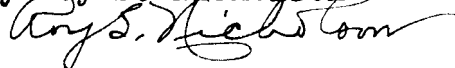


WORKING TOGETHER TO ATTAIN OUR OBJECTIVES

By Roy S. Nicholson



The fact of the Divine-Human Partnership comes to view in our Conference Theme, "Workers Together With Him", which is based on Paul's words in II Corinthians 6:1, "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." What a glorious truth that we are in partnership with God. He planned it that way at creation. God could have created the world as we have made it. He could have flecked it with fields and dotted it with cities. He could have put the marble in the palaces as easily as He buried it in the quarry. He could have spread the earth with velvet lawns as easily as He covered it with uncultivated fields. But He did not!

God made the crude elements and then created man in His own likeness and left the development, polishing, perfection and promotion of these to man. He could have mixed colors on the canvas as well as on the twilight sky; or have erected skyscrapers as easily as He reared the mountains' heads. But He did not! He created things as He did with the view of bringing man into partnership with Him, of making man a co-worker with Him.

Doubtless this question is in your minds, "What was God's purpose in creating us for partnership with Himself?" Be assured that there is nothing mercenary about it. Men seek partnerships for profit. Men seek as their partners those who have capital, influence, ability, something to add to the partnership. But God seeks "bankrupts" as His partners. He desires as His associates those who have nothing of themselves in order that all may be to His glory. His aim is not speculation, for there is no profit in partnership with bankrupts. Bishop Morrison said: "He is not anxious to see what He can make off us, but

of us." He wishes us to see what He can help us to become. He desires to lead us out of poverty into boundless wealth. He furnishes all the capital stock. "Without me ye can do nothing." Thus, all our resources are in Christ.

Someone has told the story of the complaining little apple lying in the bottom of the blossom. "I need strength from the earth, light from the sun, nourishment from the rain. I need everything, yet I can do nothing but cling to this stem. I cannot run, walk, or fly." All it could do - and did - was to cling, abide. It did just that! And by doing that it got the needed nourishment, water, light, etc. It grew, ripened, got rosy and mellow - it became a perfect apple by just clinging to its source of help.

Let us learn a lesson. We are to do what we can, and then God does what we cannot do. But we must do our part, or the partnership fails! The soil, the sun, and the rain are all in vain unless we sow the seed. There will be no harvest unless we do our part. If we disappoint God, He has made no other plans. Angels cannot do what He created man to do. His glory is at stake. He depends upon our obedience. Dare we fail Him in this crucial hour?

The next ten years bid fair to be the greatest decade in the world's history. The Church is faced with both an opportunity and a challenge which it has never known before. It needs help to achieve what it should. General Omar Bradley, a military man who knows whereof he speaks, said in a Boston speech: "The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace; more about killing than we know about living." What a description of our age!

There are those who take satisfaction in saying that within the past century man made more scientific and material progress than in the previous millennium. But they forget that ethical and spiritual progress did not keep pace with scientific and material advancement.

We are living in terribly confused and strenuous days. We speak of "one world" but in reality we have two. Our world is split "from top to bottom, politically, economically, ideologically, and spiritually" (Judd). And not only is the world divided, but, sad to say, many of the Churches are divided - often over relatively unimportant and trivial matters.

If there was ever a time when we needed leaders, it is today. But the lot of today's leader is not an easy one. Just as truly as no one is as critical of the preacher as one who has never preached, so none are as critical of the leaders as those who have not shouldered their own responsibilities. An industrial leader recently told his group that any man who craved a place of leadership today ought to have his head examined. Then he thought a moment and added that any man who was asked to fill a place of leadership and rejected it ought to have his conscience examined.

As religious leaders we should ponder that last suggestion. Our work is difficult and demanding. It exposes one to misunderstanding and criticism. "The true leader looks upon his functions as far more than the mere making and delivering of commodities or services. He does more than perform today's job well. He devises better methods for the tasks of tomorrow and visualizes the challenges of...the day after tomorrow" (Hepner, Psychology Applied to Life and Work, p. 25). But if the places of leadership be left to indifferent or selfish individuals, what will become of our world? In spite of our very best efforts, we

find group fighting group, class contending with class, one race and creed hating another race and creed, church opposing church, good institutions invading the territory of other good institutions and offering keen competition, while evil forces are making enormous gains!

