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Excerpts from

May Letter 1948 **= Letter from Nueva Helvetia (1948)**

translated by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, 2006/2008/2010/2011

Letter from Nueva Helvetia, May 6, 1948
= *Maibrief 1948*

parts with page numbers in braces { } = cited in J. Kentenich, *Christliche Zukunftsvision* (ed. H. Schlosser), Vallendar-Schoenstatt 1998

other parts [] as cited in J. Kentenich, *Sie kam - Sie sah - Sie siegte. Lehrbriefe 1948* (ed. H. Hug), Berg Sion 1997

further subtitles and paragraph breaks added

Nueva Helvecia, May 6, 1948

[47] On May 20 our Sisters' family will be officially erected as a secular institute of diocesan right, so that – God willing – it soon become an institute of pontifical right.

That paves the way which the other institutes will sooner or later also go. Indeed, thus far it has always been the case that what the Sisters tested in their circle and acquired as proven possession soon became, with adaptations, the common possession of the entire Family. We therefore all follow with fervent interest our further interior and exterior development, the expansion and completion of our Constitutions and customs, as well as the unfolding of our life and fruitfulness in the mirror of the times and of the proven ecclesial communities that predate us.

So it is that this day grows in significance, a day which already has great importance in the annals of our Family history. The Tri-duum that will precede and follow it, that wants to help us understand and appreciate its meaning, will put it in the right light and give it a worthy setting. It will enkindle our souls to sentiments of heartfelt gratitude, unshakeable trust, and an insurmountable spirit of victory.

May it become for future generations what it already is for us:

**a glorious victory,
an encouraging confirmation and
a serious obligation.**

Part I **May 20, 1948 as a Day of Victory**

(Section 1: Looking Back on January 20, 1942)

(1. Our history since January 1942 as march to victory of the MTA)

[48] Since January 1942, our Family history is like a radiant march to victory of the MTA, clearly and confidently announced in the Carmel letters and Dachau writings, made increasingly manifest

in the events of the Carmel and Dachau, then finding surprising continuation in the events of the time thereafter both at home and abroad, giving our great hopes for the future justification as long as we maintain, safeguard, and propagate the spirit of the past years.

What Caesar exaggeratingly wrote of himself, our MTA can say of herself with full justification: *Veni, vidi, vici* – I came, I saw, I conquered!

Today's happy event is an outstanding victory in this long chain.

(2: *Formal aspect of January 20, 1942*)

Said January stands at the *centerpoint* of a unit of life and a fullness of life that found a tangible conclusion in the Third Founding Document of October 18, 1944.

(...)

(3: *Content of January 20, 1942: Concrete Anticipation of the Future Vision of the Catholic Church*)

{4} Since 1942 and 1944 our original and concrete version of the great Catholic vision of the future has existed in our ranks with overwhelming and victorious vitality.

(*The development of our vision of the future has a long history, finds classical expression in Heavenwards*)

The Pre-founding Document already captured this with unambiguous clarity and light. All the ensuing periods reveal it with greater clarity, until the Dachau prayers¹ – the Third Founding Document in prayed form – fully reveals it in all its dimensions and breathes and awakens a happy spirit of victory.

Those who are unfamiliar with this vision and do not live in and out of it with loving self-surrender will be unable to do much or anything with these aphoristic prayers. The conscious choice of an image-free form and the intentionally bare, direct, and “gripped”

¹The prayers in *Heavenwards*.

vision of life runs counter to modern tastes and raises the objections of those who live in the past. These verses only speak from and to those whose view of things may have received its training by study of the past and present, but who simultaneously live in the future; they see their task to be the shaping of the approaching amorphous chaos into a new, Christian cosmos.

(*The vastness of the spiritual revolution today*)

{5} Only those who go through life with open eyes know how great this chaos already is today, how far the re-valuation of all values has progressed.

The spiritual revolution is already so universal and radical that hardly any sphere of life is left untouched. Modern technology brings people so close together that their interwovenness of fates exceeds that of any previous era of world history. Everything presses towards an unprecedented uniformity and mass-mindedness, placing on the same level, almost overnight, the customs and way of thinking, the outlook on and habits of the life of a native in a remote hut and the civilized man of leisure. We are rapidly approaching a one-world civilization and culture.

