

taking three parts? No, the Son is distinct from the Father, and the Holy Ghost is distinct from the Son and the Father. They are three—but three what? Well, remember God's name, told to Moses: He who is. God *is*, we might say, so completely, that he *is* three times over. In psychologists' jargon we might say he is three Egos, he can say Me three times over. The way we put it is to say God is three Persons.

It is baffling to the wits, it is impossible to understand. But then why should we ever think that God is possible to understand? It may be impossible to understand, but it is very necessary to believe, because our eternal happiness consists in sharing the life of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. God didn't unfold the mystery of his being simply to give us something to break our heads on. He sent his Son and his Spirit into the world in order to make our life a more than human life, a share in the divine life. And the divine life consists in the Son eternally issuing from the Father, and the Holy Spirit being eternally breathed forth from the Father and the Son. It is into that eternal movement of uncreated life that we are destined, if we will only believe, to be caught up. This is eternal life, to know thee, the Father, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent.

No man, says St John, has ever seen God. No; but how does he go on? The only-begotten Son of God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him.



## THE PASSION OF THE HOLY MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY: II

(TRANSLATED BY H. O'D.)

**N**EXT we have a description of St Satorus' vision, written by himself.

We had suffered (he wrote) & we left the body & started being carried towards the East by 4 Angels whose hands weren't touching us. We weren't going up lying face-upwards but rather like going up a gentle slope. And once we were clear of the world below we saw an immense light & I said, 'Perpetua

(as she was just beside me), this is what the Lord promised us, we've really got the Promise.' And while we were being carried by those 4 Angels a huge Place opened out in front of us which was like a kind of Park with rose-trees in it & flowers of all sorts. The trees were big as cypresses & their leaves were burning away non-stop. Now there in the Park were 4 other Angels brighter than the first lot who when they saw us paid us homage & called to the other Angels in astonishment 'Look, they're here, they're here.' And those 4 Angels who were carrying us were overcome with fear & put us down & we went on foot across a lawn covered with violets. There we found Jocundus & Saturninus & Artaxis who'd been burnt alive in the same persecution & Quintus who was a martyr too though he'd died in prison & we asked them where the others were. But the Angels said to us 'First of all come inside and meet the Lord'. And we came near a Place & the walls of the Place were like they'd be if they were built of light & standing in front of the door into this Place were 4 Angels who dressed people going in in white Raiment. And when we were dressed we went in & we saw an immense light & we heard people saying SANCTUS SANCTUS SANCTUS<sup>1</sup> altogether non-stop. And sitting in the middle of this Place we saw a kind of Old Man with snow-white hair but a young face & we couldn't see His feet. And there were 24 old men on His right & left & lots of other people standing behind them. We went in all agog & stood in front of the throne & 4 Angels lifted us up & we kissed Him & He patted us on the face with His hand. And the old men said to us 'Go out & play'. And I said, 'Perpetua, you've got what you wanted'. And she said to me, 'Thanks be to God because though I was cheerful enough when I was alive I'm now even more cheerful here'. And we went out & in front of the door we saw Bishop Optatus on the right & Aspasius the priest & preacher on the left standing apart from each other & looking miserable & they threw themselves at our feet & said to us, 'Make peace between us because you've gone away & left us in this state'. And we said to them, 'Aren't you our Father-in-God & you our priest & yet you throw yourselves at our feet like this?' And we were very upset & embraced them. And Perpetua started talking to them in Greek & we took them aside into the Park under a rose-tree. And while we were talking to them the Angels said to them,

<sup>1</sup> In Greek in the original; Agios Agios Agios.

'Leave them alone so they can have a rest, & if there are any quarrels between you, forgive each other'. And this put them to shame. And they said to Optatus, 'Keep your people in better order because they swarm around you as if they were coming out of the circus & squabbling about the teams'. And it looked to us as if they wanted to shut the doors. And we began to recognize many of the brethren there & the martyrs too. And we were all fed with a quite indescribable perfume which was very satisfying. Then I woke up very happy.

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These were the most striking visions of the blessed martyrs Saturus and Perpetua, which they wrote down themselves. Secundulus, however, was still in the prison when God summoned him to leave this world by a quicker route, in his kindness letting him escape the beasts. His soul may not have been pleased about this, but his flesh certainly was. Felicity also experienced the Lord's favour. She was pregnant when arrested, and was now in her eighth month. Pregnant women are not allowed to be exposed for punishment, and so as the day of the show drew near she was in great distress, in case she might be postponed because of her state, and have to shed her holy and innocent blood later on, amongst criminals. Her fellow-martyrs were deeply disturbed at the prospect of having to leave such a good companion behind, by herself, for she had travelled so far with them along the road to the same hope as theirs. So, three days before the games they joined all together in a single appeal, and prayed to the Lord with great fervour. Immediately after this prayer her pains came on her. Being a premature delivery it was inevitably painful, and she suffered a great deal. During it one of the gaolers said to her, 'You despised the beasts when you refused to offer sacrifice, but what will you do when you're thrown to them, if you're feeling this so much?' So she said, 'Now it's me suffering what I suffer, but *there* someone else will be in me, suffering for me, because it's for Him I'm going to suffer'. She gave birth to a girl, whom one of the sisters brought up as her own daughter.

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It is the Holy Spirit who has permitted—and permitting has willed—that the story of what happened at the games should be written down—even by someone who is unworthy to complete

the account of such a glorious occasion; and as it was also more or less Perpetua's own command that it should be done, we are surely only discharging the sacred office which she committed to us by adding one more testimony to her constancy and loftiness of soul.

