

A Prolegomena to Understanding and Evaluating Dr. Ralph Winter's "Fourth Era Kingdom Mission"

David J. Hesselgrave

In late August 2006 almost thirty individuals including U. S. Center staff personnel but also specialists in missiology, education and the sciences responded to an invitation from Dr. Ralph Winter to attend an October consultation in Techny, Illinois. The larger concern of the consultation had to do with the future of the Roberta Winter Institute. But the specific purpose was to discuss Dr. Winter's "...radically different interpretation of the Lord's Prayer and the Great Commission." (Winter 2006)

That discussion has now extended for almost two years and may well prove to be one of the more important of current missiological discussions. This essay might best be thought of as prolegomena and incentive to undertake the more intensive dialogue that Dr. Winter's new proposal unquestionably deserves.

Winter's "Fourth Era Kingdom Mission" in Outline Form

Winter's basic notions emanate from secular sources as well as sacred Scripture. With respect to the latter, Winter has a high view of Scripture. In fact, by his own confession, he is a classical inerrantist.

Biblical Moorings

1. Concerning creation and the struggle between good and evil,

God and Satan. Genesis 1 is the story of a new beginning in which the dust settles, light returns, and non-carnivorous animal life and non-violent human life are created. However, humans

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are seduced by Satan, violence returns, and the relatively short history of the Bible ensues.

2. Concerning God's promise to Abraham and Israel's missionary call. Genesis 12:1-3 and its elaborations indicate that Jehovah called upon Israel to take an active, not a passive, role in sharing the promised blessing with surrounding nations. The opera-

tive word here is the word "active."

3. Concerning the mission of Christ. Christ's mission was both redemptive and restorative—it yielded both the gospel of salvation and the gospel of the kingdom. Christ came to give his life a ransom for sin (Mk. 10:45) but also to war against evil, set captives free (Lk. 4:18-19) and destroy the works of the Devil (I Jn. 3:8).

4. Concerning the Lord's Prayer. The petition "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10) focuses on life on earth, not life in heaven. Ultimately it means that the church should do more than pray for the coming of the king-

dom, it means that the church should take an active role in its advancement.

5. Concerning the Great Commission. Winter's interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20, highlights the phrase "obey all that I have commanded." This phrase implies that Christian mission includes all that the Great Commandment, for example, requires.

6. Concerning proclamation and

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demonstration. As long as the gospel is merely “information” and “words” it will be insufficient, unconvincing, and even meaningless because words without deeds have no meaning. Deeds that war against evil clarify God’s glory more than accomplishing or completing it. In a profound sense, the glory of God manifest in his creative work and the good works of his people is itself a means of mission.

Extra-biblical Components

1. Cosmological components.

Winter believes that God created and endowed Satan with the extraordinary capacity actually to initiate sin and suffering in all their multifarious forms. His special focus on the destruction of disease-bearing microbes likely grows out of his own experience.

2. Paleontological components.

Building on Merrill Unger and a “con-

ing “kingdom war” between God and Satan. “First Inheritance Evangelicalism” was characterized by a dual emphasis on the earthly and heavenly, the social and the personal. In America it branched into two “reductionisms.” One reductionism among upper class influential Christians emphasized social concern—God’s will on earth.

A second reductionism (i.e., “Second Inheritance Evangelicalism”) emphasized personal salvation coupled with an other-worldly focus on heaven. This second reductionism, represented by evangelist D. L. Moody and theologian C. I. Scofield, became mainstream evangelicalism in America. It labeled those who exercised social concern as liberals; eschewed the word “kingdom,” and evolved a theology of “this world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through.” It elaborated into the Bible school movement, and the

Mission in this Fourth Era requires that we address the world in terms provided by scientific consensus and intelligent contributions to global needs.

temporary scientific consensus,” Winter understands our world to have evolved over perhaps 500 million years that were characterized by great violence, massive eruptions and a series of cataclysmic “extinction events” triggered by collisions of asteroids with our earth. All of this preceded Genesis 1:1 and resulted in the destruction of most life and the generally chaotic condition of the whole world including that part of the world dealt with in the Genesis account.

3. Historical components.

Winter’s new understanding rests squarely on his interpretation of history—biblical history, of course, but also church and mission history. Fast-forwarding to modern times here, Winter takes special note of the part played by post-Reformation “First and Second Inheritance Evangelicalism” in this on-go-

Bible schools educated the majority of evangelical missionaries during the early 20th century. Only recently has it attained social influence through the conversion of Bible schools into colleges and universities.

