Our Missionary Responsibility In The Crisis Of Western Culture

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Let me begin by expressing my gratitude for your invitation to share with you in these days, and let me also say that I realise the limitations from which I necessarily suffer. The background of my ministry is India and England, where I now serve an inner-city congregation. I realise that the intellectual and cultural situation in England is by no means identical with that in Germany. Our theological backgrounds are different. Nevertheless, we share much of a common western culture and I hope, therefore, that these thoughts which I want to share with you are not entirely wide of the mark.

About 15 years ago I was taking part in the WCC's conference on 'Salvation Today' in Bangkok. We were in a plenary session, looking at the global situation of the Christian world mission. Sitting next to me was General Simatoupong of Indonesia. He was the general who commanded the Indonesian forces in the war against the Dutch. When there were no more Dutchmen left to fight, by a very natural transition he turned to theology, and he is now one of the outstanding spokesmen of Indonesian Christianity. He had just intervened in the debate. I do not remember what he said. What I do remember is that, as he came and sat down beside me, I heard him say under his breath, 'Of course the question is, can the West be converted?'

I knew, of course, that he was right. Among all the cultures which have power in the contemporary world, the culture which originated in western Europe is the most powerful and pervasive. It dominates the cities of most of the world. What is called 'modernization' in Asia and Africa is usually co-option into this way of thinking and behaving. And it is precisely this powerful culture which is most resistant to the Gospel. Christianity is a growing movement in large parts of the Third World, rapidly growing in some places. In the West it is on the defensive, if not actually shrinking. Plainly, if one is looking at the global situation of the Christian world mission, the crucial question is: 'Can the West be converted?'

Simatoupong was looking at the West from outside, from the vantage point of a more ancient civilization. His was, if you like, the view point of a foreign missionary. And the foreign missionary does have certain advantages over the native. He sees things which they do not see because they take them for granted. They are just 'how things have always been.' I remember that when I went as an English missionary to India 50 years ago, and tried to understand Indian life and thought, I slowly came to realise how important it was that the doctrines of karma and samsara have hardly been challenged in all the great revolutions from the Buddha to Gandhi. They describe how things are and have always been. Human life, like all of nature, is a cyclical affair, a matter of endlessly repeated birth, life, decay, death and re-birth. In a world so understood there is no way in which a particular happening in history can decisively change the human situation. It can only illustrate and exemplify what is always the case. And that, in general, is how Indian thought understands Jesus. As a young missionary I used to spend an evening each week in the premises of the Ramakrishna Mission, studying with the monks the Upanishads and the Gospels. The great hall of the monastery was lined with pictures of the great religious figures of history, among them Jesus. Each year, on Christmas Day, worship was offered before the picture of Jesus. It was obvious to me as an English Christian that this was an example of syncretism. Jesus had simply been co-opted into the Hindu world-view; that view was in no way challenged.

It was only slowly that I began to see that my own Christianity had this syncretistic character, that I too had – in a measure – co-opted Jesus into the world view of my culture. I remember an incident which made me realise this. I was taking a group of village teachers through St Mark's Gospel. My Tamil wasn't very good, but I was fairly confident about my theology, fresh as I was from theological college. All went well till we reached the first exorcism. Now Westminster College had not taught me much about how to cast out demons. My exposition was not very impressive. These village teachers looked at me with growing perplexity, and then one of then said: 'Why are you making such heavy weather of a perfectly simple matter?', and proceeded to rattle off half a dozen cases of exorcism in his own congregation during the past few months. Of course I could have said: 'My dear brother, if you will kindly let me arrange for you to come to Cambridge and take a proper training in modern science and then a post-graduate qualification in psychology, you will be able to understand that Freud and Jung and co have explained everything.' In other words, 'If you will permit me to induct you into my culture, you will see things as they really are.' But this was a bible study, and Mark's Gospel was sitting there, saying what it does. Inwardly I had to admit that he was much nearer to Mark than I was. Outwardly I kept quiet and went on to the next passage. I am not saying that there is an easy answer to my problem. One could put it this way: 'Do you try to understand the Gospel through the spectacles provided by your culture?' or 'Do you try to understand your culture through the spectacles provided by the Gospel?' There is no easy answer, but it is a real question.

