

A Tribute to Paul G. Hiebert, Professor, Colleague, Brother, Pilgrim

Tite Tienou, Ph. D.
Senior Vice President of Education & Academic Dean
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

I met Dr. Paul G. Hiebert in September 1980, in Pasadena, California, on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary at the beginning of my studies there. I saw him, for the last time on this side of life, in January 2007 at his residence in Highland Park, Illinois, just before he left to stay with his daughter Barbara Rowe and her family in Maryland on his “way home” (his own words). God called him home a few weeks later. Till we see each other again on the other side of life, I thank God for him and take this occasion to pay tribute to Paul Hiebert, professor, colleague, brother and pilgrim. For me, these are the words that come to mind when I think of Paul Gordon Hiebert.

Since my association with Paul Gordon Hiebert began in the context of the relationship between a professor and a student, the first aspect of his legacy, for me, is that of Paul the professor. With the multitudes of his students, I thank God for Paul Hiebert, the professor. In the classroom, in his office, in his living room, at dinner tables in homes and in restaurants and in conferences and colloquia, the Paul I remember was a professor. He taught with words and without words. He exemplified intellectual curiosity and creativity with courage, humility, grace and faithfulness to God’s gospel. With his guidance and encouragement, learning was not a burdensome yoke. This man, recognized around the world for his brilliant intellect, the breadth of his knowledge and his magnificent academic contributions, did not crush or intimidate his students. On the contrary, he made all of us feel that we were contributing to his own growth in scholarship! Thank you, Professor Hiebert, for leaving us such a legacy.

Professor Hiebert made it easy to make the transition from being his student to becoming his colleague at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is the person who recruited me to teach with him in the Mission and Evangelism Department of which he was the Chair. Humanly speaking, without his quiet determination to move the department in a direction of “a post-colonial era in missions ... without arrogance and paternalism” (words from his “The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift” in *TSE Bulletin*, May-June 1985, p. 17), I would not have agreed to take the position offered me. When my family and I arrived at O’Hare airport on a hot August day in 1997, Paul met us, took us to a restaurant for lunch

and drove us to our temporary dwelling on campus. He and his wife Fran, together with the other faculty members of the Mission and Evangelism Department, eased our transition into life in Illinois and at Trinity. Working with him for the last ten years has been constant joy and encouragement. With Paul I experienced true collegiality without the usual obstacles of hierarchy and rank. He had the remarkable gift of speaking a word of encouragement at the right time, making an appropriate suggestion or giving an invitation to co-write with him (with most of the work done by him but much credit given to the co-author). His kind of collegiality made it possible for all his colleagues to be mentored by him.

Paul was more than a colleague to me, he was a brother. From time to time, especially in private extended conversations, he would call me his brother. Last year, on Easter Sunday, brother Paul invited Marie and I to share the Easter meal with him at *Country Squire*, a restaurant in Grayslake, Illinois. During the meal Paul talked about Fran because the two of them liked to go to that restaurant for special occasions. We could not imagine that less than a year later Paul would not be with us. This year, just before Easter, our hearts ache because we miss brother Paul but we grieve with hope in the risen Lord, in whom he trusted fully.

In his chapter entitled “The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing” (*Globalizing Theology*, Baker Academic, 2006, p. 297) Paul writes that “a growing number of missionaries are ‘inbetweeners’, standing between different worlds”. Paul Hiebert was an “inbetweeners” *par excellence!* He lived the life of a pilgrim, sharing his earthly possessions and goods liberally. In this life he stood between many worlds but he was always conscious of the world to come. I will never forget his parting words, the last week I saw him, as he would take leave of us at his doorstep: “We do not say good-bye, we say see you!” Paul, the pilgrim is finally home! See you, Paul.

Tite TIENOU