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The 1978 CMS Annual Sermon, delivered at St. Andrew's Church, Short Street, London, 4 December 1978, on the text 1 Corinthians 1:23-24. Republished in *International Review of Mission* 68: (July 1979): 301-312.

Context and conversion

We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1: 23-24

It is easy for us, who are committed to the preaching of the Gospel, to forget how strange, and even repelling, the Gospel is to the ordinary common sense of the world. You will have seen the reproduction of the famous graffito from the 1st century which shows a man worshipping the figure of a crucified ass, with the words scrawled below: "Anexamenos worships his god". In a world which longed for personal salvation, and which was full of gods and lords claiming to meet that need, how utterly absurd and indeed revolting to claim that a Jew from a notoriously troublesome province of the Empire who had been condemned as a blasphemer and executed as a traitor was the Saviour of the world! How on earth could anyone believe that?

1,900 years later, after so many centuries of Gospel preaching, the claim is still as offensive to ordinary common sense. How do you preach the Gospel in a way that is going to make any sense to an intelligent humanist, to a militant worker on the shop-floor, to a devout Muslim, to a dedicated Gandhian? How do you so go about it that this story begins to make sense?

The presence of an unsolved problem can usually be detected by noting how the words we use about it quickly become worn out and have to be changed. There was a time when people talked of 'applying' the Gospel to our problems. Forty years ago F. R. Barry wrote *The Relevance of Christianity* and for three decades we discussed the 'relevance' of Christianity to this or that situation. In foreign missionary circles we talked about the 'point of contact'. Today the operative word is 'contextual'. The Gospel, we are told, becomes meaningful only in the actual context. We must begin with the context and then see where 'gospel issues' arise. If, for example, you suggest to a group of industrial chaplains that their job is to go into the factory and preach the Gospel, they will tell you that you have not yet begun to understand their problems. And they may well be right.

But does the programme of 'contextualisation' solve the problem? Let me put the positive case as strongly as I can. To begin with, the preaching of the Gospel must be in the language of the hearers.

That is already a kind of contextualisation; it is a provisional acceptance of their thought-world as the form in which communication is to be made. And this acceptance must go farther than the mere use of words. The evangelist has to 'sit where they sit', and indeed he must be ready, like the prophet Ezekiel, to sit there 'overwhelmed among them' for many days. He can only speak at all if he is speaking from within the world which they inhabit. But this does not mean that he accepts their analysis of their situation. To do this is the temptation of 'contextual theology'. I am not thinking only or even mainly of the Liberation Theology which begins by accepting the Marxist analysis of the situation—not merely the economic analysis of the working of the free market (which may well be accurate) but the much more far-reaching analysis of the total human situation which classifies all mankind as oppressors and oppressed. I am thinking of the much more general pattern which always seems to emerge when one begins with the context. The evangelist is almost forced to begin by identifying a problem or a cluster of problems, and then go on to outline the Christian answer, which takes the form of a programme or project. This problem-programme syndrome is so pervasive that we do not often stand back to look at it. If we do so, it is immediately obvious that—in theological language—we are in the realm of the Law and not of the Gospel. Our Christian contribution to the situation is then to lay a burden on men's conscience—often a burden which is too heavy for them to bear and which can spiritually crush them. How much of our Christian talking about the problems of industry, of economic justice, of racial equality produces only a paralysing sense of guilt and impotence, or else the blind fanaticism of the crusader who can see no moral issue in the world except the one he has chosen to concentrate on. Both of these are the typical result of the preaching of the Law.

But what does it mean to preach the Gospel in such situations as I am referring to? How does the transition take place from the perspective in which the Gospel is irrelevant nonsense to the perspective in which it is the power of God and the wisdom of God? How is this vast communications gap bridged? I think there is no doubt that the New Testament teaches us that the bridging of the gap is not and can never be an enterprise undertaken from (so to speak) this side of the chasm. There is no logical way by which one can argue from the context to the Gospel. There is, I think, an analogy here with the situation which Thomas Kuhn has analysed in his book on 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'. He has analysed the movements in scientific thought which he calls 'paradigm shifts' and has shown that there is no logical bridge connecting the old view to the new. From within the principles of Newtonian physics, Einstein's formulations are nonsense. Only after the paradigm shift has occurred is it possible to show, from within Einstein's world, that Newton's laws refer to the marginal case of bodies moving at low velocities. This understanding is only possible after the paradigm shift has occurred, and this shift is a sort of leap which cannot be justified by reasoning based on the Newtonian principles. I suggest this as an analogy—and no more. But it perhaps illustrates the point I am making, namely that—in the New Testament—the new way of understanding the total human situation in which the Cross is seen to be the power of God and the wisdom of God is the result of a radical shift of perspective which is called conversion and which is strictly speaking not a human accomplishment at all but a supernatural work of God. No one chooses to adopt this perspective as the result of a process of reasoning from the human standpoint. Those to whom the word of the Cross makes sense are—in the words of our text—the ones whom God has called. It is not their decision. They are simply a company of people who are only distinguished from others by the fact that God has called and commissioned them to be the locus, the place from which the total human situation is seen in this new perspective. They are—as Paul goes on to say—a very undistinguished crowd indeed—in fact a decidedly scruffy lot. The only point about them is that they have been called for this purpose.

