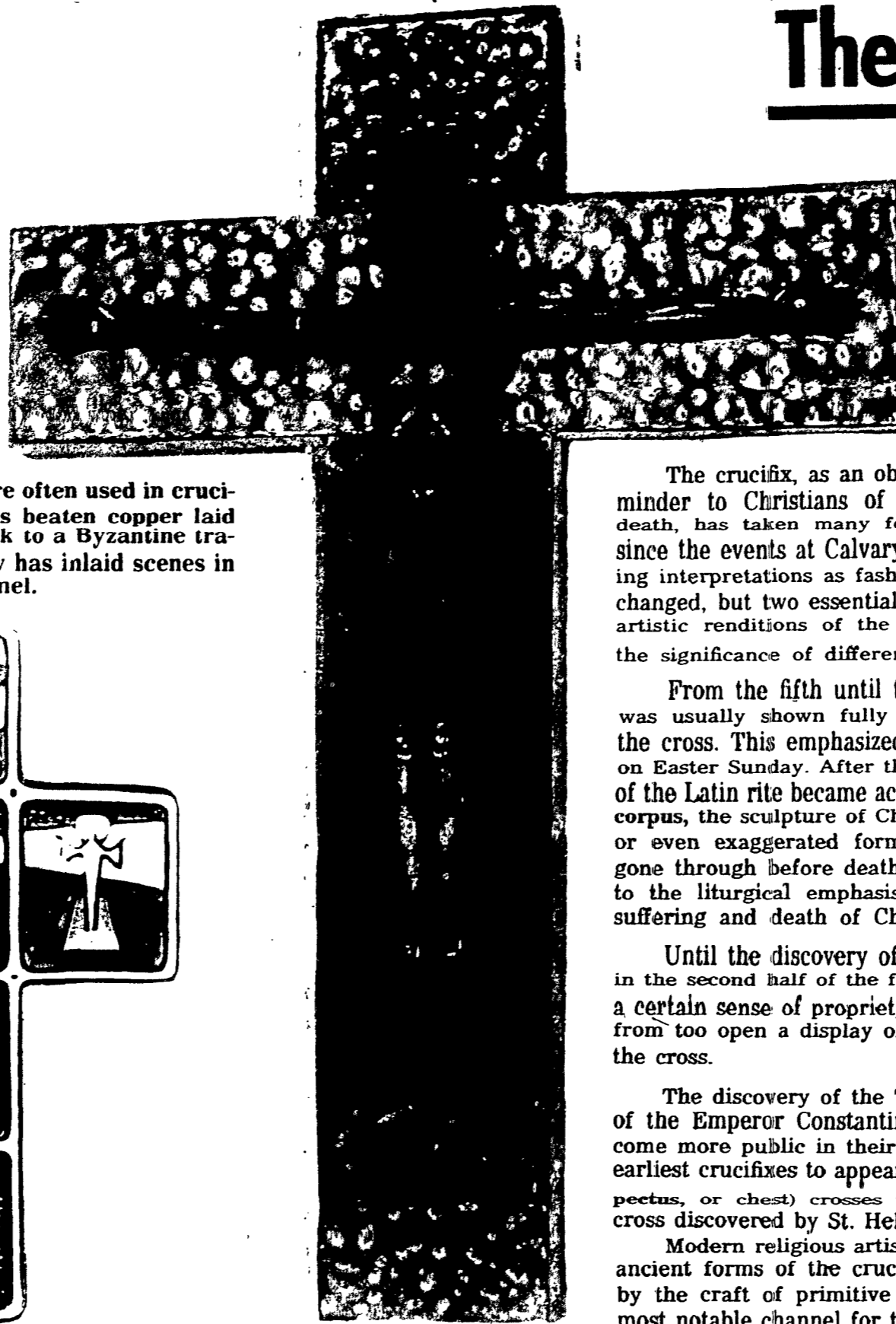
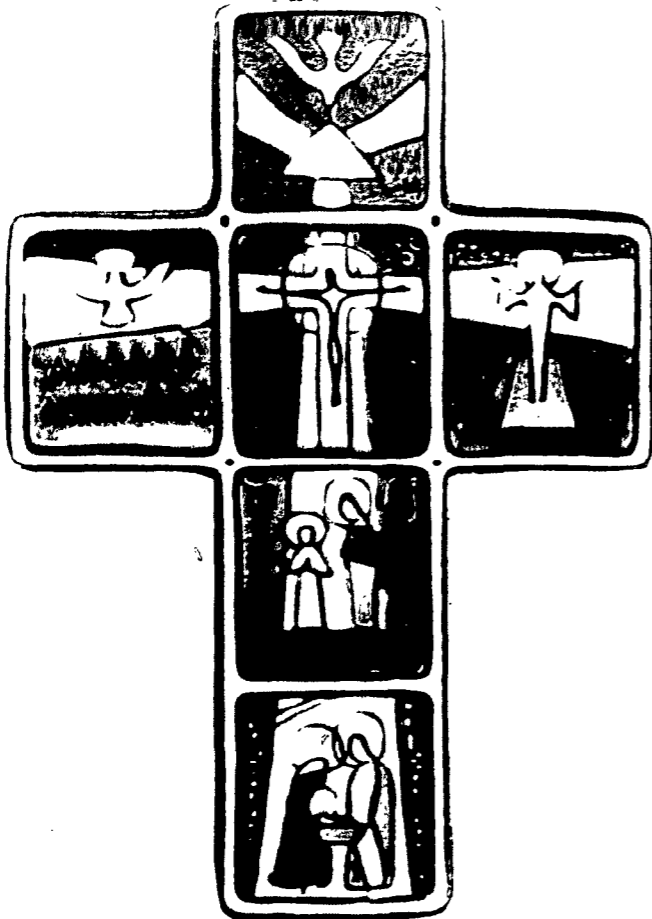


