



Upholding Mystery: An Anthology of Contemporary Christian Poetry

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Most readers of contemporary poetry would agree with literary critic Helen Vendler that "there is no significant poet whose work does not mirror, both formally and in its preoccupations, the absence of the transcendent"--that no major modern poet writes religious poetry. Indeed, the very idea that a vital Christian poetry might arise within our thoroughly secular culture seems almost inconceivable. Is it possible that a body of Christian poetry is now being produced whose literary merit is equal to its religious conviction? David Impastato's splendid anthology, *Upholding Mystery*, answers that question with a resounding and surprising "yes."

From Andrew Hudgins' often humorous narratives to Geoffery Hill's darkly impassioned lyrics, from Denise Levertov's incisive personal and political insights to Wendell Berry's lovely evocations of the divine presence in nature, *Upholding Mystery* offers readers a wide range of both poetic and spiritual satisfactions. Featuring only poets who are currently writing--including such well-known poets as Richard Wilbur, Annie Dillard, Daniel Berrigan, Les Murray, and Louise Erdrich, along with the impressive though less-known voices of David Craig, Scott Cairns, and David Brendan Hopes--this superb anthology provides generous selections of work that is admirable equally for the stature of its verse and for its illumination of the Christian ethos. By limiting the number of poets included, this collection allows readers to gain a thorough familiarity with each poet's work and to see how each struggles with, celebrates, and embodies a vision of the sacred throughout a personal body of verse. In addition, editor David Impastato provides brief, accessible, extremely helpful introductions that highlight the specifically Christian concerns of the poems, and he organizes the book into sections dealing with such topics as The Cross, Transformation, Injustice, Presence, Praise, The Mystical Body, and so on, thereby giving the reader a coherent theological journey as well as the pleasurable experience of the individual poems.

Here, then, is a contemporary encounter with Christian mystery, in poetry that is as vibrant, as compelling, and as meaningful as any being written today. David Impastato has done an invaluable service in showing that the transcendent is indeed alive and well in the hands of contemporary poets, despite reports to the contrary, and in gathering a dazzling array of poems that will appeal in equal measure to religious and literary readers alike.

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