

- ed. 1786), 87-93. English translation: *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, (Translated & analysed by H.J.Paton; London: Hutchinson, 1948), 101-104. The passage was cited and made the key to his argument by James P. Mackey, *Power and Christian Ethics* (New Studies in Christian Ethics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 55.
- 15 The Sermon on the Mount recommends that alms be done in secret, so much in secret (a philosophical joke) that the left hand should not be allowed to know what the right hand is doing; but so that "thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6.1-4).
 - 16 *O Deus, ego amo te* attributed to St Francis Xavier (1506-1552) translated by Edward Caswall (1814-1878).
 - 17 Ernest Renan, *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1876; 9th ed., 1922) 141-142. The speech ends, "Consolons-nous, pauvres victimes; un Dieu se fait avec nos pleurs", 143.
 - 18 Op.cit., German, 127-128; Paton, 123, = Part III, concluding remark.
 - 19 J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1845), Chapter I, Section II, Paragraph 7; (The 1878 edition reprinted; New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 70.

A Scholastic Universalist The Writings and Thought of Bernard Kelly (1907—1958)

William Stoddart

Bernard Kelly was a regular contributor to *Blackfriars* and other Catholic periodicals over a lengthy period extending from the 1930s to the 1950s. Rayner Heppenstall, in his book on Léon Bloy,¹ called him "a man of the purest genius". In more recent times, however, he seems to have been strangely forgotten. If we speak of him now, it is because we believe that his insights, drawn from scholastic philosophy and especially from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, are of value not only for present-day Catholics, but for all Christians, and indeed for spiritual seekers of all faiths. Kelly once said: "There are some of us who can't rightly pray without a pen in our hands." Kelly was clearly no ordinary writer: for him writing was prayer. He epitomized the view that prayer could only be accomplished on the basis of truth, and his writing was a means of

determining and fixing the truth in his own mind and in the minds of others. A few years ago Barbara Wall published a moving account of Kelly's life²; here we shall concentrate chiefly on his writings and thought.

Kelly's inspiration was the writings of the Medieval philosophers and, in particular, the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. For him, the *Summa* was a vehicle of truth and a paradigm of spirituality. Many are aware of St. Thomas's declaration towards the end of his life that, in comparison with the Divine Reality Itself, his writings were as a heap of straw. A differing and more important evaluation is less well known: Christ Himself appeared to Aquinas in a vision and said to him: *Bene scripsisti de Me, Thoma* ("Thou hast written well concerning Me, Thomas").

The nature and role of the *Summa* that these words imply has for long been lost from sight. The study of philosophy—ancient, medieval, and modern—has been reduced to merely the history and description of a succession of concepts, more or less detached from the realities, earthly and divine, that they are supposed to express or reflect.

For Bernard Kelly, on the contrary, philosophy remained what it had been in the high Middle Ages: the handmaid of theology (*ancilla theologiae*). For him, it never lost its original sense, the love of wisdom, the love of that *sancta sophia*, which says of itself: "From the beginning, and before the creation of the world, was I created, and unto the world to come, I shall not cease to be." (*Ecclesiasticus*, xxiv, 14)

This view of philosophy began to disappear at the time of the Renaissance and was dealt a virtual death blow by the Enlightenment. Since these two cultural cataclysms, European thought, "emancipated" from both Christian revelation and Platonic intuition, has been little more than a cascading downwards, at an ever increasing speed, towards eventual catastrophe.

Against the stream, Kelly clung to philosophy as love of wisdom or love of the saving truth: *vincit omnia Veritas*. A natural concomitant of this perspective is the spiritual attitude enshrined in the famous words of St. Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

In this connection, Bernard Kelly emphasized that "purity" is not only a moral virtue, but above all an intellectual one. In this mode, it is identical with truth and an indispensable prelude to grace. Without truth—and here Kelly echoed St. Thomas—prayer ("the one thing needful") is vitiated and frustrated from the start. Such was Kelly's message, and it was for this reason that, immediately following his death, Fr. Kenelm Foster, O.P. apostrophized him in a poem as follows:

“Like Dante’s, a memory of God seemed to me your mind’s music.”

The relationship between “intellectual purity” (truth) and “a memory of God” (prayer) was Kelly’s vocation.

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In the earlier part of his life, Kelly was for a time infatuated with the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and wrote a long essay on it. In his ideas, Hopkins was impeccable: he was both Platonist and Thomist. His poetry, however, was another matter: its forms were innovative and its manner subjective.

