

## The Melbourne College of Divinity: A Selective Historical Overview

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### PART ONE Setting the Scene

IN 1909 THE NEW NATION OF AUSTRALIA celebrated its ninth birthday, with Melbourne playing a central part in the festivities. The first Commonwealth Parliament opened at 12.00pm on 9 May in the Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens. This historic event was followed by the first sitting of the Senate in the Legislative Council chamber of the Victorian Parliament House at 1.10pm. At 2.30pm the House of Representatives met in the Legislative Assembly chamber. Sir Edmond Barton was the fledgling nation's first Prime Minister.

In 1909, Dame Nellie Melba embarked on a "sentimental tour" of Australia which covered 10,000 miles and incorporated visits to many remote towns. South Melbourne defeated Carlton by two points to win the 1909 Victorian Football League Grand Final. Elsewhere, technology took wings when the Wright Brothers developed an aeroplane that could carry two men, fly for sixty minutes, and reach a speed of forty miles per hour. On 19 October, Comte de Lambert of France set an aeroplane altitude record of 300 metres.

In 1909, on a darker note, the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families became official policy of the Australian government, managed by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB). The removal policy remained in effect until 1969.

In many respects, it was a very different world to the one in which we now live. A series of subsequent wars would not only change the map of the globe but also alter forever global perceptions of the human race, what it was truly capable of, and how truly destructive it could be. The Melbourne College of Divinity was forged in the cauldron of

these world events, and while affected by them, cast its gaze beyond them. True to its motto, *Qui est ex Deo verba Dei audit* ("The one who is of God, hears the words of God"), the College, swept along by the winds of change, stayed faithful to its purpose, that is, to challenge each person who came within its ambit not only to hear the words of God, but to follow the Word of God, and live consistently with this reality.

### Inception

Just as the year 1909 was drawing to a close, at the instigation of the Church of England scholar and Archbishop, Dr Henry Lowther Clarke, a Committee of eight individuals met in the heart of Melbourne to discuss a common concern. These members of the Committee had undoubtedly met before under different circumstances, as they represented the leading scholars and the heads of the major Christian denominations of the time.<sup>1</sup> The Committee came together in the middle of a summer afternoon for a very specific purpose, described in the Minutes of the meeting, as follows:

#### *Divinity Degrees in the University of Melbourne*

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*A meeting called by His Grace the Archbishop of Melbourne for the purpose of considering the question of a Theological Faculty at, and the conferring of Degrees in Divinity by the University of Melbourne was held in the Archbishop's Vestry, St Paul's Cathedral on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December 1909 at 2pm.*

A Committee of all those present was formed at the meeting "to approach the University Council with a view to the repeal of the words 'except Divinity' from Section 25 of the University Act 1890".

The first meeting of the unnamed Committee "was closed with the Benediction".

A subsequent meeting of the still unnamed Committee on 1 March 1910 produced a document entitled:

#### *Memorial*

*Addressed to the Council of the University of Melbourne by a Committee consisting of Representatives of leading Religious Denominations in Victoria on the question of Divinity Degrees in Melbourne University*

The Memorial presented a case for the establishment of a Faculty of Theology at the University of Melbourne. The Memorial generated an

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1. Representatives on the Committee were from the Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, and the Church of England. The Roman Catholic Church was not represented at the meeting, but as will subsequently be seen, fully endorsed the purpose of the meeting.

immediate response in the form of a Memorial from 55 leading graduates of the University of Melbourne opposing the setting up of a Faculty of Theology at the University, and supporting the status of the university as a purely secular institution. This opinion was officially shared and proclaimed by the University Council.

