

THE SHRINE AS THE PLACE OF THE COVENANT

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We are concerned [in what follows] not so much with some surprisingly new insight, but with creatively resting mind and heart in what is known, in central truths and emotions that have been proclaimed on countless occasions. We are concerned with the ***pious belief and conviction that the MTA has entered into an original covenant of love with Schoenstatt as a place and as a Family.***

[The fundamental conviction that the covenant of love is effective]

Once again take in drop by drop what you know so well that you can talk about it in your dreams. Take it in as though you were hearing it for the first time: **everything that has developed in Schoenstatt owes its origin to this covenant of love and our pious belief in it.** Nothing has come into existence there without it. This is true of everything without exception. It is true of the spiritual currents in Schoenstatt and its organisational forms; it is true of the elements of our inner and outer lifestyle and our tried and tested customs; it is true of our original spirituality in the form of Workaday Sanctity, the Instrument's Spirituality and our Covenant Spirituality; it is true, finally, of the individual establishments and projects – the buildings, working groups or fields of work. This touches upon a truth that lives and works in us almost like a Family dogma or secret, and which we will not allow anyone to undermine. It is eternally old and eternally new.

The soul will not tire of repeatedly occupying itself with this subject and savouring it to the full. This will happen in particular when outward circumstances point to it expressly, for instance, when we approach a consecration after coming to a serious decision, or before we accept a larger outward undertaking, or else when we are attacked, or are faced with extraordinary demands. No one will be able to understand Schoenstatt who does not know about this “dogma” or “secret”. Whoever wants to destroy us need only wound us fatally in this respect. Think of the saying of the Bishop of Limburg: “Whoever wants to destroy Schoenstatt need only remove its ‘secret’.”

[The covenant of love – root and foundation]

If you remove the roots of a tree, it will have to die sooner or later. No matter how mighty its trunk, or how many and varied its branches, [we know that it will be killed]. Both could be used as timber for valuable projects, but the tree will be dead and will remain dead. It will no longer grow to the heights or in breadth, nor will it bear fruit. In this connection think, if you like, of our organizational network if this source of life is taken from it.

A storm may blow away the roof of a high-rise building, it may shatter windows and threaten to throw down walls; the damage will be quite easy to repair. However, if the foundation collapses, the building cannot be saved, no matter how beautiful it may seem to be from outside.

What the root is to the tree, what the foundation is to the house, that is what this special covenant of love means to our Family. It can be found at the beginning, at the middle and it will be there at the end of our Family history. Everything that is true to Schoenstatt's spirit bears it inalienably and indelibly in its heart and on its forehead.

[The growing creativity of the covenant of love]

As you know, it worked with wonderful creativity and as a fervent longing from 18 October 1914 until 1919. From then onward it entered history as a growing force that urged us with irresistible power to the height and breadth, to the depth and extent, and knew no rest until it had embraced all groups and classes of people.

At first it worked like an inconspicuous “stream of grace”¹, but as time went by this developed to become a mighty river of grace that rushes powerfully through the country, transforming its banks into wonderful gardens and splendid buildings. Locks and dams of whatever form, or built by whatever agency, can halt the river for a time, it is true, but they cannot hold it back completely for any length of time. One day it will break through the retaining walls and pour with intensified force into the surrounding countryside.

[The history of the power of a little spring]

The picture of a little stream and a river, of locks and dams, reminds me of an event that took place some years ago in Bohemia. We are told that in Pribram in Bohemia they needed water for a silver mine. Since there wasn't enough close to Pribram, they built a huge reservoir high in the Brydy forest to collect the water from the mountains and channel it to the valley. The lake was bounded on three sides by the mountains, and it was only contained on one side by a dam that was a number of fathoms high and wide. The work cost a huge amount of money. The people until today have called it the Billion Lake. When they were building this huge dam, they came upon a tiny spring at one point. The danger of this spring was pointed out to the builders, but in the end they decided that such a tiny spring presented no danger, because of the pressure on it of such a mighty wall of earth. They buried the spring instead of channelling its waters. Years passed. The lake was always filled with water and no one remembered the spring any more. However, the hidden spring worked quietly under the weight of the earthen wall and never tired of trying to find a way to the light. One dreadful night it

¹ In the 1950s, in order to play down the importance of the covenant of love, Fr Schulte spoke of it as a “little stream of grace”. Fr Kentenich has taken this up.

managed to do so. The only thing was that it emerged into the light not on its own and not as a weak spring. Through its hidden work over many years it had undermined the dam, combined with the mighty waters of the lake, and surprised the completely unsuspecting people of Pribram with a powerful flood. The people tried to save themselves by climbing trees, and some paid for this catastrophe with their lives. This is what the people relate. ... So far the report.

