

**'do not turn a deaf ear to
the cry of
these
islands...'**

**Learning from History:
John Macfarlane's
leadership context,
crises & contribution**

by J.C.K. Daniel

**A Mission Possible Resource in
the *Leading Well* series**

MISSION POSSIBLE

**Leaders helping leaders
in the flow of God's love to the world**



Rev John Macfarlane c1808 - 1859

**LEADING WELL: LEARNING FROM HISTORY -
'Do not turn a deaf ear to
the cry of these islands' – PART I**

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A Mission Possible Resource in the '*Leading Well*' series

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Preface

‘The one thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history!’¹

History offers us the opportunity to learn from the experience of others. While we cannot change the past, we can change our reading of it, with the potential to invest in our present in ways that leave a legacy of positive consequences for those that follow us. The Reverend John Macfarlane took seriously the Biblical narrative, the stories of his Tradition, and the accounts of returning missionaries at the Scottish Kirk’s General Assembly. It eventually led him to Aotearoa New Zealand. The rest as they say is history!

In this two-part volume, our task has been to allow Macfarlane to ‘tell’ his story; as we outline and evaluate his influence on Aotearoa in the period 1840-44. It is our premise that we as ministry and mission leaders, the church, and our nation can benefit from sitting awhile at Macfarlane’s feet. In a sense we are learning again of the treasures in leadership gifted to us as a nation.

The first paper, Part I, outlines Macfarlane’s context, crises, character and contribution, and explores how this might inform and challenge us in our own context. It concludes with a worksheet section (Appendix A, page 20) to aid reflection and learning; a Timeline of Macfarlane’s ministry in Aotearoa (Appendix B); and a select Bibliography. In the Part II that follows, Rev Te Kaawa narrates Macfarlane’s quite significant and largely untold engagement with Maori in his inimitable style.

We have sought to let Macfarlane speak, as much as possible without embellishment or undue criticism. However, we confess this is a draft and we are still learning. We share our bias in viewing Macfarlane through our 21st century eyes, with the benefit of hindsight, and our own ‘missionary motivation’ – that we may ‘learn from history’...

May you be encouraged as you read, be inspired to ‘grow and tell’ your own story, and equipped to write the Church’s and perhaps your nation’s future history.

If you want to share with us your feedback, insights, or your own story, or require our help, or simply want a copy of this resource, please click on this link: nme@maxnet.co.nz.

God bless you as you journey,

John Daniel
Dunedin, April 2013

¹ Allan Davidson, in a lecture on *Christianity in Aotearoa*, St John’s College, Auckland, 1996.

PART I

Rev. John Macfarlane

First Presbyterian Minister in New Zealand (1840-44)

The Context and Contours of his ministry, and what we might learn from his Challenges, his Character, Contribution and Crisis.

A Moment in History

It is Sunday 5 April, 1840. The sun shines on a beautiful day as the bell-bird calls a congregation of approximately thirty people together on Pito-one beach in New Zealand. Prominent in the group is the officiating clergyman, of ‘medium height’ and ‘in the vigour of manhood’.²

The Rev. John Macfarlane, first minister of the Martyrs’ Parish Church, Paisley (from 22 July, 1836 till responding to the Church’s call to accompany the first Scottish Colonists to New Zealand on board the *Bengal Merchant*) had walked onto the stage of Aotearoa New Zealand history.

The brightness of that day however belied the squalls of that restive summer. Symbolically, they also belied the storms the settlers had left behind, and those to be faced by Macfarlane during his brief but eventful ministry in this fledgling Dominion.

Context: The push and pull of Colonist motivation

The Push

Belich tells us that Europe in the 18th and 19th Centuries was ‘exploding outward in one of the most phenomenal expansions in human history’.³ This expansion took the form of contact, settlement and Empire. It involved both commerce and Christianity. At the same time, the effects of the French Revolution reverberated, while Enlightenment literature and thinking were receding under the ‘radicalism of anti-establishment voluntarists...Nothing was what it seemed’.⁴ Whilst the middle classes proclaimed their new values of profit, property and achievement, the working classes groaned

² For a full description of the service see the report by a participant who had arrived on the *Adelaide* on 7 March, 1840) as quoted in J.R.Elder, *The History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, (Christchurch: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1940) 29f. Also see Charles P Littlejohn, Ed, *St Andrews, The First 150 Years*, (Wellington: St Andrews on The Terrace, 1990) 3.