At a meeting of the Committee on 5 April 1910, Rev E. H. Sugden "advocated the founding of a Theological University and the obtaining of a charter for this purpose". All were in agreement, and "It was determined by the Committee that what is sought for was legislative power to examine in Theology and to confer diplomas and degrees." The Committee resolved that the Premier and the Minister of Education be asked to receive a deputation from the Committee on the subject of Divinity degrees, and that the Secretary write to the Catholic Archbishop Thomas Carr to ask if he would join the Committee. Archbishop Carr responded on 12 April 1910:

In reply to your courteous letter I desire to state that as we have a recognized and universally observed means of obtaining Degrees in Divinity, we cannot consistently have representation on your faculty. On that account I do not think that I should actually join you in the proposed deputation to the Premier and Minister of Education, but I am quite willing that it should be stated at the proposed meeting that I am in favour of an independent body unconnected with the University having powers to confer Degrees in Divinity.<sup>2</sup>

This letter was presented to the Premier on the following occasion. On Wednesday 20 April 1910, the Herald newspaper reported under the heading *DEGREES IN DIVINITY: The Proposed Faculty: Deputation to Premier*, that the Premier of Victoria made the following statement: "I will place the request before the Cabinet and ask it to give its consent to what you gentlemen propose." The report continued: "This was the reply that the Premier gave today to a deputation representing religious denominations which asked him to take the necessary steps to have created an independent body empowered to confer degrees in Divinity."<sup>3</sup>

At its meeting in the Archbishop's Vestry at 4.00pm on Tuesday 26 April,

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<sup>2</sup> In a previous letter to the Committee dated 7 April 1910, Archbishop Carr wrote: Since the question of granting Divinity Degrees by the University of Melbourne was first raised, it has always seemed to me that the solution of the question was to be found in the formation by Act of Parliament of an independent body or bodies to confer such degrees."

<sup>3</sup> (Melbourne) *Herald*, 20 April 1910.

The following items which the Committee proposed to have embodied in the Bill to be introduced into Parliament were agreed on:

Name: The name shall be "The Melbourne College of Divinity" (carried by a majority six to one)

Constitution: The College shall consist of sixteen persons, six of whom shall represent the Church of England in Victoria, four of whom shall represent the Presbyterian Church of Australia in Victoria, four of whom shall represent the Methodist Church of Victoria and one of whom shall represent the Baptist Union of Victoria and one of whom shall represent the Congregational Union of Victoria.

The Melbourne College of Divinity Act 1910 was passed into legislation by the Parliament of the State of Victoria on 17 December 1910. At its inception, the Melbourne College of Divinity was nine years younger than the Commonwealth of Australia. The College is the sixth oldest self-accrediting Higher Education Institution in the nation, and the second oldest in Victoria.

#### The Raison d'être for the Founding

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century most Australian clergy came from Great Britain, where they were trained and ordained. Local training was sporadic, denominationally diverse and not standardised. While a variety of colleges had emerged within the Protestant churches to provide training for ordained ministry, typically a principal with clergy assistants, clergy with scholarly intentions looked to Great Britain for education and inspiration.<sup>4</sup>

The motivation behind the initial meeting of church leaders and scholars on 29 December 1909 was to bring to reality a shared desire not only to standardise the training of Australian clergy but also to provide local clergy with an academically rigorous preparation for ministry commensurate with their calling, and equal to anything that was available overseas. This was the reason the members of the Committee initially approached one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Australia to offer degrees in Divinity.

Following its failure to be incorporated into the University of Melbourne, at its meeting on 26 April 1910 (the meeting at which the College received its name and its Constitution was agreed upon), the Committee laid down the requirements for the granting of diplomas and degrees, specifically for the Bachelor of Divinity and the Doctor of

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4. Charles Sherlock, Paul Beirne, *The MCD – An Historical Overview*. Supplementary Material 1.4 in the MCD Performance Portfolio for the 2005 Australian Universities Quality Agency Audit of the MCD, p. 1.

