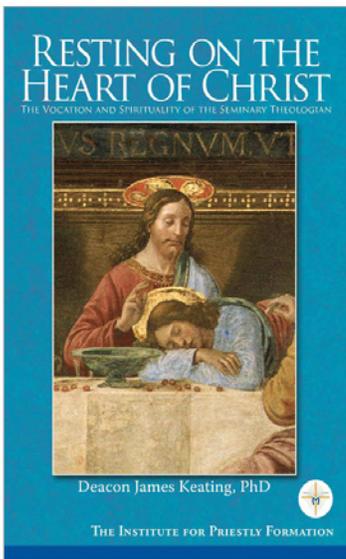


BOOKS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

BY ADAM BOOTH, C.S.C.



Resting on the Heart of Christ by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.

Omaha, NE
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Deacon James Keating wrote *Resting on the Heart of Christ* shortly after becoming a member of

the Institute of Priestly Formation (IPF), following a thirteen-year teaching career at the Pontifical College Josephinum. Drawing on this extensive experience, he wrote the book as reflection on the “vocation and spirituality” of the seminary professor (*Resting*, 33). To continue the conversation with those still teaching in seminaries and those providing spiritual direction to seminarians, the IPF has hosted two conferences whose talks have now been edited by Keating and published in two volumes entitled *Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way* and *Seminary Theology II: Theology and Spiritual Direction in Dialogue*. It is appropriate to consider these works together in review, as a sustained initial sounding, followed by collected diverse echoes.

Keating’s original book is intended as “a book of spiritual reading” (*Resting*, 25), rather than a strictly academic treatise. The frequent move from assertion to the posing of meditative questions (set off from the main body of the text) will surely be helpful in allowing those of his readers who are seminary theologians to use this book as an occasion for reflection about their own praxis. More fundamentally perhaps, this feature models for his readers the type of spiritual-reflective pedagogy Keating seeks to promote.

The book seeks to draw out the consequences of the call of seminary theologians to be “not simply teachers in a prosaic sense but spiritual formators” (Ibid.). For Keating, the function of seminary theology is to be at the service of

pastoral desire (37). His first main chapter begins with a consideration of what it means to do theology in a seminary context, which in large part consists of developing a contrast between seminary theology, which is ordered to “a deeper appropriation of the spiritual reality,” and university theology, with its “more secular and ‘professional’ goals” (35). Keating maintains and seeks to promote an appreciation of these two fields as each having their own proper genius. He names the two approaches prophetic-critical theology and contemplative theology respectively, which aptly captures the difference and the place both have within the Church.

From theology itself, Keating turns to the identity of the seminary theologian. Relying on Cardinal Dulles’s concept of postcritical theology, something of a synthesis is developed between ‘narrow’ understandings of those two modes, wherein academic integrity and critical objectivity is not sacrificed to make room for personal and affective contemplation but enriched, even “fulfilled” by it (81). The ordering of the goods is stated clearly in Keating’s third chapter: “the critical approach to learning would serve the contemplative approach, and the contemplative would nourish and order pastoral ends” (87). He

advises keeping before us “the face of the parishioner” as a key text of seminary theology (89). While one might add a nod to the non-Catholic who stands in needs of the Church’s evangelical activity, this is helpful as an end to orient one’s vision. The seminarian does not engage the Tradition to master it for its own sake, or even for personal or spiritual enrichment, but for the sake of serving his future parishioners. In the second volume of conference proceedings, Fr. Peter Ryan, S.J. will draw out some more developed consequences of this compelling insight of Keating’s.

Keating then offers a reflection on two models of study appropriate for the seminary theologian: a receptive model akin to praying with an icon and an active model akin to Ignatian imagination. A reader who gives these reflections the pondering time they deserve will find them rich in their capacity to spark fruitful reflection on what takes place when one engages in theology. This reviewer found the reflection on Ghirlandaio’s *Last Supper* particularly beautiful, in which the Beloved Disciple lays his head by Jesus’ heart. Beauty is not only a feature of Keating’s prose, but also of his attractive vision that intellectual striving may have a *terminus* of loving rest. May all our writing display an irenicism appropriate to a people moving

towards resting on the heart of the Prince of Peace!

In his fourth chapter, Keating seeks to develop a pedagogy that takes beauty and goodness as seriously as truth, building on insights from teaching adult learners in other contexts. This application of these insights demonstrates further the wisdom of the Vatican II Council Fathers’ call that seminary formation should attend to “the newer findings of sound... pedagogy” (*Optatam Totius*, §11). Keating encourages classes that are both beautiful and truly loving, in approaching one’s students with genuine charity. The character and prayerfulness of the professor matters as the seminarian is being formed to be “the dean of the school of prayer that is the parish” (130). This image of the parish as a school drives many of Keating’s reflections and may help seminarians connect their experience in the seminary with the parish life for which they are preparing.

Grounded in an image of the seminary classroom as a place where people of faith welcome the personal God of Truth, Keating has some helpful advice for how explicit prayer can be incorporated both into classroom time and a seminarian’s required preparation. These suggestions should help a seminarian reflect on how the content being learned is informing

his walk with God, with the stated hope that seminarians able to thus engage theological content will form “a generation of priests able to identify and welcome God in events that appear to be ‘only secular’ in nature” (143).

