

A MARIAN APOSTLE OF MODERN TIMES

This is the Introduction of Father Jean-Louis Barré, S.M.,
to his study of the Marian writings by Father Emile Neubert, S.M.
Translated from French into English by Father Joseph Stefanelli, S.M.
Edited by Brother John Samaha, S.M.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Father Emile Neubert (1878-1967) was one of the first theologians to open the road of patristic research on the Virgin Mary. His thesis, *Marie dans le dogme de l'Eglise anténicéenne*, was notable from the moment of its presentation in 1907. This young theologian, one of the precursors of the patristic renewal in France, would be crowned with an honorary degree on the anniversary of this thesis, March 7, 1966, by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg. Still today it is recognized as an important milestone in Marian studies. "It was the first patristic thesis in our Faculties to be dedicated to Mariology."¹ Published in 1908, it inaugurated a series of published books and articles. It was like a solid scriptural and patristic source, gauge of a relentless research by the author with a view to uniting "his doctrinal and spiritual views which amaze us when we read his works."² What Father Koehler stressed in his short biographical note for the magazine *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, 1967, preceded a first presentation of a bibliography of the author who had died that same year.

Among the people, it was a completely other work, different in style and form, by which Neubert would, little by little, achieve world renown: *Mon idéal, Jésus, Fils de Marie*. It was a treatise which, through its acceptance by the general public, was ranked with other great and celebrated popular works of Mariology such as *Le Traité de la vraie Dévotion*, of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort and *Les gloires de Marie* of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori.

¹ Theodore Koehler, "Le Père Emile Neubert (1878-1967), Marianiste," in *EphMar*, Madrid, 17 (1967), p. 531.

² Koehler, "Le Père Emile Neubert (1878-1967), Marianiste," p. 531.

Heir to the teachings of the founder of the Society of Mary (Marianists), Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Neubert, in his small book *Mon idéal, Jésus, Fils de Marie*, gives us, in a kind of short “tract of missionary spirituality,” a veritable pedagogy for walking the road to holiness. It is an itinerary of the Christian life in which Jesus and Mary speak to all the baptized in an interpersonal relationship. Translated into more than fifty languages, a pocket edition of this work inspired millions of Christians, including Saint Maximilian Kolbe and Frank Duff.

After this little masterpiece of Marian spirituality, Neubert would go more deeply into Mary’s mission and ours with a concern for evangelization.

Other published works and articles are also sources for our study. This study seeks to highlight the specialized theology about Mary in the “Neubertian” works, of which the popular *Mon idéal, Jésus, Fils de Marie* is the masterpiece. Requests for new editions express a desire of our contemporaries to discover the “spiritual masters” and “the paths of spirituality.”

Following the path traced by the written work of Emile Neubert, a new response to this desire should “further a devotion rooted in the doctrinal exigencies of faith.”³

The thesis which we submit here should permit us to lay the foundations for the glorification of Emile Neubert, but our considerations are not limited to that point alone.

We have found, during all our research, that the intellectual and spiritual matters have joined our first intuitions. In fact, we anticipated that his theological and spiritual thought possessed, whether in a profound or in a barely touched manner, elements which would permit us, in the context of the Vatican Council II and in the Marian thoughts of John Paul II, to contribute to the renewal of Mariology.

Neubert’s great intuitions are found in gestation within his words. If they were to be reconsidered through a highlighting of all the “Neubertian” theology, we would then have an

³ Koehler, “Le Père Emile Neubert (1878-1967), Marianiste,” p. 531.

original way of bringing his contribution, posthumously, to the maturation of Vatican Council II in its pastoral applications and in the indispensable work of ecumenism.

It seems to us, in all audacity and humility, to be able to focus the eyes of the Church on the obvious holiness of Emile Neubert as one who, from his youth, decided “never again to commit a venial sin willfully” so as not to displease Mary, whose servant he became in order to please his Master and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The methodology of this presentation

The first chapter allows us to become acquainted with the author. He displays his personal evolution, especially in his early years, as he recounts a review of his autobiography. He began it when he was 80 years of age, at the request of his community superior. We shall better understand the significance of his message through his apostolic commitments as priest in the Society of Mary and through his writings, during his entire life. He was known especially as professor of theology and member of Marian societies. His principal works are presented in summary, with their editions; they provide an overview of the whole of his works.

The second chapter presents Mariology in France at the beginning of the twentieth century after an ecclesial and Mariological sketch with reference to the preceding centuries. It takes into account the overall evolution of history in the West. Then, after noting the immediate influences which affected him at the time he was writing his thesis, we give a succinct review of the essential twofold influence of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort and, above all, of William Joseph Chaminade.

In the third chapter, we present an overview of the major themes of his Mariology in dogma and in worship. We follow, through his different themes linked to Mary, the biblical and patristic foundations of his teaching in the totality of his works. We consider the maternal and apostolic mission of Mary in his theological view.

Following this approach to the ensemble of our work, we explore, in the fourth chapter, the originality of the short treatise *Mon idéal, Jésus, Fils de Marie*. This replay is done in the light of chapter eight, *De beata*, of *Lumen Gentium*. In a subtle form and an original manner of expression, Neubert offers us the fruits of a thought constructed with a renewed Marian mentality whose other works unfold for us the theological, patristic, biblical, and anthropological underpinnings. The international reception to *Mon idéal, Jésus, Fils de Marie* leads us to seek the reasons for which this small volume is more than a mere devotion.

The fifth chapter considers the question of the reception of his work, of its influence within the Society of Mary, and more extensively within the Church. Viewed with the texts of Vatican Council II and those of the postconciliar time, and following Blessed William Joseph Chaminade and the better-known Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, we engage in a critical review of his entire work.

*La Mission de la Vierge Marie
d'après les écrits
d'Emile Neubert (1878-1967)*

Jean-Louis Barré, S.M.
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