[Application of this account to the covenant of love's spring of grace]

Every comparison is limited. It is all the more true of this account. I would like to differentiate between the similarities and differences. In the event reported above, there are plenty of differences. However, in both instances the similarities can be found in the spring. To start with, please see it – of course, with an eminently positive meaning and fruitfulness – as a symbol of Schoenstatt's first period, from 1914-1918. Unnoticed and without being widely known Schoenstatt, the place, lay on the highroad of life. Just as unnoticed and attracting even less attention, the spring of grace seeped through from the shrine, although – as people could see later on – it was already part of God's plan. Those in the know – and there were few of them – were aware of it. The broader public hardly noticed it. That did not even happen to any great extent in the College². The spring flowed further and further, it grew bigger and bigger, and combined with the river that had originated from Pallotti's life of sacrifice and work many decades before. Both flowed into the same riverbed, passing through lands and seas, bearing with it a great movement of renewal. In contrast to the spring in Bohemia, it became a source of great blessing and life for countless people, until it attracted the gaze of people all over the world. Now it may stand a historically significant test of its divine origin and mission, so that it may afterwards flow powerfully and without hindrance to countries everywhere.

You do not expect me to go through the individual stations of this significant development with you. You have experienced them personally and have the ability to describe them brilliantly. We are concerned with an endless interplay between the law of the open door and its creative resultants, which reached a climax on 20 January 1942 and its surrounding events. From there it took hold of far-flung groups, and – furnished with the divine seal of many and varied trials – was borne in Germany before the forum of ecclesiastical authority and outside Germany into the most distant places.

Allow me to say a brief word about the first source of the river of grace [i.e., our Schoenstatt covenant of love]. It could help to direct your own independent survey of the historical development that followed. Our believing gaze remains captured above all by the Founding Document of 18 October 1914. To be more precise, it is captured by the covenant of love that was entered into at that time

² This refers to the Pallottine Minor Seminary built on the slopes above the original shrine.

between heaven and earth, between our Blessed Lady and Schoenstatt as a place and a Family. Recall that all the consecrations, which have taken place in our ranks in the course of forty years, imply that people are being drawn into the covenant made at that time, or else they are its extension and repetition.

[The shrine – treasure, home and focal point]

So it is not by chance that the shrine with its covenant of love, with its river of grace and life, the “treasure in Schoenstatt’s peaceful meadow”, has become the protective home, the centre and focal point for Schoenstatt, the City of God³, which resembles the eternal city of Sion, in which love is triumphant, and truth and justice always reign. The Song of Home never tires of praising this joyful fact:

“This wonderland is known to me,
it is a sunny meadow lit by Tabor’s glory, where our Thrice Admirable Lady
is enthroned
amongst her favourite children,
and loyally rewards all their gifts of love
with the revelation of her glory
and endless, endless fruitfulness:
it is my homeland, my Schoenstatt land.⁴”

In the “Instrument’s Mass” we pray:

“Preserve until the end of time
what he gave us as his testament:
our Thrice Admirable Lady,
the treasure in Schoenstatt’s peaceful meadow.
As long as we protect her faithfully,
he will gather the best around us.⁵”

The Family remains unshakably convinced:

“When we look at our own strengths,
every hope and confidence disappears.
We reach out to you, Mother,
and ask for rich gifts of love.

In storms and dangers

³ A reference to Augustine’s “City of God”.

⁴ Refrain from the Home Song, Heavenwards, p. 158. (I have made a close prose translation of the verses, so the page references are to the German text. T)

⁵ Prayer after the Consecration, Heavenwards, p. 34.

you will remain faithful
to the covenant you made with us,
and onto which you have richly poured graces.

You will send us the vocations
who will pledge themselves for your kingdom,
you will send us work and rich blessings,
adding your omnipotence to our powerlessness.⁶

In every situation we thought about the covenant of love:

“They have made a covenant with you.
May it remain firm, as though forged from iron.
Then I know they will be safe in your faithful protection,
and will not fear the blind rage of the deluge of sin.

You will lead them all victoriously home to the Father,
so that they can sing songs to the Lamb.
I firmly believe that whoever is faithful to their covenant of love
will not be destroyed.⁷”

The petition never dies from our lips:

“Build from here a world
that will please the Father,
and that our Lord once prayed and pleaded for
with great longing.⁸”

[The groups of guardians around the shrine]

Since our shrine is so important – perhaps this is unprecedented – we are not surprised that, after the example of the “Chapel Act” of the Indivisa Course⁹, living chains of guardians have grouped themselves like unbreakable links around it as time went by. The first chain is formed by the elite communities, above all by the Adoration Sisters, with their central houses at the place of grace

⁶ From the Morning Prayer in Heavenwards, p. 15.

