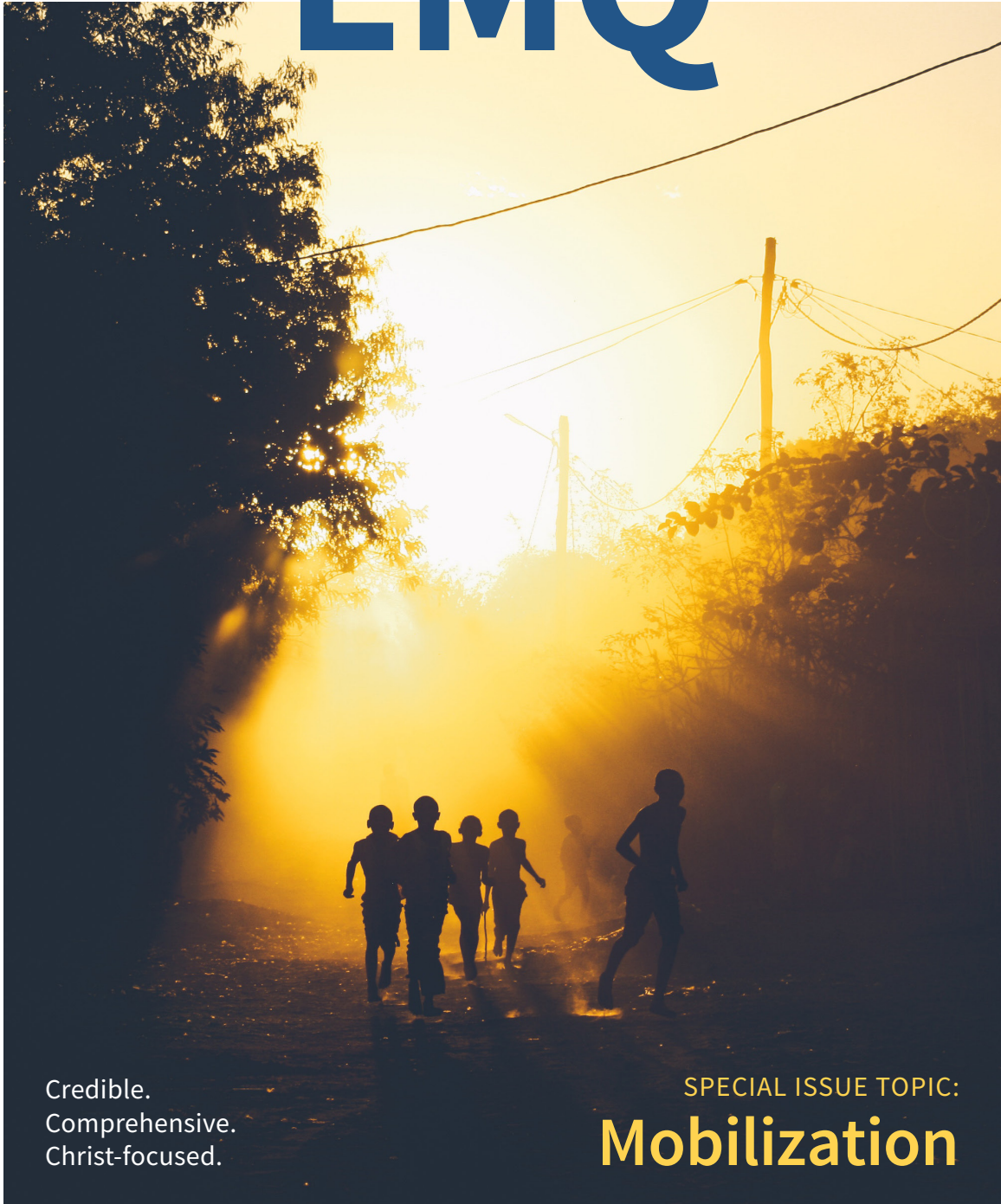


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SPECIAL ISSUE TOPIC:
Mobilization

Ralph D. Winter: The Entrepreneurial Mobilizer

Greg H. Parsons

Most people who know something about the late missiologist Ralph Winter, know about his Lausanne 1974 plenary address on unreached peoples (Winter 1975). Some know him from his reinvigorating the discussion about church and mission structures—which he called Sodalities and Modalities (Winter 1974). Still others know him because of his foundational work on Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in the 1960s (Winter 1969).