Divinity degrees. In relation to the Bachelor of Divinity, which was in fact a graduate degree, the Minutes state:

*The Degree of Bachelor of Divinity shall be obtainable by examination which shall be open only to such candidates as have graduated in the University of Melbourne or some university whose degrees are recognized by it;*

*Candidates for the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity shall subsequently to University graduation pass two examinations and complete two years.*

Subjects undertaken in the Degree were Contents of the Bible, Hebrew, New Testament Greek, Church History, Apologetics, Old Testament, New Testament Biblical and Historical Theology, Patristic Literature, Christian Ethics and Comparative Religion. Of the five Bachelor of Divinity candidates who sat for the first Bachelor of Divinity examinations in 1911, four received a pass grade, and one failed.

The Doctor of Divinity had similar stringent standards:

*Candidates for the degree of Doctor of Divinity must be Bachelors of Divinity of at least seven years standing;*

*No candidate shall be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Divinity unless he shall have been admitted previously to a Master's Degree in some (university) faculty.*

The Committee was united in its agreement that the academic training of clergy in Australia would be rigorous, first class, and of a standard equal to that available in any country in the world.

The other point essential to this story of origins is that the Melbourne College of Divinity was from its inception an ecumenical institution, committed to the training of clergy from any and all Christian denominations. The word "ecumenism" was barely known in Australia, or for that matter internationally, at the time. To place in historical perspective the significance of the birth of an ecumenical College of Divinity one hundred years ago, it is instructive to consider another broadly representative meeting of Church leaders which was taking place at this time on the other side of the globe, a meeting at which the term "ecumenical" also came to be associated.

#### The 1910 Edinburgh Conference

On 14-23 June 1910, a World Missionary Conference was held in the Assembly Hall of the United Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. The Conference Chairman, John R. Mott, described the Conference as: "the most notable gathering in the interest of worldwide expansion of Christianity ever held, not only in missionary annals, but in all

Christian annals.”<sup>5</sup> More than 1200 delegates from a wide range of Protestant missions and church bodies attended the meeting, whose purpose was “to consider missionary problems”.<sup>6</sup> Eight Commissions within the Conference addressed the most pressing mission issues of the time.<sup>7</sup>

Kenneth Ross and Kirsteen Kim list a number of significant impacts of the Conference, among them, the fact that it was attended by some of the most significant church leaders of the day “and stimulated the formation of the ecumenical church Commissions on Faith and Order and on Life and Work, as well as cooperation in theological and mission education”.<sup>8</sup>

Hugh Martin states that the World Missionary Conference “opened a new era in the missionary enterprise but it was also the beginning of what we now call ‘the ecumenical movement’. ‘Edinburgh 1910’ was in fact a fountain head of international and inter-church co-operation on a depth and scale never known before.”<sup>9</sup> Church Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette states: “The world Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, was the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement.”<sup>10</sup>

If indeed the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh was “the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement”, the Melbourne College of Divinity, founded in the same year the Conference took place, and independent of it, can lay rightful claim to being the birthplace of ecumenical Christian theological education on a world scale. No small claim, indeed, but one that I am convinced is justified.

#### The Years of the Registrars

At this point, I should state that the purpose of this Introduction is not to cover the entire history of the Melbourne College of Divinity in all its complexity. My aim, rather, is to touch lightly on aspects of this history: to communicate some sense of the whole, as well as an appreciation of the importance and indeed uniqueness of the institution known since its establishment by the acronym “MCD”.

5. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott 1865-1955: A Biography*, (Geneva: WCC and Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1979) 342, quoted in Kenneth R. Ross and Kirsteen Kim, “Edinburgh 1910 to 2010: Centenary Assessment and Mission”, *One in Christ*, 43/ 2 (2009). 114.

6. Ross and Kim, “Edinburgh 1910 to 2010”, 113-15.

7. Ross and Kim, “Edinburgh 1910 to 2010”, 115.

8. Ross and Kim, “Edinburgh 1910 to 2010”, 115.

9. Hugh Martin, *Beginning at Edinburgh: A Jubilee Assessment of the world Missionary Conference 1910* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1960) 3; Ross and Kim, “Edinburgh 1910 to 2010”, 117.