An important philosophical essay of Kelly’s — which unfortunately remained unpublished—was “A propos of *Animus* and *anima*”. This was a well-referenced scholastic riposte to a muddled and sentimental book, *Animus and anima: The Mind and Heart of Love*, by the Jesuit Martin D’Arcy. D’Arcy interpreted *Animus* exclusively as “mind”, which, as one of the “contents” of the soul (*anima*) was thus “inferior” to it. Kelly, the traditionalist, pointed out that the term *Animus* also had the meaning of “Spirit” and was thus synonymous with the scholastic terms *Spiritus* and *Intellectus*. In this sense *Animus* (the universal and supra-formal Spirit or Intellect whose symbolic seat is the Heart) is “superior” to *anima* (the individual and formal soul).

One must remember that, from a purely linguistic point of view, the Latin word *animus*, like the French word *esprit*, has two meanings, namely “mind” and “Spirit”. One way of differentiating these two meanings is to give *Animus* [or *Esprit*] a capital initial when it means “Spirit”. This now enables us to say (more accurately in several respects than the title of Fr. D’Arcy’s book) that *Animus* (when it means Spirit or Intellect) is symbolically related to the “Heart”, *anima* (which means soul) to the “breast”, and *animus* (when it means mind) to the “head”.

We can likewise see that the traditional ternary *Spiritus–anima–corpus* (Spirit–soul–body) may also be expressed as *Animus–anima–corpus*. Here *Animus* (Spirit or Intellect) is greater than *anima* (soul). On the other hand, as already pointed out, *animus* (when it means “mind”) is one of the contents of *anima*.

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Three main strands were present in Kelly’s work. The first, as has been indicated, was the recalling of contemporary Christian thought to Thomism and contemporary Thomism to its origins, to the spirit of its founder. The second was the provision of a traditional and scholastic critique of the modern world, or rather, of the modern deviation, which, for very precise reasons, Kelly—following certain pioneering spirits who will be mentioned presently—traced back to the Renaissance (and its *de*

facto espousal by the Renaissance popes). In Kelly's eyes, the process of decline could be defined in terms of the negation of one true principle after another, and he studied this not merely at the philosophical, but also at the social level. His essay on "Christians and the Class Struggle"⁴, for example, is an interesting study of the social and political characteristics of the modern world, which he saw in terms of a well-nigh ineluctable slide, through capitalism and industrialism to socialism, communism, and anarchy⁵. Nevertheless, in forecasting these disasters, his tone, at a deeper level, could not simply be called pessimistic, since, as so often in his writings, the overall burden of his essay is to remind us that the purpose of this life is sanctification.

The third task which Bernard Kelly felt imposed on him was that of clearing the ground—not only for Catholics, but for all Christians—for a sound approach to the Eastern religions. He regarded this task as urgent, one reason amongst others being the proliferation of all manner of false cults and gurus—some of them from the East, and most of them claiming to be Oriental—that had already begun.

Kelly knew that the encounter of the world religions was inevitable and, given the special needs of our time, he saw that this had a positive side. He strove, angelic as he was, that this encounter might be, not destructive, but for "the greater glory of God"; in other words, not for the loss of souls, but for their salvation. As if foreseeing the modern chaos, his first principle in this domain was that of the overriding need for *orthodoxy*—not only on the part of Christianity, but also on the part of the non-Christian religions which, in both east and west, were being usurped by secularism on the one hand and disfigured by denominationalism on the other. What was the use, he felt, of comparing, say, Mormonism with Bahai'ism, a Teilhard de Chardin with an Aurobindo, a dubious Jesuit with a dubious *ayatollah*. Here is how Kelly puts it:

Confusion is inevitable whenever cultures based on profoundly different spiritual traditions intermingle without rigid safeguards to preserve their purity. The crusader with the cross emblazoned on his breast, the loincloth and spinning wheel of Mahatma Gandhi when he visited Europe, are images of the kind of precaution that is reasonable when travelling in spiritually alien territory... The complete secularism of the modern western world, and wherever its influence has spread, has opened the flood-gates to a confusion which sweeps away the contours of the spirit... Traditional norms ... provide the criteria of culture and civilization. Traditional orthodoxy is thus the prerequisite of any discourse at all between the Traditions themselves⁶.

Kelly's approach to the non-Christian religions could be compared to

Eckhart's use of Plato or St. Thomas's use of Averroes: the interchange had to do with truth. His position, not without daring, exemplified how truth incorporates charity, and how it is not compromised (nor any the less rigorous) by so doing. Thus:

At a certain level of incomprehension, the attitude of [denying the foreign revelations] is the only tenable one. But to keep up that attitude in the face of increasing light would be a monstrous perversion of intelligence...

