

Victor Wiens Plenary talk at Thailand 2017 (with testimony by Jean-Claude Ambeke)
SEEING THE HARVEST ... AND WHAT IS IN OUR HANDS
Thursday, March 9, 2017, PM Session

Introduction

In our lives, there are realities of highest importance, which we do not see at first sight (repeat). Some examples: When we read the book of Revelation, what amazing spiritual activity is going on in the heavenly realms, which impact our lives here on earth, but which we do not see with our natural eyes! In II Kings 6, Elisha's servant could only see the Syrian army surrounding their town. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. There are spiritual realities we do not perceive, unless the Sovereign Lord of the universe opens our eyes.

In John 4, Jesus and the disciples were returning from Judea to Galilee. They were tired and hungry, so they stopped in Samaria. Jesus rested and the disciples went after lunch.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (vs 7-10).

The Samaritan woman saw only a tired Jewish man – Jesus saw an opportunity for a life-transforming conversation which would lead to salvation coming to a lost village.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." ³³ Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" ³⁴ "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (vs 31-38).

The disciples saw only a hungry master, but Jesus perceived a perfect moment to reveal some truths about spiritual harvest, such as had just happened with the Samaritan woman and her people.

The harvest is often where we least expect it ... for the disciples it was in despised Samaria; for us it may be in some despised region or among some despised people group. The harvest is often through whom we least expect ... through a marginalized woman to her entire village.

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers (vs 39-41).

A few months ago I was in Cali, Colombia. There I heard about a ministry connected with the Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches called “Cruising for Jesus.” This ministry was begun by a converted motorcycle gang member named Horacio. It reaches out to bikers, drug users, and other marginalized people. They now have three church plants near Cali, and another three outreach posts in the area. The harvest is often through whom we least expect.

The harvest includes both sowing and reaping ... we must do both, and trust the Lord of the Harvest for results. We do well to remember from our own daily experiences, that effective “harvest” goes beyond cutting and gathering grain. Most of us, when we need bread, don’t go to a field that is ripe, or to a storehouse of grains. We go to a market. The harvest also includes gathering the grain, milling it into flour, baking it into bread, and distributing it to the consumer; likewise, our spiritual harvest must go beyond evangelism to gathering, discipling, training, and sending (the already referred-to Mission Strategy Map is one tool to help us determine where we are in the harvest, and what remains).

We need to turn our attention now to the bigger picture. Let us further see the global mission harvest, and look for what is not so obvious at first sight.

A. *Seeing the Past Harvest: From coast lands to people groups.*

We shall limit our review to the modern period of missions; although Catholic and some Orthodox missions were quite active, we shall focus on Protestant mission expansion as a context for MBs. How has the harvest happened in the last 225 years?

- 1) **Denominational missions to the continental coastlands, 1792-1865.** (Map 1792) By 1792, Protestant harvesting had been limited mainly to biological growth in Europe, and colonial growth in North America and Australia. Intentional missionary efforts were being conducted only by the Danish-Halle mission in India, and the Moravians in the Americas and Africa. A breakthrough came with William Carey and the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792. Many other denominational missions were established in this period. Due to the challenges of travel, communications and provision, the harvest was limited mainly to coastal regions and islands. As one can see (Map 1865), by the time the MB family was born in 1860, a global harvest was beginning (highlight coastlands).
- 2) **Interdenominational missions to the continental inlands, 1865-1910.** A new harvest season began when Hudson Taylor, serving in China, received a vision for the masses of unevangelized in the inland regions. In 1865 he established the China Inland Mission (later, Overseas Missionary Fellowship; today OMF International). One new focus was on the inland regions, another was on the recruitment of ordinary workers without extensive theological studies. As a result of this new approach, vast unevangelized regions received the Gospel (Map 1910). Examples of these new missions include the Africa Inland Mission, and among Mennonites, the Congo Inland Mission (today, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission).
- 3) **Evangelical missions to the countries of the world, 1910-1966.** This period was bracketed by two global mission consultations, Edinburgh (Scotland) in 1910 and the first Billy Graham-sponsored Evangelization Conference of 1966 (Berlin, Germany). The missionary focus narrowed even more from regions to countries. As mainline church missions declined, evangelical missions led the way to either target or enter virtually every country on earth (Map

1966). Mennonite Brethren were a part of this missionary movement among evangelicals, entering at least 12 new countries, from China (1911) to Panama (1958).