10. Kenneth Scott Latourette, ‘Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council’, chapter 8 in Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol. 1, (Geneva: WCC, 1993 [1954], p. 362, quoted in Ross and Kim, “Edinburgh 1910 to 2010”, 117.

In addition to its governing body – “the College” – the MCD was administered by six Registrars, from 1910 to 1975. Rev J. Mathew, a Presbyterian, was the first Registrar of the College from 1910-17. He was followed by Professor Adam (1917-24), Rev Principal Shaw Griffith (Congregationalist), Rev Frederic Ernest Oxer (1928-47), Rev Dr Calvert Barber (1947-66) and Rev Alfred Bird (1966-76). A full history of the MCD, yet to be written, will detail the important and formative contributions each of these Registrars made to the MCD. During the sixty-five years in which they stood at the helm of the MCD, the nation was involved in two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Korean Conflict and the Vietnamese War. Guiding the College through these times was fraught with many difficulties and challenges. It is a testament to these men’s commitment and creativity that the College not only grew, but also flourished and diversified.

#### The 1965 Conference

On 25-26 May 1965, a national Conference on theological education was convened by the MCD President and future Governor of Victoria, The Revd Dr J. D. McCaughey. The Conference was held in Ormond College, at the University of Melbourne, and drew together College members, examiners, Protestant seminary and Bible College principals from Australia and New Zealand, and delegates from the Australian College of Theology. Fifty-eight people participated in the Conference. This unprecedented gathering verified that the MCD functioned as the focus for Protestant theological education in Australasia and the Pacific. As a result of this Conference, the Bachelor of Divinity was restructured, a Diploma of Theology for matriculants was introduced, and an Advisory Committee was established to manage the detail of student matters. More significantly, the Conference heralded far-reaching changes in theological education, signalled by requests for an undergraduate degree in theology, and specialist awards in Pastoral Care, Liturgy and Education.<sup>11</sup>

The proposed introduction of a taught undergraduate degree in theology was the subject of impassioned debate on the floor of the Conference, and when put to a vote, was defeated 24 to 22. This defeat, however, proved to be a temporary setback.

#### Change of the Act, Change of Direction

Following the Conference, College representatives approached the University of Melbourne regarding the offering a joint degree in Arts /

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11. Sherlock and Beirne, *The MCD – An Historical Overview*, 2-3.

Religious Studies. It took almost twenty-seven years for this request to bear fruit, which it did when the MCD and the University of Melbourne became affiliated institutions in 1993.

A request was also made to the Victorian Minister of Education to have the MCD Act revised to allow a first degree in "Religious Studies". A structure for this degree was established in consultation with Roman Catholic authorities who wished to offer it, and who sought representation on the College. This development began a series of discussions which led to a reconstitution of the MCD Act and the governing body of the College, and the inclusion of associated teaching institutions within the MCD.

A report of several meetings between representatives of the MCD and representatives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne was tabled at a meeting of the College on 1 December 1971. The Report stated that:

The time is opportune for the reconstitution of the Melbourne College of Divinity to allow full representation of the Roman Catholic Church on its governing body. The Government of Victoria should be asked to amend the MCD Act in order to achieve this. The amendment should also contain the provision for the MCD to teach and examine for a primary degree in theology. Candidates for this degree must receive teaching as well as undergo examination. It would be the responsibility of the MCD to accredit institutions or groups of institutions as teaching centres for the degree.

The College received a letter on 7 June 1972 from the Most Reverend J. R. Knox, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, which stated:

I am very happy that the conversations concerning the reconstitution of the Melbourne College of Divinity and participation of the Catholic Church of the Melbourne Province (in which the Archdiocese of Hobart shares special membership) have been so fruitful. During the last week I have finalised the discussions with the Bishops of the Province concerning the proposal for a re-drafting of the Melbourne College of Divinity Act 1910-1956, and am happy to report unanimous approval for the proposal.

The letter was received by the College, and the Registrar was asked to prepare a minute expressing thanksgiving to God for this momentous communication.

