

# Mystical Rose: Historical



*March 14<sup>th</sup> 2010*

*Volume III*

*The History of the Catholic Church: Part V*

*Perils from Within: The Great Heresies*

*(313 A.D.—476 A.D.)*

The heresies which placed in peril the Church's unity of faith in the period following the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) differed from earlier heresies, broadly speaking in two ways. In the first place they were greater and more dangerous, not merely in the religious sense, but socially and politically. It is hard for us who live in a worldly age to realize how the faith was so intimately bound up with daily life in these earlier times that the preaching of an erroneous doctrine could throw society into chaos. And yet such was the fact. Controversies were not left to the theologians: monks marched against monks, the common people thronged the streets in excited crowds, a decision, as often as not, was forced for one side or the other by the calling out of the imperial soldiers.

The first of these great heresies was that of Arius, dealt with below. Here for the first time was a heresy:

1. Adapting itself to the social and political conditions of the time;
2. Having a leader of outstanding personality and determination, and



3. Supported by secular power.

History shows that these are the three things which go to build up heresy on a grand scale. There were, however, other factors which may account for the vaster proportions of the heresies of this time;

1. According as the faith spread, it had to meet with peoples of widely differing traditions and different outlooks.

2. As the age of persecution passed, fervor tended to diminish.

3. As time went on, many thinkers, anxious to follow the example of the Christian Emperors, became Christians, but in a luke-warm way, still

remaining attached to their pagan philosophy.

4. Theologians were still dealing with difficult questions of doctrine in which, very often, exact forms of expression had not yet been decided upon.

Again the greater heresies differed from those which had gone before, in the Church's manner of dealing with them. The power, which Our Lord gave to the Church, of expelling the poison of false doctrine from its system, is one which adapts itself to circumstances of time and place. In the beginning heretics were searched out by the local bishops and punished with excommunication. The progress of their errors was checked by any means in the bishop's power, appeal being made to Rome only in the graver cases. When the Church was given her freedom by the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., however, she was enabled to summon together her bishops in Councils, either local (synods) or general (worldwide) Councils. The first General Council was that of Nicaea, called to grapple with Arianism in 325 A.D.

*Note*—we shall speak frequently of the Church in the East and in the West.

In a general way the "East" includes Asia, Greece, and the Balkan Peninsula. The word "West" includes the rest of Europe, and North Africa. It will also be well to bear in mind the meanings of the words "Person" and "Nature".

"Person" denotes the owner of the acts: "Nature" denotes the active principle through which the person performs his acts. In Our Lord there were two active principles, His Divine Nature, and His Human Nature; He performed His Divine acts through the Divine Nature and His Human acts through His Human Nature. All His acts belonged to the One Person, the Divine Person.

### *Section I—In the East: The Problem of the Divine and Human in Christ.*

At the period of which we are writing there was a sharp contrast between the heresies which agitated the Eastern world and those of the West. The Eastern Church, which was ever prone to ponder on the remote and the abstract, concerned themselves with the mystery of



the Divinity as well as the Humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ. Discussions arose which issued in three great heresies led by respectively Arius, Nestorius, and Eutyches.

### *The Heresy of Arius and the Council of Nicaea.*

The business that brought the three hundred eighteen bishops to Nicaea in the year 325 from all over the Christian world was to find a remedy for the disturbances that had seriously troubled the East for now nearly two years. The cause of these disturbances was a new teaching about the basic mystery of the Christian religion. The new doctrine, popularized through sermons, writings, and popular hymns and songs, was called Arianism, after the man who introduced it, whose name was Arius.

It was the doctrine of Arianism that Our Lord was a pure creature, made out of nothing, liable to fall, the Son of God by adoption, not by nature, and called God in Scripture, not as being really God, but in name only. At the same time, Arius, would not have denied that the Son and the Holy Ghost were creatures transcendently near to God, and immeasurably distant from the rest of creation.

