

encounter

The Unfolding Mission

Dr Roshan Allpress
National Principal/CEO

Between the 1787 circulation of *A Proposal for Establishing a Protestant Mission in Bengal and Behar*, that argued that the East India Company should allow Christian clergy to minister outside European enclaves in the subcontinent, and the founding in 1799 of the *Society for Missions in Africa and the East* (later renamed the Church Missionary Society), a new vocational pathway emerged – that of the professional missionary.

Prior to this, of course, Christians travelled and lived amongst other cultures in a “missionary spirit” as they carried on the perennial work of spreading the Gospel, but it was near the end of the eighteenth century that the word “missionary” became a noun in English. The timing was no accident. It coincided with the beginnings of persistent circumglobal military and mercantile shipping, and it sparked a new kind of organisation – the missionary society – that began to experiment with ways to provide the necessary support for Gospel-bearers to live across oceans and cultures.

New Zealand was a critical site in the early development of the modern missionary movement. The small missionary band who left England in 1809 and finally settled in the Bay of



Islands in 1814 established arguably the first “successful” settler colony in the English-speaking world supported by a missionary society and with mission as its primary aim. Focused efforts ensured that the gap between developing a written form for Māori and the translation, printing and distribution of select books of the Bible was only a few years. As the efforts of European missionaries began to bear significant fruit during the 1830s, followed by waves of conversions led by Māori missionaries, lessons learned in New Zealand were fed back into the projects of missionary societies around the world. Here, as elsewhere, in response to the increasing entanglement of the settler churches with the imperial project, it was a few farsighted leaders of missionary societies who began transitioning the churches under their care to indigenous leadership – laying a critical foundation layer for the growth of today’s majority-world churches.

The flourishing of these roots of mission in New Zealand continued in the twentieth century – not least with the

founding of dedicated institutions to equip people for mission, including the Bible Training Institute in 1922 that is now Laidlaw College. Many thousands of well-trained, professionally-supported missionaries were commissioned from churches in New Zealand for service around the world.

The need for intercultural mission remains, with the mission-field far more accessible than it was at the turn of the nineteenth century. Not even a missions-trip flight away – our local schools, supermarkets, neighbourhood barbecues, even our churches, are opportunities for us to intelligently and humbly do the work of translating the Gospel for new hearers of many cultures, including Māori and Pākehā. In the twenty-first century, New Zealand is now a net recipient nation of global missions work – with more missionaries arriving here every year from Asia, Africa and the Pacific, to reach a society, including many who have grown up immersed in church culture, who need to hear afresh the good news that demands to be shared.

As Jesus said, “the harvest is plenty, but the workers are few” (Matt. 9:37). Pray and partner with us, as we remain committed as a College to the work of preparing and sending men and women for the work of mission – here and around the world – as “missionaries” in the traditional sense, and in new Gospel-shaped vocations that our eighteenth-century forebears could not have imagined.

Mission Now: From and Within Aotearoa New Zealand

Our best educated guess identifies 1,500 workers in mission today from and within Aotearoa New Zealand (depending on how you define “mission”). In the 1970s we were fêted for being the largest sender of foreign missionaries in the world... *per capita*¹. Today on the world stage that is no longer the case. According to the latest reports, the largest sender of missionaries (per capita of church members in the nation) is actually Palestine!² Calculated against the Christian population in each country³, our missionary percentage per statistical Christian is 80 per 100,000, compared with South Korea at 140 per 100,000, USA at 55 per 100,000 and Brazil at 30 per 100,000.

So many variables exist that render statistical manipulations like these a curiosity at best. They are a remnant of a bygone era of modern industrialisation—an invention of the colonial impulse. Mission today is moving away from the numeric objectification of people and nations. A fresh look at Scripture and pre-modern Church history reveals a much more interpersonal mission mandate. We are to go into all the world to make disciples⁴. I am convinced that by this

Jesus meant we are to invite people everywhere into the community of the Kingdom and teach them how to live out the ethics of the Kingdom (empowered by the Holy Spirit) in whatever way that community is best socially manifested in their part of God’s earth.



Mission from and within Aotearoa New Zealand participates in this Great Invitation alongside every nation in the world where Christ is known. The Gospel takes root in the cultural ‘soil’ of every land and sprouts forth in a unique way according to the cultivation of the narrative of Christ at work in their midst. So, we have a unique testimony to share alongside the many authentic gospels in the world, and therein lies our mission responsibility. God continues to call Jesus-followers of our nation to follow wherever He leads, to bear witness to God’s goodness in our midst with those who do not know Christ. That witness

is personal but it is also national and international, and it is shaped by our values.

Today’s realities of globalisation and migration mean that ‘others’ are coming to our land with their unique witness to the gospel, shaped by their values. They have much to teach us if we have ears to hear. If there is one thing I treasure from over 25 years’ involvement in international missions service it is what I have learned about God from brothers and sisters who live in worlds very different from mine. Mission today means being willing to embrace and celebrate differences in gospel perspectives and practices, while recognising that we are all citizens of the same Kingdom under the same Lord.