On 30 November 1972, representatives of the MCD and the Roman Catholic Church met and approved the form of the Bachelor of Theology degree and its four fields of study. The reconstituted MCD Act was accepted by the Victorian Parliament on 5 December 1972. The revision to the Act also made the Doctor of Divinity a "senior" degree, and added a Doctor of Theology to the degrees offered by the MCD.

On 28 February 1973 the reconstituted College met, with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church present for the first time: a most important and significant ecumenical development in the Melbourne College of Divinity and within the churches themselves. At this meeting the College also authorised the Bachelor of Theology to be the first degree taught by the new Associated Teaching Institutions (ATIs) of the MCD.<sup>12</sup>

These decisions marked the beginning of the new phase of development within the MCD. After growing steadily for sixty years, the MCD was now being reshaped, its role as a self-accrediting examining body being complemented by the teaching of degrees through accredited institutions.<sup>13</sup>

#### The Era of the Deans

Under its new and official status as a teaching body, it was deemed advisable that the role of Dean replace that of Registrar at the MCD. Three Deans have served the MCD during the subsequent years: the Revd Dr John A. Henley (1976-90), the Revd Dr Harold Pidwell (1990-2000), and Professor Paul L. Beirne (2001-).

A light skimming over the period 1976-2010 cannot do justice to the fundamental changes that took place in the College during these three and a half decades. Rather, I will cover the more recent period from 1997-2010, most of which I have participated in, as a metaphor for the changes that have taken place, not only in the last 13 years, but in the history of the College as a whole. The heading of the next section could very well be the heading for the history of the College since its inception. I trust that the reader will understand that the period which this section addresses is representative of the challenges and opportunities which have presented themselves to the College since the first meeting of the Committee on the afternoon of 29 December 1909.

## PART TWO

### The Ongoing Quest for Identity

On 1 March 1997, a Conference to explore and shape the future direction of the MCD – the *Towards 2010 Conference* – was held at the University of Melbourne. As a result of the Conference, the governing body, the College, on 19 March 1997, set up a Task Force to examine

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12. Catholic Theological College; Evangelical Theological Association (consisting of Whitley College [Baptist] and Churches of Christ Theological School); United Faculty of Theology (consisting of Jesuit Theological College, Trinity College Theological School and the Uniting Church Theological Hall); and Yarra Theological Union (consisting of several Roman Catholic religious congregations).

13. Sherlock and Beirne, *The MCD – An Historical Overview*, p. 3

and report on seven areas deemed vital to the future development of the MCD. The Task Force worked through four committees: Technology and Distance Education; MCD Libraries; Finance; and Purpose and Role of the College. The Task Force presented a Report to the 24 March 1999 meeting of the College. A major recommendation of the Task Force was to establish a Policy and Development Committee, whose foundation Chair and Convenor was Bishop Andrew Curnow.<sup>14</sup>

On 21 August 2000, the Policy and Development Committee promulgated a Green Paper entitled *The MCD – Toward the Third Phase*. In order to achieve the structural, administrative and physical changes that this required, the Committee offered proposals in three areas:

- Reshaping the academic administration of the MCD into three Boards: Undergraduate Studies, Advanced Ministry Studies, and Postgraduate Studies – the reshaping came about from 2001;
- The Future of the ATI structure – this influenced the 2005 revision of the MCD Act;
- Finances of the MCD and its Colleges – this led to significant changes in fee structures across the MCD.<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, a Draft White Paper was compiled by the Policy and Development Committee, and was presented to the College on 25 October 2001. It was circulated throughout the MCD for comment at a Staff Consultation Day on 1 November 2001.<sup>16</sup>

In 2001, as a result of extended submissions and tenacious work by Dean Harold Pidwell, the MCD was listed by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training as a Schedule 1 Institution, together with Australian universities. This listing enabled the MCD to receive Commonwealth funding to support research in the form of a Research Training Scheme, an Institutional Grant Scheme, Australian Postgraduate Awards and International Postgraduate Scholarships, and Australian Research Council Grants. Commonwealth funding for research increased five-fold in the following eight years.

