

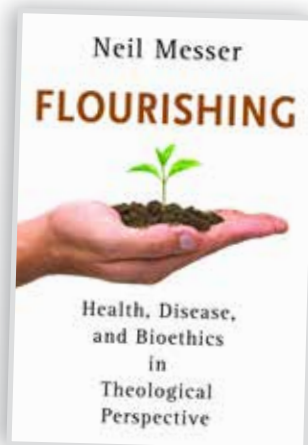
encounter

A Final Word

Dr Rod Thompson | National Principal

Welcome to the final edition of *Encounter* for 2015. In this edition a number of staff write about a book or blog that has impacted them this year. We hope this may give you some reading ideas for your summer holidays and beyond!

What a wonderful year it has been, full of God's grace and our expressions of gratitude, full of challenges and our expressions of petition and perseverance. My term as Principal concludes at the end of 2015. We will be returning to Australia, to live again in Sydney. May I thank all of you who receive *Encounter* for your interest in, and support for, the College.



The Lord calls us to be saints not heroes. I have recently appreciated Neil Messer's book *Flourishing: Health, Disease, and Bioethics in Theological Perspective*¹.

In it he writes: "Part of the inversion of human values brought about by the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is that we are no longer called to be heroes, but saints. That is why – as Jesus tells Peter at the end of John's gospel – a distinctly unheroic death, in which Peter stretches out his hands and is led where he does not want to go, 'can be the kind of death by which he would glorify God (John 21:18-19)'".

May we persevere in our commitment to be saints – Spirit-filled, God-loving, Christ-serving people who trust the Lord throughout our lives.

¹ Neil Messer, *Flourishing: Health, Disease, and Bioethics in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2013) Kindle Edition: loc 1516.

New options for Postgraduate study

In keeping with recent changes to NZQA's definition of Masters degrees, Laidlaw's Master of Theology may now be completed by theology graduates in 180 credits rather than 240 as previously required. This opens up opportunity for accelerated post graduate study. Some students may even find that the Masters degree is now possible within 12 calendar months.

HIGHLY CONFIDENT!

Laidlaw recently underwent an external review by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

NZQA has rated Laidlaw at the highest possible level of Highly Confident and we are now recognised as a **Category One** college in our sector.

We are delighted with this result!

Laidlaw's new website

We'd love you to have a look at our website which went live in July. The site is designed to be more user friendly for those with mobile devices and features some fantastic new video footage which captures the essence of the College. Supporters now have the option to donate to Laidlaw via the website.

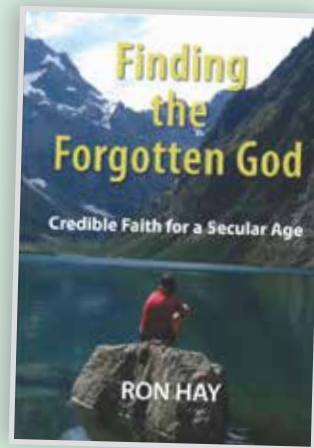
www.laidlaw.ac.nz

Explaining the Christian Faith

Dr Bob Robinson | Senior Research Fellow
(Christchurch Campus)

In recent months I've been selling or giving away dozens of copies of what I think is the best book that explains and defends the faith for Kiwis. The book is Ron Hay's *Finding the Forgotten God*¹ and recent winner of this year's Ashton Wyllie prize for the best NZ book on spirituality.

Part one of the book is about 'Exploring the reasons for faith': 'Is this world all there is?', 'What evidence is there for God?' and chapters on the Bible, Jesus, the cross and resurrection. Part two is about 'Clearing the roadblocks to faith' and offers honest reflection on suffering, science, evolution, other religions, the



'new atheism' and the goodness of God. The third part offers practical guidance on 'Entering the realities of faith' and, most appealingly, includes testimonies of eight New Zealanders coming to faith in Christ.

The tone is distinctively Kiwi – from the lovely cover to its many NZ allusions. I like its intellectual honesty (both the

"calamity of creationism" soundly spanked and the new atheists neatly deconstructed) and there are none of the embarrassing dimensions found in much popular apologetics. The wide research behind the book is tellingly applied even as the style remains clear and appealing. Secular people are unlikely to buy (or even see) this book – so they need to receive it from someone who cares enough to offer it with ongoing prayer and an invitation to talk further. What could be easier than placing this pleasant-to-look-at, readable and 'no-cringe' outline of the Christian message into the hands of our non-Christian friends and family? Buy, read, give and pray!

¹ Ron Hay, *Finding the Forgotten God* (Auckland: Daystar Books, 2014). See the book's website: www.findinggodb.co.nz.

A fuller review of this book will appear in the next edition of Stimulus journal.

