077 - The Development of Marian Doctrine

Emil Neubert
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Rev. Emil Neubert, S.M.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Emil Neubert, S.M., has been one of the most prolific Marian authors of our century, having published eighteen books (not including several for private circulation only) and innumerable articles on devotion to Mary. His most famous work is a popularization of the doctrine of Filial Piety of Father William Joseph Chaminade, published in America under the title My Ideal: Jesus, Son of Mary. Originally released by Bruce in 1936, this work is now issued by the Maryhurst Press of Kirkwood, Mo., in a revised edition. This Marian classic has also appeared in fourteen other languages: French (8 editions); Italian (5 editions); Dutch (4 editions); German (4 editions); Spanish (2 editions); Polish, Japanese, Hungarian, Slovak, Chinese, Ukrainian, Slovenian, Portuguese, and Breton.

The only other works of Father Neubert to appear in English are Queen of Militants (Grail, 1947); Mary in Doctrine (Bruce, 1954); Living with Mary (Marianist Publications, 1954), and Life of Union with Mary (Bruce, 1959). Some of his other Marian books include: Marie dans l’Eglise Anténicenne (1908); Vie de Marie (1936); La Doctrine Mariale de M. Chaminade (1937); La Dévotion à Marie (1943); De la Decouverte Progressive des Grandeurs de Marie (1951); Marie et Notre Sacerdoce (1953); and La Vie d’Union à Marie (1954). Une Ame Mariale Victime (1956) La Mission Apostolique de Marie et la Nôtre (1956), L’Ame de Jésus Contemplée avec Marie (1957), et Marie et L’Éducateur Chrétien (1960).

Father Neubert made his first profession of vows as a Marianist in 1895 and was ordained in 1906, receiving his doctorate in theology from the University of Fribourg in 1907. Although a native of Alsace, he spent the next fourteen years in the United States, most of the time as novice-master. In 1921 he was recalled to Europe as one of the pioneers to staff the diocesan college of Strasbourg. In 1923 he was appointed director of the International Marianist Seminary at Fribourg, Switzerland, and he held this position until 1950.

His present position as chaplain of the Marianist community at Institution Sainte-Marie, La Tour de Scay, France, allows him more time for his literary activities.

The Development of Marian Doctrine, a clear exposition of the evolution of Marian dogma, with special emphasis on the “sensus fideliun,” is taken from the introduction to Father Neubert’s book Mary in Doctrine (Bruce, 1954, but now out of print).

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“Behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; because he who is mighty has done great things for me,” proclaimed the Virgin Mary when her cousin Elizabeth greeted her as "the mother of my Lord." In the Gospel itself we find only two of "these great things" clearly stated: her miraculous virginity and her divine maternity. At present the faith and love of the Church attribute to her a great number of others: her Immaculate Conception, her perfect sinlessness, her fullness of grace, her mission as Co-redemptrix and Distributrix of all graces, her Assumption, etc. The faithful are as convinced of the certitude of these latter as they are of the first two. But the problem is to see how the latter truths are contained in the gospel revelation.

Before He left His disciples, Christ, in promising them the Holy Spirit, declared: “Many things yet I have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will teach you all the truth. For he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he will hear he will speak, and the things that are to come he will declare to you. He will glorify me, because he will receive of what is mine and declare it to you.” On Pentecost the Holy Spirit revealed to the Apostles the most immediately important among the things our Lord had tried in vain to make plain to them; namely, the mystery of the Passion and of the Resurrection, the true nature of the Redemption and its extension to the whole world, the necessity of suffering and of being persecuted. The others He would reveal to the Church later on as the need arose, because the Holy Spirit remains with the Church to enlighten and guide her to the end of time. He does this very remarkably with regard to those glories of Mary not explicitly mentioned in Scripture.

