



Transcriptions

Lines People Draw Ted Ward

Annotation: *Installation address. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1988.*

Ted Ward's address at his installation as Aldeen Professor of Missions, Education, and International Studies emphasizes the tendency of many Christians to seek to manage our complex world, and doctrinal systems, by dividing and labeling—drawing lines. This address appeared later as Ted Ward. Lines People Draw. *Faculty Dialogue* 1989 (11): 7-22. Subsequently, Ward revised the article to appear in the *Common Ground Journal*, [Vol 10 No 1](#): (Fall 2012)



If there is such a thing as leadership in the service of Jesus Christ, it is a relatively singular thing—simply following where God leads. Through this educator's career beginning at mid-century and quite possibly extending into the new millennium just a dozen years ahead, the sense of greatest need has always centered on the gaps that trap people into isolation from one another and from truth. My greatest rewards have come from helping people across those gaps. Reflecting on the meaning of these experiences, it seems to me that problems often arise from the lines that people draw. The solutions can take many forms, of course, but one example is evidenced in the creative combination of responsibilities embraced within the mandates of the Aldeen Chair. Whereas both missions and Christian education are commonly relegated to the far side of a neat line drawn between theology and practical theology, missions and education are almost always set across from each other on yet another line that people draw. Given all these lines, it is surprising to find one designated chair in a major theological seminary devoted to putting things back together again the way our Lord spoke of them in his partings statements:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.

The Great Commission is a whole idea, a unity, a single theme; but there is a tendency to draw lines. Ever since sin entered the Creation, humankind's rebellion against God has resulted in one division after another. Line after line being drawn to represent both valid and dubious distinctions. Never satisfied until the unity is pulled apart into its component particulars, the tendency is relentlessly toward reductionism and toward conflict. Accelerated by the Industrial Revolution and now exacerbated by the Information Revolution, specialization and compartmentalization are characteristics of our times. In business, industry, and surely no less in education, we manage our increasingly complex world of ideas and relationships by dividing and labeling. Proudly discussing his first day in the sixth grade, the youngster said, "No, we don't have arithmetic this year. We're all done with that stuff. Now we have mathematics." Similarly, the misguided seminarian might say, "No, we don't study doctrine here; we study theology." Distinctions among studying the Bible, studying doctrine, and studying theology are, to some extent, justified; but most evangelical seminaries try not to draw the lines quite this way. Lines so carelessly drawn can separate essence from evidence, theory from practice, and idealization from realization.

One of the marks of the educated person is the capacity to draw discriminating lines that distinguish one thing from another. As God set Adam to work in the Creation, this human capacity was employed in the task of naming the creatures. Without names there is no effective communication about things. Indeed, orderly thought itself depends on reliable systems of classification. Unless one draws lines wisely and well, there can be no useful names.

As in many another human paradox, the capacity to distinguish can become exaggerated and can work against the grasp of truth. When lines are drawn that separate and isolate parts of a whole, discrimination becomes a barrier to understanding. Drawing lines between people on the basis of race illustrates this paradox. Such a use of the God-given capacity to distinguish violates the wholeness of God's purposes in Creation and God's provisions of redemption.

Some lines are very harmful. The human tendency toward pride causes people to draw lines between themselves and other people. Line-drawing so easily serves the purposes of pride and alienation—sometimes to assure a better seat at the banquet; sometimes to demonstrate superiority, at least, in one's own eyes, and sometimes to avoid the inconvenience of becoming involved in the pains and griefs of a neighbor. Worse yet, a religiously drawn line that seems to justify alienation allows the learned priest to pass by on the other side of the road. What sad uses people make of religion.

In the realm of ideas, the tendency to draw lines can become a barrier to truth. Schooling experiences that are principally concerned with words and lists, defining and classifying, accepting and rejecting can lead toward a life of verbal sorting rather than of whole mature thought. The cause of Christ has not been well served by the line between secular and sacred. Since the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, there seems to be no particularly good reason to accept a distinction between things that have to do with God and things that do not. Indeed, what is there that exists without a relationship to God? Only in some limited human perspective, usually self-centered and

colored by an uninformed grasp of the things of God, does intellectual narrowness serve humankind well.

