murder. So the martyrs got up of their own accord and transferred themselves where the crowd wanted. First of all, though, they kissed one another, in order to consummate their martyrdom with the solemn kiss of peace. All the others took the sword-thrust without flinching or crying out—Saturus especially, who died first, as he had been first up the ladder: this time too he was waiting for Perpetua. But Perpetua herself, in order for her to have just a taste of pain, was pierced between the ribs and shrieked in agony. Then she took the shaking hand of the young and inexperienced gladiator and guided it to her throat. Perhaps it was only because she willed it herself that such a woman could be killed at all, because the unclean spirit was afraid of her.

O brave and holy martyrs! You were truly called and chosen for the glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who magnifies and honours and adores him certainly should read about these examples, no less than about older ones, so that the Church will be built up, and so that new virtue may give testimony that one and the same Spirit is working until now, together with the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ his Son our Lord: to whom be glory and infinite power for ever and ever. Amen.

THE TRINITY AND THE FATHERS

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IN a celebrated passage Gibbon justly remarks that 'the profane of every age have derided the furious contests which the difference of a single diphthong excited between the Homoousions and the Homoiousions'. But this unfavourable impression of the preoccupations of the early Church has been shared by more than 'the profane'. In somewhat less amiable terms than Gibbon the equally Olympian figure of Mgr Duchesne speaks with an oddly similar distaste of the dogmatic developments of the first five Christian centuries when he writes: 'Since the curiosity of men would investigate the mystery of Christ, since the indiscretion of theologians laid on the dissecting-table the Blessed Saviour, who came to be the object of our love and

of our imitation rather than of our philosophical investigation, at least the investigation should have been made more peaceably by men of approved competence and prudence, far from the quarrelsome crowd'.[1] And there can be no doubt that this attitude has often been shared by many devout Catholics who have tried to penetrate the maze of the early history of dogma.

In the Christian, of course, this exasperated distaste is only a passing mood. To off-set it there is the more permanent feeling of reverence and gratitude for those centuries during which, under the Holy Spirit, there was worked out that classic statement of our faith whose terms are the commonplace of creed and catechism today. The purpose of this article is to try to deepen that reverence and gratitude by making it more intelligent; to seek to make our acceptance of the terms in which we proclaim our faith in the Blessed Trinity less 'blind' by showing how these were evolved under pressure of the same faith burning with incomparable intensity in the whole Church of the patristic period.

It is indeed curious to note how in both Gibbon and Duchesne one object of their complex distaste is the intense popular interest which the early trinitarian and christological controversies aroused. We have seen Duchesne's contemptuous dismissal of the 'quarrelsome' mass of the faithful. Gibbon, for his part, was obviously amused at 'the boast of Tertullian that a Christian mechanic could readily answer such questions as had perplexed the wisest of the Grecian sages'. And yet it is just this involvement of the mass of Christians as a whole in these questions that is the key to a more sympathetic understanding of them. The Arian controversy was not reserved for a handful of intellectual word-spinners, mitred or unmitred: every Christian thought he had a part to play in it. No doubt we should find it most perplexing, could we be transported back in time, to enter a fourth-century barber's shop in Alexandria or Byzantium and find our attendant whispering in our ear his opinion of the rival merits of *homoousion*, *homoiousion*, *anomoion*, *homoion* and the rest, in much the same way as our barbers nowadays enthuse over the Hearts, the Spurs and the Wolves. Yet we should be wise to seize the lesson in this parallel. For just as the football talk of the common man today is grounded in the very real and deep experience he has as he assists Saturday by Saturday at the beautiful (and for him almost sacred)

1 *Histoire ancienne de l'Eglise*, t. iii, pp. 323-4.

ritual of our big stadiums, so too the theological chatter of the ordinary early Christian arose from the experience of that intense and active participation in the liturgy which we are struggling so hard to recover today.