During the 12 years since I came back to England, and especially since I had a pastoral charge in Birmingham, I have come more and more to feel that England is a foreign mission field as much as India was for me in 1936. I have come to feel that there is an English parallel to the picture in the Ramakrishna Mission Hall. I mean, of course, that it has increasingly seemed to me that instead of allowing the Gospel to challenge the unexa-mined assumptions of our culture, we have co-opted Jesus into our culture by giving him a minor role in what we call the private sector. The matter is very clear when we look at the lay-out of a news magazine like Time or Newsweek. We know that if we want to find any reference to Jesus we shall not find it in the section 'World Affairs'. It will be tucked away in the little slot between 'Drama' and 'Sport', among the optional activities for the private life. It does not challenge the assumptions which govern our understanding of public affairs.

Simatoupong's statement was correct. The fact is not only that this western culture is now – under the name of modernization – increasingly dominant throughout the world; it is not only that this culture is showing many signs of disintegration in the place of its origin. It is also that Christian missions have themselves been powerful bearers of the process of modernization during

the past two centuries. Missionaries have introduced western education, science and technology wherever they have gone, and are still doing so. And yet we who belong by birth to this western world know that our culture is in profound crisis. The confident expectation of progress towards an ever-better world no longer exists. Educated Europeans have a deep feeling of guilt about our culture. There is a widespread belief that if we want real wisdom we must go to the East rather than to the Christian roots of our western culture. The literature of our time in Europe is filled with a sense of pessimism. The Chinese theologian Carver Yu, looking at Europe from the East, sums up our contemporary cultural scene as 'technological optimism and literary despair'. What is our responsibility as bearers of the gospel, as missionaries, in this situation?

First, I suggest, diagnosis. Here – in a very superficial way – I would like to make five points.

1. If we look at western culture from the perspective of other, older cultures, its most obvious feature is that it is split into two parts: there is a public world of what are called 'facts', and there is a private world of what are called 'values'. 'Facts' are what everyone has to accept whether they like them or not; 'values' are a matter of personal choice. 'Facts' are what every child in school must learn and accept – for instance, that the development of the human person depends on the programme encoded in the DNA molecule; 'values' – whether expressed in religious beliefs or otherwise – are matters for the Church and the home. Even as recently as 100 years ago, every child in a school in Scotland learned as a fact that 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever'. This was as much a fact as anything in biology or physics. To-day such teaching is not permitted in the public schools. It is not part of the facts. We take pride in being a pluralist society where many different creeds can flourish. We do not teach as public truth any particular belief about the purpose of human life. But this pluralism does not extend to the world of 'facts'. When there is disagreement about what are called 'facts' we do not take it as an occasion for celebrating the glories of pluralism. No! We argue, we conduct experiments, we try to convince each other of error and we do not rest until we reach agreement about the facts. In this public world of 'facts', pluralism does not reign.

The root of this dichotomy between a public world of facts and a private world of values is to be found at that crucial turning-point in European history, the turning point which led to the rise of modern science. At the risk of drastic over-simplification one can say that the crucial decision was the decision to turn from asking questions about purpose to asking questions about cause, from final causes to efficient causes, from teleology to mechanism, from asking 'what purpose does this serve?' to asking 'how does it work?' Ancient Greek and mediaeval science had asked about purpose: the new science asked about what it is that makes things move.

And, needless to say, the asking of that question has opened up enormous new vistas both of knowledge and of power. But there is a price to pay. If one eliminates questions about purpose, then there is no way in which one can find a factual basis for values, no way of moving from the statement 'This is', to 'This is good'. One can, for instance, undertake an exhaustive analysis of a watch to show how it works at every level from its visible mechanism down to the operation of its molecular, atomic and sub-atomic elements. In that sense one may discover 'everything there is to know' about the watch. But it would not enable one to discover what is the purpose for which all this mechanism is put together. And therefore there would be no way, no factual way, of distinguishing between a good watch and a bad one. If I say 'My watch has not lost ten seconds in two years', most people who were not philosophers would say: 'Then it is a good watch'. They would move easily from a statement of fact ('This watch has not lost ten seconds in two years') to a statement of value ('This is a good watch'). Most people would say that this was a good move. But this move is only possible if I know the purpose for which these pieces of metal were put together in this way. If, for example, it is for decorating my sitting-room, or for throwing at the cat, the conclusion 'This is a good watch' does not follow. Only if I know the purpose can I say 'This is good'. Knowing the causes which make the watch operate does not give me any ground for saying 'This is a good watch'. If we eliminate questions of purpose, then 'facts' are simply

facts and we cannot call them good or bad; they are 'value-free'. And 'value-free facts' are the carrency in which our public world carries on its business.

