly, the Bridal Chamber, *thalamus*.

¹⁰⁸ Eve, figuratively speaking, was formed from the side (*costa*) of the sleeping Adam, so by analogy Mary was formed from the side of the Holy Spirit. The connection between the side of the sleeping Adam and the pierced side of the dying Saviour is an image often used by the Church Fathers.

¹⁰⁹ Marriage.

¹¹⁰ *virtualiter*: virtually or as a possibility.

¹¹¹ The marriage was consummated.

¹¹² The conception of the Word made Flesh.

With what a wonderfully full resonance those words now resound, “And blessed is the fruit of your womb.”¹¹³ “Blessed the womb that bore you!”¹¹⁴ The Blessed Mother is, secondly, the Bride-maid; she leads the maternal seed to the Bridegroom.

How can we understand this close two-in-oneness, this union of the *Verbum Divinum* with the Blessed Mother? There is a *unio iuridica*, *unio quasi-physica*, *unio hypostatica*, as well as a *unio quasi-hypostatica*.¹¹⁵ a bridal relationship in the widest sense, in a broad, in a very narrow and in a narrow sense. The expression *unio quasi-hypostatica* is daring. It has to be explained, even if only because “quasi” does not say anything definite, it is a filling word. It implies: The union is as close as at all possible between a created being and the *Verbum Divinum*.

From this we can only begin to understand those words of St Bonaventure: God could have created a greater world, but not a greater Mother. Why? Because of this intimate union. It is simply so intimate that it is impossible to envisage it being more intimate. So if we normally reject optimism about creation (*Schöpfungsoptimismus*), we don’t reject this optimism.

Now we can also understand the image in the Book of Revelation better: The Woman clothed with the Sun. We may think of her maternal womb. The Blessed Mother appears before us as the unparalleled reflection of almighty God and the God-Man. How profoundly they are united.

At the moment when the Blessed Mother entered into a *matrimonium consummatum* with the *Verbum Divinum*, she at the same time celebrated her marriage with the *Verbum Divinum incarnatum*. Can you now understand how the miracle became a reality, so that she could be both the Mother of God and Bride of God simultaneously? We should think this through on our own.

In conclusion we think again of the Blessed Mother’s visit to Elizabeth. At the moment the Blessed Mother greeted her, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she guessed the mystery. So we have to go to the Blessed Mother and pray to sense and learn to understand this a little. We will probably also be able to say: How is it that the Mother of my Lord comes to me? How is it that this mystery has been entrusted to us?

¹¹³ Lk 1,42.

¹¹⁴ Lk 11,27.

¹¹⁵ A legal, a quasi-physical, a hypostatic and a quasi-hypostatic union.