Especially to be pitied is the Christian who has dealt with the difficult reconciliations of theological understanding and scientific understanding by simply accepting dualism. I shall never forget one lamentable graduate student who castigated me for assigning a reading by a non-Christian author as a part of the disciplines of a supposedly valid theological education at a prominent theological seminary. This person had come to loathe reading anything that could not be instantly trusted on the basis of the faith claims of its author. Narrowness of this sort isolates Christians from important extensions of truthful understanding that are available because of common grace.

Do we understand Robert Frost's poem, *The Mending Wall*?

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
. . . Before I built a wall I'd asked to know
What I was walling in or walling out.

For a Christian, the most crippling line drawn is between Christian reasoning and other processes of reasoning. The line between sacred and secular may serve as a convenient basis for compartmentalization, but the line is not consistent with the way God has created his universe. The human being cannot be divided into natural components and supernatural components. Whenever we distinguish a sociological perspective from a theological perspective as if the former were inherently godless, we do violence to the wholeness of truth, itself. Arthur Holmes has shown that the statement, "All truth is God's truth," is far more than a cliché. For the educated Christian, a sociological perspective is informed by theological substance. All so-called perspectives, indeed, all information and all insights, if held in the mind of an integrated Christian, are subject to the same discipline of the whole counsel of God and are capable of being similarly informative.

Grappling in a biblical way with the distinctions between Christ and culture disallows that the two should ever be divorced. It is a creative tension. Sin lies at the root of dissonances, but redemption means that there is a basis for reconciliation. Lacking integration, intellectual wholeness, the individual Christian and the institutions of Christianity are vulnerable to apostasy. Over the last twenty years, the feverish attempts in Christian higher education to get faith and learning back into mutual accord are a reflection of the effects of dualism in Christian thought.

Some lines that people draw really do get in the way. The lines between the sub-divisions of a major field of study, theology, for example, are drawn to represent matters of territory and administrative convenience to educators, publishers, and librarians. But the wholeness of a discipline can be obscured and unbalanced by overemphasizing any of its parts. With the dramatic expansion of human knowledge has come specialization. Partly a concession to the post-Renaissance reality that one can't know everything about everything; that clearly motivated by managerial concerns about efficiency, specialized departmentalization has become the norm. The major consequence has been negative; compartmentalizations of thought and of literature. In many cases the academic mortals who serve as custodians of the disciplinary shrines tend to dig the lines ever more deeply as if to defend their vulnerable bit of sacred ground. Competitiveness and pride disturb the unity of theology. Theoretical theology is placed on one side of a distinct line to distinguish it from practical theology. Old Testament is across a line from New Testament. Even within a given subdivision of theology other lines are drawn.

For example, in homiletics, oratorical skills and exegetical skills seem to have lost their interdependence. The bits and pieces are attended to in some sort of blind hope that somewhere along the line someone else will put the pieces back together and make sense out of the whole thing. If the drawing of academic lines were merely a matter of organizational expediency, it might be easier to justify. But such lines give rise to all sorts of prideful and pompous disgraces. The so-called quote “professional disciplines”—Christian education and missions, for example—are seen as less prestigious than the so-called “academic disciplines.” The closer one comes actually to serving the church in a concrete, contemporary, action-oriented learning process, the more likely one is to encounter resistance allegedly based in standards of accreditation and institutional tradition. One must wonder if the ultimate value of erudite theology is assumed to be exclusively in the brain.

Very close to my heart, to the substance of my academic career, are the presumably separate sub-disciplines of Christian education and of missions. The lines that have been drawn to demarcate these two fields within theological studies are less than constructive. In the first place, the gospel makes sense only in terms of mission. The God who redeems was made flesh and dwelt among us to bring good news of deliverance to those who are trapped in humankind’s three forms of poverty, as noted in Luke 4.