I am aware of dozens, if not hundreds, of other things that *could* be on that list—some of which may be even more significant.¹ Winter was a “serial” inventor—ever the engineer. And, he was always a professor—ever the teacher, be it one person or thousands. As a young man, he realized he would need to motivate people and organizations toward deeper involvement in missions. So early in life he began challenging people toward the Lord and His Word. As his opportunities and experience grew, his passion to motivate others to involvement grew. The global mission “industry”—as he liked to call it—were the ones most interested in what he had to say.

This article describes a few of the ways he approached motivating people. As Steve Hawthorne describes it, “When Christians intentionally inspire, instruct, mentor, or equip fellow Christians to become engaged and fruitful in His mission, they are doing the work of mobilizing.”²

Influencing Family and Friends

Winter was very focused on whatever task was on his mind at any time—always passing on vision and ideas to draw people to important things small or huge. He applied this in his interaction with people when he was young, before he was well known.

His younger brother David Winter, himself an accomplished educator and President of Westmont College, recalled how Ralph had challenged his life direction:

When I was just starting college ... I was just sort of drifting and he [Ralph] saw that and ... said, ‘Dave you are just messing around you need to get away from here you need to leave family and friends and have an adventure, an experience, and I know just what you should do,’ as he usually did. ... He said, ‘You need to go to Prairie Bible Institute.’ ... I didn’t even hesitate, he was very persuasive, and I was also intimidated by his vision, his ideas—I just went. It absolutely changed my life. I came back from that year a different person. I would have never done that except for Ralph.³

Another well-known person Ralph Winter influenced was his close friend, Dan Fuller, son of the radio

evangelist Charles E. Fuller. After graduating from Caltech and Navy flight training, Ralph decided he wanted to go to Princeton to study Inductive Bible Study. Dan described the influence of Winter's on his life. In reflecting back to a time when their two families were at a picnic together, Dan said:

He was this person who liked to be doing as useful and wonderful things as he could with his time. And had an unusual intelligence. . . . I really enjoyed being around Ralph. He always had something interesting to say, some new idea. . . . I said, "I would like to be with that kind of person at seminary." I think that eighty percent of the direction that my life has taken comes from that picnic at the Winter's house when I decided to send my application to Princeton. . . . He felt the importance of learning the Inductive Bible Study. And that's the thing that I gave my whole life to. . . . and I owe it to Ralph.⁴

Growing Global Engagement

While at Princeton, Winter met J. Christy Wilson, who was the InterVarsity representative in the area. In December 1946, Winter and J. Christy recruited students to drive to Toronto to join more than five hundred fifty others for the first InterVarsity Christian Fellowship student convention⁵ (Klein 1947, 5–6).

About the same time, Winter heard about the need for English and other subject teachers in Afghanistan. This seemed like a great way both to serve the society for the good and to be "light and salt" in the world. Over the next several years, he recruited more than 100 to go Afghanistan and serve. (Winter 2000, 6–7) He also traveled up and down the East Coast getting medical and other equipment donated to Afghanistan, to help start the Afghan Institute of Technology, modeled after CalTech. His older brother Paul, also an engineer, served there for over a year.

Ralph was mobilizing when he met his wife Roberta. He had been asked to speak to student nurses at the LA General Hospital chapel. At the conclusion of his message, Ralph asked the young women if any of them wanted to go hear a missionary speak. He had room in his car for five girls and took them to hear Frank Charles Laubach (1884–1970), well known around the world for his literacy methods. On the way back from Laubach's talk, some of the girls, who were very conservative, expressed doubt as to whether Laubach was "a real Christian" or not. The questions arose less from what Laubach had to say, and more due to the fact that they considered the church where he had spoken to be liberal. Ralph asked the girls directly whether they thought Laubach was a real Christian and only one was willing to say so: Roberta Helm. He was also impressed that, though she was from a narrow Christian background, she was willing to buck peer pressure in the car rather than side with the other girls who disagreed with her. Less than six months later, they were married.⁶

On the "Field" in Guatemala

Ralph was always attempting to encourage people see the world a little differently. To motivate prayer for his and Roberta's work in the mountainous, indigenous area of Guatemala, Ralph produced slideshows for supporters and a newsletter describing a number of different aspects of their work and vision.