But how does the Holy Spirit lead the Church “to bring forth from her store-room” the “old things” concerning the Mother of

1 Lk. 1:43, 48-49.
2 Jn. 16:12-14.
Jesus and those "new things" that the Church attributes to her in the course of time?  

Is this effected through the speculation of her theologians? No. The history of the various Mariological beliefs shows that the faithful—simple Christians with their pastors—have professed each one of these long before the theologians busied themselves with them; in many instances, indeed, the theologians at first rejected them and admitted them only gradually, under the compulsion, as it were, of the simple faithful. This, precisely, was the process in regard to belief in the total absence of actual sin in Mary, in her Immaculate Conception, in her Assumption. The fact is that the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit is guaranteed to the faithful as a whole, not to a group of scholars even though there be saints among them.

But how have the faithful discovered the different privileges of the Virgin? Have they reasoned better than the theologians? They have not reasoned at all; they have contemplated.

St. Thomas speaks of a double manner of judging: "by reasoning and by a certain 'connaturality' (conformity of nature) with the things to be judged." Thus, of chastity he says that "the man who has learned the science of morals judges rightly after reasoned investigation, but he who has the habit of chastity judges of such matters by a kind of connaturality he has with them." Elsewhere St. Thomas calls this connaturality an inclination, a sympathy. Pascal makes an analogous distinction with regard to the difference between the geometrical mind and the subtle mind. He says that the reason why geometricians are not subtle is that they do not see what is before them; and, being accustomed to the clear and evident principles of geometry and to reasoning only after they have clearly seen and handled the principles, they are lost when it comes to delicate matters in which principles are not so readily perceived. Here principles are barely seen—rather they are felt; and it is infinitely difficult to make them felt by those who do not see them for themselves. They are things so delicate and so numerous that it takes a very delicate and acute sense to feel them and to judge rightly and justly by reason of this feeling, for usually they

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3 Mt. 13:52.
4 II-II, q. 45, a. 2, c. Cf. I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3.
cannot be demonstrated logically as in geometry since these principles are not mastered in the way that geometrical principles are mastered; indeed, it would be impossible even to attempt to understand them in that way. The things must be seen immediately at a single glance and progressively through reasoning, at least up to a certain point.

The geometric mind rules in mathematics and in other abstract sciences, while the subtle mind is at home with complex realities such as art and, above all, life. In these latter instances it is important to see the thing "at a single glance" and not "progressively through reasoning." By contemplating a vital truth, wholly and lovingly, a kind of instinct is acquired to see with almost infallible certitude what is conformable or contrary to this truth. So far as supernatural truths are concerned, the Holy Spirit, by the gifts of Intelligence and Wisdom, singularly perfects this intuitive faculty, especially in humble and loving souls.

What is the vital reality which, when contemplated in its totality, has given the faithful the power of gradually discerning the various privileges of Mary which the Gospels do not treat explicitly? It is the ensemble of facts which Scripture gives us concerning Jesus and Mary and their relations with each other.

Every Christian knows that the Son of God willed to be born of Mary in order to save us. He is her Son; Mary is His Mother. She is the true Mother of the Son of God Incarnate. As all mothers do their babies she has formed Him of her substance, carried Him in her womb, brought Him forth into the world, swaddled Him, nursed Him, protected Him, reared Him, and covered Him with her kisses.

She is even more a mother than any other mother: she alone has conceived Him without the co-operation of a man.

And He is her Child, truly her Child, more her Child than is the child of any other mother, because to her alone He owes His whole human nature.

He has behaved toward His Mother as would any other true child: He has allowed Himself to be nourished, clothed, carried by her; He has been submissive to her; but above all, He has loved His Mother.

Who does not know from experience the love of a child for
its mother? It is the first, the most sincere, the strongest, the most universal of all loves, even in persons the least refined.

The faithful see intuitively with what love such a Child must have loved His Mother — as God, with an infinite love; as man, with an inconceivable love.

But, to love is to give. If He loved her so much, He must have given her all that He could give her; all that she, pure creature and woman, was capable of receiving.

