



Melbourne
College of Divinity

CENTENARY RECEPTION

in the State Drawing Room

Government House

Wednesday 17th February, 2010

Opening Prayer

Creator God, source of all being and understanding ,

We come together today in thanks and praise for the theological story that is the
Melbourne College of Divinity.

We remember and give thanks for those who set the foundations of the MCD
one hundred years ago.

We remember and give thanks for all who joined the journey of theological education,
who steadfastly kept their eyes upon the common good
and discovered the joy of learning in this ecumenical environment.

We thank you for the Church leaders who encouraged and sustained the MCD as a
community of grace.

We thank you for those who had oversight of curriculum development and
educational management.

We thank you for all the students who have studied with us over the past century;
for the privilege it has been to both teach them and learn from them.

Gracious God, we thank you for your companionship with us in Jesus Christ;
we thank you for the ever-present inspiration of your Holy Spirit.

We rejoice in the way you have shaken our domesticated boundaries,
stimulated us to ask questions and have urged us to find you waiting for us
in the new and unexpected.

We pray that as the journey of the MCD continues
into an ever-changing and largely unpredictable future,
that you will bless all those who join us on the journey,
and care for those who leave along the way.

Loving and merciful God, your enduring presence is our destiny
and we commit ourselves today to continue following you
in faith and truth,

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.

Amen

Governor's Address

Acknowledgements:

Mr Bob Stensholt
Member for Burwood, representing the Premier

President of the Melbourne College of Divinity, the Reverend Dr Terry Curtin

Vice President, Dr Graeme Blackman
and Mrs Pauline Blackman

Dean and CEO, Professor Paul Beirne
and Ms Anna Finkl

Reverend Merrill Kitchen

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land the Kulin Nations and pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

Jan and I are very honoured to celebrate the centenary of the Melbourne College of Divinity with you this evening.

The College has a proud history that stretches back to 1910 when members of the Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches, the Church of England and the Churches of Christ were appointed to establish the world's first ecumenical higher education institution. Since that time the MCD's foundation members have been joined by the Catholic Church and the Salvation Army.

More recently, the College also has a proud history of connection with this office, and this House. I am mindful particularly of the epic contribution made to ecumenism and theological scholarship by my predecessor, the late Dr Davis McCaughey, who was known probably to almost all of you. I understand from the staff still here who served him that the House was commonly full of local and visiting scholars, unravelling the mysteries of eschatology, ecclesiology, phenomenology and pneumatology!

In a world where relationships among religions are often fractured, it is easy to pay lip-service to cooperation between denominations. More difficult is to actually engage in genuine collaboration. What distinguishes the College is the fundamentally ecumenical nature that has been a central tenet since the College's foundation. The unique collaboration among the churches, based on mutual respect for the views of others and the pursuit of learning, continues proudly and vibrantly to this day. A reflection on the tradition of good will among its members, this spirit is also a reflection of the spirit of harmony and cooperation, imperfect though it might be at times, that defines our great city whose name the College bears.

Globally recognised for its national and international training and rigorous academic programmes, the College is the second oldest self-regulating higher education institution in Victoria and the sixth oldest such institution in the country. Through its unique mission, the College lives daily the creative and proper tension between the church and the state, the secular and the sacred: The MCD is a registered higher education provider, accountable to the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation and to the rigours of AUQA – a very worldly concern! At the same time it provides students with a community of scholarship and reflection in which to anchor their faith in understanding, an enterprise dating back to St Anselm and beyond.

As one who has spent a lifetime involved in research and higher education, I firmly believe in the important role that quality academic institutions play within our society. Underpinning these institutions must be an ethos of critical inquiry and open dialogue; engagement with local, national and global communities; respect and openness; professionalism; enthusiasm; flexibility; and innovation.

Such an ethos, I am delighted to observe, is alive and well and is ingrained in the formal values of the College. This approach to learning and teaching will stand it in good stead as the College continues its exciting evolution over the next hundred years.

I congratulate you heartily on your centenary. It is now my great pleasure to invite the Dean, Professor Paul Beirne, to say a few words about the history of the College.

Professor David de Kretser AC
Governor of Victoria

Dean's Address

Professor David de Kretser, Governor of Victoria, Mrs de Kretser, the Honourable Bob Stensholt representing the Premier, Heads of Churches, Distinguished Guests, fellow members of the MCD Community.

I wish to begin by thanking Governor de Kretser and Mrs de Kretser on behalf of the Melbourne College of Divinity for hosting this very significant event to mark the Centenary of the College—it is deeply appreciated.

The Melbourne College of Divinity is an extraordinary institution, founded as it was 100 years ago by an Act of the Parliament of the State of Victoria, at a time when ecumenical cooperation in general, and in the training of clergy and laity in particular, was practically, if not totally, unknown. In this sense, and in many others, the MCD has been a pioneering higher education institution in Australia and internationally, and remains so to this day.

What are the reasons for the MCD's longevity and for its success over an extended period of time? I will note some of these, in the knowledge that the list is far from exhaustive.

First, is the MCD's spirit of, and commitment to, ecumenical co-operation in all its aspects, which is the hallmark of the institution, and one of its greatest strengths. In his final summation as Head of the Australian Universities Quality Agency Audit Panel which conducted an Audit of the MCD in September, 2005, Professor Gareth Thomas from the University of Otago made the following comment: "When the Panel members read the claims of ecumenical cooperation in the MCD Performance Portfolio in preparation for the Audit, we all considered these claims to be wildly exaggerated. Following our visits to the Recognized Teaching Institutions and Colleges of the MCD, we came to the unanimous conclusion that the claims were not only true, but were radically understated."

