

Mystical Rose: Historical



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Volume II

The History of the Catholic Church: Part III

Perils from Without: The Roman Persecutions

(30 A.D.—313 A.D.)

1. The Miracle of Endurance. (Introductory note):

In the parable of the Mustard Seed, Our Lord foretold the amazing growth of the Kingdom of God, the Church, from apparently small beginnings. In the parable of the Leaven, He showed how it would grow: as the leaven meeting the dough causes ferment and conflict, so the Catholic Church causes turmoil and moral strife when it meets with fallen human nature, prone as it is to choose what is evil and to oppose what is good. (Luke 12:51). Human nature is, moreover, ceaselessly incited to resist the Truth by Satan, the great enemy of the Redemption, working through human agencies. The history of the Church is incomprehensible unless we recognize that the intelligence which guides all the forces opposing Catholic life is the intelligence of Satan.

When Our Lord walked the earth, the devil strove, through the Scribes and Pharisees, to trap Him in His speech. When they failed to do this, they tried to overcome Him by violence. The devil's armory is limited and his methods do not change, and hence all the obstacles



placed in the way of the Church by her great adversary may likewise be reduced to *guile* and *force*. (notice that St. John refers to the devil as a *liar* and a *murderer* from the very beginning): guile to set the minds of men to break down the internal unity of the Church by causing one or more of its members to be influenced by the intellectual and moral errors of the day and to separate themselves from the unity of the Church's faith or government by heresy or schism (perils from within). Force appears when earthly rulers attempt to breakdown the external unity of the Church by persecution (perils from without).

Our Divine Lord in founding the Church had foretold that His followers should suffer persecution; that they should be delivered up to the princes of this world and be scourged and slain for bearing witness to His name. So it came to pass. Rome, the mistress of the pagan world, some realized that in Christianity a rival power had come to challenge her sway over mankind, for pagan Rome was opposed to the teachings of Christianity in the most important things in life. First, in the matter of religion, the Romans; in no way religious-minded even for pagans, favored a worship that consisted merely in the fulfillment of certain ceremonial rites and rituals; Christianity, on the other hand, demanded a total conversion of life and a constant war on the passions: "Unless a man deny himself..." Secondly, in political life, the Christians, however well disposed to the law, often found it impossible in conscience to obey, and thus drew upon themselves the opposition of the Emperor and his officials. Lastly, in social life, the followers of Christ had to avoid certain public places as occasions of sin; this caused them to be accused of "hatred of mankind", an accusation leveled at once by ignorant masses and the reputed men of letters, with the Jews ever ready at hand to fan the fires of distrust and suspicion into the flame of open persecution.

The Catholic Church preached a way of life which clashed with that of the Empire; hence the Empire armed itself against the meek followers of the Crucified Jesus and became the first mighty weapon to be wielded by Satan in the futile war of hate which he is to wage against the Church to the end of time. The Roman persecutions, although not clearly defined one from the other, lasted over a period of three hundred years, and are usually spoken of as the *Ten General Persecutions*. It is possible to deal with them in three phases.

Phase I: The First Development (54A.D.—200A.D.)

Except for a passing episode during the reign of Claudius (41-54A.D.), when the Emperor, wearied with the constant clashes between the Jews and Christians, banished one and all from the city (Acts 17), the Church enjoyed peace until the reign of Nero (54-68A.D.), the instigator of the *First General Persecution*. Suspected as having himself caused the great Fire



of Rome (July, 64A.D.), Nero turned the stream of popular suspicion on the Jews who, in turn, cast it on the hated Christians. A large number of arrests were made, the prisoners being “Convicted not so much of the crime of incendiarism as of hating all human kind,” and subjected to ghastly tortures recorded in detail by Tacitus and St. Clement of Rome. Those who did not die were pressed into forced labor, while the Christians remaining at liberty were scattered throughout all of Italy.

The First General Persecution was therefore due not to deliberate imperial policy, but, as Tacitus remarks, to the personal cruelty of Nero and, as St. Clement adds, to the jealousy of the Jews. It was, however, followed by “certain edicts” against Christianity which were important in giving a legal take-off for all future persecutions.

After the death of Nero (68A.D.) the Church enjoyed comparative peace until the fourteenth year of the reign of Domitian (95A.D.). In that year the Emperor imposed upon Christians a tax levied on the Jews since the fall of Jerusalem in 70A.D. The Christians considered that to pay the tax would be to identify themselves with Jewish belief and practice. The anti-Christian edicts of Nero were consequently revived and the *Second General Persecution* began. It claimed among them, a great number of its victims, St. John the Evangelist, St. Clement of Rome, highly placed imperial officials and members of the noblest families, including some of the kinfolk of the Emperor himself, notably, his cousins Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla. Shortly before his death in 96A.D. Domitian caused the persecution to cease.