The Reason I Jump

Fiona Sherwin | PA to Academic Dean,
Disability Liaison (Henderson Campus)

When we think of people with autism we may assume that if they cannot speak, they cannot think. This assumption is often the furthest from the truth. In *The Reason I Jump*¹ Naoki Higashida invites the reader into his world as a 13 year old living with autism. Although he finds spoken communication almost impossible, he is not mute; in fact he is very articulate. With the help of an ambitious teacher and his own determination, his world has been unlocked through his written word, dictated via his communication board and transcribed by a helper.

This book is profound and impacting. The wisdom and insight espoused by Naoki is beyond what any 13 year old would ordinarily be able to articulate, let alone a young person with autism – a disability that often impedes the ability to live in the world, a world which you and I can navigate, but is confusing



for a person with autism. Often, when we interact with a person with autism, we are uncertain as to what they are thinking. They might seem stressed, for example, because of their behaviours, but Naoki helps us understand the world of autism a little more. In his preface he writes: "You can't judge a person by their looks. But once you know the other person's inner self, both of you can be that much closer. From our point of view, the world of autism must look like

a deeply mysterious place. So please, spare a little time to listen to what I have to say. And have a nice trip through our world." (p 17)

I work with students here at Laidlaw who have a disability or long term illness that impacts their studies. They welcome me into their lives, it is a privileged place. Some of these students are on the autism spectrum. Each are different, but in reading Naoki's perspective I feel a little more equipped.

The book is an easy read. Its format is question and answer, though perhaps Naoki doesn't answer how we would expect. What he does say is certainly worthwhile. If you know of a person on the autism spectrum, then I wholeheartedly recommend this book to you, or perhaps a gift to a parent, grandparent, aunty or uncle who is entering into the world of autism due to a child's diagnosis.

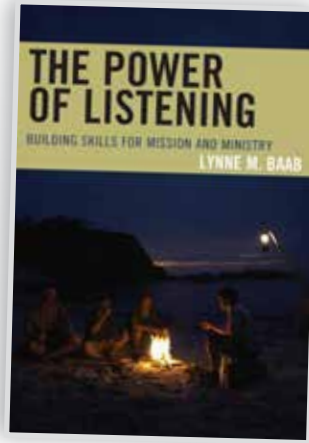
¹ Naoki Higashida, *The Reason I Jump*, translated by KA Yoshida and David Mitchell (London: Sceptre Publishing, 2013)

How are we listening?

Graeme Flett | National Internship Coordinator

*The Power of Listening: Building Skills for Mission and Ministry*¹, is an accessible and hands-on read. Author, Dr Lynne Baab (Senior Lecturer, Theology, Otago University) speaks candidly about the merits of listening and invites pastors, missionaries, lay leaders and congregants to consider more thoughtfully the virtues of listening as an integral characteristic of Christian spirituality. The call “for congregations to be places where good and interested listeners are nurtured” (p.167) lies at the heart of this book. Each of the eleven chapters offers a pathway for enriched conversation around what it is to listen. Congregational life, mission, consensus and discernment, reading scripture and spiritual practices are some of the key areas explored.

If the title suggests this is just a technical book of ‘how-to’s, it camouflages



unintentionally Baab’s deeper pastoral concern. *The Power of Listening* has a prophetic but subtle edge which, I would strongly suggest, presses those thumbing its pages to ask, *how do we listen well?* In a world of on-line noise, we are given mere seconds to process one media bite before the next cuts in. Without a moment to pause, we feel the urge to once again download information. Suffice to say, our mental capacity to stay attentive is squeezed. Baab tackles this reality by offering

multiple angles that call us to think more holistically and comprehensively about listening in view of how Christ-followers might be faithful in their daily interactions with each other.

What I appreciated about this book was the reader’s own authenticity and humility. On occasions, she renders a personal story in order to press a particular point. Her posture invites the reader to thoughtfully consider their own pastoral presence and ask: *do I listen deeply to the other?* Self-reflection and consideration of one’s own listening attentiveness is clearly intended by the author. At the end of each chapter a set of provisional questions are listed to prompt discussion and ongoing reflection. This is complemented further by a list of resources which expand on areas covered in the book. For those involved in any form of pastoral work as well as those managing and leading people, this book has something timely to say.