⁷ From the Prayer of the Shepherd in Heavenwards, p. 138f.

⁸ From the prayer “Keep the sceptre in your hand”, Heavenwards, p. 130.

⁹ After the Nazis had taken over the Minor Seminary at Schoenstatt, the danger was great that they would also take over the shrine. In response to this danger, the Indivisa Course of the Sisters of Mary formed a ring around the shrine on 31 May 1939 and offered to protect the shrine and the founder, who was praying in the shrine, with their own lives.

itself. The second chain is formed by all the individual associations together. The third is formed by the wreath of daughter shrines in Germany and other countries that are consciously oriented to the original shrine. They can be compared to watch towers protecting the King's castle, rendering it invincible and multiplying its effectiveness. The fourth chain is formed by the members of the Adoration Movement composed of special groups from all walks of life. The fifth and last is made up of all the families that have set up a Schoenstatt corner in their homes, and who hold it in high esteem.

In this way we are presented with a movement of renewal that has a stronghold, a "Tower of David", at its centre, and is surrounded by countless local castles (daughter shrines, wayside shrines and Schoenstatt corners), and people who are flying islands (from the elite sections and groups of the Movement). They surround it like a living and life-giving protection and base. All in their way have adapted to the fluid circumstances of the times and have spread through every country, in order to collect the willing instruments who have been called by the MTA, and form a united body of people – a *societas bene ordinata* – who are ready to fight and certain of victory.

“Do you know the land prepared to fight,
that is used to victory in every battle?
Where God espouses weak people
and chooses them to be his instruments;
where all trust heroically in him
and do not build on their own powers;
where they are prepared
to jubilantly give their life and blood out of love.¹⁰”

[The covenant of love as a petition and consecration]

If I may dwell upon the Founding Document for a moment, I will have to ask you to distinguish between two points of view. As you know, it can be seen as a petition and as a consecration. In both instances it clearly has the character of a covenant of love. According to the words of our Lord, every petition directed to God is a covenant. Consider for a moment our Lord's admonition, then it will become absolutely evident. Our Lord demanded: "Ask and you will receive, search and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you" (Mt 7,7; Lk 11,9). "The Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name" (Jn 14,13; 15,16). Even the outward form of these words has the character of a covenant. It is not at all difficult to read this in the text: *If you ask, if you search, if you knock, then I will hear your prayer, then I will let you find, then I will open to you.* It would be difficult to express the covenant character more clearly.

¹⁰ From the Home Song in Heavenwards, p. 161.

The same applies to the consecration to the Blessed Mother. It has always been seen by the Marian Sodality (Congregation) as a reciprocal covenant of love. In the Founding Document those words are placed in our Lady's mouth: Ego diligentes me diligo. First show me that you really love me. Then I will ... Once again and quite unmistakably we see the covenant character.

[The specific originality of our covenant of love]

However, the specific originality is determined by the content of the covenant. In order to understand it, or, it would be better to say, to grasp in detail how we arrived at it, we have to know its history. Here the old saying applies: If I know how it came into existence, I also know what it is.

The Founding Document drew its water from three sources. We owe all three to practical faith in Divine Providence, or the law of the open door, or, to be more precise, it is not difficult to recognise that all three clearly point to God's plan.

[The first source – the history of the Marian Sodality in the College]

The first source is the brief history of our Marian Sodality for the students. At the time it had existed for not quite two years. However, this source can only be understood and interpreted correctly if it is seen with faith in Divine Providence. Please read the Founding Document, then you will immediately know what is meant. It states: "Whoever knows the past of our Sodality will not find it difficult to believe that Divine Providence has something special in store for it." Please underline the two concepts: "Divine Providence" and "something special". From this you can conclude that God was the first to speak, not human beings. To put it another way, God stands as the God of life at the beginning of Schoenstatt's history, not human beings with their self-centred hopes, with their puny expectations and deluding desires. It is not superfluous to stress this. It is also God who appears not with an everyday, but with a special, very special plan. We are justified in speaking, therefore, in our case of a Providentia specialis, indeed, specialissima. Please compare this with the conviction that is alive in the Family, that it has been given a special mission.

