

BOOK REVIEW

LUIGI GIOIA, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*. Oxford Theological Monographs, Oxford University Press 2008 ISBN 978-0-19-955346-4, xvi+330pp, £ 65,-

I Literature and theoretical framework

Augustine's *De Trinitate* is, although its *Wirkungsgeschichte* might suggest otherwise, a personal account of his theological exploration on the question how man knows God and how God makes himself known to mankind. Therefore, it is very welcome that Luigi Gioia provides the reader with 'a modest [...] and sympathetic descriptive analysis thoroughly committed to accounting for the whole of the treatise, on the presupposition of its unity and its coherence.' In his introduction Gioia explains that – far from being a handbook of systematic theology – Augustine's *De Trinitate* aims to introduce his reader 'in the practice of knowledge of God.' (3)

Luigi Gioia in this monograph studies *De Trinitate* with the method of close-reading. He states that, in order to approach this epistemological question as a function of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is necessary 'to explore connections between the doctrine of the Trinity and other theological areas such as Christology, soteriology, doctrine of the Holy Spirit, doctrine of revelation, and doctrine of the image of God.' This reveals the wideness of the scope of Gioia's research-project, and also his systematic theological stance. The latter is also reflected in Gioia's departure from 'highly representative 20th century critics' on Augustinian Trinitarian theology of Karl Rahner and Karl Barth. Luigi Gioia also aims for a refutation of Olivier du Roy's reading of *De Trinitate*. Du Roy criticizes Augustine's Trinitarian theology for a tension between its anagogic Platonic approach of the soul's ascent returning to the One, and the development of Augustine's doctrine on creation in an Anti-Manicheistic context.¹ Consequentially, du Roy's position reduces the role of faith in Augustine's discourse to an 'authoritative spun towards interiority through moral purification on humility, where the anagogical mode takes over.' In his discussion on Augustine and

¹ O. du Roy, *L'Intelligence de la Foi en la Trinité selon St. Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391* (Paris, 1966).

modernity Gioia highlights Augustine's anthropological turn of theology and adopts Rowan Williams's missionary interpretation of *De Trinitate*. The implication of this position is that Gioia observes the Augustinian self as a dynamic self in movement.² The epistemological mission of the mind is therefore to learn to see on it as acted upon by God. Gioia clarifies this notion of theological epistemology in reference to Lewis Ayres' study of exercitation in incarnation. This exercise satisfies mankind's need 'to undergo a certain *exercitatio*.' This leads Lewis Ayres to a reading of books 4-14 as an *exercitatio mentis* through Christology. Ayres defines *exercitatio mentis* as 'a training in modes of thinking increasingly interior, and increasingly free from images, a gradual intellectual movement from the material to the immaterial, fundamentally Neoplatonic in character.'³ Located within the life of the body of Christ, this notion of *exercitatio mentis* leads Gioia to the insight that theological epistemology is a function of soteriology, as God can only be known through the love of God. Consequentially, the starting point of Gioia's investigation of *De Trinitate* is the consciousness of the actuality of God's salvation in the loving knowledge of faith.

II Outline of discourse

For his analysis of *De Trinitate*, Luigi Gioia chooses for 'a combination of sequential account of the way the overall argument unfolds from one book to the next, together with an analytical account of each line of enquiry.'²⁴ Within this analysis, Gioia discerns two levels. The first level concerns Augustine's exposition of the mystery of the Trinity. The second level involves the issue of knowledge of God. Even though Gioia does not explicitly recognize this, the first level seems to be dominated by the power of Augustine's rhetorical skills.

² The fact that this monography was based on Luigi Gioia's earlier dissertation on the same subject, may be due to the exclusion of Richard Sorabji's interpretation of the so called *cogito* arguments in *De Trinitate* X.10.16 in his *status quaestionis*. Sorabji observes coincidences between Avicenna's Flying Man and Augustine's concept of non-bodily self and self-knowledge. Sorabji points to Porphyry as a possible source. R. Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death*. (Oxford, 2006), 212-29.

³ L. Ayres, 'The Christological Context of the *De Trinitate* XIII' in: *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998), 111-39, esp. 114, referring to J. Cavadini, 'The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*' in: *Theological Studies* 23 (1992), 103-23.

