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Mary and the Apostolate

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 a dozen 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); and Living with Mary (Marianist Publications, 1954). Some of his other Marian books include: Marie dans l'Eglise Antenieceenne (1908); Vie de Marie (1936); La Doctrine Mariale de M. Chaminade (1937); Le Devotion a Marie (1943); De la Decouverte Progressive des Grandeurs de Marie (1951); Marie et Notre Sacerdoce (1953); and La Vie d'Union a Marie (1954).

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.

Despite his numerous writings, Father Neubert has not, until his recent retirement, devoted most of his time to writing. His literary output is considerable because of his practice of writing something every day. The major portion of his time has, in fact, been taken up by his many duties as superior, teacher, preacher, spiritual director, and retreat-master. 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.

"Mary and the Apostolate" is the substance of an address given to the Mission Circle at the University of Fribourg in 1940, together with selections from Father Neubert's book Notre Don de Dieu.

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MARY AND THE APOSTOLATE

EMIL NEUBERT, S. M.

Whenever there is question of a work that offers special difficulties and requires a peculiar power of adaptation to various and delicate conditions, the right spirit is of paramount importance—of an importance similar to that of the soul in the human being. Its importance is especially great if there is question of a supernatural work. All the natural knowledge, experience, and skill of the world will not be able to convert a soul if that supernatural spirit is lacking. And yet, because of the many obstacles that are encountered in a difficult apostolic undertaking, almost our whole attention may be directed towards the natural means to overcome the obstacles, while the supernatural side of the problem is neglected.

Now my purpose is precisely to show you how, under the guidance of Our Lady, you will always be animated with the right supernatural spirit in the apostolate, and with what efficiency your apostolic endeavors will be crowned. I shall first explain the apostolic mission of Mary in the world; that is, Mary’s role in the apostolate in general; next, her special role in the apostolate of today; and finally some practical conclusions for our apostolic work.

The Role of Mary in the Apostolate in General

In order to understand Mary’s role in the apostolate, it will be useful to recall briefly some notions of Mariology that are well-known to you, namely, Mary’s spiritual motherhood, her cooperation in the work of the Redemption, and her function as distributrix of all graces.

YOU KNOW THAT MARY IS OUR MOTHER IN THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER, and a true Mother, not only because Jesus, dying, called her so—this would have created only an adopted motherhood—but because she is the Woman who really gave us our supernatural life. She conceived us, so to say, at the Annunciation, when conceiving Jesus, as Pope Pius X explains; for we are members of His Mystical Body, and the Head and the members form but one single whole. She brought us forth on Calvary, for it was there that Christ merited for us definitely to live by His life, and Mary cooperated in the mystery of the Redemption as she did in that of the Incarnation. “Therefore, before expiring on the cross, Our
Lord wished to give us a sign of that spiritual maternity by confiding Mary to the beloved disciple, St. John. Jesus did not constitute her our Mother under the cross; rather, He publicly declared her to be our Mother who had been so from the time of her consent to the Incarnation at Nazareth. ‘Behold, she is your Mother,’ He meant.

“As individual members of the Body of Christ, our birth into the supernatural life occurs at our baptism. Supernaturally we are all born dead. It is necessary that the life merited for us by the death of Christ be infused into each one in particular. Now it is the Blessed Mother who obtains this, as every other grace, for us. Without this grace which she obtains for us we should remain forever dead. No one, therefore, is reborn into the divine life unless Mary has given him supernatural birth. Her maternal care does not, however, stop here. . . Thus she continues in heaven to be our loving Mother, the providing Mother of each one of us in particular, after having at Nazareth and on Calvary become the Mother of all mankind.” (Resch: Our Blessed Mother. Milwaukee, Bruce, pp. 155-156)

YOU KNOW ALSO WHY MARY IS CALLED THE CO-REDEMPTRIX. Her cooperation in our Redemption consists: “1. In her deliberate consent to the divine proposal at the moment of the Annunciation. As soon as she pronounced her Fiat, she was already collaborating in the work of our redemption. She consented to furnish the Victim Whose immolation would save us. Mary became the Mother of God to become the Mother of the Redeemer.

