

# Rev. Dr. Owen B. McGuire

## Some Reflections On Our Lady's Birthday

On Sept. 8, Tuesday of this week, the Church celebrated the "Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary," or, in other words, the Birthday of the Mother of God. It reminds me that the attitude of American Protestants generally towards Catholic veneration of the Mother of Our Saviour is very different from what it was, say fifty or sixty years ago.

This does not mean — unfortunately it does not mean — that they have become more orthodox Christians, nor that they have approached nearer to Catholicism. It does, however, show that the old prejudices deriving from the passions and polemics of the Reformation period have been dying out. It shows also that these prejudices have subsided and the non-Catholic mind being freed to consider the matter rationally and dispassionately, they have come to see that the Catholic doctrine and practice in this matter appear logical, consistent and in accordance with the most noble of our human instincts, namely love and veneration for motherhood.

But whatever be the cause or causes of the change the fact is evident, that the change has taken place.

### PAMPHLET MAILED

I am led to make these remarks from reading a document which was placed in my hands last week by one of our priests. He had received it through the mail from an anti-Catholic organization which has its center and publishing house in New York City, where it was founded 50 or 60 years ago by an apostate priest. The document is a pamphlet written by a man who says he had been a "Roman Catholic" for 30 years before he saw the light and became a "converted Catholic" without the "Roman" led chiefly to this conclusion when he saw the superstition and idolatry of the Catholic veneration for the Mother of God. His pamphlet is to show up this "official and organized Catholicism."

But the point here is this: I had thought that the organization founded by that apostate priest had become extinct, and as I had heard nothing of it for many years, was surprised to see that it was still in existence.

At one time my memory it made quite a stir, and was supported by a number of non-Catholic Christians. I don't now remember whether it was while I was a student at St. Andrew's Seminary (1883-1886), or when I returned here as a young priest, that same "Converted Catholic" priest was invited by a Protestant minister to occupy his pulpit in Rochester. He not only "preached" in the said pulpit but also lectured in a hall provided for him; and his calumnies were given first-page prominence in two of Rochester's four daily papers.

This is a free country, including freedom of speech and freedom of the press. But the question was and is, if a man is free to come into a peaceful community and attack one-third of its population (that was the proportion of Catholics in Rochester at the time) by studied insult, outrageous calumnies and downright lying, not only on our veneration for the Mother of God but on other Catholic doctrines and practices, and even on our loyalty as American citizens. It is to me inconceivable that such things could happen today in Rochester or Elmira, without a protest from the non-Catholic public. Therefore I have said that the attitude has greatly changed. For that we have reason to thank God.

### CITES CHESTERTON

I have been led to make these remarks also by something else I have read during the past week. In looking over some clippings that I made from the Catholic press of England while I was over there, I turned up an article by Chesterton in the Catholic Times of Liverpool on the subject "Why I Became a Catholic." Chesterton has written many articles on this same subject. In fact in one of his latest books before his death he has six chapters on "My Six Conversions" — namely six things that had occurred since his conversion which would have led him to become a Catholic, if he had not already been one. "At least six times during the past few years," he writes in this book (*The Well and the Shallows*), "I have found myself in the situation in which I should certainly become a Catholic if I had not been restrained from that rash step by the fortunate accident that I was one already." But this article in the Catholic Times has not, I think,

appeared in any of his published books.

He has another article on this subject with the title "Mary and the Convert," and though it may seem a digression here he says something there that is well worth notice. Many Catholic writers on the spiritual life have said and repeated that veneration for the Mother of God is a sign of predestination — that such a person is sure of salvation. Although Chesterton's parents were Unitarians (and also Universalists) he had always, even in childhood, a love for the image of the Blessed Mother.

### CURIOUS LONGING

He writes: "It may be an accident, or a highly unmerited favor of Heaven, but either it is a fact; that I always had a curious longing for the remains of the particular tradition (the Catholic veneration for 'Mary') even in a world where it was regarded as a legend. I was haunted by the idea while stuck in the ordinary stage of school boy scepticism. I was affected by it before I had shed the ordinary sunny religion in which the Mother of God had no fit or adequate place. I fished not long ago, scrawled in very bad handwriting scraps of an exceedingly bad imitation of Swinburne, which was, nevertheless, apparently addressed to what I should have called a picture of the Madonna." He goes on to say that he took pleasure in reciting Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpina," deliberately directing the lines away from Swinburne's intention and supposing them addressed to the new Christian Queen of Life rather than to the fallen pagan Queen of death. The lines of the Hymn are:

"But I turn to her still, having seen she will surely abide in the end Goddess and maiden and queen — be near me now and here."

It is certainly astonishing, the more astonishing because of the religious of the religious atmosphere in which the child moved. And he says: "And I had from that time onwards the very vague but slowly clarifying idea of something all that Constantine had set up, just as Swinburne's Pagan had defended all he had thrown down."

In reading that passage of Chesterton one is naturally reminded of the memorable passage in Newman's Apologia:

### DREW A DEVICE

"When I was in Littlemore (before his conversion) I was looking over old copy-books of my school days and I found among them my first Latin verse-book, and in the first page of it there was a device which almost took my breath away with surprise. I have the book before me now and have just been showing it to others. I had written in the first page in my schoolboy hand: 'J. H. Newman, Feb. 11, 1811, Verse-Book.' Then follow my first verses. Between 'Verse' and 'Book' I have drawn the figure of a solid cross upright, and next to it is, what may indeed be meant for a necklace, but what I cannot make out to be anything else than a set of beads suspended, with a little cross attached." Namely a Rosary. Yet he cannot remember having

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## CHILE MOURNS TIMELY DEATH OF ARCHBISHOP

SANTIAGO. — The Government, the press and the entire country join with the Church in mourning the tragic and untimely death of the Most Rev. Juan Subercaseaux, Archbishop of La Serena, who died of injuries received in a motor accident. His death, a civil and military authorities and thousands of persons attended the funeral service in the La Serena Cathedral. The Most Rev. Juan Subercaseaux, Archbishop of La Serena, was a Chilean, born in 1864, and was a member of the Chilean Academy of Letters. His father, Don Juan Subercaseaux, was Chilean Ambassador to the Holy See; his mother, Dona Amalia Merynck de Subercaseaux, was distinguished in her own right as a writer and as a

social worker in the La Serena Cathedral. The Most Rev. Juan Subercaseaux, Archbishop of La Serena, was a Chilean, born in 1864, and was a member of the Chilean Academy of Letters. His father, Don Juan Subercaseaux, was Chilean Ambassador to the Holy See; his mother, Dona Amalia Merynck de Subercaseaux, was distinguished in her own right as a writer and as a

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