That condition challenges us to unite on our principles and objectives, agreeing upon the best methods by which our principles are to be applied and our objectives are to be reached. We must not compromise our ideals and standards, but we must agree on the methods for reaching our goals. The world situation is so acute that we cannot wait until we reach agreement on minor matters. That has never been done. There have always been things on which groups have differed, often quite greatly.

If each one insisted upon having his own way on all points, there would be agonizing chaos, resembling a modern traffic jam at an arterial intersection. We must agree upon a pattern of procedure, going and stopping as the signal for each is given, realizing that the safety and progress of all is secured by each recognizing the others' rights.

Since we are "workers together with Him", ours is an "unbeatable" partnership if we play our part properly. If we are to succeed, however, it will require "unity based on agreement and teamwork" and "cooperation based on understanding." Without teamwork, our efforts will be in vain. There is no doubt about Wesleyan Methodists being "workers"; but the trouble is that they do not always have teamwork; too often there are conflicts and cross currents in their efforts. Unless this point is safeguarded, we shall have groups or individuals working for their own immediate ends, without regard for the best interests of the larger body. It would help us to remember that according to Webster teamwork is defined as: "Work done by a number of associates,

usually each doing a clearly defined portion, but all subordinating personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole; as, the teamwork of a football eleven or a gun crew."

Our responsibility as leaders is to blaze a trail for our people to follow; not to wander with them in some wilderness hoping to find a way out of the chaos. They may be overlooking something they ought to see, or evading some burden they ought to bear; hence, it is our duty to direct them into proper courses of action and channels of thought. Let us not face our problems with a sense of futility or fatality, but let us face the fundamental facts with courage, assured that we shall triumph by God's help. Let us get our problems out into the open, where we can deal with them.

The story is that William Jennings Bryan, the Great Commoner, had the habit of gently scratching the fringe of hair around his very bald and shiny pate. The more he concentrated on anything, the more constantly he scratched this fringe of hair. One day he sat in a railroad car reading a book and scratching his head. A nervous cowpuncher, who had watched the performance until he could stand it no longer, spoke right out: "Doc, if you'd ever chase him out into the clear, you might stand a chance of getting rid of him!"

In this second Wesleyan Methodist Leaders' Conference, let us get some of our problems in the clear and see if we cannot get rid of some of the things that have impeded our progress.

We must face the facts, however much they may shock us. But let us hope that they jolt us out of our sleep. In eighty-five years we failed to gain as many members as were gained during the first twenty years of our denominational existence! In 1860 we had 20,000 to 25,000 members. In 1948 we had 31,147. In 1948 no less than eight of our Conferences showed a loss of members. Last year we had a gain of only 1.6% in our membership. We stand about midway between two sister holiness groups. One's ratio of increase was 3.75%; the other was approximately .7%.

When we realize that we have four times as many schools as they had in those earlier days, that transportation and communication have been vastly improved, and that the financial situation is vastly better now, our ability to make gains should have multiplied, whereas it has actually decreased. The implications demand serious reflection.

- (1) Have we served our purpose so that we no longer have a mission?
- (2) Have we lost our passion for souls? Or (3) have we misplaced our emphases?

In those earlier days our fathers were crusaders. Their hearts burned to see slavery abolished. Nothing was too menacing to deter them from preaching their convictions about the moral evils of slavery. Their positive and passionate proclamations made them many enemies, but also won them many friends and increased their membership rapidly. That period was followed by controversy and contention over secondary matters. Their gains began to disappear. Division set in and death very nearly overtook the Church. It is significant that a revival which emphasized "holiness unto the Lord" turned the tide and saved the day. They began to put primary things to the forefront and again moved ahead. Today we appear to have become complacent, self-satisfied, and "at ease in Zion". We do not possess our father's crusading spirit. There is a lack of passion. We are growing sleepy and drowsy when we need to be wide awake and crusading as never before. More is at stake now than was at stake then.

Let us face some troubling facts: We say that we want a coordinated program; yet our Conferences are very self-absorbed. They often plan and promote their programs with little regard for what the other Conferences may be doing or planning to do. We say that we want greater gains, but declare that we are unable to exert more effort than

at present. We want more members, yet our folk decline to do more personal work. We want a greater circulation of our periodicals, yet there is little concerted effort to secure this. We want more doors opened and more fields entered, but we do not have men to enter many of these already opened; and we say that we cannot accept any heavier budget assignments, yet many churches have bank balances that exceed their fondest dreams of yesteryear. We ask for greater fruit from evangelism, yet we follow many methods that have proved ineffective. We lament that our schools do not furnish us with more preachers and pioneers, yet our churches do not furnish the schools with material out of which to make such workers. We want to receive a maximum of personal rights and benefits, yet bear a minimum of responsibilities and burdens.