I have been led to reflect upon this text by discussions which I was privileged to share during the summer with the seven authors of *The Myth of God Incarnate*. This book is an indication of the contemporary spiritual climate in which we have to preach the Gospel. Fifteen years ago 'Honest to

God' reflected the zeitgeist of the secular 60s. The traditional idea of God was no longer possible; only Jesus remained for our reverence; we had to discover a way of putting him at the centre of our reverence without being tied to traditional theism. In the present decade the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. 'Transcendance' is back in fashion. The authors of the 'Myth' (with the help of well-orchestrated publicity) have captured the new mood. They assume without criticism a very traditional theism and rightly see that—from this point of view—the Gospel as hitherto understood is nonsense. Jesus simply is not that kind of god. This book has value in that it sharpens the issue that we have too often evaded. There is an either-or which—perhaps specially in English theology—we have been unwilling to face. Either one can take the general religious experience of mankind as the clue for our understanding of the human situation, and then seek categories with which to fit Jesus into this understanding; or one can take Jesus as the absolutely crucial and determinative clue for all understanding and then try to understand the rest of human experience from this centre. This, of course, is the issue which Karl Barth pressed relentlessly in all his writing. And if one is asked—as I am often asked—"But why should you choose one perspective rather than the other?", one can only answer: "You don't choose: you are chosen". It is to 'those who are called' that the strange story of a crucified God is indeed power for salvation - their own salvation and the salvation of the world.

'Those who are called' - who are they? The rest of the Epistle, and all of the Pauline literature is unanimous in its answer: they are the whole body of those who confess Jesus as Lord. Once again we have to insist that they are a very undistinguished lot - culturally, ethically, politically. The rest of the Corinthian letter shows what kind of people some of them were. They would hardly even rate the title 'nominal Christians'. They are - in brief - the Church. This whole body is the locus of this perspective which so radically questions the accepted perspective of the surrounding culture.

Few would wish to question the assertion that the Church is - in some sense - the locus of witness to the Gospel. The purely verbal preaching of the story of Jesus crucified and risen would lose its power if those who heard it could not trace it back to some kind of community in which the message was being validated in a common life which is recognisable as embodying at least a hint and a foretaste of the blessedness for which all men long and which the Gospel promises. Even at the very beginning our Lord laid it down that the messengers of the Gospel should go two-by-two. His presence is promised where two or three are gathered in his Name. Paul himself is never without his beloved fellow-workers. It is in the life of a new kind of community that the saving power of the Gospel is known and tasted, and such a community - in however embryonic a form - will always be the locus of that miracle by which the paradigm shift which we call conversion happens.

I am using these rather roundabout phrases because I want to avoid any suggestion that the community is itself the author or agent of conversion. Conversion is always a free and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. And it is to the community that the Spirit is promised. The one body and the one Spirit belong together - not that the Spirit is domesticated within the body, but that the body owes its life to the continually renewed and free work of the Spirit. To these points I shall return. I now turn to another implication of the statement that the Church is the locus of witness to the Gospel - an implication which is more controversial.

The question of the relation of the Church to the work of missions has recently been raised afresh in a paper by Dr Ralph Winter in the American journal *Missiology*. It is entitled "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission". Its thesis is that the words "Church" and "Mission" stand for two distinct structures and that in fact this duality has always been present and will always be necessary for the discharge of the missionary task. Dr Winter identifies the two by the terms 'modality' and 'sodality'. He finds the classic model in the New Testament itself. The congregations to which Paul wrote were

examples of the former. They were essentially Christian synagogues. Alongside of these there was, says Dr Winter, a "second, quite different structure" exemplified in Paul and his colleagues. This was a "missionary band" which—though no doubt originally sent out by the Antioch congregation - functioned as an independent entity. The essential point here is the "additional commitment" beyond what is involved in simple Church membership.

This necessary duality of structure is, says Dr Winter, carried forward into the Middle Ages through the monastic movement. This "allowed nominal Christians to make a second-level choice—an additional specific commitment." The parish-diocese structure represented the modality; the monastic orders the sodality. Both were held together in the mediaeval synthesis. The monastic orders provided the source of inspiration, renewal and advance. When, by the process of 'secularisation' (in its original sense) the sodalities fell under the control of the modalities, we had an early illustration of the danger which "exists today whenever the special concerns of an elite mission sodality fall under the complete domination of an ecclesiastical government, since the Christian modalities (churches) inevitably represent the much broader. . . . concerns of a large body of Christians who, as first-decision members are generally less select". The 19th century saw a huge development of 'sodalities' in the shape of undenominational missionary societies. These were (in the United States) taken over by the churches in the latter part of the 19th century and became denominational agencies. They thus dropped back to the level of 'modalities' with their first-decision Christians'. The consequence was that, in their work overseas, they founded modalities but did not create sodalities; they founded churches but not missionary societies. What is vitally needed now, says Dr Winter, is that, in the areas of the younger churches, this necessary duality should be introduced. For without the presence of sodalities which gather together second-decision Christians, the modality-style churches of Asia and Africa, consisting of first-decision Christians, cannot fulfill God's redemptive mission.

At this point in my exposition it will not surprise you to learn that, for this transatlantic student of missions, the perfect example of the true sodality is none other than the Church Missionary Society. This present occasion, therefore, seems to be an appropriate context in which to examine Dr Winter's thesis. Let me at once say that I think it contains both truth and error. If I am to make what seem to be the necessary distinctions, I must ask your leave to return to my text and begin again from the fundamental mystery of the communication of the Gospel, of that miracle by which what seems to be scandalous and senseless is grasped as the very power and wisdom of God. The words 'mystery' and 'miracle' are the proper words. There is always an element of mystery. Why does the same seed sown in one place produce nothing and sown in another produce a rich harvest? I have talked with scores of men and women converted to Christ from other faiths or no faith and have read the testimonies of countless others. Three things, I think, are clear from these testimonies. First, there is no one road by which men come to Christ. That is obvious. Secondly, in each story there is always (if we listen long enough) a whole series of apparently chance happenings, often strung out over many years, which have - at the end - suddenly 'clicked' into the new pattern. Many of these happenings are such as cannot be contrived by any evangelistic agency - chance words spoken or written, providential deliverances from danger, sudden gleams of light in unexpected places, and dreams. How often has a dream been the decisive event which has brought a person to the point of seeking out the Christian fellowship and asking for baptism! And this leads me to my third point, which is that conversion is truly a work of God in which our words and deeds are given a place but of which the overall control is surely not in our hands. As I have talked with men and women who have come to Christ from other worlds of understanding, and as I have read the story of the birth and growth of new churches in the course of the Christian centuries, I have been more and more struck by the fact that there is no direct proportion between the organised efforts of missionary agencies and the actual event of conversion. There is in

fact the enormous and puzzling disproportion which is suggested in the parable of the sower and the seed.

The text: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" is one that often comes into my mind when reading missionary promotional literature. Large commercial firms calculate the volume of increased sales which they can expect from a given input of promotional effort, and military establishments make similar calculations regarding the 'cost-effectiveness' of a particular programme. Missionary agencies sometimes imagine that they can engage in the same type of exercise. But they are wrong. If the reading of history and the actual experience of converts is our guide, we shall learn that there is no direct proportion between evangelistic effort and resulting conversion. Over and over again the massive campaign produces nothing, and some quiet word spoken in the ordinary course of a caring human relationship is the seed that produces a mighty harvest. If this were the occasion I could quote many examples from personal experience. Conversion is a miraculous work of God. It is by his calling that the paradigm shift occurs which makes the story of the Cross the power of God to salvation.

Am I being irresponsible? Am I suggesting that there are no human conditions or the converting work of the Spirit? Perhaps, since I have quoted Barth, some of you may be mentally humming the refrain in which a theological student is said to have summarised what he thought was Barth's theology:

Sit down men of God
His kingdom he will bring
Exactly when it please him
You cannot do a thing

Barth needs no defence, but I had better defend myself! I have insisted that it is he Holy Spirit alone who can and does convert the soul so that what seemed to be nonsense becomes the power of God for salvation. But I have also insisted that the Church is the *locus* of this action. I cannot follow the modern fashion of regarding the Holy Spirit as a kind of will o' the wisp to be pursued wherever we see something interesting happening and to be expected anywhere but in the church. I have insisted that the Spirit is not domesticated in the Church; he is the lower by whom the Church is ever anew created. But I must follow the New Testament in insisting that the mark by which the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the many other spirits abroad in the world is the confession that Jesus is Lord, and that confession is also the mark by which the Church is distinguished from every other society. To separate the Spirit from the Church is to depart from the New Testament, and that is too high a price to pay even for a really up-to-date theology. But how is the converting work of the Holy Spirit related to the being of the Church? That is the crucial question. It is the spirit who converts, not the Church. Where, then, does the Church come into the picture?

I think the answer of the New Testament on this point is clear and consistent. ie Church comes into the picture at the point where it is on trial for its faith, at the point where it confesses the sole lordship of Jesus in the face of the overwhelming power of that which denies it, at the point – therefore - where it bears the marks of the Cross, at the point of *marturia*. Let me, for validation, simply remind you of characteristic words from three different strands of New Testament material. In the Synoptic Gospels it is said that when the Church is on trial before the powers of the world the Holy Spirit will speak on its behalf, and that therefore we are not to worry what to say. In the Johannine discourses it is promised that, when the whole world hates and rejects the word of the Church, there will be an Advocate who will speak and who will overturn the world's fundamental opinions. In Paul's letter to the Romans it is said that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and heirs of his kingdom if we suffer with Jesus in order that we may share his glory. One could quote many other texts but these must serve as a reminder of the constant teaching of the New Testament that it is the Spirit who is the

witness, and that the occasion the locus of his witness is the place where the disciples are following Jesus on the way of the cross, making the good confession before the powers of the world as Jesus did before Pilate, sharing the messianic tribulations, bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in the body which is truly the body of Christ.

There are two points here: that the witness of the Spirit is a gift promised to the Church and not a demand laid upon the Church; and that the gift is promised to the Church which shares with Jesus in the messianic tribulation, that is to say in the suffering which occurs at that point where the reign of God in Jesus challenges the powers of evil ranged against it. If I am right here, and I am sure that I am, we have to admit that traditional Protestant missiology has not been faithful to Scripture at this point. We have regarded witness as a demand laid upon us instead of seeing it as a gift promised to us. We have made the missionary imperative into a law, a heavy burden laid upon the conscience of Christians, whereas the New Testament sees it as a gracious gift, as—if I may use the phrase—a spin-off from Pentecost. This is why you cannot find in Paul's letters a single passage where he urges his readers to be more active in evangelism. There is absolutely nothing in the New Testament corresponding to the almost frantic appeals for missionary activity which have been common in Protestant missionary practice. What you *do* find everywhere in Paul's letters, as in the whole New Testament, is the admonition to every Christian to stand fast against the power of the enemy, to endure tribulation for the sake of the Gospel, to follow Jesus on the way of the Cross. Where that condition is fulfilled, we can be utterly sure that the Spirit will bear his own witness in his own way and in his own time. *That* is not our problem. And of *course* it is the whole Church which is thus urged to follow Christ. The call for faithfulness is not addressed to an elite group within the Church; it is addressed to all.

Let me, for a moment, turn from Scripture to contemporary missionary experience. I have been involved (and I shall always thank God for this joy and privilege) in several situations, both urban and rural, where the Church was growing quietly but steadily as men and women were being brought to faith in Christ, baptism and Church membership. As I reflect on these situations I do not think that they were the places where special evangelistic campaigns were the order of the day, though they may have contributed. I think they were situations where the local Christian congregation was fulfilling these four conditions.

- (1) It was a truly believing, worshipping and celebrating fellowship which the Gospel was proclaimed in word and celebrated in sacrament and enjoyed in the life of a caring community.
- (2) Its members were involved in the life of the society around them, not for living for themselves but entering deeply into the sorrows and conflicts of their neighbours, being truly 'the Church for others'.
- (3) Its members were ready, when appropriate, to give an account of the hope that was in them, with (as Peter says) gentleness and reverence.
- (4) Its members were willing to respect and welcome, rather than to denigrate the differing gifts of others. By this I mean that (for example) those with the gift of evangelism did not despise those whose gifts were in the direction of social service or political action, and vice versa, so that these differing forms of involvement did not cancel each other out but reinforced each other.

Where this is the situation, the ordinary people of the neighbourhood are constantly being brought into touch with the Church not chiefly through organised campaigns (though there is certainly a place for these) but through a multitude of relationships in word and act in the course of daily life, and each of these contacts eventually leads back to that place where something strange and odd happens every Sunday morning, and so the interested person is led - perhaps at first just by curiosity - to try to find out more of this strange story of Jesus, of a cross and an empty tomb. But, and I repeat this again, the ways by which he is led and the happenings through which it all falls together in his mind into the new

pattern, in other words his conversion to Christ, is the work of the Spirit. The Church is but the place where this work of the Spirit is done. And, since I have been speaking of my own experience, it is worth just reminding ourselves that there are situations where the Church is stripped of all the activities that we usually describe as missionary, where - as in the USSR - it is stripped right down to the absolute centre and left only with the liturgy. And yet just here is the place where the Holy Spirit is in our day performing the miracle which we find almost impossible - the bringing of men of the calibre of Solzhenitsin out of the overwhelming power of a totalitarian atheism into the faith of Christ.

When mission is seen in this way there is no dichotomy between Church and mission. There is no gap between conversion and church membership. We do not face the agonising problem that tortures many a faithful evangelist: what happens when you ask a newly born Christian to go and become part of a senile and moribund Church? Church and mission are one, not because the Church controls the mission, but because the Spirit is taking the faithful confession of the Church as the occasion for his own work of conversion.

But - and there is obviously a very large 'but' to be added at this point: what about the situation where there is no such Church present. What about the unevangelised areas? What I have described is right in situations where the Church already exists. But there are vast numbers of situations where this is not so - not only areas which are geographically distant from any Christian congregation, but also human communities which (even if there are Christian congregations in the vicinity) are effectively out of reach of Christian influence for reasons ethnic, cultural or political. It has been the special work of Donald McGavran to stress this point in his very voluminous writings and speakings, and of course the point is absolutely valid. What about the unevangelised areas - in this larger sense of the phrase? Here we come, I believe, to the element of important truth in the position of Dr Winter. I shall give reason for dissenting from his doctrine of modalities and sodalities, but I must first say what I think is true in his contention. When I was the editor of the *International Review of Missions* I was under some considerable pressure to delete the final 's' from this title. Many of my colleagues were offended by my obstinate refusal to do so. Probably they thought I was subliminally influenced by the constant experience of having one of the 's's omitted from my Christian name. Anyway, as soon as I had vacated the Editor's chair the amputation was carried out and we now have the *International Review of Mission*. But I remain of the opinion that this was a mistake. I think that there is a proper distinction to be made between the total mission of the Church, and those particular activities which we call missions. The former word includes everything that must be done in fulfilment of the original commission "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you". The latter denotes specific actions taken in order to bring about the presence of the Christian witness in a place where it is now absent, whether that 'place' be a geographical area or a situation which for any reason is out of living contact with the Church. These are specific acts for which some, but not all, members of the local Church must offer themselves. In the classical biblical case the congregation at Antioch sent Saul and Barnabas for this purpose. Their going was a mission of the Antioch Church. It was distinct, for not the whole congregation went. And if the Church is to fulfill its total mission there must be many of such distinct and deliberate acts for the creation of a Christian presence in situations where it would otherwise be absent. There must be - in other words - missions. Everything is not said simply by saying mission. To this extent I believe that Dr Winter is right.

But I am bound also to dissent from his argument as a whole. In the first place I can find no evidence that Paul and his fellow-workers were ever regarded as an entity distinct from the Church. Paul knows himself to have been called for a specific service and there are times when he uses the first person plural to speak in the name of himself and his colleagues to a local congregation. But a careful study of all these passages will show, I think, that this distinction is a distinction within the one reality of the

body of Christ to which is entrusted the fulness of the Spirit's gifts. And quite certainly there is no hint anywhere that Paul sought to establish in each place two distinct societies, one for the generality of Christians and one for those who have made the 'second-level' decision.

This leads to my second point. I have said that we need to speak of missions as distinct activities to which people are called for a specific purpose. But it is a totally different thing to speak of two levels of commitment within the Church to accept and to institutionalise a double standard, one for the 'nominal' Christians, and the other for an elite group who have made the 'second-level' decision. Not only is this radically unscriptural; it is also practically disastrous. It is, in fact, a very old and simple form of sectarianism. For if the mission is defined as a distinct form of Christianity alongside the parochial and diocesan forms, and if it is further defined as consisting of those who have made a 'second-level' decision, then the purpose of the mission must be to establish not churches but missions. How can the missionaries ever wish to see as the result of their labours merely an increase in the number of nominal Christians? I speak with feeling because I remember so vividly the lessons I learned as a young missionary in India, in a situation where Dr Winter's scheme was in operation. There was a mission whose work it was to preach the Gospel in the surrounding country; and there was a church whose only function was, apparently to be the passive receptacle for the products of the mission—a sort of bowl into which the fish that were caught could be put for storage. And it was easy to see that they got the message: they were the nominal Christians. If there was one conviction that was burned into my mind by that experience it was the conviction that to separate mission from Church is to corrupt both.

Let me again make the positive point. There will always be need for the specific service of those who are called to take part in missions—to be the means of creating a Christian presence in places where none existed. This specific service will, like every human activity, have to be given an appropriate institutional form. I do not myself think that it matters much whether this form is that of a voluntary society - like CMS - or of an agency of the Church - as with the Church of Scotland. I confess my preference for the latter, because I have seen the General Assembly of that Church compelled by its own structures to take seriously the missionary obligation. But I repeat that I do not think that any vital missionary principle is at stake. What I think must be rejected is the idea which Dr Winter advocates, that there must always be an institutional dichotomy between the ordinary congregational life of the Church and an organised embodiment of what he called the 'second-level commitment'. When missions become divorced from the ordinary day-to-day life of the Christian fellowship in the world, then one has to ask the question: what are missions for? If the answer is 'To make Christians' then we have to ask: 'Are they to be first-level or second-level Christians? If the former, then surely the profound disappointment at the end of so many missionary campaigns is not merely accidental but necessary. If the latter, if missions exist to make missions, then we are in an infinite regress. I would say that missions are to bring about the presence of the Church where it does not exist; and that the Church is the place where through the faithful following of Jesus by ordinary men and women along the way of the Cross the situations are created' where the Holy Spirit can do his own sovereign work of bearing witness to Christ and bringing men and women to conversion. But surely this faithful following must be in the warfare of their own discipleship in the world. It is only so that the Church can be seen as a sign of the coming kingdom and can therefore illuminate and validate the preaching of the Gospel. Missions are denatured if they are not seen to spring out of and lead back into the life of the Christian fellowship as a whole. Missions are distinct activities in that they are deliberately sent to places where the Church would not otherwise be present. But they ought not to be different in the sense of bearing witness to a different kind of life from that which is offered to all who are in Christ.

I began with a text in which St Paul reminds us of the fact that the miracle of conversion by which the foolishness and weakness of the Gospel becomes the power and wisdom of God for salvation is a miracle accomplished by the calling of God. The communication gap between the Gospel and the world is not bridged by a programme of contextualization - necessary as that is. It is bridged by an action of the Holy Spirit using the faithfulness of those whom God has called into the life in Christ. The human condition is simply faithfulness to that calling. To move from Pauline to Johannine language, the branches have nothing to do but to abide in the Vine. When they do so, they are assured of much fruit - but the fruit will be not their achievement; it will be - quite simply - the fruit of the Vine.

I will end by making a confession. There was, I confess, a text behind the text. I was started on this line of thought by a sentence quoted in a recent CMS *News-letter* from that revered and beloved friend and teacher and Christian statesman, Max Warren. "A diocese", Max is quoted as saying, "is irrelevant to the primary task of the Church - that is evangelism". You will understand that - after spending most of my working life as a diocesan bishop who identified himself as a missionary, I found that an arresting remark. I can well understand how it could come to be made. And yet I must in conscience dissent. I go back to my text. The word of the Cross is foolishness to our contemporaries as it was to St Paul's. It can become the power of God unto salvation only through the witness of those who are called—and that means all who are called, learning to live together a common life which embodies the passion and the resurrection power of Jesus. It is the whole body of the believers which must - in the end - be the instrument of contextualisation for the Gospel. I have argued for the distinct identity of missions within the total mission of the Church. I plead that this identity never be defined over against the whole life of the Church but always as within its greater and more all-embracing ministry. And I think that it is most important to be clear about that.