

## **A Tribute to My Colleague, Paul G. Hiebert.**

by

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Upon receiving word of my esteemed colleague Paul Hiebert's homegoing, I recalled my very first acquaintance with another anthropologist of repute, but of a very different kind. That particular anthropologist condescended to present some lectures in my initial course on the subject at the university. Were I to mention his name, many of my readers would immediately recognize it, but I will refrain from doing so because of the incident that also came to mind. One day, after expatiating on the Piltdown finding (the hoax was as yet undisclosed) he closed his lecture with a wide grin by saying, "And if you want still more evidence for our evolution from prehistoric ancestors such as this, I simply invite you to take another look at my own physiognomy!" For the majority of the class it was not a new idea. Nevertheless, I dare say that no one expected him to reinforce it verbally!

I don't remember whether or not I ever shared that particular story with Paul Hiebert, but if I did I'm sure it evoked hearty but quiet laughter because he had a remarkable sense of humor. But Paul was a sterling representative of a very different type of anthropologists—one of the kind with whom I became acquainted after becoming engaged in missions and, especially, missiology. I am thinking of anthropologists such as Marvin Mayers, Alan Tippett, G. Linwood Barney, Charles Kraft, Norman Allison and Robert Priest to name a few. The obvious distinction here is that, unlike that unbelieving professor of my university days, these anthropologists knew/know God.

It is to that point I want to speak in paying tribute to Paul G. Hiebert. The fact is that even anthropologists do not really know “man in culture” until they know “God in heaven.” Or, as I would rather put it in this context, to be the best kind of anthropologist one must also be a very good Christian theologian. *That is exactly what Paul was and at three levels—personal, academic and practical.* His personal demeanor was that of a consummate Christian gentleman—a model for all of us. His scholarship was evident in the facility with which he handled data having to do with anthropology and theology, yes, and also communication, sociology, philosophy, history, missions and more. One of his last writings included a soon-to-be-published book on missional theology. Another is a chapter on contextualization for a book being edited by Ed Stetzer and myself. And as for “down-to-earthness” and practicality, I invite you to read his “Short-Termers—Leave Your Jeans, Shorts and Sneakers at Home!” You will laugh a lot—and weep a little too!

*If Paul G. Hiebert was not “one of a kind,” he was certainly “one of the kind of which we need many more.” So, thank you, Paul, for teaching us. And thank you, Lord, for sending Paul to our churches, our schools, our missions . . . our world.*

**Published in the special issue “A Memoriam of Paul G. Hiebert”**  
[www.globalmissiology.org](http://www.globalmissiology.org) April 1, 2007