

CELEBRATING THE WORK OF GOD THROUGH THE LIFE OF AN INNOVATOR RALPH D. WINTER (1924–2009)

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Introduction

Creative approaches to life and work seem too rare. All of us can think of people we know who are “a little different” in a creative way. Sometimes they are a bother. Why don’t they just do it the acceptable way everyone else does? Why do they always come up with another, different idea? Sometimes, when we are around them, we are tempted to utter those seven words that can kill any new idea: we have never done it that way before.

I’ve wondered what it is that makes some people think differently. As believers, we realize that they

RALPH AND PAUL WERE ALSO INVOLVED IN SOME EARLY DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS STARTED BY A NEW MINISTRY CALLED THE NAVIGATORS.

can be a part of what God uses for his purposes in history. He moves in certain ways and times to do what he desires in and through the lives of his servants. One of those servants was Ralph D. Winter, born December 8, 1924.

I’ll focus this biographical sketch on Winter’s earlier life and on aspects of his story that our readers may not know.

Upbringing

Ralph Winter’s grandfather was a butcher who had emigrated from eastern Germany in the 1860s. His father, Hugo, was a self-trained engineer. Hugo worked his way through the ranks of the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, eventually having 1,200 engineers working under him in the Rapid Transit and Design Division. He was the one



person to get approval from more than 70 cities in the L.A. region for the routes of a

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Hazel and Hugo Winter, Ralph’s parents

freeway system, which, even now, is only two-thirds completed. Hugo came to Christ as a result of the preaching of Billy Sunday.

Ralph’s mother, Hazel, was the daughter of an engineer. She strongly desired to go to college, but was never able. While Hugo was quiet, Hazel was outgoing. Both were deeply involved in the Christian Endeavor youth movement, where they met. They were also “members” of a China Inland Mission (now OMF International) prayer meeting, which met in their home.

Christian Endeavor was a significant factor in the maturing of Ralph and his older brother Paul. It helped to teach them leadership, because it required young people to run and lead their meetings. Ralph and Paul were also involved in some early discipleship groups started by a new ministry called The Navigators. Their first ministry headquarters was



Ralph in his navy uniform, pictured front, far right

just one mile from the Winter home. The “Navs” not only sought to reach out to sailors on Navy ships, but also started groups for high school students called “Dunamis” (the NT Greek word for “power”). One of those groups met in the home of Hugo and Hazel, and was led by Lorne Sanny (who would later take founder Dawson Trotman’s place to lead the Navigators). Dan Fuller, son of famous radio evangelist Charles Fuller, was also in the group. Together, they all learned discipline and love for God’s word—memorizing hundreds of Bible verses, some of which Ralph quoted throughout his life, such as: Mark 9:24b, “I believe, help my unbelief.” Or Galatians 6:9a: “And let us not be weary in well doing.”

Ralph and Paul were close in age and temperament. Paul majored in engineering and became a respected structural engineer, able to work through difficult calculations on unique structures. The third son, David, was six years younger. David majored in anthropology and later focused on education, serving as the President of Westmont College from 1976 until 2001.



Education: Formal, Non-formal, and Informal

With the onset of World War II, everyone’s life, including Ralph’s and Paul’s, were impacted.

Because he was too young to join the Navy right away, Ralph began studies at the nearby California Institute of Technology (Caltech), following his brother in

engineering studies. He finished his first year and heard about the Navy’s need for engineers in the Pacific theater. But the Navy sent him back to Caltech to complete his training so he could be of more help. He finished in a year and a half (a total of 2.5 years!). As the war progressed, the U.S. was in need of pilots, so, when he finished at Caltech, he signed up for the Navy pilots’ training program. Before he finished the training, the war ended and he was discharged quickly.

