

Obituary: William Kevin Presa

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Abstract In this obituary, I detail the life and contribution of William Kevin Presa.

Keywords William Kevin Presa

William Kevin Presa 13 November 1935–14 October 2012

Kevin Presa was an early contributor to *Sophia* with ‘Grace and the Will’ (vol. 4, no. 2, July 1965) on Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians and Augustinians. ‘Assent, Belief and Truth’ followed in October 1968 (vol. 7, number 3). A later offering was ‘St Thomas on Religious Belief’ in volume 19.

Kevin’s working life began with a period of five years as a Clerk of Petty Sessions in the Crown Law Department, Victoria. He qualified as a Clerk of Courts and Registrar of the County Court. Such a career provided an entrée to the practice of law, but Kevin did not take this path. Instead he turned to the study of philosophy at the University of Melbourne, the birthplace of *Sophia*. In 1960 he graduated with First Class Honours in Philosophy and was awarded the Hastie Scholarship for the student placed first in the Honours List. He then wrote a Master of Arts thesis on ‘Intention and Responsibility’ under the supervision of A.C. (‘Camo’) Jackson, graduating with First Class honours. He was appointed to a lectureship in philosophy at the University of Otago in January 1962 and in August 1965 moved to a lectureship at the University of Melbourne. He retired from the Department at the end of 1992.

Though Kevin had not pursued a career in the law, he displayed a forensic attention to detail in his work. He probed philosophical texts like a cross-examining barrister. This propensity went with a prodigious and wide-ranging memory. Apart from its scholarly usefulness and potential for amusement, this was regularly displayed in honours examiners’ meetings. At these meetings honours grades and ranking were assigned, but not by any simple appeal to arithmetic. Indeed, when Kevin began to attend these meeting, marks were given in Greek letters, or combinations of them, so that assigning honours grades required a good deal of

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discussion and comparison of intuitions. Kevin contributed a comprehensive grasp of precedents, the details of which were clear and comprehensive in his mind, though often rather vague in the minds of his colleagues. He was also a repository of accurate information about the rules for the various awards to be distributed, as befitted a former Hastie Scholar.

In preparing for Kevin's funeral, the priest who conducted the service asked to see the books Kevin was reading at the end of his life. Among them were works by Jacopone da Todi, the thirteenth-century Franciscan poet, other medieval mystics and Dante, all adorned with Kevin's emphases and marginalia. This was not an adventitious selection, but entirely consistent with the wider range of his life-long intellectual, literary and religious interests and his love of the Italian language.

Kevin is survived by his first wife, Marie, his second wife, Elizabeth, his children Cristina, Greg, Louise, Cath and Domenica, his sons-in-law Darryn, Tim and David, and his grandchildren Rory, Angus, Emily, Dylan and Conor.

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