The second phase in the conflict between the Church and the Pagan Roman State opened with the reign of the second Antonine emperors, Trajan, who, a true roman, aimed at restoring stability to the Empire through the enforcement of the law. The refusal of the Christians to take part in a pagan thanksgiving service naturally, therefore, caused the edicts of Nero and Domitian to be revived and another added. Provincial governors were instructed “not to search for the Christians but to punish them if they persevered in their profession of faith after they had been denounced and convicted.” In spite of these instructions, this, the *Third General Persecution*, gave the Church many more martyrs including; St. Simeon (kinsman of Our Lord and cousin of St. James the Less, who he succeeded as Bishop of Jerusalem); St. Ignatius of Antioch, whose letters, written by the saint while on his way to Rome for trial, are among the most treasured records of the early Church. The persecution continued in a more or less mitigated form into the reign of Hadrian (117-138A.D.) and Antoninus Pius (138-161 A.D.): towards its close about 155A.D. it claimed St. Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna, Tutor of St. Ireneaus of Lyons and familiar friend and disciple of St. John the Evangelist. (Note)- The persecutions of the first century A.D. were followed by great activity among Christian writers. The Antonine Emperors seemed on the whole to be broad-minded, willing to tolerate Christianity within the limits of the law, open to conviction: Christian scholars



were consequently encouraged to present the case for Christianity in what came to be called *Apologies*. Among the first generation of Apologists should be noted the names: Quadratus, Ariston of Pella, Aristides, Tatian, and St. Justin of Rome. Their works, as we shall see later, played an important part in the development of the statement of Christian Doctrine.

With the succession of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161A.D.), Christianity begins to be recognized as a power of immense social influence in the Empire, and is, consequently, treated with hostility or favor according to the political interests of the moment. In the first year of his reign in 161A.D. Marcus Aurelius, admirable Stoic though he was, issued an edict against the Christians. An outburst of popular anti-Christian feeling gave fuel to the official order, and the *Fourth General Persecution* followed.

Christians of all ages and of the most diverse social rank laid down their lives for the faith. St. Felicitas with her seven sons at Rome, and St. Justin the Apologist, (165A.D.); St. Pothinus, the Holy Martyrs of Lyons, St. Cecilia at Rome in 177A.D. and the Martyrs of Scillium in 180A.D. all stood forward joyously to shed their blood for the name of Christ. Again Rome was humiliated and Christianity exalted.

(Note)—The reign of Marcus Aurelius saw the rise of a second generation of *Apologists* to meet the attacks of pagan writers. Notable among these pagans were Lucian of Samosata and Celsus, in 178A.D. whose works were refuted in the following century by the great Christian scholar Origen in 253A.D. In general the new apologists: Meliton of Sardis; Athenagoras; Minucius Felix—aim at showing that Christianity is more than capable of satisfying the needs of the intellect and that far from being enemies of the State, the Christians are its most loyal and valued citizens.

Phase II: Intense Growth (200—250A.D.)

The *Fifth General Persecution* followed an Imperial Edict issued in 202A.D. by Septimus Severus, a soldier-emperor of African descent, who influenced by his Christian physician and his wife, Julia Domna, had at first treated the Christians with respect. The edict was carried out with great severity in the provinces and made many martyrs throughout Egypt, Proconsular Africa, Gaul, and Italy. The most noteworthy in Africa were the Catechumans of Carthage; Perpetua, Felicitas, Revocatus Saturminus and Secundulus; and in Gaul St. Irenaeus, the great opponent of the Gnostics, and bishop of Lyons, where so many were put to death that the city streets flowed with their blood.



Septimus Servus died in 211 A.D. Under his successors Caracalla, from 211—217 A.D.; Heliogabalus, from 218-222 A.D.—both of these men were more or less insane—the Church enjoyed a foretaste of the peace she enjoyed under the young emperor Alexander Servus (222-235 A.D.). A sincere admirer of Christian ideals and Church government, Alexander revoked the long-standing anti-Christian edict of Nero and granted the Christians the right to exist; to own property; and to assemble together for worship. But the respite was short-lived. Alexander was assassinated by

Maximin of Thrace, another soldier emperor, who proceeded to express his supreme contempt for all forms of religion in the *Sixth General Persecution*. Two Popes perished: St. Pontianus in 235 A.D. and St. Antherus in 236 A.D. along with a large number of the faithful.