At that time God's intentions were still shrouded in deep darkness. The darkness lifted in the same way – the ways of Providence. It happened through interpreting the history of the foundation of a great place of pilgrimage at Pompeii in Italy, and the task I had been officially given as Spiritual Director to educate the boys. You know both sources. So I can put it briefly.

[The second source – the start of the place of pilgrimage at Pompeii]

In the autumn of 1914 Providence played an article into my hands. It reported on how the lawyer Bartolo Longo, after his conversion from Free Masonry, was able "to found a place of pilgrimage" on the ruins of Pompeii. Later it was confirmed by

countless miracles and achieved world fame. The question immediately arose in me – it arose quite spontaneously: Could not something similar be possible here? Does this not provide an answer to the question: what is the special quality that Divine Providence seems to have planned for Schoenstatt? Perhaps it is something similar. At any rate it is by no means impossible. When you work through the Founding Document, you will not find it difficult to read between the lines and discover these thoughts. You will also be able to understand the brief reference to the theology and philosophy of history in the text. On the one hand, I was convinced that such an interpretation required extraordinary daring and courage of me. Please read: “A daring thought, almost too daring for the general public, but not too daring for you.” In order to do justice to this attitude, the camouflage name was coined later: The Ingolstadt-Schoenstatt Parallel. On the other hand, the insight constantly urged me on to action: “How often in world history has not the small and insignificant been the source of the great and greatest achievements. Why should this not also be the case with us?”

[The third source – the task to educate]

Such reflection prepared the ground well for an understanding of the third source. It indicated the character and direction in which, according to God’s plans, Mary’s special effectiveness should probably unfold. In order that you can understand this I have to remind you that, as a true Providentia child, I understood my appointment as Spiritual Director in 1912, and the task to educate which it included, as a divine pointer giving me the direction for the rest of my life. You will find obvious traces of this attitude in the Pre-founding Document. You can read there: “Now comes my appointment as Chaplain – completely without my agency. So it has to be God’s will. I, therefore, obey and am determined to carry out all my duties towards each and all of you as perfectly as I can. Here and now I place myself at your disposal with all that I have and am – my knowledge and my ignorance, my abilities and disabilities, but above all my heart.” This described and determined my future path through life as an educator.

Everything without exception was subordinated and sacrificed to this divine call and calling. My soul was so strongly filled with it that the inner connections were immediately made to the place of grace God was possibly planning to bring about, when I became consciously aware of the idea. You can conclude from the way the Programme set out in the Pre-founding Document became the programme for my life and education, how much this vocation to educate moved me inwardly. It contains in germ everything that later became a reality in Schoenstatt’s history. Not even the organisation and structure of the whole Movement is excluded from it. It is not without reason that it concludes with the words: “According to your Statutes, we should foster devotion to Mary as a community. Outwardly it is already there in the beautiful banner and the medals. However, the main thing is still missing – in keeping with our circumstances we need an inner organisation similar to the Sodalities (Congregations) as they exist in the various Gymnasia (Secondary Schools) and Universities. We want to

create this organisation. We, not I, because in this regard I want to do absolutely nothing without your full agreement. We are dealing here not with work for the present moment, but with an institution that will be of use to all future generations. Your successors should, therefore, draw from your zeal, your knowledge of souls and your wisdom. I am convinced that we will be able to bring about something useful if all co-operate.”

What would have been more obvious than that this third source, which had been opened up by Divine Providence according to the law of the open door, had united with the other two and formed a common riverbed. From this came the great idea: The Mother of God should simply descend here to this shrine as our educator. We wanted not merely to educate ourselves under her protection – as the Pre-founding Document put it – but rather to have her dwelling in our midst, so that she could take our education in hand along with the education of all who gave themselves to her with us. She is the one who has always motivated our self-education from here. She wants to call a comprehensive, well-organised movement of renewal and education into existence, to lead it and to make it bear rich fruit.

In order to motivate her to do this, we offered her our merits in the form of contributions to her capital of grace, to the level of the Blank Cheque, Inscriptio and Engling Consecration. We give ourselves to her with all that we have and are. In return we expect her to prove that from here she is in fact the great educator, and lead us to the heights of holiness and a fruitful apostolic life. According to the Founding Document she clearly agreed to this type of covenant of love. She declared: “Be zealous in bringing me **contributions to the capital of grace**. Then I will gladly take up my abode in your midst and distribute gifts and graces in abundance. In future I will draw youthful hearts to myself from here and educate them to be useful instruments in my hand.” That is the simple, fundamental and original form of Schoenstatt’ covenant of love, which later grew to become Schoenstatt’s vision of the future through the law of the open door and creative resultants.