Similarly, the ministry of teaching is integral with the fulfillment of godliness inherent in the fullness of God’s redemptive process. In the 20th century, missions and education have each been treated to the mixed blessing of specialization. In similar ways, in similar timetable, toward similar ends, these two facets of the wholeness of the gospel have been given separate status imbued with their own rights to specialized literature, faculties, and advanced degrees. Where will it end? It may be for the 21st century to pull these matters back into wholeness and comprehensive integrity. But when it does happen, it will honor God and make the field of Christian education, as a whole, relate more constructively to the human condition.

In a way, we are trapped behind the lines. Christian higher education institutions talk to one another to some extent, but show only slight capacity or interest in being influential in national and international debates of moral issues. One major kingdom assumption underlying much of Christian higher education, especially theological education, is thus in default. Graduates have not gone forward in substantial numbers to infuse the academic disciplines with biblical standards of truth. The relatively few interactions between public policy and what passes for Christian thought seem largely to be in the hands of exploiters, naïve reformers, and theologically illiterate thumpers of simplistic propositions. Perhaps the time has come for this theological seminary to relate theological foundations more explicitly to sociopolitical and economic reasoning. Here, again, the classical roles of institutions are governed by lines that people draw; but what eternal truth is at stake if a theological seminary should include, within its mission, the providing of sound theological groundings for people in political and media leadership? The contribution of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to television commentator, Bill Moyers, points the way.

What about the issue of pulpit or pew? Does theological education, substantial theological education, have any value beyond the clergy? The problematic line between clergy and laity confuses the church. The unfinished work of the Protestant Reformation centers on the institutionalization of meaningful roles for the laity. Pursuant to the propositional assertion of the priesthood of the believers should have come all sorts of actualizations of the Christian vocation of all Christians. Instead, the sacramental uniqueness of the ordained priest was replaced by a new cultural equivalent: the teaching office of the ordained minister. Rather than ushering in a radical fulfillment of the New

Testament teachings on the church, the image and expectation of the docile and passive people of God was, thus, perpetuated. The reformers, while proclaiming the priesthood of all believers, in fact elevated the teaching office in such a way as to perpetuate the gap between clergy and laity. While no longer implying the same sacerdotal uniqueness, the clerical distinction remains. Seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism replaced the authoritarian priest with the authoritarian preacher. The little people of God have become very accustomed to having their shepherds talk down to them.

Institutions of theological education, even those serving fellowships that claim a high view of the congregation, perpetuate this flaw of the Reformation. The calling of God is for set-apart servants, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who will minister in special ways to the communities of faith. This much is biblical. But by tradition, the clergyman is elevated and separated. His status within the hierarchy of the church derives from a system of intellectual meritocracy which divides the church into several strata from the learned to the unlearned. Because the reformers were unable to institutionalize their theme of the priesthood of all believers, the stage was set for prompt return to a passive voice and behavior for Christianity's laypersons.

Just when is a ministry full-time? The presumption that the church can put all needed ministers on salary is very much a product of the wealthy West in the 20th century. The historical patterns of ministry and the current realities in much of the newly-churched world point in the direction of bi-vocational ministry. Mono-vocational ministry—by this term we mean full-time employment salaried by one congregation or organization—may be more an aberration of the past century than a fulfillment of God's best for his church. Not only does the mono-vocational assumption exacerbate the clergy/laity gap, but it also contributes to the image of a minister paid to do the work and meet the needs of parishioners.

Further, the relationships between Western missionaries and congregations in post-colonial nations are, indeed, strained by the often unreasonable expectations that the universal norm is for a budgeted church with a salaried pastor. In the restrictive customs of many mission organizations, a fellowship of Christians is not even allowed to call itself a church until these conditions are met. The pastor is usually expected to be formally educated, too, well above the congregation.