After a period of renewed toleration under Gordian III and Philip the Arab from 238-249 A.D. the *Seventh General Persecution* was launched by Decius in 249 A.D. Viewing with alarm, the growing disregard for imperial authority, Decius planned a return to the ideals of old Rome. Christianity was to be abolished as un-Roman and all suspects were arrested and tried. Among the relatively few martyrs of this persecution were: Pope Fabian; Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem; Babylas, Bishop of Antioch; St. Agatha of Sicily; and the seven brother martyrs renowned as “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus”.

The *lapsi* or apostates were very numerous. This fact can be explained by: The elaborate methods of torture employed by the State to force a denial of the faith by the suspect; the years of comparative peace which had cooled the fervor of many Christians; the fact that many, quite possibly, saw little harm in assenting to the formula which was sufficient to evade the law and save their lives.

The pastors of the Church, however, took a severe view of any denial of the faith, and severe canonical penances were imposed upon the *lapsi* before they could be reconciled. Letters of recommendation from imprisoned confessors of the faith were, however, frequently accepted by the bishops in part commutation of the canonical penance; an implicit practical teaching of the doctrine of indulgences. Abuses regarding this practice were strenuously combated by St. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 257 A.D.) whose strictures and stern attitude towards the delinquents gave rise to the schism of Novatus.

Phase III: Climax

(250-313 A.D.)

Decius was killed in battle against the Goths on the Danubian frontier in 251 A.D. He was succeeded in turn by Gallus (251-253 A.D.), and Valerian (253-260 A.D.) He had succeeded merely in losing the best and gaining the worst for the Christians. His policy was nevertheless pursued, after a brief period of tolerance, by Valerian, was prompted, it is said,



by fear of the gods and urged by his counselor Macrinus to institute the *Eight General Persecution*. Two anti-Christian edicts of 257A.D. and 258A.D. resulted first in the exile of a vast number of bishops and priests, freely followed by many of the faithful; and later in numerous martyrdoms: St. Cyprian, with many others, in his Episcopal city of Carthage in 257A.D. and Pope Sixtus II, his deacon St. Laurence, who jested from the grid-iron, and St. Agnes of Rome, St. Fructuosus with his two deacons in Spain in 260A.D.

Peace was restored with the death of Valerian in 260A.D. Then his son, Gallienus (260-268A.D.), who succeeded him, gave back their full rights to Christian citizens and restored directly to the bishops all confiscated Church property. Peace continued during the reign of Cladius II (260-270A.D.). In the fourth year of the reign of Aurelian (270-275A.D.), when the Emperor, with a view to establish the worship of the sun-god Mithra as a state religion, began the *Ninth General Persecution*. Aurelian was assassinated eight months later and his edict was forgotten. Consequently, the ensuing years gave to the Church stability and an honored position she had never enjoyed before. It was the calm before the last terrible storm. The heart of Paganism still throbbed passionately in ancient Rome. Popular hatred for Christians was still strong; the pagan writers fanned the ignorant prejudice of the mob; it only needed a word from the Emperor to set an anti-Christian drive in motion.

It was the task of the Emperor Diocletian (284-303A.D.) to attempt to restore the prestige of the tottering Empire. Diocletian worked with method: He divided the Empire in two, retaining the East under his personal rule, with Galerius as his lieutenant or Caesar, and handing the West to his colleague Maximian, assisted by Constantius Chlorus; He restored to the imperial person every possible mark of pomp and honor, making it quite clear that he aimed at ruling the Empire as a kind of Eastern despot receiving almost divine honors from his people.

For fourteen years Diocletian favored the Christians. But influenced by the example of his lieutenant, Galerius, who began to persecute the Christians in 298A.D. Diocletian changed his attitude and opened the *Tenth General Persecution*, on the feast of Terminalia, February 23, 303A.D. Four edicts were issued in all parts of the Empire except the Western division, which was administered by Constantius Chlorus, whose son, Constantine, was soon to give the Church her freedom. As a result of these four edicts, the most fearful of all the persecutions was soon in full operation.

The Close of the Persecutions

God had decreed that this, the most terrible of the persecutions should herald the triumph of the Church. One day in the year 312A.D. Constantine campaigning against Maxentius, a rival candidate for the imperial power in the West, prayed for aid to the God of



the Christians and was answered by a vision of the Cross in the noon-day sky; over the Cross were the words in Greek: “In this sign thou shalt conquer” (Newman: *Essays on Miracles*: 2:5). The following night Our Lord appeared, bearing the same symbol, to the pagan Constantine, and explained its significance. The general had a new standard constructed; the *Labarum*, bearing the heavenly sign, and with his army marching behind it, defeated Maxentius at the battle of Milvian Bridge outside of Rome in 312A.D. Constantine, now undisputed Emperor of the West, proceeded to negotiate in favor of the Christians with Licinius, who succeeded Galerius in the East, and together, in 313A.D. they issued the “Edict of Milan” which decreed “to the Christians and to all men...free power to follow whatever religion each man chooses.” In the same year Constantine became a catechumen. He was sole master of the Roman world in 324A.D. He was baptized in 337A.D. and died the same year. With the edict of Milan, the three century long agony of the Catholic Church came to an end.