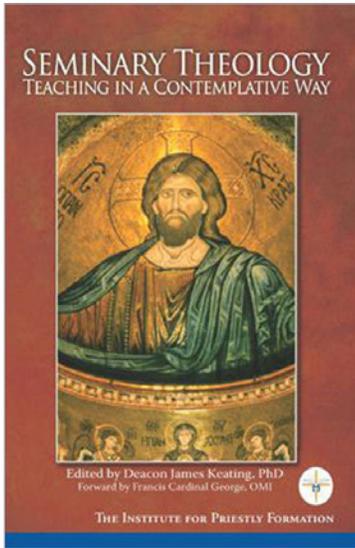
Following this is an intriguing chapter which draws some lessons from liturgy for seminary teaching. Notable are the invitation to integrate silence into the classroom, as inspired by its place in the Liturgy of the Word, as well as a consideration of what full, conscious, and active participation looks like for a student in a classroom. The final chapter considers what one would hope a contemplative method of teaching theology might “yield in the life of the parish priest” (171). An important point of this chapter is the need to let spiritual formation truly be the integrating pillar, not restricted to “the private conversation of the internal forum” (174). The aim—one that should truly undergird all that happens in a seminary—is that the seminarian learn to live “in communion with [Christ’s] pastoral charity” (179). The book ends with an appendix written with a seminarian as its intended audience, encouraging them to appreciate how intellectual formation can enliven their spiritual lives, and exhorting them to become “intellectuals... in a

way that leads to God” (205). It is something that many students of theology, including those who are engaged in teaching, would do well to remember.

In this book, Deacon Keating asks a very important question: how can intellectual formation be order towards a pastoral zeal that is grounded in contemplative love? The posing of the question and the soul-searching it should occasion among those responsible for forming priests is gift enough for readers of this slim, inexpensive volume. In addition to asking the question, Keating provides an engaging and compelling vision of seminary intellectual formation that maintains academic rigor while ultimately being grounded in love. The vision is a productive and fruitful one, as evidenced by the two subsequent books of conference proceedings.

In fact, this vision is so attractive that I think Keating’s ideas may be welcomed by a broader audience than he himself might suspect. He writes provocatively at one point that “mystery has been banned from the university” (108), and at various places in his work displays a somewhat pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of positive reception of his ideas in university theology departments. Such departments are, of course, incredibly (and richly) diverse

places, but I think there is cause for considerably more optimism. Having received my own education in theology at the University of Notre Dame whilst engaged in seminary formation, I experienced many classes taught by professors who were concerned that the material we were learning would be directed toward deeper faith and more keenly directed zeal. It is my conviction that universities can form their students in the mystery of self-gift in their own way (which will be different than how a dedicated seminary undertakes this). Unfortunately, Keating has encountered in the academy an approach to theology “torn from its moorings in faith... having become merely a course of study in history, politics and sociology” (45). This surely exists, but the good news is that I have also encountered faith-filled engagement with the humane sciences that built up my ability to keep in front of me the human face of the parishioner and find the divine in the apparently secular, to address two of his desiderata. I hope that those working in a university setting will be able to set aside the occasional polemic in this work, which is really quite incidental to the substantial positive contribution that this book could make to their reflections on their scholarship and pedagogy.



Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D. (ed.)

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In many ways, the two volumes of *Seminary Theology* (*STI* and *STII*) provide answers to Keating's central question, from the perspective of differing theological disciplines or approaches to spiritual direction. As with most conference proceedings, some papers will interest some readers more than others. Given their number, there is not space in this review to consider each in detail. I will dwell longer with those papers that occasioned more serious reflection on my part, by which no critique of the others is intended. One unfortunate feature of these books is the disappointing presence of many

small typographical errors. I would encourage readers not to judge the quality of the scholarship by the quality of the editing.

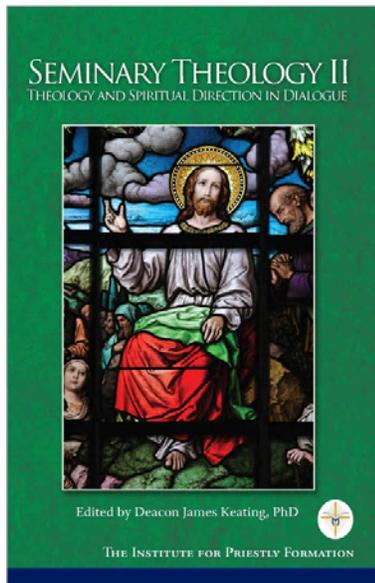
The first article by Deacon Keating summarizes what he had written in *Resting on the Heart of Christ*. Next up is an article by Fr. Thomas McDermott, O.P., which is an elegant reminder of the importance of inspiring a lifelong love of learning in a diocesan priest. The article states that lifelong learning is vital for the pastoral fruitfulness of a priest, as well as a "means to holiness" (*STI*, 37). It also presents a telling analysis of why priests often neglect this. Fr. Thomas Lane's article on teaching Scripture explains the relationship between the necessary teaching of historical-critical approaches to Scripture (and gives practical solutions based on the Church's documents on how to overcome some seminarians' reluctance in embracing these approaches) and the prayerful response to Scripture one desires in priests. One helpful suggestion is to teach *lectio divina* in an introductory class on Scripture. The endnotes furnish a useful bibliography on the trajectory of the Church's thinking on the historical-critical method. Dr. Perry Cahall's article draws some lessons concerning pedagogy from the practice of the Church Fathers. Drawing on *Dei Verbum*, Cahill

starts from a relational approach to Revelation and concludes with an intriguing invitation to the seminary theologians to adopt 'witness' as their primary identity.