An entirely new image of world and man is being formed. The great question which gives no rest to all who know it and are in positions of responsibility is always the same: Will the image bear the imprint of satanic powers, or of the divine?

(*The collectivistic vision of future*)

Collectivism appears in the most widely varied forms and demands to be heard. It is poised to pounce on the entire world. Europe is already largely at its feet. In other parts of the world, in spite of every restriction and effort to rein it in, it struggles to break through to victory. *It, too, lives from a great vision of the future.* This is its secret, apparently constantly nourished by diabolical influence and satanic powers.

How often do we deal with it as if it were a system! But we miss the point. We point out its inconsistencies and it just smiles and goes

back to work, certain of victory. With its entire soul it holds fast to its all-encompassing image of world and society which it embraces with burning love and an admirable will to sacrifice; even when shown its errors, it remains unshaken. {6} It sees, promotes, and demands the sociological reform of world and humanity.

Under its influence, the problems of modern life – which through the rapid pace of intellectual and economic development produce fissures in the relationships

between person and society,

between person and economy,

between person and technology,

between person and social advancement –

crush together with an incredible violence and devastating density. Its vision rejects a personal God, deifying man instead.

Even so, this does not hinder us from discovering in it the features of divine revelation, despite its rejection of all Christianity...

(The counter-vision of Mary and Christian history)

Vision can only be overcome by vision. All other approaches will fail, and rational arguments will achieve least of all. The history of Christianity is proof of this, especially in its early years.

In the Magnificat, Our Lady expressed the great Christian vision of the future with the memorable words: ‘*Et exaltavit humiles...* – He exalts the lowly’ (Lk 1,52).

The Apocalypse returns this theme in its own way, rounding it out in brilliant images.

Consciously or unconsciously this vision lives on, even though distorted and as a tiny, insignificant ray, in the collectivistic concept of the world and humanity. Every form of collective ideology aims at giving the dispossessed, the fourth class, a place in the sun, and letting them benefit from the unexpected modern advances in business and technology. Just as the moon is most rapidly removed from view by the rising sun, so the collectivistic ideal, with its meager content of truth, is overcome when we allow the sun {7} of the Christian vision of the future to be seen in all its beauty and glory, as

it is depicted for us in Sacred Scripture.

The Christian West owes its *shape and form*, and hence its happiness and advancement in every sphere, to this vision of the future.

(Today’s task in view of the Christian vision of the future)

What is now needed is to free [this vision] from its *time-bound forms* and to *comprehend its essential elements*, to *proclaim* it fervently, and to give room for *a creative development of its dynamic life* in these *new conditions*. We may often be discouraged when we see how collectivism, with its thin and narrow ray of light, exerts an irresistible ability to shape hearts and determine world history, while we who call our own the full, radiant light of the sun, stand disheartened and helpless before the problems of our times, almost only capable of looking backwards, lacking the nerve to look forward, or only doing so with a heavy pessimism.

(Schoenstatt’s vision of the future)

From the beginning, Schoenstatt has meticulously tried to make its own the entire Christian vision of the future, and through its “secret”² to clothe it in an original and effective form.

{8} It, like collectivism, but with a different interior and exterior structure that sets it in opposition to it, wants to be viewed as

(a) a *universal vision* which embraces time and eternity; this world and the next; the economic, social, political, moral and religious needs of all people, including the marginalized, the masses of the millions.

(b) On the basis of the spirit of faith, especially a practical faith in Divine Providence, it lays claim to an *acquired vision*, therefore making no claim to any extraordinary infused light or – as in the case of Don Bosco – divine dreams.

(c) Like the Church herself, whose member it is and for whom it seeks to prosper, it has a pronounced *messianic character*, that is,

² The covenant of love with Mary.

a desire to help redeem the world, not only from earthly troubles, but also from sin and alienation from God, by trying to resolve in a new way the relationship between personality and community, personality and economy, personality and technology, personality and social mobility through the most basic principles of Christianity in the school of the MTA.

(d) It proceeds with a great, *mysterious spirit of victory* into the new times:

- not supported as collectivism is by convictions built on {9} materialism and the conditions of historical development wherein the displacement of the old order by a new paradise is an absolute law of nature,

- but by the inbreak of the divine, such as we have perceived in the light of Divine Providence countless times in the Family since 1914, and could experience since January 1942 and the ensuing Third Founding Document in unexpected fullness.

