

My Journey with The Ralph D. Winter Lectureship

By **ANDY BETTENCOURT**

Andy Bettencourt is a Research Associate at Frontier Ventures, has chaired the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, co-hosted The Missions Drop Podcast, assisted the IJFM in their publications, and facilitated innovation with mission groups as a part of the Winter Launch Lab.



An Introduction to the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship

The Ralph Winter Lectureship has a significant legacy! It has included speakers like Greg Boyd, Amos Yong, Rene Padilla, and Andrew Walls, and it honors the legacy, genius, and curiosity of Ralph Winter, the founder of Frontier Ventures. Each year, we attempt to put on a lectureship that probes the field of missiology and questions of the day. Like our founder, we seek to push these questions toward the edges of mission, where those who have not yet clearly heard the gospel in an understandable form lie.

The Winter Lectureship 2021: Buddhist-Christian Encounters

Four years ago, I was asked to help with this event while I was a volunteer in FV's Winter Launch Lab. The topic was Buddhism and specifically the work of Karl Reichelt, a Norwegian Lutheran missionary to China in the early twentieth century. Reichelt established a Christian monastery for Buddhist monks and found an innovative way of engaging the thought and practices of these monks. His innovative missiological engagement has stirred the thought and reflection of several missions thinkers, some of whom contributed to our conference, including Notto Thelle, Amos Yong, Rory Mackenzie, and Terry Muck. These men encouraged us to more thoroughly engage with Buddhist thought, practices, and people and consider both what the Buddhist may say to us as well as what we may say to the Buddhist on behalf of Christ. This encouragement towards a more comprehensive engagement with those of other faith traditions strikes deep into the heart of our work and ministry at Frontier Ventures.

The Winter Lectureship 2023: Beyond Contextualization

Thus, two years later, we explored the topic of contextualization across religious boundaries and barriers. Kang-San Tan was our lead lecturer and put forth the idea of “inreligionization” in which one may take Christian theology and its elements and have it interact with other religious worlds, communities, and forms of thought. Although many of us weren’t thrilled with the complexity of his terminology, we generally liked the idea of reflecting critically on our own religious heritage as well as offering a hospitable engagement of the heritages of others. We also acknowledged that religious traditions from Islam to Christianity to Hinduism to Buddhism contain a lot of variety and that members of each faith tradition often have profound areas of difference in practice and belief with members of their own broader tradition. Is it necessary for one to leave their birth religious tradition and community to follow Christ? We found this to be a complicated question as each tradition and culture that we come from contains both goodness from God as well as devastating sin from the brokenness of humankind. For Kang-San, this question is quite personal being raised in a Buddhist family and having a brother who is a practicing Buddhist monk. For other speakers, like Darren Duerksen and Harold Netland, it is more theoretical, but this has also brought them into intimate relationship with folks who are navigating the challenges of complicated religious worlds. Anna Travis provided a welcome practitioner’s voice as she

spoke of members of a Muslim community that came to follow Christ and eagerly examined the Scriptures, while remaining connected to their communities and cultures. Another speaker discussed how he has slowly come to more fully engage with persons of other faith traditions after deeply reflecting on the complicated history of mission in India. All too many stories from this place testify to the power dynamics at play between the missionary and the missionized, and have made honest discussion across religious differences nearly impossible in some contexts.

Homogeneity and Hybridity: Revisiting HUP

We have also covered topics like the Homogeneous Unit Principle, which interacts with the challenges of race, class, caste, language, and urbanization. How do we see Christ reflected so richly in many other cultures, languages, and settings yet leave space for Christ to speak into ethnic and cultural divides? This topic is often engaged too hastily and leads to problematic results on either side of the debate. We need people to grow in Christ in their local communities and have patience with that, but we also know that the Bible speaks to the realities of the foreigner, stranger, and outcast in our midst. Furthermore, we know that *Christ has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility* (Ephesians 2:14, NIV) and relational barriers between individuals and groups. Thus, we have a complicated reality especially when we wish to witness to high-identity-peoples who do not yet know Christ and may not yet interact with other communities or persons for a variety of reasons. This led to our conference in 2022, where we had 11 speakers as well as several roundtable discussions to unpack the complicated layers involved in this conversation in a variety of places across the globe. Readers of this article would



be greatly enriched by engaging the *IJFM* issue that recently published much of the content from this conference, *IJFM* Issue 40:1-2 (Published July 2024).

Wisdom for Cross-Cultural Service

Last year, we focused on the field of Missiological Anthropology and heard insights from five seasoned scholars: Darrell Whiteman, Miriam Adeney, Bob Priest, Michael Rynkiewicz, and Dan Shaw. These scholars shared their own stories and journeys in academia and mission about how anthropological study and research has affected their work and faith. They also noted with profound grief the lack of rigorous anthropological study and reflection in the mission community. Despite this, each person has uniquely contributed to the work of mission from their field of expertise. Darrell Whiteman has trained missionaries, mostly in the Global South, for their field work with a short set of anthropological tools that both enriched as well as challenged them. Miriam Adeney has conducted research and study on five continents and helped others tell their stories with their own voices, language, and cultural forms. Bob Priest has engaged with topics from spiritual warfare to sexuality with an impressive depth of research and data. Michael Rynkiewicz has challenged church and mission communities in their understanding of race, rights, and the complexity of culture, which is always contested and never just one thing. Dan Shaw has translated the Bible for the Samo people and carried along an interesting and slow practice of translation, which sought to profoundly interact with people, their community, culture, and ways of making meaning, so that they could remain Samo in Christ, much like the Jews and Gentiles of the New Testament.



For Further Information and Materials

If you are interested in further diving into the materials mentioned above, please reach out to me, Andy Bettencourt at andy.b@frontierventures.org. I will do my

best to point you in the right direction to some of the articles and recordings that we have obtained from these lectureships. Also, we will hopefully have them published on the Ralph D. Winter Research Center Website soon, rdwrc.wciu.edu.

What's Coming in 2025?

In our upcoming foray into the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, we will be exploring the world of urban missiology. Viv Grigg and Danny Hunter of William Carey International University are currently formulating this event, and I will be assisting them as things move forward. We hope to bring another program that engages with questions from around the world about the work of God's kingdom in different communities, especially those that have yet to interact with a contextually relevant gospel. Stay tuned for more information. This lectureship will happen in spring of 2025 and may be attended virtually or in-person, and of course, we will record all the content and make it available to attendees.



We look forward to continuing to stir the minds, hearts, and actions of those practicing and critically reflecting on missions to the least reached populations of the world! 📌