³ James Belich, *Making Peoples* (Auckland: The Penguin Press, 1996) 115.

⁴ Peter Matheson, ‘1840-1870: The Settler Church’, in *Presbyterians in Aotearoa, 1840-1990*, Dennis McEldowney, Ed (Wellington: The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1990) 15f.

under the effects of urban overcrowding, joblessness, hard labour for poor pay and other effects of the Industrial Revolution.

In the Church, evangelicalism and missionary enterprise revived. However, the Church of Scotland (as so often in her history) was engaged in a fierce controversy with the law-courts and the state (the ‘Ten-Years Conflict’) that culminated in the Disruption of 1843.⁵ At the same time, ambitious ‘Church extension’ projects were undertaken at home and abroad, with Scotland experiencing the building of many churches in rapidly growing areas in the early 1800’s, the Martyrs’ Parish Church being one. Simultaneously, an increasing gulf was developing between the Church and the working classes.

The Pull

Equally, visions of a new ‘land of promise’, with one class of people, and the desire to ‘better oneself’, drew the pioneers.⁶ The stories of Captain Cook’s voyages, Hongi Hika’s visit to England (1820), the writings of Dr Arthur Thomson,⁷ and E.G.Wakefield’s lectures (1836) and his 422 Page *British Colonisation of New Zealand*, were influences. The Colonial Office and the New Zealand Company also played a significant part, with the latter pushing ahead ‘with more zeal than discretion’ with ‘plans for developing the infant settlement’.⁸

Hardly surprising that the totally unprepared settlers’ hopes of an ‘earthly paradise - a smiling land’ sank in the marshes of Pito-one, and prompted historian Alexander Marjoribanks’ description of a ‘barren...inhospitable shore’⁹ following their arrival on 21 February, 1840.

A Historical Fulcrum

As Macfarlane and “flock” aboard the *Bengal Merchant*, cried as Scots-in-exile ‘How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’,¹⁰ they were probably unaware of arriving at an important historical ‘fulcrum’:¹¹

⁵ The Disruption of 1843 in which more than 400 ministers left the Established Church of Scotland to form the Free Church - The conflict was over the system of Church Patronage, which the evangelical, ‘Non-Intrusionists’ in the Church opposed in favour of democratic election [of ministers] and government.

⁶ Belich, 328ff, discusses five variants of ‘getting on’ which he sees as a universal migrant motive. Also Ibid, 298, for the New Zealand Company’s use of ‘Land of Promise’.

⁷ Dr Thomson, a respectable scientist who had written his thesis in Edinburgh on the racial effects of climate, was a ‘convincing publicist’ of New Zealand’s salubrious climate for Anglo-saxons. See Belich, 299f.

⁸ Elder, 27, describes the large areas of land purchased (within a week) on questionable terms from the Maoris, for disposal to the emigrants on their arrival.

⁹ Alexander Marjoribanks, *Travels in New Zealand*, 11f, primary document excerpt in Littlejohn, 2.

- They were the third ‘wave’ of Europeans to populate New Zealand.¹²
- The lawlessness of whalers, the antics of Baron de Thierry, and perhaps the self-interest of Busby had led to the Declaration of Independence (October 1835).
- 1830 had seen the beginning of mass Maori engagement with Christianity and literacy,¹³ and from 1835, a proliferation of Churches and mission stations.
- The Treaty of Waitangi had just been signed (6 February, 1840).

The New Zealand pioneers of the Presbyterian tradition with their own form of government, emphasis on the Word, on education, social issues, on grace and faith, and the sovereignty of God, had become the first settler church, and John Macfarlane the first Minister to the settlers.

Challenge and Response: Conflicts of Tradition, Culture and Convenience.

Pioneering life was very demanding for most of the settlers. The church was in a new environment, trying to recreate its institutions; establish, recruit, train and maintain its ministry; erect church buildings and schools; organise its constitutional structure; offer services of worship, education and pastoral ministry to the community.¹⁴

Macfarlane faced many challenges. History does not record his responses with the image of success that is associated with Burns and Cargill and the later settlement in the Settlement in the ‘Geneva of the South’ (ie Dunedin/Otago). Nor does it associate him with the ‘muscular Christianity’ of others such as Bishop Selwyn. The extant primary material describes the realities of the early pioneer settler life, the successful planting of the Scottish church, the challenges and opportunities of the mission field, pleas for support and more workers from ‘the Church of our Fathers’, and the illness and other costs of his extraordinary workload.¹⁵ What follows is an outline of these areas of challenge and response, success and disappointment.

