

## Book Reviews

**Resting on the Heart of Christ: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian** by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D (*Omaha: IPF Publications, 2009*), 208 pp.; and **Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way**, edited by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D (*Omaha: IPF Publications, 2010*), xiv + 165 pp.

DEACON James Keating and the Institute for Priestly Formation, through these two books, *Resting on the Heart of Christ and Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way*, have endeavored to give spiritual formation its rightful place in the seminary, beginning with the seminary theologian, who teaches and models wisdom to seminarians. These volumes are addressed principally to seminary theologians (professors), though they would be profitable to seminarians, helping them to take a more contemplative approach to their studies and to modify expectations for their professors and themselves.

*Resting on the Heart of Christ* addresses the vocation and spirituality of the seminary theologian. The book is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, Keating describes the real state of the separation in theological methodology between universities and seminaries, providing a snapshot of the state of theology and of the attitudes of theologians today. The seminary theologian, unlike the pure academic, eagerly thinks “out of love for God in the ecclesial service of intellectually forming seminarians, whose desires are being purified by contemplative study within a sacramental communal life” (56).

In the second chapter, Keating expresses his desire for contemplative theology in the classroom. The seminary theologian is one who facilitates a deep encounter with Christ in the classroom. Lectures can be conceived as an extension of the Liturgy of the Word. Theology done with a deep sense of faith, rather than from a hermeneutic of suspicion, can lead to the necessary integration between knowing and believing.

This leads Keating, in chapter three, to lament the fact that seminary professors are not usually trained to so orient their lectures and study in this way. Recognizing that the study and teaching habits of seminary theologians will have a profound impact, not only on future priests but also on the laity, Keating proposes that the seminary theologian give greater attention to his own meditation and selection of books; interestingly, he advocates taking an “iconic stance” toward theological studies. The critical factor in making this possible will be the *horarium*. Keating admits (114): “The whole argument of this book will go nowhere unless and until seminary theologians are given time, guidance, and material assistance to move their teaching method and preparation in a direction that welcomes contemplation.”

Chapter four gives the seminary theologian some sense of how spirituality, integrated with academic theology, might concretely affect classroom teaching. Keating describes this integration as “a *surrendered searching*, a *discerning abandonment*, or a *listening trust*. The terms *listening*, *discerning*, and *searching* imply a cognitive aspect in welcoming *truth*, whereas *surrender*, *abandonment*, and *trust* express the faith response of welcoming a Person” (124).

Teaching in a contemplative way requires periods of silence in class to meditate and to allow oneself to behold the beauty of truth. The goal is not just to know about God but to know God in an affective way. These moments of silence will initially seem awkward, but Keating believes that the pastoral effects of this practice will build up the contemplative *habitus*, which will have pastoral effects through the handing on of the fruits of contemplation in parish life.

Ultimately, this is directed toward Eucharistic worship, a subject addressed in chapter five. Keating stresses the importance of praying together as a seminary faculty, especially at Mass; it is important not only for the theologian and for community life, but also for the seminarian, who will see that his professors are striving for holiness. In chapter six, Keating revisits the idea that the interpenetration of spirituality and academics has a pastoral aim. Since it is the task of the seminary to form future priests whose ministry flows from a pastoral charity rooted in deep communion with Christ, pure academic theology will never be enough. After a short conclusion, Keating provides a tool for seminarians to use in *receiving* this contemplative teaching, modeling student learning after the practice of *lectio divina*.

*Seminary Teaching: Teaching in a Contemplative Way* develops these themes more fully. The work is the fruit of a seminar in which seven seminary theologians, including Keating, studied the possibility of actually implementing this contemplative approach to teaching. The volume is divided

into three sections, each with two essays, and concludes with a synthesis by Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.

In the first section (“Vision for Renewal”) Keating and Thomas McDermott give the general overview of the approach. Keating’s essay is a synthesis of *Resting* but provides the essential elements of the approach. McDermott’s promotes the cultivation of the habit of lifelong learning in the diocesan priesthood. Ongoing formation is a neglected aspect of priestly formation. Given competing interests and time constraints, only the priest who is formed to love learning will continue his studies in a serious, contemplative way after ordination.

In the second section (“Sources of Wisdom”), Thomas Lane and Perry Cahal apply the contemplative approach to the teaching of Scripture and the Fathers. Lane, in an approach similar to that of Benedict XVI in *Jesus of Nazareth*, discusses the usefulness and limitations of the historical-critical method, which must be complemented by the life of prayer. The study of Scripture aims at deepening intimacy with Christ. Likewise, Cahal notes how deeply in love the Fathers were with the Word of God and the Person of Christ. It is the love of Christ that ultimately transformed the intellect of the Fathers and shaped the moral life and action of the early Church.