- 4) **Global missions to the peoples of the world, 1966-present.** Previous to this period, a number of ministries were already focused on ethnic and linguistic peoples, such as the Bible Societies and Gospel radio ministries. However, in 1974, at yet another global mission consultation (in Lausanne, Switzerland), Ralph Winter pleaded for mission agencies to give greatest attention to what he called “the hidden peoples,” the thousands of *ethno-linguistic people groups* without any Gospel witness, or without an indigenous church strong enough to reach their own people group (also called *least reached* or *unreached*). Now with missionaries from all over the world, we are focused more than ever on reaching these *ethne*, the “nations” referred to by our Lord. Let us look a little closer at these “nations.”

When Yahweh promised Abraham that all families on earth would be blessed through him, he was referring to people groups. When Jesus promised the Gospel would be preached to all nations, and then the end would come, he was referring to people groups. When he commissioned his disciples to make disciples of all nations, he was referring to people groups. Finally, in John’s Revelation of the nations worshiping the One who sits on the throne, and the Lamb, it is a vision of all people groups. These are the fundamental units cited in Scripture in God’s missional plan. One mission agency illustrates the people groups concept this way ... (display <https://vimeo.com/128750127> What is an UPG?, until 2.22 minutes).

Both through missions and migrations, the Lord of the Harvest has spread the MB Church far and wide, to five continents, dozens of countries, and many more people groups. One of our patriarchs, JB Toews, was convinced that God had raised up the MB Church to be a missionary movement, not only among other Anabaptist denominations, but together with other evangelicals for the reaching of the masses of lost people and unreached people groups. Today is an opportune moment to ask, “How are we all doing in this divine calling?”

B. Seeing the Present Harvest: The Status of Christian Mission Today

The 20th Century has seen tremendous missional advances, and we are truly grateful. The Church in the Global South and the Global East is joining the Church in the North and West as global partners in the Gospel. In many countries of the global South there are more practicing Christians than in the countries of the global North (Brazil=25% evangelical vs. Canada=8%). The Scriptures have been translated, at least partially, into 3200 languages. The Gospel presentation in the Jesus film has been seen by billions

Video: Unreached People Groups

- People group = Ta Ethne (Greek words)
 - = a group of people with a common history, language, identity
- There are 196 countries, but over 16,000 people groups
- Example: Pakistan = 1 country, but 400 "nations" or people groups
- About 7000 of 16,000 people groups in the world are unreached by the Gospel (less than 2% evangelical)
- About 3000 people groups have no Christian ministry engaged in reaching them.
- Most Unreached People Groups are in a region called the 10-40 Window
- They are either Tribal, Hindu, Unreligious, Muslim or Buddhist
- Only 3% of all cross-cultural missionaries are working with the UPGs.

in 1460 languages. And 2.2 billion can now access a variety of Christian programming via the media of radio, television and internet.

Dare we ask then, “What is the status of the Gospel being received in the world today?” We can and we must ask this big question. The size of the question, and the task remaining, leads us to use smaller categories in order to grasp some of these big ideas. Missiologists view the world as three: C-B-A. Some visual aids will help us understand these worlds better (display <https://vimeo.com/127875015> “The Task Remaining” until 2.35 minutes).

Our mission = go and make disciples! How are we doing?