The second reason for the MCD's longevity is its commitment to rigor and excellence in all its academic pursuits;

Third, is the constant support of the Churches in providing personnel, programs, facilities and financial and spiritual support to the MCD for its first 100 years, for which we are exceedingly grateful;

Fourth, is the MCD's ability during these 100 years, to adapt to the changes in the Churches, and in society, and to respond creatively to the challenges which these changes bring;

Fifth, is the quality of the MCD's faculty and its administrators—all highly trained and dedicated professionals whose contribution to the life of MCD and to its students

reaches far above the call of duty, and who are, to a person, passionate about the MCD and the Colleges which constitute it;

Sixth, and certainly not least, is the quality of the students of the MCD: mature, inquisitive, committed and wise, they are a treasure to be nurtured and sent forth with confidence. This is not just a ‘party line’ opinion. One of the AUQA Panel members, a Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) from Edith Cowan University, reflecting on the three days she had spent visiting the RTIs and Colleges and interviewing people said simply, and somewhat whimsically, “I want to take your students back with me.”

Finally, the MCD community strives take seriously and incorporate into its life the motto of the College: *Qui est ex Deo verba Dei audit*: The one who is from God, hears the Words of God (and we might add: ‘and lives them’.)

One cannot discount the possibility that the main reason for the longevity of the Melbourne College of Divinity, for its growth and for its increasing diversity, is that the Lord recognizes this to be a very worthwhile, even essential, endeavour, and the breath of the Spirit holds it ever higher and higher aloft.

Thank you; and I invite you as you leave this evening to take this historical memento of the founding of the MCD with you from the table at the entrance.

I now introduce to you, Very Revd Dr Terry Curtin, President of the Melbourne College of Divinity, and Master of Catholic Theological College.

Professor Paul Beirne
Dean
Melbourne College of Divinity

President's Address

Professor David de Kretser, Governor of Victoria, Mrs de Kretser, Mr Bob Stensholt, Member for Burwood, representing the Premier of Victoria, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues of the Melbourne College of Divinity.

This is an historic occasion as we mark the centenary year of the Melbourne College of Divinity. The Dean, Professor Paul Beirne, has set before us the underlying reasons for our history and its achievements.

What might mark the next decades of the MCD?

Firstly, the Melbourne College of Divinity will seek to place before all Australians for their benefit the full richness, depth, reach and utility of its theological endeavours. The MCD Summit of 2008 put it in these words in its Vision Statement,

We provide the highest quality theological education, scholarship and vocational formation in order to transform attitudes to Christian faith and enable transformational participation in communal life.

The words were carefully weighed in their composition. They reveal a strong and resolute commitment to theological research and teaching of the highest calibre. They set this work as a service to society and carry the conviction that, properly understood, Christian faith enhances and empowers human lives.

The Melbourne College of Divinity emerged from the common desire of Christians that such a contribution be made. It has drawn together the Anglican, Baptist, Churches of Christ, Roman Catholic and Uniting churches, and The Salvation Army. Other churches will join us, that is clear, and in doing so they also will experience the MCD's "recognition and respect for the traditions of [its] member churches [lived] in an atmosphere of mutuality and ecumenical cooperation."¹ The College and its members will continue to pray and to hope, with Jesus in the gospel of John, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). Our theological ecumenism is at heart a spiritual ecumenism, and in this we find our dialogue, cooperation and collaboration to be a true "exchange of gifts"².

The gifts we bring to each other within the Melbourne College of Divinity are rich and this raises a serious question. How might our theological education, our scholarship, our vocational formation, best be brought to the churches, the society and the world in which we live? Here the Melbourne College of Divinity looks with intense interest towards the proposal under national protocols for higher education to create Specialist Universities. The MCD has a one hundred year long demonstrated record of academic excellence, and its Council has agreed in principle to seek such status. In its future the MCD plans to develop into a world centre of excellence for

¹ Melbourne College of Divinity (2009) *Annual Report 2008*, Page 11.

² John Paul II (1995) *On Commitment to Ecumenism*, n 28. Quoted in Peter R Cross (2007) "John Paul II and Ecumenism" in Robert Gascoigne (editor) *John Paul II – Legacy and Witness*. Homebush, NSW: St Pauls Publications, Page 123.

learning, teaching and research in divinity and its related disciplines. Were we to achieve the status of Specialist University the profile of the Melbourne College of Divinity would be considerably heightened and it would bring fresh impetus to all we do as we commence our second century.

In reflecting on the future of the Melbourne College of Divinity I should address its students, a number of whom are here tonight. You are our future, and in that you bear the burden of our expectations. These are well described in a recent study of theological education in Australia.

Theology graduates in professional ministries serve local communities across the nation, seeking to discern, respond to and demonstrate the love of God shown in the depths and heights of human existence. The many graduates not employed by the churches or church agencies find their theological learning shapes and informs their Christian world-view, equipping them for their work, political engagement and social relationships.....By its own nature, theological education.....entails ongoing reflection on the nature and meaning of community identity and service.³

I am sure you will not fail in your calling.

To conclude:

Australian theological education is long-established. It is an “academically robust and distinctive dimension of higher education”⁴, and makes a distinctive contribution to the Australian higher education sector. Prime among Australian theological institutions the Melbourne College of Divinity as it begins its second century

.....continues to set [its] priorities by seeking to discern and follow the purposes of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, not only for the sake of the churches, but for humankind in all its diversities, and the whole created cosmos.⁵

May we be blessed in our endeavours.

The Very Rev Dr Terence R Curtin
President
Melbourne College of Divinity

³ Charles Sherlock (2009) *Uncovering Theology*. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Pages 196-197.

⁴ Charles Sherlock (2009) *Uncovering Theology*. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Page 14.

⁵ *Ibidem*.