One does not discover the purpose for which a watch exists by examining its parts. A person who had always lived in a society with no clocks or watches would not be able to discover its purpose by the most exhaustive analysis and examination. He would have to ask the maker, or else ask someone who already knew the purpose. It is impossible to discover what (if any) is the purpose for which the cosmos and human life exist by examination of all the facts, The data for a valid induction do not exist – unless we are willing to wait until cosmic history has reached its terminus. At the dawn of the modern scientific age Lord Bacon advised his contemporaries to avoid speculation and collect facts. By speculation he meant theological and philosophical theories about the purpose of human life. On these matters no certainty was possible. So concentrate on the facts which can be certainly known. The purpose of the entire frame of things could only be known if its author was willing to disclose it. In other words, it could only be known by revelation. And revelation has to be accepted in faith. It is a matter of personal decision not public truth. So, statements about how human life is governed by the DNA molecule are facts, part of public truth. But statements about the purpose of human life to glorify God and enjoy him for ever are not facts; they are private opinion. Here is the fundamental split in our culture.

It was enormously widened by the work of Descartes. Since Descartes our culture has been dominated by the ideal of a kind of knowledge which could not be doubted. Hannah Arendt has suggested that it was perhaps the invention of the telescope, showing that the stars and planets are not exactly as they appear to the naked eye, that gave birth to this passionate search for a kind of knowledge that could not be doubted, a kind of knowledge which involved no risk, no faith-commitment. The unquestionable and lucid certainties of mathematics were to provide the paradigm of real knowledge. In the English-speaking world this was powerfully reinforced by the work of John Locke, who defined belief as that which we fall back upon when we do not have knowledge. Thus 'I believe' means 'I do not know'. Statements about God and his purpose are prefaced by the words 'We believe', because we do not know. Statements in a text-book of physics require no such preface. They are simply statements of what is the case, as impersonal and as inescapable as the statement that two plus two make four. The developments of modern physics, and the work of philosophers and historians of science, have shown how misleading this is. All scientific knowledge rests upon faith commitments, upon beliefs which cannot be demonstrated by science itself. Faith is not a substitute for knowledge, but its starting-point. As Augustine was fond of saying: 'I believe in order to understand'. And Einstein in a classic sentence has said: 'In so far as the statements of mathematics are certain, they make no contact with reality; in so far as they make contact with reality, they are not certain'. The idea of a kind of knowledge which is totally impersonal, which involves no commitment on the part of the knower, is an illusion. But it dominates our culture.

It was obvious that in this cultural shift, the first casualty would be biblical authority. How can the bible survive in this world of 'value-free facts'? During the 18th Century, at least in the English-speaking world, the defence of biblical authority took the form of a demonstration that its teaching was in accordance with 'reason' as the Enlightenment understood it. But this defence rapidly crumbled during the 19th Century. The result which we now inherit in the 20th Century is a split within the Christian community which corresponds precisely to the split down the middle of our culture. On both sides the dichotomy between 'facts' and 'values' is accepted. On the one side are the fundamentalists who assert the factual inerrancy of Scripture and who regard statements of Christian doctrine as factually correct propositions of the same kind as the statements of physics or astronomy (see for example the 'Creation Science' advocated in the USA). On the other side are the liberals who see theological statements as symbolic expressions of the religious experiences which are essentially inwards and personal. Theology is thus not concerned with factual statements about the world and about history; it is about religious experience which is essentially inward and personal. The bible is to be read not as factual history but as the record of religious experience. Here, very plainly, is simply a reproduction in Christian

terms of the fundamental split in western culture. Both sides, fundamentalists and liberals equally, axe operating within the assumptions of our culture. What is required is a far more radical challenge to those assumptions. How shall this be attempted?

Plainly the fundamental issue is epistemological; it is the question about how we can come to know the truth, how we can know what is real? What we have been looking at in this very hasty and superficial review of the development of thought in our culture is the breakdown of the connection between the objective and the subjective poles of our knowing. All knowing is an accomplishment of the knower; it requires and involves a personal commitment to the enterprise of trying to know and to understand. It has an essential subjective pole. But equally it has an objective pole. It 'latches on' to some reality outside the knower. Otherwise it is not knowing at all. Its grasp may be limited and faulty, but nevertheless it is a grasping at something which is there, objectively. What has happened in our culture is a breakdown of the unity between these two, so that we have a public world of so-called facts which are supposed to be 'objective facts', things which are there whether you believe them or not and which everyone has to learn to recognise and come to terms with, the world of public truth which forms the substance of the curriculum in the schools and universities. And, on the other hand, we have the world of 'personal faith' which is subjective, a matter of individual choice. In this realm – as is often said – 'Everyone needs to have a faith of his own'. So long as the faith is sincere, we do not ask whether it is true; that would be an offence against pluralism. It is a matter of personal choice. And, needless to say, the things affirmed in the creeds of the universal church belong to the second category.

