Of Gardens, Flowers, Mary

The current boom in gardening in the United States may reflect the affluence of an aging population, but it also could be a way of recovering an ageless symbol of the search for God. Alongside the nursery and seed catalogues and garden manuals, there are almost as many books (a few are listed at the end of this article) highlighting the spiritual dimension of gardening, reminding us that gardens and flowers figure prominently in the Scripture, Christian tradition, and Marian devotion.

Scripture refers to the earth as “the Lord’s Garden” (Gen. 2,8; 13,10; Ez. 32, 8-9). The early Christian writer, Origen, spoke of the “garden of the soul,” and Hippolyte of Rome saw in the garden an “image of the Church” where the Lord was the gardener. Early ascetics strove to recreate a harmonious way of life which mirrored Paradise (the Septuagint’s word for the Garden of Eden). In her autobiography, St. Teresa of Avila speaks of her life as a garden cared for the Lord: “What an appealing image to think of my soul as a garden and imagine that the Lord was taking a walk in it.”

The Old Testament’s Canticle of Canticles, the biblical book which received the most commentaries in the early middle ages and the source of many texts applicable to Mary, refers frequently to gardens and flowers. The “closed garden” (chapter 4,12) was an image for describing the Lord’s special and unique relation to the Church, the Virgin Mary, and the Christian soul. The Marian writings of St. John Eudes and St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, filled with references to gardens and flowers, reflect a tradition which sees the Virgin Mary as the restoration of fallen humanity: “Mary is God’s Garden of Paradise,” (The Secret of Mary, #1). Christian art has many representations of the Virgin Mary seated in a garden with her child.

Collections of prayers derived their names from gardens. The word *rosary* (rosarium) was originally a garden or collection of roses. First appearing in the 1500s, books known as the “Garden of the Soul” (*Hortulus or Ortulus Animae*) contained the Little Office of Our Lady, other psalms, and prayers (similar to the Latin *Horae* or English Prymers). Bishop Richard Challoner’s *The Garden of the Soul: A Manual of Spiritual Exercises and Instructions for Those Christians Who Living in the World Aspire to Devotion*, first published in 1740, was in use by English Catholics well into the twentieth century. (In 1901, Herbert Thurston, S.J., wrote “The Garden of the Soul is now the title of a prayer book so well known and so long in use among us Papists that one has heard the phrase ‘a Garden-of-the-Soul-Christian,’ used as a nickname for a particular type of old-fashioned Catholic who . . . was not favorable to new-fangled devotions.”)

The flowers in the Canticle of Canticle were early associated with Marian devotion: “I am the flower of Sharon, a lily of the valley. As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among women” (ch. 2). Beginning in the 13th century, painters in Northern Europe began a tradition of representing the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation with a lily in his hand or with a vase of lilies in the room. Early portrayals of Mary’s Assumption show lilies and roses coming from the empty tomb. By the fifteenth century, lilies, roses (red and white), and violets became symbols associated with Mary: the white roses of purity, red roses of love, violets of humility. Baroque painters delighted in portraying the Virgin Mary surrounded with garlands of flowers.

In the medieval garden, flowers and herbs were permeated with religious and liturgical significance. A few names still survive: Pentecost rose (peony), Alleluia (wood sorrel blooming in Paschal time),
St. John’s wort (blooming near the feast of John the Baptist), Our Lady’s Slipper (columbine), Assumption lily (hosta). Fr. Ludwig Gemminger’s *The Flowers of Mary*, first published in Germany in the 1850s, is a series of meditations on thirty-one flowers (one for each day of the month). Sturdy and salutary advice on Christian living was drawn from observing common garden flowers - from May-Bells, the sunflower, to the “forget-me-not.” For example, the meditation on the tulip with its head directed upward promptly prompted the reflection: “God is to the soul, what the sun is to nature, its light, its warmth, and its life.”

