



## Transcriptions

### The Finest Sort of Educational Environments- Attuned to the Times

Ted Ward

**Annotation:** *Christian Camping International, Opryland Hotel and Conference Center, Nashville, TN 1992.* CCI is now the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA). Repeating his assertion that camping is the finest educational environment (See transcript, “The Finest Sort of Educational Environment”, 1971), Ward notes that the camps can provide the sort of community experience people lack. He cites four human problems: physical and social hunger, fear, disorientation, and alienation and then describes an older more sordid form of human conflict—ethnic hatred—that has re-emerged after the downfall of ideological conflict: democracy vs communism. Stressing the need for people with the skills of reconciliation, Ward encourages camps to make this one of their emphases.



CCI [Christian Camping International] has, indeed, come a long way. This experience tonight, as much as anything, is a celebration. It is a celebration of Christian camping. Christian camping has come a long way. Christian camping is still unfolding. It's becoming more widely recognized, its values becoming more thoroughly understood. We're still arguing about whether we operate within church or parachurch. Never mind, let's suspend that for a few days and just enjoy it. God is the author. Christ is building his church and somehow, we are serving him.

I find it fun to look back. My days with CCI and with Christian camping go back considerably more than the 20 in my introduction. I can go back at least 25 years and reflect on the relatively few multipurpose facilities of that time. Several overgrown Bible conferences. I was on staff of one of

those back in World War II. Pine Brook. Remember that one? I was young but I was on staff. Many summer only rustic facilities. Lots of Mom and Pop camps. Perhaps this is where the gender revolution began. George always cooked; Edith repaired the plumbing. Altogether providing good experiences, doing good things for God's people. Making possible some things that wouldn't happen otherwise in life. Enriching, building, strengthening, teaching; but lacking coherent theory or very much in the way of orderly philosophy.

Part of the problem was that few of us were thinking big enough in those days. As we reflect back now we wonder who could have foreseen the phenomenal growth of the 12-month, specialized conference center, and the fully weatherized facilities and what that make possible? For many churches, many organizations, who could have foreseen the explosion of children's camps? Who could have foreseen the recognition of this part of ministry as being a vital, indeed, a central part of Christian education within the churches of this part of the world and now moving around the world? Who could have anticipated the symbiotic relationship that would emerge between the superchurches and camp facilities, especially in regard to their need-meeting focus for teens and young adults? Or who could have imagined such an overflow crowd as this at Opryland, CCI?

I've enjoyed watching from the sidelines always with great interest and great concern. The fact is the Lord has led me in a different mission and a different ministry in my life than to play out some of my earlier interests and concerns directly in camping. At the university for a number of years, I directed the university's center for research on human learning, and it was at that point when I became so deeply concerned that the people of God understand more fully the importance of learning as a social phenomenon. The good Lord has not created Adam to be all alone. That criticism that God offered of his own work on that sixth day was immediately corrected and humankind has become the societies of the world as we know them. God has ordained many of the functions of the human being to be social functions, and particularly we have failed to understand, in many cases, that learning itself is a social phenomenon.

I cringe when I see the many things done in the name of Christian education and, indeed, in the name of other sorts of education in the way of such individualized and privatized learning experiences that people do not have the benefit of the social interaction with other learners while they're encountering new ideas. This is really a blight upon us. It's very unfortunate that the models used largely in Christian education up until not too many years ago were modeled on early nineteenth-century schooling experiences. Much has been made of the Sunday school idea—unfortunate that word Sunday *school*—because, indeed, learning is much more a function of life than anything that should be properly thought of as occurring in some kind of cubic space with a clock on the wall.

At Green Lake a number of years ago, at the Green Lake convention in Wisconsin, I urged a break with the schooling-type approach to teaching and learning, especially for Christian camping. There was a great deal of interest in that particular period of time in making more of the camping experience as a learning experience. Christian camping was barely understood at that point in terms of much more than good experiences for the nurturing of Christian children and evangelistic outreach to many young people who would attend camp without a knowledge of Jesus Christ. But in terms of the real understanding of the development of the Christian, and what sorts of things could happen in a camping-type environment so little was truly understood and I saw then a danger of Christian camping becoming a copycat of some of the worst features of others aspects of Christian education.

So I really hit hard on this that we ought to respect more fully the value of the camping environment as a learning environment. And my notes show that I said on that occasion, “Christian camping is already using the finest sort of learning environment.” Ed Uhland, bless his heart, picked up that sentence, deleted a few carefully chosen words, translated it into plain English, and printed it on everything right up to T-shirts: “Christian camping is the finest learning environment.” Now I didn’t mind the deletion of those several little words already using the finest “sort of” learning environment because this particular statement led to my being dubbed “the patron saint of Christian camping.” I understand this is a revolving title and I lost it some time ago but I intend to earn it back. I am thoroughly convinced that what we do for boys and girls, young people, men and women, for each other in the name of Christian education should take full advantage of the contexts in which people can learn as a natural part of the interactions of life.

It is no mistake here tonight that Bob Kovalik [?] turns our attention right off the bat to the important matter of getting in touch with each other at an environment like this. At a conference such as this, we emulate that kind of networking that should be characteristic of our camps themselves. No matter how many people, no matter how disorderly it may have to become from time to time, we need to sound out what it is that we’re seeking and who it is that can help, whether it’s commodities—or even more important—experiences, understandings, and the answers to many of life’s fundamental problems.

You see, Jesus himself only had three years to prepare a group of men who would stand alone after he would leave them and transform the world. And since he had only three years, he didn’t allow himself the luxury of building a school. He could have; they had been invented by then. The Romans had picked it up from the Greeks. They knew full well about schools. But our Lord Jesus Christ instead elected to use a totally different process. He elected to use a very ancient and time-honored process that reflects on the reality of social learning. He brought those 12 men out from their work-a-day world and took them with him on the countryside and as they went to the valleys, and the hillsides, the lake, the river, in and out of the cities, it seemed that they were always moving from one campsite to another.

Now by 1992, it’s generally accepted that camping, retreats, even conferences, and live-together intensive courses are important learning experiences. Indeed, I think of these sorts of experiences as the best possible resources to offset the twin inroads of Satan on the church of Jesus Christ: the twin inroads of materialism and individualism. At least, potentially so. I think it is upon us, in this time, to reflect that much that we do in camping today may be in danger of overly catering again to the materialism and the individualism that many Christians bring to us. And we need to draw some rather sharp lines with reference to just how far it is that we’re willing to go to try to recreate that kind of commodity-oriented luxury and the privatization that people are used to at home.

Christians today profoundly lack community experience, and even the temporary community—as camping is sometimes called—the temporary community of camping, so long as the values there are more Christian, has significant healing power for the Christians of our time who have, in so many cases, been blighted in their development because they are so individualized and so materialized.

The church of Jesus Christ is spoken of in Scripture in several metaphoric terms: as a body, as a unitary organization under hierarchical and structured management. But one of the most valuable

pictures we get is the church as a community. God's people learning with and from each other, living together, experiencing things so that together they are a testimony. They are a showing forth of his death, burial, and resurrection until he comes.

In 1979 I think it was, in French Lake, Indiana, I led some exercises in discussions to get us a little more in the habit and maybe to build some skills of futurism—that rather inelegant art of considering the meaning of trends and trying to anticipate what sorts of options we have in order to be ready for a future that we can only vaguely guess. There, as we were beginning to move into the '80s, I was encouraging God's people, there and elsewhere, to use the '80s as a time for Christians to begin to prepare themselves in an orientation toward the '90s which I knew would be what the '90s have turned out to be: a time when the whole world is turning its attention to long-range planning, reflection on what they're doing, value considerations, reassessing their goals, and getting in mind the sorts of things they would like to do as that marvelous calendar transformation occurs at the end of 1999 and we move into the third Christian millennium.

I felt then, and I still feel now, that Christians have a very definite role to play in that kind of anticipation and we need it to be among the people who are really thinking carefully about where we're going. This program, in this particular conference, is one more in a series of fulfillments of the ground that we laid at that time. This is a time for us, each one, to take stock, to evaluate, to plan, to consider the shifting of emphasis and moving more deliberately into Christian outreach and Christian nurture. I warned then against triumphalism: that spirit of presuming that we have finished every good battle and all we must do is sit back for the great rewards that our God has promised us. Indeed, we have a long road ahead.

Now we look around and ask, what is it to be attuned to these times? Indeed, what is new? People are hungry. People are hurting. People are hating. The three great h's of hellish influence in the world that we know. To be attuned to the times is somehow to be relating ourselves constructively to these hungers, these hurts, these hates because there is one great 'h' of heaven: people are still hoping. Thank God, hopelessness has not altogether set in. Even in some of the world's most tragic calamities, which are very much a part of our time, we find that there is something of the image of God deep in the spirit of even those who do not know God—that preoccupation with the possibility that things might be better.

Interestingly, Barna and other researchers have shown that as we do studies in the United States of people in different socioeconomic strata, it is the people who are the most apt to be hurting and to be hungry who will rate the hopefulness of tomorrow higher than those who are trapped in wealth and in satiation. Even the poor know how to hope. The rich often forget. That is a bridge already built by the Lord Jesus Christ—a bridge across which we can move with the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. People are seeking an answer to hunger, an answer to hurt, an answer to hate; and we have that answer in Jesus Christ. We must always remember to present it not in condemnation, not in fear, not in anger, but in hope.

You see, God is way beyond us. As I reflected back in preparation for this talk on the many sorts of resolutions and conclusions that we had come to at the French Lick Conference in Indiana, I noticed that there really was only one where we really missed it. Now we could miss it yet in other points because 2000 is not yet here, but I believe none of us there at French Lick had quite the hope, quite the optimism to anticipate what God had in mind doing to bring communism to an end. We did not anticipate the downfall of communist ideology. What a different world it is from what

was the USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, always presumed to be our great enemy. Today to a rather benign collection called the Confederation of Independent States and indeed a pathetic collection in dire need of help. We saw it first in Poland then Czechoslovakia and then, to our great surprise, Bulgaria, Albania and elsewhere within the communist-bloc countries, an awareness that communism had indeed failed.

It was perhaps not nearly so much an ideological preference for democracy because that is not what it was, but simply a sense of futility and an awareness that hope must lie somewhere else. Who is left today? Cuba and Vietnam: the friendless orphan nations. With this one major exception, the shift in the world orbit of power, the agenda we developed at French Lick still is largely on track. Interesting, even the most controversial single piece of that agenda, the foreseeing of Christian camps as refugee centers has, in fact, come to pass in the Near East, in Eastern Europe, and in South Florida as a consequence of Andrew. This sort of change in our attitude is an appropriate change given the world in which we live.

There are gaps and conflicts within our own structures, within our own country, and I'd like to talk to you very explicitly about some of these because to be attuned to our times requires more than just some sense of satisfaction that we guessed it right on some previous occasion. Certain things have gotten a lot worse than we thought they could get. As a matter of fact, there are some things that are going to rise up in their seriousness in the years ahead to the point where we must have much more clear position. Bill Pannell, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, has just released a book that I would commend to you, *The Coming Race Wars? A Cry for Reconciliation*<sup>1</sup> in which he describes what very well may be happening in many parts of the nation not simply in the Detroit of the past, in the Los Angeles of this immediate year and elsewhere wherein the conflicts between ethnic groups within the United States becomes so severe that it turns into a kind of street warfare. This book is no fly-by-night book. It's published by Zondervan and it is a very carefully reasoned piece on what explosive situations we really are confronting. We have some divisions within our country that are not unique to our country but they certainly are about as bad as you find them anywhere. We have divisions between our rich and our poor. We have divisions along ethnic lines, and increasingly we have divisions along the lines of our young and old.

I'm always curious how the media follows things like this and especially in the very week of a presentation such as this, the *Atlantic* magazine features as the cover and main series of articles: "The New Generation Gap," speaking specifically to a generation and age gap of a new sort to be emerging within our own country. This current issue of the *New Republic*: "Racial Justice, Have We Given Up Completely?" And in the same mail came the ministerial forum for the denomination of which I am a member, and the whole issue is given over to tearing down cultural barriers, racism, and reconciliation.

I tell you, there are many people paying attention today to this set of issues and I think we must look at them carefully. We should understand some statistics at least, though I always choose not to beleaguer people with numbers on such an occasion as this, I think you can get one thing clear in your mind: if you divide the United States citizenry into five parts—that's easy to do because that's how many God gave you on each hand and, you know, in case you lose one visual aid you've always got the other one. You put the richest 20%, one-fifth, here, and the poorest 20% here. Let

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<sup>1</sup> William E. Pannell. *The Coming Race Wars? A Cry for Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993

me tell you something about the wealth in this nation that I think you can stick with. This group here takes home, in economic equivalent terms, almost 50% of everything that is income for the whole nation. This fifth, almost 50%. This fifth less than 4%, less than 1/25. Now if that persists, it will tear us up. It has torn up many another nation. I should give it opportunity for our brother from Brazil to tell about what happens when that situation gets even worse and literally tears apart the fabric of a nation. What is the social climate of our time? In our own nation—and I speak primarily to the folks from the United States at this point though many of these things are parallel in other parts of North America, specifically Canada; and yet I must speak fervently from my own context and I would not attempt to preach to the Canadians. We live in a time where four great problems exist, and if we are going to be serious about doing ministry, whether in churches or within service missions to the church as in Christian camping and conference ministry, we're going to have to get serious about these.

Let's go again to hunger. There are physical hungers, social hungers, and indeed spiritual hungers; and as has been said over and over and over again, our Lord himself demonstrated that you cannot deal with spiritual hunger while you ignore physical and social hunger.

Fear. People today are simply overwhelmed by circumstances they cannot seem to affect. This is true in urban America but it's becoming more and more common, even in small towns and in suburbs. We have used the suburb as a kind of an escape citadel and it is beginning to break down. Fear, whether of the welfare of one's own family; fear, whether of the security of one's own job; fear of all sorts, lurks for everyone and preoccupies a great deal of time and energy in peoples' lives.

Disorientation results from this, the third of my concerns, especially when the fears drive us to reject former values. There are many people today who have given up on their own value system and they do not even seek an alternative system. They are simply lost and they know it. Resulting then in the fourth of these concerns: alienation, non-relatedness, futility, impotence, and ultimately anger.

Now underneath it all globally is the downfall of ideology as the major basis of war and conflict. And what has re-emerged out from under this period of ideological conflict—democracy versus communism and all the rest of the 'isms' which no longer seem to be worth fighting about. What has re-emerged is a deeper and older, and more sordid source of human conflict: ethnic hatred.

Let me take you just for a moment to a series of nations that will ring a bell over the last 20 years in your mind in a sequence: Zaire, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia, and indeed persistently the Republic of South Africa. Africa provides for us a literal showcase of raw ethnicity wherein people cannot get along with other people who have a different background. Whether the difference has produced language differences, cultural differences, nevertheless whatever, they are different. And when people are antagonistic toward people who are different, you have tragic situations. That's the way to read today's concern in Somalia. This is indeed one of the most profound losses of human life to hunger in this century. But, as a matter of fact, it has as its root not crop failure, though that's part of it; not climate change, though that's part of it; but the ultimate tragedy is it has human hatred at the base of it arising out of, not ideology, but ethnicity. People desperately need to be reconciled to one another. But this world has never been so lacking in skilled agents of reconciliation.

Take Yugoslavia. How do you understand Yugoslavia? It's a terrible religious war. It is ethnic in its origin. It is basically several different ethnic groups that literally have a third group trapped in their midst. Serbs and the Croats and others of the ethnic groups of Yugoslavia have the Muslim minority trapped in their midst. They're fighting each other and they are all fighting the Muslims. And when you strip it down to its barest terms, it's an ethnic war along, believe it or not, Roman Catholic versus Eastern Orthodox lines. Christians fighting Christians and trapping Muslims in the middle.

Take Germany today. One of the most tragic cases in this century, where people were invoking Jehovah God and the name of Jesus Christ in an effort to stamp out the Jews. The neo-Nazis are attempting to stamp out anyone who is not purely German.

Take England. The profound schisms between Christians and Muslims in the cities of England is at the ragged edge of out-and-out street rioting. Or let's not go so far. Consider the U.S. where a racist and a neo-Nazi is able, in our time, to become a serious contender for a governorship. We are not that far from raw racism ourselves. In fact, I think to understand ourselves fully, honestly, we must understand that there is a racism endemic and historic within the American society that has indeed affected the imagery and the ideas and the willingness of Christians to make something that honors the Lord Jesus Christ out of their churches.

If you take the Bible seriously, you have to reflect on the fact that the church wasn't even worth persecuting until after Acts 6. They simply slogged along. Growing, yes, but always in Jerusalem. The Great Commission had said, get out to Samaria; go to the outermost parts, and they were right there in Jerusalem until after the stoning of Stephen. But do you know what led to the stoning of Stephen? Take a look at chapter six. It says, the church was growing, but there was a dissension among them. There was an overlooking. There was an ignoring. There was a mistreatment of a minority group within the church. We so easily refer to this as the time when the church started the deacons and from then on they had parking lots which, of course, keeps deacons busy.

Let me call your attention to the fact that Luke goes to great pains to tell us that the church did something absolutely phenomenal there in Jerusalem when they finally recognized that the problem in the church was indeed their own internal neglect of people that were different. The Jewish folk among them were neglecting the Greek-speaking sector within the converts and the widows in that Greek-speaking sector were systematically being overlooked in the distribution of food to meet their needs.

Because they recognized this and came together and did something totally unthinkable, God caused the church to prosper in altogether new ways. What did they do? They came together, recognized the problem, acknowledged it, and got about solving it by asking people from that minority to help the majority learn to relate effectively to the minority. Luke wouldn't have gone to such great pains, given such detail, as to give us the Greco-Roman names of all seven of those fellows. Read it carefully. That passage still haunts me with reference to what it is that God wants his church to be today.

It is quite possible that part of our problem today is that the church of Jesus Christ has never taken seriously enough, at least in our times and our places, the role of the peacemaker and the reconciler. God intends his people to be peacemakers and reconcilers. Hear James 3:17 & 18, "But

the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raising a harvest of righteousness.” I ask you, is this perhaps our next frontier? Even as Jesus Christ reconciled man to God at the cross, so our task is reconciling people to God through the blood of Jesus Christ and reflecting that reconciliation in terms of our relationships to one another.

I believe today that the church of Jesus Christ could be producing a significant number of the people needed in this world to serve as peacemakers and reconcilers. How come we don’t have a reputation for doing that? Now here it is. Perhaps the greatest value of Christian camping really attuned to our times, is the providing of situations in which Christians learn to be peacemakers. Now this isn’t farfetched. Consider. Five ideas. At your Christian camp, God’s people, old and young, can learn five important parts of this puzzle.

Learning to live with others who are different. Wow, that’s important! And I don’t know of any place where I’ve seen it working better than in Christian camping. *We can* do it; *we do* do it. Let’s consider it a particular burden.

Second, learning to share and co-operate; in effect building a community. Where else but in Christian camping?

Third, a situation or a place in which people can trade in, even temporarily, their control-orientation based as it is, even for Christians, in pride and prestige; and in exchange adopt a strength posture based in love. Abstract? Some of you know how to do it. Let’s all learn.

Fourth, the gaining of self-awareness and reciprocal respect. Self-awareness: who I am, what my strengths, what my weaknesses, what my flaws are, what my heritage is, the weaknesses in my heritage, the problems that it gives me, the tendencies that it gives me, and then a respect for others that is reciprocal. It goes back and forth. Trade-offs.

And then fifth. At your Christian camp God’s people can learn to experiment with more Christ-like interpersonal skills and attitudes. It’s a safe place to try out a slightly different persona. Let’s encourage people to do it.

I’m not suggesting a new one-issue campaign, God help us. We are so good at raising up Christians on negative campaigns. Wow! Here we go. Down with racism. See, we’re good. Down with abortion. Boy, we can camp in the streets and chain ourselves to fences and do all kinds of things. No, we don’t need another negative campaign. In fact, we don’t need a single-issue campaign at all. What we need is to develop and propagate Christian attitudes and the skills of gentleness, meekness, mercy, compassion, and equality which are spoken of in the Scripture. I call your attention in Colossians 3 to that absolutely marvelous little statement of the negatives: anger, rage, malice, and slander—the things of the old life, the negative qualities of life—bridged into the beauty of the virtues of love, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. That Colossians 3 contrast of the old with the new is bridged over in a very easily overlooked verse, Colossians 3:11, that describes a place—a place where this transformation needs to happen. There are very few people that take note of verse 11. They simply contrast the old life and the new life. Don’t miss the bridge verse, “here,” here, as a place; here is a place, “where there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.”

There it is. There is a place where people can move out of this old life into a new life. Where is that place? Is that place your camp? It could be. Take a look at Colossians 3 and ask God to make your camp a Colossians 3:11 camp.

Ethnicity, culture—large and slippery words. Let me give you a practical definition, not a professor's definition, but a really practical one. These matters that we're talking about are differences that divide people if they aren't otherwise reconciled. There are things about being a human being that cause other human beings to be turned off. You know that. It occurs in families. It occurs in churches. It occurs in camps. It occurs in staffs, unless we are otherwise being reconciled. These differences are usually matters that you can see or hear or smell. Think about it. Race, color, hair-type, size of lips, shape of the eyes, language, lifestyle, age. Now there's one you can't get away from. We've got a problem that is like an ethnic problem of the old and the young. In fact, it's graded off into several sectors. And then gender. We have got to come to terms with that matter, folks. We cannot simply hide behind a few narrowly interpreted New Testament texts and simply put it off to the side and say, let's get on with life. We have got to find a way to bridge this ethnic-like difference between man and woman which, by the way, in the Scriptures making differentiations—all except the Colossians' passage—always gender is thrown in among them.

You have a marvelous journal. I commend it to you. "Camp as a Healing Community." Bob Hiltz [?], July-August '92. Beautiful article describing the need to nurture staff, the need to build community, the need for a healing spiritual ministry, and his last words here—I pray the opening sentence in our camp's promotional video is true of all CCI camps, conference and retreat centers, quote, "In the midst of a world of turmoil and stress, God has carved out a unique place for rest, recreation, and spiritual reflection." Could I suggest we tag on one more line? ". . . and for learning the ways of reconciliation." Forgive me, Bob, tag on one more line.

I'm encouraging you in the name of the Holy Lord whom we serve that we present ourselves more effectively as builders with him of his church. A few practical suggestions:

- Focus your ministry. You can't do everything.
- Develop your staff.
- Bring out the best in people.
- Be a learner. Don't make the same mistake twice. But be experimental; make new mistakes.
- And fifth. Be real. Let people feel your heart.

You see, I'm trying to impress on you, not just intellectually, but as a spiritual burden, the importance, yea, the urgency of what it is that you are doing to build and strengthen the body of Christ. You are carrying out an important ministry. Do it in ways that reflect the righteousness, justice, and mercy of God. Do it in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Do it as the incarnate Christ would do it, and do it well. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called God's family. Let's pray,

King of kings, Lord of lords, name above all names, Prince of Peace. We worship you. We thank you. We seek the strength of your Holy Spirit and the guidance of your Word. May it be our covenant with you, Father, that as we dedicate these next several pleasant days that you will meet us, each one, at the very point where we most need to see more clearly, to feel more deeply, and to grasp more thoroughly what it is that you have set before us. Thus, this great convention, Father, is in your hands. Amen.