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## Homage and Respect

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## Homage and Respect

### Very Reverend Emile Neubert, S. M.

The half-century of scholarship represented in the career of Father Emile Neubert, S.M., spans a time of great change in theology. Begun during the controversies over Modernism, it closed in the ferment of the age of Vatican II.

Without question, Father Neubert was one of the foremost mariologists of the Twentieth Century. The bibliography in this *estschrift* attests to his scholarship; the eminent theologians who have contributed attest to the respect which he is accorded by his peers.

To be a significant theologian in any age is a notable thing, but to have been a Mariologist in the first half of this century was much more than that. It was to have shared in one of the major developments in Catholic dogma in our times, with all that this implies – painstaking research, public and private controversy, question and exploration, and public response.

Father Neubert's scholarship is apparent in his writings. His doctoral thesis, presented to the University of Fribourg in 1907, was the first ever written in Mariology. It was a major study (and remains so even today) of patristic Mariology. This emphasis on basic sources of Marian dogma runs throughout his work, appearing most forcefully in his *Mary in Doctrine* (1953). His contributions include his emphasis on the Spiritual Maternity of Mary and the analogy of the privileges of Mary and the privileges of the humanity of Christ. Beyond these, however, is another point which came to dominate his writing and thinking. He remarks at the opening of Chapter Five of *Mary in Doctrine* that "works on Mariology ordinarily do not mention an apostolic mission of the Blessed Virgin." Father Neubert found himself unable to avoid the practical apostolic implications of his work, however. In a string of books he considered the impact of the Marian apostolate on specialized Catholic Action, the priestly ministry, and Christian education.<sup>1</sup>

The facts of Father Neubert's professional life can be put in relatively brief form. Born in 1878, he joined the Society of Mary in 1896. In 1903 he received a licentiate in literature from the Sorbonne, and in 1907 his S.T.D. from Fribourg, *summa cum laude*. He had been ordained the year before.

In 1908 Father Neubert came to the United States, where he stayed in various capacities until 1921. Two of these years were spent teaching at the University of Dayton's East Campus, then the Mount St. John scholasticate of the Society of Mary.

From 1922 to 1949, Father was director of the Marianist Seminary at the University of Fribourg. This was his most fruitful period. Besides his seminary work and research, he

was co-founder in 1936 of the French Society for Marian Studies. For many years, he was active in the program planning for the French Marian Congresses. To this was joined his influence on his Marianist seminarians, who themselves developed a significant body of Mariological studies.<sup>2</sup> In 1954 the University of Dayton awarded Father Neubert its Marianist Award. He died on August 29, 1967.

Along with the great development of Marian theology during Father Neubert's career, however, came a significant flowering of Marian piety. Keenly alert to the role of the piety of the faithful in revealing the Marian beliefs of the Church, he followed this with great interest. Concerned that this devotion not stray from its Christocentric basis, Father Neubert published a number of works for the general public emphasizing that there could be no piety without a solid doctrinal basis, and no Marian devotion that was not at the same time centered upon Christ, as Mary herself had been. Chief among these works was the little book, *My Ideal, Jesus, Son of Mary*, which has run through many translations and innumerable editions. Its sale approaches a million copies worldwide.

Since Vatican II, Mariology has been embroiled in controversy in theological circles. In some quarters its legitimacy as a separate field of study is questioned. In his last years, Father Neubert did not join in these most recent debates. The range of interests and approaches of the Mariologists who have honored him here by their contributions, however, is ample testimony to the breadth and solidity of his own scholarship.

Norbert Brockman, S.M.  
for the Editorial Board

<sup>1</sup> Notable here are his *La mission apostolique de Marie et la nôtre* (1957), *Mary and the Priesthood* (1952), *Marie et l'éducateur chrétien* (1960), and *Queen of Militants* (1944).

<sup>2</sup> Among the more outstanding works are those of Joseph Bruder, S.M., *The Mariology of St. Anselm* (1939); Francis Friedel, S.M., *The Mariology of Cardinal Newman* (1928); Paul Hoffer, S.M., *The Intercession of the Blessed Virgin According to the Masters of the French School* (1937); and Albert Mitchell, S.M., *The Mariology of St. John Damascene* (1930).

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