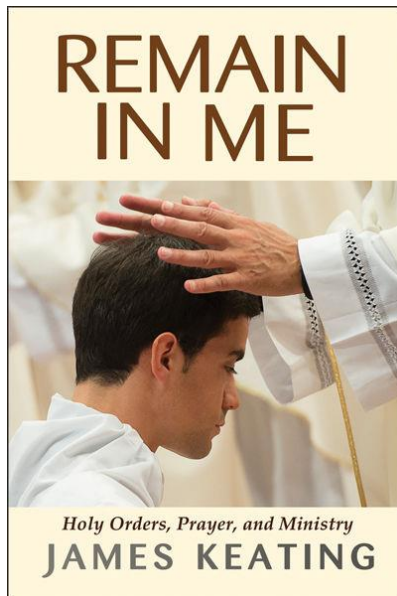


James Keating. *Remain in Me: Holy Orders, Prayer, and Ministry*. New York: Paulist Press, 2019



At first glance, this book by Roman Catholic theologian James Keating may seem somewhat removed from the normal preoccupations of deacons. By and large the diaconate is viewed as a practical, hands-on order rather than a contemplative one. Furthermore, the emphasis of *Remain in Me* on the spiritual dimension of the deacon's *parish* ministry may not appeal to those, notably in the Anglican/Episcopal and Lutheran churches, who see social justice outside the parish as the primary role of the diaconate. And the book is intended for all those in holy orders, not only deacons.

Yet Dr. Keating, Director of the Institute of Priestly Formation at Creighton University in Omaha, is himself a deacon and has made a considerable contribution to the study of the diaconate. His books at Paulist Press include *The Deacon Reader* (ed.) in 2006, *The Heart of the Diaconate: Communion with the Servant Mysteries of Christ* in 2015, and *The Character of the Deacon: Spiritual and Pastoral Foundations* (ed.) in 2017. In his writings, Deacon Keating focuses on the significance of prayer and the spiritual life for priests *and* deacons.

Remain in Me presupposes priests and deacons collaborating as a team in parish ministry. The author sees a “natural union” between them, which carries “the potential to ignite a brotherhood of creative pastoral thinking” (xii). In his foreword to the book, Fr. Donald Haggerty wryly comments that “in general, priests, unless truly humble, are not inclined to take instructions from the services of a deacon” – adding that in this case it would be “to their loss and detriment” (ix).

An experienced spiritual director himself, James Keating calls for a thorough grounding of clergy in prayer and thus in “a living communion with the Trinity” if their ministry is to be authentic and fruitful. “As we slowly become clerics who *are prayer* and not simply ones who *say prayers*,” he says, “the Spirit can more easily speak through us to the infinite variety of needs and wounds our people bring to us for healing” (19). Deacon Keating does not underestimate the challenges of the spiritual life. In particular, he points to the danger of *busyness* on the part of the ordained. “Some of us,” he observes, “can become slaves to busyness out of neurotic need” (46); ministerial identity can be confused with “a feverish life of activity” (55).

To overcome obstacles to the interior life, Dr. Keating recommends seeking the counsel of a spiritual director. With such help, the cleric comes to realize that “the spiritual life is not a personal accomplishment or failure; it is, instead, an awakening to the presence of God as love at the very core of our being” (5). This experience of divine love permeates and underlies the ministry of the ordained. Deacons should take note of Deacon Keating's observation that spiritual direction can “help us to integrate more fully our call to charity, word and sacrament” (20) – the balanced, tripartite, diaconal vocation emphasized in his book *The Character of the Deacon*.

Remain in Me offers advice and assistance to those seeking the prayerful life in their own ministry. A chapter entitled “Suffering Temptations” and another on “Prayer Renewed” suggest how to accept one’s own vulnerability as a path to understanding that of others and deal with feelings of loneliness and isolation. In the face of inevitable setbacks, we can counter a sense of failure by gratefully receiving God’s mercy and rejecting “the lie of ‘perfection’ ” (40). Solitude and contemplation can be vehicles for an encounter with God which, says Deacon Keating, is a “seeing that moves one to *action*, a receiving that prompts *giving*” (53).

The sacrament of holy orders is itself a channel for God’s grace: “For the deacon, it is his configuration to Christ, the Word sent and proclaimed to the needy, which orders his imagination” (61). Deacon Keating cautions that “clerics are not there to help people in the way a social worker is” – other professionals are more competent in this field. Rather, “our primary gift to others is our fascination with God” (58). The role of the cleric, including the deacon, is as much to *be with* people as to *do* things *for* them. This involves suffering, reconciliation, conversion, and introducing Christ to others. There is a counter-cultural prophetic dimension in the ministry of the ordained, going beyond the cultural idols of every age to show the all-encompassing love of God “through our sacramental, proclaimed, and charitable ministries” (71).

Remain in Me concludes with a chapter called “United in Holy Orders.” Non-Roman Catholics will find the pages on clerical celibacy to be of peripheral interest; much more applicable is the exploration of prayer and spirituality in the family life of the married deacon. The relationship between deacons and priests is briefly addressed in the context of the Eucharist and the laying on of hands by the bishop; one would have welcomed a fuller treatment of this topic.

Pope Francis, who particularly appeals to Anglicans/Episcopalians, is only cited once in *Remain in Me*, whereas John Paul II and especially Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI are quoted multiple times. Also noteworthy is the absence of references to the ministry of *women*. Interestingly, James Keating has been named by Pope Francis to the second papal commission examining the question of female deacons in the Roman Catholic Church, as has Dominic Cerrato, another U.S. deacon and author of the book *In the Person Christ the Servant*. It will be interesting to see how this commission plays out. The first, appointed by Francis in 2016, wrapped up its work in 2019, apparently unable to agree whether women were validly ordained to the diaconate in the early Church. A member of that commission, Phyllis Zagano, has a very different perspective; her latest book, *Women: Icons of Christ*, is the subject of our next review.

Finally, those for whom social justice is the main focus of the diaconate should not easily dismiss *Remain in Me*. Deacon James Keating sees the spiritual life as the foundation of *all* diaconal ministry, including “charity.” And he reminds us that the deacon can contribute substantially to parish ministry.

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The Vocational Diaconate: Book Review and Discussion

by ***Deacon Canon D. Michael Jackson***

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The ministerial order of deacons is the subject of discussion and debate, conferences and research, development and experimentation in a number of Christian churches – among them Roman Catholic and Eastern, Anglican/Episcopal, Lutheran and Methodist. Diaconal ministry in these traditions was assessed by the contributors to a book I edited for Sacristy Press in Durham, UK, in 2019, ***The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective: Ecclesiology, Liturgy and Practice***. Continued interest in the diaconate is evidenced by some other recent publications.



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