I take it that the serious interest of, for example, Hinduism, is its truth... Here a preliminary attitude of *crede ut intelligas* is I think necessary, and if this seems to be begging the question, I can only insist that unless you do not disbelieve, you can never hope to make the transition even momentarily from a Western to an Indian point of view.⁷

If it is the truth of Hinduism that one is looking for, one can set no limit at the outset to what one is going to find.⁸

Bernard Kelly was a friend and colleague of the Catholic sculptor and philosopher Eric Gill, who likewise held Thomist and traditionalist views. Gill introduced Kelly to the writings of his friend Ananda Coomaraswamy, Keeper of the Oriental Collection in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Of Coomaraswamy, Gill had written:

There was one person, to whom I think William Rothenstein introduced me, whom I might not have met otherwise and for whose influence I am deeply grateful; I mean the philosopher and theologian, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Others have written the truth about life and religion and man's work. Others have written good clear English. Others have had the gift of witty exposition. Others have understood the metaphysics of Christianity and others have understood the metaphysics of Hinduism and Buddhism. Others have understood the true significance of erotic drawings and sculptures. Others have seen the relationships of the true and the good and the beautiful. Others have had apparently unlimited learning. Others have loved; others have been kind and generous. But I know of no one else in whom all these gifts and all these powers have been combined. I dare not confess myself his disciple; that would only embarrass him. I can only say that I believe that no other living writer has written the truth in matters of art and life and religion and piety with such wisdom and understanding.⁹

This panegyric was but the tip of the iceberg! Eric Gill died in 1940 and left the field of inter-religious relations, as approached from a traditional Catholic point of view, to Bernard Kelly. Kelly corresponded with Coomaraswamy and quickly discovered that he was a leading

member of what has come to be known as the “traditionalist” or “perennialist” school, whose founders were René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon. This school is explicitly centered on the concept of *sophia perennis* (or *religio perennis*) and in his last years, strong in his Thomist orthodoxy, Kelly was to penetrate it and be refreshed by it. Kelly too eulogized Coomaraswamy:

His extraordinary semantic power in the use of words gave to his metaphysical writings a purity and pregnancy of which it is hard to find the equal in English. He was nothing if not a challenging writer: challenging to intelligence, able to put egoism, prejudice and impure intentions in their place without the crude resort of contempt, but above all challenging to sanctity. Under his influence, the task of effecting mutual understanding between East and West, from a hopeless dream, became an intellectual vocation, addressed not primarily to scholars in the secular sense ... but to theologians: to those versed in doctrine.¹⁰

Turning to René Guénon, Kelly says:

In the works of Guénon, the recall to tradition has the utmost urgency. His polemical works attack, without quarter asked or given, the complacent individualism of the twentieth-century world, its obliviousness to its own lack of anything approaching genuine spirituality, its rationalism, its materialism, its literary philosophizings: its humanism, its persuasion of its own progressive superiority, its blindness to traditional truth. With very good reason he disclaims any pretension to put forward a “system of ideas” to compete with the “systems” of modern philosophers. He recalls Westerners to their own Catholic tradition, the Moslem world to Islam, India to Hinduism— each to the tradition from which they may draw life, and to a truth which transcends the opinions of men...

The Guénonian position is thus situated far above the syncretism of an Aldous Huxley or a Gerald Heard, which retains the literary individualism of the 1920s. It is not a syncretism at all. In principle, his point of view is situated in the transcendent unity of traditional doctrines: not in the theory of their unity, but in that unity itself...

It is supremely difficult to oppose [Guénon] in any essential matter without finding oneself in opposition to truth.¹¹

Finally, speaking of Frithjof Schuon, Kelly writes:

His work has the intrinsic authority of a contemplative intelligence... If in *The Transcendent Unity* Schuon speaks of the way of Grace as one who understands that Divine economy in relation to the exoteric and esoteric paths of Islam and to the ways of *bhakti* and *jñāna* in Hindu tradition, in *Spiritual Perspectives* he speaks of Grace as one

in whom it is operative and as it were in virtue of that operation. The book has a fullness of light which we have no right to find in the twentieth century, or perhaps in any other century.¹²

Bernard Kelly became personally acquainted with Frithjof Schuon¹³, whom he met several times in London in the mid-1950s and whom he visited in Lausanne in 1957. On the latter occasion Kelly made the acquaintance of Schuon's friend Titus Burckhardt, a major exponent of the traditionalist viewpoint¹⁴.

Kelly read the *Summa Theologica* in Latin. To facilitate his Hindu studies, he had acquired a knowledge of Sanscrit. Towards the end of his life he began to learn Arabic, and studied both the Koran and certain classical Islamic authors including Ibn 'Arabî and Al Ghazâlî.