In the West Review which led to the Higher Education Support Act (2003) the MCD was noted as having a distinctive place as a Higher Education Provider established by a Parliament, yet not being a university. As a result, the MCD was listed as a Table B (private, self-accrediting) institution (along with the two Australian private universities, Bond and Notre Dame).

As a Table B Higher Education Institution, the MCD was scheduled in 2002 for an Audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency: as

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14. Draft White Paper: Policy and Development Committee Minutes 9/10/01.

15. Draft White Paper: P&D Minutes 9/10/01.

16. College Minutes 25/10/01.

noted below, this took place in September 2005, the first such audit of a theological institution and the first of a private Higher Education Institution.

Because of the MCD's changing status in relation to the Commonwealth government, as well the considerable internal changes that were taking place in reshaping the Boards of Study, not all recommendations of the White Paper progressed at this time. At a meeting on 19 July 2002, the Policy and Development Committee posed the following questions: "What is the MCD?" and "What shape should the MCD take in future?" The Committee agreed to replace the initial section of the White Paper with a Vision Statement for the MCD.<sup>17</sup> Other sections of the White Paper progressed through a review of MCD Regulations, which saw significant development in regard to the roles of Chairs of Examiners, Examination Boards and Examination Procedures. A Building Fund Regulation was also introduced to advance the search for a permanent home for the MCD administration.

On 22 November 2003, an open meeting of the Executive Committee, which included Heads of MCD Colleges and a number of specialist invitees, saw draft Vision, Mission, Values and Context Statements composed for the MCD. These Statements, which formed the basis of the first draft of the MCD Strategic Plan, were certified by the (renamed) Policy and Strategy Committee on 20 May 2004 and accepted by the College on 23 June 2004.<sup>18</sup> A restructured Strategic Plan was compiled to accord with an "architectural" rather than "linear" model, that is, with long term goals for Governance, the Academy, Development and Administration (implemented in yearly Operational Plans). This Plan was accepted by the MCD Council on 29 November 2007.<sup>19</sup>

In July 2005 the State Government wrote to the MCD seeking permission to "open" the MCD Act, in order to have it conform to National Governance Protocols. Following an expedited and comprehensive consultation by the Executive across the College as a whole, and working in close cooperation with State government representatives, the MCD (Amendment) Bill 2005 passed both Houses of the Parliament of Victoria on 14 September 2005.

The Objects of the College defined in the Strategic Plan were included in this radical revision of the MCD Act. This Bill instituted a smaller Council to replace the College as the MCD governing body, with a more equitable representation of churches. It established an Academic Board, and introduced "Recognized Teaching Institutions" to teach a specific award, or a range of awards, thereby broadening the

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17. P&D Minutes 19/7/02.

18. College Minutes 23/6/04.

19. College Minutes 29/11/07.

participatory scope of the College.<sup>20</sup> This change bought about consistency among MCD-related Colleges, and allowed the recognition of new ones, notably The Salvation Army Training College.

The Vision, Mission, Values and Object statements and the Strategic Plan served the MCD well in the Audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in September 2005. The MCD AUQA Audit Report was posted on the AUQA Website on 26 January 2006, and the MCD Response to AUQA Recommendations was submitted in June 2007. These two events, the MCD (Amendment) Bill 2005, and the AUQA Audit, which occurred simultaneously in September 2005, assisted the MCD to effect what the 2001 White Paper could not: that is, to define its identity, expressed in its Vision, Mission, Values and Objects as detailed in its Strategic Plan, and yearly Operational Plans.

Based on this definition, and in my role as Dean, I composed a State of the College Paper in June 2006, under three sections: *Where have we come from? – the recent past; Where are we now? – a comparative study; Where are we going? – influences that will direct the MCD in future.* The Paper contained six proposals and one recommendation, namely, *That the Council convene an MCD Summit in December 2006 to discuss issues and challenges facing the College in the immediate future.* The Paper was presented to Council at its meeting on 16 August 2006.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence, Council convened the Summit on 18 November 2006, focussing primarily on the issue of whether or not the MCD should become a Specialist University. A second Summit under the title *MCD 2015* took place on 6 December, 2008.