(This vision of the future is found in Heavenwards)

Those who have lived their way into the spirit of *Heavenwards* will easily recognize on all its pages *the basic features of this universal, acquired, messianic and mysteriously victorious vision of the future.*

The concept of God and man, the concept of history, society and the Church as it is outlined there, all of it points expressly to this vision, offers ample material for meditation and study, and can provide effective schooling for the mind, will, and heart of a person who wants to keep a clear head and sure hand in chaotic conditions.

It is easy to find the same basic characteristics in the Holy Sacrifice – particularly {10} in the “Mass of God’s Instruments” – and day after day to fall more deeply in love with this vision and allow it to take shape and form in everyday life.

(The literary options of Heavenwards)

The battle over the literary style of these prayers may be fought honestly and openly, without suggestion or anxiety, in the forum of

public opinion, but it must not distract us from essentials, nor diminish our forward thrust, nor weaken our united front. On the contrary, according to the plan of Divine Providence it should re-awaken us all, particularly the foot-draggers who, culpably or not, have failed to assimilate the lifestream of the past years. It should give us a deep insight into the divine plans for the world, fill us with warmth and readiness to surrender and sacrifice everything for the renewed ordering of the world and society along Christian lines, and inspire us with invincible optimism.

(....)

(Section 2: Erection of the Sisters of Mary as an Institute of Diocesan Right – Victorious Consequence of January 20, 1942)

(....)

(1. I will not present in detail the long string of victories since January 1942)

(....)

(2. I will only present our erection as an institute of diocesan right as a victory in the context of our vision of the future)

(....)

[67] Before his last trip to Rome [in 1946] I visited Cardinal von Galen³ of such fond memory. Among other things, the conversation revolved around the juridical footing of our Sisters. My comment that a [canonical] basis would first have to be created and that founding and directing [such a community without it] was a great act

³ Clemens August Graf von Galen (1878-1946), bishop of Münster from 1933, raised to Cardinal shortly before his death in 1946.

of daring, he called out with emotion:

“Yes, you have truly dared terribly much in your life!”

It is true.

The founding, direction, and expansion of the entire movement was daring.

The constant illegal activity at the risk of death in Koblenz and Dachau was daring.

January 20, 1942 was especially daring.

The publication of *Heavenwards* and printing such a large number of copies was daring.

The symbolic interpretation of personal events was daring.

[68] The separation from the family in Europe in times when important decisions had to be made was daring.

The current world travels in order to establish the International in foreign parts of the world is daring.

Sending out young, inexperienced people to foreign countries where they had to fend for themselves in the most difficult years of the war was daring.

Even greater daring may await us in the future.

We approach them not without some training. Whether and to what extent everything will still succeed for us?

(Provida Mater Ecclesia)

One thing at least has succeeded. Today’s celebration tells the story.

The Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* of February 2, 1947 provided us with the juridical framework we needed. Even more! As Fr. Weber and Fr. Menningen have shown, we influenced the content of this Constitution which the Roman press widely praises as a work for the ages. We did so through our entire ontological structure, through the way we proved our mettle in most difficult situations, as was acknowledged and made known to the Holy See by many, mostly foreign bishops.

In this, the words of the “Shadow of the Shrine” found surprising realization. Today the Church officially recognizes us as a secular

institute.

[69] The words from the mouth of our MTA ring brightly in our ears and hearts: *Veni, vidi, vici!* I came, I saw, I conquered.

How many mountains of difficulties had to be overcome, how many battles fought until this glorious victory could be won. From now on we stand on the firm ground of canon law, enjoy the Church’s protection, rejoice in her blessing and can employ our best forces to expand our work without fear that our existence or effectivity will be threatened or hampered by the Church.

We spontaneously fold our hands and pray with all our hearts:

For everything, yes for everything, let me give heartfelt thanks, clinging to you, Mother, with tender love.

What would have become of us without you and without your motherly care!

Because you delivered us from great need and bound us to yourself in faithful love, I will give you thanks, be grateful forevermore and dedicate myself to you with undivided love⁴.

