



Transcriptions

Sources of Knowledge

Ted Ward

Annotation: *Christian Education Conference, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1985.* Ted Ward observes that Christian education is often defined as the field that offers courses that pastors don't have to take. He believes it is unfortunate that the field has emerged in such a way that what should be central pastoral concerns have been splintered. He identifies four trends that he believes suggest a hopeful future for the field. See Part 2: Priorities for Research, 1985, Audio Archives.



I'm delighted to be here. This is my first time on any sort of a formal platform since signing a contract with this institution and in a way this is a sort of inaugural. It hasn't been billed that way or described that way and I'm thankful that it has not because I'm already, after that introduction, eager to see what I might have to say and I'm afraid that might just be too much. I suspect there is some degree of platform quality with respect to the thinking that I will share with you in the next several days, but you must understand it to be somewhat tentative because I am a person in transition. I have been in transition for 55 years now and I don't know how long that's going to go on. As a matter of fact, I am in transition more in terms of place than in terms of type and kind of service, but I respect my colleagues at Michigan State University and I respect my colleagues here. And I think one of the reasons why transitions for academic persons are significant and important and must be negotiated carefully is because if that respect is to be made lively and active, it requires a good deal of dialogue.

So I'm going to be throwing down some foundational platforms today not in any sort of aggressive manner, but more in the invitational manner so that we might, as an academic community, deal with some issues and together create an effective agenda for Christian education in this institution. Unfortunately, the field of Christian education is often defined as a field that offers courses that pastors don't have to take. A negative descriptor of any field is always hazardous. As a matter of fact, I am one person who regards it as very unfortunate that the field of Christian education emerged as it did because it has emerged, as is today emerging the field of missiology, in such a way that it has splintered what should be central pastoral concerns. Much of what we're doing today in the world, both in Christian education and in other fields (missiology and now even evangelism) is premised, at least incidentally, on the proposition that every church is a large church with multiple staffs and all the specializations that can be fractioned off beginning with the janitorial services and the services of the organist and the church musicians on up through the educational functions should be, if at all possible, splintered away from the pastoral role so as to leave the pastor only the important things. I submit that once you have splintered off janitorial service and the concern for the nurturance and development of the spiritual welfare of God's people, you have pretty much reduced the pastor to being a person whose name will appear in a bulletin.

As a matter of fact, the matter of Christian education rightly defined is the central concern for the development of God's people. Therefore, any department of Christian education or any section of an institution that proposes to be Christian education that is in any way isolated and insulated from the rest of that institution of theological education is probably weak. And I trust that, over time, we can build bonds of real strength in this institution—building on foundations that are already well laid. I see myself not so much as a reformer so much as a stimulus to the continuing development of that which God is already doing in this place.

And with respect to the international and the intercultural I would, again, make the same sort of observation: that once we let any domestic situation, any local/provincial situation become the center of our universe, as if the pastor in a local parish is somehow disentangled from the rest of God's universe and the rest of God's work in the world today, we have rendered that pastor and that church largely impotent given the conditions in which, as an interdependent community of mankind in the universe, we must speak not just to local concerns, but with wisdom and with concern to the concerns of all of God's Creation. Therefore, a holistic concern is not simply an intellectual matter, but also a socio and economic matter as well, and I am sure that most of you are well-tuned to those sorts of concerns, as well.

I just reminded myself and asked Warren this morning if it were not true that I had attended, in this same capacity, a Christian education conference here or somewhere within the last decade. He assures me that it was not many years ago. This itself is a distinctive because I am well on the way to becoming an entrant in the Guinness Book of World Records with respect to having spoken more places once than any living soul. And I rather had the feeling that I was being invited back here today. This, for me, is somewhat rare because, as a matter of fact, some of the things that I usually raise as questions are often not taken with a great deal of enthusiasm. I tend to ask hard questions, as I see hard questions, and I tend to put fingers on issues, as I see issues, and I care not what people will do with those issues if they choose not to engage them. Generally, if they choose not to engage them, they choose not to re-engage *me*.

It was about a decade ago when I made a speech for a certain Scripture-based press not too far away in which my opening line was, Christian education is neither. That particular phrase I

quoted because I had first seen it as graffiti on a theological seminary stall. And when I read it, I recognized that it was not my writing, so it is quite possible that someone else independently invented that phrase. But in this particular conference for this particular publishing house, which, by the way, has joined the long list of places that have not invited me back, I was trying to put a finger on what I see to be a very crucial issue: that Christian education should be eminently Christian and eminently educative. And whenever we are in any way compromising what it means to be essentially Christian or treating as a matter of carelessness the matter of effectiveness in education, we do violence to the foundations that we claim as Christians.

Now within this last decade and certainly not simply because of that little piece of graffiti, there have been a number of things in Christian education that I see as promising changes and promising trends. In fact, the counter-trends themselves are becoming dangerous. Because having once shaken off the preoccupation with children which bound up Christian education for so long and recognizing, as has been the case in the last decade, that the whole of the life of a person is a function of development and must be properly addressed by the church as a matter of lifelong spiritual development, the field of Christian education has very well recognized now the central importance of adult development. As I say, some of the antidotes are becoming their own poisons because, as a matter of fact, right now I'm afraid that what's happening is that everybody and his brother and sister are going into Christian education as adult education specialists and I'm beginning to wonder whose looking after the kids? Because, indeed, children are still a matter of basic concern for the Christian community, even as they were identified in the Old Testament in that very favorite text of the Christian education textbooks in terms of that sector of the community to which adults have a functional, intense responsibility for nurturance.

Another thing I'm seeing in the field of Christian education today is the development of a much more significant agenda of concerns; concerns in terms of not just teaching, but also of research and better understanding. And I will, in the lecture tomorrow, develop for you something of the concern that I think we should share with respect to the research base in Christian education. This new significant agenda has as one of its center pillars the concern for institutions of Christian education, not just programs of Christian education. As I see it, we have come through a long period of preoccupation with program offering and program management and, if you please, glorified chair-moving in the church.

Now we see the field of Christian education addressing the social institution of the family, the parish as a social institution of people, and the various educative institutions of the church as being properly the domain of concern for Christian educators. As a matter of fact, it is a strange thing that, among all the professional fields, the only field that does not have resident within it a functioning research community studying the institutions that they are housed in is the field of theological education. Medical education has a research unit; legal education has a research unit in almost any prominent institution. But the field of Christian education and the field of theological education, in general, the field of the whole of Christian higher education including the liberal arts colleges have very, very few people committed to any kind of self-study internal to those establishments and this is beginning to dawn upon the Christian education community as a frontier needing exploring.

The third of the trends is what I see as a much more significant dialogue with culture, much less ostrich behavior than we saw one and two decades ago, and a great deal more involvement of

the Christian educating community with the whole of the developing societies in our own nations and around the world.

And the fourth of these trends which I see to be very promising and very significant is the increased emphasis on spiritual development. One of the unique functions of religion is in the matter of the spirit of humankind. And as we take our work seriously, we must necessarily be knowledgeable about the nature and form and substance and nurturance of spiritual development. And I think it has been, at least in part, because of the way the field of Christian education emerged in the 20th century that the whole area of spiritual development was in evangelical and Protestant, in general—theological education wrenched away from the ministerial formation experiences and given to the sub-specialization of Christian education. And then because the Christian education field tended to take the British Sunday school model as its central focus and focused primarily on children, there tended to be a vast neglect of this whole area of spiritual development and I am delighted to see that emphasis restored.

Now you may already detect that I am an educator in many respects including the fact that, as most educators, I am paranoid. Educators, in general, become paranoid or they are paranoid and therefore they become educators. I'm not sure where the chicken and the egg is. It has been said that those who can't do, teach; and those who can't teach, teach teachers; and those who can't teach teachers, keep trying. And somewhere in there I suspect that accounts for many of us in this room. Part of the problem in the whole field of education, whether it's Christian education or education as is broadly defined in the institutions of the world, educators and education tend to be a field concerned with what would seem to be everybody's business. Everybody teaches. Any parent teaches children. Anybody teaches. You teach your brother. You teach your sister. You teach your parents, from time-to-time. And you're very conscious of the fact that what teachers do when they teach you is something that you could do, too, if you really wanted to. You know, sit down and read this. You know, stuff like that. Bring me tomorrow a paper on . . . That doesn't really require a lot of skill, and, therefore, teachers tend to be people that are doing the ordinary. And unlike doctors who are doing mystical things like looking down inside parts of the body that nobody else has ever seen and doing marvelous things with them at the end of knives while people that are really vitally affected are dead, there's a real mystique about that, you know. Similarly, the law. They write these long words and they put stuff that looks like Elizabethan English, but it isn't, together in such a way that no one can understand it except them, and then you know you have to go to a lawyer. Now I think educators ought to do the same thing. We've got to either to go back to Elizabethan English with both feet—I mean really commit ourselves to it—to create an absolutely isolated community so we can be specialists. Or we've got to do something else in order to raise the stake in our value because otherwise it's going to continue to be this cycle of paranoia and defeat.

As a matter of fact, not even having a doctorate helps. That's one reason that people in education are so motivated to get higher degrees—they keep hoping that somewhere they won't turn into a permanent Rodney Dangerfield. But I can tell you that there's a real blow that comes after you have a doctorate and you have children. Your children are on the phone and one of them says, yeah, he's a doctor. And you can tell by the tone of voice that this isn't going to come to a good end. Yeah, he's a doctor, but not that kind. No, no. You're thinking of the kind that help people. I mean, when they pick that sort of stuff up at age 5, you know you got trouble.

You see the field of education is really a very vulnerable field because it sits right out front. Everybody's involved with it one way or the other, and everybody has a chance to assess it and

evaluate it. And, of course, all the people who are in it as subjects of it are smarter than the people who are trying to operate it. That goes without saying, or haven't you been to Trinity? Or Michigan State? Or Sunday school? By the way, how many of you know very well that you could teach your Sunday school class better than the current guy that's doing it? That's what I mean. We grow up that way.

Then we see the field of education flopping around from one fad to another. I was asked this morning if I was going to use an overhead projector. Now here's the way I was asked: "You want an overhead projector?" "No, I don't think so." Then you could tell that there was another question that was being censored right there on the spot, "Why not?" That was the question, you know. And then the declaration, "This is going to be something different; a Christian education professor without an overhead projector." I believe in overhead projectors. I believe in effective communicating and oral communication, too. I believe in effective lecturing. I believe in effective talking. I believe in effective conversation. I believe in a lot of things. And that's one reason that I think sometimes educators get in trouble: they forget that there are a lot of things you can use effectively if you know how. Instead, we go we go almost like faddists who are enthusiastic in one minute for this event and this kind of experience, and then a month later we're over here, over there.

The whole field of education has been really victimized since World War II by technology. First it was tape-recording, you know. Once the Germans discovered a way to put sound on long tapes—their first ones were steel; they tended to be not very portable—but after we turned that into oxides on paper and then oxides on plastics, we really got to the place where that was really the thing of the future. We should put everything on tape. And then, of course, we discovered we could put visual experience on tape and that obviously is the whole answer. So the effective Christian education of the future is obviously somehow wrapped up either in videotape or somehow computers. Now computers are a great thing, too. So are disposals, by the way. But I think we have to be very careful to sort out when you use a disposal and when you use a computer because there is a certain kind of limitation associated with virtually any technology. It is good for certain things and not good for others. And I think sometimes we adopt things and we run around telling everybody that they would be a much better cook if they used a disposal. I doubt seriously that being an effective cook has anything at all to do with using a disposal or not. Similarly, I doubt very much if being an effective teacher has anything at all to do with whatever particular technology you use or don't use. Now most of us think of Jesus Christ as the great teacher and I think we should be very, very suspicious of that because there's a real good possibility that he did not use an overhead projector. He did not ride a bicycle either, but there's a good possibility that he would have if he had one.

We have to understand things in their context, but we have to understand things particularly with respect to their limitations. And we cannot be a faddish-tic field. What has happened in the field of education because of technologies and fads and because of this paranoia of being an educator? Is it the whole field of education has become fragmented to the point of being almost incoherent? Fragmentation, the breakdown of sectors into compartments and then the freezing of those compartmental lines into permanent walls, is part of the condition of humankind today.

One of the reasons why we are facing the problems that we do in local churches is because people compartmentalize their religious experience into certain parts of their life and certain parts of their week. And most of us are well aware of how important it is to tell people that you really ought to be a seven-day-a-week Christian. Well, that goes pretty well as a matter of rhetoric, but it's very

hard to apply because most of the influences in life are compartmentalizing influences. And especially since we also do it within the field of education for the church, we just make a bad matter worse.

We are, every one of us here, in one way or another a victim. We are victims of the process of compartmentalization. What happens when we've become compartmentalized is we devote thinking in fragmentary ways rather than building thought into whole packages. We can respond if we can see the specific clues. Now in some educational models the result is worse than others. In many respects, what we do in the United States with an educational model that's basically a kind of heuristic discovery-oriented processing experience tends to be more holistic than many of the rote learning processes that you find in in many places. But, on the other hand, we are just as prone as anyone else to overspecialization. The presumption that that's not my business, that's his business, you know. He's the specialist in this, I'm the specialist in that. And if you want that question answered, you go to him. If you want this question, you come to me.

I think probably one of the most significant turning points in my own life was about 15, 18 years ago when Edmund Clowney said to me, "Ted, that's a theological question." The context of his saying it caught me up short because I had just said to him, "Ed, that's a theological question. You answer it." And his retort to me was, "Ted, that's a theological question," which is literally my words. And what he was saying as we developed it in the conversation later—and, by the way, he did that in public, because I had done it to him in public. He had raised a question in a forum and queried that of me. And here he was, the eminent theologian asking me, for heaven's sake, a theological question and I threw it back at him. And then he threw it back at me and he said, Ted, that's a theological question. Therefore, that's *our* question; not my question, not your question, but our question. And he committed himself and, at that point, invited me into a commitment of discovery of the relatedness of ideas and thoughts. As we, as Christians, take our theological frame of reference as our organizer for a whole view of our lives and our experiences and our understandings, this is really the theme.

What are our foundations in the field of Christian education? Now when I say that, when I give you that question, I am not wanting in your mind the image of a Sunday school teacher or the program manager and the chair-mover in the local church who is called the Christian education minister. I'm talking about Christian education broadly defined—including this institution, including what your children experience in churches, what your family is experiencing in its home implementation of the Christian commitment of family, and all of the rest of the institutions that serve the Christian community educatively. What is the source of our content? I submit that our content has three functional sources. These three functional sources can be, if we're not careful, like the rest of our life, fragmentary and separate. So that instead of the three being, as in the Trinity, an integrated whole that has a oneness; they become, instead, three different kinds of things largely unrelated.

I choose to share with you this morning the Psalm that I think of as the educator's Psalm. If there is any passage of Scripture that expresses values that are central to the issue of the sources of truth, it is Psalm 19. Psalm 19, a hymn of praise to our God, suggests in very precise ways that there are two and, yea, three modes in which God reveals himself to us. And I would like to read this Psalm with no other comment and no break as I read it through. I will choose to comment on it later. I will even attempt not to stress words as I go through it outside the general frame of its text itself in order to respect it properly. But what I would like you to be aware as we begin it is that I am

looking at this Psalm as a hymn of praise to the God who is in the business of revealing himself to us. What is it to be educated as a Christian? It is to be involved in the revealing that God is providing and to be related to that revealing in a systematic, whole way.

Now, Psalm 19:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

It is very clear, is it not, that this Psalm speaks of God revealing himself in nature? The first six verses, we find a declaration of the boldness of God's demonstration of his Creation. The figure of the sun is picked up here, even as it is picked up in many non-Christian, non-Judaistic religions, as a central theme of that through which the God, or the gods, reveal their greatest power. The sun is the metaphor here of God's having revealed himself in that which is absolutely beautiful, adequate, pure, holy, fulfilling in the Creation.

In verse 7, the shift is obvious; the shift from the Creation to the preceptual, to the Law, to the Word, to the writings of the God. Our God has communicated, then, in the mode of his revealing in Creation—a Creation to be examined and to be grasped as eagerly as we would grasp the second, which is the revelation in his Word. God reveals himself in at least these two modes and this Psalm sings great praise to that fact.

But the Psalm, if you'll notice, makes no sharp distinction, if there is indeed a third part. It is really a kind of a developing integration with the second part. But it's quite clear to me that there is a shift, a subtle shift, a gentle shift, a sort of overlapping shift. As you move down through verses 8 to 10, you move out of the framework of the precepts which in this Psalm, by the way, God as the giver of preceptual truth is the God who uses his Word, even transcendently above his Creation. So the understanding of his Creation, this first sector of the Psalm, is going to be incomplete without the revelation of the Word. There is a transcendent place of the Word. And this is one reason why the authority of Scripture is so central to the issue of proper Christian approach to truth. These are not three equal functions. They are a kind of a triadic function in which the Word is centerpiece. But the power and the majesty of God in his revealed universe is that which captures the psalmist's mind and eye and heart and he gets into it this way. And then he, above that, exalts the Word.

But, if you notice that transition that begins about verse 8 from precepts, we begin to get things that are basically sense-oriented and we begin to move, in this Psalm, in the direction of an awareness that I, as a person, have a part in what it is that God is revealing. It is not a static universe. It is not a static Word. It is not something that's out there. It's also in here. Look at the number of emphases here on that which can be empirically grasped. For example, in verse 8, "giving light to the eyes" the empirical function of seeing. And then the affect to "the fear of the Lord is pure." Now granted that fear is not fear is not fear, you know. But fear, here, has to do with a response, an affect of response to what it is that God is. So we have an affective picture here. And then we go down to gold. And gold is quite often a symbol of that which is elegant to the eye and elegant to the feel. And if you have experience with bars of gold, and the heft of those pieces of gold and the smoothness of gold, you know that this is a very sense-oriented picture "than much pure gold."

Then "sweeter than honey." You see, again, the person sensing, feeling, tasting, touching, hearing. "By them is your servant warned". And you see the ears and you see the hands extended to hear the warning. All of this coming down to "in keeping them there is great reward". And that which we can see as the reward of our God. This, indeed, speaks to the process in which God is revealing himself in life's experience.

Now let me hasten to say that this is not an argument for either process theology or experiential revelation. Absolutely not! But I think if we simply wash those particular propositions overboard without examining this sort of Scripture, we're missing something because God is at work revealing himself in your life today. He is using processes through which he has already revealed himself. Indeed, yes. But God is inviting us into a lifelong learning in which we are active partners.

Therefore, a third facet of this great Psalm, which then allows the Psalm to conclude with this self-judgment concern, "Who can discern his errors?" I submit to you, if you take that third part out, that particular passage is a jangle; it's a dissonance. Why would that suddenly develop into a self-evaluative emphasis in that paragraph? Why? You say, well, in light of the given-ness of the Word. Yes, but it still doesn't come through the processing of the respect for one's own capacity to see, feel, judge, taste, and affectively involve himself with the work of God in his life. I submit to you that our God is revealing himself in that which is out there; and quite often that which is out there in the universe is not sufficiently looked at by Christians who are spending so much time on this pinnacle of the revelation in the Word that we tend sometimes to neglect the systematic study of that which God has done in his universe.

I am a social scientist. I am very committed to the proposition that there are things to learn from the Creation. Now that doesn't seem to offend people at all if I'm an astronomer. In fact, I remember the first of the great series of Moody Institute of science films, *The God of Creation* and it was dwelling on what our God has done in the magnificence of the Creation out there in the universe. And somehow that's okay for evangelical Christians to say, yes, God's great. He's created lots of stars out there and they don't bump into each other very often, isn't that great? Well, I submit that that's just a drop in the bucket. That's just a drop in the bucket. When you examine what God has done with his absolutely infinitely complicated sixth-day creature, you see God at his best.

Now, indeed, the whole of Creation is under the curse of sin, and what I see in myself and what I see in you is not all the way God intended it to be. But it's still the handiwork of God and I need to respect it and I need to study it. I need to study the human being and I need to study human society because God has revealed himself in his Creation, and the human being and human society

are part of that Creation. It was on the sixth day when God said, today we'll do something special. And it was part of that doing something special when God said, "It is not good that man should be alone." And God created human beings as society. We should not as Christians in scholarship and in pastoral ministry shy away from that which we can learn and that which we can understand systematically through the process of examining the 'out there' which includes us as persons. That's one of the areas of neglect.

The other area of neglect is this third facet which has to do with the capacity to become involved as a subject participant with God acting upon the Word; acting upon the experiences that we understand empirically because it's as we act upon that which life is giving us that we truly develop knowings which are worthy of being called wisdom.

We have an active role. The Christian community, of all communities in human society, ought to be at the edge of being a lifelong learning community. Now that is a current catchword. It's a buzzword in education today. It's a fad, and maybe I'm simply playing into one more of those fads. I don't know. But I submit to you that one of the marvels of this sixth-day creature, you and me, is that there is, in every one of the seasons of life, thresholds of development and thresholds of learning and thresholds of wisdom-building that are exciting and that stretch us continuously as we walk through life.

We should be very conscious of the fact that the Scriptures teach a self-criticism which is based on a knowledgeable grasp of the Word. The figure of speech in the episode that you're familiar with in James 1, the distinction between hearers of the Word and doers of the Word, is a distinction that focuses on the use of or neglect of feedback on what you are like. One who is the hearer, only, looks at his natural face in the mirror. Notice he looks at his natural *face* in the face. It doesn't say he looks at the mirror; but he looks at his natural face in the mirror. In other words, don't get preoccupied in your sermons with making it a point, which is later made by James, that the mirror is the Word. Yes, that's true! But the point of the metaphor is that when we look in the Word, we see ourselves and can walk away forgetfully being unconcerned about what we are seeing of ourselves. This helps to explain why, in so many of our churches, we have people who know the Word much better than they know themselves. And that's sad. It's sad when people know the Word better than they know the Lord of the universe. It's sad when people know the Word better than they know that universe. It's sad when people know the universe and the Word and don't know themselves. All those conditions exist in churches today.

Our commission, it seems to me, from Psalm 19 and the rest of Scripture is that as people involved with the development of God's family—read Christian education, if you want; or read it out, if you want, because this is all of us—as we are involved with the development of the community of God's people, it is our particular responsibility for a bringing together, correctively; bringing together those three aspects of God's universe of communication so that the people we deal with are more respectful and more eager to inquire into and become acquainted with that which is the handiwork of God, whether it's a little duck and the firm ways of a mother duck on the front busy plaza of a chapel or whether it's a cloud or a star or a blade of grass or, as Jesus occasionally used, figures of lilies, how they bloom, and of birds, how they are cared for.

We invite people into that understanding and then we bring them into a maturing of that understanding through the disciplines of the Word. And we do that best when we also help them see

themselves clearly and bring the whole of this triadic function of the foundations of knowledge together into one piece.

We must do some corrective work. This is not simply a job for Christian educators. This is a job for all those who lead in the families of God. But after we've done the corrective work and after we've thought of it in terms of how do we correct some of the things that are wrong with us today, the exciting thing is that it's a positive not a negative act that we engage in. Because as we bring together the fragmented works of the church and of the Christian community, at large, we are assertively bringing glory to the one true God who is alive and at work in this world today. Our mission is no less than that.

Let us pray. "May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen.