

RESPONSE TO PAUL CEDAR’S “CHALLENGES TO COLLABORATIVE EVANGELISM”

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Programs depend upon personalities for their existence. This is true in television and in the church. Movements are led by visionary leaders who can stand upon the shoulders of those who have come before, and who can see clearer and farther into the future. These visionaries are leaders in the present. Such a visionary leader is Dr. Paul Cedar.

Paul Cedar is such a leader because he is deeply a person of faith. He operates from the center; therefore he is not in fear or bondage to the circumference. He has freedom in his relationships because he is so firmly rooted in the center which provides him with a genuine openness to others.

In fact, and you would expect me to give you at least one Wesley word, Paul Cedar reflects the Wesleyan conviction that as we are centered in the Christian faith, we can confidently exclaim, “If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand.” Wesley said it as follows:

In Essentials—Fidelity
In Non-essentials—Liberty
In all things—Charity

This center leads not to arrogance but to a genuine vulnerability to others. It is the shape of the cross. This paper reflects the heart of Paul Cedar and my response is a reflection of my own journey.

It was a most significant moment in Christian mission when 165 leaders came together in Lisle, Illinois around the call to evangelize the gospel in our time. In that meeting, in which I was present, the question which was paramount for me was what can we do together that we cannot do separately, and what can we do better together than we can do separately?

For the past 13 years I have served as the World director of Evangelism for the World Methodist Council, the organization which links together Churches in the Wesleyan tradition in 138 countries with 75million persons. I have kept a diary of my ministry during this period, and I discovered that I have used one text more often than any other. Since I am an evangelist, this is the text:

“But I will stay in Ephesus unto Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” I Corinthians 16:8-9

This text continually came to my mind as I read the provocative paper of Dr. Cedar, “...a wide door for effective work has opened..., and there are many adversaries.” I think that Paul Cedar has it in the correct order. He focuses on the victories, “the wide door,” before he sees the adversaries or the challenges. Program people see the problems more often than they see the possibilities. Paul, you do not have to apologize for celebrating victories.

LOOKING AT SOME CHALLENGES

There are some specific challenges raised by Paul to which I wish to respond.

Spiritual unity is absolutely essential. The believers were “all together...” before the Holy Spirit came. Spiritual unity is a prerequisite for Pentecost, and Pentecost is at the very center of spreading the good news of Christ Jesus our Lord. I am a firm believer in the Acts 1: 8 sequence:

No Holy Spirit—No Power
No Power—No Christian Witness
No Witness—No Christian Conversion
No Conversion—No Living Church.

The temptation to be independent is more a reflection of our American culture than it is a reflection of who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ. As I have ministered with Christian brothers and sisters in many countries, I have noted that when they recognize the great challenge before them they are together. I have often said if the 120 in the Upper Room had called in an outside consultant to analyze their situation, they would never have left the room. Independent is not our word as Christians—the community of faith under the Lordship of Christ Jesus is our strength. The independent often have their own converts which produces their own disciples rather than disciples of Jesus.

Dr. Cedar is painfully right when he lifts up the challenge of separatism. We often elevate the non-essential to such a level that we separate only because we do not associate with those who do not separate. I

have met persons who are so narrow minded that their ears scrape together. It is amazing to me to see how there are those who think that one group has a patent on words. In our movement there are those who say, “Let the evangelicals speak about ‘being born again,’ and let those in liberation speak of the kingdom of God.” Yet in the only explicit use of these words by Jesus, they are together! To try to separate word, deed and sign is like asking the silly question, “Which is more important breathing in or breathing out.” The challenge is too great for us not to see the wide door for all to evangelize the gospel.

Paul, in the Bible, not Cedar, writes, “I will stay in Ephesus till Pentecost for a wide door for effective work has opened to me....” And it is true. Ephesus became the center of mission for the church in the very first century. Tradition says that the Apostle John became the Bishop of Ephesus. And we know that John was exiled to the Island of Patmos, a rock in the sea just over the way from Ephesus. It was there that the revelation came to John. You will recall that the first letter was to the Church at Ephesus. Listen to it—Revelation 2:1-5. This is serious. If the Church neglects its first love, spreading of the gospel, then the lampstand is removed. If the lampstand is removed, then we are in darkness.

Spreading the good news of Christ Jesus matters.

Look at this word—Collaborative—Co-Labor—Co-Laborers in Spreading the Gospel. In this world there are more than 6 billion people. One-third acknowledges that Jesus is Messiah. Another one-third knows the name of Jesus but do not acknowledge him as Lord. And there is another one-third, over

2 billion persons, who have never heard the Name above all Names in their own heart language.

So...

WE'VE got a lot of work to do.

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We've got a lot of work TO DO!

Bless you Paul Cedar, for helping us see more clearly the wide door that is open for all of us to walk through together for effective ministry. And praise the Lord who has promised to us, "Look, I have set before you an open door, which no is able to shut." Revelation 3:8