“2. In the identification of her dispositions throughout life with the interior dispositions of the Redeemer: ‘that uninterrupted community of life and labors of the Son and the Mother’ (Pius X). Her thought, sentiment, and will were always identified with those of Jesus Who desired but one thing: the accomplishment of the work for which His Father sent Him into the world, that is, our Redemption.

“3. In that companionship of sorrow and suffering with her divine Son at the moment of His passion and death. The passion and death of the Savior was the price of our Redemption. ‘She shared so entirely in His passion that if it had been possible she would gladly have borne all the torments her Son bore’ (Pius X).” (Resch, op. cit., pp. 145-146)
FINALLY, MARY IS THE DISTRIBUTRIX OF ALL GRACES: a doctrine well-known to all Catholics at present. This privilege is a direct consequence of the previous one. Since on earth, through her co-Redemption, she helped Christ to acquire all graces for us, so now in heaven she helps Him to distribute them to all men.

Thus far I do not claim to have told you anything you did not know. But of the doctrine expounded thus far, there follows a consequence which is less well-known and is of highest importance for our purpose: that Mary has been entrusted by God with an apostolic mission in the Church; not any kind of apostolic mission, but a mission universal as regards time and space, a mission that extends to the whole Church and lasts from the death of Christ to the end of the world; an apostolic mission which not only is far superior to that of any other apostle, but is, with that of Christ, the very source of every other apostolate, so that the apostolate of all other apostles is but a participation in the apostolate of Mary. And this results directly from the three social functions of the Blessed Virgin we mentioned above.

1. MARY COOPERATED WITH JESUS IN THE REDEMPTION OF MAN-KIND. Yet Redemption, although merited in principle on Calvary for all men, is not actually accomplished until it is applied to every individual soul. Now, in the words of St. Paul, "the vocation and the gifts of God are without repentance." The cooperation which Mary gave her Son at Nazareth and on Calvary she must give until the end of time.

Having given Jesus to the entire world in general on the day of the Incarnation, she must give Him to every creature in particular throughout the ages. Being co-operatrix with Jesus in the work of the Redemption, she should remain His Co-operatrix in the application of the Redemption to each soul. For the Redemption has not yet been fully realized: the grace of salvation merited for all on Calvary must still be applied to each man as he comes into this world. Such is the mission until the end of time. With Jesus she worked at the Redemption of all men; with Jesus she must work at their conversion and sanctification.

2. MARY IS THE MOTHER OF ALL MEN. As such, she must be able to employ every means to bring back her unfortunate, wandering children
to the road of salvation, and thus hinder them from ignoring, and what is far worse, cursing forever their heavenly Father and Mother. Can we imagine that God made her mother of men and did not give her in the highest degree the greatest of all desires in the heart of a Christian mother—to see her children eternally happy with her? Or, having given her that desire, would He refuse her the means of realizing it? All the reasons given to prove the eagerness of Mary to receive sinners prove likewise her apostolic mission. Does a mother rest content with welcoming only those of her children who are faithful or repentant? Is she not as anxious, even more so, about those who do not wish to return? Can she rest until she has won them back to God's love and hers? To say that God confided to Mary a universal apostolic mission is simply to affirm that He made her a worthy mother of the Savior and of mankind.