(We owe thanks)

We owe thanks, first of all, to our Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt and to the Triune God. But also to the Most Reverend Archbishop of Trier and to Vicar General von Meurers, without whose active support we would not be able to celebrate this day. (....)

[70] Our thanks shall be to try to fulfill to the best of our ability the hopes and expectations of the MTA and the Church.

(Our image of the human person and community)

That should be all the easier because the victory of May 20 also bestows official legitimacy on the new image of man and community

⁴ *Heavenwards*, p. 146.

which we believe to be one of the reasons we were called into being.

Both images are already clearly recognizable in the Pre-Founding Document and have since served as the guiding idea and driving force of all the lifestreams and institutions of the entire Family.

Expressions have changed, but the content has always remained the same. It is a thing of charming beauty, and gives us courage and enthusiasm to take the history of our Family and spirituality and show its connection [71] to the times we live in, something which the current generation does not know in its full clarity and force or of which it is too little aware.

I cannot go into the details here. Perhaps the October Week will be the right time.

For today it will have to suffice to remind ourselves that it has always been about the person

who without many and strong obligatory external bonds and without an all-encompassing secure external protection through indissoluble bonds to the ideal, masters life and unites in community out of a deep, interior sense of responsibility for those around him.

(....)

Part II **May 20, 1948 as a Confirmation**

[77] At the same time this victory also means for us a confirmation of the sources of knowledge and life which have given us light and strength. It is an encouragement to us to continue to use these sources without reservation.

(1. Confirmation of our source of knowledge)

The source of knowledge, the light which brightly penetrates all darkness is *the simple, supernatural faith that especially takes the*

form of practical faith in Divine Providence.

This is a source which we have carefully utilized and kept pure, and jealously and vigilantly protected with austere consistency, preserving it from every taint of false mysticism.

We constantly looked, clear-eyed and willingly, to the God of life and of history and let ourselves be led by him in childlike spirit. Hence, the reproach does not apply to us, that we understand the signs of the heavens, but cannot interpret the signs of the times.

Like St. Paul we let ourselves be guided in all situations by the law of the open door, that is, we tried to discern from each situation, from all that God sent and permitted, his divine will, and to vigorously fulfill or endure it. We carefully tried to recognize the great plan of love, wisdom, and omnipotence of the Eternal God in all detail, and to courageously make it the plan for our life and actions. We tried to attentively read the schedule which he had set for each day from all eternity, and to act and let ourselves be treated accordingly. It was not always easy. It often demanded of us daring for the mind and will, even at peril of having to proceed immediately to the next door, often without knowing the direction which the path would take us.

(Heroism of faith is an essential part of the new man)

It is not for nothing that we educated ourselves in the past years to a heroism of faith. After all, it forms an essential part of the new man. The Carmel and Dachau letters are untiring in searching and discovering God's plans in this regard.

Because in the long run our task will be to educate coming generations in making these attitudes their own, it is recommended that we take these writings and let them give us an orientation.

What the fourth verse of the Hymn of Thanksgiving sings –

Whatever was too earthbound in our thinking
and too human in our giving of self
God desired to direct upwards

and anchor entirely in himself⁵ –

is something which the letters interpret as the decided will of God, who wants to educate us through bitter blows of fate into heroes of the three divine virtues.

(...)

(Covenant way)

This unadorned and vigorous faith in Divine Providence makes it easy for us to recognize and acknowledge the unique covenant of love of the Blessed Mother with Schoenstatt as it finds expression in the First Founding Document. God's activity in the history of our Family, and of the history of the times, revealed to us without particular difficulty the intent of Our Lady,

- (a) to come to dwell in Schoenstatt by virtue of this covenant,
- (b) from there to introduce into the whole world a profound and far-reaching movement of renewal and education to rescue the Christian personality and social order,
- (c) to use us as instruments toward this end.

But at the same time it showed us the mutual obligation of the covenant partners to a faithful and enlightened cooperation so as to resolve this threefold task.

The same light of practical faith in Divine Providence gave us the timely signal for the Second and Third Founding Documents, and indeed to do all things great and small which we have been allowed to do in the course of the years.

(...)

Part III **May 20, 1948 as an Obligation**

⁵ *Heavenwards*, p. 164.

[86] Nor does this exhaust today's significance. Our celebration would be missing an essential element if we were not aware of the grave obligation which this implies for us and for those to follow us.