Winter was especially impacted by his time at Caltech. It was a place that was conducive to tinkering and problem-solving, which fit Ralph. He noted that, “They look at things with brand-new eyes to try to invent solutions to engineering problems...”¹ At Caltech, Ralph was also exposed to world-class professors such as Linus Pauling, who was “the best

teacher I ever had. He prepared so thoroughly, he had everything worked out in advance, he was a brilliant, brilliant guy.”²

Abruptly returning from pilots’ training, there was not a lot of time to plan what was next. Ralph attended Westmont College for a year to study NT Greek. There he was first exposed to Inductive Bible Study (IBS). Desiring to study IBS more deeply drew him to Princeton Theological Seminary. He “recruited” Dan Fuller to go with him so they could study under Howard Tillman Kuist, who wrote, *These Words Upon Thy Heart* (1947). After studying there for a year, meeting the likes of Bill Bright and J. Christy Wilson, Ralph and Dan returned to Pasadena (along with Bill Bright) to attend the opening year at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1947.

In 1948, Ralph attended the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Norman, Oklahoma and returned to Fuller for another year. Then he heard that Prairie Bible Institute in Canada taught the Bible combining inductive study with an interesting “search question” approach, so he attended Prairie for one semester.³ A burden for Afghanistan had grown, and Ralph used the next “off” semester to further a project to help develop a Caltech-type school in Afghanistan called the Afghanistan Institute of Technology. He also saw the need for teachers of English there, which he responded to by recruiting dozens of volunteers. As he began to prepare to go as one of those teachers, he enrolled at the Columbia Teachers College and received a TESOL certificate there in 1951.

That summer, he met a nurse, Roberta Helm, who had just graduated top of her class from the USC Nursing School. Five months and one week later, they were married in December 1951.⁴ Ralph had planned to return to study anthropology at Columbia, but heard about the faculty at Cornell University doing



some creative, cutting-edge thinking related to linguistics. So, just before he was married, he enrolled in the Cornell Ph.D. program, finishing in August of 1953. He realized that if they were going to serve in missions, it might be best if he completed a recognized theological degree, so he re-enrolled at Princeton and received a Bachelor of Divinity degree there two years later (two daughters were born during this period).

In the midst of these seven schools, mobilizing for service in Afghanistan and plans to serve there,

Winter's inquisitive mind approached every subject with interest and curiosity. Often, he would ask the question Dawson Trotman asked, "Why am I doing what I am doing the way I am doing it?"

A few books and authors also impacted Winter, including *This Freedom Whence* by John Wesley Bready (1942). Bready outlined the impact of the Great Awakening in the UK on society in general. Winter first saw Bready's book in the late 1940s and learned from it the power of the gospel to transform society and to right social ills. While Ralph knew some about John Wesley and the results of his ministry, he commented that he "knew Wesley as an evangelist. I had no idea that the whole country would change because of his preaching."⁵

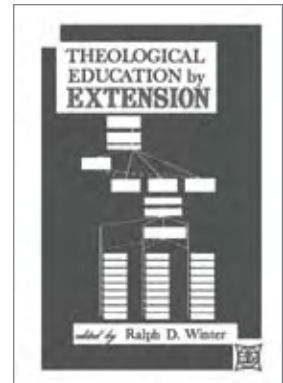
Ralph also remembered the book *The Missionary and Anthropology* by Gordon Hedderly Smith (1945, Moody Press), which was one of the first works out about the subject. Approaching a wide range of subjects from an engineering perspective allowed Winter to consider various angles when looking to solve problems. But later, he would realize that identifying the right problem was, at least initially, more important than solving the problem.

To the Field: Guatemala

When Ralph, with Roberta's help, finished his studies at Princeton, a request from the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board came to their attention for an ordained minister with training in both linguistics and anthropology. They also wanted a spouse who was a Registered Nurse. It seemed to fit well, so they applied, were accepted and entered into six weeks of pre-field training. Then it was off to language school in Costa Rica for a year.

They arrived on the field in 1957. They began to observe and to learn the Mam language of the Indians in the area. This region, above 10,000 feet, was a reached area with many churches and ministries already there. Later, Roberta Winter wrote about the Mam:

They were—and are—very poor . . . Thus, missionary outreach to them had to combine not only evangelism and church planting but also agricultural, medical, economic, and educational work. Since none of them had more than three grades of school, there were no ordained Mam Indian pastors at this point, nor was there any way that they could get the necessary entry-level education . . . Their one-room huts were made of mud with dirt floors and three stones strategically placed in the middle of the floor to serve as a fireplace-stove.