Conclusion: The Martyrs

Could we dwell at greater length on the sublime topic of the martyrs, we should consider in detail that: 1. Vast numbers were put to death: some by solitary execution after torture; others by being rounded up in big drives and massacred out of hand.

2. The martyrs were drawn from all ranks of society and were of all ages; the blood of children of tender years flowed with that of the aged and infirm, patricians of noble blood died side by side with their slaves. 3. The martyrs’ courage was truly supernatural; in the jaws of death “they gave a beautiful and superhuman manifestation of Christian Virtue, of the joyful acceptance of death and suffering, of seraphic love, of profound humility, and of the very spirit of Christ on the Cross, *praying* with full heart for the salvation of their enemies and *blessing* the very hands that were red with their blood.” It is especially in this that the martyrs differ from those who gave their lives for other causes.

The martyrs could not have suffered as they did had they not been sustained by divine power. To them in a special manner, the Holy Ghost dwelling within the Church gave the gift of His fortitude which is stronger than death. That is why their constancy broke the determination of the strongest and most efficient power the world has ever known. Ten times the Pagan Roman Empire flung the full weight of its colossal might against the frail Christians that had grown up within it. Ten times did the frail Christians emerge from the conflict stronger, more radiant, and triumphant. The survival of the Church through the first three hundred years of her life made clear to the world that she owed nothing to human agency and that man did not build what man was powerless to overthrow.

The History of the Catholic Church: Part IV

Perils from within: Early Heresies and Schisms

(30A.D.-250A.D.)



Introductory Note:

In order to lay the ground work for the Great General Councils of the Church, we must first cover the early attacks against the Church prior to the first General Council held at Nicaea in 325A.D. We must see how Divine Providence set the stage for what was to come next. As Our Lord did not leave His Church immune from attacks from without, she was not altogether free from perils from within. “It must be that scandals come.” While the Church was bearing persecution from her enemies she was fighting another battle; from which she would emerge equally triumphant, in her own household against the evil spirits of heresy and schism.

The deposit of faith divinely given to the Apostles and their successors was meant by Our Lord to be gradually unfolded, taught, and explained to the faithful. This work of teaching and explanation was to be accomplished in a human way through the application of the laborious mind of the Church’s teachers to divine things, with the gifts of infallibility and indefectibility ever at hand to guard the integrity of the faith and preserve it pure and free from error. As a child grows, by having its powers called forth in overcoming obstacles in its path, so the explanation of Christian Doctrine advanced by the discussion that arose in meeting and overcoming heresy.

Early Heresies

A **Heretic** in the strict sense of the term is a baptized person who, retaining the name of Christian, persistently denies or entertains a doubt concerning one or more of the divinely revealed truths proposed by the teaching authority of the Church referred to as Dogmas. The word *heresy* signifies a *choice*; the believer accepts the whole deposit of faith as proposed by the Catholic Church; the heretic rejects such parts of Dogmas that do not commend themselves to their individual personal approval.

Heresy like persecution has its ultimate source in the wiles of Satan working through and aided by the malice of men. It may spring from a thousand different personal motives: intellectual pride; stubbornness of will; the illusions of religious zeal; the allurements of ecclesiastical power; considerations of petty jealousy or spite. The same may be said of **schism** by which a baptized person, retaining the name of Christian, separates from the true Church by refusing to acknowledge its lawfully-constituted authority or to hold interaction with the faithful.



Of the errors which occurred before the first *General Council of Nicaea* in 325 A.D., only the later can be called heresies in the strict sense. The earlier are often spoken of as *Pseudo-heresies* since they sprang not so much from the bosom of the Church as from Jewish or Pagan religious sects; which, selecting and adopting certain Christian practices and corrupting them with the poison of their own false teaching.

The **Jewish sects** in question were mainly three in number: The Petrines (or Nazarenes); the Ebionites; and the Elchasaites. All affirmed, in a greater or less degree, that the Jewish ceremonial law continued to bind under the new Dispensation and either denied or cast doubt upon the Divinity of Jesus Christ. They were actively combated by St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Jude. Their influence waned considerably after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and most of them were extinct by the fifth century.