The Fathers of the Church stood by the Traditional Teachings of the Church regarding the Trinity, which goes back to the time of the Apostles. First of all, these teachings were directed by the form of Baptism, as given by Our Lord Himself to His Disciples after His resurrection. To become one of His disciples was, according to His own words, to be baptized “into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”; that is, into the profession, into the service, of a Trinity. Such was Our Lord’s injunction: and ever since, before Arianism and after, down to this day, the initial lesson in religion taught to every Christian, on being made a Christian, is that he thereby belongs to a certain Three, whether anything more is revealed to us in Christianity about the Three, also known as the Triune Godhead.

The doctrine of the Supreme Trinity is the elementary Truth of Christianity; and, accordingly, as might have been expressed, its recognition is sort of keynote, on which centers the thoughts and language of all theologians, from which they start, and which they end.

Examination of a chain of pre-Arian writers, from every part of Christendom, reveals that “There was during the second and third centuries a profession and teaching concerning the Holy Trinity, not vague and cloudy, but of a certain determined character” and that this teaching “was contradictory and destructive to the Arian hypothesis”. And from all this literature, the fact emerges that, from the very beginning, “the doctrine of the Trinity lies at the very root of the Christian conception of the Supreme Being, and of His worship and



service”; and that “it is impossible to view historical Christianity apart from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity”.

It was in the year 323 A.D. that the Arian crisis developed. The struggle between the advocates of the new theory and the Church authorities who stood by the tradition was to continue for many years. And now, for the first time in the history of the Church, the State intervened in what was, of itself, a dispute about belief. A second point to note is that the State, on the whole, sided with the innovators, and was hostile to the defenders of the traditional truth.

The State, or political party, in which the Arian troubles arose and developed, was what we know at the Roman Empire. This State, for its inhabitants, was one and the same thing as civilization, and not surprisingly. When Constantine ascended the throne in 324 A.D., he found the empire, as it had been for more than three hundred years. But history does not record any political achievement even remotely parallel to this. For the empire took in, besides Italy, the whole of Europe west of the Rhine and south of the Danube, and also the southern half of the island of Britain. In the east it included the whole of the modern state of Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, and all the lands on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea westward to the Atlantic Ocean.

And Constantine, the first emperor to abandon the pagan religion and to profess himself a Christian, stood out to his own generation primarily as a highly successful soldier, triumphant in a series of contests with rivals for the imperial place. Such wars, fights between rival generals for the imperial throne, were the chief curse of Roman political life, and especially so in the third century, the century in which Constantine was born. He would have been a little boy when Diocletian became emperor in 284 A.D. Diocletian, in order to put an end to the constant wars, immediately associated himself with another soldier, as joint emperor, one to rule the East, and one to rule the West. In 293 A.D., Diocletian took this devolution another step further. With each emperor there was now associated a kind of assistant emperor, with the title of Caesar, the actual ruler of allotted territories and destined to be, in time, his principal successor. The soldier chosen in 293 A.D., as the first western Caesar was Constantine’s father, Constantius, commonly called Chlorus (the Pale) from his complexion. His territory was the modern countries of Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, and England. Constantine’s father belonged to the cult of the Unconquered Sun (*Sol Invictus*), which worshipped the divine spirit who ruled the whole universe, whose symbol was the sun. In 306 A.D., Constantine’s father died. In 311 A.D. the *Sol Invictus* re-appeared on the coins in the West, replacing *Jupiter and Hercules*. However, what Constantine gathered from his famous “vision” in September 312 A.D., in which he saw the Cross which shone in the sky while under it was a shimmering legend: *In hoc signo Vinces*, which means *by this Sign thou shalt conquer*, was that this Supreme Divinity was promising him salvation in this military crisis. He



dispatched a messenger to assure them of this and to tell them how to act, and that this message was from Christ, the God whom the Christians worshipped, and that the badge his soldiers must wear was the sign of Christ, which was the sign of the Cross. He did not ask for baptism after his victory the next day. He did not ask for baptism until 25 years later when he was dying.