Their clothes (of which they had only one change) were patched and repatched; in fact, where the women carried their babies on their back, the patch itself was very often patched. The Mam diet was almost completely corn with a bit of black beans once a week perhaps and a tiny bit of meat for a very special and somewhat rare occasion. They had no milk, no eggs, no other vegetables or fruits—there was just no money for these. They raised chickens but could not afford to eat either their eggs or the chickens themselves. (p. 24)⁶

The Winters worked to help raise the living standard of the people. Because the Mam were so poor, and since there were no natural resources in the region, Ralph sought to connect them to resources and to give the pastors the skills they needed to be able to work in various kinds of businesses. These included things such as a photo shop, weaving for the women, dental work, the first ambulance service for the region, as well as businesses that were not as mobile including a wood-working shop and a print shop.

Missionary James (Jim) Emery, with his wife Genet, preceded the Winters to the field. Together, Ralph and Jim noticed that they were not really training leadership fast enough to supply the existing churches. Jim had worked for a few years in a residential seminary that only had trained ten active pastors after 25 years. Something had to change.

Many late nights of discussion between Winter and Emery (who were later joined by Ross Kinsler)

began what became known as Theological Education by Extension (TEE). The core idea was to get the training to the natural leaders rather than bringing unproven young men out of their churches into a centralized seminary. TEE spread around Latin America and many places in Europe, Africa and Asia. It is still used in a number of locations, the largest of which is India, where The Association for Theological Education by Extension currently has 13,000 students (as of February 2009).

To the Fuller School of World Mission

Winter's work with TEE as well as some of his writing got the attention of Donald McGavran, who was just starting the School of World Mission (SWM) at Fuller Theological Seminary. McGavran and Alan Tippett had started the specialized



training school only to serve furloughed missionaries. Ralph was the third faculty member; although he was not planning on teaching beyond one semester when he first arrived.

Over the ten years at the SWM at Fuller, Winter had some 1,000 missionary students in his classes. He taught "Church History" but didn't call it that or see it traditionally. Instead of focusing primarily on individuals or doctrine, he looked at the expansion of Christianity. Here the perspective of former missionary, prolific writer and Yale church historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette, profoundly impacted him. Winter loved the fact that Latourette concluded each section of his major work with an essay on the impact of Christianity on the cultures where it was spreading and a section on the impact of those cultures on Christianity.⁷

But as Winter heard about the lives and the reports of ministry from those 1,000 missionaries, he began to see a pattern. In Winter's classic style, he would say things like, "None of these missionaries came back from fields where no missionaries had gone." In other words, there were "fields" from which no missionaries could return, because none had been sent. As he began to look into this further, he discovered major blocs of cultures, or people groups, where there was no viable church

presence. Fuller's SWM had an increasing focus on the church growing where it existed; the Winters' increasing focus was on the Church going where it had not gone.

Many discussions and brainstorming ultimately led to Winter's presentation at the Lausanne 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. A number of Fuller professors were involved in the event. Winter's presentation, "The Highest Priority: Cross Cultural Evangelism," was given on Saturday morning, and Winter claimed that the place was half-empty from people needing a break during the 10-day event. He and Roberta were not sure that anyone there "got it." But it was a watershed for them, and would become one for the mission movement in North America, and, ultimately, in many other places around the globe.



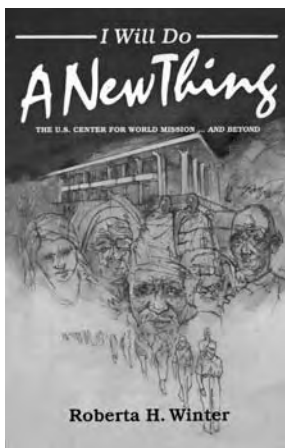
What Winter was saying in his Lausanne presentation was that if the church around the globe were to reach out in evangelism as far as it could, in every direction, more than half the world would still be unreached. We could no longer look merely at *countries* where the gospel had gone. We needed to look at *people groups* or cultures where the gospel had not yet penetrated. The strength of the church was crucial.

It was simple: Figure out what was left to be done and inform and motivate people to do it. The ministry of mobilization was a crucial element.

