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Priest, poet and theologian: Essays in honour of Anthony Kelly CSsR

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Priest, Poet and Theologian: Essays in Honour of Anthony Kelly CSsR

Neil Ormerod and Robert Gascoigne (eds)

Preston, Vic: Mosaic Press, 2013, 253pp. RRP: \$36.95

The healthy state and rich potential of theology in Australia is mirrored in this collection of essays to honour Anthony (Tony) Kelly. His contribution as a Redemptorist priest and theologian to Australian religious, cultural and spiritual life has been remarkable. This is enhanced by his international standing as reflected, for instance, in his membership of the International Theological Commission over the past decade. Symptomatic of all that is the extensive range of his books and journal publications listed in the first section of this book. His influence is reflected in the fourteen contributions from colleagues and former doctoral students from, or associated with, the Australian Catholic University. Through scholarly interchange over many years, Kelly has exercised a not insignificant impact on the formation of many in the theological community and on the shape and direction of its concerns whether nationally or internationally.

The book's editors are to be congratulated. At the start, they offer a very helpful overview of the context and the various chapters in the book. They have been able to capture a wealth of personal scholarship from each contributor. At the same time, the respect and warmth for Anthony Kelly from the different authors is apparent, as too is their pleasure in participating in the project.

The three sections of the collection—Theology, Spirituality and Contemporary Issues—are ample evidence, as the editors note, “of the range and breadth of Tony’s theological learning and interests, and of his ready willingness to assist developing theologians in a number of different disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts” (viii). The theological section has chapters from Anne Hunt, Glenn Morrison, Peter Stork and Neil Ormerod covering themes such as, respectively, the Trinity, Paul and resurrection effect, Girard, blood sacrifice and the death of Jesus and, finally, science and religion. Spirituality is represented by discipleship in Mark (Francis J Moloney SDB), a Marian Missionary spirituality of prophetic dialogue (Gerard Hall), the role of experience in theology (Meredith Secomb), re-forging theological language through poetry (Gregory B Smith) and human vulnerability in relation to God and theological discourse (Beatrice Green). The final section “Contemporary Issues” finds offerings from Robert Gascoigne (human poignancy and moral foundations of liberal society), Peter N V Hai (Asian bishops’ conferences and theology of the laity), Richard Rymarz (challenges facing the Church today for handing on the faith), Bernard Mulcahy, OP (Seminary formation, theology and *Optatum Totius*) and John Little (conversion and business leadership in the light of Lonergan).

The contents of this book, in its depth and variety, display three qualities that characterise the particular contribution of Kelly. The first is captured elsewhere by Andrew Louth who, in his study of St. John Damascene, cites the work of a Greek writer and critic Zissimos Lorenzatos.

Originality means to remain faithful to the originals, to the eternal prototypes, to extinguish a wisdom of (your) own' before "the common Word", as Heraclitus says (Fr. 2)—in other words, to lose your soul if you wish to find it, and not to parade your originality or to do what pleases you.

This seems to be very true of Kelly in his approach and in his work. He is "original" in being faithful to our Christian "originals" where his writing seems to emerge from a contemplative wonder before the Word—the mystery of Christ.

Perhaps, too, Kelly's writing has something of the French word "un original." It is very much the man, not in a "parading" himself sense, but in that sometimes quirky, very fresh, but clearly identifiable voice of Anthony Kelly the poet and creative thinker.

In this collection there are also traces of a third quality. I wonder how many of his readers come away from reading Kelly with a sense of a shift in how they see things. It is not strongly disruptive. It is slow burning. I can only describe it as "courteously subversive." Perhaps it is captured in the subtitle of his book *The Resurrection Effect*—"Transforming Christian Life and Thought."

A final word. A few years ago, a reviewer in the journal *Spiritus* suggested that some writers open "hospitable space" for others to join them in the author's own adventure. By stretching out their hands to the reader, "they offer in kind the gift they have so transparently received." This book is a testimony to the many people who would like to say thank you to Anthony Kelly for doing exactly that.

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