¹⁰ Peter Matheson, *From Scotland with Aroha*, (Wellington: Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1988) 8ff, describes well the predicament of the settler church. cf, Elder, 28.

¹¹ Belich, 115f, notes ‘stories of Maori-European relations are usually balanced on the fulcrum of 1840...’

¹² Sealers, Whalers and Traders being the first (late 18th Century), Missionaries from 1814 (Marsden) onwards being the next, and finally settlers. See Claudia Orange, ‘The Maori People and the British Crown (1769-1840)’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, Keith Sinclair, Ed (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1993) 24.

¹³ Belich, 217, notes the impact of the freed Maori slaves spreading the Gospel following Hongi Hika’s death. He maintains ‘Peace brought Christianity...’ - an arguable point.

¹⁴ A.K.Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand*, (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991) 28.

¹⁵ John Macfarlane, ‘Letter to the Rev Dr Welsh’, 23April 1841, *The Home and Foreign Missionary Record*, November 1841, p.404; and also *ibid*, 26April 1841, p.405, records his challenges, his responses, and his pleas to the parent church.

The Initial realities

The *Bengal Merchant* dropped anchor at Port Nicholson on the 21 February 1840. The difficulties of the voyage, culminating in the relief of arrival, were countered by the disappointing marshes of Pito-one and thoughts of 'home'. Macfarlane responded to the moment with a service on board ship that Sunday (the 23rd February), preaching on Psalm 137: 5-6:¹⁶

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

It was the 8 March before he was able to hold the first service on shore. The initial hardships of the landing were followed by the building of his house, whilst maintaining Sunday Services (open air to begin with - as noted earlier). Worship services were later held in 'private houses' and then in the Exchange.¹⁷ The continual changing of makeshift centres for worship, and the length of time to raise funds and build a church, were challenges added to by the religious indifference of a community concerned more with getting established and making a living.¹⁸

Writing of these early days nearly sixty years later, John Dickson was able to say, 'a hard beginning is a good beginning. It is good for the Church, good for the State, and good for the individual.' But was it good for Macfarlane?

Work among Maori

As we explore that question, and given Rev Te Kaawa's research and the context of this conference, a summary of Macfarlane's little known interest in work among Maori is particularly worthy of note:

- Though a minister to the settler church, he had taught himself te reo Maori on the voyage over, apparently influenced by 'strong evangelical and humanitarian motives'.¹⁹
- Working with Maori in 1841, he acknowledges that while 'there is no European missionary in this district', 'morning and evening worship is performed by one of their number...with the greatest devotion'.²⁰
- He conducted some services, including marriages, in te reo Maori.

¹⁶ John Macfarlane, *The Home and Foreign Missionary Record*, April 1841, p.307, as also quoted in Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 33.

¹⁷ John Dickson, *History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*. (Dunedin: J. Wilkie & Co., 1899) 422f.

¹⁸ Matheson, 1840-1870, 22. Also A.K.Davidson, *Pious Energy: Presbyterian Personalities and Perspectives* (Wellington: Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1989) 10.

¹⁹ A.K.Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 11.

²⁰ John Macfarlane, 'Letter to the Rev Dr Welsh', 26 April 1841, p.405. See also John Macfarlane, *The New Zealand Presbyterian Magazine, (NZPM)* August 1872, p.246, and as quoted in A.K.Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 11.

- He was concerned about a settler Church preoccupied with colonisation with ‘little concern’ about resulting injustices to Maori.²¹ As Davidson notes, ‘Settler Christianity, while benefiting from the peace promoted by missionary efforts, and the government introduced as a consequence of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, acted with little regard for either the missionary contribution or Te Tiriti.’²²
- Macfarlane was critical of the New Zealand Company for their not surveying and setting aside the tenth of land promised to Maori. His call though went unheeded.
- He also attempted to set up a dispensary for Maori, promising to ‘guarantee a donation of £20’ if others supported his plan. His call was rebuffed.

Nonetheless, he continued his involvement until the arrival of James Duncan, the Reformed Church missionary to the Maori.