These two titles of Mary, that of Co-Redemptrix and that of Mother of Mankind, prove that God ought to confide to her a universal apostolic mission. Her title of distributrix of all graces proves that He did confide such a mission to her. What is meant, in fact, by being an apostle? It means to devote oneself to saving souls from Satan. It means bringing them to Jesus in order to be transformed into Him here on earth and be made eternally happy with Him in heaven. But we get no grace except through Mary. Consequently, all the activity of an apostle, whoever he be, his very vocation to the apostolate, comes from her. Mary does not merely step in at a certain time during his apostolate when he is unable to cope with rebellious souls; she it is who inspired him with the idea of his ministry and who is the cause of all his success. If she ceases to act, even for a moment, he ceases to be an apostle. She is the apostle. He is but her instrument, much in the same way that priests are the instruments of the one Priest, Jesus Christ. Whether he realizes it or not, he is but doing the work confided by God to Mary. He merely helps her in distributing all graces. He carries on, in the little sphere of his activity and under the influence of Mary, the mission confided to her by God for all time and every place. He is the soldier who, even without thinking about it, combats in obedience to the orders he receives from the commander-in-chief of God's army.
We might corroborate these conclusions by the teachings of Holy Scripture—even the assertion of the first prophecy in the Old Testament: “I shall put enmity between thee and the Woman, between thy seed and her seed. She shall crush thy head;” but especially by a number of facts contained in the New Testament; by the teachings of the Fathers and of the popes, in particular those of Leo XIII, Pius X, and Pius XI; and by the history of the Church which verifies the words of the sacred liturgy: “Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, for alone thou hast destroyed all heresies;” and shows that the great apostles were always great servants of Mary.

**Mary’s Role in the Apostolate of Today**

Several great servants of God and of His Mother have foretold that Mary’s action in the apostolate of the Church, though real from the beginning, would manifest itself in a quite special and forceful way in the times that were to come. You doubtless know the prophecies of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort concerning “the Apostles of the latter times.” He announced that there would rise up in the Church great saints who would surpass the former saints as the “cedars of Lebanon surpass little shrubs,” who would be totally consecrated to the Blessed Virgin and would carry on an unceasing warfare against Satan and his helpers. Other holy men made similar predictions, without knowing those of St. Grignion.

To speak of but one whose doctrine is best known to me, Father Chaminade, whose process of canonization has been started in Rome. During the French Revolution he lived for some time in exile at Saragossa, Spain and received from the miraculous Lady of the Pillar special revelations concerning her action in the apostolate of modern times and of cooperation she expected from him towards it.

As a consequence, Father Chaminade founded two religious societies, one of men and the other of women — the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary, who were totally consecrated to her and even took a special vow of devotedness to, and perseverance in, Her service. Here is how he expressed himself on this doctrine in a circular letter. After having explained Mary’s apostolic struggles and triumphs in all centuries
and having portrayed the prevailing heresy of the present day, religious indifference, he proceeds:

This description of our times, unfortunately so exact, is however far from discouraging us. Mary's power is not diminished. We firmly believe that she will overcome all others because she is today, as she was formerly, the incomparable Woman, the promised Woman who was to crush the serpent's head; and Jesus Christ, in never addressing her except by this sublime name, teaches us that she is the hope, the joy and the life of the Church and the terror of hell. To her, therefore, is reserved a great victory in our day: hers will be the glory of saving the faith from the shipwreck with which it is threatened among us.

Now we have understood this design of Providence . . . and have hastened to offer Mary our feeble services in order to labor under her orders and combat at her side. We have enlisted under her banner as her soldiers and her ministers, and we have bound ourselves by a special vow, that of Stability, to assist her with all our strength until the end of our life, in her noble struggle against the powers of hell. And as an Order justly celebrated has taken the name and standard of Jesus Christ, so we have taken the name and standard of Mary and are ready to hasten wherever she calls us in order to spread her cult and through it the kingdom of God in souls.