Indeed, who is a missionary? At this point, another line that people draw needs to be considered. The line between missionary and other Christians in international vocations is based on the assumption that international and cross-cultural evangelization is the exclusive task of persons employed by churches and by parachurch organizations. This line has dubious foundation in Scripture. It is reasonable to assume that the gospel was spread in the early centuries by bi-vocational persons going abroad into situations as participants in the work-a-day world of craftsmanship and merchandise. At least part of the sustenance of no less an example than the apostle Paul was derived from employment in a menial craft: tent-making. The habit of mono-vocational reasoning prevents a certain mission boards from recognizing today's tentmakers because they allegedly will not have as much time to quote "be missionaries" because they will be earning their income within the economy.

In Macau, just before Christmas, I carefully read the long inscription on the gravestone of Robert Morrison, the pioneer missionary to China. I was struck by the juxtaposition of three lines: The first Protestant missionary to China, sent to China by the London Mission Society in 1807, for 25 years Chinese translator in the employ of the East India Company. Morrison's life and callings reflect the historical pattern of outreach of the church; a dedication to the service of Christ in the

world reflected both in the employed career and in the ministry of the Spirit. The combination of vocations—professional translator in secular employment and missionary to China is a tribute to the omnipotence of God, not to the cleverness of Robert Morrison. If he is to be called a tentmaker, it would be in the Pauline context of functional employment within the society, not in today’s meaning of tentmaker: a sort of cover for being someplace that is not feasible to be if you’re a mono-vocational missionary.

For many a Christian, some of them overseas, an employed vocation authenticates a valid contribution to society; and a spiritual vocation calls them to faithful Christian witness as God provides gifts to the church. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. To prepare God’s people for works of service.”

Not always are a person’s two vocations different, but history suggests that, in most cases, they are, at least, complementary reflecting on the omniscience of God. In Morrison’s case, the combination of vocations to which God called him provided for just the right combination of presence and proclamation that was needed to open the way to China. How remarkable it is that China, even under the Communist rule, is open today, as it was to Morrison, to the Christian whose vocation has credibility and evident value to the Chinese. Bi-vocationalism has been the norm much more than the exception in the history of the church. The gifts of the Spirit to the church are differentiated, but all are gifted. These facts are certain. But it is also true that this is a fallen world. Not always are disciples faithful in the discharge of their gifts; thus, it is unwise to argue for an artificial egalitarian and collectivized fellowship. Not all heed the call of Christ equally.

And then we need to ask, who is a teacher? Jesus said, “Go, make disciples, baptizing, and teaching them to obey . . .” Did he intend that people should draw lines between the several facets of this command? The structure of thought used by Matthew puts the ‘go’ and the ‘make disciples’ together as a sort of envelope that covers the whole process from initial action to its intended conclusion. Go, make disciples. The ‘making of additional disciples of Christ’ is the end; ‘go’ is the beginning. Within this envelope are two functional aspects. Baptizing in order to bring people into the one community of faith, and teaching in order to facilitate the process of spiritual growth. The sort of teaching intended is not merely a depositing of information, but with biblical epistemology it insists that true knowledge is the active use of truth, hence, being obedient.

But the church of Christ in America has tended to disconnect all of this. Traditions of this century tend to take the ‘go’ in one direction calling it ‘missions’, and take the ‘teach’ in another direction calling it Christian education. Teaching is part and parcel of the Great Commission. Surely, teaching has been represented in the activities of missions since the earliest days of the church. On board the Ethiopian chariot, there was teaching. In the jail at Philippi, there was teaching. But just as important is the emphasis on the teaching that results in obedience in Jerusalem and Judea, in our home territory. Jesus was not talking about some sort of haphazard verbal expression in the name of schooling. He commanded nothing less than teaching that produces life transformation. The church at home seems too willing to settle for the sort of teaching that has little promise for making fundamental impact on lifestyle. Much of what is done in the name of Christian education can hardly be expected to produce obedience. It lacks missionary zeal and it lacks the commitment to thoroughness that the gospel represents.