Minister to the Settlers

As Davidson notes,

For migrants coming to New Zealand in the 19th century, pragmatic self-interest was the main motivating force. Religious interests, if they were present at all, were largely secondary. The new settlers were concerned about improving themselves and making a better future for their children.²³

Macfarlane had to cope with ‘extensive and onerous duties’ as the only ordained minister to the Europeans in the Port Nicholson Settlement.²⁴ As Matheson notes, the expectations of colonial congregations on the pioneer minister included: being an educator, conducting four to five services in one day, whilst covering vast distances on foot, horse or bullock in all weathers - in short ‘none but the best’!²⁵ Macfarlane took his role seriously, travelling hundreds of miles to meet the needs of settler communities. As noted below, he had to remain faithful despite the lack of support from the

²¹ A.K.Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 4f.

²² A.K.Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 28.

²³ Allan K. Davidson, *Aotearoa New Zealand: Defining Moments in the Gospel-Culture Encounter*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996) 15.

²⁴ Littlejohn, 7.

²⁵ Matheson, ‘1840-1870’, 30f.

Church of Scotland to provide additional ministers or funds to meet the obvious needs locally and further afield e.g. Nelson.²⁶

Scant resources

In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising Macfarlane's repeated pleas to the Church of Scotland for both material resources and workers in the field.

In seeking more funds to build a worship centre, he persuasively argues his case citing:²⁷

- a) Availability and denominational rivalry: 'I am sorry to say, that I can only preach once a-day on Sabbath, as the only building...is occupied during the other half of the Sabbath by the English Clergyman.'
- b) Labour cost: 'such is the enormous price of labour , that we are compelled to look for aid to the Church of our Fathers.'
- c) Their own fundraising efforts: 'a respectable committee of the congregation has been formed...and subscriptions are in progress'; and again, '[we] are much indebted to the kindness of one of our merchants...George Hunter...[who] at no small expense...furnished us with a place of worship in his own store'.

He then speaks to 'the Christian necessity of appointing at least one, if not two additional minsters to this interesting field of labour'. He describes the extent and fruitfulness of his work, the possibilities, and the denominational rivalry, and entreats:

I earnestly hope [the Church of Scotland] will not remain apathetic, that she will not neglect one of the noblest opportunities ever afforded her of promulgating the doctrines of the gospel, and of establishing in this far isle the simple but at the same time sublime form of worship belonging...to the covenant, blood-sealed Kirk of our Fathers.²⁸

In another letter Macfarlane stresses the potential in missionary work among Maori, 'a subject which I consider of vital importance...never was there a more promising field of missionary labour opened up to the Church of Scotland than the present...there are thousands of immortal beings, not only willing, but also deeply anxious to receive "the glad tidings of great joy".' With all the

²⁶ Macfarlane, 'Letter to Rev Dr Welsh', 23April 1841, p.404. See also Elder, 31, and A.K.Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 10.

²⁷ John Macfarlane, 'Letter to Rev Dr Welsh', 23April 1841, p.404.

²⁸ John Macfarlane, 'Letter to Rev Dr Welsh', 23April 1841, p.404. See also A.K.Davidson, *Aotearoa New Zealand*, 14.

persuasiveness of a salesman he suggests this is ‘an opportunity; now afforded, which, if missed, may never occur again, of wiping off a foul stain from the history of British colonization’.²⁹

In response to his letters to the Colonial Committee, *The Home and Foreign Missionary Record* notes:

The accounts from Mr Macfarlane, our first and hitherto only minister in this great station, are very encouraging. How much is it to be desired, that the Committee found themselves in a condition instantly and effectually to meet his demand for additional labourers? It rests however, not with them, but with the friends of Christ throughout the land. May the Spirit of the Lord open their hearts, and draw forth their liberality, that the “blessing of those who are ready to perish” may come upon them.