The USCWM

The Winters returned from Lausanne believing that God was moving them again. This time it was out from under any kind of "support" from a mission structure or seminary. Just three miles away, just north and east of Fuller, another campus was for sale.





The Pasadena Nazarene College had relocated near San Diego, after a history on the Pasadena property dating back to 1910. The campus was a bit run-down, and hadn't attracted any offers. It was occupied by an eastern, mystical cult that had rented most of the main campus, which led to a multi-faceted story for which we don't have space here. For more details on the founding of the U.S. Center for World Mission, see *I Will Do A New Thing*, by Roberta H. Winter.



There are many twists and turns in Ralph and Roberta's story. At this point, it might be helpful to comment on just a few of the ideas, which are part of the history of the USCWM, the William Carey International University and their ministries. I'll focus here on a few things that are not referenced in others' comments in this issue of *Mission Frontiers*.

When Winter was still at Fuller, he had heard that there was a great increase in the number of students who responded positively to the commitment cards at the triennial InterVarsity Urbana convention in 1973. He proposed that they endorse

a follow-up course that would help students more clearly understand the biblical, historical, cultural and strategic dimensions of world evangelization. The early course, called the Institute of International Studies, is now known as *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* and has 80,000 alumni in North America alone.

Organizational Impact

Winter worked through the establishment of organizations to accomplish various purposes. This was true in Guatemala, though much more so during his tenure at Fuller, when, for example, he was asked to start William Carey Library. He worked, leveraging his Presbyterian ties, to help found a number of organizations including Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, the Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies and the Presbyterian Order for World Evangelization. Where possible, these were tied into official denominational approval, allowing for faster acceptance of these unknown projects in large circles.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find information with regard to his involvement in starting the American Society of Missiology and its associated journal, *Missiology*. Many readers are already familiar with a number of ministries within the USCWM and the WCIU, such as this magazine, the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, *Global Prayer Digest*, and various university programs such as the World Christian Foundations. You can see the attached list of some of the other organizations he had a part in starting or assisted in some way.

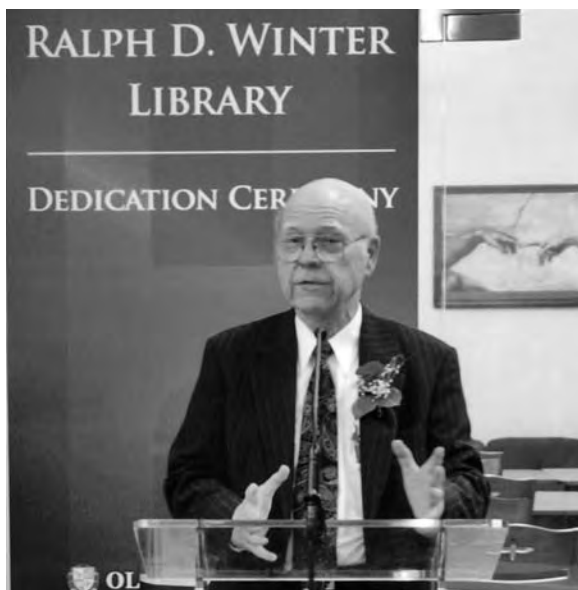


Funding the Facilities

Characteristically, Ralph tackled the funding of an \$11 million campus (\$15 million including the housing “endowment”) and housing with a different twist. He believed that he needed to raise the awareness of this task and of reaching unreached peoples to a new level. Why not seek to mobilize and inform a million believers by sharing the vision of the unreached, the purpose of the campus and the idea of mobilizing their friends toward involvement? While various campaigns to accomplish these goals have not yet met the goal of a million small-gift donors, several hundred thousand have been engaged at some level through the ministries of the USCWM since it was founded in 1976. There is a renewed campaign in the works to spread world mission vision and extend this mobilization effort, not to pay for the campus, but to fulfill our desire to continue to spread the word and mobilize people toward involvement in prayer, resources, sending and engagement in Kingdom advance.