Medieval England, “Our Lady’s Dowry,” abounded in flowers with names and legends related to the life of Jesus and Mary. Modern interest in recovering the old English names and legends of flowers stems from Judith Smith’s, *The Mary Calendar* (1930). Ms. Smith spoke about the “intuitive devotion” of the ancestors in the faith who spontaneously “saw everywhere signs and symbols of the presence of God-made man and of his holy Mother.” She observed, “Every field path and hedgerow became an illuminated Book of Hours.” Her book, with striking woodcuts, dealt with the “wildflowers of summer, many of which were thought of as being among the manger hay.” In 1932, in the revival of the medieval “Mary Garden,” Mrs. Frances Crane Lillie started a garden of these plants with a medieval Marian name at St. Joseph’s Church, Woods Hole, Massachusetts. In 1951, two young businessmen, Edward A. G. McAuliffe and John J. Stokes, formed a non-profit group to revive and promote the medieval practice of giving flowers a religious significance by associating them with the life and virtues of the Virgin Mary. Today, they continue the promotion of the Mary Garden through their Internet site.

Mary Gardens today can take many different forms — a simple image of Mary in an indoor dish garden, or an outdoor garden of wildflowers, perennials, or annuals, with some symbol of the Christian life. Noted Mary Gardens are at St. Catherine’s Parish, Kalamazoo, Michigan; St. Mary’s Parish, Indianapolis, Maryland; and the National Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows, Portland, Oregon. On June 10, 2000, a “Mary’s Garden of Prayer” was dedicated on the grounds of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C. Sponsored by the National Council of Catholic Women, the three-quarters acre site has at its center a sculpture of “Mary, Protector of the Faith,” by Washington artist, Jon-Joseph Russo.

For More Information:
Mary Garden’s Home Page: www.mgarden.org
The National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception: www.nationalshrineinteractive.com
Fr. Thomas A. Stanley’s *A Garden Way of the Cross*: www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/gardens.html

**Fiftieth Anniversary of the Definition of the Assumption**

November 1, 2000, was the fiftieth anniversary of Pius XII’s definition of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. In Pius XII’s document on the Assumption, the word *privilege* appears several times. Writing in *Marianum-Notizie*, Fr. Ignacio Calabuig, O.S.M., suggests using the word *sign* to indicate all the meaning contained in that “moment of grace.”

— The Assumption is a *sign* of a glorious destiny; both Christ’s Resurrection and Mary’s Assumption proclaim that life has meaning, that, even though humanity may subvert God’s plan, the body is destined for glory and immortality.

— The Assumption is a *sign* of God’s style or manner of acting, which is unpredictable. Theologians study God’s activity; for example, how he lifts up the lowly. The Assumption is the final consequence of the gift God bestowed on his lowly handmaid. “He who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14,11; 14,18). True to his style, God exalted the lowly (Mt. 23,12).

— First Fruits and Image of the Church: Mary and the Church image one another as virgin, bride, mother. Mary is “the wholly unique member of the Church,” and the Church sees in Mary that which she herself desires to be” (SC 103).

— A *sign* of Presence: The liturgy of the Assumption contains three texts on the Ark of the Covenant that can be read from a Marian perspective: Chronicles 15 (reading at the Vigil Mass), Psalm 131, and Apocalypse 11,19. 12,1-6. The Ark, containing “a golden urn filled with manna, Aaron’s flower rod, and the tablets of the law” (Hebrews 9,4), was first in the fields, then carried to Jerusalem and placed in the tent David built for it. Finally, it was carried into the temple built by Solomon. Mary, symbol of the Ark of the Covenant containing bread, is carried into the sanctuary of heaven. “Then God’s temple in heaven was laid open, and within the temple was seen the Ark of his Covenant” (Apoc.11,19). (Other notices on anniversary of definition of the Assumption are in “Books and Articles” of this newsletter.)
Religious Print Art of the Twentieth Century: “From Barlach to Baselitz”

On February 22, 2001, two hundred people gathered in the University of Dayton’s Roesch Library Gallery to open the exhibit, “From Barlach to Baselitz: Religious Print Art of the 20th Century.” The exhibit included seventy works — mostly by German Expressionists—from the Scheufelen Collection. Present for the opening of the exhibit were the owners of the exhibit, Dr.& Mrs. Ulrich Scheufelen, from Oberlenningen, Germany. At the opening, Dr. Scheufelen remarked, “It is a joy to present you with this modest exhibit. Our goal is to make Christianity better known, and to promote a better understanding of the religious print art of German Expressionism, including that of Chagall.”

