

Hoodwinked

This Is a Missions Program!

By JAY MĀTENGA

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The year is 1990. My new wife and I sat in the backseat of a car, returning home from our Pacific island honeymoon in Rarotonga. Driving the car was an elder from our church, a good friend who chauffeured us from the airport to our first home as husband and wife. Aside from the usual life changes, getting married also required me to get a passport. It was my first time outside of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Before this, I had no interest in leaving the country. I felt called to serve here at home.

I met my wife, Pauline, in 1988 at Faith Bible College, a small disciple-training school in Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand, 1,473 miles due south of Fiji. We had the same classes, except for the electives. Pauline took all the missions electives in anticipation of a short-term placement in the Philippines, followed by carrying Bibles into China from Hong Kong as part of the school's six-week practicum. I, on the other hand, planned my elective subjects around avoiding the missions classes, even to the point of signing up for Women in Ministry, the only alternative elective at one point on the timetable. For the six-week summer practicum, I served a fledgling youth ministry in a small country town.

Our different ministry aspirations proved unable to keep us apart. We simply assumed God would lead us one way or another, and so we set the future aside. With our honeymoon bags packed in the trunk and us sitting close in the backseat, our elder friend swiveled in the driver's seat and thrust a three-fold photocopied pamphlet into each of our hands. The front fold read something like, "Discover God's Plan for the World... and Your Part in It." Initially, I was intrigued. I've always been attracted to the big picture. Moreover, Pauline and I were eager to discover God's plan for our newly unified lives.



Our friend turned back to the wheel. As he pulled away from the curb, he looked at us in the rear-view mirror and blithely noted, "I've already signed you up. Because of your vacation, you've missed the first two weeks, but I'm sure you'll be able to catch up." I flipped the front page open and read the course blurb. It was as cunningly worded as the front, but it didn't fool me. "Wait," I complained. "This is a *missions* course. I'm not interested in doing a *missions* course."

The way I remember it, my new bride jabbed my leg, looked up at me, batting her eyelashes, and appealed, "Aw, go on... it'll be fun." I was hoodwinked, shanghaied, caught between a protagonist and an ally. What choice did I have?! It turned out that our driver was teaching the course—*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. The New Zealand edition was 21 weeks long. It was the start of winter. Our elder friend was Michael Simkin, a pioneering mobilizer for WEC International in New Zealand. In that car, God changed the course of our lives.

Perspectives (as the course is affectionately named) was introduced to Aotearoa, New Zealand, in 1987 by a local Pentecostal church pastor who had taken the course in the USA. The pastor encouraged another leader in the church, Don Cowey, to go to Pasadena, take the course, train as a coordinator, and bring it back to New Zealand. Don, an architect who served in missions, had a passion for starting a missionary training school.¹ While Don taught the first class using the official study guide in 1987, he asked a student in the first cohort of 45 to adapt the course for a wider New Zealand audience.

¹ Interview with Bob Hall, "Global Perspective Grabs New Zealand," in *Mission Frontiers*, March–April 1990. www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/global-perspective-grabs-new-zealand.

That student was Bob Hall, a sociology professor at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. In a 1990 interview, Bob confirmed that the first cohort of 45 grew in 1988 to 200 over six courses, in 1989 to 600 in 20 courses, and, by 1990 my wife and I were two of 1,200 people in one of 40 courses around the nation.²

Not long after Bob accepted responsibility for (re) designing and administrating what became the “South Pacific Perspectives Study Programme,” he recruited Michael Simkin to assist with the development of a new Centre for Mission Direction (CMD), with a vision to “awaken those who are asleep to mission... mobilize those who are awake to mission... and support those who are moving in mission.” CMD became a major influence for missions in Aotearoa, New Zealand, between 1988 and 2006. Out of their homes, Bob (in Christchurch, South Island) and Michael (near Wellington, North Island) promoted and distributed all manner of missions awareness materials including the Perspectives courses, Caleb Project, Joshua Project, Adopt a People, Global Mapping material, Patrick Johnstone’s World A, B and C material, AD2000 (and Beyond), 10/40 Window, Destination 2000 (Sjogren), and Catch The Vision (Stearns) content, Global Prayer Digest, Brigada news, Friday Fax, and many other missions books, journals, and teaching videos.³ CMD also maintained a comprehensive contact database of missionary organizations sending from and ministering within Aotearoa, New Zealand. Although they wholeheartedly endorsed the development of Perspectives, CMD’s resourcing sat uncomfortably with some leaders of the New Zealand Evangelical Missionary Alliance (NZEMA, renamed Missions Interlink in May 1999). Nevertheless, NZEMA’s member agencies welcomed CMD’s ministry because it provided a much-needed boost to a waning missions vision in local churches.

In 1994, Pauline and I opted for a ix-month placement with our local church as part of our undergraduate education at the Missionary Training College in Tasmania.⁴ This allowed us to learn from and assist Michael Simkin and CMD. By that stage in our missions vision, we felt

² Interview with Bob Hall, “Global Perspective Grabs New Zealand.”


³ The CMD website is no longer active, but an archive of CMD’s vision and core services remains online: christian.net/pub/resources/mission3.html.

⁴ The WEC Missionary Training College in Tasmania is now known as Worldview Centre for Intercultural Studies.

that God was calling us to mobilization, a relatively new missions ministry promoted in Perspectives by Ralph Winter. It was just starting to catch on in the early/mid-1990s. In 1995, we were accepted by WEC International to serve at the sending base in Auckland, New Zealand, in administration and mobilization, continuing our work with CMD and coordinating the Perspectives courses in the upper North Island region.

In 2000, I became Director of the Pioneers New Zealand (PNZ)’s mobilization office, shoulder-tapped by one of our Perspectives students who was PNZ’s administrator. We continued to be involved with Perspectives while serving Pioneers until 2015. It was then that I was invited to lead Missions Interlink NZ, with the remit both to help its members position themselves for a new era of missions from and within Aotearoa, New Zealand, and to encourage interagency collaboration to strengthen participation in God’s mission. In 2020, I was invited to lead the World Evangelical Alliance’s Mission Commission.

In everything Pauline and I do for missions, we remain committed to the calling that first emerged in 1990 from our Perspectives reflections. The core of that vision is to strengthen participation in God’s mission, but not the way missions has been done in the past. From 1974–2014, enormous momentum grew for a certain vision of God’s mission, but it is time for a shift of ... perspective.⁵ Perspectives still influences much of my missions thinking, even as I have moved on from many Western biases. Within my local and global networks, we are in a careful process of reimagining missions in light of a maturing world Christianity. Pray for us.

I am honored to be among a cohort of hundreds of New Zealanders out of the thousands of students who were motivated into cross-cultural missions by the South Pacific Perspectives Study Programme. The fact that I serve in and from Aotearoa, New Zealand, with a frequently stamped passport is not lost on me. Through Perspectives, I caught Pauline’s heart for God’s purposes among the nations. As God did with me, let us pray for the Spirit to “hoodwink” new generations into serving God’s purposes in fresh ways for a world in desperate need of the gospel. 

⁵ For more on this period, see Harold Fickett, *The Ralph D. Winter Story* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012).