- Of 7 billion people, 33% consider themselves Christian = World C
- Around 38% know about Christ, but choose not to follow = World B
- Around 29% (over 1 in 4) have never heard of Jesus = World A
- Of 400,000 missionaries, 72% (3/4 go to World C)
- 25% are going to World B, ... access to the Gospel
- Only 3% are going to World A, where Jesus is totally unknown

There are many other unreached people groups (or *least reached*) that live in countries considered “reached.” Examples of these are the Chinese of DR Congo/Angola, the Arabs of S. America, the Kurds of Germany, and the Punjabis of Canada. Do you know who they are and where they are in your country? Furthermore, by focusing today on unreached people groups, we are not saying they are more lost or more important to reach than the urban poor, or the post-Christian secularists, or children and youth in Christianized societies. When Jesus said, “God so loved the world ...” all persons and people are included. However, we must ask, “Is it right that some are able to hear the Gospel every day, while so many others have not heard the Gospel, or the name of Jesus even once?”

I have presented a macro-view of the status of the Gospel in our world. We must also ask what is the status of our own family of faith, the MB, in Christian mission today? (ICOMB/MBM map)

- God has granted us 21 organized conferences of churches in 18 countries.
- We have pioneer work or emerging conferences in another 20+ countries.
- More importantly, we are increasingly aware that our call is not to geo-political countries, but to ethno-linguistic peoples ... the nations referred to by our Lord and throughout Scripture. Since Curitiba 1988, MB Mission has sent or supported workers in no less than 20 UPGs (from Khmu in N. Thailand to Arab peoples in N. Africa to Punjabi peoples in N. India).
- However, the Lord of the Harvest is stirring MB all over the world to see the harvest, to pray for workers, and to send them. Today we rejoice that our global family is catching a vision for reaching the UPGs in our contexts:
 - Paraguay = Nivacle
 - DR Congo = Batwa, Chinese
 - Japan = Thai
 - Brazil = Mandjack
 - Germany = Arabs
 - India = Myanmar
 - Colombia/Panama = Wounaan

C. Seeing the Future Harvest: A Compelling Vision

- 1 “Sing, barren woman,
you who never bore a child;
burst into song, shout for joy,
you who were never in labor;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband,”
says the Lord.
- 2 “Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,
strengthen your stakes.
- 3 For you will spread out to the right and to the left;
your descendants will dispossess nations
and settle in their desolate cities.
- 4 “Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame.
Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.
You will forget the shame of your youth
and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.
- 5 For your Maker is your husband—
the Lord Almighty is his name—
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
he is called the God of all the earth (vs. 1-5).

Isaiah prophesies a future harvest for the people of God. If there was a fulfillment for old Israel, it was at best partial. The greater fulfillment will come through the new Israel, the Church of God. Many children shall be born. Enlarge the tent, stretch the curtains ... lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes ... you shall possess the nations.

Jesus said “I have other sheep.” Peter the born-again Jew, through a compelling vision from the Holy Spirit, spoke the Word of God to Cornelius, and thus burst open the door to the Gentile nations. Paul said, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known.”

Finally there is the Revelation given to John:

9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.” (7:9-10)

If Peter’s vision to go to the house of Cornelius was compelling, I call on us in this gathering to let this vision (refer to screen) from our Lord compel us unto the nations. Four times in the Revelation this

universal peoplehood of nations, tribes, peoples and languages is cited; in 5:9 they have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb; in 14:6 the eternal Gospel is proclaimed to them; in 13:7 they must battle the beast called Anti-Christ; and in this passage they stand before the throne in holy worship of their Creator and Redeemer. This is where God's salvation story is going – this is where we must also go.

I trust you will be there; I trust your people group will be there; I trust there will be many more tribes there because the tribe called MB was faithful to our call to be a missionary people.

D. Seeing the MB Church in the Harvest: What is in your Hand?

In the world's eyes, and in some of our eyes, we are so small - too small to accomplish much. Some have seen Mennonites in general as "the quiet in the land." Indeed we are a people of peace. Yet does this mean we do not wage war with the enemy of our souls, and for the souls and bodies of those for whom our Lord died? Let us imitate Christ. He was meek, but He was not weak. He was the Son of Man (human), yet filled with the resurrection power of the HS; he was the Lamb who was slain, but also the Lion who conquers; the Suffering Servant, yet Triumphant King.