Nineteen prominent European artists are represented with scenes from the Bible and the life of Christ. Included are thirteen etchings from Marc Chagall’s “Bible” (1931-57); works of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Oskar Kokoschka, Christian Rohlfis, George Grosz; Emil Nolde; Max Beckmann; Ernst Barlach, Georg Baselitz, Edouard Manet; Ludwig Meidner; Otto Dix’s Ecce homo (1949); eleven color etchings from Georges Roualt’s Passion; eight lithographs from Otto Dix’s Scenes from St. Matthew’s Gospel; twelve woodcuts from Max Pechstein’s The Our Father; and HAP Grieshaber’s Polish Way of the Cross.”

Dr. Scheufelen explained that “German Expressionism is the most important contribution of Germany to European art of the twentieth century.”

... In Memoriam

Fr. Walter Brennan, O.S.M., 65, a past president of the Mariological Society (1995-96), died suddenly in his office at the Marian Center of Our Lady of Sorrows Servite Monastery, Chicago, Illinois, March 8, 2001. He was a Servite for forty-two years, ordained in 1961. He received a master’s in philosophy in 1965 and a Ph.D. in 1970 from DePaul University. He had been provincial of the former Eastern Province of Servites, 1988-1991. In 1988, his The Sacred Memory of Mary was published. This book combined his knowledge of Scripture and early Christian literature with his interest in hermeneutics, symbolism, and literary theory.

His presidential addresses to the Mariological Society stressed the need for discerning the essential elements of Marian devotion so that they might be inculturated into contemporary society. From the Servite Marian Center, he distributed his “Marian Update,” a one-page bulletin highlighting a point “not usually noticed” from a prayer, a text of Scripture, or the image of Mary. In one of his last bulletins (#62), he wrote of Mary, our Model and our Mother. “Christ asks us to accept the challenge to think, forgive, to identify with the less fortunate, to be kind. This is how to be holy.

This is not often done in the world. So Christ offers us the example of a tender mother, a good woman, a friend: Mary. She was human and she did it. She is given us as our mother who, through her prayers and closeness to the Spirit of God, helps us to do what Christ asks. She is given us as a model showing us what to do, and how to do it.”

Fr. Alban A. Maguire, O.F.M., 86, another past president of the Mariological Society of America (1968-1969), died March 21, 2001, of complications from a fall at the Franciscan friary in Ringwood, New Jersey. Fr. Maguire was president of Holy Name College in Washington, D.C., 1964 to 1969, and was provincial minister of the Franciscan Province of the Most Holy Name, 1980 to 1987. In his presidential address at the Mariological Society in 1968, he was aware of the quandary many American Catholics experienced after Vatican II, especially in matters related to Marian devotion. He urged studying the changes to see “whether the Council in giving new directions to the Church has not also given us the material for the renovation and enrichment of Marian doctrine.”

In 1531, ten years after the Spanish conquered Mexico, as Juan Diego came before the bishop to present to him roses which he gathered in December, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was revealed on the cloak which contained the roses. Each year, ten million people visit the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City where Juan Diego’s cloak is on public display. For more than four centuries, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been an object of veneration and also of investigation.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, studies were made into the style of the painting, the origin, a possible relation to some other style: The preservation of the painting on the cactus cloth, which should have deteriorated after twenty years, and the unfading brightness of the colors remain unexplainable. Infrared photography and computer enhancement of the image, begun in the 1980s, could not find the “under sketch” which most artists would need for such a work. This finding — plus the style, the colors, the design, and the preservation — caused the investigators to conclude that the work was the result of many “impossible coincidences.”