Our fundamental purpose is to make the world mission more real to the people back home. This means that we must strive constantly to wean the people away from mere interest in us and fasten their gaze upon the people to whom we are going. Travelogues and family details will not enter at all except where . . . the general role of the missionary can be helpfully explained to folks whose concept is out of date.⁷

While serving in the rural area of Guatemala, Ralph and co-missionary James Emery saw the need for local pastors and leaders to finish their elementary education. This would allow them to continue training for the ministry. They put together a team, which Ralph helped recruit from several mission organizations, which created primers in the core subjects: science, math, social studies, and history. If the students learned this material, they would know all they needed to finish their schooling and pass the final test. Then they could

go to seminary and get a seminary degree, and then be ordained (Winter 2000, 28–9).

Theological Education by Extension (TEE)

But, those men and women couldn't go anywhere! They were subsistence farmers—in addition to any church/pastoral ministry they had. So, Winter and Emery developed a way to take the training to the pastors and leader rather than making them go far away to the city for training. TEE was born. As it grew, they sought to mobilize interest and involvement beyond their area or even merely Latin America.

Ralph saw an opportunity to increase the impact of TEE when he met James F. Hopewell, who headed the Theological Education Fund (TEF) under the WCC.⁸ At the time, the TEF was seeking to persuade seminaries around the world to merge in order to train ministers more effectively from one base, combining buildings, libraries, and dormitories.

During the conference where they met, Winter had lunch with Hopewell and explained to him what they were doing in Guatemala. Later, TEF gave a \$14,000 grant to purchase books for twelve regional extension sites in Guatemala and Mexico⁹ (Winter 1967, 10).

In 1965, Hopewell was the most experienced “outsider” to observe the activities of the Guatemala “experiment.” In the book Ralph edited on TEE, he wrote in his introduction to a chapter by Hopewell, “This document in early 1965 represents the first time an eminent person was willing in a large group to go out on a limb to this extent for the extension concept and to give his words added force by accompanying them with a critique, a serious critique, of traditional methodology” (Hopewell 1969, 36).

Ralph realized that for TEE to be accepted, they would have to mobilize basic awareness among Christian leaders in the U.S. So, in 1966, he wrote several popular level articles for *World Vision Magazine* (which was a generic, missions periodical that dealt with a broad range of issues). The first was, “This Seminary Goes to the Student,” focused in Guatemala and on getting training to the “rural man” (Winter 1966, 12). It mentioned those being trained using TEE methods in Guatemala, Bolivia, and Columbia, as well as other organizations using TEE. The list included The West Indies Mission, George Allen Theological Seminary, Evangelism-in-Depth, and United Biblical Seminary. In a later article he mentions the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the joint efforts of the two major North American mission associations (IFMA/EFMA) expressed through the Committee to Assist Missionary Education Overseas¹⁰ (Winter 1970, 16).

The California Friends Mission was also using TEE in Guatemala and Honduras, with thirteen regional centers and eighty-five students. In Guatemala, the Presbyterians had one hundred students and eleven regional centers where students gathered in their own localities, at least once a week. By mid-1969, he wrote that the seminary in Guatemala had “220 students and has become the catalyst of a whole movement involving more than 50 other schools in Latin America, and there is serious interest around the world” (Winter 1969, 8).

As TEE spread in Latin America, Ralph along with Ralph Covell, who was training missionaries at what became Denver Seminary, traveled through Asia sharing with all would listen about the values core to TEE: Getting training to the existing leaders, rather than training younger, unproven leaders who are moved away from their churches for training.

TEE continued to spread, though not as deeply as Ralph had hoped and dreamed. *The World Directory of Theological Education by Extension* (Weld 1973) reported various aspects of TEE programs, including where training had occurred, materials produced, and locations of programs. He lists the following forty-two countries, many with programs in multiple cities.

In India, the program was still strong in 2009. The Association for Theological Education by Extension there, runs the largest Christian training entity in the country, with thirteen thousand active students.¹¹ OMF reported that in Cambodia, “Theological Education by Extension (TEE) is an interdenominational group committed to educating and training church leaders, wherever they may be. TEE provides this training through a mixture of home study, group learning and ministry application”¹²

The 2010 edition of *Operation World* lists sixty-four different countries as having or needing an increase in TEE ministry—including thousands of students. Many of these are in places you would expect—areas where poverty or security are major issues—such as: Algeria, where, “The establishment of strong indigenous groups

and church leaders. The rapid growth and sensitive context makes leadership development a constant challenge. TEE is developing quickly in order to help raise up a new generation of leaders” (Mandryk 2010, 99).¹³

Mobilization that Continues

When I first met Ralph Winter at a student meeting in 1976, I did not know anything about unreached people groups. I was interested in the reaching the whole world but did not understand what that might take to accomplish. What I learned that evening changed my life, setting a trajectory for the rest of my life. I could not get out of my mind both the man and his message. As I processed what I learned about the lack of the gospel witness among thousands of people groups, the mobilization task became clear that ever. Later, I realized that if every church in the world were to reach out as far as it could in every direction, more than one half of the world would remain untouched.

