



Transcriptions

Church and Family: Partners or Paradox Ted Ward

Annotation: *Christian Education Conference, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, April 17, 1980.* Scripture affirms that the family is important in Christian education. Ted Ward observes that the church often does not foster family development; and its programs often compete with or hinder family development.



Indeed, one of the saddest realities today is that so much of what we do within the church, not just within the Christian education program in the church but in the church at large, does not really foster family development; it almost competes with family development. Great is the pity. And we are at a crossroads in history at a moment when I think we must take much more seriously the matter of family and church. And to take what otherwise is clearly a paradox of these two vital components of our experience and our development as Christians and remove them from that paradoxical relationship and move them into a true partnership.

I have been most recently involved in the White House Conference on Families. One of the reasons that they now call it the “White House Conference on Families” is because when it was singular, the White House Conference on the Family, there was just no way to placate the various kinds of extreme forces that exist in our society. From one side, the women’s lib and the gay rights and all these who want very contrasting forms of lifestyle and see the White House Conference on Families as a threat to their rights; and on the other extreme, those who want to hold for a very, very narrow definition of the classical traditional American family which has occasionally existed to some

extent, but is in their minds *the* only road to fly. And somewhere within the middle, those of us who have a biblical Christian orientation that says the real issue is the way we relate to people and the way that family is the matrix for the development of children. And regardless of its particular form recognizing that even within the community of the body of Christ worldwide there are many different forms of family, all of which fulfill biblical roles and functions for the matrix of development which we think of as being particularly crucial in family; we find ourselves somewhat caught between these two extremes. And the White House Conference on Families that will be held in three national sections in the east coast, the mid-west—Minneapolis, as a matter of fact, in the mid-west—and then in California this June and July will probably bring national headlines to something of the tremendous conflict that exists in our society about this very crucial issue of family. And I think those of us who are Christians should be very well advised not to join the lunatic fringes on either side, but to find some way to be more biblical and come down the center in reconciliation so that our nation can be brought back to a consciousness of the crucial importance of family without tying ourselves all in knots about particular issues of whether or not family must be defined as including within the household 2.4 children. Heaven knows that the biblical family rears its children so that they might, as our Lord instructed, go out and establish yet more families. And it is no less a family that parents having reached that point of age and development themselves where the children are out, they are not then a non-family. They have then become a kind of new form in development of family in which they carry on yet other roles with their children, grandchildren, and the perpetuating of the family imagery.

Indeed, whether we are advocating nuclear families as in American-style or extended families as in much of the world—in fact, much of the Christian communities of the world are really in the extended family model—whether we're asking for new modes seems to me to be something of a debatable that we cannot grapple with in this particular talk this morning. But let me suggest something of a basic starting point so that you know what I'm driving at with family: I'm talking about mothers and fathers and children in whatever arrangements of functional relationships and lifestyle that is at the one and the same time biblical and socially responsible.

Now when we talk about this paradox, we also have to define church, and for want of a more elegant definition, let me begin with this one: that I'm defining church as a community of believers in our culture usually owning a church plant—that is a factory for doing things called church activity—and the established programs of that plant. All of that I mean by *church*, but the essence being that *community of believers*.

The partnership that is referred to in the title for today's lecture is a biblical concept drawn from what seems to be God's intention: that the fellowship of the community, that is the community of the body of Christ, the church, and the family, as the micro unit of the church should work hand in hand, but the responsibility for children is given primarily to the family. The Deuteronomy chapter reflects this, writings in Proverbs reflect this, the kinds of injunctions to parents in the New Testament reflect this: the development of children is a family responsibility. The paradox comes, then, as I define paradox from the church having on many occasions and at many points, supplanting the family. Having supplanted the family, it thus depresses the family.

Now what is a paradox? A paradox is a statement that is self-contradictory, hence, false. I have proposed, for example, on past occasions that one such paradox is Christian education. I refer to that not in criticism of Christian education departments, but in criticism, in general, of what we do within institutionalized Christian education, whether in churches or in theological seminaries

when we value education that, in many occasions and circumstances, is not inherently and carefully defined in Christian perspective. One cannot educate Christians in a non-Christian manner. But, again, that would get off to yet another lecture and I don't want to ask for that much trouble this morning.