The Crucifix:

Different materials are often used in crucifixes. Cross above has beaten copper laid over wood. Going back to a Byzantine tradition, the cross below has inlaid scenes in enamel.



The crucifix, as an object of veneration and as a reminder to Christians of their Saviour's suffering and death, has taken many forms during the two millennia since the events at Calvary. It has been subject to differing interpretations as fashions in art and sculpture have changed, but two essential themes persistently appear in artistic renditions of the Passion, and both pertain to the significance of different parts of the Easter feast.

From the fifth until the thirteenth centuries, Christ was usually shown fully clothed and triumphant upon the cross. This emphasized the glory of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. After the thirteenth century, Catholics of the Latin rite became accustomed to a crucifix on which corpus, the sculpture of Christ's body, showed in realistic or even exaggerated form the suffering which he had gone through before death. This latter style corresponds to the liturgical emphasis during Good Friday on the suffering and death of Christ.

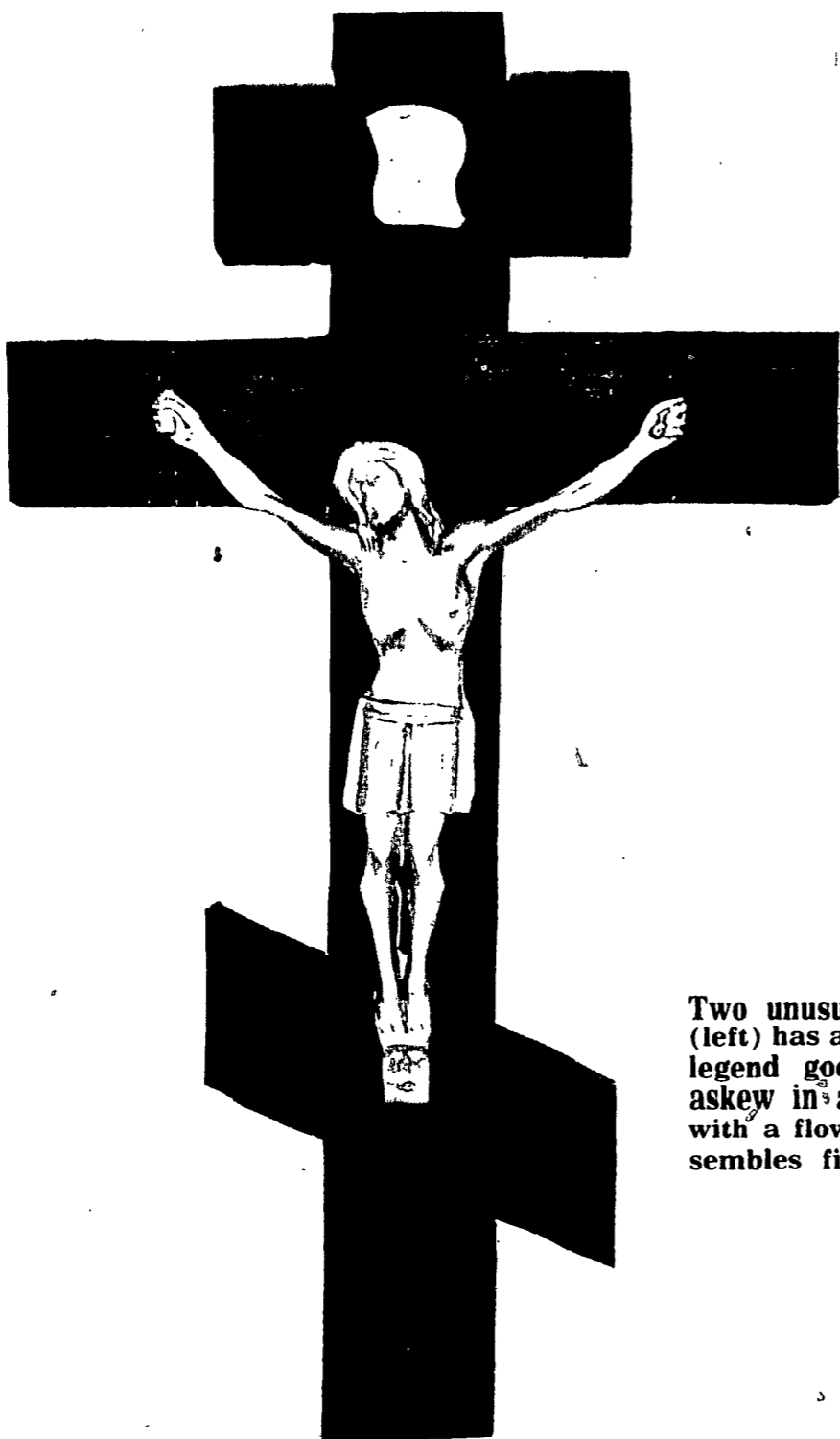
Until the discovery of the True Cross by St. Helena in the second half of the fourth century, persecution and a certain sense of propriety kept the primitive Christians from too open a display of veneration for the symbol of the cross.

The discovery of the True Cross and the conversion of the Emperor Constantine prompted Christians to become more public in their use of the cross. Some of the earliest crucifixes to appear in public were pectoral (from pectus, or chest) crosses which contained relics of the cross discovered by St. Helena.

Modern religious artists, in addition to rediscovering ancient forms of the crucifix, also have been influenced by the craft of primitive peoples, notably African. The most notable channel for this influence is the work of the Cubists, especially Picasso.

The crucifix, now an integral part of altar furniture, has also been sanctioned by the Church for many other uses. Among these are public monuments and shrines, objects for private adoration, and it is recommended that a crucifix be placed in the hands of the dying as part of the last rites. A cross shape has even been adopted as the basic shape of some monstrances, used for displaying the Eucharist.

Although design and usage have varied, the crucifix remains the sign of the Christian.



Two unusual crosses: The Russian cross (left) has a twisted foot support because, as legend goes, the dying Jesus kicked it askew in a moment of agony. The cross with a flower and petal design (right) resembles fifth-century crucifixes before a corpus was added.

