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Foreword

Christian Faith, Formation and Education is a very welcome and timely addition to the contemporary academic discussion of the role of Christian faith in education. The role of any religious faith in education, especially in more formal education, can, of course, be highly contested and presents a sharp contrast to secular viewpoints of the aims and purpose of education and the focus of educational endeavour. As a number of the authors in the book point out, the debate becomes ultimately focused on anthropological and theological issues: the understanding of what it is to be human, to be a human in the world and the role of Christian faith in this understanding. The chapters in this book propose that there is a role for Christian faith in education and the explanations and examinations of this role are accomplished with conviction and nuanced argumentation.

As with all of the edited collections that provide a series of genuine insights, the different chapters provide original and innovative research, an invigorating diversity of perspective and a variety in the methods of research. The chapters in the book tackle a broad range of themes including: the underpinning and, arguably, foundational concepts and terminology; the role of faith in Catholic schools, universities and adult theological education; promoting agency in learners, interpreting scripture; Christian leadership; Catholic pedagogy and the challenges faced by the new generation of Catholic teachers. The research methods range from various types of theory to empirical studies to drawing on data from a major research project. The book also strikes a good balance between the theoretical, the practical and the professional and this enables the creative and the troublesome tensions to emerge, be identified and be addressed. A number of the authors engage in a close analysis of some of the prevailing modes of thinking and world-views such as: subjectivism; relativism; positivism and neo-liberalism. The authors critically explore and probe these and present vigorous counter arguments and counter positions. Some of the authors consider the thorny issues of the confusing and ambiguous terminology that can be used in discussions of themes such as *faith*, *faith formation*, *faith development* and *Christian Education* and provide a clarification and critical reappraisal of some of these key terms.

The individual chapters in the book are very stimulating and engaging and are characterized by a high level of scholarship. The chapters are very readable and thought provoking. The authors all have different academic histories and come from a variety of disciplines and scholarly backgrounds. Some of the authors also represent important international views on the role of Christian faith in education. It is instructive to reflect on the consonances and dissonances between the experiences in Australia and Canada and the UK. Interestingly, a good number of the authors adopt an interdisciplinary approach to their research and this produces fascinating blends and syntheses of some of the following: theology, philosophy, education, developmental psychology; religious education and biblical studies. This creates an academic richness and sophistication in the positions and arguments adopted in the book, but also demonstrates that Christian faith, formation and education cannot be confined or reduced to a small number of academic disciplines and, indeed, can and must be studied and researched within and between a wide range of disciplines.

This is an edited collection that deserves careful reading, study and reflection and will be an important academic resource for students and academics and all those with an interest in Christian faith, formation and Education. Ros Stuart-Buttle, John Shortt and all of the authors are to be congratulated on producing such a valuable academic work.

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