My personal and professional commitments happen to be rather coincident with issues of family because I am concerned with human development as a person, as a Christian, as a father, as an educator, and specifically as a social science researcher within the field of education. I have four areas of my background and concern that coincide with this issue today and bring me to it, not simply as a concerned Christian, but as a concerned Christian who also has a professional responsibility in the area.

First of all, my responsibilities are defined professionally to include the relationship that educational operations, formal and nonformal, have to the moral and spiritual development of persons. Secondly, I am specifically involved in the matter of family development as one of the major modes of socialization, and as one of the stronger potential modes of nonformal education within a complex society. Third, I am involved with the social and cultural aspects of learning; coming at learning, as you may have already detected, less as a psychologist would come at learning, but more as a social anthropologist would come at learning; a cultural anthropologist with an orientation toward the way that the community configurations in which we exist relate to our development processes. And fourth: within the last five years having become, as is characteristic of a number of my colleagues in social science, very concerned about what social science can do to inform a society about the probabilities of various sorts of alternative future that face us.

One of the new missions of social science has become, not to foretell the future, but to indicate some of the choices that are made in the present in terms of the probability effects that they will have on various forms of society in the future. I have been described on several occasions as a futurist and have written within the Christian press materials from that frame of reference that have branded me something of a futurologist, I was called that just the other day. And I kind of shudder when that is thrown at me because it smacks of that kind of overstepping of the role of future-telling that we do not intend; simply rather as social scientists to point out the probable consequences of certain choices that are being made in the present. From this matrix then of concerns, I would like to share with you, pointedly, a number of matters that have become of transcendent concern in my own reflections of recent time.

Arising out of my involvement with value education particularly, first, I see the retreat from integrated religion leaving our society relativistic. This I put at the top of the list because as a human being concerned about the broadest sense of human welfare, the broadest societal cut of my concerns as a Christian must come down to some kind of a view of what is wrong in the world. And particularly in our society I see that moral relativism is a core decay.

Secondly, at the more pragmatic level, I have come to the conclusion that schools aren't able to help very much. Now I did not say here secular schools, public schools, or anything of the like. I did not even exclude Sunday schools. I am not convinced that the *schools*, as we have them constituted in our society, are able to help much, whether Christian, public, or otherwise. In fact, I find, even in the current craze for expanding Christian schooling and the access to elementary and secondary schools that are parochial in their scope, it's claimed by some of the supporters of that movement to be now at the rate of one per hour. The establishment of new Christian schools in the

United States at the rate of one per hour is a datum that I have not been able to verify, but told me by a responsible person. I find that what is done in most cases—at least those that I have observed and those that I have reflected on as I've seen their curricular approaches—to be largely a warmed over copy of what the public schools are already doing badly, which brings me to a general observation: that much of what we do in the name of church-related education tends to be copied from bad examples and not improved upon very much in the process.

My third concern is that the foundation and nature of one's experiential communities are the vital matrix of one's moral development. And using yesterday's terms, I refer here to moral development both in the sense of content and structure. This may be a little complicated statement, but what it boils down to is that one person exists within a variety of communities. We exist within a family community. Those of us who are Christians in the church, exist within a church community. We exist within a neighborhood community and we are part of a regional/national community. We are part of a world community. All these communities impinge upon us. And the quality of the experiences that we have in those communities, particularly in matters of justice, the quality has a great deal to do with whether or not we persist in the developmental program in the moral development realm. And if we're concerned about moral development, we must absolutely be concerned about the foundation and nature of these communities in which we exist.

Now this is perhaps a more elaborate thing to say than simply people become like the kinds of life they live. It really raises the question of what kinds of communities we put ourselves into. What kind of *family* community. What kind of *church* community. And I submit, as Christians, we ought to be primarily concerned about those two. I find many Christians getting hung up about the neighborhood community and failing to recognize that the neighborhood community, even the local school community, is a less potent community than the family community and the church community. And if the family community and the church community are strong, young people will survive very well, thank you, in the other sorts of communities. And quite often when people get terribly preoccupied about the other communities that their children are in, what they're really doing is overlooking the quality issues in the family community and in the church community. If the family is not a place of justice, if the church is not a place of justice then, indeed, you are missing the two primary communities that are involved with the development of the family or of the child.

For Christians, the *family* is the central and essential community and I point that out with the willingness to underline family, even at the expense of having it appear above church. I think it is biblical to do so. The church is to be modeled on and to function as an extension of this community. And that understanding I think is theologically defensible, though quite often badly misunderstood in terms of the kinds of things that we assume about what ought to be the nature of Christian education.

And my fifth concern: The church must speak prophetically to the crises of society. And it is that notion that there are things that we can say to our society, we can say within the church, we can say to the Christians of this country, we can say to each other that have a prophetic base that have a base in the Word of God that brings us into accountability before God for those things that socially and culturally we have let go away from the biblical teachings about the nature of community and the nature of human development.

Now for those of you who like to take shorter notes, you might want to write down these as the main grabbers for today: children in trauma, family in crisis, society in tragedy, and church at

crossroads. That's quite a scope for one lecture, but that's where I'm coming from. I could give you data, perhaps you've heard them ad nauseam. You don't even have to read more complicated literature than *US News* and *World Report*, *TIME* magazine, *Newsweek*, and the like to see the evidences that children in our society are, in many, many cases, in deep trauma. And that, as a matter of fact, the family structure of the United States has disintegrated to the point of very severe crisis. By the way, one of the more hard-to-swallow pills is that the data with reference to such crucial variables as permanency of marriage, or putting it in the converse, divorce rate, does not speak very well for the Christian community. Our divorce rates in major denominations that have been surveyed, specifically, *vis à vis* the national census data, suggests that the Christian community of the United States is not notably significantly different from the society, in general, with reference to permanence in marriage. And I ask you where did our Christian values go with reference to what marriage is all about?

One of the points I made in the White House last week when I was being pushed very hard by one of the President's domestic advisors who was fretting: Where do all these religious lunatics come from? or words to that effect. I said, well, I can't account for some of the things that are said and done, but I can tell you one thing, there are an awful lot of people in our society who are aware that there are two transcendent values that Christians cannot compromise. And when either of those two is threatened, they're going to squeal. One of them is this notion that is biblical: that a commitment to marriage is a commitment to a life experience of two persons together. And some of us would argue that divorce is absolutely unthinkable possibility for Christians. Others of us would say, no, in the great forgiveness of God, even those kinds of errors and sins that produce the schisms of divorce can be healed. But, I said, the crucial issue, whether or not we stand this or that place on divorce, is that the model, ideal, the norm for marriage, biblically, is a permanent relationship. And in our society we're making it easier and easier and easier for people to avoid that kind of a concept.

I said, secondly, the whole question of responsibility for children is very deeply threatened and many of the people that you're referring to as extremists are simply saying, don't do anything else in the form of making laws and regulations that would make it easier for people to have children without accepting the responsibility for children; that, within a Christian perspective, children must be seen as a welcomed responsibility and when they are seen as nothing but a responsibility to be turned over to the State, you're going to get all kinds of howls from the Christians.

And I believe that these are the two crucial values that are threatened and yet, for the Christian community, cannot be compromised. My own sense of the future says that the secular society is going to proceed in the direction that it's going now. I don't see any particular ground on which to argue for some kind of reversal of the secular trends; but I think the Christian community must detach itself from those trends in society and, in the process, become more unique. I think that the church in North America is apt to come under stress from the secular society if Christians become more settled and behaviorally functional on those two values. In other words, we may become unique enough that we may get criticized and possibly even persecuted for our quote "narrowness" with reference to fidelity and children as responsibility for family. If we are so persecuted, I suspect that it will have the salutary effect of toughening up the church. I think the church in North America has had all the leisure it can stand, and in the great providence of God, he's saying, well, you've stood that test rather badly, but maybe I'll give you some reprieve. Here comes some persecution. I say that not in humor; I say that with dead seriousness.

There is a paradox that can be defined in terms of its roots. I'd like to go through with you several of what I believe to be the key problems and give you some sense of what I believe to be hope. I've divided this particular chart—if you're making notes that are systematic, you may want to notice that it has four rows. [Chart is not available.] I'm going to deal with them one at a time—and ultimately it has three columns. And I'm going to hide that column for now and first run down through to the bad news, and then later come through the good news. First, in the second column in this particular visual are identified as the assumptions that lead to neglect and the parallel realities that lead to blight—neglect and blight being the two key words. I warned you that this was kind of a good news/bad news kind of a lecture. Of the many things that we could list, I've identified four, which, in my own estimation, are at the top of the list. Your own private list may very well have other matters that for good reason are even more important than these.