Loss and Remarriage

Roberta, after struggling with multiple myeloma for nearly six years, died in October 2001 just weeks shy of their 50th anniversary. When Barbara Scotchmer, one of the Winters’ friends from a long-time supporting church, wrote to them at Christmas the same year, Ralph called to tell her about Roberta’s death. In ensuing correspondence to all of his donors, he explained that he was an “unemployed husband.” He had never lived alone in all of his life. He asked for suggestions as to how he should go about finding another wife. He liked



Barbara’s suggestions as well as her response to a paper, which he sent with the same letter. They talked, emailed, visited the four daughters and were married five months and two weeks (July 6, 2002) after their first official dinner date in St. Louis, MO in January! Their courtship was one whole week longer than Ralph and Roberta’s!

An Engaged, Passionate Life

There were many other areas of interest that Winter might mention when you talked with him: from defective Western views on the family, to pre-Genesis theologizing, to almost any area of science, to how to view the Bible. Many have read his work in areas such as the wartime lifestyle and can see his life was an application of a man who was focused and engaged with almost any issue—if it related to clearing the way for God to be known more fully and His Kingdom to come.

He saw things differently, but not just to break away from tradition or to exercise his own freedom to do what he wanted. His perspective on God, His Kingdom and His call on our lives harnessed Ralph Winter’s mental and physical being throughout his life up to his death on May 20, 2009. 🌐

End Notes

- 1 Interview with Ralph Winter by the author on August 14, 2006.
- 2 Interview with Ralph Winter by the author on July 31, 2006.
- 3 This became a pattern Winter used in his teaching at Fuller, in the design of the “Perspectives” course and in the “World Christian Foundations” course, of which he was the editor.
- 4 You can read of this story in the booklet Roberta Winter wrote, named *Five Months and One Week*.
- 5 Interview with Ralph Winter by the author on August 14, 2006.
- 6 *Initiatives*, an unpublished paper by Roberta H. Winter, 2000.
- 7 *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, seven volumes, 1937–1945, Harper.

RALPH D. WINTER: A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

Education

- Ph.D. in Linguistics, Anthropology, Mathematical Statistics, Cornell University, 1953
- M.A. in TESL, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951
- B.S. in Civil Engineering, California Institute of Technology, 1943
- B.D., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1956

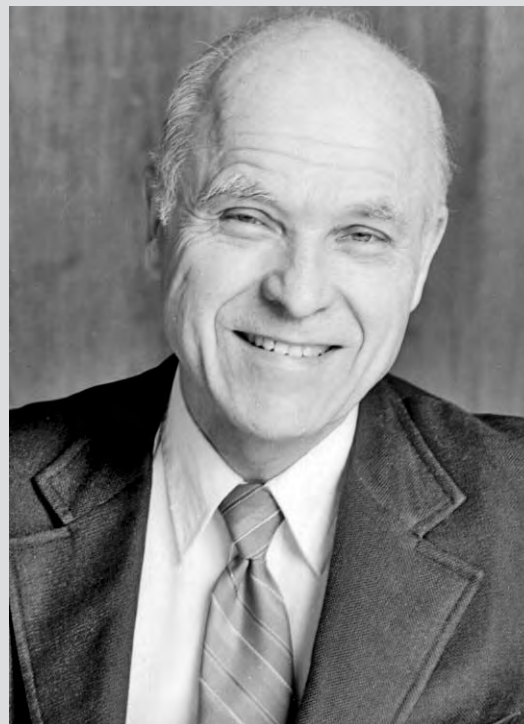
Experience (Selected)

