

BOOK REVIEW

Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way. Edited by Deacon James Keating. Omaha, NE: IPF Publications, 2010. 165 pp. \$13.95. ISBN 978-0-9843792-0-0.

The teaching of theology within a seminary context has its own proper purposes and goals, for it represents an important aspect of priestly formation that must be undertaken in relation to and in collaboration with other dimensions of formation. The unique character of theological education in seminaries and the proposal of an approach that responds to its specific needs make up the central focus of *Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way*. It is a much needed, and therefore very welcome, contribution to the literature on the topic of seminary theological education.

The modern trend toward specialization in the various fields of human knowledge has been a great source of development and progress in those same fields, contributing to the advancement of societies and cultures. The emphasis on separation and distinction has enabled people to know more and more about ever more specific areas of inquiry. True in the natural and human sciences, this has also shaped modern theological study, not only in the university but in the seminary as well. Though specialization need not lead to hostility among various disciplines, it can inadvertently lead to benign isolation in which insights from one area are not always considered by or integrated with other areas. This is true in theological study specifically in terms of the disciplines such as dogmatic, fundamental, moral, and biblical theology. It is perhaps also true in seminaries where the four pillars of priestly formation – human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral – articulated by Pope John Paul II in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) can be viewed too distinctly and separately to the detriment of overall seminary formation. Ideally all dimensions of priestly formation must be addressed harmoniously and holistically. According to John Paul II, this is best accomplished in the priest's recognition that "spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his *being* a priest and his *acting* as a priest" (PDV #45). The United States bishops have stated in the *Program of Priestly Formation*, "[spiritual formation] stands at the heart of seminary life and is the center around which all other aspects are integrated" (#115). It is precisely this point in relation to the teaching of theology in seminaries that the contributors to *Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way* seek to address.

The book as a whole argues for, gives examples of, and makes suggestions for ways in which the spiritual dimension can move from having merely

marginal influence in the seminary program of formation, *vis-à-vis* the academic component, to being truly the heart of seminary life and study. It is summed up in the call for a more *contemplative* approach to the teaching and study of theology. Deacon James Keating, editor of the volume as well as author of the introduction and first paper, indicates that such an approach is integrative. "Theology is not contemplation and then teaching; it is contemplation even *in* teaching, contemplation even *in* research" (19, original emphasis). The scope of the collection of seven essays, each by a different theologian familiar with seminary formation, is to explore and encourage a different way of teaching theology in the seminary classroom, a method that enables the seminarian to deepen his relationship with God because he is free "to listen for His presence within the content of theology" (20, original emphasis). This new approach, Dennis Billy writes, "has more in common with the sapiential approach of monastic theology's *lectio divina* than scholasticism's attempt to identify the objective truths of the faith or modern theology's fascination with the historical-critical method" (158).

Primarily, the book has in mind the seminary professor as it discusses the benefits of such a contemplative approach and how it might be concretized in the seminary classroom. The first three sections of the book, each containing two essays, move from articulating a new understanding of seminary teaching and learning (*Vision for Renewal*) to reflections on Scripture and the Early Church Fathers as sources for renewal (*Sources of Wisdom*) to particular examples of this approach using Balthasar's theology of God the Father and the study of Christology (*Models of Writing and Teaching*). The volume ends with Dennis Billy's essay, "Contemplation and Theological Learning in Catholic Seminaries", which both summarizes the previous papers and lays out challenges for the future. The process through which the book was developed resulted in a cohesive unity among the various chapters. All seven contributors participated in a weekend seminar "to study the possibility of developing a contemplative approach to seminary theological formation" (148). Recurring themes and cross-references throughout the book attest to the deliberate aim to address an area of particular concern for men and women involved in seminary theological formation, making this not just a collection of disparate essays but a true collaborative effort with a single unified goal. To this reader, that goal was achieved.

The strength of this work is the way in which it captures the current state of seminary life and formation in the United States, honestly confronting limitations and challenges. An appreciation of the particular perspective of contemporary seminarians is also clearly evident. Throughout the book the texts relevant to seminary formation are referred to and drawn upon to advance and

support the book's central focus. With a feel for the experience of today's seminarians, the authors' analyses and subsequent suggestions for teaching theology in seminaries are credible and challenging. A consistent theme found in many of the essays is that such a *contemplative* approach lays groundwork for continual theological study and ongoing formation in the life of the priest; certainly an important objective. In this sense the book not only addresses the more immediate unique goals of teaching theology in seminaries but looks to serve the need of priests to be *theologians for life* (20).

In his foreword, Francis Cardinal George expresses the hope that this book will be widely used by seminary theologians and that it will become a resource for faculty development in institutions of priestly formation (xiii). Given both the strengths of this work, with its theoretical outlook and practical application, and the lack of works currently addressing seminary education, it would be a blessing for that hope to be fulfilled.

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