

Praise for *The Gardens of God*

“The strong pastoral and contemplative challenge of *The Gardens of God* invites reflection at many different levels, but its core message was summed up once in a brief, memorable statement by St. John Paul II: the minister of the Gospel ‘must possess and pass on that “knowledge of God” which is not a mere deposit of doctrinal truths but a personal and living experience of the Mystery.”

—**Paul Murray, OP**, Professor at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, from the foreword

“In the garden of humanity on the move, gardeners of the caliber of Cardinal Arthur Roche are striving to enliven the project of Jesus Christ to restore the world willed by the Creator, his Father. Tirelessly, Cardinal Roche sows in all hearts the words that give life; he heals wounds by pouring out the living water of the Holy Spirit; he recalls the Savior’s promise to create a new earth, a lush garden forever saved by love, peace, and justice for all. This book is a true guide for any gardener who yearns to bear fruit in the garden of his own life.”

—**Cardinal Gérald Lacroix**, Cardinal-Archbishop of Quebec, Canada

“Cardinal Roche offers us meditations on what are in effect archetypal biblical gardens. Remarkably, the entire arc of the story of salvation is enacted in these gardens, beginning in Eden and climaxing twice, first in the garden of the empty tomb of our Lord’s Resurrection,

and finally in the enclosed garden of each believer's heart. I am given hope as I move through these gardens, seeing in them what I might have otherwise missed without the cardinal as guide."

—**Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB**, Abbot of Mount Angel Abbey

"In this thoughtful and well-crafted book, Cardinal Arthur Roche offers inspiring insights into the metaphorical image of the Church as God's garden. The nine chapters, beginning with 'Tending the Garden' and ending with 'The Enclosed Garden,' offer deep meditations that will nourish the faith journey of priests, religious, and laity alike."

—**Donna Orsuto**, Director of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas, Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University

THE
GARDENS
OF
GODS

CARDINAL ARTHUR ROCHE

Foreword by Paul Murray, OP

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Dedicated
to my Brother Priests

After the gift of this natural life, how can I yet again thank You, O Lord, for the even higher gift of faith and grace in which uniquely, at the end, my being finds its refuge? How can I worthily celebrate your goodness, O Lord, for having been immersed as soon as I entered this world into the ineffable Catholic Church? For being called and initiated into the Priesthood of Christ? For having had the joy and the mission of serving souls, brothers and sisters, the young, the poor, the people of God? And for having had the unmerited honour of being a minister of holy Church?

Testimony of Pope St Paul VI, 1965

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Foreword

Fr Paul Murray, OP

This book has a very particular focus. It contains reflections preached by a cardinal archbishop to fellow priests and bishops in different parts of the world. It is to them, to the shepherds and leaders of God's people, that the Word of God is here being proclaimed. The title of the book is significant: *The Gardens of God*. Cardinal Roche is concerned to remind us that priests and bishops are called not only to be shepherds in God's kingdom; they are called also to be gardeners in that kingdom, their task to plant the seeds of living faith and cultivate the plot of "land" given to them by providence – whether that happens to be a parish or a diocese.

The image of the garden appears in an unusually striking manner in both the Old and New Testaments. In *The Gardens of God*, attention is given to five of these appearances, each one more vivid than the previous: the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Garden of the Tomb, the Garden of Paradise, and the Enclosed Garden. What becomes clear, as we read more of the

work, is that the different dimensions of faith experience, which these gardens represent, although they relate directly to the challenge of the priestly vocation, relate with no less directness and relevance to the vocation of each and every disciple of Christ. This means that the encouraging and radiant message of *The Gardens of God* can speak as much to the situation of the laity in the Church as to the lives of bishops and priests.

Those of us who may perhaps be undergoing great suffering, or who may suddenly be experiencing great joy, find named in the biblical images of Gethsemane and Eden something of our own experience as believers. And that is no small grace. But *The Gardens of God* encourages us, dares us, to think more radically about the meaning of these “gardens”. We are encouraged to step back from our usual preoccupations and, in the light of these very powerful images, to reflect on who we are and to whom it is we belong. This task is one which, centuries ago, St Bernard of Clairvaux, writing in a long letter to the pope of that time, famously called “consideration”. If, reading St Bernard’s letter, we didn’t know already to whom it was addressed, we might be inclined to think it was a message of earnest advice sent to a busy parish priest in our own time. One of its central teachings, a teaching repeated in *The Gardens of God*, is the critical importance of self-knowledge in the life of a busy pastor. The aim is not, of course, to replace the primary focus on God and neighbour with an exaggerated focus on the

self. Far from it. Nevertheless, St Bernard of Clairvaux makes bold to say:

If you wish to belong to others like him who became all things to all men, I will praise your humanity, but only if it is full. But how can it be full if you yourself are left out? You too are a man. So then, in order that your humanity may be full and complete, let your bosom, which receives all, find room also for yourself. . . . For if you are a stranger to yourself to whom are you not a stranger? . . . Remember, I do not say always, I do not say often, but at least sometimes render yourself to yourself.