When he set his name on the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. which gave Christianity legal permission to function in public throughout the empire, no one could foresee that many of the unrestricted converts to Christianity would retain many of their former pagan beliefs. We have the

Donatist Schism in 321, and the appearance of Arius in two years time in North Africa. Arius was a priest in Alexandria in Egypt. Before he became a heretic, he was troubled with schism. One of the bishops, Meletius, continued to function as a schismatic, setting up two groups of Christian clergy in Egypt, the one which was traditional, and the “Meletian” line. Confusion was great and the contests were bitter everywhere, the faithful people were as active as their pastors. It was out of this Meletian schism that Arianism was born and developed. We know of seventy letters which Arius wrote to bishops all over the Christian world, including the Pope. He also wrote to Lucian of Antioch, Eusebius, bishop of the imperial city itself, who had a strong friendship with Constantia, sister of the emperor, who was also consort of the eastern emperor Licinius. Eusebius called for a council of bishops to reinstate Arius. When Arius returned to Alexandria after the support of the councils of Nicomedia and Caesarea, his arrival set the entire city ablaze. Constantine dispatched Hosius to make a personal investigation of the affair. After Alexandria, the next crisis appeared when the bishop of Antioch died suddenly, and when 56 bishops, who were subject to that See, arrived from Palestine and Syria to elect a successor, they took the opportunity to notice the Arian development. They voted to condemn the new teaching by a vast majority of 53 to 3, and then excommunicated the three dissidents. One of them was the bishop of Caesarea.

And now, in the early spring of 325, it was decided to summon a council representative of all the bishops in the world. Councils had been held in Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, and Nicomedia in which at least half of the bishops of the East must have taken part. Constantine decided to call a general council, and chose the place where it was to be held and sent out the invitations to the bishops, offering them free passage in the imperial transportation system.

The Council opened at the imperial summer palace in Nicaea on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 325. Nicaea was about seventy miles from Constantinople, on the Asiatic shore of Bosphorus, at the head of Lake Iznik, 25 miles south of Nicomedia. Three hundred eighteen bishops participated in the council; most of them were from Greek speaking lands where the trouble was raging, as well as Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor. There were also bishops present from Persia, and the Caucasus, from the lands between the Danube and the Aegean Sea, Africa, Spain,



Gaul, and Italy. Since Pope Sylvester I was too old to travel, he sent as his Legate, Hosius, bishop of Cordova, along with Vitus and Vincent, two of his priests from Rome.

Eusebius of Caesarea who had described the great moments of the Council was evidently moved by his recollections of the scene when, the bishops all assembled in the great hall of the palace, some of them lame and blind from the tortures undergone in the persecutions, the Roman master of the whole Roman world entered, robed in scarlet and gold, and before taking his place at the throne, bade them be seated. Constantine came with a minimum of pomp, and in his brief address he did no more than welcome the bishops, exhort them to peaceful conference and admit that the spectacle of “sedition” within the Church caused him more anxiety than any battle.

The theology of Arius was solemnly condemned. But if it was a simple matter for the episcopate to testify to its belief that the Divine Word was truly God, it was less easy to agree about the best way to phrase a declaration of faith; i.e. to construct a statement to which no subtly could give a heretical, Arian meaning also. One section of bishops was anxious to no terms should be used which were not already used in Scripture. But the Scriptures had not been written for the purpose of confuting philosophically-minded heretics. It was now necessary to say that the accepted Scripture meant just “this” and not “that” as well. And if this were to be accomplished, the technique must be adopted of coining a special word for the purpose. The statement as the council finally passed it was founded and the traditional faith was formulated in the Nicene Creed which still forms part of every Sunday Mass. The word the council chose is *homoousion*; a Greek word meaning *consubstantial*. This is the special, non-scriptural word which the council adopted to characterize the true, traditional belief, a word which would be impossible to support any kind of Arian theory, a test word that would always make it clear that the Arian theory was incompatible with the Christian tradition, and which would serve the practical purpose of preventing any further infiltration of these enemies of Christ within the Church, and defeat any endeavor to change the belief from within.