Calm examination and careful verification see this obligation from two points of view – **juridical and pedagogical**.

(1. Our Obligation to the Legislation of the Church)

Through today's act we are implanted in the mother soil of the Church. In the future no one will be able to question the legitimacy of our unique way. This we know.

Even as we rejoice, however, we do not want to forget that the Church has not yet issued the more detailed guidelines for the secular institutes. She will do so through executive legislation expected any day. Those familiar with her wisdom know her custom of making careful use of past experience when formulating such juridical decrees, and likewise know that her glance is turned to the uncertain, wavering future which no longer wants to have anything to do with the past.

In this, her practice, she is aware that in this matter she moves on ground that is soft and full of pitfalls. She therefore first waits, with prudent circumspection, to hear [87] about extensive experiences in individual cases before coming forward with full certainty. This explains her reserve in approving individual institutes.

This is where our obligation begins.

(We gather experiences and offer them to the Church)

If the Church let influence in some way the content of the Constitution [*Provida Mater*], she has the right to expect a serious effort from us from now on to do everything in our power to make sure that nothing enters our constitutions which is foreign to its essence. She expects us to carry this great intention in prayer to God and Our Lady, to consult with experts, to communicate in extensive fashion our experiences to official bodies of the Church and give them a deep insight into the interactive forces which have found ex-

pression in our constitutions and customs and which are not easy to recognize at first glance, and without which we lack sufficient juridical basis to form the new man in the new community in purebred form and to lead it into the battle of our times.

(2. Our Pedagogical Obligations)

To this juridical effort must be joined a serious work of education. Indeed, the latter must take the first priority and be seen as the main task.

A law drafts the blueprint, while education carries it out and furnishes it and makes it habitable.

If one compares the family with a net, the legal [88] norms are the threads. They are without a doubt necessary, otherwise there would be no net. The openings, which form the greater part of the net, stand for education.

The “new man” is far more a task and matter of enlightened education than a formally legal matter.

(Education is where our Strength and Mission lies – only Future Generations will Understand This)

This is our special strength and mission according to God’s plan. After all, from the start we were a decisively modern movement of education which undauntedly took its orientation from the eternal stars and held fast to the immutable basic principles of Christianity. [This movement] always knew and knows about concrete forms, about the advantages and disadvantages of earlier educational systems and attempts, but at the same time also kept and keeps a sharp eye on the future, so that in its intention and action only coming generations will be able to properly understand and appreciate it.

(...)

(Reservations About the new Ideal)

[90] Not a few men of high responsibility only accept the Constitution [*Provida Mater*] with grave reservations. For them, weak

bonds lead to easy living. They fear a fatal slide into the abyss, where solid support will be lacking from the protection of a closer-knit community. They predict that the efforts to Christianize the world without strong bonds and without a secure support will end in a worldly and complacent Christianity. For them the traditional orders are not only the most valuable and proven options, but the only valid ones for the Church to permeate [the world] as leaven.

(We Take them Seriously)

Prophets of this type should be taken seriously. They will not be so easily silenced. Many experiences and observations appear to back them up. They have often had the chance to peer behind the scenes, and the lack of discipline, mediocrity, and superficiality that they found confirm their judgment.

(Special Dangers for the Pallottine Ideal)

A misgiving recently expressed by one of our Fathers went in this direction. I was leading a gathering of priests in Oudtshorn (South Africa). On that occasion I tried to explain the position of the [1947] General Chapter of the Pallottines on Schoenstatt and described the lifestreams within the [Pallottine] Society. One of the priests asked to speak. Pointing out that it had been bluntly proclaimed from Limburg that we were a community of secular priests, he said, “If we describe ourselves this way, [91] we must fear that all the young men who really want something will enter the orders and there will be no serious vocations left for us. We will then remain eternally unfruitful.”

(Answer on the Level of Life)

Whoever gathers such statements and others like them and lets this urge him to seriously investigate the complex of question involved, will easily conclude that we cannot just claim that our critics are mean-spirited, but that a truly serious question is in play. Indeed, it is about the life and death of our family.

