



ENCOUNTER

*Oh, the joys of those who... delight in the law of the LORD...
They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.*

PSALM 1:2-3



Theological Education ... and Hairdressing:

..... WHAT IS THE FUTURE?

BY DR ROD THOMPSON | NATIONAL PRINCIPAL

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has announced reductions in government funding for a number of tertiary programmes in 2015. Within the next decade funding may well cease. The targeted areas? Christian ministry, theology ... and hairdressing.

What does theology have in common with hairdressing?

TEC's answer, conveyed to us at a recent meeting in Wellington, is that qualifications in theology and hairdressing do not lead to high paying employment outcomes. They are not priority areas in the same way as engineering, IT, and business. They do not meet industry needs.

Studying the Bible? It is for special interest, not skill acquisition. It is for personal enrichment, not high wage employment. The churches should pay. It seems that, for the government, a "good" society is measured in terms of employment statistics and financial income. Human identity is realised through individual work. Human well-being is secured by good wages. Truth, goodness and beauty – three abiding faces of culture – are reduced to the interests of "economism", that is, the idolatry of economic wealth as the purpose of life.

We beg to differ. We value employment. Humans need to work. We also value economic prosperity as one measure of well-being. Humans should prosper economically. But it is not the only measure.

The purpose of human life cannot be understood only in terms of employment.

Human satisfaction cannot be measured merely in terms of wages. And society's goods must be understood as more than economic. A truly good society values justice, love and compassion. Its wealth is measured in terms of good character, faithful relationships, families at peace and neighbourhoods in which violence and abuse have been abolished. Skills cannot be considered "good" unless they are embedded in virtuous human lives – lives of integrity and courage and care and hope.

This is what theology is about. It is about the passionate love of God, neighbour, and God's world. It is about the selfless life and love of Jesus, which changes everything in terms of measuring and then embracing truth, goodness and beauty. If we have no biblical studies and theology; if we have no biblical scholars and theologians – we will become a self-possessed, impoverished and mean society.

We need biblical studies and theological education more than ever before. The churches, this nation, the Asia-Pacific region and the nations of the world need rigorous, Christ-centred, transformational biblical studies and theological education more than ever before. The question is, who will pay? Who will meet the cost of theological education?

Laidlaw College will take a lead in dialogue with government agencies such as TEC, contending for the significance

of theological education. However, we don't believe it is realistic to expect that the New Zealand government, shaped by increasingly secular values, will alter its current trajectory.

What is the future of theological education? It is in the hands of those who recognise how critical it is for the future of this nation. I was recently in Korea visiting with the leaders of the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) in Seoul. This highly influential institution receives only 3% of its funding from the Korean government.

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And this is the case in many countries around the world. Australia and New Zealand have been an exception to the situation in most nations where minimal government funding can be expected for theological education.

Laidlaw College remains totally committed to biblical, theological education that is evangelical (shaped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to which the Scriptures bear unique and authoritative witness), bicultural and intercultural (in response to the Gospel and the Treaty of Waitangi), formational, missional, fuelled by research, raising up leaders for churches, and having an intelligent and courageous voice in the marketplace and public issues of the nation.

Does this quality of theological education have a future in Aotearoa New Zealand?

It is time for all who love the Gospel of Christ and seek to be agents of the kingdom of God to allocate significant funds and resources to theological education. Laidlaw College and tertiary evangelical Colleges of like-mind will increasingly need financial support. We need to raise up a large foundation of investments for the College. We need financial assistance for upgrading IT facilities. We need scholarships for our students. We need alternative income streams to government funding.

Please prayerfully consider giving your support to theological education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

How you can help

- If you would like to make a financial contribution towards the College, please refer to the enclosed response form, or make a direct deposit into the following account: Laidlaw College Inc. 03-0155-0050416-00 (Westpac).
- Please continue to keep Laidlaw College and other New Zealand theological colleges and providers in your prayers.

Where Real Life Begins

HILARY JOHNSTON | GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN THEOLOGY STUDENT AT LAIDLAW COLLEGE

In some ways, I'm still amazed that I decided to study theology. I had always thought that it might be a good idea, but this had paled in comparison to the seemingly more pressing need to get on in life, to travel, start a career, and settle down. However when I reached the end of my degree at Auckland University, I found I was rather unimpressed with my options. I saw myself twenty, thirty years ahead, in a good job, earning a decent amount of money, occasionally travelling, living in a comfortable family, and I suddenly realised that this was a far cry from what I wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but this version of reality seemed unutterably boring.

Deciding to study theology at Laidlaw was probably the best decision I could have made. It was such a detour from where I thought I was heading, and yet it was precisely in this "detour" that I discovered how much bigger and more exciting God was than anything else on offer. More

importantly I realised that God was not some backseat, afterthought triviality that I could inject into a life shaped by cultural materialism and self-centredness. Instead I became convinced that God is a life-giving, exhilarating reality that insists on being a priority, a conviction that has bizarrely widened my options rather than narrowed them. The possibility of living differently, on the margins instead of comfortably, has now become a real and tangible opportunity. I have often wondered about pursuing my love of writing, but it was the confidence that I gained through studying theology at Laidlaw that persuaded me to start acting on this aspiration. This is the only life I have and I want to spend it living in deep relationship with the broken and suffering of this world, giving everything that I have courageously, not opting out for a safe, half-lived life. This, for me, is where the value of theology lies. It is not second to "real life"; it is where real life begins.



