

Groaning and Graduation

Studying for a theological degree can be like the experience of birth. That's the view of the Rev. Dr Rod Thompson, National Principal of Laidlaw College. He said that "birthing is both delightful and agonising" when speaking at the inaugural graduation ceremony of Bishopdale Theological College at Christ Church Cathedral in Nelson on 31 March. Dr Thompson spoke with feeling of the birth of his two granddaughters in the last year. He commented that their lives were birthed out of groaning which is part of the created order that Paul speaks of in Romans 8:22. "New life," he said, will "always be looking for the full future of God's Kingdom."

Dr Thompson's address came after interviews with the five graduating students who expressed some of the same ideas. One spoke of being "petrified" before the first class, and another felt unsure that she would be able to complete three years of full-time study. At times, some of the graduands felt like giving up when inspiration for essays was slow in coming, or when Greek seemed like double dutch. But all of them spoke of the encouragement and support given by tutors and staff throughout their studies, especially when they felt stressed because assignments were due. This was the help they needed to "birth" their degrees.

Ven. Dr Tim Harris, Dean of Bishopdale Theological College, spoke of the importance of education and learning so that students of the College are equipped for ministry wherever their lives take them.

One graduand, Alistair Smith, has been inspired to continue with graduate study because he finds deeper knowledge answers his questions. Rev. Nathaniel Petterson found time to think through some heresies, as well as enjoying the study of God's grace. Rev Zane Elliott and his wife Karen, now ministering in Dunedin, have found that their degree course enables them to say why they believe what they believe. Rev Di Griffin is putting her pastoral care knowledge to practical use in her work.

In the main address of the evening, Dr Thompson spoke of being inspired by the story of Hans and Sophie Scholl, students at Munich University in the early 1940s. They were members of the White Rose group who were arrested by the Gestapo and beheaded. Why? Because they wrote about truth, love and goodness in leaflets that were distributed to oppose Hitler's Nazi regime. Dr Thompson urged his listeners to follow the example of the Scholls in being aware of the goodness of God, while struggling with lies, deception, and violence.

Dr Thompson's final advice to the graduates was that as agents of the Kingdom of God, they should be "incisive and intelligent for the church and for the world. Celebrate goodness, and confront all things with grace," he urged.

Bishop Richard Ellena presented the graduands with their formal degree documents, and those who are priests were given a Bishopdale preaching scarf.

The worshipful ceremony also included a moving mihi from Ven. Andy Joseph, Rev. Dr Graham O'Brien singing *The trumpet shall sound*, an aria from Handel's *Messiah*, and readings on wisdom from Proverbs (8: 1-11) and 1 Corinthians (1:20-31). Prayers were led by Bishop Derek Eaton, whose vision led to the foundation of the College.

From

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