The third section (“Models of Writing and Teaching”) is written by Margaret Turek and John Gresham. Turek’s paper, “Balthasar’s approach to a Theology of God the Father,” allows one to contemplate the Fatherhood of God and gives a glimpse of what the contemplative approach might look like in the classroom. Her paper also allows one to contemplate the Paternal-Filial relationship and the Divine-human relationship, which have important implications for future priests in understanding spiritual fatherhood and their relationship to their flocks. Gresham focuses on applying a contemplative theological approach to Christology and attempts to draw seminarians into deeper intimacy with Christ through history, the Scriptures, the Fathers, and through the experience of and encounter with the Risen One. Dennis Billy concludes the work with a short synthesis of each paper and with a list of emerging challenges.

One of the challenges presented by Dennis Billy at the conclusion of *Seminary Theology* is the need for refinement of terminology. The terms “meditation” and “contemplation” are often used interchangeably, though this is not the case in the spiritual masters. The term “contemplative theology” needs further refinement. A second challenge that must be faced honestly is whether academic rigor can be maintained in the pursuit of quasi-monastic wisdom. There is some content (*fides quae*) that must be appropriated by seminarians and must be taught by seminary

theologians. What will the standard be? The proof will be seen in the works of new priests formed at those seminaries in which this model is being consistently applied. A third challenge lies in the *horarium* of the seminary. If the institution and faculty are not committed to an *horarium* that fosters contemplation, as Keating admits, the project will likely fail. A fourth challenge is that, with seemingly endless increases in the mandates of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, faculty may be resistant to changing their own habits in teaching style method and may be reluctant to thoroughly revise course notes and content to foster contemplation. Finally, some would argue that it is simply naïve and idealistic to think that “monks” can be formed who will, at the same time, also be effective pastoral ministers in an ever-busy world. On the other hand, it is by aspiring to holiness of life and contemplating the Lord that spiritual communion with Christ is reached. It is often the task of the Church to propose the ideal of excellence to her children.

Despite these challenges, the Institute for Priestly Formation and Deacon Keating purposefully have undertaken the task of rediscovering an approach to theology which cultivates a genuine love for learning and for the acquisition of holy wisdom. A truly positive assessment should be given to the contribution made by these works. First, the books recover and integrate into priestly formation the wisdom flowing from the monastic and Ignatian spiritual traditions. Second, the works capture the state of seminary theology and priestly formation in recent decades, accurately portraying the existing tension between the academic and formational models of seminary education. Through the proposed contemplative model, they challenge the idea of “pure” scholarship with the idea that faith, with its hermeneutic of trust rather than suspicion, is an essential, purifying element in seminary intellectual formation. Third, the books revisit the “content” of seminary education, reminding seminary theologians that the essential content of theology is God, the Word, written and handed down. While maintaining academic rigor, professors can be more judicious in their choices of course material, selecting readings which foster contemplation and intellectual conversion. Fourth, the volumes demonstrate a healthy affirmation of the vocation of the seminarian of today, acknowledging the cultural challenges, fears and hopes, and authentic desire for holiness that exists in many. These volumes are an important resource for anyone serving as a seminary theologian.

The Institute for Priestly Formation was founded to assist bishops in the spiritual formation of seminarians. If seminaries were fulfilling their mission, why was or is such an institute necessary? Romanus Cessario has pointed out that there has been a separation between scholarship and

sanctity, between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of wisdom, exemplified in the differences between “university theology” and “monastic wisdom” (“Scholarship and Sanctity,” *Nova et Vetera* 8 (Spring 2010): 233–49). These separations are not the only ones. Indeed, *Pastores dabo vobis* and the *Program of Priestly Formation* speak of four dimensions or pillars of formation: human, intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual.

While it is hoped that these dimensions would be integrated, often one pillar dominates. Seminaries have attempted to keep pace with their secular peers and their Protestant counterparts through accreditation processes. This has brought about greater academic standardization and may have improved *academic* rigor at Catholic seminaries. Occasionally, this has come at the expense of the pursuit of wisdom or one of the other dimensions of priestly formation. At other seminaries, it is not the intellectual dimension that is emphasized but the pastoral dimension that is given priority, usually at the expense of academic rigor. Pastoral activity uprooted from the Church’s intellectual tradition and spirituality seldom, if ever, bears good fruit.

It is true that in *Pastores dabo vobis* (25 March 1992), Blessed John Paul II wrote: “The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the *charity of Christ* the Good Shepherd. Hence, their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character” (57). Nevertheless, the dimensions of formation can become isolated from one another. By entering deeply into communion with Christ, by knowing Him, through prayer, study, and human formation, the seminarian is formed pastorally. The process begins with prayer. To be a shepherd of souls, one must know the Good Shepherd intimately. Hence, the *Program of Priestly Formation* (115) gives priority to spiritual formation: “Since spiritual formation is the core that unifies the life of a priest, it stands at the heart of seminary life and is the center around which all other aspects are integrated.”<sup>1</sup>

This is what these two volumes represent: the initial movement toward re-establishing the rightful place of spirituality as the core of priestly formation. They are a reminder of a famous maxim of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori: “If God is lost, all is lost.” N·V

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<sup>1</sup> *Program for Priestly Formation*, 5th edition (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2006), 115.