

Christmas 1995

This is Roberta

Dear wonderful friends,

I've just told Ralph that we should change the design and greeting here to Happy New Year, or something like that. The one consolation we have for being late is that our letter does not fall into your hands with a hundred others which you may have received during December. And unless you have available a design of little naked cherubs depicting a new year, just what could we do indicate 1996 that would already be on a computer design disk? So we'll just stay with the holly. It may be our last holly anyhow, since a couple days ago we cut down the 40-year-old holly tree at our front door whose trunk was so big that we feared the root structure was endangering our foundation. I felt a bit sad to see it go because I love holly and what it stands for. But it is a relief not to worry about stepping on a holly leaf when barefoot!

So, we're off to the races again—or so it seems to me. My teaching schedule begins in a few days on the 16th, and from then until mid-March, I'm teaching in nine different cities, and speaking 12 times in seven weeks. Pray that my voice and my strength will hold out. (Maybe I should ask that you pray that next time I'll have sense enough or be humble enough to say No!) But I do enjoy teaching. When I come home to stay in March, I have the Voyagers Sunday School class, trying to finish my series on Moses.

For at least four years now we have not been able to get all together a family. The last "near miss" was a couple of years ago in London for all but our youngest daughter's family. This year before Christmas we were all together here in Pasadena except for our third daughter's family in London. (Sigh!) It makes it very hard indeed to take a complete family picture. I have to admit that it is a bit less chaotic with ten instead of thirteen children under 14.

This time the sons-in-law—Bless their hearts!—allowed Ralph and me and these three (of our four) daughters to go off on our own for a whole day, sans children and chaos. That was wonderful. We love our grandchildren, but it is hard to carry on an adult conversation with so many children around. Like Billy Graham has said (so I've been told), "You love to see them come and you love to see them go." Or is that merely a sign that we're a year older?

We are heading now further into the wind as we tackle the preparation of Module III of our World Christian Foundations curriculum (an entire M.A. program). Throughout these four, arduous years I don't know whatever we would have done without

This is Ralph

Dear faithful friends,

Here is something very curious. Roberta and I—even you as you read this letter—are dependent ultimately on the existence of that very special Person, the God "who is there." That's why the issue that disturbs many comes at Christmas time—then it is we "face the music" on the ultimate question of who Jesus was. That's why we enclose a pungent, exciting document on the significance of Christmas.

Then, those of us who are older must face the fact that as the years tick away we ourselves are leading up to another "ultimate" of sorts—as our own personal time runs out.

One of the most vexed questions of the human story has been the matter of the "succession" of leadership.

We all want to leave behind something of value. Roberta and I inherited both a blessing and a grave responsibility when dozens of acres and dozens of families became part of our larger and unavoidable "family" here in Pasadena. This group, is legally known as "The Frontier Mission Fellowship" (also known as The U.S. Center for World Mission).

The on-going life and vision of this enterprise is in the hands of a permanent "fellowship" patterned after historical mission structures which have remained true across the generations.

This kind of an organization was anticipated. Although by now our own children and their families have been gone (thousands of miles away) for many years now, other younger people have become part of a lean and meaningful team here in Pasadena. What has come together is something I began to think through years ago: *an intentional community*.

Yes, our ten years of work and further reflection in Guatemala plus my teaching for ten years at Fuller Seminary, clearly solidified certain perspectives about the realities of the Christian movement. What sort of thing has lasted? Not local congregations. They wither and die. Not denominations, they too, fall on hard ground and slowly fail.

The only kind of organization which has often survived vibrant across centuries has been the type of "intentional community" in which children are not necessarily expected automatically to follow the lead of their parents. Each new member is invited in on the basis of the clear personal guidance of God rather than on the basis of the benefit of doubt we naturally extend to members of our own family.

At the same time we strive mightily to nourish and bless our own natural families, whether or not they are a part of our intentional community (called the Frontier Mission Fellowship). Many of our people have enjoyed much richer relationships with family members after coming here to work in our task-oriented fellowship; it is bound together not by blood ties but by common purpose.