What must He have given her? To strangers, we generally give those things which we treasure less; but it is not so for those whom we love. “What properly constitutes love,” says St. Ignatius of Loyola, “is the reciprocal communication between the lovers of their possessions, of their influence, of their works, knowledge, riches, honor, of all their goods.” Without knowing St. Ignatius, every Christian feels that Jesus must have shared His own graces and privileges with His Mother, and especially so, because He Himself created her. He did not choose from among the daughters of Eve a woman whom He would make His Mother; He created her expressly to be His Mother and consequently He made her exactly as He wished her to be. Besides this, Jesus’ love was not just any love, but the love of a son. Now, nature itself (and therefore, the Son of God, the Author of nature) wishes that every child resemble its mother not only physically but spiritually as well.

What, then, could be more evident to the faithful than that Jesus, perfect Child of Mary, shared all His supernatural riches with His Mother in the measure in which she was capable of receiving them?

The fact of Jesus’ filial love — that He was the infinitely loving Son of Mary — would alone have sufficed to make the faithful understand that He would have His Mother participate in all His prerogatives. But, more than this, the Christian finds in Scripture, besides the fundamental truth of the Incarnation, certain other data which confirm his opinion. There are, for example, these texts: “Hail, full of grace,”5 and “how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”6 “Blessed art thou among women,”7 “For, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me

5 Lk. 1:28. 6 Lk. 1:43. 7 Lk. 1:42.
blessed; because he who is mighty has done great things for me.”

There are, too, those important events mentioned in the Gospels: her miraculous and fruitful virginity; the miracle of Cana accomplished by Jesus at the request of Mary; the thoughtful attention of the dying Jesus in confiding His Mother to the virgin Disciple, whom He loved above all; the association of Mary with the sufferings and the redemptive work of her Son both in the prediction of Simeon and in the scene on Calvary.

These various scriptural data persuade the Christian that Jesus, truly an infinitely loving Son, had wished to do for His Mother all that He could do for her and therefore had wished to share His privileges with her in the measure in which a woman, mere creature, was capable of possessing them. This persuasion, soon becoming a conviction, guides them when there is question of attributing to Mary some prerogatives not explicitly indicated in holy Scripture.

In proportion as the faithful turned more often to the Mother of Jesus, both as a result of their growing devotion to the “Ever Virgin, Mother of God,” and as an effect of the development of other truths related to the Marian doctrine, as well as through the work of theology and through the defenses against heretical attacks, this conviction became progressively stronger; and as a consequence, clearer and more numerous resemblances between Christ and His Mother appeared to the eyes of all. Taken together these splendors now constitute an impressive whole. A rapid glance at the most important ones will suffice: the predestination of Christ and that of Mary before all others, decreed at the same time; the Immaculate Conception of Christ and of Mary; the absence of sin, of imperfection, and of concupiscence in both of them; both full of grace; Christ, the Redeemer, and Mary, the Co-redemptrix—or, as the Fathers said, Christ, the New Adam, and Mary, the New Eve; Christ merited for us all graces in strict justice, Mary merited them congruously; Christ is the advocate before the Father, Mary before Christ; all graces come to us through the Christ-Man and through Mary; Christ is our High Priest, Mary is associated to His priestly oblation; Christ is King; Mary,
Queen; Christ and Mary, glorified in heaven both in body and in soul; etc.

The Church takes this close relation between the two into account in its worship: witness, for example, the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; the first Friday of each month dedicated to the honor of the Heart of Jesus, and the first Saturday, to the Heart of Mary; the world consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by Pope Leo XIII, and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by Pope Pius XII; Good Friday as the solemn commemoration of the Passion of Christ, the preceding Friday, the solemn commemoration of the Compassion of Mary, etc.

Of course, the Christian instinctively realizes that the similarity between the privileges of Christ and those of His Mother is in no sense identity. Christ, the Christian understands, has His prerogatives by His very nature as God Incarnate, while Mary has received hers only by a free gift of God—"He who is mighty has done great things for me." Furthermore, there is a difference even in their mode and in their perfection.