Cardinal Roche refers more than once to the work of St Bernard, and to the work of many other saints and theologians. These “voices”, far from distracting the reader, lend to the text an illumined quality and a wonderful depth and colour. And this, I would say, is particularly the case in the final chapter, “The Enclosed Garden”, which celebrates the mystery of the Virgin Mary, viewing her, among other things, as exemplar and model of the life of contemplation.

Although no explicit references are made in *The Gardens of God* to the author’s personal experience as priest and diocesan bishop, the authority and weight of that past experience are evident throughout – the knowledge of the bewilderment and desperation in the hearts of many of our contemporaries; the depth of their thirst

for God; and the awareness of a shepherd's own need for continual, personal conversion and for an authentic life of prayer. The strong pastoral and contemplative challenge of *The Gardens of God* invites reflection at many different levels, but its core message was summed up once in a brief, memorable statement by St John Paul II: the minister of the Gospel "must possess and pass on that 'knowledge of God' which is not a mere deposit of doctrinal truths but a personal and living experience of the Mystery."

Preface

For pastors who live in circumstances which are personally challenging and where the general current of life, culturally as well as in other ways, hits hard against the teachings of Christ, there is an encouraging passage in the Acts of the Apostles. There we find St Paul facing the self-same difficulties that many bishops and priests face today. The city of Corinth was wealthy, the capital of the southern province of Greece under the rule of the Roman Empire. Its culture was sybaritic, its vices notorious, all of which affected its entire population. The hedonistic culture not only blurred but also had the capacity to suffocate much that was at the heart of the Gospel message. It was a deep disappointment to Paul and made him hesitate in his mission. However, in a dream it was revealed to him that despite the challenges there were good people there who were faithful and who needed to be cared for: “The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack

you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:9–10). It was enough for Paul to know this. He stayed and worked there and developed a special love for the Church he founded, despite later witnessing the decay which settled all too comfortably into its life like a poison ivy whose roots were buried deep on the outside yet whose tendrils were craftily invasive in penetrating the entire fabric.

When Paul later wrote his famous letters to them, he used the metaphor of ‘God’s field’ to describe the Church (1 Cor 3:9), which resonates with Pope Francis’ image of the Church today as a ‘field hospital.’ Amidst the wrangling over allegiances within the community, he reminded his hearers that while they had benefitted from the apostolic zeal of Paul who had planted the seeds of faith and Apollos who had watered those seeds, it was in fact God who had given the growth. Paul describes himself and Apollos as being at the service of the one who alone makes things grow. The entire Church is seen as a single field. Their respective roles, though different, had been given to them by God for the overall good. Both were needed, but it was God who was the true gardener.

What happened to the Christian community of Corinth sends a clear message to the Church in every age.

The chapters in this book, born in the main of conferences offered to bishops, priests, and seminarians in various parts of the world and at different times, offer some reflections based upon the metaphorical image of the Church as God’s garden or field in which we

PREFACE

encounter the pastoral challenges before us today. Greece was the world's first democracy whose way of thinking was imprinted upon its citizenship. Reflecting upon this, however, Paul counsels us against being formed by the patterns of this world, of drifting into sectarian polemics or divisive ideologies, and to see our task from a very different perspective.

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Tending the Garden

The secret of getting ahead is getting started.

Mark Twain

A story is told about a Desert Father who one day visited his neighbour to ask: "What is spiritual fatherhood?" The other thought for a while and then said: "One beggar telling another beggar where to get bread!"

The crumbs that are found in these pages have fallen from some of the bread which has been given to me to eat and which I have chewed upon at different moments and which has nourished me. In sharing them with you I act simply as a weather-beaten signpost whose only wish is to point to where the bread shop is!