First of all, I think there is an assumption within much of the church in North America that Christian parents will bring up their children in Christian ways. That assumption sometimes is not put in exactly those words because its patent falsehood or its absurdity would kind of show through so we don't say it out loud, but we continue to make that sort of an assumption: that Christian parents will bring up their children in Christian ways. So we kind of take that for granted and let that run on its way. But, as a matter of fact, the parallel realities that I believe lead to blight within the church are that many parents need help to become able to provide Christian nurture.

The competency of parents to deal with children is not altogether a genetic socio-biological function or biological function. It has a social quality and characteristic in it. The quality of and the forms of nurture, even of smaller children, is always responsive to and must be relative to the kind of society in which we are living. The fact is that many people today have not been able to cope themselves with what is going on in the world. And with reference to their own children, they are not only uncomprehending, but they are recognizably helpless. And if we are assuming, as so many churches do, that this whole business of being a faithful Christian parent can be handled with a few sermons that deal with Christian virtue, and the few sermons that deal with the walk of a Christian every now and then, and then spend all the rest of the time in salvation messages in order to get the rest of the people in the city saved, we're going to have people who, in fact, are lacking the kind of help that they need to become competent parents. One of the reasons for the falling away of the church in many of our denominations is squarely in terms of the kinds of parenting the children of that church have had. And I refer categorically to some of the larger mainline denominations that have exhibited this blight in a very extreme form.

The second of these roots of the paradox is that assumption we find that the skills and the competencies of parenting emerge naturally as needed. And, of course, as a developmentalist myself I'm particularly vulnerable to this particular assumption. I'm prone to make it, believing as I do that, in fact, competent parents do become competent most readily through interactions with their own children. And that one of the finest ways to learn to be a parent is to really have a loving concern for one's own children. And I have asserted from time-to-time that some of your best Sunday school teachers come, not out of ETTA classes, but out of competent parenting experiences. In other words, I am arguing that there is, in the experience of being a parent, a tremendous developmental quality that produces many, many needed competencies of parenthood, and that God has made us that way so we will respond. We refer to some of these as maternal instincts, and things like that. By the way, you may be interested in knowing that up until about five years ago, the majority of the research studies on this whole matter of intuitive parenting, maternal competencies, and all the rest of this stuff focused on the role of mother. We are in a society that has never really taken very

seriously, at the research level, the role of father until about five years ago. And the other night in Washington, Urie Bronfenbrenner, who's also on the research forum, was identified by Jim Dobson as having shifted his ground in drastic ways in the last five years. And Urie Bronfenbrenner came back and said, sure, I have. We now have some data coming in on the nature of fatherhood. I thought to myself, my, my, my, isn't it marvelous? We've finally discovered fatherhood. And what a difference it makes even in the thinking of Urie Bronfenbrenner with reference to what it is that children really need in life; not just mothering, and father's who help with mothering, but it's fathers and mothers—fathers who are good at fathering, and mothers who are good at mothering. And it's very tempting for us to assume that somehow that just occurs out of the developmental matrix of experience.

But, as a matter of fact, there are some realities and that is that incompetencies and the resultant problems are real and they ultimately become a necessary concern for the church. And, at this point, we are familiar with the fact that the church, in the last twenty years, has increasingly given time and attention and a whole lot of money to remediation, so we have elaborate schools of psychology attached to seminaries now. At least some seminaries you've probably heard of. And in many of these the primary focus is on one-to-one therapeutic remediation. In other words, after the horse is stolen, how do you lock the barn? And I submit that that's got to change. We cannot take a *post hoc* view of this problem. We must turn it around and recognize that these incompetencies and the resultant problems come out of, not a lack of genetic stuff within our parents, but in the overwhelming sets of problems that exist within the secular society within which we live and the way these impinge upon the Christian family.