In the analysis of the first half of *De Trinitate*, Gioia stresses the anti-Arian character of these books and explains how scriptural exegesis is concentrated on the traditional anti-Arian interpretation of the Christological hymn from the letter to the Philippians. Augustine concludes that the traditional hermeneutical rule to attribute actions *in forma Dei* to the Father and actions *in forma servi* to the man Jesus is not satisfactory for his purposes. For that reason Augustine starts to reformulate this hermeneutical rule. What seemed subordination now indicates direction: *de Deo* or *a Deo* *ex Deo*. This enables Augustine to analyse the Old Testament theophanies and the *missiones* in book 2 and 3 as occasions where God uses creation to reveal his will. Gioia's interpretation of book 4 gives him the opportunity to explain his principle of the inseparability of soteriology and revelation. With regard to this tenet, the roles of the Trinitarian persons in economy correspond to their identity in the inner Trinity.

Gioia reads Augustine's analysis of ontological categories in book 5-7 in an anti-Arian context. As book 1-4 focuses on unity in the economy of salvation, Gioia investigates whether this corresponds with Augustine's concern to deal with consubstantiality in book 5-7. Gioia's conclusion is that the unfolding of the mystery of the Trinity was Augustine's main point. As Gioia observes, the analysis of Augustine's discourse in *De Trinitate* is a complex matter. This is caused by its *nexus* of different lines and layers of argumentation and its concern to unfold the Trinitarian mystery in a way that benefits the reader. Hence, Luigi Gioia decides to carry out his analysis in hierarchical order instead of a linear order. The effect is that the exposition on Christ as a mediator in book 4 illustrates the epistemological principle of identification of reconciliation and revelation. (Chapter 4: Christ, Salvation and Knowledge of God) But before being able to evaluate priority and necessity of Christ as a mediator, Gioia explores Augustine's attitude to philosophy in chapter 3: Augustine and philosophers. This involves Augustine's opposition between *scientia* and *sapientia*, the philosophical concept of happiness, philosopher's claim of the possibility to gather knowledge of God without mediator, and an outline of the evolution of Augustine's attitude towards philosophy, especially to (neo) platonic philosophy. Chapter 5 discusses Augustine's development of doctrine on divine action in revelation: Trinity and Revelation. Gioia underlines the importance of God's invisibility in soteriology and the indispensable character of faith in epistemology. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit in its function to envisage the transition from economic to immanent Trinity is the subject matter of chapter 6: the

Holy Spirit and the inner life of the Trinity. Luigi Gioia scrutinizes Augustine's doctrine of the Holy Spirit under the aspects of Christology, unity and the order of the Trinity. This will lead in chapter 7 to the examination of Augustine's use of logical and ontological categories in his doctrine of Trinity. Gioia concludes that Augustine reflects on the substantial unity of the Trinity as a dynamic unity of love, rather than in metaphysical categories. The latter do not have a descriptive or explanatory function in Augustine's discourse.

Hence, Luigi Gioia in chapter 8 (Love and knowledge of God) studies the conversion of the knowing subject in its enquiry to God, as God can only be known in loving him. Gioia elaborates in chapter 9 (Knowledge and its paradoxes) on the books 9-11 of *De Trinitate* on knowledge from the senses and on intellectual knowledge. Gioia observes that Augustine's illumination theory is to a large extent metaphorical. It illustrates our ability to define and to judge that which we know from the senses. (193) The paradoxes of knowledge described by Gioia refer to the paradox of craving for knowledge which presupposes knowledge-before-knowledge and, furthermore, to the possibility to see a form of i.e. justice above our selves in truth itself. This is illustrated with the metaphor of illumination.

Before reaching the final and main topic of the book – the image of God – Luigi Gioia recaptures the theme of Augustine's ideal of philosophy in chapter 10. In a discussion on book 4 and 12-14, the notion of 'philosophizing with Christ which restores *dilectio* and heals pride' is elaborated on as a philosophy which becomes worship in the acknowledgement of the 'dependence on God at the root of the possibility of knowing.' (231) The theme of the image of God is discussed in chapter 12 with help of an excursus on the historical genesis of Augustine's doctrine of creation in *De div. quest.* 51 and *De vera religione*. The triad being, life and knowledge from *De div. quest* is originated in Marius Victorinus. In this closing chapter Luigi Gioia first discusses the image-exemplar aspect of Trinity, which stresses the analogical role of the image. Secondly, he treats the relational dynamism of Augustine's concept of *imago Dei*. This highlights the image's relation of origin and of end. The investigation of the *imago Dei* is continued with a report of the roots of this doctrine in his doctrine of creation, its dependence on Plato's theory of participation and its kinship to Plotinus and Marius Victorinus. Gioia closes this chapter with an elaboration on the problem of the postlapsarian status of the image, its relationship to the Trinity itself, the distinction between a created image and a renewed image, and, finally, the epistemological function of the *imago Dei*.