Brethren and sisters, if this next decade is to be the most momentous in the world's history, we must help to do something about it. We have 31,147 members. If within the year each of them would win one soul, that would mean over 62,000 reached with our message. If each of those would win one more during the next year, that would reach 124,000. Continuing the ratio of one win one, by the end of the third year we would have won 248,000 souls. The end of the fifth year would see us nearing one million! By the tenth year we would have won almost thirty-two million people. Surely a Spirit-filled, passion-fired Christian ought to be able to win one other soul to Christ in 365 days! Do not dismiss this as impracticable. Remember - we are in partnership with Christ. This is His method for reaching and saving the lost. He has provided no other way of reaching them.

Since we are in partnership with God, "workers together with Him", we must study to show ourselves approved workmen. We are not as successful as we should be because we have not cooperated as we should

have. Cooperation involves two directions which F. C. Minaker, in "A Short Course in Human Relations", calls "the vertical and the horizontal." By vertical is meant cooperation with those who are our superiors and those who are below us in authority. By horizontal is meant cooperation with those on our own level. A breakdown of cooperation in either direction means defeat.

Vertical cooperation may be only partial - and thus be hurtful - as when it is (1) such unwholesome slavery to our superiors that those below us feel that we are "apple polishing" and catering to the so-called "big brass"; or (2) when it involves such disrespect for our superiors that it encourages contempt for, and distrust of, all leadership. In this critical age there is such widespread contempt for leadership and so much hostility toward what is called "management" that many so-called good people are chafing under all regulations. They despise restraints. Many manifest the attitude of "I'll do as I please, or you'll suffer the consequences." Or, "Might makes right"; or what is equally as fatal: "What you have is mine, if I can find some way to get it!"

Horizontal cooperation is not only very important; it is also very difficult. Often it is harder to secure than vertical cooperation. Our democratic policy has encouraged independence. But there is a safety factor in interdependence. If anywhere along the line from the smallest congregation in the Conference to the greatest department of the denomination there is any overlooking of its dependence upon the others, there will be ultimate confusion and contention, if not ruin. When a local church feels more important than the Annual Conference, the work of the Conference is hindered to that extent. As more local churches feel thus, the greater is the danger to the Conference. If an Annual Conference feels more important than the denomination, the

general work of the Church suffers to that extent; and as more Annual Conferences take that attitude, the greater is the undermining of the whole denominational structure and its work. If the general body forgets its relationship of dependence upon, and responsibility to, the Annual Conferences and local churches, there will be inevitable disaster.

If industrial leaders are so aware of the need and value of cooperation that they spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to publicize that need and to correct the lack of cooperation, surely we religious leaders should realize how vital teamwork is in perpetuating the spirit and work of our Lord and Savior. We are bound by the triple ties of our profession of grace, our calling as ministers, and our ordination vows to "work together" for God's glory. We are not only obligated to do this for these reasons, but a lost world looks to us for help. The Church is the last hope for a world that trembles on the brink of perdition. If we, the representatives of true holiness, of original Methodism at its best, fail in this crisis - what will be the eternal effects of our failure?

Let us face the awful fact that not only may we fail God and souls, but that we are doing less than we should. Then let us ask "WHY?"

SOME THINGS WHICH PREVENT COOPERATION

Fear, in any of its many forms, is one great hindrance to cooperation and teamwork. One fears that he may invade another's realm; or that he is not qualified to do the work as well as others; or that he will be accused of seeking publicity and praise if he promotes a new or aggressive program. On the other hand, there may be the fear that others will excel us and be considered more effective and successful than we are if we help them; or that they may get the credit for

something which should come to us. Out of fear there could spring the tares of jealousy, for people are jealous of those whom they fear may excel them. They are seldom jealous of those to whom they feel equal or superior.

Antagonism also hinders teamwork. Some people have personalities that make them enigmas to us. Their policies, likes, dislikes, and methods of procedure run counter to our own. Their idiosyncrasies irritate us. In them we see so much that we dislike until we withhold our help from them, excusing our attitude by the fact that we are doing nothing to hinder them. The awful truth is that we are doing nothing to help them promote the Lord's work. After all, it is not our work. It is God's work. We are all helping to do it. There is so much to do that no one of us can do it all, and no one method has equal appeal to all. There must be cooperation among all the workers, or there will be disappointing results at harvest time!