In a book entitled 'The Closing of the American Mind', for many months the best-selling book in the United States, the Jewish philosopher Alan Bloom sees a total relativism as the dominant feature of our culture. It is no longer possible to say of anything: 'Right' or 'Wrong'. One does not speak this language any more. One speaks of 'values', 'life-styles' and 'authentic persons'. Bloom traces this back to Nietzsche, who was (says Bloom) the first to recognise that the Cartesian method must in the end destroy every possibility of making firm affirmations of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong. The method of systematic doubt must ultimately make such firm affirmations impossible. The only thing that would be left is the will - the will to power. And, says Bloom, this talk of 'values' is simply Nietzsche wrapped up in cotton wool. 'Values' – as distinct from facts – are what some people want. They are a matter of the will, not of the truth. The only question now is: 'Whose will prevails?' The Hungarian physicist and philosopher Michael Polanyi has expressed this in a vivid metaphor. He says that the last 250 years of European culture have been the most brilliant in human history, but their brilliance was created by the combustion of the heritage of a thousand years of Christian civilization in the oxygen of Greek rationalism; that the fuel is now exhausted; and that pumping in more oxygen can not produce more light. In other words, we are at the end of the critical era. Is it possible for us, living after and not before this era, to make firm affirmations of truth as truth? Is it possible to announce the Gospel not as an option for private choice, but as public truth for all? Can we say with the apostle, 'I know whom I have believed'? Can we announce the Gospel as personal faith and public truth?

Polanyi approaches our problem with a profound analysis of what is involved in the enterprise of knowing. Most of the great discussions of epistemology in the past three centuries have approached the matter through the visual sense. And it is perhaps natural to do so, for it is obvious that our eyes can deceive us. Polanyi approaches the matter through the tactual sense. He takes the example of a surgeon using a probe to investigate a cavity into which it is not possible to look. A medical student using the probe for the first time will perhaps be conscious for a time of the pressure of the probe on the palm of his hand. As he grows in experience he will forget this. All his attention will be directed to what the tip of the probe is discovering in the invisible cavity. The probe becomes a kind of additional finger. It is an extension of his body. He feels what the tip of the probe is finding. He indwells the probe in a manner which is an extension of the way that I

indwell my finger. He may be tacitly aware of the pressure on the palm of his hand, but focally he is attending to what the probe is 'feeling' at its tip.

Polanyi takes this as a way of entry into the whole enterprise of knowing, of probing reality. Like the surgeon using the probe, we explore reality by indwelling a whole range of instruments – words, concepts, images, ideas. We have to learn to use these and while we are learning we attend to the new words, the new concepts. But when we have become familiar with their use we no longer attend to them. We are tacitly aware of them, but focally aware of the reality they enable us to probe. We indwell them. When we are learning a language we have to attend, for a time, to the individual words and to the grammar and syntax of the language. When we are fluent in the language we no longer attend to these, though we may be tacitly aware of them, We use them a-critically. We focus our attention on the meaning which they convey. At some point we may find that we are not truly conveying the meaning. We will then have to look critically at the words, and perhaps find new ones. But while we are trying to communicate our meaning, we use the words a-critically. We cannot at the same moment take a critical attitude to the words and use them to convey meaning.

We learn to use our own mother-tongue in this way at an early age. As we grow we are introduced to further tools through which we extend our probings into the world around us: books, maps, theorems, classifications of date, concepts by which a whole area of thought is encapsulated, dictionaries, computers and much more. While we use these things we indwell them. They become an extension of our own powers. We use them a-critically to probe the area of reality which we are exploring. At times we may become dissatisfied with the probe, look critically at it, and perhaps try to fashion another. But all of these tools are part of an entire cultural tradition into which we are inducted by our training at home and in school. The vastly greater part of this is simply taken for granted and not questioned. It usually takes the shock of some disaster, or of encounter with a radically different tradition, to move us to a critical look at our own cultural tradition. And, in any case, we can never take such a critical look except by relying a-critically on some other way of grasping things. The idea that we can have a critical approach to everything at the same time is, of course, absurd. It is strictly impossible to doubt anything except on the basis of something which we do not doubt, some set of beliefs which we hold a-critically.