The third of the roots of the paradox for Christian education is in the assumption that leads to neglect: an assumption that schooling is the most effective and efficient approach to education of children. Now I'm not here to suggest that schooling is useless we ought to bury it. Ivan Illich suggested something of this with the title of his book, but if you read him carefully, he's talking about something else. He's talking about a much larger sense of social criticism in which we should understand—and I think wisely Christians should follow this advice—Ivan Illich would argue that we need to understand the way the institutions of society shape the kinds of thinking we make, the kinds of persons we become, and institutions are terribly powerful. And if those institutions have flaws built into them, they will produce flaws in the general society. There is a reality, in fact, that Christian education of all sorts—and I'm talking about not just your local Sunday school class, but I'm talking about seminaries—Christian education of all sorts has adopted school-type models of education despite the fact that our Lord assiduously avoided them. And, by the way, our Lord did not ride a bicycle either, but for a very different reason. As a matter of fact, bicycles hadn't been invented yet. And he was not faced with the decision about whether or not he would ride a bicycle. But schools virtually intact, the way we know them today, had been invented. And when our Lord organized a three-year intensive learning task for twelve people, he did not start by raising money for a dormitory. He went into experiential learning in the countryside and involved his people with dialogue with each other and himself and in contact with the people that they were concerned about, and he lived with them and walked with them and went to dinner parties. And I submit that makes for a very exciting kind of education.

When we are in this particular assumption: that schooling is the most effective and efficient approach to education in children, we tend even to overlook the kinds of things that we can do with the institutions that are already in place, such as family, and the ways that the church itself is a learning matrix for that community, that body of believers, if it just looks at itself that way. And one

of the reasons that I am a very devout advocate of Christian camping, and I am, is that I think the Christian camping movement is one of the most exemplary sectors of the field of Christian education today with reference to its alertness to the value of collective learning experiences in relatively less-structured environments over longer periods of time. Intensive exposures in collectives, in communities, intensive over time.

Now I'm occasionally asked how would I equate the value of a week at camp to how many weeks of Sunday school. I don't like to get involved in formulas like that. In fact, I don't like to pose questions like that that imply either/or kinds of choices. Why not take both/and kinds of notions? But, as a matter of fact, if I had to choose I'd probably choose for intensive camping experiences even over the rather, what's sometimes referred to as erosive education in which you trickle water across the stone for a few minutes each week. It'll carve great canyons. In Colorado and Arizona you have evidence that that works. But you also notice it takes several years. I'm inclined to think that what we do in Christian camping is a sort of bellwether—a sort of forerunner of the restoration of a sense of learning community to the church itself. And I'm very enthusiastic about what Christian camping is and can be for the church community in general. And I am most excited about what family camping does.

The last of these assumptions and realities is the assumption that education in the church is one clear-cut area that can be delegated away from the pastoral responsibility. Now that may be putting it in a little blander, balder form so that you can see it, to recognize it as a kind of a weird assumption, but if you take a look at the way we organize theological education you'll know that there's a lot to that. In fact, one of the ways to identify which courses are Christian education courses in your typical seminary in the United States is to ask the question which courses don't pastors have to take? That's the way you define Christian education: it's what pastors don't have to take. And if you look in churches, you find out that Christian education, in many cases, has become isolated from pastoral ministries. And pastors define their role somehow as spiritual, and then they get a Christian education person to handle the education, and a music person to handle the music, and a janitor to handle the cleaning up. Anything that you can define as non-spiritual then becomes delegable away, and the seminaries run around and say, okay, that's what you want, that's what we'll make. I think that's very, very dubious in light of the pastoral teachings in the Scriptures. And if you understand education in the terms that I'm describing education, you know that education is not separable away; it has to do with the wholeness of life and the fulfillment of personhood. And it is, at the essence, a matter of spiritual development. And if one person can be concerned for spiritual and the other person concerned for education, I haven't understood spiritual, nor have I understood education and I wish someone would explain it to me. I just don't see how you can make that split.

But let me get off the negative because I'm an affirming kind of a person. I'm a very hopeful kind of a person because I believe in the reformation of the church. I believe in redemption. I believe that God is at work. And I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ has promised that he will build his church, and I think he's doing a very, very interesting good job. It isn't exactly the way I'd do it, but he hasn't asked for advice. As a matter of fact, I am amazed at what God is doing in our time. I see great hope, but I see it out of things like this and that—these, by the way, rhyme across the chart in case you're trying to keep focused—but let me just identify what I see as four very hopeful signs, and they are hope for Christian education. But you'll already detect, from what I'm saying about Christian education, that the only kind of Christian education that I'm really involved with enthusiastically is that which is truly integrated into the life of the church.