Perhaps one of the most common hindrances to teamwork is prejudice. Something one may have heard, or thought, or felt; something he did not understand because of his limited or incorrect knowledge of the facts, often creates prejudice. It is easy to misunderstand another! And if one is misunderstood he may, as a natural consequence, be misrepresented and thus be mistreated. A bishop was outlining his dilemma regarding a man who was involved in a matter which indicated a need for discipline. The bishop felt that the incident could not be excused as insignificant. Yet his best counsel from a number of professional men was that the individual's condition was such that at the time he was not responsible for his decision and should not be disciplined. The good bishop queried: "What shall I do? If I punish him, his examiners will say I disregarded the facts; and if I do not punish him, his critics will accuse me of condoning misconduct." Sure

enough, he was severely criticized for taking what he felt to be the right course.

At that same meeting there was present another famous leader who had been accused of holding unwholesome doctrinal views. But his ethical standards made me admire the position he took on a matter which the orthodox men were about to pass with apparent approval. Oh, the damage that prejudice has inflicted!

A feeling of inferiority also prevents cooperation. If one feels that what he can do or contribute has no value, that it will not "count", he will withhold even that. Nothing could be more fatal than for one to feel that he does not count. Each one does count! We are not only "workers together with Him"; we are also "members one of another", so that what helps one helps all, and what hurts one hurts all. When one does his part, others do not have to assume his load, but when he fails to do his part, others must do their part and his!

It is fundamental that we leaders recognize, and get our people to recognize, that each individual is valuable and has a vital contribution to make to the whole work of the Church. No group is so self-important or so all-sufficient that it can neglect individuals. They make up the group, and when one individual fails, it weakens a link in the chain which then loses its strength and value. There is not a man or woman, boy or girl, whose help we do not need. They may be from the great industrial centers or from the rural areas; from the factory or the farm; they may be landlords or tenants; young or old, rich or poor, but we need them all. We are out to develop Christian character, not to build Church castes.

A lack of appreciation for objectives also hinders teamwork. If one does not appreciate objectives, he will not assert himself to reach them. One will remain indifferent to them until they have a

personal interest for him. When they are found to be vitally related to something in which he has a great interest, they become alive to him.

A Methodist minister was riding homeward on a train. He shared the seat with a fellow-townsmen. As the train was entering his town the stranger casually remarked that in a telephone conversation just before he boarded the train, his wife told of a little excitement in their town - a child had almost drowned that morning. The minister, mildly interested, asked if he knew whose child it was. "The Methodist pastor's boy", he was told. Immediately his mild interest was gone. The man rushed to be the first one to hit the ground and hail a cab. It was his boy! That made a big difference.

Let us ponder our mid-century objectives one by one. The Board of Administration approved them as goals for the balance of this quadrennium. Not one is unreasonable, unnecessary, or impossible.

Our Mid-Century Objectives

- A net gain of 10% in new churches organized. This would mean 91 in the next two years.
- A net gain of 10% in our Church membership. This would mean 3,114 in the next two years.
- A net gain of 10% in enlistments for full-time Christian service.
- A net gain of 10% in our contributions for all budget items.
- A goal of 17,500 subscriptions to THE WESLEYAN METHODIST. We now have 12,300.
 - 15,000 subscriptions to THE WESLEYAN MISSIONARY. We now have 11,900.
 - 15,000 subscriptions to THE WESLEYAN YOUTH. We now have 7,100.
- The Superannuate Pension Plan in operation in each Conference. This is nearer true than ever. Two are yet out.
- A Wesleyan Young People's Society organized and functioning in each local church. Last year the W.Y.P.S. lost members.
- A total enrollment of 100,000 in our Sunday schools. We now have 85,373.
- A substantial gain in the enrollment of all four of our colleges, with special attention being given to those who are candidates for the ministry and the mission fields.

Each one of these is important to the Church's work, and each one deserves our heartiest endorsement and promotion. Surely you have some ideas as to how we may cooperate to achieve them! Do not stand aside and wait to see if they are going to be reached. Help us reach them. Often the help that is not would determine the difference between a victory and a defeat. Again and again things have succeeded when others felt certain that they would not succeed. Whatever may be our personal feeling, we are obligated to promote the program approved by the majority. Let us as leaders not give any occasion for others to excuse their lack of cooperation by finding an attitude of indifference toward the denominational and conference programs.