Equally important is Winter’s well-known division of modern mission history into three (now four!) eras during which the gospel was taken successively to coastlands, inland areas, and then “unreached peoples” everywhere. Now we are in a “Fourth Era.” Reaching coastal, inland and unreached peoples continues, but more important is our increased understanding of evil, disease and medicine; and globalization and the challenge of reaching great cities and “diaspora peoples.”

4. Apologetic/polemical components.

Mission in this Fourth Era requires that we address the world in

terms provided by scientific consensus on the one hand, and intelligent contributions to global needs on the other. Otherwise, Christianity will lack credibility. In fact, we stand in danger of losing our own children. Mission-minded Christians should be at the forefront of research. They should establish universities rather than Bible schools.

Towards an Evaluation of "Fourth Era Kingdom Mission"

What I have written above has been reviewed by Dr. Winter, though in a somewhat different form, and he has agreed to its essential correctness. To my thinking, his proposal represents the most ingenious and comprehensive statement of transformational mission yet conceived by an evangelical missiologist. Many have embraced concepts that lead in a similar direction (e.g., transformationalism but also incarnationalism, holism, developmentalism, environmentalism, evolutionism, globalization and more), but Dr. Winter has woven these strands together in such a way as to construct an avant-garde missiology that will appeal to many Christians—especially younger ones. My purpose in what follows, then, is to raise some of the numerous questions that need to be explored when studying and evaluating Fourth Era Kingdom Mission. Admittedly sketchy and only suggestive, these questions grow out of extensive personal correspondence with Dr. Winter as well as a careful reading of relevant writings. They are designed to encourage and engender a wider and deeper discussion of Dr. Winter's current thinking.

Some Basic Questions

1. Theological Questions. When dealing with the vexing problem of suffering, Winter commends the work of Gregory Boyd who espouses open theism; writes that "God looks like Jesus"; describes Jesus and his ministry in terms of "freeing people from evil and misery"; and adds that Jesus was "war-

ring against forces that oppress people and resist the good purposes of God" (Boyd 2008). But we must ask, To what extent do Winter and Boyd mistake some of God's attributes in their effort to absolve God from responsibility for human suffering? Again, is the foregoing characterization of God and Jesus (and Jesus' ministry) full-orbed or only one-dimensional?

2. Exegetical Questions. Winter's "radically different interpretations" of the Lord's Prayer and the Great Commission may be different. But are they valid? Does not his reinterpretation of the Lord's Prayer remake a model prayer into a model prescription? As for the subsidiary phrase "obey all that I have commanded you," does it define mission as in much of holistic missiology or does it rather define what discipleship entails?

3. Semantic Questions. The assertion that words without deeds are meaningless is reinforced by pointing to Jesus who validated his ministry and

ed to avoid discussion of classical eschatologies. Vagueness and ambiguity at this point, however, only engenders more questions. For example, how are we to understand Christ's words, "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout all the world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:13) and the emphasis of A. T. Pierson and a host of other mission leaders on completing the Great Commission in order to "bring back the King"? Or, at the other end of the eschatological spectrum, how does Fourth Era Kingdom thinking differ from that of George Eldon Ladd when he writes, "He [Christ] is never interested in the future for its own sake, but speaks of the future because of its impact on the present"; our mission is to "...display the life of the eschatological kingdom in the present evil age"? (Ladd 1974, 337; see also Hesselgrave 2005:330-45)

5. Motivational Questions. Winter sometimes deprecates the kind of

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The assertion that words without deeds are meaningless is reinforced by pointing to Jesus who validated his ministry and message by mighty works and merciful deeds.
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message by mighty works and merciful deeds. True to a point, but is this not pressed too far? We would agree that the ultimate "proof" for the truth of the gospel of Christ was, and is, the vicarious death and bodily resurrection of Jesus. But we ourselves were not eyewitnesses of Christ's death and resurrection. We have only the written records of eyewitnesses! Must we not conclude that, ultimately, the truth of the gospel rises or falls, not only on the meaningfulness of those records, but also on their factualness?