It was always our ideal to build up a community capable of providing the Church valuable services in dangerous times, but with-

out imperiling in the least the spirit of the whole and the principles of true holiness. We could not have stretched out our hand for a lower ideal. All of those who come to us are penetrated by the same spirit. They have given our family their love and life-strength, not in order to live the good life, not to live a cozy, comfortable life while avoiding the dangers of the world, but in order to place in an original way their entire person with all their capabilities at the disposal of God and God's work.

Mediocrity and bourgeois living are hated by us in the soul. When compared with communities of the older kind, one generally comes to the conviction that in many things we are much stricter and place much more serious demands on ourselves than many others. This is how it always was and this is how it must remain in the future.

(The Standard of the Evangelical Counsels – Especially Obedience)

[92] Regardless, we must never fall behind them when it comes to the spirit and deeds of obedience, to the interior detachment from earthly things, and to the attitude of the Immaculata.

Obedience needs to be and must be more strongly cultivated than elsewhere. Even while giving it a family-like character, it should constantly characterize our family right to the top. In this not even the Jesuits should surpass us. Otherwise we cannot remain an *acies bene ordinata*⁶. We cannot maintain our unpretentious, joyful style without this profound seriousness of self-detachment animated by love. If I see things correctly, this spirit is the reason why Rome is so benevolent towards us and so soon takes the initiative to invite us to become a community of pontifical right.

(Exterior and Interior Attachments – Cultivation of Ideals)

The loose exterior bonds are for us the symbolic expression of an original and yet truly powerful type of person and community poured from a single mold.

The looser and weaker the attachment below is, the more firmly

⁶ A well-ordered battle division.

we must be attached to the ideal. Hence the entire community's broad cultivation of ideals. Hence the many financial expenses which we take upon ourselves for this point. If one compares our organizationally safeguarded means for cultivating the spirit, one will soon understand why we can hold our own with all other communities in this area, but leave most of them far behind. This is what an institute demands which is built up around a clearly perceived idea and [93] which has the courage to let this ideal determine its organization and constitutions, customs and spirit into every detail.

(Illustration)

Perhaps a simple analogy can help us to understand more deeply the difference between our unique type and that of the older orders. We let a boy go get his building blocks. We give him two tasks. The first time he should take a small block and assemble all the other blocks in such a way that they form a perfect "work of art." The second time we give him a large block. Now he should do the same thing. The first case symbolizes our community. The task is to construct a masterpiece in personality and community based on few obligations. The second case illustrates the usual type with its strict obligations and rules regarding a perfect community life.

Every analogy is limited. This one too. And yet, it makes a little more understandable what we want to say. In both cases the goal is the same work of art. Not in the one case half a work of art and in the second case a complete work. The only difference is the way in which the blocks must be assembled.

May 20 means for us the obligation to strive undauntedly for this totality with all the means at our disposal. The other institutes will support us in this with great zeal, each in its own way.

(The Church of the Future needs our Type)

[94] We are convinced that the Church of the coming times will need men and women of our type. The growing secularization of all areas of life and the growing interdependence of all nations and individuals, along with the attendant susceptibility to suggestion and

mass-mindedness, demands a stronger shift of striving to the formation of the inner personality core and its attachment to the ideal. Otherwise it will not be possible to stave off the mass-mindedness in the midst of such a mass [society].

(End)

(....)

We sense how great is Mary's victory when she allows her favorite work to flourish in the Church and world in spite of all human weakness. And it should be the pride and honor of us all, to be her willing instruments toward this end.

(....)

{39} The dark clouds on the horizon give us reason to fear a new storm. Will God first demand that we prove ourselves in a new time of storms? Either way we must prepare ourselves. And so: Sound the trumpets to gather the troops, and strive unceasingly and with organic onesidedness for the realisation of our old great ideals!

And if no new war leads the nations of the world to the slaughter? Even then the trumpet's sound is correct. The coming time is making people so dependent on each other that we will certainly become its victim unless we weld our front together into a single, impenetrable, {40} indomitable block. *Universalism includes the danger of nihilism already in normal times. How shall we overcome this malignant cancer, which is the same as the annihilation of every vigorous personality, in a era of unprecedented mass-mindedness?*

(....)

We pray and sacrifice that the Blessed Mother will always find instruments which she can use entirely as she wishes, so that at the end of the world she will be able to repeat triumphantly the words: *Veni, vidi, vici!*