In this volume, Professor Dale M. Schlitt develops a spirituality of the Trinity. He does this by carefully examining various testimonials to experiences of the Trinity. “Testimonial” is used in a twofold manner, as “witnessing and encouraging” (8). The book as a whole is meant to be a witness to the various records of testimonies of experiences of the Trinity and to encourage others to reflect on their own experiences.

Arranged in 16 chapters, the book begins with an introductory section and concludes with a reflection on discipleship. Chapter 1 sets the foundation and tone for the rest of the book. It describes the experience of Jesus contained in the biblical New Testament gospels, which is the founding experience. In the gospels, Jesus is portrayed as experiencing himself as the Son of God, whom he calls Abba, who is empowered by and acts in and through the Holy Spirit in a unique way. This experience of God has become the foundation of belief in the Trinity—that is, “three divine Persons as one God, one God in three divine Persons, and one God as three divine Persons.” It is Jesus’ experience of God that Christians have reflected on, together with their own experience of God, reflected on in light of Jesus’ experience, that the testimonials studied bear witness to.

The testimonials studied by Schlitt are drawn from several different historical periods. They are arranged chronologically and derive from different socio-cultural contexts, with a special emphasis on more recent
or even contemporary examples of giving witness to experience of the Trinity. This gives the book a global appeal and character. Many of the testimonials described are in written form, but others are not. The not-written ones include an icon, the architectural design of a chapel, music, and a movie. Each in its own way manifests the experience of the author or creator and invites the reader to reflect on what is presented in light of their own experience, thus prolonging the experience of the Trinity.

Having participated in the PhD seminars in Spirituality of the Trinity in which we discussed most of the material of the book with the author, I eagerly awaited the publication of the book. I was impressed with the manner in which the author has integrated various points of view, including some from his students. My favorite chapter of the book is Chapter 4, on Abbot Suger and the chapel of St. Denis. Reading this chapter, more than any other, I found the author more self-revealing and engaging with the reader. He writes of his own experience of visiting the chapel with a former research assistant, inviting the reader to journey with them as they walk through the chapel and to experience with them what they see and feel. I would have loved to see more of such personal revelation and engagement by the author. I feel that it would have given the book a more “spiritual” and less “academic” feel.

The two chapters on Raimon Panikkar’s witness were for me the most challenging to engage with. I found them to be highly technical and difficult to relate to.

The following remark, found at the end of the book, seems to me to be an original insight:

I would suggest, then, that we consider these testimonials and related experiences to be post-resurrection prolongations, in space and time, of Jesus’ experience of God. That we as well consider all disciple-dependent communal, shared, and individual experiences of the Trinity down through the ages as such prolongations. These various prolongations ultimately come to expression in, and as, the lives of Spirit-empowered disciples of Jesus crying out in word and deed, Abba. (435–436)

Some, however, might find the idea that testimonials are “prolongations” of the experiences of the Trinity debatable.

The book as a whole is an important contribution to the area of spirituality. God, as the source of spirituality, is a subject worthy of continued study. Studied from the perspective of experience is not something that has often been done. What has been more common are theological treatises of the Trinity. Professor Schlitt has spent the bulk of his academic career immersed in the subject and carefully distinguishes, defines, and explains terms and concepts. His goal, however, is not simply to provide clarity on the subject, but as he constantly explains, to prolong the experience and to encourage. This is the spiritual goal of the volume.

I strongly recommend the book for study in any program on spirituality. It is also a volume that might serve well an adult catechetical program. The language and explanations of the volume are accessible. The size of the book, at 488 pages, might frighten those who are not used to such lengthy studies. Courage! Once you start reading, you will be gripped by the clarity of the author’s thought pattern and writing.

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