According to St. Athanasius, who was present at the Council as a Deacon, Hosius of Cordova, the Papal Legate sent by Pope Sylvester I, was the one who proposed the Greek word for consubstantial to the Council. Constantine declared himself in favor of it being used, and the Council accepted it with each bishop giving his vote of approval. Two bishops refused to accept it and along with Arius and a few priest supporters, they were sent into exile by command of the emperor. The bishops then passed to other problems: in the first place, the twenty-year old Meletian schism. Its leaders had appealed to Constantine, and the Emperor left it to the Council to judge. The bishops supported their brothers in Alexandria, but offered the schismatics very easy terms, restoring Meletius himself to his See of Lycopolis.



But he was not, ever again, to confer holy orders, and all those whom he had unlawfully ordained, were to be re-ordained before again being allowed to officiate. Moreover, they were to be subject henceforward to the true, i.e. Catholic, bishop of the place. Those whom Meletius had made bishops might be elected to Sees in the future, as vacancies arose, but always done with the explicit permission of the bishop of Alexandria, the traditional head of this extensive episcopate.

A second practical problem, which had teased the eastern Churches for generations, was now finally solved, *viz.* how the date of the Easter feast should be calculated. "All our good brothers of the East, who until now have been used to keeping Easter at the Jewish Passover, will henceforward keep it at the same time as the Romans do." The bishops of Egypt announced this in a letter to their people. Finally, the bishops promulgated twenty disciplinary canons passed for general observance. Five canons deal with those who fell away in the recent persecutions. If any such have since been admitted to ordination they are to be deposed. Those who have apostatized freely—that is, without the compulsion of fear—are to do twelve years penance before being admitted to Holy Communion. If, before the penance is completed, they fall sick and are in danger of death, they may receive Holy Viaticum. Should they then recover they are to take place with the highest class of penitents—those who are allowed to hear Mass, though not to receive Holy Communion. Catechumens who have fallen away—i.e. Christians not yet baptized—are to do three years of penance and then resume their place as catechumens. Finally, the Christians who, having once left the army, had re-enlisted in the army of the persecutors, the lately destroyed Emperor Licinius, are to do thirteen years' penance, or less if the bishop is satisfied of the reality of their repentance, but always three years' penance at least.

There are two canons about the re-admission of heretical schismatics. First of all there are the remnants of the schism begun in Rome by the anti-pope Novatian, some seventy-five years before the Council of Nicaea. Novatian was one of that fairly numerous class for whom the rulers of the Church deal far too mildly with repentant sinners. He ended by denying that the Church had the power to absolve those who fall away in times of persecution; and his followers, self-styled "the Pure", extended this disability to allow sins of idolatry, sex sins, and murder. They also regarded second marriage as a sex sin. At this time there were many Novatians in Asia Minor, and the Council offered generous terms to those who wished to be reconciled, recognizing the orders of their clergy, and the dignity of their bishops, but exacting written declarations that they will regard as fellow Catholics those who have contracted a second marriage and those doing penance for apostasy.

To the second class of schismatics the same generosity was shown. These were the sect that descended from the notorious Bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata, deposed in 268A.D. by a council of bishops, for various crimes and for his heretical teaching that there is no



distinction between the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. But these “Paulinians” so to call them, are to be re-baptized. Those who had functioned as clergy may be re-ordained if the Catholic bishop to whom they are now subject thinks it fitting to do so.

On various aspects of clerical life there are as many as ten canons. No one is to be ordained who has had himself castrated, nor anyone who was recently converted to the faith. “Yesterday a catechumen, today a bishop,” says St. Jerome, “in the evening at the circus and the next morning at the altar; just lately a patron of comedians, now busy consecrating virgins.” It is the canon itself which speaks of ordination, and Episcopal consecration, following immediately on baptism. Bishops are not to ordain another bishop’s subject without his consent. No clerics—bishops, priests, or deacons—are to move from one diocese to another. Clerics are forbidden to take interest for money loans, and for this offence they must be deposed.

Finally, there are two canons regarding three famous sees: Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The council confirms the ancient custom that gives the bishop of Alexandria jurisdiction over the bishops of the civil provinces of Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis. And likewise the ancient privilege of the See of Antioch, and of the chief sees of the other provinces. Jerusalem is a city apart. The Holy City *par excellence*, and although its bishop remains as much as ever the subject of the metropolitan bishop of Caesarea, he is allowed what canon seven calls a precedence of honor, without a hint to say in what this consists.