The Christian knows that Mary is only a creature, dependent on Christ for everything; that she is a woman, a mother, and that her grace is adapted to her own nature and to her special function. Christ exists for God; Mary exists for Christ. God constituted Christ as our unique Redeemer; Mary can exercise her function as Co-redemptrix only through union with Christ and she herself had to be redeemed by Him. Christ is our necessary advocate with the Father; Mary is our advocate with Christ and through Christ. And so it is with all the other privileges of the Blessed Virgin.

Of course, this analogy between the prerogatives of Jesus and those of Mary, the work of the filial piety of the Son of God for His Mother, felt from the earliest times and felt clearly enough to guide the judgment of the faithful with astonishing sureness amidst often contradictory opinions, was not formulated from the very beginning. However, it was formulated quite early. From the first half of the eighth century, St. John Damascene (†749) affirmed it in regard to the Assumption. "It was necessary," he declared, "that the Mother should have entered into the possession of all
the goods of her Son, and that she should have been venerated by all creation as the Mother and Handmaid of God. It is a customary practice that the wealth of the parents pass to their children. But here, as was said by a wise man, the springs of the sacred waters flow toward the height: the Son, in fact, has submitted the entire creation to the dominion of His Mother.\(^\text{10}\) St. Louis de Montfort realizes that he is only repeating a truth already long recognized when he writes: “All that which is proper to God by nature, is proper to Mary by grace.”\(^\text{11}\)

In order to give this truth the desirable theological exactness, the following formula can best be used: \textit{To the various privileges of the humanity of Jesus there correspond analogous privileges in Mary, in the manner and in the degree required by the difference between her condition and that of her Son.}

The theologians had long since formulated two other rules: (1) The rule of \textit{fitness} — God accorded to Mary every privilege which befits her in herself and because of her Son; (2) the rule of the \textit{privileges of the saints given to Mary} — every privilege that God conferred on a saint, He must have conferred on Mary either in the same or in a more perfect form.

These two rules are valid but rather vague in their application. Exactly what was fitting for Mary? In what form did God give Mary certain unusual privileges which He granted also to some other saints in view of their special missions? In reality, these two rules have never helped the theologians to discover a new truth, but only to confirm truths arrived at by the Christian consciousness of the faithful. On the contrary, the rule of analogies between the privileges of Christ and those of Mary is precise and fruitful. Following it the faithful have discovered all the Marian truths implicitly contained in Scripture and known by us today.

This rule is more comprehensive than the principle of \textit{consortium} praised — and rightly so — by a certain number of theologians, in virtue of which Mary is considered as the associate of Christ in His mission. The rule of analogies between Jesus and Mary applies

\(^{10}\) P.C. 96, col. 741.

\(^{11}\) \textit{True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin}, No. 74. The context shows clearly that in the aphorism quoted the saint understands by the word \textit{God}, the Son of God Incarnate.
to their functions—as does the principle of \textit{consortium}—as well as to their other prerogatives.\footnote{12 I formulated this rule for the first time in the first edition of \textit{Marie dans le Dogme} in 1933. It has been used in this form by several theologians who have recognized its fruitfulness.}

The principle of analogies is not, however, the only light which guides the faithful in the discovery of Marian privileges. If there were identity of prerogatives in Jesus and Mary, we could reason: Jesus possesses a certain privilege, therefore Mary also possesses it. But since there is analogy only, there will be differences as well as resemblances. To what extent is such a privilege of Christ also in Mary? The principle of analogies tells us only in a general way: “according to the manner and in the degree required by the difference between her condition and that of her Son.” How do the faithful estimate this manner and degree? With the help of certain \textit{related truths} furnished either by holy Scripture or by the common teaching of Christian doctrine. Thus, with regard to the Immaculate Conception, they recall what they have learned about the state of primitive innocence and about the sin of Adam and Eve, its cause, and its ransom paid by Christ. In the case of the Blessed Virgin’s co-operation in the Redemption, they review in spirit certain scenes of the Gospel: the Annunciation, the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, Mary on Calvary, as well as the fault of our first parents and Eve’s role in our loss. In determining belief in the Assumption, they consider not only Christ’s Ascension and His place at the right hand of the Father but also the general doctrine of the resurrection of the body, together with St. Paul’s teachings concerning our body of sin, and the like.