Far more important in the history of the Church, by being more long-lived and dangerous, were the **Gnostics**. These were scattered groups of Gentiles, half-pagan, half-Christian, who claimed a kind of secret superior wisdom regarding the truths of philosophy and religion, and handed it on to those privileged to gain admittance to their ranks. Gnosticism was a patch-work of all the errors of its time. In general it held that there were two supreme principles or gods: a god of Spirit and Light and Good; and a god of Matter and Darkness and Evil. They denied or corrupted the Catholic doctrine on the Incarnation and consequently most of the teachings of the Church. And although they condemned bodily pleasure as evil in itself, they went to extremes of immorality as well as to extremes of asceticism.

Among the Gentile philosophers converted to the faith, there were more than a few who retained a more or less secret attachment to their old errors. Unmasked and denounced by the Apostles, their successors and ecclesiastical writers, they separated one by one from the Church and became the leaders of heretical sects which gradually became lost in obscurity. The Gnostics operated in four widely distant centers:

1. During the first century, in *Syria*, under the influence of Simon the Magician, whose denunciation is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter eight; later by his disciple Menander, and later still by Cerinthus, both from Samaria.
2. During the second century, in *Alexandria*, under the influence of Basilides, Valentine, and Carpocrates. Valentine taught that the body of Jesus, though real, was not human nor was it formed of the substance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but of purely heavenly origin.
3. In the second century, in *Asia Minor*, under the influence of the *Docetists*, Cerdo, and Macion of Pontus, the Docetists edited a Marcionite Bible, and taught that the body of Jesus was a mere appearance or phantasm (Gr. Doceta), that His life and death were devoid of reality.



4. In the third century, in *Persia*, under the influence of Mani (also known as Manes or Manichaeus). It has been said with truth that Gnosticism, an extreme form of intellectual pride, was a greater danger to the early Church than persecution. Here were groups of men, many of them calling themselves Christians, who laid claim to a secret superior knowledge regarding truths committed by God to the Apostles and their successors along with divine authority to teach and explain them. Fittingly enough, the power of the Gnostics was shattered not by argument, but by a direct vigorous appeal to the traditional authority of the Catholic Church as the

one authentic and accredited exponent of the Sacred Scriptures. The appeal was made by St. Irenaeus, disciple of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, and the successor of the martyr-bishop St. Pothinus, in the Episcopal See of Lyons, in his great work “Against Heresies”: it had immediate effect and Manichaeism was the only form of Gnosticism to survive it.

Closely resembling Gnosticism in many respects was the heresy of **Montanus**, a native of Phrygia. The fundamental error of Montanism lay in substituting private illumination for the official teaching of the Church. It was consequently condemned by Pope Eleutherius (177-192A.D.), and by the end of the fifth century had ceased to exist.

With two women associates, Miximilla and Priscilla, Montanus began about 172A.D. to announce the approaching end of the world. Preparation for the judgment was to be made by a rigorous ascetism and a severe morality that allowed no pardon for grave faults; marriage was suspect and all goods were to be held in common. As a prologue to the end of all things, the Paraclete had become incarnate in Montanus, so he affirmed; and the heavenly Jerusalem was to descend upon the town of Pepuzium in the Phrygian plain. The prophecies of Montanus were utterly in the course of spectacular ecstasies. This fact, combined with the undoubted austerity of the Montanist’s lives and the already wide-spread conviction that the *Parousia* or Judgment was at hand (St. Paul 1&2 Thess.), attracted to the sect a great many followers in Asia, Europe, and Africa where it seduced even the great mind of Tertullian.

Heresies regarding the Most Holy Trinity: The teaching of the Church regarding the sublime mystery of the Most Holy Trinity; that in God there are Three Divine Persons really distinct as Persons but consubstantial, or having but one and the same divine nature; can be attacked in two ways:

1. By denying that the Three Divine Persons have one and the same nature or substance: this was the common error of the great heresies of Arianism and Macedonianism, which sprung up about the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325A.D.
2. By denying that the Three Divine Persons are really distinct; this form of error regarding the Blessed Trinity, is found before the Council of Nicaea in the heresies we are now studying.



The perils of Judaism and Gnosticism; denying either the true divinity or true humanity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, had directed the minds of theologians to the Most Holy Trinity. In their attempts to give a systematic explanation of Catholic belief regarding this difficult question; the science of theology was but in its infancy and some theologians fell into the error of regarding the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as being but three *modes* or manifestations of the one Divine Person: this heresy is spoken of as **Modalism** or *Sabellianism*, from its leader Sabellius. Others, including the great scholar Origen who died in 254A.D., in their zeal to oppose the Modalists, fell into the contrary error of teaching that not only God the Son is a different and distinct Person from God the Father, but that He is even less than the Father and **subordinate** to Him. This heresy is called **Subordinationism**.