But it is the eyes of the image which have fascinated investigators for the past fifty years. In the last century, two nineteenth-century ophthalmologists (Purkinje andanson) discovered that whatever is seen in the eye is also reflected in the eye (actually reflected in three places due to curvature of the cornea). In the 1950s, an examination of the eyes of the image, by Dr. Rafael Torija-Lavoignet, identified the figure of Juan Diego. The most recent investigations of the eyes were conducted by Dr. José Asté Tönsmann, (Ph.D., Cornell University, Systems Engineering) who applied the same techniques used to interpret images received from surveillance satellites. The eyes of the image (about 8 millimeters), were amplified 2500 times. The photos were digitally processed, and filters were used to separate the layers within the images. Dr. Tönsmann found more than the image of Juan Diego. Within the eyes were a group of thirteen people, including Bishop Zumarraga, Juan Diego, a seated Indian figure, a younger man acting as interpreter for the bishop, a male and female with African characteristics (referred to in Zumarraga’s will), the governor of the colony (Sebastian Ramirez y Fuenleal), and, standing in the back, a family group (man, woman, and several children). The same thirteen images, save one, are found in both eyes. This discovery of the family group in the Virgin’s eyes, Dr. Tönsmann concluded, may be a “hidden message,” reserved for our time, intended to strengthen family life.


This is an original approach to the Fourth Gospel: seeing it through the eyes and faith of the author. “The anonymous disciple” is also the universal disciple with whom all can identify. The identification is not with the author’s achievements, for which he wishes no recognition. Rather the identification is through a personal relation, a sharing the faith of “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

The reader is invited to experience the impact of the beloved disciple’s vision of Jesus. The principal scenes of John’s Gospel are presented: Nicodemus on rebirth, the Samaritan woman, the healing of the paralytic, Mary Magdalen,
the Calvary scene, the post-Easter appearances. At the same time, the reader enters into the deeper themes of the Gospel: Jesus’ gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paschal mystery, communion, the gift of Mary, and evangelization. The final section compares Cana and Calvary, where what was anticipated in one is completed in the other.

As in his many other works, Fr. Montague continues his tradition of allowing the reader to draw the advantage of many contemporary biblical approaches, without intimidating scholarly references. Each section ends with questions related to “real life” for prayer and discussion.

... Articles


A survey of the political, social, and ecclesial movements (liturgical, ecumenical, biblical) which were the context for the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950. At his election in 1939, Pius XII confided three tasks to Msgr. Tardini, the third of which was the definition of the Assumption. After the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the Holy See began receiving petitions to define the Assumption. The dogma was almost proclaimed at Vatican I. Popular religious periodicals, in the 1920s and 1930s, presented over a millions signatures for the definition. The Spanish hierarchy and Academia de Lérida supported the proclamation. Finally, the publication in 1941 by G. Hentrich and R.G. de Moos of the petitions presented to the Holy See, and Martin Jugie’s editions of Eastern writers in 1944 proved to be the deciding factors in the decision.


Karl Jung enthusiastically hailed the Pius XII’s proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950 as “the greatest religious act since the Reformation.” Jung’s theology of symbolic archetypes which influence the human personality includes reference to the Virgin Mary as symbol of mother, of mediator, of Wisdom. Mary also was part of Jung’s theory of progressive incarnation, and her Assumption completed the Trinity as a quadernity.


In the post-World War II era, Mariology was often the way in which other theological topics were addressed. In 1951, Karl Rahner prepared a manuscript of 478 pages, his major work on Mariology. The middle section contained 258 pages on the Assumption. The introduction dealt with the development of dogma in general, and the concluding section considered the dogma from an eschatological, anthropological, and ecumenical viewpoint. Possibly because of the theological atmosphere in 1950s, the work was never published. With the opening of Vatican II, Rahner’s perspectives changed and he never revised what would have been his major work on Mariology. [The Marian Library has a photocopy of this manuscript.]


The 1950 papal definition viewed the Assumption as a singular privilege of the Virgin Mary; the definition suggested a two-staged eschatology in which soul separated from the body at death is reunited at the general resurrection. Beginning in the 1960s, biblical studies suggested a more holistic approach and identified an eschatological resurrection (at the end of times) but also a glorious exaltation (after death) as the destiny of martyrs, prophets, apostles. The exaltation of Mary is a paradigm anticipating that to which the Church aspires.


A small image of Madonna and Child in St. Matthew’s Church, Westminster, intended as the focus of meditation, gives the impression of elevation and enthronement. The nakedness of the two figures represent Christ and the Virgin as the New Adam and the New Eve. The artist, Guy Reid, described as “deeply devout” Anglican, wished to show the humanity of the Word made incarnate. But herein lies the weakness. Images of the Incarnation must show the divinity and the humanity. Taken together with the large bronze regal image in the same church, one might find divinity and humanity, “but, on its own, this Virgin and Child may not achieve the paradox the subject requires.”

