



From a Packed Lunch to Great Banquet

By **RICHARD M. VERREYNNE**

Richard Verreyne lives in South Africa, training pastors, church planters, and missionaries. He leads a ministry, Church on the Move, seeking to mobilize and revitalize the Church for its global mission task. He can be reached at richardverreyne@gmail.com.

Outside his campus abode at the US Center for World Mission, Ralph Winter and I enjoyed a packed lunch in the winter of 1982. Shaded by a big old tree, he recounted the birth of Perspectives. I concede I knew very little about global missions, especially the unreached. I was a 32-year-old pastor of an evangelical church on the east coast of South Africa.

Meaningful missionary themes emerged during my four years of seminary. The Great Commission stood out among my academic mentors, but the weight of cross-cultural missions never settled on me. Personal evangelism was my priority. As a young pastor in Cape Town, I had the joy of seeing a newly planted suburban church expand rapidly.

I started training teams in evangelism, using Jim Kennedy's popular model, Evangelism Explosion (EE), before eventually being invited in 1982 to participate in the 20th anniversary of EE to be held in Fort Lauderdale. Having never traveled to the US, I sought advice from my friends, Dave and Debbie Bliss, who said, "You simply have to spend at least one whole week at the US Center for World Mission and meet Ralph Winter!" And so, I did.

Now I was here, intently listening to Winter relate the need for a fresh new perspective on missionary training; how stacks of curriculum material shaped a compendium of reality-filled missiology; how God brought together a significantly large number of partnering professors and mission practitioners

with much to contribute through writing and live presentations. They would start training teams called to ripe mission fields among the unreached. I was hearing from the source of a dynamic story about how God shaped the Perspectives Study Program.

Before my unforgettable meeting with Winter, I walked the campus from this side to that, visited the William Carey Library, and spoke to some of the cosmopolitan students. Always in the back of my mind was the Bliss' story of how the USCWM came into being. I now witnessed the enormous faith venture to buy this vacant college campus without money and how the massive prayerful faith fundraising process came to pass.

Having talked much and eaten little, the sage then placed a ring binder with the study guide before me; on top of that was the brand new blue 1981 edition of the *Perspectives Reader*. His words were soft and uninspiring, as a deep frown marked his forehead: "See if there's anything you can do with this." Walking away from that conversation, I clutched my gift, wondering, "What would I go and do with this?"

Now, I had the opportunity to structure a new two-year missions course and decided to use *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*.

Back in South Africa, God's plans were unfolding. The second conference of the South African Action for World Evangelization (SAAWE) took place in Durban. I started working closely with this organization, inspired by their motto: "South Africa a fountain of good news to the nations of the world." In 1983, I was called to a local church east of Johannesburg, where the Christian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) was also docked. I assisted as an administrative registrar and taught missiology. For decades, missions in South Africa had been caught up in the throes of apartheid. Something was needed to wrest free the study of mission from this disempowering grip of politically inspired views. Now, I had the opportunity to structure a new two-year missions course and decided to use *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. In 1985,

I was appointed as CRTS president. With interest so overwhelmingly heightened for the missiology course, we structured CRTS to have a School of Theology, training pastors with a strong missional emphasis, and a School of World Mission, equipping mission candidates with a sound evangelical theology for cross-cultural mission endeavor. The results have been profound, with numerous mission candidates deployed into Africa, Asia, and the 10/40 Window. Many local churches are involved in missions and becoming sender bases from which the Lord of the Harvest can send out his called ones.

That local church east of Johannesburg became something of an epicenter church from where their own missionary testimony of prayer, faith-promise giving, and sending missionaries multiplied hundredfold and more! The 1990s saw more than 2,500 local churches in various denominations adopt a missionary vision and become involved in world evangelization. According to the *South African Christian Handbook* (SAAWE; 1989 ed.), the number of missionaries sent from South Africa into the world was a meager 285. An SAAWE estimate in 1989 stated that mission-supporting churches could be counted on one hand. We sorely wanted to see that change!

The Lord blessed these efforts abundantly as the fruit of mission endeavor spread like wildfire during the 1990s. In 1997, the estimated number of missionaries sent out from South Africa exceeded 7,000, with over 1,000 local churches becoming involved in missions.

We give glory to God for mission-mobilizing being initiated in South Africa and its ripple effect throughout Africa, the 400 minority groups in China, Russia's many indigenous peoples, and the Indian subcontinent with its 2,500 unreached and unengaged people groups. Dear faithful partners in Winter's vision—by the grace of our God, we have "seen what we could do" with the gift of that vision, a reader, and a study guide. We await a great banquet with all nations as the Lord's guests. Soli Deo gloria! 🏡