If we can show the world the reality of John 17:18-23 by our love, not just for one another but also for ‘others’ who follow Christ, the world will know the Father lovingly sent the Son.



Dr Jay Matenga Wood
Director, Missions Interlink NZ

¹ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/missions-and-missionaries/page-7>. Although this is often stated, I have not found an original source or evidence for this. I understand it arose from one of the earliest editions of Operation World.

² Johnson, T. M., and G. A. Bellofatto. 2013. Christianity in Its Global Context: 1970-2020. In *Society, Religion, and Mission*. South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. P76

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_by_country, which at least allows us to compare like with like.

⁴ Matt 28:19

Studying with an eye to mission

Jenny Mackie
Alumni Coordinator/Student Dean



While Kiwis often head to Nepal to trek the Himalayas, Laidlaw student Abigail Alcorn flew to Kathmandu for an entirely different reason. Midway through her Teaching degree, Abigail took up the opportunity offered to students to

spend a practicum in a development setting instead of a New Zealand school. She spent a term at the Kathmandu International Study Centre (KISC), a Christian school supporting families who live and serve in Nepal. With an interest in overseas mission, it was a chance for Abigail to explore what it would be like to teach in a mission school.

The choice of country was not random. Abigail spent her primary school years in Nepal where her parents served with International Nepal Fellowship. At intermediate age she was herself a pupil of KISC. After two weeks observing in various classrooms, she spent seven weeks with a Year 2 class of 20 children from a variety of countries, their

Australian teacher and Nepali teaching assistant. The teacher was excellent and Abigail found it a hugely formative time, coming away “with a lot of confidence that I could do it”. The opportunity to reconnect with the school, Nepal and Nepali food was an added bonus!

Abigail’s interest in overseas mission is reflected by other Laidlaw students who embark on short or longer term missions trips while studying. To provide the opportunity to engage with global needs and to integrate missions experience into students’ studies is one way that we continue to pursue the vision of Robert Laidlaw, Joseph Kemp and others who founded our college.

Returning from and to Mission

Dr John de Jong
Lecturer – School of Theology

In 2005, my wife Rebecca and I, with Adam (2) and Grace (10 months) left New Zealand and made our home in Yangon, Myanmar. While there we were blessed with two more children, Sarah and Charlotte. For twelve years we were involved in local church ministry and theological education. I was the Old Testament and Hebrew lecturer and head of biblical studies department at Myanmar's leading interdenominational seminary. It was a major chunk of our lives - challenging, at times difficult, full of surprises, yet as we look back we thank God for such a privilege. We saw God at work in a young, vibrant and growing church. Everything was not perfect but, then, the entire New Testament is a collection of documents that were written addressing problems in young and growing churches.

Returning to New Zealand has posed its own challenges for our family.



John de Jong with Myanmar students

New Zealand has changed but, even more so, we have changed and are different than the people who left 13 years ago. We are so thankful to God for the opportunity to teach at Laidlaw College this year. I am teaching Old Testament, Hebrew and "Intercultural Studies: Introduction", which is an introduction to missions in the modern world. Mission has changed so much over the last 100 years. The Christian church is now ecumenical in the true sense that it exists all over the entire inhabited world. The classical missionary image of westerners (often in pith helmet) taking the Gospel to non-westerners is a thing of the past. Although the USA still sends out the most missionaries, the next biggest sending nations are now Brazil, South Korea, and India, and most Christians now live in the non-Western world. Mission is now from everywhere to everywhere. Modern migration means

that intercultural mission no longer requires leaving your country. And those who are called to overseas missionary service now need to think long and hard about how they will partner with the church that is quite likely already established in the place they want to go. It is a new world for modern missions.

I consider my missionary experience indispensable for teaching about missions today. Firsthand experience means that the significant issues in missions and mission studies are not abstract or simply academic topics. It is exciting to integrate this experience with the insights of other practitioners and academics in preparing Christians for missionary service here, there and everywhere.

Why does God call us to be an intercultural church?

We call ourselves a *multicultural society* and while we acknowledge that there are challenges which come as people of differing customs and worldviews work and learn together, publicly we are generally positive about the journey.

The reality for many of us, however, is that in our discretionary time we still choose to hang out with those similar to us. While there is nothing wrong with this in one sense - we all need a space where we feel 'safe' to be ourselves - this way of being spills over into the church. I have visited many churches where leaders enthusiastically called themselves

'a multicultural church' - with people of other ethnicities in their midst - but nothing has changed in the way they meet and worship together.