I found Dr. Margaret Turek's article entitled "Balthasar's approach to a theology of God the Father" (*STI*, 97) the most engaging of the volume. In her tour-de-force exposition of Balthasar's approach to the "all-powerful powerlessness" (104) of God the Father, Turek demonstrates how engagement with difficult theological sources can lead a seminarian to "contemplative beholding of God's Paternity" and from there "to demonstrate an attitude of service toward the laity 'to the point of a total gift of self'" (116). Her writing is almost poetic; the sources she commands vast and complex; the challenge she extends to seminarians breath-taking: you are "called to take such a risk, to hazard such self-abandonment" (117).

Dr. John Gresham's article covers the important topic of "contemplating Christ in the classroom" (125). This article has some helpful suggestions about how to integrate critical and contemplative work by having students in a Christology class take a devotional title for Christ from a litany and not only study its biblical and historical background but also make it their prayer. The result is

to be a meditation presented to the class integrating both elements. Developing a facility for this kind of integration could do wonders for the seminarians' preaching. Fr. Dennis Billy closes the volume with some concluding remarks, summarizing each article and offering some thoughts for going forward.



**Seminary Theology II:
Theology and Spiritual
Direction in Dialogue by
Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.
(ed.)**

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The second volume of *Seminary Theology (STII)* seeks to put teachers and spiritual directors in dialogue, featuring articles from authors in both fields. Fr. Todd Lajiness's short article seeks to draw some lessons from *Dei Verbum* for establishing a dialogue for intellectual and spiritual formation. His basic thesis is that "theology is a transformative encounter with a person, not with a principle or idea" (*STII*, 17). This material would be familiar to people who had read the earlier volume, but may be helpful to those approaching this

book first, which is presumably the intention in putting it at the start of the book. Fr. Earl Fernandes has contributed a very helpful article on how spiritual formation can develop the virtues needed to approach theology contemplatively, using the Desert Fathers as his chief source. His notions of *telos* (the ultimate end – the Kingdom of God) and *scopos* (the immediate goal – purity of heart) provide a good framework for approaching these questions. He has practical suggestions for spiritual directors and professors, advising the latter to learn the art of judicious reflection questions from the former. Msgr. Gerard McCarren's article draws lessons from the liturgy for seminary pedagogy, expanding richly on the already meaty fifth chapter of Keating's *Resting* book. A nice touch is his application of a directive from the *Rule of St. Benedict* to treat practical tools as vessels of the altar to encourage professors to develop in their students a reverence toward the mundane parts of their disciplines.

Father Raymond Gawronski, S.J. has provided an introduction to an Ignation approach to spiritual direction as spiritual fatherhood. This will be helpful to those professors unfamiliar with what exactly goes on in spiritual direction as well as its undergirding conceptual

framework. Noteworthy is his insightful use of a comparative religions perspective to elucidate the art. Fr. Daniel Trapp, a seminary spiritual director, examines the notion of “affective maturity” (97) and offers suggestions to professors for how to aid seminarians’ growth in this respect. An intriguing suggestion arises from structuring some of his thinking around the *munera* of priesthood. Trapp points out that professors often think about the pastoral applications of their subjects and calls for the same thoughtfulness about the implications for priestly sanctifying and teaching. Fr. Peter Ryan, S.J. offers a nice example of how a seemingly obtuse philosophical distinction (between the *finis cuius gratia* and the *finis cui*) has real implications for spiritual formation. His insistence that we are to “seek first the kingdom of God” (124) has the potential transform the zeal for personal holiness—with which men today often enter the seminary—into a zeal for the cure of souls. His model ‘pep talk’ on spiritual maturity (138-40) would make excellent reading for anyone engaged in formation. Fr. Steve Wlusek draws parallels between the work of the professor and the director that should influence how the former undertakes work in a seminary. The focus on attentive listening as a pre-requisite for

effective teaching is an especially insightful point. Fr. Dennis Billy once again closes the volume drawing out some commonalities among the papers.

Both volumes of *Seminary Theology* contain many gems. One theme for future consideration for the IPF would be how intellectual formation can help students reflect theologically on their existing and future ministerial experiences. In the meantime, these books would be a valuable addition to the shelves not just of seminary formators but of anyone involved in the theological enterprise who cares about forming students to be citizens of heaven.



Deacon Adam D.P. Booth, C.S.C. graduated with an M.Div from Notre Dame in 2013 and is currently serving in Holy Cross and St. Stanislaus parishes in South Bend, Indiana.