

UNCOVERING THEOLOGY: PRESS RELEASE

Australian theological education: the covers are lifted

Uncovering Theology: the depth, reach and utility of Australian theological education was launched at the conference of the Australia & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools at the Australian Lutheran College, Adelaide on July 7, 2009. It is issued by ATF Press, the leading publisher of theological research in Australasia.

The book is the result of a project on which the Revd Dr Charles Sherlock has been working from January 2008 to June 2009, 'scoping' the Australian theology sector for the first time. Dr Sherlock has been engaged in theological education for some four decades, notably as Senior Lecturer at Ridley College and later at Trinity College, Melbourne, teaching Theology and Liturgy, alongside active involvements in the Anglican church, and in ecumenical theological work. Charles was Registrar and Director of Ministry Studies of the Melbourne College of Divinity 2003-2007. He currently ministers in the Anglican Diocese of Bendigo, and as Executive Officer of the *Australian & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools*.

The *Uncovering Theology* project, funded by the *Australian Teaching & Learning Council*, "marks the emergence of theological education as a part of the mainstream of Australian higher education landscape," write the co-chairs of the project, Dr Mark Harding and Professor Neil Ormerod. "It will shape the future of the discipline."

Launching the book, Professor Gabrielle McMullen FRACI (Prov-Vice Chancellor (Academic), Australian Catholic University) noted three themes in its pages.

First, "the spirit of recognition and respect for the traditions" of the various churches is evident. "Such theological ecumenism is linked to spiritual ecumenism, the very heart of ecumenism," she said. Such dialogue, cooperation and collaboration become 'an exchange of gifts' (as John-Paul II put it in *Ut Unum Sint*). "This publication provides rich detail of this exchange between institutions from different traditions."

Secondly, faith: "faith in Jesus Christ as the answer to the question that is every human life." Professor McMullen cited Neil Brown in saying, "far from being easy, reflective faith is often more a tumultuous sea than a calm lake".

"The third theme is that of service," she noted, as exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus. *Uncovering Theology* "expresses this principle powerfully," citing from the book (pages 196-7):

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.

Professor McMullen concluded by saying, "Australian theological education is long-established. It is an 'academically robust and distinctive dimension of higher education' (*Uncovering Theology* page 14), making a significant and unique contribution to the Australian sector."

Professor McMullen concluded her address by noting a "further dimension to theological education, and as the report concludes so powerfully, Australian theological institutions

continue to set their 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.

Further information about the book is available at www.atfpress.com/atfpress/book.php?ID=112.