However, Macfarlane was to be disappointed. No-one came from the Church of Scotland. He continued to shoulder the workload, till in 1843, James Duncan of the Reformed Church of Scotland came as missionary to the Maori. Duncan worked with ‘little success’ in the Foxton region till the early 1860’s when he was called to serve the Europeans in the area. In general, ‘early attempts by Presbyterians to work among the Maori had little impact’.³⁰

Problems within

In May 1843, Macfarlane faced dissention in the congregation with the arrival of the Reformed Presbyterian missionary to the Maori, James Duncan, who was called by an initial group of approximately 50 to be their minister. It is worth noting however, that the first New Zealand church to be built by the settlers, St Andrews, was opened by Macfarlane assisted by Duncan, on 17 January, 1844.³¹ Later though, after the opening of St Andrews, he had to cope with the added challenge of a ‘very wide and promiscuous’ congregation of approximately 150.³²

In the end, the ‘prodigious’ human cost of maintaining pastoral care in this environment, where only ‘the fit and healthy survived’ took its toll.³³ Having survived challenges that would have defeated most people, The ‘severe illness’ he wrote of in 1841,³⁴ was followed by continuing health problems that eventually led to his return to Scotland.

²⁹ John Macfarlane, ‘Letter to the Rev Dr Welsh’, 26 April 1841, p.405.

³⁰ A.K.Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 33.

³¹ John Dickson, 422f.

³² Matheson, ‘1840-1870’, 22.

³³ Macfarlane’s letter to his sister in May 1840 (the *New Zealand Journal*, London, issue 2 January, 1841, quoted in Littlejohn, 3f) infers his health, whilst good on the voyage, was perhaps not so the previous four years. Littlejohn, 7, indicates unsatisfactory health from 1841, which ultimately led to his return to Scotland.

³⁴ Macfarlane, ‘Letter to Rev Dr Welsh’, 23 April 1841.

His Character, Contribution and Crisis: A Summary

‘We must allow the people of the past to pose their own questions rather than imposing upon them our fascinations, hopes and neuroses’.³⁵

Faced with and persevering through all the disappointments, changes and challenges recorded above takes a special kind of person. Though I primarily uncovered John Macfarlane’s New Zealand ministry, beginning with his embarking on the *Bengal Merchant* on 31 October, 1839, it is worth noting Dr Macleod’s earlier comment that there was no other ‘so well fitted for the task’³⁶ - a reflection of Macfarlane’s character, faith and perhaps his contribution at Paisley. The attached Colonial Committee meeting minutes of November 1839 also record their obvious pleasure and their unanimous approval of the appointment.³⁷ The Colonial Committee report in *The Home and Foreign Missionary Decord*, November 1839 issue confirms and summarises these sentiments:

The Rev Mr Macfarlane of the Martyrs’ Church, Paisley, has agreed to accompany the first Scotch Colony to this island [New Zealand]. The Committee very cordially availed themselves of his willingness to go forth on so important an undertaking; and, from Mr Macfarlane’s tried faithfulness and success, they anticipate the very best results, in regard to the religious prosperity of that colony.³⁸

It is not surprising then that in four short years, Macfarlane met his challenges head-on and won considerable respect, *despite* or perhaps even *because* of his disappointments. In any case, from our gleanings and discussions above, it is clear that history records his achievements thus (in summary):

- He established the fledgling first Settler church and successfully transplanted the dignity and simplicity of the Scottish Presbyterian tradition.³⁹
- He boldly spoke and acted on social justices issues, in particular to do with Maori, (but was unsuccessful in obtaining settler understanding).⁴⁰

³⁵ John Briggs, ‘God, Time and History’, in *The History of Christianity: A Lion Handbook*, Revised Edition, Tim Dowley, ed., (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1990), 14.

³⁶ Elder, 26, quotes the ‘eloquent address’ of the Rev. Dr Norman Macleod given at the public farewell dinner in the Trades Hall at Glasgow to celebrate the departure of the first Scottish colonists to New Zealand.

³⁷ *Church of Scotland Colonial Committee Minutes, 19 November, 1839*, Presbyterian Archives, Microfiche MI 865.

³⁸ *The Home and Foreign Missionary Record for the Church of Scotland*, no.5, November 1, 1839, p67.

³⁹ Matheson, 1840-1870, 22.

⁴⁰ Macfarlane, ‘Letter to Rev Dr Welsh’, 26 April 1841, p.405. See also Matheson, 1840-1870, 23, and extracts of Macfarlane’s letters quoted in A.K. Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 11f. cf the letters of Dr J. Dunmore Lang, (1839) - a possible influence - noted in A.K. Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 1-6.

