

“The Time is Now!”
Bl. William Joseph Chaminade’s Marian Vision
from the writings of Fr. Emil Neubert, S.M.

The following are excerpts from the book Mary’s Apostolic Mission and Ours, written by Fr. Emil Neubert (1878-1967), distinguished Marian author. Fr. Neubert. was a member of the Society of Mary, founded by Bl. William Joseph Chaminade. Neubert depicts the Society’s founder as one of the modern giants of Marian spirituality, to be ranked alongside St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe. Recently translated into English from the original French edition published in 1956, Mary’s Apostolic Mission and Ours is now available through the Academy of the Immaculate, P. O. Box 3003, New Bedford, MA 02741-3003, www.marymediatrix.com.

William Joseph Chaminade sensed being called to the religious life early on, but he had not given the least thought to founding a new order. In fact, several times he had sought to enter some society with which he was familiar. But, at each attempt, it was evident to him that God did not want him there. In the meantime, he had been ordained to the priesthood several years before the beginning of the Great [French] Revolution, and devoted himself to the education of youth. In 1791, he rejected the schismatic oath and resolved to carry on his sacred ministry in hiding in the city of Bordeaux until 1797, when he was forced into exile.

He went to Saragossa [Spain]. There he passed long hours before the miraculous Virgin in the sanctuary of Our Lady of the Pillar, asking her to show him the means of reviving the Christian faith in his fatherland. In some extraordinary way, he received special insights from her which could be condensed to the following three: 1) It was Mary’s mission to lead the battle against Satan and his followers, and this mission would manifest itself in an especially notable way in the new era which had just begun. 2) For the accomplishment of this mission, she desired the cooperation of two new religious societies of men and women which would be dedicated to her without reserve, and would fight in her name for the triumph of Christ and His Church. 3) It was he whom Mary had chosen to muster up both of these elite troops.

The founder would express these ideas in a circular letter on the occasion of the first approbation of his work by the Holy See [1839]:

Every period in the history of the Church has its record of the combats and glorious victories of the august Mother of God. Ever since the Lord sowed dissension between her and the serpent, she has constantly vanquished the world and the powers of hell. All the heresies, the Church tells us, have been subdued by the Blessed Virgin Mary and, little by little, she has reduced them to the silence of oblivion.

This is Mary's apostolic mission in general and, behold, her special mission in current times as well:

In our own day the great prevailing heresy is religious indifference that dulls the souls of individuals, and reduces them to a state of torpid egoism and moral stagnation. ... The divine torch of faith is burning low and dying in the heart of Christendom; virtue is becoming increasingly rare and is disappearing, while vice is rampant and spreading with horrific fury. It seems that the time is near when we will witness general defection and all but universal apostasy, as has been foretold.

And yet, this sad but true picture of our times does not discourage us by any means. Mary's power has not been lessened. It is our firm belief that she will subdue this heresy like all the others, for she continues to be, as ever, the incomparable Woman, the Woman of promise who is to crush the head of the infernal serpent. Jesus himself, who in His public utterances always addressed her by this great name, would thereby teach 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, for to her belongs the glory of saving the Faith from destruction with which we are being threatened.

[The originality of Bl. Chaminade's vision consists particularly] in his repeated affirmations that this mission of Mary's was to break forth brilliantly with unprecedented power in the new age, beginning after the French Revolution of 1789. Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort had also foreseen the times of Mary's triumph. But he ended his prophecy with these words: "When and how will this come about? ... God knows! It is for us to be silent, to sigh, and to wait."¹

¹ *True Devotion to Mary*, no. 59.

Chaminade declared: “The time is now! A great victory is promised to Mary **in our day.**” We are aware of five different and solemn circumstances when he made this declaration—even in a document to Pope Gregory XVI in which he must have carefully weighed every word, as his request for the approbation of his two Foundations was inclusive. Such forthrightness in declaring his conviction, with such clarity and without the least hesitation or reservation, of Mary’s special role in the new age, is all the more astonishing in that, at the time the founder expressed it, there were no signs as yet of the revival of Marian fervor which made of the 19th and 20th centuries the centuries *par excellence* of Mary.

It was this conviction about the apostolic mission of Mary, especially in the approaching new age, and the mandate which he had received at her sanctuary in Saragossa, that determined Father Chaminade to found two societies of women and of men who would place themselves completely at the disposal of Mary to help her in her providential mission.

It should be remarked—and this seems to be a second original point of Chaminade’s Marian doctrine—that, in his Foundations, the Virgin does not intervene to help her children in their apostolate; it is her children who give themselves to help her in her own apostolate. It is for this very reason that they have come together in religious societies. Their profession is, in effect, a consecration to Mary, Queen of Apostles.

It was their filial piety toward Mary that moved these new religious to “give themselves to Mary with all their goods and all the talents of their being, so that she might make of them whatever pleased her for the greater glory of her Son!” A follower of the Berullian school [of spirituality], Chaminade faithfully charged his students with the obligation to imitate Jesus. Consider then, “that Jesus is born of Mary. Nurtured and educated by her, He was subject to her; He associated her to all his works, to all his sorrows, to all his mysteries. Devotion to Mary (i.e., dedication to the ultimate degree) is, therefore, the most striking aspect of the imitation of Jesus Christ.”²

We have committed ourselves to Mary but, in what way? In all that a child should feel and do for a good mother: love her, respect her, obey her, and assist her. Oh! We have, above all, committed ourselves to the culminating effect of filial love, assistance, and active goodwill: we have made the

² Constitutions 1839, art. 5.

commitment to publicly proclaim the name of Mary and to have her honored everywhere!³

The apostolate of the religious of Mary has become as universal as that of their Mother, for it is a participation therein:

Among the many congregations that sprang into existence in succeeding ages and in various parts of the world, some were called to one particular form of work, some to another. And last of all, we believe that we too have been called by Mary herself, to assist her with all our might in the struggle against the great heresy of our times. To this end, we have taken for our mottos, as declared our Constitutions, these words of the Blessed Virgin to the attendant at Cana: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). We are convinced that our particular mission, despite our weakness, is to perform all the works of zeal and of mercy for the welfare of our neighbor. It is for this reason that, under the general title of teaching Christian morals, we employ all the means at our disposal for preserving our neighbors from the contagion of evil, and of restoring those who have fallen under its sway.⁴

Benedict XV, on the occasion of the first centenary of the Society of Mary, wrote to Very Rev. Father Hiss, Superior General of the Society, a letter which is a kind of approbation of Father Chaminade’s views on the Marian apostolate:

It is not without divine guidance that the Reverend Chaminade went into exile to Saragossa. There, visiting the shrine of our august Sovereign, he understood the plan of divine mercy to lead his country back to Jesus through Mary. Sensing, without a shadow of doubt, that an important role had been reserved for him in this apostolate, he prepared himself for that mission by meditation and prayer at the feet of the august image. It is, in fact, not an empty praise that we give to Mary by this title of Queen of Apostles. Just as she helped the apostles, educators of the nascent church, by her support and counsels, so we must also affirm that she assists at all times the heirs of the apostolic office who seek to either prepare victories or to repair disasters in the adult Church.⁵

³ *Esprit de notre Fondation*, vol. 1, p. 127

⁴ Chaminade letter no. 1163.

⁵ A.A.S. (Acts of the Holy See), 1921, p. 173.