Being knowledgeable about the Word, even about the finer points of biblical languages, provides no firm assurance of godliness. Many laymen, even those who are largely self-taught, allow

the Word of God to inform their lives in submission to the Lordship of Christ. Having come into theological education in an unorthodox manner myself, I am especially appreciative of the designation as Aldeen Professor because G.W. Aldeen, the person honored by this memorial chair, was respected for being such a person within the church. He was a layperson as the common lines are drawn, but he had a keen sense of his ministry. He was truly bi-vocational, responsible to the calling of God in a creative career. But with the same vigor and motive, he was responsible to the vocation, calling, of being representative of God among the people his career and his church brought before him.

So much of the Christian's philosophy of life in ministry depends on how the world, as in John 3:16, how the world is understood. Holistic ministry and the Christian's concern for the whole person are among the targets of those who draw a line between verbal proclamation and other aspects of ministry. The scoffing is directed partly at the catchword language, holistic, and the whole person; and perhaps this is a justifiable target. But the scoffing is also intended to challenge the very idea that God expects anything more functional than evangelistic preaching. The belittling arises out of a severely limited meaning of the world as the object of God's love.

Certain narrow viewpoints of the world and of the gospel are based *de facto* on the assumption that God's concern is for disembodied spirits reached through intellectualized propositions in the form of rules and laws and definitions. Peter had to learn to draw his lines differently. Through a visionary experience on the housetop of Simon the Tanner in Joppa, God provided deliverance from the narrowness that line-drawing brings. Paul's emphasis on God's erasing of the ordinary lines of human categorization continues to be a bother today. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." But other topics are more popular in today's churches. It is more comfortable to leave the lines where they've been drawn.

Like it or not, change is in the wind. We need to learn some new lines just to keep in touch with reality. For example, the heir apparent to the mantle of mass evangelist to the world, formerly Billy Graham, is Luis Palau—not some North American. Just why is God bringing all those foreigners to prominence? Haven't we Americans always been ready? Don't we have the know-how and the best of support? Indeed, the church today seems hard-pressed to accept the realities of a changed world in which the initiatives for evangelism and education are now multinational.

Experience in China reminds the visitor that God's ways are far beyond our comprehension. Rather than bringing the missionary-planted church to extinction, the Chinese manifestations of Communism have provided one more historical illustration that God is sovereign. This much of the church-in-China story has been well told in recent years, but what may not be so well-understood and well-reported is the steady reduction of political tension and a concomitant resurgence of the historical, cultural values and social forms within families and communities of China. Today, Christians are not only allowed to worship in government-authorized churches, but there's a general acceptance of Christians and Christianity is spreading. Religion is, once again, validated as a part of the social fabric of China. In China, it is evident that God reaches easily across the lines that people draw. The presumed incompatibility of State socialism and Christianity has led many American Christians into anxious panic. But now that the furor has settled a bit, along with its attendant excesses of scheming and plotting, all intended to help God out. God's own plan is becoming evident. In the case of China, the persecuted church has survived and has expanded beyond the fondest hopes of those who presume that God was in trouble.

Elsewhere in the world the notion of closed country is being seen for what it is: closed in terms of human assessment, but never closed to God. The openness of China to bi-vocational North Americans has caught mission societies off guard. Most missionary boards are geared to full-time career missionaries who are to be paid entirely from funds contributed through one or another tax deductible arrangement. Such missionaries have a sort of cookie-cutter similarity in roles and job descriptions. Their work on paper, at least, centers on church planting and/or maintenance of one or another of the institutions of the church's or the parachurch structures. But many of the emerging openings, especially in Islamic- and Communist-dominated regions are for Christians who can make credible contributions to the society in something other than religious terms. The line that separates such laypersons and bi-vocational ministers from fully enjoying the support and encouragement of mission-minded fellow Christians has outlived its usefulness.

