

sonal community to have a superior at all as part of their 'environment'.

I rather hope, too, that neither of these

books becomes part of any convent environment, at least not without a warning sticker: 'Reading may be dangerous to your health'.

SR MADELEINE, O.S.A.

THE DEACON IN THE CHURCH: PAST AND FUTURE, by Edward P. Echlin, S.J. *Alba House*, New York. Pp. xiii + 139. \$3.95.

Appearing, as it does, immediately after the ordination of England's first permanent deacons in modern times and just prior to the first wide-scale ordinations of permanent deacons in the United States, this is a very timely book indeed. And Fr Echlin, who served as chairman from 1970 to 1971 of a special committee of the Catholic Theological Society of America on the theology of the permanent diaconate, has special qualifications to write it. There will be many who, not knowing the long and diverse history of the deacon in the Church, will wonder what this 'new' thing is, who will want to get some idea what a deacon is and where he came from in the first place and what he is supposed to do. This book has been written to provide answers to just such inquiries.

Judging correctly that the present role, and even the future tasks, of the diaconate must be seen in the light of its past, the author traces its history in four main stages: the Early Church's recognition of the need for men and women to provide services of liturgy, word and charity and its initial attempts to structure just such ministries; the golden age of the male diaconate from Ignatius of Antioch to Nicea; the gradual decline until the reformation; and the restoration, both the inchoate attempts of Trent and the movements in the fifties, that eventually led to the full restoration by Vatican II.

The methodology is textual and historical rather than theological, with brief interpretations of much of the available evidence. The history receives its fullest treatment in those sections dealing with the roles or possible roles of deacons within the pluralistic confusion of

early Church order, with many of the major texts being cited in full. In contrast with this variety, a unified picture of the present-day deacon's task is given in a summary of Paul VI's *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*.

But the author becomes especially daring when he surveys the possible future role of the deacon in a very brief epilogue. The importance of the deacon is seen not in what he does but in what he is, and for the author, the deacon is an intermediary—between the hierarchy and mankind, between the clergy and the married, between the world and the Church. In this intermediate role, he is seen to have almost unlimited opportunities of service. Even such items as liberating men from the effects of advertising or the 'tyranny of the automobile', lobbying for public transportation, technological sharing with the third world, and the important problem of reconciling man with his environment are not seen as being outside the deacon's portfolio. There are priests who might be envious to see the deacon's role so widely extended, while their own in the author's view is simply that of prayer, study and the preaching of the word.

Readers of this book may wish at times to disagree with the interpretations or the arguments that are presented, but they will often have to base their alternate conclusions on information and evidence that the author himself has provided for them. At other points further information may be required, yet may have been omitted in the interests of simplification or to confine this slender volume within its chosen limits.

PETER J. FENNESSY, S.J.

BREAKTHROUGH, by Mark Schoof, O.P. *Mercier Press (Logos Books)*; 275 pp. £1.50.

The *Breakthrough* is of course the way in which Roman Catholic theology has freed itself from the dead and deadening language, categories and style of the manuals of scholastic and neo-scholastic theology. How did it all happen? How did it come about that the Second Vatican Council, particularly in its documents on The Church, Revelation and The Church in

the Modern World, laid much of this old-style language to rest, and at least opened the way for genuine creative theology? For many, the answer will be seen in the startling and enspirited initiative of Pope John in calling the Council. But of course the answer is much more complicated, much less dramatic than that, as this book shows. And perhaps for this reason