What Ralph shared that night was, in essence, what he had said to the Lausanne Congress in 1974. At the time, Ralph and Roberta (who worked with him side-by-side) didn’t believe that presentation impacted many people at the time. But, thirty-six years later, at the third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town in October 2010, three major points were emphasized from the platform as the core impact of Lausanne ’74:

1. The Lausanne Covenant.
2. The clear recognition and need for evangelicals to focus on social issues.
3. The massive need to take the gospel to unreached people groups, as presented by Winter and illustrated by Donald McGavran.¹⁴

Since Ralph Winter died in 2009, I have recorded more than sixty interview testimonies of his impact on the lives of women and men. One of them is from a brother who trained in Pasadena under Winter—who coached this man and his wife to go to one of the largest people groups in Southeast Asia. Each time this man visited the U.S., he would check in with Ralph share the progress of the gospel and exchange ideas with him. He testified how much this helped them in their front-line work. They started from scratch and, as of 2016, there are none thousand Muslims followers of Christ. It has been in the hands of local leadership for several years and continues to grow.

These are only a few examples of the lasting influence of Ralph Winter’s unashamed, enthusiastic, and innovative efforts to mobilize believers to spread the Gospel in more effective ways. As he did with his brother, Dan Fuller, James Hopewell and hundreds of others, he was continually seeking to draw people into whatever idea was on his mind and heart at the time.

What is your story? Who is the “Ralph Winter” in your life? As we look to the future, and what God might want to do through us in our generation, you should also ask who are we mobilizing? 📖

Greg Parsons joined the U.S. Center for World Mission (now Frontier Ventures) in 1982—working twenty-seven years with Ralph Winter. Greg served from 1990–2010 as the director and he now serves by learning form and connect with missions and church leaders globally. He also serves as the Chancellor and Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies at WCIU.edu, writes a regular column in *Mission Frontiers* magazine and serves on the boards of Missio Nexus and Christar.

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Notes

1. I list a number of these in my dissertation on Ralph D. Winter. (Parsons 2012)
2. Steve Hawthorne is the author of *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement Study Guide*, and co-author, with Ralph Winter, of the *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement Reader*, (Hawthorne 2015, 1)
3. Comments made by David Winter at Ralph Winter's memorial, June 28, 2009.
4. Interview with Daniel Fuller by the author on March 7, 2005, 3–4.
5. This was the first of IV's every three-year convention now called: Urbana.
6. Interview with Ralph Winter by the author on August 7, 2006, 7 and (Winter 2000, 14). For more on Ralph and Roberta's meeting and engagement, see: (Winter 2001)
7. September 28, 1957 letter from Ralph D. Winter to one of his mission leaders, Dr. Rycroft, 2.
8. Hopewell had been with TEF since it started in 1958, which was before it had any connection with the WCC. Winter wrote, "He had visited more theological institutions on the face of the earth than any other man who has ever lived." (Winter 1969, 37)
9. According to "A Report of Theological Education Fund 1964-1965", 32. This is worth about \$120,000 in 2018.
10. CAMEO's sought to bring together "educators and mission leaders as to the responsibilities educators and evangelical institutes on in the homeland have for their counterparts on the mission field." (Editorial 1967, 115)
11. Email from the director of TAFTEE, David Samuel to Greg H. Parsons, February 11, 2009. I was not able to get updated statistics in time for this article.
12. <https://omf.org/us/product/theological-education-by-extension-p70009/>, accessed March 2017.
13. 2017, (Parsons 2017) <https://www.rdwresearchcenter.org/single-post/2018/02/03/Theological-Education-by-Extension-Lessons-from-the-Past-Application-for-the-Future> (accessed April 30, 2018).
14. Both Winter and McGavran gave plenary talks about the need for cross-cultural evangelism.