4. Eschatological Questions. I myself have more or less assumed that Winter is an amillennialist. But, other than anti-dispensational references, his Fourth Era proposal seems calculat-

missionary motivation that is primarily concerned with preaching the gospel and "saving souls." But he also lauds the sacrificial exploits of missionary pioneers who went early on to coastland and inland areas. But the fact is that the primary motivation of the likes of Henry Martyn, Robert Morrison, Adoniram Judson, J. Hudson Taylor and, yes, William Carey and David Livingstone as well, was not social, physical, political or educational but fundamentally and decisively spiritual. What does that say to Fourth Era missionary motivation?

6. Missiological Questions. It is now common to make Jesus' mission out to be one of divine compassion and social transformation and to

make Jesus' mission out to be a model for our own (or our mission out to be a continuation of his mission). Fourth Era Kingdom Mission follows suit. But if mission is to be defined and described in terms of "destroying the works of the Devil," what prevents us from categorizing any really good work as part of our mission? Again, what about the prominence accorded to the Apostle Paul and his mission in the New Testament and in historical missiology—and the relatively unimportant place accorded him in Fourth Era mission?

7. Apologetic and Doxological Questions. Fourth Era intentions are to make the gospel believable and to make God "glorifiable." But does not Jesus make it clear that the Holy Spirit was sent to convict the world (Jn.

16:7-8)? Does the Apostle Paul not make it clear that the gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) and that it is the "foolishness" of the message and the weakness of the messenger that bring glory to God (1 Cor. 1:16ff)?

ing to which, at his first coming, Jesus revealed the kingdom in his person, preached it in his gospel, presented it to his people, and taught his disciples to pray for its arrival. At his second coming or *parousia*, Christ will answer the prayer of his people by bringing the kingdom and establishing his rule on earth. Henry writes, "The closest approximation of the Kingdom of God today is the church, the body of regenerate believers that owns the crucified and risen Redeemer as its Head." (Henry 1965, 88) And, "The church's mission is to evangelize the world by preaching the gospel, converting men and women to Christ, instructing them in the faith, and forming them into responsible churches." (Henry 1965, 102) I agree.

2. Donald McGavran's Perspective

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1. Carl Henry's Perspective on Kingdom and Mission. A year before he chaired the Berlin Congress on Evangelism, Henry published a book in which he dismissed the "old liberal theology" according to which "The Kingdom is...defined as a life of humanitarian idealism." He went on to explain his own view accord-

tive on Mission and Missiology. McGavran went to India in 1923 as an educator believing that, as he told me late in life, "education was the door to salvation for Indians." He changed his mind; was successful in launching the Church Growth Movement; but failed in an attempt to get the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1968) to consider his question "What of the two billion [unevangelized]?" Finally, in 1988 he wrote a letter that eventuated in the formation of the Evangelical Missiological Society. In that letter he urged the formation of a "Society of Christian Missiology" that would "quite frankly" declare that "...the purpose of missiology is to carry out the Great Commission," adding that "...anything other than that may be a good thing to do, but it is not missiology." (McGavran 1988). I agree.

3. Ralph Winter's Third Era Mission Perspective. It is of considerable solace that the essentials of Dr. Winter's earlier understanding of mis-

sion and mission strategy are also pretty much in accord with my own. It was put forward in a 1998 article, "The Meaning of 'Mission': Understanding this Term is Crucial to Completion of the Missionary Task" in which he wrote:

The future of the world hinges on what we make of this word "mission" Yet at this moment it is almost universally misunderstood—in both liberal and conservative circles. About the only people who still think of mission as having to do with preaching the gospel where Christ is not named, with being a testimony to the very last tribe and nation and tongue on this earth, are the often confused people in the pew. In this matter their instincts outshine those of many eminent theologians [sic.] and ecclesiastical statesmen. (Winter 1998; initial emphasis his; latter emphasis mine)

It is worth noting that Dr. Winter's words accompanied his leadership in the effort to complete world evangelization by providing "A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by A. D. 2000 and Beyond." Also that the awkward construction "and beyond" indicated that leaders of that time were persuaded that future priority should be given to world evangelization and that the Third Era need not be superceded by a Fourth or any other era!

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Transforming Worldviews

Paul G Hiebert, Baker Academic, 2008.