The point is that all the intellectual argumentation in the early Church took place against the background of the liturgy of the worshipping Church, and indeed had its origins in the profound experience to which active membership of that worshipping community gave rise. The liturgy in action, after all, is simply the Church at her deepest, and the liturgy has as its function the task of mediating to every age the common Christian experience of the mystery of Christ.

To see most clearly the nature of that experience we must go back to apostolic times when the mystery of Christ had just burst with all its freshness into the world. We should not expect a member of the apostolic Church to define his faith in terms of the Nicene or Athanasian creeds. He would rather have spoken in perhaps more vibrant tones of his deep awareness of the risen Christ and of the Spirit, both mysteriously experienced as present in the community which they had established and into which he had been admitted by baptism. He would have spoken, too, of 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' to whom this newness of life he found within the community was effectively orientated, just as was the whole life and being of the Lord Jesus. It would be of these Three that he would speak as it was these Three that he worshipped. He would not call them 'persons', would not even call them, collectively, 'the Three'. The only names he would use would be the various revealed names proper to each (e.g., 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit'). Names did not matter so much then as the three objective realities of his experience in faith.

This is the very heart and core of the Christian faith and experience which the liturgy has mediated in all ages: the three objective realities whom we worship as divine. Long before any speculation on the Trinity developed, the Christian community was proclaiming and worshipping the Three. The baptism 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' of Matthew xxviii, 19 bears clear testimony to the liturgical practice of the first century, which is thus shown to be fundamentally one with that of the later periods described in the *Didache*, St Justin's

Apology I and the *Apostolic Traditions* of Hippolytus. In this last we find practically in its contemporary form the baptismal confession we know as the apostles' creed. How much further back than the beginning of the third century the fixed Hippolytan form goes we do not know. It is indeed likely that the formation of any *fixed* credal statement took some time. But early Christian writings from St Paul onwards abound in brief trinitarian formulas which undoubtedly reflect liturgical use and practice. The number and form of words in all of these may vary considerably, but like the apostles' creed itself they are articulated round the names of the Three, to whom the movement of Christian faith is ordered and in whom it rests. From the beginning, the Church's belief in God has been a belief in the Three. St Justin reflects this common belief when to counter the pagan attack of 'atheism' levelled against Christians he wrote:

> Thus we are called atheists. And we admit that in respect of such supposed gods as those of the pagans we *are* atheists: but not in regard to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and moderation and the other virtues, the God who is without a trace of evil. Him we worship and adore, and his Son, who came from him and taught us of these things . . . and the Spirit of prophecy. These we worship with reason and truth' (*Apology I*, 6).

This faith is similarly reflected in Theophilus of Antioch, in whom we have the earliest witness to the use of a collective name for the Three of Christian worship, the Greek ancestor of our 'Trinity': '. . . the three days [in the Genesis account of creation] which were before the luminaries are types of the *Triad* of God, his Word and his Wisdom' (*Ad Autolycum*, 2, 15).

Both these passages were written in the second half of the second century. By this time speculation about the Christian belief in God was well under way, stimulated by that dialogue with educated paganism in which the writers known to us as the Apologists engaged. If Justin, as we have just seen, countered the charge of atheism by referring to the Three, he and his fellows were equally concerned with proclaiming the monotheism inherited by the Church from the Jews in the face of pagan polytheism. Tatian, for example, in his *Address to the Greeks* (14, 1) accuses them of acknowledging 'the dominion of many rather than the rule of one'. His word for this last is 'monarchy', a word

used throughout the patristic period to express the Christian principle of monotheism.

From about A.D. 200 onward the Church was engaged in an intense struggle to understand how the apparent contradiction between this principle of 'monarchy' and the 'Triad' of her worship could be overcome. How could God continue to be proclaimed one if Three were worshipped? At the outset of this period two vastly different approaches to the problem soon tumbled into heresy. Both adoptionism and sabellianism came to grief because while retaining monarchy they sacrificed the Triad, the former by denying the divinity of the Son and (perhaps) the Spirit, the latter by failing to recognize adequately their distinction from the Father.

