

Arianism, or the heresy of Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ, fostered and protected as it was by the passions of the wicked emperors, had spread over a great part of the Roman empire.

Arius was a priest of Alexandria. He maintained that the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God from the Father was erroneous, and that there was not and could not be a perfect, absolute equality of nature in the Father and Son. In other words, Arius maintained that our Saviour, after all, was not God, but only a creature. This teaching would have practically overturned the entire work of the Redeemer. Hence the doctrine was promptly condemned at the first Ecumenical or General Council of the Church held at Nice A.D. 325. But though condemned it did not die, and for many many years was a source of discord, and an occasion of suffering to the true spouse of Christ. It was so in the days of St. Ambrose. What was worse, the emperors, instead of attending to their own affairs, continually meddled in religious questions and caused no end of confusion. In Milan not a small proportion of the populace was imbued with this heresy. In truth, Northern Italy was the hot-bed of Arianism.

In those days it was customary for the people to indicate their preference in the choice of bishops. On the death of Auxentius, the natural result in Milan was that the true Catholic and Arian parties became involved in a contest, each having its own choice.

As was his duty, Ambrose attended the gathering of the people when the time arrived to express their wish. He kindly exhorted the excited multitude to moderation and charity. His words had the desired effect. But one of the

results was to him entirely unexpected. After he had finished his address, the voice of a child in the assembly was heard crying: "Ambrose, Ambrose, our Bishop." These words came upon the people with the force of an electric shock. They took up the cry and from that moment all discord between the factions vanished. They one and all united upon Ambrose as their choice for Bishop of Milan.

Ambrose himself was stupefied and was far from willing to accept the burdens of episcopacy. He thought he had grave reasons on his side since he was not even baptized. He stole out of the city under cover of night and secreted himself. He was sought out but for a time resisted all entreaties to accept the high office.

Fortunately for the Church, when Ambrose saw it was manifestly the will of God, he no longer opposed the wish of the people, but prepared to take upon himself the weighty responsibility of a Bishop in the Church of Christ. He broke all ties that bound him to his past life: thenceforth he lived only for his flock.

Not having been prepared for the ecclesiastical state by his former training, he strained himself to the utmost to make up for lost time. Especially did he devote himself to the study of the Sacred Scriptures, in which branch of learning he before long became an adept. But he did not neglect other subjects, for he was assiduous in acquiring everything that was necessary for him to fulfil, in all respects, the onerous duties which those times placed upon a Christian bishop. Ambrose was consecrated bishop December 7, 374. He transferred his eloquence, which had been the charm of the forum, to the pulpit of the cathedral. From a pleader and judge of the laws