Let us not allow tomorrow's possibilities to be obscured by magnifying today's problems. Let us not live in some valley that causes the nearby foothills to shut out the challenging views of the great unexplored peaks of the distant ranges which beckon us to come and take new territory for our Lord. Let us be men and women of a broad vision. Let us see what others do not see. Let us see it before they see it. Let us see farther than they see. Let us soar as on the wings of an eagle, and then return to earth and work with the hands of a man to make our vision come true!

THE SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESS

Our objectives will be realized - and exceeded - if we work together with God and one another as we should. But our successful teamwork must be grounded on understanding, or a mutual comprehension of each other's thoughts and wishes. That involves familiarizing ourselves with them until we grasp them and reach a mutual agreement on our method of procedure. This does not overlook the weaknesses, but it agrees on what is to be emphasized. For instance, Ivory Soap

advertisements reveal that product to be .56% impure. No one attempts to deny that. Instead, they emphasize the fact that although it does have a slight impurity, it is a highly desirable product. Why cannot we as Church promoters be as understanding?

Furthermore, success will be hastened by our confidence in what we are promoting; that is to say, by putting our full trust in what we are boosting. I believe in my Church, its doctrines, institutions, benevolences, organizations, leaders, polity, and products. Contacts with other groups have convinced that they are not entirely free from defects. (Perhaps some of them do not advertise their differences and defects as widely as some others, so that the public information about their weaknesses is not as great as it is about some other groups.) But knowing what I do about other groups, I'm still glad I am a Wesleyan! There is no cause why Wesleyan Methodists should be ashamed of anything except it be the fact that they allow others, with identical doctrines and standards, to outgrow them while they seem satisfied with what they have done. The past was only a preparation for doing more and better work for the Master. Let us bestir ourselves and launch a crusade for God and souls.

That will require courage. Our broad vision must be accompanied by the courage to venture. The distressing thing is that while we talk about what could be done, "if" - others launch out and do it! While we talk and meditate and discuss its involvements, others achieve it. Such does not reflect upon our piety, nor our unselfish giving; but it does cost us the place to which we should be entitled as the oldest definitely holiness denomination in America. It is good to be conservative enough to estimate the cost, but it is better to have enough courage to venture into the battle before the cause is lost.

With understanding, confidence, and courage we need to possess appreciation and friendliness. If we exercise wise judgment, and by delicate perception and keen insight realize the worth of a thing, we have taken a long step forward. Many values have been lost to us because we were slow in appreciating their possible worth. While we lingered, others enlisted them under their banners. Much of these losses may have been averted if we had been a bit more friendly toward those who visited our services, looking for a spiritual church home; or who sounded a test knock at our denominational door. Many may have taken a greater interest in us if we had taken a greater interest in them. Each time we lost a prospective member, we lost a prospective supporter, a prospective candidate for some form of service to our Cause, and a prospect for heaven who may fall victim of some errorist who is characterized by great friendliness. A friendly interest in an individual often breaks down the barriers of his indifference toward the high ideals and the strict standards of our Church.

Out of this friendly interest there comes mutual good will, or favor. When leaders manifest good will for each other and toward their mutual program, obstacles melt like the mist before the morning sun. Without the factor of good will, unimportant trifles may be unduly magnified into mountains, words will be multiplied until they become a burden, and action will be reduced to a minimum. When that happens, defeat is certain. But with understanding, confidence, courage, appreciation, friendliness, good will, and vision, plus the help which God furnishes all who are "workers together with Him", we shall triumph - not somehow, but gloriously!

The attitude is not to be: "Can I get across this stream without building a bridge?" But rather it should be: "Will more get across it with peace and safety if I build a good bridge for them?"

The attitude is not to be: "Will that cost me something today?" But it should be: "Will my investment today return dividends to glorify God tomorrow?"

May we leaders ponder well these words:

"OF HIM WHO CALLED ME"

"If I believed that God called me
Knowing my faults which all can see,
To work with Him; I'd do my best
Without a fear, and leave the rest
To Him who called me.

"If I believed that God is kind,
Then how could I continue blind
To all the showered love divine
That daily falls on me and mine
From Him who called me?

"If I believed that God is great,
That all of life is plan, not fate,
Then all the good I'd like to do
With honest effort could come true
Through Him who called me.

"Since I believe that God did call,
That He is good and knoweth all,
With faith in Him I'll try to be
The kind of partner sought in me
By Him who called me."

- Quoted by Dr. T. A. Rymer, Director of
the General Commission on Chaplains,
in his Annual Report made on
November 3, 1948.