Part of the Lord's Prayer taught by Jesus asks, "Your Kingdom come..." What would this look like if God's reign was fully evident now? We are given glimpses in scripture of what that Kingdom will be:

After these things I looked, and there was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9)

Do we really desire to see an answer to this prayer? Surely, as one expression of God's Kingdom on earth, affirmation of cultural diversity and inclusion in a Christian community is something we want to be intentional about.

Many of us, as church leaders in New Zealand, come from a predominately western background. We see what God is doing in this country, and we applaud the opportunities this opens up. We have a deep desire to see our churches lead the way in inclusivity and interculturally healthy ways of being. *But how do we do this?*

The upcoming conference "*Intercultural Church: Becoming One People*" (see *ad over*) is a safe place to hear one another's stories, to build relationships with others on a similar journey, to learn and to be encouraged. As a church leader, I am looking forward to be better equipped for this exciting season we are in!



Rev Christine Harding,
Ministry Team, Discovery
Christian Centre and Member
of Laidlaw College National
Governing Council

Snapshot of a BTI Missionary – Sir Norman Perry

Dr John Hitchen
Honorary Research Fellow

There is no simple way to adequately summarise the contributions to mission made by the graduates of BTI/BCNZ/Laidlaw across 96 years. There are enough stories of faithfulness and sacrifice to fill a library, so one exemplar will have to suffice – that of Sir Norman and Lady Phyllis Perry, and the role they played in mission among Māori in Aotearoa.

BTI graduates were serving as missionaries on every continent within three years of the first graduation in 1923, with the hundredth overseas missionary commissioned just before founding Principal, Joseph Kemp, died in 1933. These achievements stirred BTI leaders to ask: is it right to do so much mission from New Zealand, at the comparative expense of mission in New Zealand, including among Māori?

James Black, one of the first graduates of 1923, had commenced work amongst Māori in the Otaia district near Opatiki, East Coast, until ill health forced him to return to Auckland in 1935. In 1935-36 BTI founded the *United Maori Mission (UMM)*, with BTI staff, William J. Mains as Director and J. Oswald Sanders as Deputy Director. James Black and his wife joined the inaugural Council. Two 1935 graduates, Miss Gwyn and A. Jock Peterson with his wife Jean, together with D. Norman Perry, were accepted as the first UMM missionary candidates.

Norman Perry (1914-2006) accepted Christ at the 1933 Ngaruawahia Convention and entered BTI in 1936, offering himself as a UMM candidate during his studies. On graduation he married Phyllis Conway (grad 1935), the

daughter of H.S Conway of the China Inland Mission. The Perrys had begun work at Black's previous station at Otaia by early 1938.

They quickly gained acceptance amongst local Ringatu communities. By September 1939, a "Maori Prayer Fellowship" had been established to support the work, and *Mahi Tahi*, "Workers Together" had been adopted as the Otaia work's motto. They were strongly committed to developing "indigenous churches", drawing on Roland Allen's writings for their model.¹ By 1939 Norman had established personal contact with Apirana Ngata, and served as his secretary for his "Tribal Work Party" until around 1950.

World War II interrupted the work, and Norman was invited by the Māori Battalion to serve as their YMCA Secretary. He was joined by another BTI grad, Charley Bennett, as the only Pākehā in the Battalion. Seriously wounded at Cassino in 1944, he returned home and moved into Presbyterian Māori work, providing significant leadership in its Māori Synod and wider church, and in 1964 became only the third lay person to be appointed Presbyterian Moderator.

He served the church globally as a member of the International Laity Committee of the World Council of Churches, led an Ecumenical Church Vietnam Peace Mission, and in association with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, initiated peace talks between Buddhists and Christians in North Vietnam in 1965. Norman actively participated on local and government bodies, chairing the East Coast Development Council (1970-80); and serving on the Ministerial Committee on Violence (1986-87), and the Roper Commission on Prison Reform (1987-89). His Knighthood was awarded for services to the community and Māori people in 1977.²

He set up a garment factory to help Māori into employment in Opatiki, and



under his guidance, *Mahi Tahi* became a Government recognised Trust committed to introducing Māori prisoners to their own culture as an essential step away from recidivism.

Sir Norman and Phyllis Perry illustrate the way mission commitment, nurtured by their studies at BTI, expanded into a lifetime of influence at the heart of our nation's church and societal life, and in its international relations, driven steadily by Gospel response to need in our bicultural nation. Large-hearted, but well-grounded contributions such as this give good reason to ponder the focus of our own lives.

¹ Petersons & Perrys, Editors, *Mahi Tahi*, Number 1, September 1939.

² Details of his church and community work are drawn from: Presbyterian Church, Obituary, August 2006, 'Sir Norman Perry Kt., MBE: A mighty totara has fallen.'

INTERCULTURAL CHURCH
Becoming One People
Friday 11 May 2018
6-9pm
Saturday 12 May 2018
9:30am - 3pm
Laidlaw College Henderson campus
To find out more and to register:
www.laidlaw.ac.nz/events/intercultural-church

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