

THE GARDEN OF MARY

From October Week 1950, p361 - 379

I would now like to introduce you to the original features of our covenant of love by means of

the Garden of Mary,
the 20th and 22nd January 1942,
and “Heavenwards”.

Also here I can only give you a very brief sketch.

First I must remove a feeling of defensiveness. When we talk about the Garden of Mary, it sounds so flowery in a time that was extremely harsh. Please do not forget that the concepts 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, also if they 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.

THE GARDEN OF MARY

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

1. 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.

a. 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 Koblenz¹ is the place of origin of the historical Garden of Mary. 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. She wanted 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

¹ Reference to the hospital of St. Joseph, which was staffed by the Sisters of Mary.

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,

Soon you will 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 father² 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 people will still talk about the "Miracle of the Holy Night".

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 tell you my name quickly: I am "Maria Providentia" 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!³

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

² Before Fr. Kentenich's imprisonment he never has been addressed as "father" in public. This is the first time it has been done thus bringing to the public awareness of the Sisters Community what has been developed over the years in private.

³ Adaptation of a popular children's carol

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 fulfill your wish when your heart and the heart of the whole Family has become a flourishing Garden of Mary. 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 chiseling and polishing. To comfort you I would like to tell you that there is always light and warmth in father's cell. And 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 Garden of Mary? 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 Garden of Mary: "When the heart of the whole Family has become a flourishing Garden of Mary", 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 was this extraordinary sense of responsibility between 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 won't believe how happy you made us all. And 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!"

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 mother 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. 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 chiseling 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 "Garden of Mary" right away, and "most faithful fulfillment 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 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 Garden of Mary carefully. I will come *soon*... And when I am satisfied with all the flower beds, 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 for this: 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.

b. The *second* period! Later, in 1945, when I had come home, the thought lived in our Garden of Mary: 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. 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 to be able to form as many people as possible into little Mary's wherever he is working.

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

By the way, the women's Institute of our Lady of Schoenstatt has united to form a 'hortus conclusus'. 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. Now let me give you a brief *interpretation* of the Garden of Mary.

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.

a. The *nature* of the covenant.

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 – between the superiors and members;

3' a covenant of love between the members;

4' a covenant of love between the Family and Vincent Pallotti.

b. Something about the *degree*:

- 1' a perfect covenant of love according to their attitude,
- 2' a perfect covenant of love in deed.

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. 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, but with transforming the attitude into action.

c. 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. This was later called the “Act of a child”. So leave behind the dungeon of individualism! I do not want to experience this all on my own; as a community we have to experience this with the head of the Family. These things are far more far-reaching than the words convey. So whoever is taken into the Garden of Mary must naturally strive so 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? 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. If I may now deepen the thoughts a little, you will have to allow me to pause with the concept “Garden of Mary”. 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 Garden of Mary. It is a light we have often caught up in these days.

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

aa. 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 for the great people – the nobles, the kings, the leaders – to build great

buildings and palaces when they come to power, 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 that he walked up and down in Paradise at midday. 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.

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.

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 more 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" (Cant 4, 12). Let me point out that 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, were 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.

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!" 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, but not remain on the surface. It doesn't matter where I start, I must always draw out the ultimate. 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."

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

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

The Blessed Mother is God's Garden of Delight, but she is not just there for God, but for all who give themselves to her, for all those 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 Garden of Mary.

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

aa. 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.

bb. 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. We have been given the great task, the great mission – among many others - in Schoenstatt to save the Father. What is attacked by the times has to be emphasized in a special way!

Another thought: the great battle about the reciprocal covenant of love began in 1935. How did it end? The covenant of love is recognized by public opinion today, indeed, the whole order of salvation is again seen under the heading of the covenant of love.

A second thought: Every jubilee year has been marked by the outbreak of new battles.

1935 – Silver Jubilee of my ordination to the priesthood - battles!

1950 – 40th anniversary of my ordination – new battles!

The battles of the past have been overcome, the present battles will be overcome, and later ones will also be overcome.

Centering in the Father – you may not overlook this – is so important also if we want to understand the Holy Spirit. Ordo essendi ... The objective order of being points to the Father as the ultimate goal of the order of salvation. So the father has also to be the first principle in the natural order; the mother is always a complementary, supported principle.

If you now want to explain God's guidance, you will be better able to understand the connection with the dogma of papal infallibility. God's glorification has to shine out more strongly, so the father of Christendom, the father as the image and likeness of the Eternal Father here on earth, has again to be seen more strongly.

When God's Spirit is at work, he never stops, he doesn't get stuck half way – there you will find a father current. As far as I know, there is nothing like it anywhere in the Church. Someone has drawn attention to it here or there. But everything cries out for motherliness today. Who has something to say about the father? Where is there a father current? So, always see the line of thought clearly! You may not think that in this battle we are dealing with insignificant details. It is the strategy of the Holy Spirit who is using us in every way to prepare the ground of the Church. We have to take this task, this mission, into account. So what is the Garden of Mary? It is a garden of little Marys who bear Christ, give birth to Christ, and in and with Christ constantly centre on the Father.

Do you now know what the covenant of love is? Can you understand it now?