I see with reference to this matter of Christian parenting, I see church-based education that puts major emphasis on family development supporting, not supplanting, the families. This is really beginning to happen in large scale and I'm very excited about it. Christian education, as a study field within seminaries and Bible schools, has largely focused historically on children because the genius of North American Christian education has come out more from the Sunday school movement than from the Reformation. This is a kind of a strange phenomenon but, in fact, it is true. And this fixation on children has tended to make us assume that the programming that is important within the church, educational programming, ought to be child focused. Biblically, it ought to be family focused and that is beginning to dawn on a lot of churches. And we're seeing a tremendous emphasis on family development and, through families, the development of competent child-rearing.

Similar to that, we're seeing churches that are taking responsibility for marriage and family preparation as educational tasks. If there's anything that burns me up, it's getting called in by a pastor's association in a local community, and though we have these in Michigan, they are being threatened by the current state laws with reference to sex education. And the churches are steadfastly asserting that that's no business of the Board of Education; it's the responsibility of the home and the church. And they say, Ward has said the same thing: It's the responsibility of the home and the church. We'll get Ward in there from the university and we'll have him go to our school board and speak for us. And I get in there in the first pastoral meeting. I say, gentlemen, you have a very easy case to make. Will you please arrange at your next meeting to bring me all the materials that you're currently using within the church to develop sex education/family preparation for your people so that we can show the Board of Education that this, in fact, is a church responsibility. I never get invited back for the second meeting. It burns me up that people will push off on society the notion that it's a responsibility of the church about which they're doing nothing! That's rotten! It is a responsibility of the church, but the church has got to do something about it and, praise God, there are churches really moving in on it. If there's anything that we could do well in this era—and the laws are in place in most of our States—is provide shared time for family development education in the public schools. Shared-time education, not religious training, but family development education with a Christian base. And the laws are in place. Christians don't have enough imagination sometimes about what influences they could have in the secular society. We need to challenge each other about that. I'm enthusiastic.

Third, I see churches that take more holistic community-building approaches to the development of Christian persons. A little bit of jargon and gobbledygook, but if you can strip it down to its core, what it says is that we're coming out of this depression era of assuming that the information approach to development is adequate, and we're beginning to get more involved in the wholeness of human life and recognizing that spiritual development itself exists as a fulfillment of all the other aspects of human personhood. Along that same line, I'm seeing churches that integrate education into comprehensive ministries for spiritual development. I don't believe I'm being overly optimistic to observe that, in much of what is going on today in Christian education and even in Christian education publishing, there is a broader definition of what it means to be engaged in spiritual development.

I'm going to be talking tomorrow about the ecology of spiritual development. And so that you might have some kind of advanced preparation to begin thinking in your own head about this, let me assert that part of our problem is that we have not really come to grips with what we mean and what is the reality of our contention that the church is concerned for spiritual matters. If I were to take a census here this morning and say, how many of you believe that the primary responsibility

of the church is a spiritual responsibility, probably the great majority of you would vote yes. Now quite often that contention is used to put down any attempts to bring the church into an involvement in the social welfare area. In other words, one of the standard alibis that religious people, particularly Christians, give for not being involved in social action, justice-seeking in the larger society, and a more holistic development of persons is that the church is concerned only with spiritual matters. Well, I am here to assert that the church cannot fulfill its concern for spiritual matters if it ignores the ecology within which those spiritual matters exist.

And I have used the illustration from time-to-time of a colleague at the university who is a specialist in the gray squirrel. And if you ask him what he's into, he says, I'm into the gray squirrel. What do you know about? I know about the gray squirrel. What are you concerned about? I'm concerned about the gray squirrel. What do you study? I study the gray squirrel. What do you teach about? I teach about the gray squirrel. Tell me about acorns. Oh, I can't tell you about acorns, I'm only into the gray squirrel. So are acorns. Tell me about the kinds of trees that the gray squirrel lives in. No, I'm just into the gray squirrel. Absurd, absurd. You know it's absurd. Spiritual development is the gray squirrel of religious education.

Let's pray:

Father, we ask you to challenge us with the times and the circumstances in which we live that we might be alert to the needs of a society in which we live and minister; that we might become faithful, responsible persons developing your people in such a way that they not only can cope, but that they can influence as the *salt* and as the *light*. May we, Father, not be hidden. May we not become unsalty. May we be strengthened in your Holy Spirit. May we not define our terms so narrowly that we miss the point. And, Father, also may we not become so dissipated that we lose our energy. May we focus on things that in the guidance of your Holy Spirit and in the teachings of the Word can be seen to be vital and worthy of our collective attack. Give us judgments and insights to this end. And we pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.