Recall from where we have come; remember who has called us. Faithful is He who has called us, and He will also do it (1 Thess. 5:24). God loves to show His greatness through our smallness. He loves little people, little churches, little things. There is a theology of smallness throughout Scripture:

- Who did God choose to be the father of many nations? Abraham, a little old man with a little old wife, who was also childless.
- Which army did God choose to defeat the Philistines? Gideon's, but only after a reduction from 32,000 to 300.
- Who did God choose to save Israel from extinction? Esther, a poor refugee girl who became a queen.
- Who did God choose to be the mother of the Savior of the world? Mary, a peasant teenager, from Nazareth (Nathanael: Can anything good come from Nazareth?).
- Who did Jesus choose to turn the world upside down? Anything but a dream team; rather, a motley crew of disciples (fisherman, tax collectors, revolutionaries).

(Jean-Claude Ambeke: illustration/testimony of "much with little" from Angola)

Let no one say, "We are too small ... we are too poor ... we are too young." We are now strategically placed for the Harvest. We live in the right countries; we have both the Scriptures and other tools to communicate the Word of God; our global family has godly and God-gifted leaders; we have training and skills; we have lots of technology and technicians; we have either an abundance of funding or the ability to sustain ourselves while in the harvest; we are not empty-handed ... we must only trust and obey. To whom much is given, much is also required. Even so, let us also remember the words of our Lord, "Without me, you can do nothing."

Conclusion

Let us briefly review some key concepts:

- Let us see nations as not merely nation states, but people groups (200 vs 16,500).

- Let us see not merely the lost in World C (Christianized), and the lost in World B (evangelized), but also World A – the world yet to hear (2 billion, 29%, over 1/4).
- Let us see 6700 UPGs, most of which are located in an identifiable zone called the 10-40 Window.
- Let us see other UPGs, no less valuable, who are “hidden” in other regions, including in countries where there is a Christian majority. They are not hidden to our Lord, and if we ask Him where they are, surely He will show us the way.
- The website for the Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net) provides comprehensive information about UPGs in every country.

Does your church or conference need a vision? We already have it in the Scriptures ... a prophecy of a large tent (Isa. 54), a Jesus flock with other sheep (John 10), an apostolic model of reaching to regions beyond, and a throne-room vision of every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev. 7). Shall we say with Paul, “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19)? Rather let us say, “King Jesus, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.”

Let us rise up with the Church worldwide to meet this challenge, and, in the words of the Capetown Commitment, let us ...

- “Repent of our blindness to the continuing presence of so many unreached peoples in our world and our lack of urgency in sharing the gospel among them.
- Renew our commitment to go to those who have not yet heard the gospel, to engage deeply with their language and culture, to live the gospel among them with incarnational love and sacrificial service, to communicate the light and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and deed, awakening them through the Holy Spirit’s power to the surprising grace of God” (p. 36).

Let us see beyond the culturally obvious. Who are the Samaritans around us? Who are the marginalized women, and men, that Jesus would like to converse with, through us?

Let us see beyond Jerusalem. Who are the people groups outside of your immediate comfort zone, in Judea and Samaria, that are definitely within reach, and are ripe for the harvest? What about those whom the Lord of the Harvest has brought to you, such as immigrants, refugees, international students, businessmen? Traditionally the call to mission has included PRAY, GIVE, and GO; with the new reality of God moving peoples around for His purposes, we must now include a call to WELCOME ... so, Pray, Give, Go and Welcome.

Let us see beyond Samaria, beyond your geographical and cultural borders to the ends of the earth. I am here because my widowed grandmother courageously chose to emigrate to the ends of the earth for a better life for her children and grandchildren. Some of you are here because some missionary chose to courageously cross land and sea to bring the Gospel to your unreached people group. Is God calling you to go to the ends of the earth? Is God calling you to mobilize workers for a distant harvest field, or one nearby, that is now ripe for reaping? Is God calling you to consider adopting an UPG, or another if you are already engaged in reaching one.

With Elisha, we pray, “Open our eyes Lord, that we may see the world as you see it.” With Jesus we pray, “Lord of the Harvest, let us see what we have in our hands, and send forth more workers into your harvest field.”