

# The Professional Status of Teaching

Teaching as a profession is at the crossroads. Recent Federal and State Government Reports (such as the recent report into teacher professionalisation by Dr. Gregor Ramsey in NSW) has shown that although teaching is a profession in terms of the qualifications and expertise necessary to teach, it does not function in the same way as other self-regulating professions e.g. it doesn't set its own standards for entry into, and progression through, the profession. One of the results of this lack of professional functionality is that teachers often don't conceptualise themselves as professionals in the same way as, for example, is common in the legal or medical professions. Moreover, the community as a whole, partly because teachers have not exercised a strong professional voice, views teaching as a lower status profession, if it is viewed as a profession at all. All these factors mean that many teachers feel devalued in their work as professional teachers, which has a detrimental effect on their overall job satisfaction and, potentially, on their performance in the classroom.

## **Teachers Valuing their Work**

While the establishment of a professional structure for teachers (i.e. a body such as the Australian Psychological Association, or the Australian Medical Association) is still some way off, *teacher professional development* is one critical way in

which teachers can enhance their status as professionals in the short term. Teacher participation in professional development expresses to teaching colleagues, students, parents, and the wider community that teachers value their work as professionals, that they are part of a growing profession that incorporates new knowledge as it refines its professional practices, and that teachers are able to act collegially to maintain and improve the standards of their profession.

## **High Quality Professional Options**

For the Christian teacher, this commitment to professional development is doubly important. Christian teachers are faced with the dilemma of not only being part of a profession whose status is in question, but also being seen as a marginalised part of that profession. This, of course, is not true. However, it demonstrates the critical need for Christian teachers to take their professional development even more seriously than their secular colleagues. It is for this reason that the Institute of Christian Tertiary Education (ICTE) is absolutely committed to providing high-quality professional development options to *all* Christian teachers. Currently, we provide three fully accredited degrees in higher education: a *Master of Educational Studies*, a *Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies* and a *Bachelor of Education (Conversion)* course. We have also just submitted a proposal for a full, four-year, Bachelor of Education (Primary/Middle-School Education) course to the government for accreditation, and in the future we

will develop Diplomas of Education for both primary and secondary teachers. In addition, we offer Certificated Short Courses in many areas (including Special Education, Teaching Methods, and Children's Literature).

The most important thing about these courses, however, is that they are all taught from an explicit and well developed Christian educational perspective. This means that all our courses explicitly recognise the sovereignty of God, the exaltation of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, especially (in this context) in the lives of Christian teachers. Moreover, all our courses show Christian teachers what these Biblical understandings mean for them as practicing professional teachers in 'real life' classrooms with 'real life' students. We do not leave Biblical understandings 'hanging' without applying them to the real world of teaching.

All of this means that you as a Christian teacher have access to a Christian tertiary body which is committed to providing you with the resources necessary to enhance your professional standing and practice. More importantly, ICTE does this from a deep conviction that we all serve the one Lord who is worthy of our praise and service. For these reasons I urge you to 'aim for the heights' in your professional development as a Christian teacher. Take the opportunity to develop your gifts and abilities as Christian teacher to their fullest extent. In this way your standing as a professional educator, but more importantly your ability to serve our Lord in, and through, your teaching will be maximized.

Please feel free to call the ICTE for any information or advice you need to take advantage of any of our courses.

***Dr Martin Dowson, ICTE Lecturer***