III Evaluation and reflection

Luigi Gioia's courage to choose the complete *De Trinitate* in its unity and coherence as the *objectum materiale* of this monograph is praiseworthy. His research strategy, close-reading subsequently followed by analysis on two different levels, is a solid strategy. The analysis concerns the level of the unfolding of the mystery of the Trinity and a deeper level of the epistemological question on knowledge of God: theology. Luigi Gioia's analysis is often directed at the doctrinal implications of Augustine's discourse in terms of functions in revelation, reconciliation, etc.. This makes this book attractive for contemporary systematic theologians.

A consequence of the method of close-reading is the inclusion of larger quotations of Augustine's text, in translation and the Latin text in footnotes. Although Luigi Gioia avoids a paraphrase or *lectio continua* of Augustine's text by a thematic and hierarchical analysis of the texts, sometimes the analysis of the sequential argumentations are lengthy and redundant. A positive side-effect of the extensive treatment and quotation is that the reader can follow the discourse of *De Trinitate* in Gioia's book without text-edition. This makes his monograph attractive for a larger scholarly theological public.

Another side effect of Gioia's style is that the inclusion of Augustine's highly complex discourse in the argumentation of Gioia's book makes it hard to elaborate simultaneously on two different analytical levels. Although Luigi Gioia mentions the level of the exposition of the mystery of the Trinity and locates it as an outer layer especially in book 1-3 of *De Trinitate*, the focus of his research remains on the inner layer, the theological epistemology. Gioia locates the development of this inner layer from book 4 onwards. Gioia's analysis shows that these layers are intertwined and not easy to separate.

As Gioia has observed in his chapter on Christ, Salvation and Knowledge of God, God captures our faith in Him to lead us in his truth, because He wants to make Himself known in this same faith. (76) However, in his reference to Lewis Ayres' studies on *De Trinitate* and the incarnation as an *exercitatio mentis*, the question how faith – initiated by God – and *exercitatio mentis* relate, remains unasked and untreated.

Gioia's analysis of the impact of philosophers on Augustine could have won depth and contrast with an extensive close-reading of primary texts of philosophical authors. This affects chapter 3 about Augustine and philosophers where Luigi Gioia discusses Augustine's dependence on stoic philosophy and Platonism. Close-reading of primary texts might

have clarified the discussion of the *imago Deo* and its complex relationship to Marius Victorinus and Plotinus in chapter 11.

Luigi Gioia extensively elaborates on love and faith as theological concepts. However, the ethical aspects of living according to these (theological) virtues remain relatively unexplored in his discourse. Since, according to Augustine, *temporalia* only can have their proper function when correctly used in the light of faith, faith as a virtue and gift illuminates the correct use of *temporalia*. For this reason, the dynamics of theological virtues, such as love and faith reveal simultaneously the initiative of God in descending movement and the ascending movement of the human soul to the realm of eternity in faith. This dynamics of virtue supports the pedagogical notion of *exercitatio mentis*, which aims to relate the temporal dimension of life to the realm of eternity.

From what has been observed above, it is clear that Luigi Gioia has realized a praiseworthy reading of Augustine's *De Trinitate* departing from its unity and coherence. This will show itself of interest for a wide scope of theologians. It also became clear that a monograph with an *objectum materiale* of this size and complexity unavoidably leaves aspects unexplored or underexposed. Having said this, we are left with the question whether this monograph contains what its title aims at: The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. In his conclusion Luigi Gioia affirms that 'the principle of unity and coherence of works dealing with Christian doctrine should always be looked for in the *conexio mysteriorum* first', which means that they should be approached 'in a distinctive Christian way', 'looking away from ourselves and concentrating on Christ's salvation, his Holy Spirit, and the Fathers invisibility, their equal divinity and their consubstantiality, i.e. the doctrine of the Trinity and its corollary represented by the doctrine of revelation.' (302) Luigi Gioia in this monograph offers an appealing reading of *De Trinitate* which respects this hermeneutical principle.

A complex work such as *De Trinitate* with its fusion of prayer and reflection admits more than one specific method of reading. Gioia's thematically reading offers an accessible and intelligent reading of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, which makes the book once again relevant for contemporary theological reflection on the mystery of the Trinity.

Martin CLAES