GRADUATION 2014

CHRISTCHURCH: Friday 5 December, 7.30pm | Chinese Church, Bryndwr

AUCKLAND: Saturday 6 December, 1.30pm | Trusts Stadium Arena, Henderson

For more details about Graduation, please visit the Laidlaw College website: www.laidlaw.ac.nz

A Marked Faith

NAYLOR OWEN | TUTOR (KAIAKO), MANUKAU LEARNING SUPPORT CENTRE; LAIDLAW GRADUATE (BTH; MTH)

I have a traditional tattoo. Some call it a Pe'a. Traditionally, one who has this tattoo has served his family well and endeavours to live a life marked by some sense of honour. The last time my grandfather travelled from Samoa to come and visit me and my family, he looked around curiously at my lawn and said, "What good is it having a Pe'a, if your grass is long?" Translation: "Lazy men don't wear that tattoo well."

As pointed out by my grandfather, when I decided to be tattooed, I signed up for a different kind of life; a life in which there were certain expectations and realities that I would have to both acknowledge and pursue – even be held accountable to.



Naylor Owen

As Christians, we have signed up for a faith that is holistic. Jesus made that clear from the beginning (Mark 12:30). As such, there is an essential part of our faith that should be marked by intellectual prowess and pursuit. The intellectual aspect is of no more value than other aspects of our faith, but is surely no less valuable or essential either.

In fact, theological education is oftentimes the only arena where various truths about reality (as close as we can get to them) are discovered and shared accordingly – truths that are grasped primarily via Scripture and theological contemplation, scientific method and historic observation. We need people to embrace the challenge of searching the deep and complex areas of our faith and our God, and seek a way to translate these vital truths to a church and a world that needs them. This is why I studied theology at Laidlaw and why I teach it now. Not because I needed to – but because we need to.

The mind is part of Christian worship, reality, and community. To belittle this reality is like having a Pe'a and being lazy – it doesn't reflect a community tattooed by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Theological Education – Why Bother?

CORALIE BRIDLE | MASTER OF THEOLOGY STUDENT AT LAIDLAW COLLEGE

A midlife "moment" is not necessarily defined by a craving for dermal fillers or a red sports car. Sometimes the "moment" ushers in a keen awareness of the lack of breadth and depth in one's theological education. Such was the case for me. Whilst dermal fillers might have dealt beautifully to some external sagging and bagging – it was "filling out" on the inside that was a more urgent priority.

I was raised in the nurturing cradle of a loving family and a faithful church. Within these familial and ecclesial walls, I was confident and secure regarding matters of faith. Whilst some would argue that church is the "real world," I had a sense of myself as living in a "gated community." Inside that community I knew the right answers. On the outside I was less confident. A career in Oncology nursing can knock some of the swagger out of the most ardent evangelical!

So my "moment" has afforded me the gift of an opportunity for sustained

theological enquiry at Laidlaw College. I write the word "gift" with care and deliberation. I have observed sufficient suffering and death to know that glib answers to painful contexts bring no honour to God or humanity. I have witnessed sufficient triumph, peace and hope to know that we do not live in a one-dimensional world. Exploration of these broader dimensions of life makes the study of theology energising and challenging. In short, a theological education has enabled me to synthesise my careful talk and experience of God both within, and beyond, the community of faith. Such an opportunity is a gift received and a gift offered



forward to New Zealand society and the world at large.

It would be foolish to pretend that my investment in theological study is always met with unreserved endorsement. However, my mind, my heart and my wrinkles are in one accord – this is Kingdom work and I'm committed to it for the foreseeable future.

Theological Education for a New Day

DR MARTIN SUTHERLAND | VICE PRINCIPAL ACADEMIC



Theological education is always changing. Not surprising, really. Christians have always recognised the need for serious Bible study and reflection. We have always seen the need to re-examine the way in which we present the Good News of Jesus Christ – new words for different contexts and changing times. The Bible Training Institute, from which Laidlaw eventually grew, was itself a response to a sense that the then available models for training were not adequate. The issue is always under review, no less today than it was in 1922.

Alternatively, we have seen the re-emergence more recently of church-based, perhaps not officially accredited but nonetheless well organised and well taught, classes in Bible and Theology aimed at interested laypeople who are not seeking a formal qualification. This is a welcome trend, genuinely enriching the church landscape in New Zealand.

So what is next? There can be little doubt that local, low cost but well structured, options will continue and prove their worth. At the more advanced levels the challenges facing tertiary education in general will play a big part.

New Zealand is fortunate in having multiple pathways to theological education. Many colleges have been able to access official accreditation and funding, leading to excellent diplomas and degree programmes. If we broaden our context to Australasia there are many choices available, each with their strengths and relative advantages.

What sort of funding options will there be, for both the full-time student and the institutions? What will be the impact of online and flexible models? Will traditional programmes, which require 3-5 year commitments, be replaced by shorter, modular options, in order to meet the needs of diverse students in a rapidly changing environment? Whatever its shape, the success of theological education will be gauged by one measure: does it strengthen the church for God's mission in a new day? All of us involved in such training and education must return constantly to that challenge.



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Hot off the press AND JUST IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS

King David in 2 Samuel - \$30 (plus p&p)

The DVD, "King David in 2 Samuel: Biblical studies in power and love, friendship and betrayal for 21st century disciples", is a must-have Bible study resource made up of six 20-minute talks by Dr Rod Thompson. Exploring how the life of King David can help inform the way we live in our 21st century world of families, schools, workplaces and communities, these talks challenge how we read and understand the Bible, and how the Gospel shapes all of life.

The DVD is intended for use by churches, ministries and small groups. Discussion questions for each session can be found in the accompanying study guide. Go to www.laidlaw.ac.nz/e-store/dvd to order your copy (available from 5 December)!



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