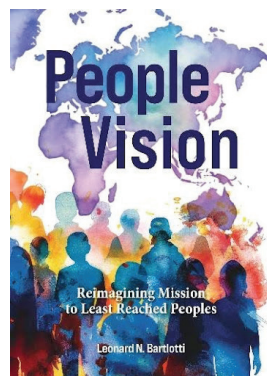


People Vision: Reimagining Mission to Least Reached Peoples

By Leonard N. Bartlotti, Editor. William Carey Publishing. 2024. 300 pages.

Reviewed by Don Little



Dr. Don Little, a Canadian from British Columbia, served for 10 years in North Africa as an EFL teacher and church planter, along with his wife, Jeanie, and their three children (now adults). He then served in Canada in mission leadership for eight and a half years. He has served as Missiologist-at-large with Pioneers since 2007, and he directs the equipping ministry of [The Lilius Trotter Center](#). He and Jeanie live in western New York, in the USA. Don can be contacted at don.little@sent.com.

What is in this book?

Len Bartlotti has pulled together a stimulating and representative series of articles on unreached peoples that is global in scope and comprehensive in content. With contributions from 50 (!) practitioners and leaders from around the world, *People Vision* is by far the most international study and description of people-group thinking and practice ever assembled. It was printed just in time for the 4th Lausanne Congress in South Korea in September 2024.

Len's description of the book in the introduction clearly expresses the nature of this book:

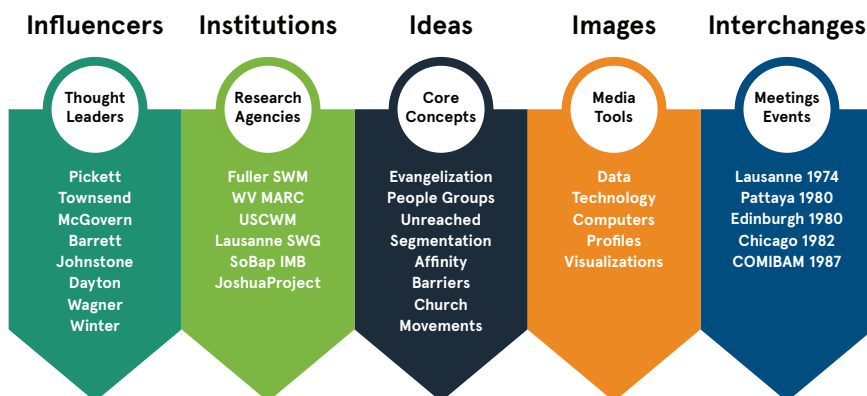
People Vision ... is an exciting, informed, global overview of people group thinking, the priority of least reached peoples today, and innovative efforts to reach them. The

book brings together the voices and imaginings of experts and practitioners, church and mission leaders, and the influencers whose ideas, organizations, images and gatherings have changed the world of missions. In *People Vision*, you will hear the perspectives of Asian, African, Latin American, European, and North American leaders engaged in frontier missions. (xv)

Topics covered include biblical & missional foundations for the UPG movement; the impact of people-group thinking on agencies, field workers, and local churches; examples of significant regional partnerships; and various reflections on topics such as mapping, apostleship, and BMB background churches. The book concludes with Len Bartlotti's (2020) seminal reflection in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* on how we need to rethink UPG-thinking and practice as our world changes.

As you can see, this library of articles covers considerable ground! Let me highlight a few key articles that I found to be very insightful and helpful. In chapter 4, "The People Group Approach: A Historical Approach," David Datema and Len Bartlotti do a masterful job of concisely pulling all the threads and key figures together to show how the UPG thinking developed and became so influential in Evangelical missions.

The Making of a Movement



This diagram (Figure 6, p.35) remarkably pulls many key figures and organizations together to help show where this whole UPG idea came from, how it developed, and how it became so influential. Permit me to cite the first paragraph of their conclusion, which the diagram summarizes visually.

This historical overview puts into perspective both positive and negative aspects of this missiological tidal wave ... A “perfect storm” was created by the coalescence of ideas relating people groups to world evangelization; the synergy of *influencers* (thought leaders) and *institutions* (research agencies); the simultaneous juxtaposition of computer technology, data, and media that provided new *images* of the unreached; amplified by the international *interchange* of ideas, people, data, and organizations at consultations and events; all of which together helped ignite and sustain a global movement. (35)

It would be difficult, having read the first four chapters, to disagree with this concluding observation: “The concept of seeing the world as people groups is arguably the most significant thought innovation in twentieth-century missiology” (36).

The second section illustrates the impact of people-group thinking with insider stories of how things changed in the IMB (Southern Baptists), the Assemblies of God, the Korean Frontier missions movement, and in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. As someone who has been involved in missions since 1977, and lived through many of the changes described, these chapters were illuminating in helping me understand how radically different things are now because of the pervasive influence of UPG thinking launched at Lausanne by Ralph Winter in 1974.

In section 6, two chapters (30 and 31), “Rethinking the People Group Concept” by Minh Ha Nguyen (who tragically died in 2024, in a traffic accident) and “Ferment in the Church: Missions in the Fourth Era” by Alan McMahan, describe the same three major global trends: globalization, urbanization, and migration, and wrestle with how people-group thinking needs to be adapted and updated. It seems the two

chapters were written without any consultation in that they both choose the same three major global trends. They both offer similar and very insightful analyses of the implications of these trends and suggest ways that we can adapt our mission strategy, and they stress the importance of taking these trends into account in our mission work. Both chapters are rich in insight and analysis.