- Motivated by evangelical and humanitarian concerns, in his many letters to Scotland he challenged the Church into action in this missionary field (again with little response).⁴¹
- He personally took services in Maori and Gaelic as well as in English (He had learnt Maori on the voyage here and saw himself as ‘quite a favourite with the natives’ as he knew a ‘good deal’ of their language and ‘always [treated] them civilly’)⁴².
- He saw the building of St Andrews (Later St Andrew’s on The Terrace) through to completion.
- He ministered effectively to a multi-denominational congregation.⁴³
- He successfully headed off challenges from the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and later the Reformed Church, and retained the Scottish Kirk presence.⁴⁴
- He attempted to help other settlements e.g. Nelson, but had ‘neither funds nor strength’ to visit.⁴⁵
- He was prominent in local affairs and was ‘held in high regard by the people’, ‘universally esteemed...and given to hospitality...’⁴⁶

Tragically, Macfarlane never seems to have fully recovered from the ‘severe illness’ he suffered in 1841, with ill-health eventually forcing him back to Scotland. He left on furlough for eighteen months in October 1844 and never returned. He took charge of the parish of Lochgilphead (Argyllshire) 9 September, 1847, was married in 1852, and died in Glasgow on 8 March 1859.

Conclusion: Another Moment in History

‘Mate atu he toa, ara mai he toa’.⁴⁷

It is more than 173 years since Macfarlane preached his first sermon by the waters of Pito-one. Since then other champions of the Presbyterian faith have made their mark on the history of our church and nation. What influence has Macfarlane had on them? What indeed does he have to say to us?

⁴¹ Macfarlane, ‘Letter to Rev Dr Welsh’, 23 April 1841, p.404. See also extracts of his letters quoted in A.K.Davidson, *Pious Energy*, 11f.

⁴² Macfarlane, ‘Letter to sister Jeannie’, April/May 1840, in Littlejohn (ed), 4.

⁴³ Dickson, 422f.

⁴⁴ Macfarlane, ‘Letter to Rev Dr Welsh’, 23 April 1841, p.404.

⁴⁵ Littlejohn, 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 5; especially Alexander Marjoribanks’ letter to the *Sydney Herald*.

⁴⁷ i.e. ‘When one champion fades away, another champion arises’ - a proverb that describes Maori belief that death is never final but is always succeeded by new life. Quoted by Rev. Tawhao Tioke, in *Te Hinota Maori: The Maori Synod, Maori Spirituality and Ministry*, Book 1 of 5, (Wellington, New Zealand: The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, 1992) 22.

At the turn of the century in **1899**, John Dickson was able to affirm that ‘the Presbyterian Church exercises an influence more potent than her numbers would lead one to expect. This is due to the uniform culture of her ministers, and the industry, intelligence, and law-abiding character of her members.’ He goes on to ask ‘What are her future prospects?’ His question and his following reply have something to say to the church of today:

They are bright with hope. Her past history, her suitability for the times, her zeal in the matter of education as well as in piety and in every good and beneficent work, her catholicity of spirit, and above all her Scriptural principles ensure that she shall continue “throughout all generations”...

At the centenary celebrations in **1940**, the Rt. Rev. J. Lawson Robinson, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand, noted that ‘certain prophets were croaking’ about ‘pessimistic beliefs that the Church was going out of existence’.⁴⁸ (Some are still croaking!) However, he believed ‘the solution of the difficulties in front of the church today was in the Church’s own hands. It had a message which belonged to no other institution but the Christian Church’. The next day, as the Iona Cross was erected to commemorate the centenary of the arrival of ‘the first Presbyterian Minister and his flock’, he concluded his address to the gathering with this reminder:

[Unless religion is built into the very structure of a nation’s life, that nation will inevitably be doomed. Our fathers have left to us a fair and glorious heritage. Let us try to be worthy of it.⁴⁹

As we farewell Macfarlane, I am aware of questions about his life that may be answered only in eternity. One abiding truth remains: despite his human frailty, his biases, his disappointments; and whatever the tragedy behind his all-too-short walk on the stage of our history, the Rev. John Macfarlane, a man of steadfast faith and vision, remained true to the tradition and task (context) he was called to, and to the Pioneer of our Faith who called him.

The Church of Scotland transplanted into the church of 1840 is now the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The church of today, as of 1840, 1899 and 1940, owes Macfarlane for his faithfulness amidst the crises and challenges of his context. How may we prove ‘worthy’ of this ‘fair and glorious heritage’? Perhaps one way would be to live by the example of MacFarlane and the

⁴⁸ J. Lawson Robinson, ‘Gloomy Prophets: the Church’s reply’, *Evening Post*, 22 February 1940.