Best Wishes
for a
Merry Christmas

Roberta Cont.

Corinne Armstrong and her team carrying the heaviest part of the load on this. This particular "module" is the one covering the human story from 200A.D. to 1980. This story happens to be our specialty. (In my many travels I've just mentioned, I'm teaching the same thing in much condensed form for Perspectives classes).

We are still longing to see a powerful spiritual revival such as our forebears knew in the Great Awakening (mid 1700s), the Finney and Moody revivals of the 1800s and those early in this century on both coasts. There are breezes blowing, but the mighty rushing wind of Acts 2 has still not arrived. We pray for that.

How about the Unreached Peoples movement? Twenty years ago when we started the USCWM, there were very few voices speaking in those terms. Now the huge, marvelous global network called the A.D. 2000 Movement has come alongside and is really taking a lot of leadership.

We at the USCWM still have a major promise to fulfill in the Million Person Campaign. I wrote 20 more chapters to update *I Will Do a New Thing*, then we decided the book was too expensive to give out free, and too long to expect most people to read. So we have to write a shorter version to challenge those not yet involved to labor and to pray. Please pray for the production of this new, smaller book.

We are both well—just minor aches and pains to remind us that we won't live forever—at least not in this life. We've just celebrated our 44th wedding anniversary. It's been a good marriage. God chose very, very well for both of us, we feel, and wish that all could experience the harmony and excitement we have had in living and working together for so long.

Each of our daughters has gone through hard times this year—either economically (they are all missionaries, on support, as we are) or in other even more difficult ways. But we are trusting God to work out everything for their good and for his glory. Pray for them too, please.

We are looking forward to this new year. May it be the year when God moves in a mighty way all over the earth, as it says in

*All over the world the Spirit is moving
All over the world as the prophets said it would be
All over the world, there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.
(See Habakkuk 2:14, Isaiah 11:9)*

Until then—or at least until next year,
Love,

Roberta

Ralph Cont.

What is our purpose? It seems to cover an immense span of different activities. *Illustrations of that spectrum:*

1. We just invested over \$25,000 in sending out over 100,000 copies of a new "Joshua Project" bulletin (by giving over our entire issue of *Mission Frontiers* to this purpose). Earlier this year, twenty-three of our team were in Korea working behind the scenes in the largest, most representative meeting in history stemming from the diverse peoples of our world today.

2. At the same time we just published 5,000 sets of four volumes each—the four Gospels—in *Greek*, each page recording line after line of the Greek New Testament along with all the other lines from the 45 most ancient and authoritative manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. This will inevitably become a standard study tool in all the world's theological schools.

What is the common denominator? Both of these projects bring glory to God, defend His Name, manifest His glory, stimulate His work for outreach to the ends of the earth.

How did our team happen to choose these projects? Because no one else seemed to be available. No was ready to do exactly these things.

Most of what we do—including these two projects—is in collaboration with others. We certainly do not wish to draw credit from others to ourselves.) But now and then in the course of history good things need a little extra push from an alert team of people who are "ready for any good work" as Paul admonished Titus to be.

Our next issue of *Mission Frontiers*—going to the press in a few days—will carry a summary of all the good things in which we have been involved this past year. I won't try to go over them, but will merely explain that we are feeling a bit more precarious than ever before. And we are. Time becomes more precious as life becomes more precarious.

In short, we are overwhelmed with needs couples with opportunities like we never have had before. Commercial organizations get "support" from every sale—as demands increase the support increases as well.

In our case letters, phone calls, faxes, and now email comes piling in with greater and greater volume. But, this DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCE MORE WORKERS. We are facing an almost impossible situation with each new triumph. We are "outsourcing" as much as possible. We are contemplating hiring a commercial writer to assist Roberta get this new book into print. But you can't buy vision and commitment with money. We need people with warm hearts and ready hands to help with the expanding challenges. Do help us pray for that.

Meanwhile, we are grateful beyond words for the clear vision and faithfulness you have manifested toward us across the years.

With gratitude unbounded,

Ralph

