

VIRGIN MARY AND VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE UNDER ATTACK

The fall season was a busy one for vandals and arsonists angry at the Catholic Church. To be more specific, statues of Our Blessed Mother and the Virgin of Guadalupe, are under vicious assault.

A statue of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus was branded with a swastika and a Star of David, as well as satanic symbols, at St. Clare Catholic Church in O'Fallon, Illinois. Another statue, St. Clare of Assisi (the church's namesake), was totally burned. Three men in their late teens and early twenties were charged with the crime in this southwestern Illinois town.

In Stockton, California, at the Church of the Presentation, arsonists gutted the church and painted a swastika on an outside wall. Graffiti was found on a statue of the Virgin Mary; the police are investigating the incident as a possible hate crime.

South Central Los Angeles has been the scene of some of the worst attacks. In these instances, the target has been statues of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Along Cesar Chavez Avenue, at least 10 murals have been defaced with slashes of paint. On San Pedro Street, another dozen images have been defaced. The Mexicans who live in this neighborhood are particularly outraged at what is happening.

The Los Angeles desecrations are adorned with inscriptions such as "666" and "The Beast." Father Gregory Coiro, the media director of the Los Angeles Archdiocese—and a Catholic League member—suspects that this is the work of some "non-Catholic or anti-Catholic Christian sect." We are happy to note that Senator Barbara Boxer denounced the desecrations and called

upon Attorney General Janet Reno to investigate the attacks as hate crimes.

Finally, in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, a statue of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus was smashed to smithereens by vandals who entered Our Lady of Refuge Church. The statue stood outside the church's rectory for more than 60 years. The attack is being investigated as a bias crime.

It is not for nothing that Our Blessed Mother is the object of most of these attacks, or that Virgin of Guadalupe is under special assault. Both represent purity in women and occupy a spiritual presence in the lives of Catholics that many non-Catholics find puzzling. And to those who are evil, the stature we accord these women is more than puzzling, it is downright detestable, worthy of attack. Some things never change.