—Reviews by John D Wilson

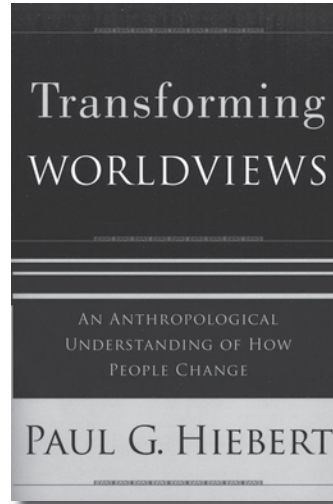
Transforming Worldviews is a remarkable book, which I wish every missionary would read, study, and if necessary wrestle with!" Missionary teams should consider working through it together.

Published posthumously, *Transforming Worldviews* is typical of Hiebert:¹ scholarly but lucid; theoretical but essentially practical; and reflecting and applying what he has written before concerning anthropological and missiological issues.²

This book is essentially in three integrated parts: The first deals with the theory and practice of worldview study; the middle deals with various

explaining synchronic and diachronic⁴ views of structure; intrinsic and relational sets; signs; logic (including relational logic); causality; themes and counter-themes; epistemological assumptions; and dimensions of worldview (cognitive, affective and evaluative themes).

Chapter 3 deals with worldviews in human contexts—that is, how people see and understand their own specific world and how to live in it. Chapter 4 outlines practical methods for analyzing worldviews and their components (such as rituals, myths,



modern values. In a footnote on page 329, Hiebert gives a startling example of this:

Ironically, even more than technology, modernity today is exporting leadership styles based on modern management principles. In the church we are increasingly aware of the need to contextualize the gospel in other cultures, but we are often more willing to contextualize the gospel than our forms of leadership and church organization. The danger is that we are planting churches into a science in which we can engineer growth if we follow the right formula.

It is important to recognize why Hiebert devoted one third of his book on “transforming worldviews” to an examination of our western worldview and its background. The reason is given on page 320:

In seminaries we need to begin by examining the worldview of the culture in which we ourselves live and how it shapes the way we think. We need to compare this against a biblical worldview in order to transform ours in light of the gospel.

Until we wrestle critically with our own worldview we are not in a position to help in transformation of others’ worldviews. Hiebert gives us tools and theories; but we must do our homework in critical reflection about our own culture, and allow that reflection to lead to our own worldview transformation. When we engage other cultures, we can experience transformation of our own worldview and bring it into alignment with a biblical worldview. Then we can participate meaningfully in helping others towards the transformation of their worldview.⁵

Finally, (in chapters 10 and 11) Hiebert discusses the elements of a “Biblical Worldview” and outlines the

Hiebert gives us tools and theories; but **we must do our homework in critical reflection about our own culture**, and allow that reflection to lead to our own worldview transformation.

kinds of worldview³ (“small scale oral societies,” “Peasant” and Western); and the final two chapters address worldview transformation with respect to a “Biblical Worldview.”

Hiebert traces the history of the concept of worldview in anthropology and gives a “preliminary definition... in anthropological terms as ‘the foundational cognitive, affective and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives’” (p. 25).

In chapter 2 he deals with the characteristics and functions of worldviews,

literature, aesthetics, and ideals).

Then in three chapters—a full third of the book—Hiebert gives a critical description of Modern and Post-Modern worldviews, and of globalization. He challenges his readers (assuming particularly North Americans) to examine our own worldview and understand how it has skewed our understanding of the gospel and how we live as Christians. We are unwittingly out of synch with the other cultures in which we live and minister, so that our evangelism, discipleship, church planting and every other ministry are done with a mixture of biblical ideals and

processes of worldview transformation.

He acknowledges that "in one sense, it is arrogant to claim that there is a biblical worldview"; but goes on to explain the idea in terms of "human understandings of the underlying givens in Scripture, rather than as the creation as God sees it" (pages 265-266). To develop a biblical worldview is to endeavour to inform and transform our underlying assumptions, categories and logic from Scripture rather than from the popular culture of the society around us. It requires us to understand fundamental worldview themes which pervade Scripture, and Hiebert examines, for example, cognitive, evaluative, and diachronic themes.

Failure to strive for a biblical worldview inevitably results in syncretism. Worldviews are not static and it is easy to slide away from a biblical worldview, and that is as true for us as for those we seek to disciple.

Conclusion

Transforming Worldviews is a valuable tool to help us understand the dynamic of worldview and facilitate the process of worldview transformation in discipleship.