At its meeting on 26 August 2009, the MCD Council passed a resolution brought to it by its Strategic Planning Committee indicating the intention to seek Specialist University status for the MCD, conditional on the College being able to fund the submission, and that Heads of participating Churches be consulted in this plan to alter the identity of the MCD.<sup>22</sup>

At a reception at Government House on 17 February 2010 to mark the Centenary of the College, the MCD was provided with up to \$100,000 by the Victorian Minister for Education to pursue Specialist University status. The Heads of Churches were consulted about this development in a March 2010 letter from the President and the Dean of the MCD.

It appears that Dean Harold Pidwell and his associates showed a certain prescience in choosing the title *Towards 2010* for the seminal 1997 Conference. The 13 years that followed can be succinctly and

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20. The Melbourne College of Divinity (Amendment) Bill 2005 passed the Legislative Assembly in August 2005, the Legislative Council in September 2005, was signed by the Governor on 11 October, was gazetted on 13 October, and took effect on 20 October 2005.

21. Council Minutes 16/8/06.

22. Council Minutes 26/8/09.

aply described as a quest to define the nature and purpose of the modern Melbourne College of Divinity.

What more fitting way could there be then for the MCD to begin its second century than to embark on the next stage of its journey under a new identity, one firmly embedded in the traditions of its first century, and pervaded and enriched by the spirit of the dynamic relationships which existed from its inception?

### CONCLUSION

In my experience as Dean over a 10 year period, there are many things that stand out, and are outstanding about the Melbourne College of Divinity. I will mention just two of these, as they represent what I consider to be the fundamental nature of this extraordinary institution.

First, is the total commitment of its member institutions – and all those who study, teach and administer within them – to ecumenism. In relation to this commitment, I will offer the view of an outside source, looking at the institution from both a dispassionate and professional viewpoint. In its final summary at the end of the Australian Universities Quality Agency audit of the MCD on 13 September 2005, the Chair of the Audit Panel, Professor Gareth Jones of Otago University made the following comment to the President of the College, Principal Merrill Kitchen, and myself:

When the Audit Panel read in the College's Performance Portfolio of its commitment to ecumenism and how this was lived out in spirit of mutual respect and cooperation between its member institutions, we were all quite sceptical, and agreed that this claim must certainly be exaggerated. At the conclusion of the Audit, having visited all of the Associated Teaching Institutions and spoken with their teachers, administrators and students, we have come to realize that, if anything, this claim is understated.

The commitment to ecumenism is a glowing coal at the heart of the MCD that radiates the vermilion light of grace through, and beyond, the institution.

Secondly, people are passionate about, and passionately committed to, the Melbourne College of Divinity. For those of us who know the MCD, this statement requires no further explanation. Every page of the College's history is shot through with this truth. My deep-felt wish is that a comprehensive history of the MCD will be written in the not too distant future so that the women and men who have served the College since its founding can be given the recognition and the thanks that they so justly deserve.

It has been a great honour to serve the College as Dean in a time of considerable change and challenge, and I am sure that each of the Registrars and Deans who preceded me would express exactly the same sentiment. I consider myself to be very fortunate to have worked with, and been guided by, six Presidents of the College. They are shining examples of what the MCD is really about and I am honoured to call each my colleague and friend. I wish to pay tribute to all those who care passionately about the College, and put this care into action. Too numerous to begin to mention here, their image is reflected in a College that is justifiably proud of its heritage, of its contribution to academic excellence in ecumenical theological education, and of what it has and will continue to offer each student who comes within its portals, that is, the opportunity to be "of God", to listen reverently to the Word of God, and to act consistently on His behalf.

*Ad multos annos*