- 2005 Co-founder, Global Network of Mission Structures
- 2001 Founder, Roberta Winter Institute
- 2001-2008 Editor, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*
- 1999 Founder, Institute for the Study of the Origins of Disease
- 1997-2009 Chancellor, William Carey International University
- 1992-1999 Vice President for the Southwest, Evangelical Missiological Society
- 1990-1997 Director, Institute of International Studies, U.S. Center for World Mission
- 1990-1997 President, William Carey International University
- 1985 Founder, International Society for Frontier Missiology
- 1979-1980 President, American Society of Missiology
- 1979-2009 Editor, *Mission Frontiers* Bulletin
- 1976-1990 General Director, U.S. Center for World Mission
- 1976-2009 Founder, General Director, Frontier Mission Fellowship
- 1975 Founder, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship
- 1975 Co-founder, Association of Church Mission Committees
- 1973 Founder, Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies
- 1972-1975 Co-founder, Secretary-Treasurer, American Society of Missiology
- 1969 Founder, William Carey Library
- 1966-1976 Professor, Historical Development of the Christian Movement, Fuller Seminary
- 1965-1966 Executive Director, Asociacion Latinoamericana de Escuelas Teológicas, reg. norte
- 1961-1966 Professor of Anthropology, Landivar University, Guatemala
- 1961-1966 Founder, Director, Union Abraham Lincoln (adult education extension program), Guatemala
- 1958-1966 Founder, Director, Industrias Técnicas (industrial training for Guatemalan Indian pastors)

- 1956-1966 Rural Development Specialist, Guatemala, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- 1953-1956 Student pastor, Lamington Presbyterian Church

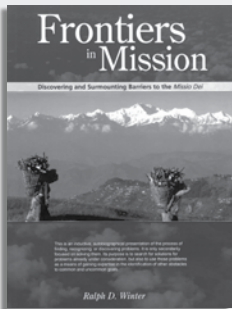
Board Experience (Selected)

- 1985-2009 International Society for Frontier Missiology
- 1977-2009 William Carey International University
- 1976-2009 U.S. Center for World Mission
- 1976-2009 Frontier Mission Fellowship
- 1975-1999 Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship
- 1975-1981 Association of Church Mission Committees
- 1973-2009 Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies
- 1972-1979 American Society of Missiology
- 1970-1974 Faculty Senate, Fuller Theological Seminary
- 1967-1973 Editorial Caribe (publishing arm of the Latin America Mission)
- 1962-1964 United Church of Christ Board of Higher Education, Honduras
- 1961-1966 Universidad Mariano Galvez, Guatemala
- 1961-1966 Colegio La Patria, Quezaltenango, Guatemala
- 1961-1966 Interamerican School, Quezaltenango, Guatemala



Books written or co-edited by

Ralph D. Winter, plus "I Will Do a New Thing"



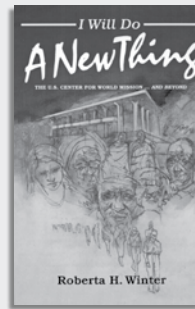
Frontiers in Mission

Ralph D. Winter
ISBN: 978-0-86585-0101

2005 WCIU Press | 340 pages | retail \$19.99

Our price \$17.99
3 or more \$15.99

This is an inductive, autobiographical presentation of the process of finding, recognizing, or discovering problems. It is only secondarily focused on solving them. Its purpose is not only to search for solutions for problems already under consideration, but also to use those problems as a means of gaining expertise in the identification of other obstacles to common and uncommon goals.



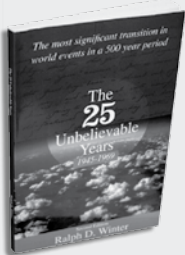
I Will Do A New Thing

Roberta Winter
ISBN: 978-0-87808-448-7

2002 WCL | 366 pages | retail \$19.99

Our price \$10.39
3 or more \$7.14

This is a story of faith—cliff-hanging prayer meetings, spiritual battle with a Hindu cult, lessons learned while in the fire of God's testing. But it is mainly the story of what God is doing in our world and faith for what He is about to do tomorrow. Here is a revised edition with three new chapters written by Roberta before she died, plus three up to date chapters by her husband. The New Thing is now!



The 25 Unbelievable Years

1945-1969

Ralph D. Winter
ISBN: 978-0-87808-102-8

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"... a brief, readable course in modern world geography and political history... puts the Pope, Billy Graham, the World Council of Churches, the world Pentecostal movement, the population explosion, Mao Tze Tung and Biafra into a single picture, and tells us with hard statistics what has happened to Christianity and the World Christian Mission... Illuminates crucial issues no one else is even thinking about... a brilliant piece of work."
—C. Peter Wagner



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Reader, 4th Ed. New 2009 Edition!

Ralph D. Winter & Steve Hawthorne, eds
ISBN: 9780878083909

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