

Caring for History

Ralph Winter was a prodigious writer. Like many others he used a pen to think. He wrote very few books, but over the years articles flowed from his pen that punctuated evangelical consciousness with prophetic jabs. My wife, Beth, is his oldest daughter and has been given the task of editing over fifty of his personal journals. His daily and weekly scribbles are sacred witness to a devoted mind pressing into God's purposes. They stretch from his early missionary service in the mountains of Guatemala to his statesman role at the U. S. Center for World Mission. The initial journals were written in Spanish as he learned to think the thoughts of a new native terrain, and as my wife translates and edits she will frequently mention a surprising historical occurrence. Collectively these little interjections have impressed upon me the need to take care of historical legacy.

Historical care is what I might call it. The general historical consciousness we carry in evangelical mission, that memory we draw on in our mission enterprise, not only needs the historian to fill in the gaps, but the archivist to faithfully hold and care for documents that maintain an accurate account of our past. It's those holdings that can correct the popular notions and apocryphal legends which we so easily generate in promoting our mission enterprise. Ralph Winter's role in mission was legendary, but he also was a historian, and I think he reluctantly agreed to preserve his journals for editing because he knew their candid and personal observations would take better care of history.

Winter's reflex was not only to interpret the past, but to care for it. He often mentioned the tragic destruction of libraries throughout the ages that inflicted such difficulty on man's ability to understand his own past. When Donald McGavran was in his twilight years and losing his ability to read, his home was close to the campus of the center where Winter worked. Winter prioritized this man's legacy in mission and assigned our staff to assist him: to care for his ailing wife, Mary; to receive dictation of his entire last book; to move his personal library; and to simply transport him to a lecture where his observations from seven decades in mission service could still transfix an audience. Nothing extraordinary, really. All this is very indicative of the honor and respect missionaries have normally given to their mentors and their historic legacies.

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Editor

Brad Gill

Editor-at-Large

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Consulting Editors

Rick Brown, Gavriel Gefen, Herbert Hofer, Rebecca Lewis, H. L. Richard, Steve Saint

Layout

Marjorie Clark

Secretary

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Publisher

Bradley Gill, representing the student-level meeting at Edinburgh 1980.

2014 ISFM Executive Committee

Greg Parsons, Brad Gill, Rory Clark, Darrell Dorr

Web Site

www.ijfm.org

Editorial Correspondence

1605 E. Elizabeth Street
Pasadena, CA 91104
(734) 765-0368, editors@ijfm.org

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Send all subscription correspondence to:

IJFM

**1605 E. Elizabeth Street
Pasadena, CA 91104**

Tel: (330) 626-3361

Fax: (626) 398-2263

Email: subscriptions@ijfm.org

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The recent establishment of the Ralph Winter Research Center carries this mandate. A distinguished group gathered from different parts of the country for an inaugural forum on the legacy of Donald McGavran (p. 61). They met in a room adjacent to the archives of McGavran and Winter, where the quiet faithful service of archivists like our Helen Darsie convert old correspondence and artifacts into ordered memory. It's here that Winter's wife, Barbara, took nearly five years to faithfully cull through her husband's 900 boxes and file drawers of papers and a trove of correspondence. Why does it matter? Well, there's a deep sense that when we lose our collective memory, we begin to lose our orientation. Mission always moves forward with the gospel, but its skill and dexterity rests on a clear historical consciousness.

This issue of the journal recalls three important legacies in frontier mission; that of Donald McGavran, Ralph Winter and J. H. Bavinck. Their legacies stem from different traditions (Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed, respectively), each profoundly but almost unconsciously

shaping evangelical mission today. McGavran's archives are located in both Wheaton and Pasadena, which now serve as pilgrimage sites for those tackling doctoral studies on his missiology. The fading memory of J. H. Bavinck will hopefully be revitalized with the recent publication of a reader for the English-speaking world (p. 75). H. L. Richard reviews this Dutch missiologist's prescient contribution to our theology of culture and religion.

And during a year of events commemorating the 40th anniversary of Lausanne '74, we also offer a reprint of Harold Fickett's scintillating description of Ralph Winter's speech on the remaining frontiers of mission at that historic congress. That speech actually represented a confluence of different legacies that today is seen as the single movement called "frontier mission." I offered a particular angle on the history of this frontier mission movement when I addressed the ASFM in Korea last year, and I include it here in the hope that it will highlight the unique missiological dynamic that runs through our international networks (p. 89). ISFM 2014 will focus entirely on the

legacy of world evangelization that developed across four decades since Lausanne '74, and you can look forward to those papers and addresses in future issues of the journal.

At *IJFM*, we'll try to do our share in caring for our mission legacies.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.