Considering the fact that theologians were only beginning to search for words and phrases to express the sublime mysteries of the Catholic Faith and that the words and phrases they found had not yet begun to be understood in the same precise way by all, as they are today, it is no wonder that the Sovereign Pontiffs were slow to pronounce sentence in these controversies. Nevertheless, in spite of their many preoccupations, the anxieties and alarms of persecution, and the slender resources at their disposal, the guardians of the faith did not fail to search out and condemn these errors and thus, by the divine aid, save the Church's teachings from being tainted at its source.

Note: The Arians of later times were extreme subordinationists. Subordinationism was further complicated after Origen's death by Theodotus of Byzantium and Paul of Samosata, who in 260A.D. taught that Christ was not really God at all but only a very perfect man *adopted* by God; that the *Logos*, or Word of God, operated in Christ as a *dynamis* or power.

The error of Paul of Samosata was more important in its reaction than in itself. He was condemned for using the term *homoousios*, a Greek equivalent of *consubstantial* or *one in nature*, like Sabellius, in a heretical sense, that would make the Father and the Son one Person. It was to this condemnation the Arians appealed when, sixty years later, at the Council of Nicaea; they used the same expression *homoousios* in its proper and orthodox sense to refute them.

Early Schisms

While the heresies we have reviewed threatened the Church's unity of faith, three great controversies; which were, however, for the most part local in nature, sought to disturb that unity of the faithful with one another and with the visible governing Head which is one of the characteristic marks of the Mystical Body of Christ.



The first of these controversies was concerned with **the celebration of Easter**. From the beginning the Churches of Rome and Asia had differed regarding the day and date of the Paschal observance. Pope Anicetus (154-166A.D.) and St. Polycarp of Smyrna both strove to bring about uniformity, but once again the controversy broke out about the year 170A.D. As a consequence, Pope Victor (189-198A.D.), having ascertained that the Bishops of Ephesus of the whole Church outside of Asia Minor approved of the Roman usage, informed Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, that this usage was henceforth to be followed in the Asiatic province. Refusing to submit, Polycrates and the Asiatic bishops were excommunicated. The excommunication was afterwards removed by the intercession of St. Irenaeus and the Western bishops, and the schism was gradually healed.

The second controversy was concerned with the **Discipline of Penance**. The first Christians, as we shall see, were highly spiritual in their lives. This was the fruit partly of the first fervor, partly of a necessary reaction against the immoral example of Paganism and Gnosticism. Some Christian theologians, however, had become too rigorous, altogether refusing sacramental absolution for certain crimes and therefore tending to deny or limit down the Church's power of forgiving sins: the principal representatives of these views were the fiery Tatian, Hermes, the author of a celebrated moral treatise called *The Shepherd*, and Tertullian.

But if sins were irremissible, then Penance, the Sacrament of God's mercy, would be in vain; the Church would fail in her mission, which, like that of Our Lord, was to help rehabilitate sinners (Matt. 1:21); contrary to all the Parables of Christ (Matt. 13), the kingdom of God on earth would be reserved for saints alone; and since it could not be known for certain who were saints and who were not, the Church would cease to be a visible society.

The official attitude of the Church was severe but not extreme. Certain grave sins were reserved, as they still are today, and were forgiven only after public penitential exercise known as the *Exomologesis*. Pope Callixtus played an important part in defending the rights of the penitent sinner against the extremists. During the pontificate of Cornelius and the persecution of Decius, St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, supported by Rome, maintained that those who denied the faith could and should be reconciled, but according to the laws of the Church. His view was opposed by Novatian, a Roman priest, who was condemned by Pope Cornelius (251A.D.). Novatian afterwards organized a powerful schismatic sect which did not become extinct until the end of the sixth century.

The third and last of the early controversies centered around **the Rebaptism of Heretics**. About the year 200A.D. Tertullian had taught that persons baptized in heretical or schismatic sects should be rebaptized on admission to the Catholic Church. Many African bishops including Agrippinus, St. Cyprian's predecessor to the Episcopal See of Carthage,



had supported his decision in practice. St. Cyprian himself defended it strongly in three synods held at Carthage (254-257A.D.), and being supported by his fellow bishops of North Africa, communicated his decision to Rome. The reply of the reigning Pope Stephen II (254-257A.D.), accompanied by a threat of excommunication, was decisive: “If anyone come to you from any sect whatsoever, let no innovation be introduced, except, what has been handed down, that hands be imposed upon them in penance.” St. Cyprian refused to submit, and without actually pronouncing sentence of excommunication, Pope Stephen ceased to hold communion with the Church

in North Africa and died in 268A.D. during the persecution of Valerian. He was followed to the executioner’s block a month later by St. Cyprian, whose name is honored by the universal Church today in the Canon of the Mass.

