



The Future is Bright

Greg H. Parsons, Guest Editor



This is the first issue of *Mission Frontiers* without Ralph Winter's involvement. I've pondered what to focus on in this space, which he filled so many times from 1979 till early 2009. Dr. Winter would not have wanted us to focus on him, so throughout this issue, we decided to emphasize what God has done through the life of one man, multiplied to so many.

If nothing else it reminds us that our lives do make a difference—one way or the other. The more intentionally we pursue the Lord and seek to influence others, the more fruit God produces, even if we can't always see it clearly.

As I've thought about what to include here I could mention some of Winter's major contributions, such as:

- *The Theological Education by Extension movement*, which helped bring training to proven leaders in their location of ministry.
- The presentation at the *Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974*, which raised awareness of unreached peoples or cultures, and the value of mobilizing engagement with them.
- The discussion of *sodalities* (mission structures) and *modalities* (church-type structures) to help us rethink how God works through his people in the Bible and in history.
- His emphasis on the *wartime lifestyle* to focus resources of any and every kind on the task to which God has called us.
- His concern that the gospel be *de-westernized*: removing Western forms and



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views of Christianity that aren't in the Bible and yet are often communicated as part of the gospel.

We could also talk about the arenas of his involvement, some of which might surprise you—as it often did me! But actually that is what you will find in many of the reflections and tributes in this issue, so I won't repeat these.

Perhaps then, it would be best to share a few of the burdens on Winter's mind—some of which had been in his writing for many years. These are not in any order. Others who knew him might have chosen different issues or said these in different ways.

1. *Long-term Gospel Impact*: It is thrilling to look around the world at the places where the gospel has spread and seems to have taken root. Yet in some places, it looks as though this impact has failed to make a sustained difference, such as in post-Christian France. As Dr. Winter might have said, "If modern-day France is the future of the gospel, we're kidding ourselves to think our missions efforts today will endure tomorrow."
2. *The Influence of Culture*: This concept seems to have grown out of lessons Winter learned long ago from historian Kenneth Scott Latourette. Latourette noted that as Christianity spreads, two things happen: a) it impacts the cultures into which it is going; and, b) it is impacted by those cultures. Christianity has been shaped by culture, be it Jewish, Greek, Roman, German, English, Russian, American, etc. The question we need to grapple with as we take it to still new frontiers is: How can I be sure I am communicating a biblical message to this people or culture?

3. *Kingdom Perspective*: Winter was also moving from the language of "church planting" to *Kingdom Mission*. It isn't that church planting work isn't a crucial part of the process, but as far back as the 1960s, he was concerned that it was easy for missionaries to let their "activities" become the focus of their work, forgetting the bigger picture of what God desires to do among people and communities. Kingdom Mission looks at what it is that God may want to accomplish, as best we understand it, and pursues that, all the while looking to the Bible to determine how we "do" church or missions. Winter defined Kingdom Mission as that which includes and also goes beyond the church itself to see "God's will done on earth as it is in heaven."
4. *Focus on Frontiers*: Winter was always looking for new frontiers of the gospel. In the last few years, he was not talking about Unreached People groups as often, not because the job to reach them is finished, but because that task had become a well-known focus (at least in mission circles). So, he was looking for things that the mission world or the church world had overlooked. These frontiers represent barriers that need to be crossed, but which may not be easily or clearly identified. Some may even say that these new frontiers don't exist or they may resist efforts to cross these boundaries. Winter never did this as a way to be trendy. He knew that trends come and go and often they over-emphasize or overstate the new idea, and can thus misdirect people who hear later in the communications loop.
5. *Fighting Evil*: Over the last eight years, Winter began to seriously examine Satanic evil which, from his perspective, is both an affront to God and a hindrance to the spread of his fame and glory. As he observed major global problems that are dragging down the human race, he was both challenged and frustrated. Challenged—as he began to develop theories about how Satan's work is distorting creation right under believers' noses. Yet frustrated—that it was hard to find Christians who cared enough to give their lives and careers to combat them. He was convinced

that committed believers should be fighting evil at any and all levels. Normally, we think of this kind of warfare in mainly “spiritual” terms, dealing with sin in people’s lives and the more obvious impact of Satan. And, we deal with those in mainly spiritual ways: by praying, teaching or giving counsel. Winter would say we should go beyond all that. If something is attacking people’s view of God’s goodness and glory, we should counter-attack by figuring out what is happening at, for example, the biological level, and find a way to correct it. We shouldn’t stand by and suggest that if God wanted to, he would take care of it.

Naturally, other items could also be listed, but we will leave that for a future issue or other forums. For Winter, all of this was a walk of faith and obedience.

What’s Next for the USCWM?

When a supporter of one of our staff heard about Dr. Winter’s death, they wondered if the USCWM would close down. In a word: NO!

Our team has been shaped by Dr. Winter, and one of the things that he has instilled in us is the idea of continuing to look for new frontiers, for new ways of communicating. We have a passion and a desire to advance God’s Kingdom any way possible.

So what are we going to do? Well, we’ll continue much of what we have been doing: producing *Mission Frontiers*, running 200 *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* classes around the U.S. and helping others do that around the world, publishing and distributing books through William Carey Library, producing training resources we (and others) can use to prepare future workers in Kingdom Mission, launching the Roberta Winter Institute and so on.

But we are looking into new things, such as having a Ralph D. Winter annual lectureship or strategy events to draw together people engaged with core issues in global mission. We’ve dreamed about starting a 3-month pre-field missionary internship—in conjunction with pioneering agencies and as a follow-up to *Perspectives*—to

develop and mentor the next generation of workers.

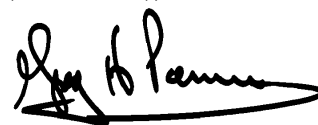
And we want to launch programs that have been on the drawing board—or which we tried, but didn’t have enough resources to pull off right. One example is what we used to call the “Million Person Campaign.” This was designed to raise awareness on the part of one million people to the plight of the unreached peoples. We’ve had various plans on the drawing board, but haven’t launched more than a few trials. We still believe we need to continue to mobilize.

We’ll keep other programs moving forward such as INSIGHT, World Christian Foundations, and the production of such resources as the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* and the *Global Prayer Digest*.

Finally, during this season after Dr. Winter’s death, we are seeking the Lord’s wisdom. As our leadership team adjusts to Dr. Winter’s death and the appointment of Dave Datema as the next General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship (see pages 56-57), we are praying, studying the Scriptures together and building relationships with each other (and people we’ve known through the years). This task-oriented community is strong. We will build on that as we seek the Lord for the future.

Lastly, thanks to many of you who have prayed for us over these years. We need that now. Because we believe the Lord still has much for us to do, we also want to ask many of you (in the U.S.) to consider joining our team at some level. We are putting the finishing touches on a trial plan to encourage people like you around the country to volunteer in your own area. And, we hope that many will join our team here in Pasadena or in one of our other offices here in North America.

Yours for bringing about the obedience of faith among all peoples for his name (Romans 1:5),



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