These “related truths” have another advantage: that of directing the mind toward the discovery of other prerogatives of Mary. For instance, hearing Simeon tell the young mother that she will have to suffer with and on account of her Child and seeing her at the foot of the cross bring to mind the thought of Mary’s co-operation with the Redeemer, a co-operation already included in a general way in the principle of analogies.

In this way the faithful, inspired by scriptural data and by common Christian doctrine, deduce from what seem to be very vague scriptural teachings on the Mother of Jesus, an increasing
number of explicit statements. They are sure that they are not wrong; but, in fact, may they not be? To adhere completely to a given doctrine and to live by it, one must be certain of its truth beyond all possible shadow of doubt. Do we possess a criterion of infallibility in these Marian doctrines? We do have three criteria—the same three we have for all truths of faith. It will be useful to examine them briefly here because of the discussions to which these Marian doctrines may give rise.

**First, the Common Belief of the Faithful.** Through a single Christian, even very learned and very holy, is subject to error, the body of the Christian faithful is infallible. Jesus is always with His Church to guard it from all error. “Behold,” He says to His disciples before returning to the Father, “behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.”[^13] He is with His Church principally to prevent her disappearing; but He is also with her to keep her in the way of truth. His word is “spirit and life,”[^14] and belief in His word is the indispensable condition of salvation. “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned.”[^15] Were Christ to permit the body of His disciples to err, He would be permitting the loss of His Church. But His Spirit is always with her to teach her “all things.” Now, the Church is the body of the faithful; infallibility is guaranteed, not to a handful of them, but to the majority of the members, whether learned or ignorant.

Moreover, what is common belief is certain belief. The greatest and most saintly theologian who would put forth a doctrine contrary to the universal belief in a matter of faith would necessarily be in error.

As a matter of fact, the universal belief of the Church has always been considered as an evidence of orthodoxy. In the General Councils the bishops express the belief of the faithful of their dioceses. The pope himself before defining a dogma consults the bishops of the entire world in order to learn the belief of the different churches on the subject.

[^13]: Mt. 28:20.
[^14]: Jn. 6:64.
[^15]: Mk. 16:16.
The infallibility of the common belief of the faithful guaranteed by the spirit of Christ is also assured by the second criterion, the ordinary teaching of the Church. In fact, if the body of the faithful professes a certain doctrine it is because the pastors of the Church have taught them.

The Ordinary Teaching of the Church. The universal belief of the faithful is not always easily known. It demands knowledge not only of what is believed in the territory or country where one lives but of what is believed in the entire world. To arrive at such knowledge would demand a poll quite difficult to conduct.

But God has provided for our need of certitude in this matter. As a criterion of infallibility easier to consult than the common belief of the faithful He has given us the common teaching of the bishops. The Holy Spirit established bishops to govern the Church. Governing includes not only the administration of the Church but its education also. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them,” the Master said to the first bishops in His final instructions, and a short time previously He said, “He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me.”

The faithful can know the truth infallibly only if those to whom they should listen can teach it in an infallible manner. Undoubtedly a bishop can be mistaken; all the bishops of one country can be mistaken; but the majority of the bishops of the whole Church cannot be mistaken and their universal teaching is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

The teaching, or, as it is called, “the ordinary magisterium of the Church,” enjoys the same infallibility as the solemn decisions of the sovereign pontiffs. Hence, the Vatican Council declared: “All the truths which are contained in the Word of God, written or transmitted by Tradition, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgment, or by its ordinary and universal teaching, proposes to our belief as divinely revealed, must be believed by a divine and catholic faith.”