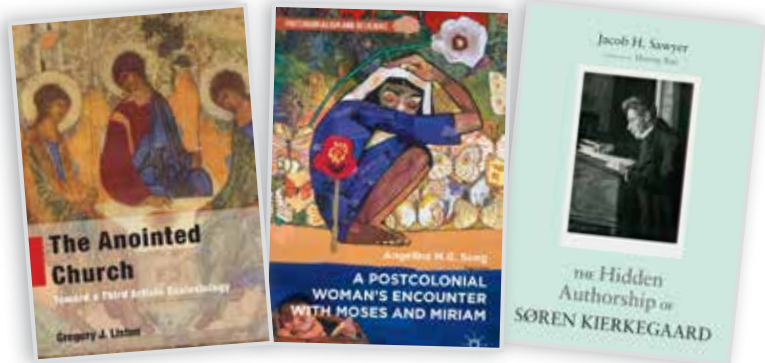
¹ Lynne Baab, *The Power of Listening: Building Skills for Mission and Ministry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014)

Celebration of Research

Dr Martin Sutherland | Academic Dean

Laidlaw is a community of discovery. One of the ways in which the college seeks to serve the Kingdom is in the encouragement of enquiry and publication. Recently we held the second of our “celebrations of research” for 2015. A number of staff spoke of their ongoing interests and forthcoming publications. However it was especially pleasing to acknowledge the appearance in book form of the work of three of our former students.

Greg Liston completed a PhD at AUT University. His thesis was snapped up by Fortress Press and published as *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third-Article Ecclesiology*. “Third Article Theology” characterises an approach that intentionally starts with the Spirit. Over recent decades, Spirit Christology has offered significant insight into the person and life of Christ. Greg’s book



provides the first constructive and systematic ecclesiology developed through the approach of Third Article Theology.

Angeline Song completed a PhD with supervision from Laidlaw, at Otago University. Angeline’s study involves a textual and personal engagement with the story of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 2. In *A Postcolonial Woman’s Encounter with Moses and Miriam* Angeline draws on her own experience to reflect on the significance of this and related stories. In the process she explores new methods of reading which uncover insights previously missed.

Jacob Sawyer completed a Masters thesis on the work of the Danish

Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. So enthusiastic were his examiners that he was encouraged to seek publication of his analysis. The result is *The Hidden Authorship of Soren Kierkegaard*. In this work, Jacob adds a new understanding to the huge scholarship on Kierkegaard by identifying Kierkegaard’s famous use of non-de-plumes to be a key device in his argument.

These three examples from former students combine with staff work on theology and cancer, popular culture, C.S. Lewis and NZ church outreach to demonstrate the rich and varied nature of the culture of discovery at Laidlaw. Something to be celebrated indeed!

Haera Ra!



We have been blessed to have Rod Thompson as our leader for the last 5 years. Rod was commissioned as National Principal in November 2010 and has had an immense and varied workload since then. He is a gifted teacher; his teaching enriching not only Laidlaw students but the wider Christian community. A number of his public lectures were filmed and are now in use as home group resources. He has preached at many churches, spoken at conferences, on radio and Shine TV, and lectured in Bible Colleges overseas.

New initiatives were introduced during Rod's tenure as Principal: a reconnection with our alumni saw the re-starting of an alumni newsletter, and annual gatherings in Auckland and Christchurch; a deeper commitment to supporting those with disabilities saw more assistance offered to those often on the margins, and the running of conferences on disability; and last year the opening of a campus in Manukau was borne out of a desire to further equip the Christians of South Auckland.

Rod has travelled within NZ and beyond to form closer connections with alumni, supporters and other Christian colleges. He has been a mentor to individual students and met regularly with student leaders.

We acknowledge Rod's humility, his wisdom, his commitment to the Gospel and thoughtful reflection on its themes, and his courage during the times when difficult decisions had to be made.

We also honour Rosanne's faithful support of Rod, and acknowledge the sacrifices they both made to uproot from family to move to New Zealand. We pray God's richest blessing on Rod and Rosanne as they head into a new phase of ministry.



Being Authentic

Joel McGeorge | Teacher/Kaiako
(Manukau Campus)

The blog written by Micah Murray, www.micahjmurray.com, is one which has impacted me the most profoundly in the last year. I have appreciated his authenticity and many times this year I've wished more Christians I know would read this blog.

Somewhere along the line, a lot of us seem to have gotten the idea into our heads that we were all created by the Father, Son and Spirit in order that we might become 'good Christians'. Of course, what this actually *means* varies depending on the circles in which you mingle. But it often seems that "fearfully and wonderfully made" is not considered a reality until we have somehow done more than merely being human, and achieved

the appropriate level of 'Christian-ness'. This potentially leads to a lot of exhaustion as we strive to live up to a subculture's expectations around what it means to be a Christian.

Someone who helps me avoid this unnecessary exhaustion is Micah J. Murray. His blog, *Redemption Pictures*, reminds me that it is okay to be human. Micah is refreshingly honest about how hard it sometimes is to be an authentic human: "Becoming human, it turns out, is a lot more difficult than I expected." Sometimes he is painfully honest about his struggles, and his blog is not always the most comfortable reading. But its discomfort is not the kind which leaves you feeling like you will never be a good enough Christian. I have found it more like the kind of discomfort which leads me to look once again at *the human* - Jesus Christ - whose grace is indeed made perfect in our weakness.

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