It is clear from St. Cyprian’s writings that he acknowledged Rome as the “Principal Church” to which all other churches must render obedience. But he seems to have regarded the question of rebaptism as a mere question of discipline and not as a question involving an important question of faith. The controversy, however, served more than a useful purpose:

1. It established the doctrinal truth, later to be endorsed by St. Augustine in his controversy with the Donatists and afterwards defined by the Council of Trent, which states that Baptism rightly conferred with proper intention, form, and matter, is valid independently of the faith of him who confers it.
2. It occasioned to show a clear-cut manifestation of the Primacy of Rome.
3. It brought to light for the first time the question of the extent of a bishop’s dependence on the Holy See.
4. Lastly, with the controversies that preceded it, it is one more revelation of the intensely human ingredient the Church is made of, for all the divine power that sustains and preserves her; and of the providential manner in which that Divine Power turns to good account lapses of human frailty “for the building up of the Body of Christ.”

Concluding note: When we consider that the Church at this time was not merely stretched on the rack of persecution but struggling to expel the poison of heresy from within her own organism, the manner in which she arrested these three movements towards schism proves once again that the power of God is with her, and that He will never permit her to be thwarted in her mission through the frailty of her children; “Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.”

Again, it is profitable to note that very many of the early heresies, particular among the Gnostics, passing though they were, claimed apostolic authority for their false teaching and sought to gain a foothold at Rome. Thus did the very rebels of the Catholic Church bear witness to the two great foundations of her teaching; apostolicity and authority: “Each in his own way all visionary concocters of new faiths served, in turn, the cause of Christ by coming

to dash themselves against that “Corner-stone” on which He had built it.”

(*History of the Church; Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur 2/3/1944*)



St. Cecilia, Virgin and Martyr

November 22, 177 A.D.

For over a thousand years St. Cecilia has been one of the most greatly venerated of the maiden martyrs of the early Church and is one of the seven such named in the canon of the Mass. Her “acts” state that she was a patrician girl of Rome and that she was brought up a Christian, though apparently her father was a pagan. She wore a coarse garment beneath the clothes of her rank, fasted from food several times a week, and determined to remain a virgin for the love of God. But her father had other views, and gave her in marriage to a young patrician named Valerian. On the day of the marriage, amid the music and singing and rejoicing of the guests, Cecilia sat apart, repeating psalms to herself and praying fervently for help in her predicament. When they retired to their room, she took her courage in both hands and said to her husband gently, “I have a secret to tell you. You must know that I already have a lover, an angel of God, and he is very jealous of me. If you touch me in the way of marriage he will be angry and you will suffer; but if you respect my maidenhood he will love you as he loves me.” Fear, suspicion, and anger came upon Valerian. “Show me this angel,” he replied. “If he be of God, I will refrain as you wish. But if you have a human lover, you shall both die.” And Cecilia said, “If you believe in the living and one true God and receive the water of baptism, then you shall see the angel.” Valerian agreed and was sent to find a bishop named Urban, who was in hiding near the third milestone of the Appian Way. He was received with joy and there appeared a venerable old man bearing a written document stating: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, above all, and in us all.” “Do you believe this?” Valerian was asked, and he assented and was baptized by Urban. Then he returned to Cecilia, and found standing by her side an angel with flaming wings, who put upon the head of each a chaplet of roses and lilies. Then appeared his brother, Tiburtius, and he, too, was offered a deathless crown if he would renounce his false gods. At first he was incredulous. “Who,” he asked, “has returned from beyond the grave to tell us of this other life?” Cecilia talked to him for a long time until he was convinced by the words and the miracles of Jesus Christ, and he, too, was baptized and at once experienced many marvels.

Valerian and Tiburtius devoted themselves to alms-deeds and burying the Christian victims of the prefect Turcius Almachius, till they themselves were arrested and brought before him. They refused an act of worship to Jupiter and were executed. The prefect’s officer Maximus being converted by their example was beaten to death for his belief.



Cecilia buried the three men in the cemetery of Praetextatus, and then she, too, was arrested, after she had arranged with a convert named Gordian to turn her house into a church. The arguments of Almachius could not move her and she was sentenced to be suffocated to death in the bathroom of her own house. But though the furnace was fed with seven times its normal amount of fuel, Cecilia remained for a day and a night without receiving any harm, and a soldier was sent to behead her. He struck her neck three times, and then left her lying. She was not dead and lingered for three days, during which the Christians flocked to her side and she formally made over her

house to Urban and committed her household to his care. She was lying on her right side, her hands crossed in prayer before her. She turned her face to the floor and remained in that position until her death. The position of her fingers, three fingers extended on her right hand and one on her left hand, were her final silent profession of faith in the Holy Trinity. The early Christians clothed the body of the martyr in rich robes of silk and gold and placed it in a cypress coffin in the same position in which she had expired. At her feet were placed the linen cloths and veils which were used to collect her blood. She was laid to rest in the Catacomb of St. Callistus by the future Pope Urban, who had baptized her husband and brother-in-law.

