

The Roberta Winter Institute: Destroying the Works of the Devil to Make His Glory Known

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Birth of an Institute

The Roberta Winter Institute (RWI) sprouted in the latter months of 2001. Just as the world was reeling from the 9-11 tragedy, Ralph D. Winter was reeling from a tragedy of his own: watching Roberta—his wife and companion of 50 years—slowly fade out of this world due to terminal cancer. In her honor—and because he came to view disease eradication as a crucial new way to glorify God—Winter officially established the RWI shortly after her death.

Ironically and shockingly, not long after establishing the Roberta Winter Institute, Winter was diagnosed with the same type of cancer that took Roberta's life (multiple myeloma). Over the next eight years he laid the groundwork for all that he hoped the RWI would accomplish, even as his health continually declined. What he left behind was a collection of some of the most interesting and far-sighted ideas of his career.

Passing the Torch

Though its founder passed away in 2009, the work of the Roberta Winter Institute continues on with fresh conviction and vision. That vision is to ignite in the body of Christ a theological shift regarding disease and its eradication. Below are five points that summarize the theological shift we aim to kindle.

1. That disease is not from God, but a work of the devil to be destroyed (1 John 3:8) as part of the larger context of the cosmic war between God and Satan.
2. That disease eradication is not only an effective way to address human suffering, but also a marvelous way to empower missions, validate the gospel message, and demonstrate God's character.
3. That more diseases than we realize can actually be permanently snuffed out on a global scale, i.e., eradicated.
4. That pennies on the dollar of all health research funds go toward researching the origins of our diseases.

5. That the body of Christ could be vitally helpful and should be actively involved in the cause.

What We Do

To ignite this theological shift, we're working hard to drive new thinking through our events and resources, and we're fostering new research and initiatives aimed at conquering the roots of disease. Below are some endeavors we'd like to see into existence. Following that is a list of the firstfruits of our efforts, projects that are just getting off the ground.

Initiatives We'd Like to Catalyze:

1. Awareness Campaigns

A good example of an awareness campaign we'd like to inspire is Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. Perspectives is perhaps the most effective and widely used mission mobilization tool of the last forty years. This 15-week study program has inspired and directed countless souls into their most strategic role in world missions. Can a similar program be developed for the cause of disease eradication?

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2. Funding Campaigns

A little known fact is that Rotarians have been at the forefront of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative since it began in 1988. In that time the number of polio cases worldwide has decreased by more than 99%.¹ Recently the Rotary Foundation raised \$200 million in three years² to help tackle the last 1% of polio cases worldwide. They did this by challenging each of their 34,000 clubs to raise \$2,000 per year, for three years. For comparison sake, if each of the roughly 314,000 Protestant churches in the United States³ followed the Rotarian pattern, over \$1.8 billion would be generated in three years.

3. Prayer Movements

Prayer has always been a crucial element to missions. No one questions Samuel Zwemer's assertion that "the history of missions is the history of answered prayer." In the future, we expect the same will be said of diseases that become eradicated.

4. Special Purpose Organizations

Obviously a whole host of additional organizations will be necessary, everything from scientific research to public health education and policy to vaccine delivery efforts and more. Organizations like the Carter Center provide patterns to follow. However, we see great wisdom in starting small, "for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin." (Zec 4:10)

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Firstfruits

Thankfully God has already connected us with a handful of people who desire to partner with likeminded souls and experiment on the peripheries with solutions that more established institutions can't or won't consider.

1. Institute for Study of the Origins of Disease

Winter long dreamt of establishing a research organization that would conduct scientific and social research about the origins of disease. In February 2014 we convened an all-day summit to brainstorm about such an organization, including potential diseases on which to focus. The result was the launch of a postgraduate level research institute headed by biochemical geneticist Richard Gunasekera.

2. Horrifying Creation Book

Quoting C.S. Lewis, "All creatures cause pain by being born, and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die." (*The Problem of Pain*) Is this the way God intended things? Or has Satan corrupted natural processes to produce things like malevolent parasites and carnivorous

predators? The aim of this project is to integrate scientific evidence with the assumption that all violence in nature—especially disease—is the result of nature being corrupted by Satan and his fallen angels.

3. Database on Human Suffering

There are a number of databases that track disease, corruption, poverty and other causes of human suffering. There are also databases—such as the Joshua Project—that provide statistics about unreached people groups. Can these two types of databases be combined to determine the people groups in most need of both the light of the gospel and the alleviation of suffering? We think so. That's why we're fostering a feasibility study regarding this concept.

Kingdom Breakthroughs

As a joint project of William Carey International University and Frontier Ventures, the Roberta Winter Institute aspires to fill this crucial niche: to be one of many catalysts seeking kingdom breakthroughs among unreached people groups. But catalyzing kingdom breakthroughs among unreached people groups isn't merely about planting viable, evangelizing, indigenous church movements. In the big picture, evangelism and discipleship can be viewed as the recruitment and training of "soldiers" for a war. Evangelism—or recruitment for the kingdom—is not the sole divine objective. To quote Winter again, "recruitment before battle is a priority, but merely a priority." Once recruited, these new soldiers with their transformed lives must battle the "works of the devil," (1 John 3:8) such as spiritual darkness, corruption, and disease. As they address the roots of these problems, their good works will then legitimize and enable further evangelism, resulting in still more recruits for the battle of the kingdom. In this perspective the mission of the Body of Christ is greatly enhanced from simply getting people into heaven, to restoring God's reputation and making his glory known.

To find out more about the Roberta Winter Institute, visit our website: www.robertawinterinstitute.org 

¹ <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Polio>

² <http://www.polioeradication.org/tabid/461/iid/189/Default.aspx>

³ http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#largest



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