⁴⁹ J. Lawson Robinson, ‘Address of the Moderator of the General Assembly [of the Presbyterian Church] at the unveiling of the Cross of Iona, Petone Beach, 23.2.1940’, Typewritten manuscript held in the Presbyterian Collection, Hewitson Library, Knox College, Dunedin.

many pioneer women and men of the founding Presbyterian Church, and learn from their challenges and mistakes:

- Make the effort to humbly and knowledgeably engage with the culture of our day, and make the gospel relevant to them, without resorting to the extremes of proselytising or religious syncretism
- Take the initiative to speak out on social justice issues and model/make changes in the way we relate within our own families, congregations, and communities
- Continue to stress the importance of education as the right of every New Zealander
- Hold concern for our own health as ministers of the gospel, as well as the health and healing of others, if we are to fulfil our task
- Take seriously the call to make disciples by developing leaders to continue the work of ministry
- Remember we do not work alone, though the pioneers often did
- Continue to seek for unity in the way we relate with others of different denominations, different faiths and points of view, being open to learning and change whilst remaining true to the principles of our faith
- Tell the stories of our founding mothers and fathers, of their earnest adherence to the tenets of our tradition, and most especially of their faithfulness to the gospel and to the One who called them to preach it in lands such as ours, that we too might share in Christ
- Persevere in the work, knowing God will use it to bless ‘generations as yet unborn’, as He has done with me as I have studied the life of John Macfarlane.

His influence? Perhaps it is appropriate to close with the words of another who was so influenced:

We must all acknowledge our debt to the past. We inherit the wisdom of all the ages. If we are wise today its because our fathers toiled and prayed and suffered, and we have incorporated their experience in our present character. In a thousand ways we find our roots in the past...What we are today as a Church has grown out of what has been. We look back to those small beginnings and we take courage. However difficult may be the work of the Christian ministry today, however disappointing the results of our labours, we can at any rate derive inspiration from the fact that the God who prospered our fathers, and who gave them strength to endure and overcome is our God too...God’s reservoirs of grace...are overflowing still for our refreshment and renewal...He who was the object of their faith...is exactly the same to us today, the same undiminished, unaltered, steadfast object of trust and power.⁵⁰

I too have learnt from John Macfarlane. He has helped me see again the Christ he pointed to, reminding me of whose I am and why I am here.

⁵⁰ J. Lawson Robinson, ‘Back to sanity: Opening address by Moderator’, *Evening Post*, 21 February 1940.

‘Well done, good and faithful servant’.

Appendix A: Listening to Macfarlane, Learning from History

‘The one who doesn’t know history is like a leaf that doesn’t know it is part of a tree.’⁵¹

‘What experience and history teach is this: that people and governments have never learned from history!’⁵²



As stated earlier, History offers us the opportunity to learn from the experience of others. In this two-part volume, our task has been to outline and evaluate the Reverend John Macfarlane’s influence on Aotearoa in the period 1840-44. We offer his story as an encouragement and invitation for others to explore their own stories.

Consistent with that, and with our premise that we as ministry and mission leaders, the church, and our nation can benefit from sitting at Macfarlane’s feet, this section is provided as an aid to reflection and for ‘learning from history’ should you need it. In a sense we are learning again of the treasures in leadership gifted to us as a nation.

But first some perspective...

It seems extraordinary that these small islands set in the wide expanse of the South Pacific, almost indiscernible from space alongside more illustrious and visible neighbours, can have any significant influence on global history. Yet, from time to time, Aotearoa New Zealand has achieved notable firsts –

- The first to give women the vote (Kate Sheppard 1893);

⁵¹ Allan Davidson, in a lecture on *Christianity in Aotearoa*, St John’s College, Auckland, 1996.

⁵² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, German philosopher, 1770-1831.