There is so much more one could say about the wealth of perspectives brought together in this book but let me conclude this summary by mentioning the first two appendices. Appendix 1 consists of six and a half pages of questions and answers about people groups. This is an excellent overview of UPG thinking, and the answers given to the questions many people ask about UPGs are concise and compelling. Appendix 2 has 11 pages of extremely informative maps, graphs, figures, charts, and lists. There are many kinds of stunning facts made visual here.

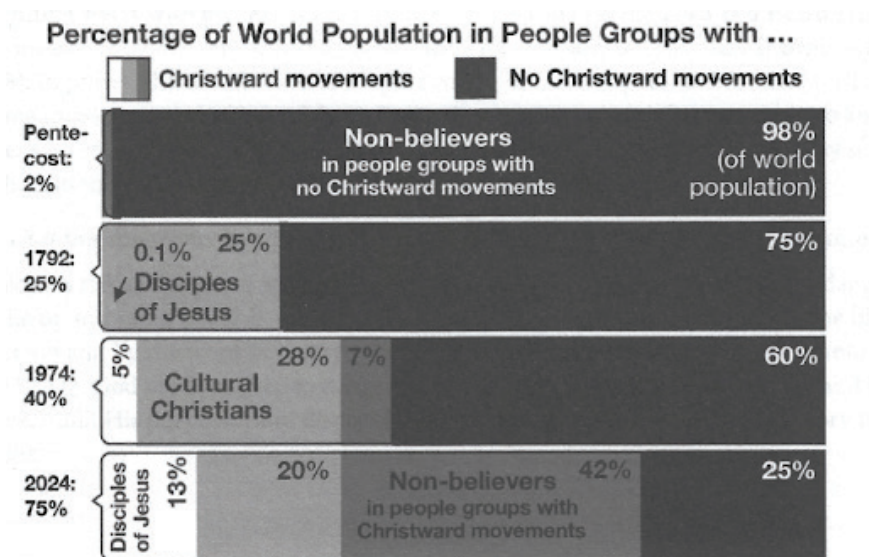


Figure 13: The Increasing Progress of the Gospel. Used with permission by R. W. Lewis.

Here is just one of the numerous illuminating figures in Appendix 2, page 282 (Figure 13). In looking at the bottom two rows of this chart, one can see the enormous progress that has been made in the 50 years since Lausanne (1974). Yet there is still so much to be done!

So, what do we make of this library in one volume?

Having facilitated a series of four online events in our mission in 2024, in which we discussed and wrestled with UPGs and what they mean for our ministries, I found reading this book cover-to-cover was a fresh education in UPG history and thinking. I was called by God into full-time ministry among Muslims as a teenager before the idea of UPGs had been developed, and while on the field, I was not enamored with UPG strategies nor did I seriously study what all the hoopla was about. Reading this book has deeply impressed me afresh with the powerful paradigm-changing impact of UPG thinking and helped me understand in a far deeper way why this understanding of missions has been so foundational in shaping the world of missions in which most of us live today.

How does *People Vision* help those of us serving in the trenches?

Whether you are in your first term, and just starting to learn the language and culture, or you have been serving for 20 or 30 years, there is something for you in *People Vision*. There are so many types of insights throughout the book. I cannot imagine anyone reading this book who will not have multiple “Ah hah!” moments of illumination. One such moment for me was the realization that one billion unreached people live in India alone (xxvi), and that half of the population of all Frontier People Groups live in India (287). Also, Datema and Bartlotti’s description of the development and influence of the people-group paradigm (chapter 4) was illuminating in that this has all happened since I first began ministry. It was fascinating to learn how the Live Dead initiative (birthed in the early 2000s) within the Assemblies of God, which focuses on church planting among unreached peoples, now accounts for 30% of all Assemblies of God global workers. And it disturbed and challenged me to learn that now, even after 50 years of UPG strategizing and mobilizing, “fewer than

4% of global missionaries work among UPGs, where 60% of the world's nonbelievers live" and that only 1% work in Frontier People Groups that have now viable witness to Christ (196).

Readers should keep in mind that *People Vision* is more of a library of articles than a cohesive book. The book would have been better had the contributions been more integrated and cohesive. For example, the section with short comments from field members about how people-group thinking impacts their ministries was interesting, but it did not really add much to the book since it was too arbitrary, and few conclusions were drawn from the wide variety of comments.

I wholeheartedly endorse this book!

That said, I would highly recommend that every team serving among unreached people get a copy of this book, study it, and have it on hand as a reference. This volume should be required reading for all mission candidates. And I would encourage you to get your supporters and church leaders to read this book.

For those already invested in people-group thinking the book is a powerful reinforcement. For those new to the whole idea, or skeptical of it, as I was for many years, *People Vision* makes a compelling case for the ongoing significance and priority of keeping the focus of local churches around the world on the peoples who are still unreached and without access to the gospel.

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Bibliography

Bartlotti, Leonard. 2020. "Reimagining and Reenvisioning People Groups." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* vol 56, no.4.