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They were being treated with unusual severity by the Tribune, who had been frightened by the warnings of some extremely silly people into thinking that they might be spirited out of the prison by some kind of magic incantations. But Perpetua challenged him to his face. 'Why don't you let us build up our strength a bit?' she said. 'We're very special prisoners, you know—after all, we are going to fight for Caesar's birthday. Wouldn't it be more credit to you if we were in better shape for it?' The Tribune was dumb-founded and felt ashamed of himself; so he gave orders that they should be treated more humanely, and let her brothers, and other people too, have permission to go in and bring them comfort—even the Governor of the prison himself was beginning to have faith.

The day before the games they were having their last meal (usually known as the 'Free Dinner'), and as far as possible making it not just a free dinner but an *Agape*. During it they addressed the bystanders with their usual bravery, threatening them with the judgment of God, bearing witness to the joy of their suffering, and jeering at the curiosity of the people who had come to stare at them. Satorius said, 'Isn't tomorrow enough for you? How you enjoy seeing what you hate! Friends today, enemies tomorrow. But have a good look at us now, so that you'll recognize us on Judgment Day.' All this astonished them and they went away, and as a result many of them were converted.

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The day of their victory dawned. They were full of cheer as they left the prison for the amphitheatre as if they were going to heaven, their faces shining with happiness. If they were at all apprehensive it was for joy, not for fear. Perpetua brought up the rear, looking calm and walking with a firm step, a true wife of Christ, God's own favourite. The look in her eyes daunted everyone who saw her. Felicity was there too, delighted that her baby

had been born safely, and that she was able to fight with the beasts. From bloodshed she was going to bloodshed, after the midwife to the gladiator; after child-birth she was to be washed by her Second Baptism. They were brought to the gate, and an attempt was made to get them to dress up—the men as priests of Saturn, the women as devotees of Ceres. But Perpetua was too noble-minded not to resist resolutely right up to the last, and said, 'We have come here, of our own accord, just so that our freedom won't be taken away from us. We've given up our lives to get out of having to do things like this. That's the bargain we made with you.' The Tribune gave in, and let them be led in just as they were—Injustice recognizing Justice. Perpetua started singing, for she already saw herself trampling on her Egyptian. Revocatus and Saturninus and Satorus shouted threats at the spectators. When they came within sight of Hilarian they started nodding and pointing at him, as if to say, 'You are judging us, but God will judge you'. The crowd got furious at this and demanded that they be scourged by the keepers as they passed down their ranks. The martyrs congratulated themselves on being able to share the Lord's own sufferings.

Now he who had said, '*Ask and you shall receive*', gave to each of them the kind of death they wanted. Whenever there had been any discussion among them about the sort of martyrdom they would like, Saturninus had always maintained that he wanted to be thrown to *all* the beasts—that way he would win a more glorious crown. So at the beginning of the show he and Revocatus were matched against a leopard; then he was put on the platform to be mauled by the bear. Satorus, on the contrary, dreaded the bear more than anything, but hoped that the leopard would put an end to him with one bite. So when they tried to put the wild boar onto him, it was the keeper who tied him to the boar who was gored, and died after the games were over. Satorus was only dragged about. Then he was roped to the gangway up to the bear's den: but the bear refused to come out. So Satorus was called back for the second time, un hurt.

For the young women the devil got ready a very ferocious cow, provided, contrary to the custom, to match their sex by the sex of the beast. They were stripped and covered with nets, and then led out. The crowd were horrified to see that one of them was a delicate girl, and that the other had recently had a baby, as

her breasts were still dripping with milk. So they were recalled and dressed in loose clothes. Perpetua was brought out first. She was tossed, and fell on her back; she sat up where she was and pulled her torn dress across her thigh to hide it, thinking of her modesty more than of her pain. Then she asked for a pin and did up her hair, which had all come undone. It was not the right thing for a martyr to suffer with her hair untidy, in case it looked as if she were in mourning and not in glory. Then she got up, and noticing that Felicity had been knocked down she went over to her and gave her a hand to help her up too. The two of them stood there side-by-side, and as the crowd was now in a less brutal mood they were recalled to the survivors' gate. There Perpetua was taken care of by Rusticus, a catechumen at that time, who had been keeping close to her. She had been so far away in spirit, in an ecstasy, that now she seemed to wake up from a kind of sleep and began looking round. To everyone's amazement she said, 'I wonder when we're going to be led out to that cow?' When she heard what had already happened she wouldn't believe it at first, until she realized there were signs of rough treatment on her body and her dress. Then she called her brother and the catechumen over and told them, 'Stand firm in the faith, and love one another, all of you, and don't be scandalized at what we're suffering'.

Meanwhile at the other gate Saturus was giving encouragement to Pudens the soldier. 'It's turned out just as I prophesied it would—those animals haven't hurt me at all so far. So now believe absolutely. You watch, when I go out there I'll be finished off in one bite by the leopard.' Right at the end of the show the leopard was let out, and one bite from it covered Saturus with so much blood that as he came back the crowd yelled at him, 'You've had a good wash, haven't you'. What better way of being saved than by being washed in the glory of such an occasion! Then he said to Pudens the soldier, 'Goodbye, and remember my faith, and me. And don't let this disturb you but strengthen you.' He asked for the ring from his finger, pressed it to his wound and gave it back to him as a pledge of his inheritance and a memorial of his blood. As he was nearly dead he was thrown into the usual place with the others to have his throat cut. The crowd demanded that this should be done in the centre so they could see clearly when the sword pierced their bodies, and associate themselves with the

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

RONALD TORBET, O.P.

**I**N 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