This . . . is certainly the distinguishing character and family trait of both of our Societies: we are in a special manner the auxiliaries and the instruments of the Blessed Virgin in the great work of reforming morals, of preserving and propagating the Faith, and by the fact, of sanctifying our neighbor. She communicates to us her own zeal and entrusts to us the projects which are inspired by her almost infinite charity, and we make a vow to serve her faithfully until the end of our life, to carry out punctually all that she tells us. We are glad that we can thus spend in her service the life and strength that we have pledged to her.” (Chaminade: Stability, pp. 9-10)

WHATEVER THE RESPECT WE OWE TO HOLY MEN who have made such predictions, we are not bound to believe their predictions. Yet we see that these have been initiated and are receiving every day an ever
greater accomplishment. No epoch ever witnessed a renewal of Marian piety as that which began towards 1830. It produced manifestations of devotion towards the Virgin unknown even during the most enthusiastic periods of the Middle Ages. If, in fact, the "centuries of faith" have seen, as we have witnessed during the 19th and 20th centuries, grand churches rising in honor of Mary, immense crowds of pilgrims filling the roads leading to her sanctuaries, fervent souls praying in secret, enthusiastic multitudes breaking forth in joyful hymns before the image of Our Lady, have they seen, as we have, so many theologians studying Mary's prerogatives, national and international congresses meeting to set forth her grandeurs and to seek ways and means for the systematic extension of her cult? Have they seen the Pope himself, not obliged by the attacks of heretics but out of pure devotion, defining or preparing to define the great things that God has done for Mary? Medieval devotion to Mary was pre-eminently sentimental and simple, consequently exposed to diminish. Our devotion is more doctrinal and therefore, it would seem, more solid, durable, and fruitful.

ANOTHER NEW ASPECT OF MARIAN DEVOTION is that a number of apostolic men are realizing more and more clearly the apostolic role of Mary. Father Chaminade was one of the first to preach it openly. Since his time others have taught this doctrine more or less definitely. The Blessed Virgin has occasionally intervened to spread the idea. The wonderful conversions brought about since 1830 by the Miraculous Medal, and the conversions obtained at Our Lady of Victories and all over the world through the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary are evidences of her intervention.

WE SHOULD ALSO NOTE THIS UNPRECEDENTED FACT, that since the beginning of the 19th century, a vast proportion of founders of religious societies seem anxious to place their work under the direct patronage of Mary, and to insert under one form or another, the mention of the Virgin in the name of their Societies. And if at the start they had other views, heaven itself has at times forced them to follow this idea, as was the case with the Venerable Liebermann. The past few years have witnessed throughout the world marvelous apostolic works placed directly under the auspices of the Immaculate Virgin.
Some Practical Conclusions

All of us, whether or not we are called to a particular apostolate, should learn to adopt a Marian attitude towards all people. For if we love the Blessed Virgin we must imitate her. She loves all, for all are her children. She loves all because she sees in them Jesus, her Son by nature. She makes no distinctions between souls. Our apostolate with souls is but a participation in the apostolate of Mary. These considerations should first of all make us love all those souls especially confided to us — family, relatives, work-contacts, social-contacts, etc. Since they are Mary’s children we should love them with Mary’s love, with a real eternal love.

We must love, too, with unremitting devotedness. The thought of her who suffered unspeakably to help redeem us and those confided to our care, will spur us on to devote and sacrifice ourselves for them after the example of our Mother. What we do for others we are doing for her. That devotedness is our practical way of showing our love. How could we say that we love Mary, whom we see not, if we do not love her children whom we see?

Nor will our attitude towards souls be that of a condescending devotedness, that of a man who knows his superiority, but is willing to be kind to those whom he considers far below him. This would not be a Marian attitude. Mary, though the Mother of God, went simply to her cousin Elizabeth to greet her and rejoice with her and also to serve her. And later, she simply said to Jesus at the marriage feast of Cana: “They have no wine.” In every case, it is Jesus Whom we are serving when we serve souls — and we ought to be highly honored to be allowed to serve Him in the person of others.

Above all, we shall be full of confidence in the success of the apostolate if we remember that we are doing Mary’s work. “To her is reserved in our days a great victory.” And we shall share in that victory if we work under her auspices. She has crushed the head of the serpent and shall ever crush it. If we fight in our name, we may meet with failure upon failure and soon grow discouraged. But if we fight in the name of her who is always victorious we are sure to conquer. “Without Mary we cannot succeed. With Mary we cannot fail.”
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