- to split the atom (Ernest Rutherford 1919);
- to elect a lady Mayor (Onehunga 1894);
- to introduce an 8 hour working day and a public holiday (Labour Day) to celebrate the event;
- to power flight (Richard Pearse 1903);
- to climb Mt Everest (Edmund Hillary 1953);
- to establish a Public Trust by Act of Parliament;
- to have a nation-founding document that declares sovereignty and self determination to the indigenous peoples (Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840);
- to break and hold many world records in athletics and other sports;
- to hold the record for the highest number of Olympic gold medals per head of population of any country in the world;
- to develop the world's first jetboat the Hamilton jet (Bill Hamilton 1950's);
- to invent and do the bungy jump (AJ Hackett 1988);
- to complete the first ever intra-uterine blood transfusion thus saving babies (foetuses) with Rh disease/haemolytic disease (Professor Lilley 1963);
- to pioneer the development of cardio-pulmonary bypass (Brian Barratt-Boyes 1958);
- and first to have women occupy the five most powerful roles in the country simultaneously (Prime Minister Helen Clark, Governor General Dame Sylvia Cartwright, Chief Justice Sian Elias, Leader of the Opposition Jenny Shipley, Attorney General Margaret Wilson – in 2001).

The list is long yet far from complete. As New Zealanders we acknowledge and celebrate these accomplishments and the people behind them. As Christians in Aotearoa, we recognise the faith, hope and love and the hard work that undergirds them. In diverse fields of endeavour, we have had and continue to have the privilege of champions who 'punch above their weight'.

John Macfarlane, the first Presbyterian Minister in Aotearoa New Zealand, a key part of our early nation-building, is one such champion. Though largely unwritten, his legacy remains. As accounted here, his context, his crises and his contribution continue to speak to us and challenge us:

His context and ours – What resonates?

Macfarlane's context was not an easy one – personally, locally, nationally or globally. Neither is ours...

So what resonates for you from your reading his story:

Is it the global context, a question of national identity or other national crises; the land issues, the immigration trends and issues; alcohol, crime, youth, cultural issues;

Or at a personal level, is it workload, size of task, travel/geographical issues, loneliness/isolation, lack of help/support from denominations, ill health, lack of funding/resourcing; or is it trouble within your own teams...

What may be learnings here for you, your church and beyond?

How would you deal with your issues in the light of Macfarlane's experience?

From Settler to 'Settled' Church, and yet...

What have we learnt from history?

The transplanted settler church of Macfarlane's day is now the settled and unsettled Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

What have we learnt from history? How does this inform our understanding of God's mission and the Church's mission and ministry in the world?

Changing the present

Those of us who work 'on the ground' indeed hear the cry of these islands. Perhaps something we have heard in or from Macfarlane reminds us, challenges and sparks the inspiration and

encouragement to change the things we can, and in so doing, pass on our taonga; to do something today to make tomorrow better...as he sought to do.

Passing on the taonga:

We cannot change the past, as Allan Davidson has reminded us;⁵³
we can seek to understand it, learn from it, and perhaps plant these treasures,
these 'seeds of heaven', in the soil of the present and nurture them,
in the hope that they will flourish in the future that belongs to our mokopuna.

Learning from history: another first? To 'sing the Lord's song in a strange land'

Is it possible that we as ministry leaders, as churches and a nation, could be one of, if not the first to learn from him, to learn from history...

...that we may with renewed vigour sing the Lord's song in this at once familiar yet 'strange' land.

⁵³ Allan Davidson, in his introduction to the *Iwi-Tauitiw Christianity Conference*, Waitangi, November 2012.

Appendix B: Timeline of John Macfarlane's life and Ministry

- **22 July 1836** – Minister in Martyrs church, Paisley
- **31 Oct 1839** – Embarks on trip to NZ
- **21 February 1840** – the *Bengal Merchant* drops anchor at Pito-one beach; Macfarlane, ‘in the vigour of manhood’, walks into Aotearoa history
- **Sunday 23 February** – Service on board ship; Preaches on Psalm 137 ‘*How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?...*’
- **23 April 1841** – cites ‘severe illness’ in letters to sister, Welsh
- **1841- Oct 1844** – Makes repeated unsuccessful pleas for resources and extra helpers for mission work; continues to shoulder the workload till James Duncan arrives
- **May 1843** – Faces dissention in the congregation with the arrival of Reformed Presbyterian missionary James Duncan
- **17 January 1844** – assisted by Duncan, opens St Andrews, the first NZ church built by the Presbyterian settlers
- **October 1844** – leaves on furlough for 18 months on furlough for 18 months on furlough for 18 months due to ill health; never returns
- **9 Sept 1847** – placed in charge of parish of Lochgilphead;
- **1852** – Marries
- **8 March 1859** – dies in Glasgow

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**'Do not turn a deaf ear to
the cry of these islands' – Part II**

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