

Introduction

Some years ago, Father Alberto Trevisiol, Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical Urbaniana University, asked me to summarize my teachings on what was once called the “De Trinitate” Treatise. At that time, I was Full Visiting Professor of the Professorship which held that very same name. I reflected at length on this request. Finally, I accepted, soon realizing, however, that I could only write up my classroom lectures which were meant not only to “inform”, but also to “form” my students, helping them give reason for their faith, to bear to witness to it, and nothing more.

My aim could be academic, but not in the form of scientific academic research, because it did not seem opportune to forget the pastoral or practical note that the study of theology means in our Ecclesiastic University. The aim of this work could only, therefore, be that of a mystagogical journey with theological students, using as far as possible the inductive method. My students, who come from all over the world, have in common the liturgical heritage of the Roman Catholic Church and almost all of them since childhood. This greatly helps my work, because notwithstanding the enormous language and cultural differences, we have the same sacraments, the same liturgical symbols, the same ecclesiastical structure and the same faith belief, acquired from the bosom of the family and from the Catholic catechism.

We so share a vast patrimony, which is too a starting point from which to pinpoint the sense of rites, formulae of faith, ecclesiastical institutions and familiar habits, which suppose a Trinitarian faith often, unfortunately, insufficiently understood and insufficiently studied. Some prayers are simply taken for granted, such as the “Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit” or, the learning by heart of the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed” presumed, from baptism, as having been received too *in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. They are part of the common daily prayer, and lack of awareness prevents going beyond the simple mechanical repetition of formulae and prayers.

So, I thought that it would be opportune to start from the liturgical experience and from there, lead the theology students to the deepest understanding possible of what they already live in the liturgical celebration and in life, with the help of the Bible, interpreted by the Fathers of the Church. My book is, therefore, structured almost in a spontaneous way into a series of sections of *Teaching Units*, which were not all meant to have the same layout, and despite their size, serve as a frame to hold the composition together. Neither was it necessary to be innovative at all costs. Suffice it to say that clarity was the

most essential factor, to help the students avail of the work completed for their use, not only to help them acquire historical and philological notions, as well as theological and philosophical content, but also to help them grow in faith, opening up to testimonies and mission. Basically, this means talking about the Trinity to believers who intend to transform knowledge into real experience to become even more rooted in the faith and ever more aware of having received the undertaking to transmit it lovingly to others, through teaching and in their lives.

I have never thought that knowledge was a means to an end; not even that particular knowledge we call theology. Moreover, my Urbaniana students know that, in this, I am in every way a disciple of Evagrio Pontico, who openly declared: “*if you are a theologian it means that you pray according to truth and if you pray according to truth, you are a theologian*”. This conviction is confirmed in the constant tradition of the Church that has always repeated that the *lex orandi* is the very basis of the *lex credendi*.

During my work, I have been able to ascertain to what extent certain liturgists influenced my theological and spiritual formation. *Liturgists* such as Cipriano Vagaggini, Salvatore Marsili, Adrien Nocent; *patrologists* such as Henri De Lubac, Jean Gribomont, Basil Studer, Manlio Simonetti; *dogmaticians* such as Magnus Löhrer, Raphael Schulte, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Luigi Sartori; *biblists* such as Ignace de la Potterie and Alonso Schökel; *moralists* such as Bernhard Häring, Anselm Gunthör, Tullo Goffi; *experts in spirituality* such as Jean Leclercq, Benedetto Calati, Tomáš Špidlík; and many other professors and colleagues by whom I have been extraordinarily enriched. I have felt and still today feel indebted to all of them, even though I have not been able to cite them all sufficiently. Rather, I am no longer able to distinguish from whom I acquired this and that knowledge, nor how much. What has matured in me has certainly come from all of them, nonetheless in no way, or not in any satisfactory way, could I ascertain to what extent each of them has had an effect on me. Should I perhaps not have embarked on this writing so as to avoid the risk of unduly appropriating for myself something that one or other of my professors and companions on this journey may have sown in my memory? Perhaps the answer is yes, but the request of the Rector Magnificus of the Urbaniana encouraged me to write, in order to help those who have not had the same fortune as myself. I became more and more convinced that it was worth putting pen to paper and to run the risk. So, these pages were written and I would ask the readers, above all the theology students, to whom they are aimed, to welcome them in a critical way and to take advantage of what perhaps may be new in my writings, so that they can make progress beyond. Besides, this work is almost a review of contemporary authors, universally recognised as teachers of the subject. I wish to recall in particular Professors Simonetti and Trapé, the first for the history of the ancient Christian thinking and the second for the Augustine thinking. I allowed myself

to be guided by those who certainly knew more than me, in the various areas, in what is truly a vast matter i.e. the *Trinitarian Mystery*, at the same time trying to be as scrupulous as possible in quoting from sources. At the end of each teaching unit, the reader will find a good bibliographical reference section so that, should it be useful, it is possible to find the sources to which I refer.

I conclude by claiming to have attempted to reveal elicitation of so-called “spiritual” life, both in the liturgical celebrations, as well as in some pages of the Old and New Testaments and, furthermore, in the dogmatic research of the thinking of the Fathers of the Church. For everything else, I trust in the understanding and favourable reception of all. A second volume has been published in Italian by Urbaniana University Press in 2015, and soon the English version will be available too. This second volume is dedicated to the evolution of the reflection on the Mystery of the Trinity from medieval to modern times, touching on contemporary theological thinking: *Lezioni di Teologia Trinitaria 2. Modi di contemplare il mistero.*