In the year 822A.D. during the time of the restoration of the church dedicated to her memory, Pope Paschal I wished to transfer the remains of the Saint to a place of honor in the cathedral but could not locate her grave. The Saint appeared to him and told him of the location of her body. The relic was found exactly in the place indicated. The Pope then had the body, along with the remains of her husband, her brother-in-law, and the martyr Maximus, placed below the altar of the church.

Seven hundred seventy seven years later, one of the most documented exhumations of any saint's body occurred in 1599, when Cardinal Sfondrato ordered the restoration of some parts of the basilica. On October 20th of that year, during the course of work being done under the near the high altar, two white marble sarcophagi were discovered, which corresponded with the description left by Pascal I of the caskets containing the relics of the holy martyrs. The Cardinal had the sarcophagi opened in the presence of many witnesses of unquestionable integrity. After the marble covering was removed, the original cypress casket was found in a good state of preservation. The Cardinal, with understandable emotion, raised the lid, exposing to view the relics which had been confided to the grave by Pope Urban and Pope Pascal. The mortal remains were found in the same position in which the Saint had died almost fourteen hundred years before. Through a silk veil which modestly covered her incorrupt body could be seen the gold embroidered dress of the Saint, the mortal wound in the neck, and the blood-stained pieces of cloth. Peering through the ancient veil which



covered the body, they noted that Cecilia was of small stature and that her head was turned downward, but due to a “holy reverence,” no further examination was made.

Cardinal Sfondrato wished to retain as a memorial of this touching event a small piece of the blood-stained linen, and he distributed tiny pieces of this cloth to many cardinals in Rome. But upon inspecting the last piece, which he had reserved for himself, he discovered adhering to the cloth a small fragment of the Saint’s bone, which had been dislodged by the sword and which early Christians had unknowingly picked up with the cloth while staunching the wound of the holy martyr. Sfondrato preserved this relic as a dear and priceless treasure and placed it and the skulls of St. Valerian, St. Tiburtius, and St. Maximus in separate reliquaries for exposition.

The Cardinal also wished to retain a small piece of the Saint’s dress and while engaged in securing this, he felt under the virgin’s clothing the cords and knots of a hair shirt. The casket of the Saint was placed in a hall where it could be seen through a grated window. On the orders of Pope Clement VIII, the relic was left exposed there until the feast of St. Cecilia on November 22. The outpouring of the Roman faithful who converged on the basilica to view the body of the Saint was so large that the Swiss Guard were called out to maintain order. At the end of one month, the Pope, in the presence of 42 cardinals, offered a Solemn High Mass during which the body of the Saint was again interred beneath the main altar of the basilica.

The Basilica of St. Cecilia is believed to have been built on the site of St. Cecilia’s family mansion. The second chapel, on the right aisle, is called the Caldrium and is the room where St. Cecilia was condemned to death. Here are found the remains of an ancient Roman bathroom; the conduits are preserved which formerly contained the water which was heated in the lower room. The marble slab on the altar is the one on which Cecilia is believed to have survived the first martyrdom by suffocation and very well may be the slab which marked the place of her death. She is the patron saint of musicians because it was said that she played a musical instrument.

(Butler’s Lives of the Saints; Volume I-November: Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur, 9/14/1925)

The Explanation of Our Logo & Our Mission

Since we have named this newsletter the “Mystical Rose” it would seem only prudent that we explain why we call it, “Mystical Rose”, and why we have designed this Logo at the top of the first page.

The title, “Mystical Rose”, is taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Logo, at the top of the first page, is a desperate cry for help to the Holy Ghost, that he would inspire us with His gifts of Wisdom and Understanding.

We dedicate this work to Our Blessed Mother and we ask Her to help and guide us, so that we may be able to serve God’s people by printing material that will be spiritually edifying and educational; bringing those who read it to a better understanding of what God requires of them in order to achieve salvation; and a more sincere desire to serve the Living God to the best of their ability.

Information about Catholicism is so very necessary in order to live a good life. The world in which we live today is in dire need of that information, in order to save mankind from its own self-imposed ignorance. We hope, by the grace of God, that our newsletter will help to inform.

Fr. James Kosek

439 Thoria Ct.

Batavia, IL 60510

jkosek3@sbcglobal.net