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## Being human: groundwork for a theological anthropology for the 21st century

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## Being Human: Groundwork for a Theological Anthropology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

David Kirkhoffer with Robyn Horner & Patrick McArdle (eds)

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**K**arl Rahner's observation, some decades ago, that all theology is inescapably an anthropology is today almost a commonplace. Any discussion of God cannot but entail what it means to be human in relation to God, creation, and most importantly, to the incarnate and risen Jesus.

Such a concern guides this collection from nineteen Australian scholars, based at, or associated with, the Australian Catholic University. It is the first step in the *Anthropos in the Antipodes* project initiated by the book's three editors. The project's aims are captured on the back cover: "to consider developments over the past sixty years, current issues, and future scenarios concerning understandings of the human person in order to articulate a theological anthropology proper to the twenty-first century."

The book's clearly defined limits are provided by the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) and the four chapters of Part 1. These offer an "Interpretive Lens" for reading theological anthropology in the twenty-first century, hence, a means of integrating the book around past and present with some pointers to the future. These discussions (from Ormond Rush, Richard Colledge, John Martis and David G. Kirchhoffer—together with his fine introductory chapter) provide both the cornerstone and the benchmark for the four remaining sections of the book: Part 2: *The Human Subject* (Denis Edwards, Shane Mackinlay, Anthony J Kelly, Robyn Horner); Part 3: *The Moral Person* (Daniel J Fleming, Neil Ormerod, N.N. Trakakis, Jeffrey Hanson); Part 4: *Atheism and Freedom of Religion* (Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, Stephen Ames, W. Chris Hackett, James Gerard McEvoy); Part 5: *Human Activity in the World* (Kevin Hart, Joel Hodge, Robert Gascoigne).

It is difficult to highlight some authors while overlooking others. While perhaps a matter of personal taste, I note samples from each Part that are representative of the range of the discussion. Rush's opening treatment of the unresolved tensions with GS is a both a foundational contribution to the collection while offering a range of interpretative lenses through which to consider subsequent discussions. In Part 2, Anthony J Kelly's exploration of the "Incarnation and Human Sensibility" is complemented by Shane Mackinlay on "Alterity and Relationship in Recent French Phenomenology." In Part 3, concerning *The Moral Person*, Daniel Fleming proposes a more dynamic approach to conscience that can draw on recent developments in moral psychology and the science of moral education. In parallel, an over-optimistic view of the human search for goodness is engaged in Neil Ormerod's discussion of the distortions of desire and by N.N. Trakakis on the mystery of suffering and evil. In Part 4, Jacobs-Vandegeer's probing of the challenges arising from forms of unbelief, as crystallized in the "New Atheism", in tandem with the more recent

rise of religious fundamentalism is supplemented by McEvoy's discussion on religious pluralism associated with a secular society. In the final Part, the need for a communal model that respects the otherness of the self and of the other as considered by Hart is balanced by Hodge's critical assessment of the freedom of the individual in relation to the power of religion and of the state.

By anchoring this collection in a specific document (*GS*), the project is able to sustain clarity of focus, despite the variety of authors, themes and styles. Again, there is something appealing (and successful) in this attempt to blend the insights of both theologians and philosophers. This is enhanced by the consistent standard of the scholarship in the various contributions.

The editor acknowledges a range of questions not addressed in this volume. No doubt, this ongoing project will address some of these, such as terrorism, famine, refugees, globalisation and its financial, social and cultural impacts. Again, looking to the future, the implications for a theological anthropology globally is suggested by the increasing awareness of "spirituality" and, specifically, its apophatic expression in a secular and atheistic context. There is also the indigenous question which, while pressing at the local level, is, at the same time, emblematic of other contexts internationally and the reverberations culturally, socially, ethically and theologically.

Overall, it is striking that this book brings together a number of Australian authors whose names often appear on the covers of books as also in local and international academic journals and/or on their editorial boards. Again, this collection augurs well for the future with its representative selection of young scholars. Again, if the title of this book is seen as a question, it is one that is timely. Further, it is answered with a level of scholarship that can well be regarded as the equal of any similar endeavours beyond the southern hemisphere. One can only hope that more deepening and expanding perspectives will emerge in further stages of the *Anthropos in the Antipodes* project.

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