



Australian Catholic Theological Association

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Citation for the Award of Fellow of ACTA Elected by acclamation at the 2011 ACTA AGM

Rev. John Thornhill SM

Fr John Thornhill, SM, is in the foremost ranks of Australian theologians. His formal teaching career begins in the late 1950s and reached well into the 90s. From his putative retirement in 1998, he has continued writing and lecturing as the "people's theologian", based until recently in Brisbane, then briefly in Perth he recorded the EMMAUS series of theological reflections for use in parishes and adult education. He is now here in Sydney.

Over the years he has been an influential lecturer, first, in the Marist Scholasticate in Toongabbie, NSW, and then at the Sydney's Catholic Theological Union. For five years he was the Director of the famed Aquinas Academy (1975-1980), and served as a member of Rome's International Theological Commission. His animating influence on the Australian Catholic Theological Association (elected President in the early 90s) has been of major importance to development of this now vigorous body. His ecumenical involvements saw him serve in ARCIC II and in the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue.

His numerous articles have appeared in all type of journals, ranging from the formally academic (*Theological Studies*, *The Thomist*, *The Australasian Catholic Record*, *Pacifica*, etc) to the more immediately pastoral and spiritual. He also has at least four entries in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. The range of his books suggests a unique capacity to link theology to the life of the Church. Apart from his vocation as a Marist missionary and his alert personal concern to breathe inspiration into Christian life and practice, his interest in history and cultural developments are a clear dimension of his theological style and focus. This began with his doctoral dissertation on Arnold Toynbee's monumental *A Study of History* (Angelicum, 1957). The titles of other books underscore this point: *The Person and the Group* (in which he appealed to a tradition beginning with the classic Greek understanding of society); *Sign and Promise* (in which he articulated an ecclesiology relevant to a time of change); *Christian Mystery in the Secular Age* (where he deals with the methods and the task of theology itself in today's world); *Making Australia* (which is a significant example of an inculturated theology); *Modernity* (in which he takes us to the heart of the great cultural shifts that have occurred, to lead to a point of hope and reconciliation); finally, in an explicitly pastoral and hope-inspiring vein, *Questions Catholics Ask in a Time of Change*.

In 2008 he received an honorary doctorate from Australian Catholic University. His voluminous writings reveal the workings of judicious, open and generous Christian mind as it enters into the spirit of the age and reads the signs of the times. He is in the best sense of the word, a "Catholic theologian", ever immersed in the life of the Church, ecumenically aware, critically open to the culture, and prepared to speak with clarity and conviction to the grace and struggle of Christian life.

It is with pleasure and pride that Rev. John Thornhill SM is honoured with the award of Fellow of the Australian Catholic Theological Association.