After a rapid dispatching the rest of the Church business, the council closed on June 19, 325A.D., which also marked the twentieth anniversary of Constantine’s reign. The Emperor entertained the prelates to a banquet in full imperial style, and as they passed before the guards, presenting their arms in military salute, Eusebius made the comment wondering “if the Kingdom of Heaven on earth had not finally come to pass.”

Save for the letter of the bishops of Egypt, along with the two letters from the Emperor, the one general, announcing the new rule about Easter, the other telling the people of Egypt that the bishops had confirmed the traditional belief and that Arius was the tool of the devil, we don’t know how the decisions of the council were promulgated. But the break-up of the great council was by no means followed by silence that accompanies peace perfectly attained. The real trouble had not yet begun.

Arianism had broken up in hopeless confusion into many different and warring sects, the most important being that led by Macedonius, Arian bishop of Byzantium (314A.D.), whose principal error was to deny that the Holy Ghost is God.

Rome on its part was making every effort to stop the ever-widening wound from which the Eastern Church threatened to bleed to death. Backed by Constans, son and successor of Constantine in the West, Pope Julius I (338-352 A.D.) endeavored to win back the rebellious



Eastern bishops, in the councils of Sardica (342-342A.D.) and Milan (345 A.D.), but without success. Constans died in 350 A.D. and his brother Constantius, who was emperor in the East, took sides with the Arians, and the heresy passed from the stage of division to aggression. Arian teachings were accepted at the councils of Arles (353 A.D.) and Milan (355 A.D.), both which were controlled by Constantius. Imperial troops stormed Alexandria and turned its churches over to the heretics; Pope Liberius (352-366 A.D.), St. Athanasius, and the few remaining supporters of the Nicene Creed were driven into exile. The peak point of disaster was reached when, at the instigation of the emperor Valens, an Arian formula or creed was accepted at the Bipartite Council of Seleucia and Rimini in 359 A.D. St. Jerome made the statement: “*The whole world groaned and was amazed to find itself Arian*”.

But He who fashioned the Church had provided for dark hours such as these. The strength of Arianism lay not in itself but in the Emperor’s power of interference in religious affairs. Two illustrious figures stood boldly forward at last to challenge that interference: St. Basil, bishop of Cappadocia in 379 A.D., in the East, and St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan in 387 A.D. in the West. St. Basil was supported by his brother St. Gregory of Nyssa (395 A.D.), and their mutual friend St. Gregory of Nazianzos (390 A.D.). St. Jerome and Pope St. Damasus (384 A.D.) were supporting St. Ambrose. The united efforts of these great saints bore fruit in the next general council which was held in Constantinople in 381 A.D. under the patronage of the Catholic Emperor Theodosius the Great during the pontificate of Pope St. Damasus.

St. Ambrose’s courage can be judged from the fact that when the Emperor Theodosius carried out a massacre in Thessalonica, the saint refused to admit the Emperor to divine worship until he had done public penance for his crime.

Concerned with the most sublime and most unfathomable mysteries of the Christian religion—the Trinity and the Incarnation—and supported by calumny, intrigue, and secular power, Arianism made its influence for evil widely felt. But it served to establish more clearly the Church’s teaching regarding the mystery of the most Holy Trinity. The Council of Constantinople gave the death blow to Arianism *as a heresy*.