From the Marian Library/IMRI

Recent dissertations presented to the International Marian Research Institute (IMRI)

For the Licentiate of Sacred Theology:
Fr. Sylvester Ajagbe. The Place of the Virgin Mary among the Yoruba People of Nigeria (Diocese of Lokoja — A Case Study).
Sr. Cecilia Chu, M.I.C. Mary, Theotokos and Inculturation in Taiwan.

For the Doctorate of Sacred Theology:

Fr. Ernesto María Caro Osorio. La Virginidad de María: Virginidad por el Reino.

• The Marian Library Postcard Collection (numbering over 25,000) is listed in the Directory of Postcard Holdings in Public Museums, Archives, and Libraries (2001), and the forthcoming Hymnal Collections of North America will contain an entry on the Marian Library’s collection of hymnals.
• On Thursday, March 22, 2001, the Interactive Catholic Cultural Center (the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center) in Washington, D.C., was inaugurated. The facility has several interactive exhibits, a collection of Vatican art, and a center for scholars. The interactive computer exhibits were done by the New York firm of Edwin Schlossberg, who borrowed pictures and slides from the Marian Library for the interactive exhibits. (Cf. John Paul Gallery www.jpzcc.org).
Pope John Paul wrote a letter to the two branches of the Carmelites on the 750th anniversary of the reception of scapular from the Virgin Mary by the Carmelite Simon Stock in 1251. He spoke of the scapular as "an effective synthesis of Marian spirituality, which nourishes the devotion of believers and makes them sensitive to the Virgin Mother's loving presence in their lives." The two truths evoked by the Scapular are the constant protection of the Blessed Virgin, not only on life's journey, but also at the moment of passing into the fullness of eternal glory; and, the awareness that devotion to her must become a "habit," a permanent orientation of one's own Christian conduct, woven of prayer and interior life. The Scapular is "a splendid example of Marian spirituality, which inwardly molds individuals and conforms them to Christ." The pope mentioned that he wore the Scapular of Carmel "over my heart for a long time" (25 March 2001).

In "Just Do It: How Practice Makes Catholic" (U.S. Catholic, Oct. 2000) Fr. Robert Barron concludes by "saying a word in support of the much maligned rosary as a practice." He writes: "First, the rosary is concrete, densely objective — it is something you hold in your hand. Anthony de Mello said that the simple feel of the rosary put him in a mystical frame of mind. Second, the rosary is a way of disciplining what the Buddhists call the "monkey mind," the mind that leaps impatiently from branch to branch . . . As long as that mind-skittish, superficial, obsessive — is dominating, we never move to the deeper realms of the soul. The rosary prayer, precisely as a mantra, is meant to dull and quiet the moody mind and allow the depths to rise. Third, the rosary slows us down. (Even my Irish grandmother who prayed the rosary at 95 miles an hour, took 15 minutes to get through it!) The surface of the psyche is in constant motion, hurrying to it next thought, its next objective, its next accomplishment. But the spiritual center likes to see, to hear, to savor . . . Ewert Cousins, a theologian at Fordham University, has said that the genius of Catholicism is that it never threw anything away. How sad that so many Catholic run to the religions of the East and to the New Age to find embodied practices of prayer when we have them in spades in our own ecclesial attic."

The Mariological Society of America issues a "Call for Papers" for its May, 2002, meeting: "The Marian Dimension of the Christian Life: Historical Perspectives." The 2002 meeting will cover the late medieval, Reformation, and early Modern Period, with special attention requested on the Marian spirituality of Eastern or Western authors, on religious movements, on prayers and hymns. A precis should be submitted to the MSA Secretariat by December 15, 2001.

The University of Dayton is concluding its campaign - Call to Lead - with a goal of $150 million. Your contribution the Marian Library/IMRI is recognized as a contribution to the Call to Lead. Among the Marian Library/IMRI's great needs are the development and maintenance of book collections; scholarships for those wishing to pursue Marian studies; furnishings for the library and art exhibit area; maintenance of the Mary Page; support for digitization and online cataloging projects. Be sure to designate "Marian Library/IMRI" when you make your contribution to the University's Call to Lead Campaign.
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