The title *Transforming Worldviews* seems to be deliberately ambiguous. This book is not just about how worldviews can be transformed; it is also about how worldviews can transform us and how we behave. Perhaps we do not realize how much we are shaped by the dominant worldview of the society and people around us.

Usually, it is only through deep engagement with another culture that our own unexamined worldview assumptions come to the surface. It helps to be able to "step outside our culture and look at it from the outside, and to have outsiders tell us what they perceived as our worldview." (p. 321)

Hiebert deals, of course, with the human side of transformation through socio-cultural and historical processes. He acknowledges that "spiritual transformation is the work of God in the life of a sinner." However, it is

"because transformation involves sinners, it also has a human dimension" (p. 307).

This is a book which should be worked through in community with others. That is totally in keeping with what Hiebert writes.

We can only fully understand our own worldview through a critical process which takes account of both the "emic" (insider's subjective) and "etic" (outsider's objective) perspectives. "Knowing is a profoundly communal act. In order to know something we depend on the consensus of the community in which we are rooted..." (p. 267).

Our own culture extracts us from community to become autonomous individuals with a habit of learning which is less aware of the relational dimensions of being and knowing which are fundamental to understanding cultures and worldviews.

A study handbook would be helpful, and I hope someone will develop

such a guide, so that students and missionaries can study this together.

Endnotes

1. Paul G. Hiebert was distinguished professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He began teaching at Trinity in 1990. He went to be with the Lord on Sunday, March 11, 2007.

2. For example, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues, Anthropological Insights For Missionaries*.

3. I wish that Hiebert had included something on Islamic and Buddhist worldviews which are particularly significant in the early 21st century.

4. A synchronic view is like a slice through the structure of the culture, revealing various phenomena at a given point in time. A diachronic view deals with phenomena in a culture as they occur or change over a period of time-in a story line.

5. While Hiebert's observations are perceptive and helpful, it would have been helpful, and challenging, to have some scholars from Buddhist and Islamic cultures provide an "etic" (outsider's standpoint) critique of modern and postmodern western culture. ■

Disciples make Disciples

William R. Yount and Mike Barnett, *Called To Reach: Equipping Cross-Cultural Disciples*, B & H Publishing, Nashville, 2007. ISBN: 0-8054-4066-6

—Reviewed by John D Wilson, World Team

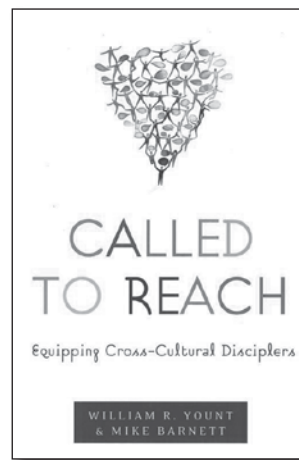
Called to Reach is a book on discipleship which is relevant anywhere, because it is not essentially about methodology but about the discipler (himself/herself) becoming a Bible-based and Spirit-empowered disciple who is growing towards maturity.

Do not be put off by Grant McClung's review in *EMQ* (Jan 2008) in which he assessed the "book is best suited as a text book in the academy for missionary preparation."

Called to Reach should be used in our theological and missionary training institutions; but it is far more than a text book—it is devotional and instructional; spiritually challenging and educationally practical; it will bless you personally as a disciple (first) and it will direct you as a disciple maker.

Every disciple is a disciple maker; so every disciple maker must first be a growing disciple. That's what this book is about.

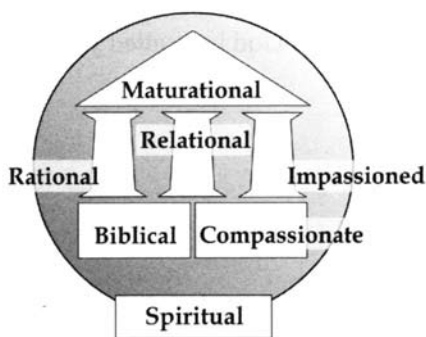
Rick Yount and Mike Barnett take seven significant elements of discipleship, which are seven aspects of character in which we need to grow in order to become mature, faithful disciples, and in turn in order to become effective disciple-



makers. The discipleship model is an integrative, “pragmatic” depiction of how discipleship proceeds.

This kind of model appears to be static whereas we are dealing with a dynamic and organic process. However, as the authors develop each characteristic in relation to each of the others, you discover the model is synergistic and useful for personal reflection and for use in your own disciple-making contexts.