*(The Church in Crisis by Philip Hughes; Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur given on September 28, 1960.)*

## *St. Agnes, Roman Maiden; 305 A.D.*

*January 21<sup>st</sup>; Dbl. Virgin, Martyr*



St. Agnes has always been looked upon in the Church as a special patroness of purity. Not only is she one of the most popular of Christian saints, but her name is commemorated every day in the canon of the Mass. Rome was the theatre of her triumph, and Prudentius says that her tomb was shown within sight of the city. She suffered not long after the beginning of the persecution of Diocletian, whose cruel edicts were published in March in the year of Our Lord 303 A.D. We learn from St. Ambrose and St. Augustine that she was only thirteen years of age at the time of her glorious death. Her riches and beauty excited the young noblemen of the first families of Rome to contend as rivals for her hand. Agnes answered them all that she had consecrated her virginity to a heavenly spouse, who could not be beheld by mortal eyes. Her suitors, finding her resolution unshakable, accused her to the governor as a Christian; not doubting but that threats and torments would prove more effective with one of her tender years on whom allurements could make no impression. The judge at first employed the mildest expressions and the most seductive promises, to which Agnes paid no regard, repeating always that she could have no other spouse than Jesus Christ. He then made use of threats, but found her endowed with a masculine courage, and even eager to suffer torment and death. At last terrible fires were made, and iron hooks, racks, and other instruments of torture displayed before her, with threats of immediate execution. The heroic child surveyed them undismayed, and made good cheer in the presence of the fierce and cruel executioners who were ready to dispatch her at the word of command. She was so far from betraying the least symptom of terror that she even expressed her joy at the sight, and offered herself to the rack. She was then dragged before the idols, and commanded to offer incense, but could not, St. Ambrose tells us, by any means, be compelled to move her hand, except to make the sign of the cross.

The governor, seeing his measures ineffectual, said he would send her to a house of prostitution, where what she prized so highly should be exposed to the insults of the brutal and licentious youth of Rome. Agnes answered that Jesus Christ was too jealous of the purity of His spouses to suffer it to be violated in such a manner, for He was their defender and protector. "You may," said she, "stain your sword with my blood, but you will never be able to profane my body, consecrated to Christ." The governor was so incensed at this that he ordered her to be immediately led to the place of shame with liberty to all to abuse her person at pleasure. Many young profligates ran there, full of wicked desires, but were seized with such awe at the sight of the saint, that they would not dare to approach her; one only excepted, who, attempting to be rude to her, was that very instant, by a flash, as it were, of



lightning from heaven, struck blind, and fell trembling to the ground. His companions, terrified, took him up, and carried him to Agnes, who was as a distance, singing hymns of praise to Christ, her protector. The virgin by prayer restored his sight and his health.

The chief accuser of the saint, who had at first sought to gratify his lust and avarice, now, in a spirit of vindictiveness, incited into fury. The governor needed no encouragement, for he was highly exasperated to see himself set at defiance by one of her tender age and sex. Being resolved, therefore, upon her death, he condemned her to be beheaded.

Agnes, transported with joy on hearing this sentence, and still more at the sight of the executioner, “went to the place of execution, more cheerfully,” says St. Ambrose, “than others go to their wedding.” The executioner has secret instructions to use all means to induce her to give way, but Agnes always answered that she could never offer so great an injury to her heavenly spouse; and having made a short prayer, bowed down her neck to receive the death stroke. The spectators shed tears to see this beautiful child loaded with fetters, and offering herself fearlessly to the sword of the executioner, who with a trembling hand cut off her head with one stroke. Her body was buried at a short distance from Rome, besides the Nomentan road.

In place of the little exhortation with which Butler is wont to conclude the first entry on each day of his calendar, it will not perhaps be amiss to substitute on this occasion the section in St. Ambrose’s famous discourse *De Virginibus* which is read today in the Roman Breviary. The very free translation which I have followed with some modifications is that of the Marques of Bute:

“This is a virgin’s birthday; let us, then, follow the example of her chastity. It is a martyr’s birthday; let us, then, offer sacrifices; it is the birthday of holy Agnes; let men, then, be filled with wonder, little ones with hope, married women with awe, and the unmarried with emulation. But how shall I set forth the glory of her whose very name is an utterance of praise? It seems to me that this child, holy beyond her years and courageous beyond human nature, received the name of Agnes, not as an earthly designation, but as a revelation from God of what she was to be. For this name Agnes is from the Greek and being interpreted signifies Pure. So that this saintly maiden is known by the very title of Chastity; and when I have added the word Martyr, I have said enough. She needs not the praise which we could utter, but do not. None is more praiseworthy than she who may be praised by all, and as many as name her, so many exalt her by the noble title of martyr.