In everything that Kelly wrote, the philosophic tone was indissolubly wed with the spiritual: the truths he enunciated were the vehicles of prayer. His untiring message that sanctification is the purpose of life permeated, and radiated from, his work. This was Kelly's vocation, and in this connection it can undoubtedly be said that his thought and expressivity reached their maturity and their highpoint in the last few essays he wrote before his early death.¹⁵

In a Catholic world already assailed for more than a century by the unprecedented challenges of the modern age (and with no better fate in store for it, as we now know, than Teilhardism and Vatican II), Bernard Kelly was a voice crying in the wilderness. God grant that we be duly mindful of those unchanging and ultimate truths of which he was so faithful and timely a witness.

1 Bowes and Bowes, London, 1953.

2 *The Chesterton Review*, Saskatchewan, May 1987.

3 *Blackfriars* (London), January 1959.

4 *Blackfriars*(London), January 1937.

5 For Kelly, communism (and the same can be said of the Teilhardian progressivism which persists even after communism has outwardly crumbled) signified a collectivist revolt against God. This is atheism in its crudest and most brutal form, and the very antithesis of both Platonism and Thomism.

6 *Dominican Studies* (London), Vol. 7, 1954, pp. 254-271.

7 *ibid.*

8 *Blackfriars* (London), January 1956

9 *Autobiography* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1940), p. 174.

10 *Dominican Studies* (London), Vol. 7, 1954.

11 *ibid.* Another highly literate Catholic who paid tribute to Guénon's seminal role was Walter Shewring, classical scholar and master at Ampleforth College who, in *The Weekly Review* (London) in 1942, wrote: "René Guénon is one of the few writers of our time whose work is really of importance.... He stands for the primacy of pure metaphysics over all other forms of knowledge.... Guénon's writings...stress the intellectual decline of the West since the Renaissance and expose the superstitions of 'science' and 'progress'.... Most of his theses are in better accord with authentic Thomist doctrine than are many opinions of ill-instructed Christians." Yet another Catholic intellectual of the same period who wholeheartedly espoused the Guénon and

Schuon perspective was Angus Macnab, author of a fascinating study of the interaction of Islam and Christianity during the Spanish Middle Ages entitled *Spain under the Crescent Moon* (Spanish translation: Olañeta, Palma de Mallorca, 1988).

- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 See *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon* edited by S. H. Nasr (Amity House, Warwick, New York, 1986). In the informative introduction to this volume, Bernard Kelly is referred to on pages 14 and 56.
- 14 Amongst Titus Burckhardt's major works are *Sacred Art in East and West* (Perennial Books, Bedford, England, 1967) and *Mirror of the Intellect: Essays on Traditional Science and Sacred Art* (Quinta Essentia, Cambridge, England; State University of New York Press, Albany; 1987).
- 15 See, in particular: "Notes on the Light of the Eastern Religions" (*Dominican Studies*, London, Vol. 7, 1954, pp. 254-271; reprinted in *Religion of the Heart*, edited by S. H. Nasr and William Stoddart, Foundation for Traditional Studies, Oakton, Virginia, 1991); "A Thomist approach to the Vedanta" (*Blackfriars*, XXXVII, no. 430, January 1956); and "The metaphysical background of analogy" (Aquinas Paper No. 28, Blackfriars Publications, London, 1958).

Reviews

KARL BARTH'S CRITICALLY REALISTIC DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY: ITS GENESIS & DEVELOPMENT 1909-1936 by Bruce L. McCormack, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp xviii + 499, £50.

Karl Barth died in 1968, which means that enough time has gone by for his work to pass into oblivion or to be discovered by a new generation. This massive book adds significantly to the evidence that Barth's work is exciting more theological attention than ever. Originally a thesis at Princeton Theological Seminary, to which the author has returned, after a stint in Edinburgh, this book draws on the vast amount of early writing that has become more accessible since Barth's death (including newspaper articles, working papers and so on, but particularly the first lecture courses). In the first place, then, this is by far the best documented intellectual biography of Barth, up to his suspension from teaching in Bonn in 1934 for refusing the loyalty oath to Hitler and his permanent move back to Switzerland the following year.

Secondly, McCormack aligns himself with a new wave of young German students of Barth whose books have not yet been translated. The frequent references serve as an introduction to these scholars, largely unknown in the English-speaking world.

Thirdly, and clearly of most interest to Catholic readers, McCormack's main aim is to overthrow Hans Urs von Balthasar's account of Barth's development, which dominates interpretation of Barth's theology in the English-speaking world, or so he claims. That the work of the greatest Reformed theologian of this century should be filtered through an early study by one of the greatest Catholic theologians, striving hard to be