Rick integrates into this model the teachers’ triad (represented by the three pillars) which he believes re-



Character Traits
drawn from the
Disciples' Model

flects God’s design of human nature: Rational, Affective and Behavioral. However, this model is not just about education and educational skills, it is about character development, and so the outer circle represents the encircling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The co-authors have prayerfully identified and combined seven characteristics which are developed in tandem in order to be a growing disciple and an effective discipler (see above). The book is laced with numerous life-situation illustrations many which disclose personal vulnerability and provide believable examples that make you desire the same for yourself as well as those you disciple. They live what they teach. This is what makes the book so good and compelling for me. ■

Report on the North Central Regional Conference

By Andrew Pflederer

The North Central Region of the EMS held its regional conference on April 19, 2008 at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. There were 315 registered participants, representing numerous schools, churches, and mission organizations. This was a 10% increase over last year’s record-breaking attendance.

The day opened in a combined session with introductory comments by Robert Priest. Throughout the day there were a total of 48 presentations made in parallel sessions in six rooms. In the afternoon there were three panel discussions on sexual issues in mission settings, short-term missions, and immigration.

Participants were offered four English tracks, a Spanish language track, as well as other themes. The first track concerned sexual issues in missions. Presentations were made that dealt with sexual identity as related to the representation of the Gospel, gender roles, missionary vulnerability, sexual abuse, and discussion related to the controversial theory of recovered memories. The second track dealt with congregations and missions and such themes such as social capital in discipleship, megachurches and mission, and the missiology of the emerging church.

The third track was short-term missions. One presentation focused on Kenyan pastors’ perspectives on short-term mission visits. Another looked at

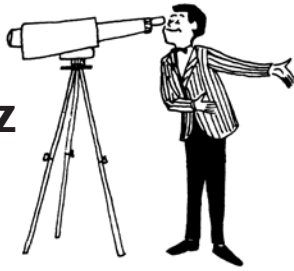
women’s short-term missions. Another interesting one was a “critical analysis of short-term mission T-shirts.” Others dealt with issues such as reciprocity, contextualization, and partnerships within short-term missions.

The fourth track looked at majority world missions. Papers were presented on Thailand sending missionaries while still receiving them, mission issues in South Korea, multi-cultural leadership in emerging missions, partnership, and mission and migrant workers. The Spanish language track addressed issues such as women as leaders and servants, immigration and politics in the U.S., pastoral realities in Paraguay, lessons learned for missional and global cooperation, and challenges of missions for the evangelical church in Latin America.

In addition to all of these, there were presentations on burial practices from multi-ethnic churches in Kenya, the bases of the global mission movement, immigration and politics, women’s issues in mission, and the missiological legacies of Donald McGavran, John R. W. Stott, Carl F. H. Henry, and Ralph Winter.

The day concluded in a combined session and closing remarks were made by Tito Paredes and David Hesselgrave. For a list of titles of the presentations as well as various links to presenters go to tiu.edu/divinity/academics/phd/ics/confold. ■

As seen
through
the **LENZ**



Dr. David Hesselgrave has had considerable correspondence with Dr. Ralph Winter regarding Ralph's concept of the "4th Era Kingdom Mission" and has some concerns regard the direction of this view of missiology. He states that Ralph has woven together concepts that "construct an avant-garde missi-

ology that will appeal to many Christians, especially the younger ones." Dave raises questions that he believes need to be weighted as missiology moves into the 21st Century. The article does not question Dr. Winter's integrity to the scriptures. Ralph is solidly in the camp of biblical inerrancy. It is his interpretation of the so called 4th Era Kingdom Mission and the questions asked by Hesselgrave that we present to you in this edition.

Ralph Winter has sent a response to Dr. Hesselgrave's article. We do not have enough room for inclusion in this edition but

will publish the response in the next edition of *OB*.

In addition, we have given you a couple of book reviews that will be helpful, both in the class room, and for the individual Missiologist. Hiebert's book especially will be challenging to our thinking, as he contends for us to be sure of our own biblical worldview before making presentations of the Gospel in other cultures. Hiebert believes that worldview must be biblically based and not culturally or sociologically based. Until we get it right in our own world, we will not be able to biblically affect another culture.

—**Bob Lenz**, editor



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED