

The Ward Consultation, Year 1
Closing Comments, Ted Ward
“At Least a Start in Grasping the Fulness of the Gospel”

I regard it as a strong affirmation of the work of God among us that so many were able to be here, especially given the distractions of this particular week. We had asked ourselves if we should re-schedule—put it off for a year? God laid it on our hearts rather specifically that we should allow God to use these times and these circumstances, and the opportunity to be together, for us to be renewed, encouraged, and invigorated in the things of Christ.

The nation has great difficulties; the world has horrible problems, and this is a time when all of us feel inadequate in the circumstances. I hope your feelings of impotence and inadequacy have been replaced, to a great extent, by an awareness that . . . *we're here*. We're here for now. It is my testimony that God is allowing me extra time to be part of what's going on. I'm grateful for it, and want to handle it responsibly and respectfully. Thank you for commemorating my ministry in this way. I really ought to have sense enough in this time of my life to fade away. But since the good Lord has given me vitality and vigor, and time and space, I'm here, and I'm here to the extent that I can be for the continuation of ministries that God has laid upon my heart. I speak to you with great warmth and enthusiasm for what we've been able to think through and do together these two days.

I'd like to start with a generalization that struck me very clearly as we did that first exercise yesterday about what we would say to the President. As I listened closely to what was being said, I noticed one thing mentioned by several people that I felt should be underlined. It is one of the things about God that has strongly affected the way I have behaved at many, many points in my career—the way I've behaved organizationally, and the way I behave when I walk away in protest. *Our God is the God of truth*. If there is anything you can count on, it is that God will always come down on the side of truth. However, the other matter that was mentioned must also be emphasized: Why did this happen *to us*. Without suggesting undue criticism, the tone embedded in such comments can be: Why do bad things happen to *good* people? Here is where the truth issue becomes significant. One of the tendencies that has been endemic in American history, in American public education, American popular media, and in American thought is the unwillingness, yes, the functional inability to be self-critical. That's a truth issue. We immediately identify an enemy—an 'other'—who is to blame. We make the presumption that *we* know where evil rests.

It is difficult to think that some part of the problem rests with us; especially because at such an emotional time people are ready to hang you for such talk. It sounds like insurrectionist behavior.

However, wouldn't it be great if we had such a keen sense of history among us as Christians that we would be able to trace back through a series of problems that may be significant as we process the events of these days?

The U.S. has a long history of involvement in other nations. Much of it has been good. I was

involved for many years with USAID doing development work in other nations. But some of our involvement has been manipulation. For example, American troops moved in uninvited into Latin America and either suppressed or overthrew governments in Latin America—totally uninvited. Governments have been relatively docile about this, but the truth of the matter is that the U.S. has had a long, long history of involvement and manipulation in international affairs. Please understand, I am a loyal American. I am simply trying to challenge complacency. We must be honest with ourselves about contemporary problems and the responsibility of our nation and others for these problems. It seems terrible to suggest that we might have created the problem at the World Trade Center; but, without in any way denying the evil of the event, we must realize that there are those who do believe that the attack was a form of retribution.

Someone observed in the film this morning that reconciliation is a process that happens along the way. Like a lot of other things about the nature of how God works, it's not something instant—not something that we can turn on and off like a light. The process we are reflecting on in this three year series on reconciliation is a slow process. Reconciliation is not a cure, it's a process. What we have to hope is that the process has begun and that it needs to be further stimulated. This is not unlike the nature of Christian development which is a continuing process of development.

History is the truth-basis of forgiveness; forgiveness is the spiritual basis of reconciliation. We as Christians are often interested in cures for things to the point of being almost clinical and medical in our approach. We try to diagnose and prescribe, or pray about it. I get so pained by the notion that “there's nothing you can do about it except pray.” O God! Help us to understand that there are things we can do all over this earth. There's a lot we can do along with praying. God does not expect to come in to rescue people who are too lazy to get off their knees.

I am engaged in a campaign for urgent reformation about leadership in the church. One of our key problems in theological education is that it is characterized by lines that we draw so that we don't have to interact with other people doing similar things. After a long period at the university, I learned that the strength of any discipline is its capacity to interact with ancillary disciplines—which can be a nuisance, because some in other disciplines come from very different sides of the ballpark. It's a lot easier to play catch with your own people. But real scholarship depends on interaction and respect across lines. Thus, my inaugural address at Trinity was entitled, “The Lines People Draw.” It went over like a lead balloon. There were not (and perhaps still are not) a lot of people interested in looking at the question, “Do we draw lines and thus create incapacity to relate and communicate?” I was dismayed when I discovered how insular and isolated the disciplines are and how incapable many were of hearing across the lines we tend to draw between disciplines. Though there are signs that this is changing, we have to constantly ask ourselves if we are people who take such fixed positions that no one could possibly talk with us because we are so sure and so right.

What we mean by exclusion relates to this point. If we determine that we are exclusively of the godly sort and that other people are exclusively not of the godly sort, we exclude ourselves from dealing with those who do not agree with us. I submit to you, that in a fallen world, there is a

place for exclusion. Note that Jesus did say on one occasion, “he who is not for me is against me . . .” What I’m concerned about is the way we view exclusion—presuming that we have done a good thing when we can exclude people from our camp. As I look at Scripture, I find a very different notion of exclusion. Consider 1 Corinthians 5: “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind that does not exist among the gentiles . . .” Then he writes, “You have become arrogant.” Now just who is Paul complaining against? I believe that implicit in this passage is a warning against the very presumption that it is our right to exclude. Instead this passage tends to be used as a vindication of that kind of negative extremism that says, “Push him out.” “Get rid of him.” Note Paul’s words: “Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” What is Paul saying? Are we to give up on this man, and treat him as one who is getting nowhere with God and, therefore, needs to be handed over to Satan. This is a hard passage, but the real motive can be obscured . . . “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” *I would describe this as a redemptive motive even for exclusion.* That’s hardly hiding behind the lines you draw. This passage to me reflects an absolute concern for reaching across lines and relating competently and effectively with others. Exclusion is, therefore, redemptive not punitive.

Another of my favorite passages in reference to this whole matter of reconciliation and intercultural difference is Acts 6. This passage is, I think, the first critical illustration of several factors: (a) Christians are going to get into interesting strife; (b) the church is going to be inhibited by interesting strife; (c) problems of interesting strife must be dealt with; and (d) there are good ways to deal with strife. While the disciples were increasing in numbers, and while things were going well (apparently), a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews. The widows were being “passed over.” What you really want to read there is “starved out.” The Christians had been selling everything and bringing it all in, and these widows were not getting their daily bread. We can see this as the first manifestation of a minority problem in a church. How was the complaint handled? The Twelve gathered together and summoned the congregation to talk about the problem. “It’s been called to our attention that there are people in our midst being discriminated against . . . It is not desirable for us to neglect the ministry of the word in order to serve tables.” The leadership says, “It is disturbing us as a body that we are neglecting some.” The people, not the leadership, identified a committee of twelve to do something about it. The twelve summoned the congregation together and proposed a solution: “Elect from you seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom . . .” Then we will be in a position to devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This neglect is wrong and is disturbing our work. Would that the Christian church today understood some of these matters of neglect, of discrimination, of pride and prejudice that are disturbing our congregations. Look at this passage. The same thing can be said of a lot of churches in other parts of the world, because it’s a human problem.

Luke listed the names of those chosen: Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. These men were all outsiders. They were not from the Jerusalem congregation. The church was effective in dealing with this problem, and what they did was admirable: They chose some people from among the people who were

themselves experiencing the problem. The committee chosen was all Greco-Roman. The problem was the neglect of the Greco-Romans. There is a significant principle here: Get the people who are among the harmed to take the place of responsibility. How can we do this in our churches? It means, first, that we need such confidence among the people of God that it becomes clear that the wrong occurring in the church is disturbing our works of ministry. Then we need to be able to treat the “other” as indeed vital to the overall ministry. Is there methodology suggested in this passage? Is there an example for us? How do we do this at Trinity International University? At Wheaton College? At missionary institutions? At home and with our families? How do we get in touch with the “other” so that we trust them for the guidance we need, listen to them, and give them responsibility and respect?

Part of my campaign in theological education and the education of pastors and ministers has been focused on the issue of “What do we mean by curriculum for the education of pastors?” I’d like to suggest an exercise for you. Identify the categories in the theological curriculum that you believe are important. Soteriology. Christology. Ecclesiology. Make your own list. Then check your list against what the catalog recommends and see what you’ve forgotten. Let me give you a few of mine.

Wanted: A truth-seeking exegesis, not the simplistic and mechanistic linguistic management of Greek and Hebrew translation that is concerned merely with literary precision. The real meaning of exegesis is to get the message from the text in a way that the Holy Spirit of God intended. This is far more than linguistic precision.

Wanted: A systematic theology that forms its questions in reference to the human condition, not just in reference to the questions from 15th and 16th-century Europe. Organizing theology around the questions of 15th and 16th century Europe is one of the major problems in theological education overseas. We need a theology that asks questions of relevance to our time.

Wanted: A soteriology that sees salvation as the finished work of Christ, on the cross, through which the community of faith develops into the fulness of Christ. Soteriology itself ought to understand the development through which people, in fact, are converted into Christ.

Wanted: An ecclesiology that puts the prayer of Jesus (John 17) into clear contrast with the accommodations that human societies make by traditionalizing human difference. This requires theology and sociology and anthropology. We tend not to see the oneness; we see the difference. We need an ecclesiology that reflects John 17—otherwise we have an “us/them” missiology, a missiology defined in terms of “us reaching them.”

Wanted: A missiology that is centered on Christ rather than on William Carey or any other missionary. Such a missiology would be informed by history, but focused on a global interdependency of churches in relation to the breadth of God’s redemptive purposes. If we can’t get out of an “us/them” missiology, we might as well quit teaching about mission.

Wanted: A practical theology that is not simply functionalism or a bag of tricks. Rather, it is an interface with orthodox theology and a lively manifestation of the gospel. For example, how would you like to be taught homiletics? Homiletics should help those who speak the truth by helping them to anticipate and overcome those problems in communication that disturb the truth that is the gospel.