The value of these two heresies for the Church was that they helped to pin the question of the Christian doctrine of God to the christological problem of the divinity and distinctness of the Son. For about a hundred and fifty years the Spirit was hardly considered at all by Christian speculation (as distinct from faith and liturgy), and the doctrine of the Trinity was hammered out over the question of the relation of Christ to God the Father. The Church's rejection of adoptionism and sabellianism witnesses to her belief in both the divinity of Christ and his distinctness from the Father. The problem now was in what sense is the Son divine, in what sense distinct from the Father, and in what sense also one with him.

The third century was a period of intense theological activity on this problem, but it was not till after the Arian crisis that a final answer was reached. Arianism was sufficiently refined to avoid the 'mere man' christology of adoptionism. Incarnation for Arius was a fact. Nevertheless the extremely exalted being who became incarnate in Christ was not God, was something 'alien from and utterly dissimilar (*anomoion*) to the Father's essence (*ousia*)' and his eternity ('there was when he was not'); and, although he was the Father's instrument in creation and cosmic activity, nevertheless in the last resort he was himself a creature (*ktisma*). The air of brisk intellectual confidence with which this theory was propounded won Arius a fair measure of popular support. Yet the reaction of the Church was unmistakable. In a few short years the first Ecumenical Council met at Nicea in 325 and arianism was condemned.

Where Arius was felt chiefly to depart from orthodox belief was in his saying that the Son was dissimilar (*anomoion*) to the Father's *ousia*. Certainly it was on this point that controversy was to rage for the next fifty years. What Nicea defined was that the Son was *homoousion* (consubstantial) with the Father, that is, of the same *ousia*, of the same 'stuff' in his concrete essential being. As subsequent events were to show, many of the Fathers of Nicea would have preferred a less downright formula and been content with a simple contradiction of Arius's 'dissimilar'. They were confirmed in this attitude by the teaching of Marcellus of Ancyra, who interpreted the Nicean term in a sabellian sense. As a result a new formula, *homoiousion*, was eventually adopted by many as a measure to safeguard the distinctness of the Father and the Son: the Son is 'similar' in *ousia* to the Father.

The *homoiousion* formula in the middle of the fourth century defended the full divinity (in our sense) of the Son against a revived and almost generally triumphant arianism (it was at this time that St Jerome was to remark that 'the whole world groaned and marvelled to find itself Arian'—*Dial. c. Lucif.*, 19); it also safeguarded the Son's distinctness from the Father against any sabellian misinterpretation; where it failed was in its inability to account for the Son's unity with the Father. This was the rock on which it foundered to give place to the final triumph of the *homoousion*. The chief instruments in this process were the indefatigable St Athanasius and the Cappadocian trio SS. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.

The advantage of the *homoousion* formula as expounded in his maturity by Athanasius is that thereby God the Son is shown to be not merely similar in *ousia* to the Father from whom he eternally proceeds as a distinct *hypostasis* (subsistence), but even identical in *ousia*. In this eternal generation there is a real Someone who proceeds, but, unlike the case of human generation, the *ousia* (stuff, nature or substance) of this Someone is not merely like (or of) the *ousia* of the Father: it is precisely the same one *ousia* in every respect. If we now add the Spirit to the other two members of the divine Triad (and it was indeed in the quarter-century immediately preceding the Council of Constantinople that the status of the Spirit became a burning theological question), we have the final classical statement of the orthodox faith about God: one *ousia* and three *hypostases*.

For us in the West this statement takes the form of the one divine substance or nature and the three persons. But from the time of Constantinople (381) onwards it was clearly seen on both sides that the Greek and Latin forms express the same developed orthodox understanding of what the Christian faith concerning God proclaims. A great deal of the whole fourth-century controversy had been occasioned by misunderstandings between Greek and Latin speakers.[1] But then again even within each of these two languages the terms employed were susceptible of more than one meaning. The words *ousia* and nature, for example, could be understood in both an abstract and a concrete way. It is important to see that in the orthodox definition it is the concrete sense which is used. If we give the words an abstract meaning we slip at once into tritheism, for by so doing we have begun to think of the Blessed Trinity in the same way as we think of three men and their one, common (abstract) human nature. The *ousia*-nature of the Catholic dogma means, on the contrary, the real, concrete, single and indivisible 'stuff' of the Godhead. The analogy on the human level for this is the individual concrete human nature which each of us possesses. But whereas this concrete human nature can only be possessed by one (*you* cannot have *my* nature, however much we share a common humanity), the concrete divine nature is fully possessed by three persons. It is precisely here that the crux of the mystery of the Trinity lies.

Whether or not Athanasius actually used the term 'three *hypostases*' is debated. Certainly he held the doctrine. But his special glory is the *homoousion*, the insistence on identity of substance. This was the starting-point of all his thinking about God. Of the Cappadocians we may say that their starting-point was rather the three persons, and in this their influence has been decisive on the eastern approach to the Trinity ever since. But in fact they achieved in comparatively few years a tremendously

1 Briefly the difficulty was this: as a matter of language the one Latin word *substantia* has two Greek equivalents, *ousia* and *hypostasis*. As a *mere* matter of language, indeed, *hypostasis* is a more exact equivalent than *ousia* of the Latin *substantia*. And so a terminology which talks about three *hypostases* in the Godhead could be very disconcerting to Latins translating unwarily as three *substances*. The difficulty was overcome by the Latins using the word *persona* as equivalent to the Greek *hypostasis* in this context. It was not till the scholastic period that the Latins evolved the word *subsistentia* as a more exact linguistic equivalent of *hypostasis*, and began talking about three *subsistences*. But by this time the word *person* had achieved pride of place. With the Greeks on the contrary, *prosopon*, the linguistic equivalent of *person*, though occasionally used, never displaced the traditional *hypostasis* in theological language.

rich body of thought full of suggestions for future developments in trinitarian theology as a whole. As an example of this we may quote a passage from St Basil's *Epistle*, 38, 8: 'Everything that the Father is, is seen in the Son, and everything that the Son is belongs to the Father. The Son in his entirety abides in the Father, and in return possesses the Father in entirety in himself. Thus the *hypostasis* of the Son is, so to speak, the form and presentation by which the Father is known, and the Father's hypostasis is recognized in the form of the Son.' Here we have the first appearance of the doctrine of co-inherence or '*perichoresis*' of the three persons in the unique Godhead, whose elaboration later was to prove important when the formalism of Leontius of Byzantium endangered the orthodox vision of the truth achieved at the term of the fourth-century doctrinal struggles. And in the same letter we have an example of another line of enquiry which the Cappadocians opened up, when Basil refers to the 'identifying particularities', the individual characteristics of the *hypostases*. This enquiry is concerned with the root of distinction in the three *hypostases*. For Basil the Father is 'the unbegotten', the Son is distinguished by being 'begotten'; Gregory of Nazianzus adds 'procession' to stand for the distinguishing mark of the Holy Spirit. This is a line of enquiry that was to find completion in the Augustinian doctrine that the distinction of persons is grounded in their mutual relations within the Godhead, and that what 'person' in trinitarian theology means is subsistent relation.

With St Augustine we have, in a sense, come to the end of the road. It is true that in many ways he also marks a new beginning. For one thing his approach to the Trinity from the absolute unity and simplicity of God has been a characteristic of the west ever since. Again, his celebrated 'theory' of the Trinity based on analogy with the human soul is something completely original and new. But St Augustine was for St Thomas and all other Catholic theologians the Master in this matter of the Trinity; and not merely for those great new contributions of his own. He won that title from them mainly because they recognized that his writings on the Trinity expressed that vision of the truth, for which so many earlier Fathers had struggled so hard, with a fulness, a clarity, and a serenity impossible while the fires of controversy still raged. They recognized in him the summing up of the patristic period.