These thoughts were prepared at different times for different audiences, but as I have been asked now to offer them to a wider readership, I do so aware that if these thoughts contain for others anything of genuine worth, then that is due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at work. Setting aside time each day for prayer and

recollection allows us the opportunity to face God and to face ourselves in the light of God's presence. As we do this, it seems to me to be important that we should really try to face God rather than succumb to self-reflection. In reality, it is more important to think "Whose am I?" than "Who am I?" Before there can be a nominative, there has to be a genitive. Through creation, but particularly through Baptism, we belong to the Lord.

The answer to the question "Whose are we?" in fact, is not simply found within our own self-consciousness. We are not solely our own mystery; we are much bigger than that! We belong to God who is beyond our measure and in whose image we are made. But part of the answer also lies with those to whom we have been sent to serve as ministers of his Good News.

It is clear that a bishop's identity is most evident when he stands at the altar with his priests and people gathered around him. There his priesthood is clearly seen as he intercedes for the Church and the entire world as he re-enacts the sacrifice of Calvary. In the Roman Canon, we learn that the bishop is one who, "holding to the truth, hands on the catholic and apostolic faith." This English translation, however, doesn't capture the entire meaning of the Latin text. *Orthodoxis atque catholicis et apostolicis* is a description of bishops, who are defined as *fidei cultoribus*, the ones who cultivate and hand on the Catholic and Apostolic faith.

The word *cultor* comes from the Latin verb *colo, colere*, which means 'to cultivate'. A *cultor fidei* is someone

who cultivates faith like a gardener cultivates the land. He is someone who plants a tree in the soil that reaches to the heavens! The word ‘column’, interestingly, has the same derivation. Classical architecture makes it easy for us to recognise trees in the magnificent columns of Greece and Rome where we see before our eyes stone trunks of trees whose capitals bear the semblance of branches and foliage.

The *cultor* is someone who plants and harvests, who works and cares for the crops, the vines, who keeps bees and tends the beasts. These are all the original Latin usages. So, from within the context of the Eucharistic Prayer, we can say that bishops and priests are gardeners and farmers, as well as shepherds! They have to work at ground level, in the dust, among the weeds in God’s field.

The *cultor* belongs to the land, which is one of the reasons why bishops have a specific territory in their titles. It is there, in his territory, that he plants and cultivates and brings in the harvest. He is someone who supports and fosters, who teaches and guides and guards against fraudulency.

In Latin there is another verb, *colo, colare* – in contrast to *colo, colere* – which is not of the same root. This verb speaks, however, of someone who adores and reverences God, who is devoted to God and zealous in his faith. In this ancient Roman sense, he is a priest of the deity he serves. And as a priest he is the one who gives right faith to God, which is the meaning of *orthodoxus*.

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building. (1 Cor 3:5–9)

The image of the gardener or the cultivator is one that in the Scriptures is originally reserved to God – “for there was no man to work the ground”, as we hear in the book of Genesis (Gen 2:5). The very first example of God’s cultivation of the land is when he breathes on the soil, blowing his spirit into the dust of the earth and forming the first man, Adam, who, with Eve, was the summit of his creation. Following on from this, God establishes and cultivates a garden – “the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east” (Gen 2:8). St Basil the Great tells us that this is the reason why there was a tradition of praying towards the east, expressing a longing to return to our homeland, to paradise.

Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and is good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the

garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:9)

After establishing this fertile patch, God then places man into this garden, handing over to him the responsibility to cultivate it further – “to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15).

St Ephrem the Syrian and St Augustine of Hippo explain that Eden, of course, is the land of paradise that God made after he created man. It is also a symbol of the Church that needs tending and into which he places the human race.

Against the immense and unfolding drama of creation in chapter 1 of Genesis – so beautifully depicted in the Sistine Chapel – and against the broad brushstrokes of bringing into being light and darkness, the swirling waters and the appearance of land, we suddenly find ourselves, in the second and third chapters, in a beautiful garden of tranquillity, which even God enjoys as he walks through it in the evening, savouring its delights. Of course, it did not last very long! The sin of our first parents brought this idyllic moment to an end. Nevertheless, what is interesting here, St Ephrem in his commentary tells us, is that the reason why God’s footsteps could be heard was in order to help our first parents – as it were, to give them a chance to make supplication to God. Instead, they hid. St John Chrysostom, however, says that the sound of God walking was to induce a fear in them for what they had done. These two opinions perhaps highlight well the difference

between a deacon and a bishop! Ephrem says that had they sought to repent at this moment, even though not regaining what they had lost through their sinfulness, God's heart would have softened and they would have escaped the curses decreed upon them and the earth.