We learn by tradition that this holy martyr testified in the thirteenth year of her age. We will pass by the foul cruelty which did not spare her tender years, to contemplate the great power of her faith whereby she overcame the weakness of childhood and witnessed a good confession. Her little body was hardly big enough to leave room for a sword thrust. A place



for the sword she had not, but what she had was a courage which could conquer the sword. She had no fear when she found herself grasped by the bloody hands of the executioners. She was unmoved when they dragged her with clanking chains. Hardly entered on life, she stood fully prepared to die. She quailed not when the weapons of the angry soldiers were pointed at her breast. If they forced her against her will to approach the altars of devils, she could stretch forth her hands to Christ amidst the very flames which consumed the idolatrous offerings, and trace over the heathen shrine the victorious Cross of the Lord. She was ready to submit her neck and hands to the iron shackles, but they were too big to clasp her

slender limbs. Behold a strange martyr! She was not of age to be punished, but yet she was ripe for the triumph; she was too weak to run in the race, but yet she was entitled to the prize; unable from her years to be aught but a learner, she is found none the less to be a teacher.

She went to the place of execution a virgin, with more willing and joyful footsteps that she would have gone with to the nuptial chamber as a bride. Her hair was not trimly braided and coiled, for the spouse she sought to please was Christ. She was decked not with flowers but with virtues. The spectators were all in tears, but she alone did not weep. They beheld her with wonder laying down that life of which she had hardly begun to taste the sweets, as freely as though she has drained it to the dregs and was weary of its burden. All men were amazed when they saw her who was not yet her own mistress or of age to testify, nevertheless bearing witness to the Most High. Though her testimony was inadmissible, if she spoke as a man, she was credited concerning God, for that which is above nature can only come from the author of nature. Consider how many threats the executioners used to excite her fears, how many promises to win her compliance, how many suitors were present who were eager to claim her as their bride. But she answered: 'It is an insult to my Betrothed to expect that I could favor any other. He that first chose me, His will I be. Executioner, why waitest thou? Perish the body which draweth the admiration of eyes from which I shrink.' She stood, prayed, and then bent her neck for the stroke. Now mightiest thou have seen the executioner trembling as though he himself were under the sentence of death, thou mightest have seen his right hand quiver and his face grow pale at the thought of her doom, while the maiden alone stood undismayed. Here, then, you see that this one victim rendered to God a double testimony, that of her purity and that of her faith. She surrendered not her virginity and she achieved martyrdom." It is interesting to realize that St. Ambrose might easily have conversed with men who were actually present at the scene.

There can be no doubt of the fact that St. Agnes was martyred, and that she was buried beside the Via Nomentana in the cemetery afterwards called by her name. Here a basilica was erected in her honor before 354 A.D. by Constantina, the daughter of Constantine, and wife of Gallus, and the terms of the inscription set up in the apse are still preserved to us. The



name Agnes is entered in the *Depositio Martyrum* of A.D. 354, under the date of January 21<sup>st</sup>, together with the place of her burial.

Pere Jubaru, claims to have discovered the reliquary, containing the greater portion of the skull of the youthful martyr, in the treasury of the Sancta Sanctorum at the Lateran Basilica. This treasury was open in 1903 after it had been hidden from view for many hundreds of years, permission to do so having been obtained from Pope Leo XIII. The relic is considered to be authentic and that her body is indeed present under the altar in her basilica. From a medical examination of the bones of the skull in the Sancta Sanctorum, Dr. Lapponi pronounced that the dentition showed conclusively that the head was that of a child about thirteen years of age.

In art St. Agnes is commonly represented with a lamb and a palm, the lamb, no doubt, being originally suggested by the resemblance of the word *agnus* (a lamb) to the name Agnes.

The palm, of course represents martyrdom.

*(Butler's Lives of the Saints; by Alban Butler: Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur given September 14<sup>th</sup>, 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](mailto:jkosek3@sbcglobal.net)*

*1-630-347-6327*