The Vatican Council was simply declaring what had always been the constant belief of the Church. St. Irenaeus and other ecclesiastical writers of the first three centuries gave us long lists
of heresies which the Church of their time repudiated. Yet, at that time (not, indeed, until the Council of Nicea in 325) no General Council nor definition *ex cathedra* of a pope had intervened to condemn these novelties. They were contrary to the traditional beliefs, and this fact alone was sufficient to lead the bishops to have the faithful reject them. On the other hand, all the children of the Church professed belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, the special power of the sacraments, the value of indulgences, the existence of purgatory, etc., not as opinions more or less probable but *as absolutely certain truths*, long centuries before the condemnation of the errors of Luther by the Council of Trent.

It is not always as easy to determine whether a proposition belongs to the ordinary teaching of the Church as it is to see that it has been defined by a solemn judgment; and, in case of doubt, assent is not obligatory. But history shows that the great majority of the faithful have never experienced long hesitation in the matter of different religious doctrines. He who seeks with simplicity to know and to live the thought of the Church can easily discover it.

There would, then, be danger of a lack, not only in devotion toward Mary but also in faith itself, if one would *a priori* admit only Mary's divine maternity, her virginity, her Immaculate Conception, and her Assumption as absolutely beyond discussion, and would treat her other privileges as mere opinions. If some of these latter appear to form a part of the ordinary teaching of the Church, they demand from our intellect as firm an assent as do the four which have been officially defined.

The ordinary teaching of the Church is contained principally: (1) in the writings of the Holy See addressed to the universal Church which, without containing formal definitions, propose to explain the traditional and universal doctrine of the Church on some special point; (2) in the instructions of bishops to their flocks — catechisms, pastoral letters — which are given as the expression of the Church's teaching; (3) in public and universal prayers according to the adage: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, for the Church would never place formulas contrary to orthodox doctrine in the mouths of her children.

Although the ordinary teaching of the universal Church pro-
poses some infallible truths, nevertheless in certain particularly serious circumstances it does happen that a more precise statement is desirable and, in fact, required. That is why God has invested the Bishop of bishops with the privilege of personal infallibility. He enjoys this privilege every time he declares that as teacher of the universal Church — ex cathedra, as it is called — he is defining a point of doctrine as being revealed. Ordinarily it is a heresy which calls forth this act. But the Immaculate Conception and the bodily Assumption of Mary, accepted as certain by the faithful for centuries, have been defined merely to exalt the Mother of God and to increase Christian devotion to her. The fact is that the deposit of revelation is not an assembly of abstract propositions that must be jealously guarded, but statements which are “spirit and life”; the more loudly these are proclaimed and acclaimed, the better are they able to nourish the devotion of the faithful.

When the pope speaks ex cathedra he does not make a new revelation; he does not suddenly extract some particular point of doctrine from the deposit of revelation; he does not proclaim what the faithful in general do not yet see, nor what they consider merely as possible. He generally lets piety and reflection accomplish their work under the action of the Holy Spirit; he examines what is of universal tradition and only afterward does he define.

But to define is more than to record. The definition makes clear for all whatever might still have left some few confused or hostile; it obliges all the faithful to acknowledge the proclaimed doctrine as revealed by God; it expresses this truth in a formula, not indeed adequate but clear and precise, which forestalls exaggeration or diminution and which satisfies piety with a new light and new source of life.

In exceptional circumstances, the sovereign pontiff, instead of himself alone defining certain truths, submits them to the judgment of the whole hierarchy assembled in a general or oecumenical council. The definitions of these plenary councils, once approved by the pope, also settle controverted questions with infallible authority.

To the solemn definitions of the popes and to the canons of the oecumenical councils must be added the articles contained in the universal creeds of faith.
And so Christ's prophecy in His farewell discourse is realized: "The Holy Spirit will receive of what is mine, and will declare it to you ... the Spirit of truth, he will teach you all the truth."\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) Jn. 16:15, 13.

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