Gardens are important. The places where we plant and gather the harvest speak to us of life and livelihood. There are quite a number of gardens specifically mentioned in the Bible. Among them, the Garden of Eden, of course, which later the prophet Ezekiel calls 'God's garden' (Ezek 28:13, 31:8–9) and Isaiah the 'Garden of the Lord' (Isa 51:3); the vineyard of Naboth that Ahab wanted to change into a vegetable garden for his own use (1 Kgs 21); the enclosed garden where Susanna bathed and was maliciously accused by lecherous old men (Dan 13); the locked garden in the Song of Songs which is likened to the Bride (Sg 4:12); and the many allegorical sketches that we find in the prophets, not least in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

But there are in particular four gardens which play an important part in God's own drama from Genesis to the Apocalypse. First, the Garden of Eden – 'God's garden' – which became the garden of sin. Second, the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36, Mk 14:32), literally meaning 'oil press' and well known as a place of prayer, which became the garden of suffering. Then, third, the Garden of the Tomb (Jn 19:41), which became the garden of victory. We should not overlook the fact that it was a new tomb, a virgin tomb, which symbolises for

the Fathers of the Church a womb from which a new birth took place. The cultivation of this garden, through Baptism, is made very clear in the Third Eucharistic Prayer where, praying for the dead, we say, “Who was united [*complantatus fuit*] with your Son in a death like his, may also be one with him in his Resurrection.” But the phrase *complantatus fuit* (keeping Romans 6:5 in mind), actually means that in Baptism, which is derived from the verb “to plunge”, we are planted in the same furrow of the earth, as it were, in which Christ was planted in death in order to rise with him to life. And finally, there is the Garden of Paradise, the garden of eternal life, the garden where the new tree of life, the cross, bears the fruit which is Christ’s Body. This garden is where the complete gathering of the Church takes place even now as well as at the end of time.

The specific character of these gardens is to be found in each diocese and in each community. Indeed, they are to be found in the gardens of every soul.

I shall use these images in order to reflect upon the question of ‘whose we are’. It may be that you feel closer to one than to another, but all of them will play a part in our life and in the lives of our priests and people, and each one of them will speak about ‘whose we are’. St Paul reminds us of our responsibility regarding this when to the church of Corinth he wrote:

Do not forget: thin sowing means thin reaping; the more you sow, the more you reap. Each one should

give what he has decided in his own mind, not grudgingly or because he is made to, for God loves a cheerful giver. And there is no limit to the blessings which God can send you – he will make sure that you will always have all you need for yourselves in every possible circumstance, and still have something to spare for all sorts of good works. As scripture says: He was free in almsgiving, and gave to the poor: his good deeds will never be forgotten. The one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide you with all the seed you want and make the harvest of your good deeds a larger one, and, made richer in every way, you will be able to do all the generous things which, through us, are the cause of thanksgiving to God. For doing this holy service is not only supplying all the needs of the saints, but it is also increasing the amount of thanksgiving that God receives. By offering this service, you show them what you are, and that makes them give glory to God for the way you accept and profess the gospel of Christ, and for your sympathetic generosity to them and to all. And their prayers for you, too, show how they are drawn to you on account of all the grace that God has given you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Cor 9:6–15)

Perhaps the thought of entering one or other of these gardens may cause us to hesitate, maybe through fear of what we may find or have to face there, tempting us

to move on to a greener pasture or to a more colourful place. This, of course, is the residual mark of original sin – the contagion which has left us with an instinct within to hide. Like Adam and Eve who “heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day . . . [and] hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8), we too need to be attentive to the sound of God’s feet and be encouraged by that sound rather than hide because of it. Resisting the instinct to turn the other way, Eli’s counsel to Samuel when God had called out to the young man in the night encourages us to be attentive. “‘What was it that he told you?’” said Eli, referring to God. “‘Do not hide it from me.’ . . . So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And [Eli] said, ‘It is the Lord!’ . . . And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and he let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Sm 3:17–19). We always grow stronger by facing reality. With the Psalmist, we can pray, deep within our hearts, “It is your face O LORD that I seek, hide not your face from me” (Ps 27:8–9). It is a good prayer for us to utter. God is to be found in all these places, as he has demonstrated, and where God is we need have no fear.

The Song of Songs tells us:

My beloved has gone down to his garden
to the beds of spices,
to graze in the gardens
and to gather lilies.

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.

(Sg 6:2-3)

We will find God in each one of these gardens, and they will give us an insight into whose we are and whose we are yet still to become.