Now there are some lines we need. None of what is said above should be interpreted as an argument for relativism or indiscretion. Surely, Jesus drew lines. His lines should become the lines of guidance for his disciples. But the Scriptures reveal that his lines were rarely the same as the lines drawn either by his followers or by his religious critics. His lines were different; sometimes in a different place, sometimes on a completely different plane. Jesus was frequently criticized, overtly and covertly, for his social behavior. He seemed neither to respect the lines that had become marks of tradition nor to encourage his followers to look backward for their images. "A new commandment I give you, love one another," he said. Paul saw the reconciliation to God through Christ as becoming a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. In that being educated implies the competency to draw taxonomic and moral lines, the legitimate drawing and using of lines must be understood. First, the proper use of discrimination is to facilitate self-directed discipline. The first application of one's moral and scientific reasoning should be to one's own life. A series of encouragements follows from this first principle. One's discriminatory reasoning and actions should be directed toward the glory of God and not toward self-aggrandizement. The mind of Christ should be sought in matters of human relationship taking account of all that we are by God's grace. We must, nevertheless, esteem others as highly as ourselves. In all that we are and all that we do, God should receive all glory.

One important mark of the theologically educated person should be an inclination to graciously lean across the lines that divide people—reaching, always reaching. As it was with the apostle Paul, we learn the distinctives that must be held and we hold the—not in pride, but in self-discipline. We acknowledge the line that distinguishes what God has done in our lives through Jesus Christ not as something that sets us above or apart, but as something that profoundly changes us into reconciling people; motivated not only by ordinary human appetites and passions, but by the profound awareness that we are obligated to pass the good news along to all. Thus, we are privileged to point the way among those who lack a moral compass. Ours is a godly alternative—not in the accommodative pandering of a materialistic Christianity, but joined with Christ in the sufferings of the cross by which we gain the capacity to identify with hurting humanity.

The lines that are really important are those that orient a moral direction in a confused era. Not the verbal moralisms and simplistic politics that the world has come to despise in the Christian West, but the radiant embrace of a moral God who cares deeply about people. Christ-like relationships with people must be sought and maintained. The sobering observation here is that Jesus sought and maintained relationships with the sick, the moral outcasts, the poor, and foreigners. His purpose was clear, but he never treated a relationship manipulatively or cleverly in order to fulfill his own will. What a tragedy that, in his name throughout history, we find Christians behaving as

goats, in the Matthew 25 sense, expressing willingness to engage in good works only if we're sure that they can be reckoned as being done for Jesus. The line we need is as Jesus drew it; between sheep and goats as a shepherd divides, that is, on the basis of their nature. Thank God for the transformation from goat to sheep. The outreach mission of the church is to bring people into this transformation through faith in Jesus Christ. The educational mission of the church is to encourage the sort of spiritual development that will bring behavior more fully into line with the transformed nature as sheep. There can be no proper line between these interlocked missions of the church.

The mission, which I intend to pursue as Aldeen professor, is the judicious bridging of barriers that hinder the full outworking of the gospel. The metaphor 'barriers' has its precedence in Scripture; the reference to the religious line between the Jew and the Gentiles. For example, the apostle Paul describes Christ as our peace who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. But in some respects, the metaphor of bridge building serves better to describe those little steps of redemptive process in which we engage while relating people to people, ideas to ideas, and people to ideas. I am deeply concerned about the way Christians often use the very gift of grace as a barrier.

There is something cavalier, yes, even arrogant about the line we draw between ourselves and others. Just two years ago in Malawi, the Christians there, living as a minority among Muslims, taught me a better way to divide between Christians and others. We don't call them non-Christians, they said. To us, they are not-yet Christians. That's why we are constantly thinking of ways to keep ourselves involved with them. They need to know Jesus and it will be from us that they learn that he loves them.

In the matter of evangelical versus liberal and evangelical vs Catholic, these are similarly problematic. As my experience in this diverse and complex world continues to expand, I am more and more convinced that those of us who call ourselves by the name of Jesus Christ need each other. We dare not devour those who approach Scripture differently, or those whose lifestyles are strange. There is but one Lord and but one church diverse as it is intended to be. The lines we need are those that will place issues of Christ above issues of culture. Everywhere I go I find Christians having trouble sorting out the cultural biases that affect their hermeneutics. Never forget, American evangelicals have a long way to go on this one.

In some future convocation, reflecting on my tenure as Aldeen professor, I hope that it can be said that *he built bridges*.