All-knowing, therefore, involves the a-critical acceptance of a language, of concepts, of ideas and images, which we indwell and through which we seek to probe the world around us. This a-critical acceptance is at first not a matter of choice. The language, the ideas, the images are those through which our minds have been formed. There is no stance from which we might look critically at them. In due course, if we lead a normal life of active intercourse with others, this 'fiduciary framework' will be called in question by those who inhabit a different framework. From that point onwards, my personal choice is involved: I can step outside the framework and look at it critically from within another. And I can be so impressed by the clarity and the coherence of the view obtained from within that other framework that I am drawn into it. In other words, I am converted. I undergo what historians of science call a 'paradigm shift'. Or, I may stay within the frame I have inherited, seeking to make use of new insights to revise and extend it. In any case, there is a personal commitment involved. There is a -decision, which means the risk of being wrong. But this personal commitment is, as Polanyi says, 'with universal intent'. It is firmly anchored to the objective pole. It is made in the belief that this is the way to grasp reality more truly, not just that it is what I personally prefer. It is made in the faith that what it shows as truth is truth for all. And if it is indeed what I believe, it will prove itself so by opening the way to fresh discoveries and fresh coherences and fresh clarities.

I have used the word 'conversion'. Simatoupong asked 'Can the West be converted?' That is the question I want to address. Can the Church offer, in the context of our culture, a new 'fiduciary framework', a new way of grasping the totality of things which can replace,not the private religious worlds of individuals in our culture, but the public world into which all of us who have been educated in a European language have, from childhood, been inducted and in

which we have lived? For two and a half centuries theologians have laboured to understand the Bible from within the 'fiduciary framework' of western culture as it has developed since the end of the 17th Century. Is it possible, in an intellectually coherent way, to undertake the reverse operation? Can we involve the critical principle in the other direction? Can we find in the Bible and the Christian tradition a 'fiduciary framework' from within which a critical examination of our culture can be undertaken?

As we begin to answer that question, it is proper to note at the outset that there are grounds in the present situation itself for some optimism in our approach. It is agreed that the modern scientific method, which has been the prime factor in shaping our public world view, has excluded in limine questions of purpose. Modern science does not ask and does not attempt to answer the question: 'For what purpose do things and people exist?' This is a methodogical decision which has opened the way for the enormously fruitful work of modern science. But this decision on method cannot be converted into a decision about ontology: science certainly cannot prove that there is no purpose in the nature of things. Indeed, such a conclusion would be self-defeating, since science is a highly purposeful activity. And, since it is in principle impossible to discover the purpose for which a thing exists simply by analysis of the thing into its several parts, it is agreed that the question of purpose is left unanswered by science, not answered in the negative. And, finally, in these preliminary points, since purpose is a personal word, purpose could only be known through the self-disclosure of the person whose purpose it is. If the whole frame of things, and the whole human story have a purpose, we can only know it in so far as the one whose purpose it is discloses it. We are bound, in strict logic, to invoke the concept of revelation And so, in the context of our present discussion, we have to talk about the Bible and about biblical authority. We have to ask: 'Is it possible, within our present culture, to speak with intellectual coherence, about biblical authority?'

At this point I would like to listen to two Asian voices. A Hindu friend of mine, a Brahmin scholar, who has made a deep study both of the Bible and of the sacred scriptures on India, has often said to me: 'I cannot forgive you Christians for the way in which you have misrepresented the Bible. You have introduced it to us as though it were a book of religion – of which we have plenty in India already. It is not. It is, as I read it, a quite unique interpretation of universal history and, therefore, a unique interpretation of the human person as an actor in that history'. The other is the Chinese theologian whom I have already quoted. He traces what he sees as the malaise of European culture to the fact that from its earliest beginnings in Greek philosophy, it has tried to find the really real in the concept of substance, of that which exists in its own right, independent of anything else. In fact, he says, this is a false trail. The really real is known only in relationships. To use the words of Bishop Zizioulos of the Greek Orthodox Church, 'being is communion'. This accords well with the findings of contemporary physics. The long search of physics to find the ultimate, irreducible particles by which matter is constituted has ended in something quite unexpected: not small indivisible particles, but changing relationships between nonmaterial entities.

The Bible is an interpretation of universal history as the history of the divine enterprise of creating faithful relationships, covenant relationships between God and his creatures, God and the human family, faithful relationships between persons and peoples founded on the covenant faithfulness of God. It has the whole cosmos as its theme. It sets the human story within the context of the cosmic story, It has its centre and turning point in the death and resurrection of Him who is the word of God, through whom all things came to be and are. It looks towards a consummation, which is beyond history and which yet gathers up all that has been wrought through history.

All telling of history is, of course, selective. No history is written except on the basis of judgements about what is significant. No 'facts of history' exist, except in so far as what happened was judged significant. The recorded facts will vary according to the judgement of what is significant, and that in turn depends upon what the 'point' of the story is. Normally we do not see the point of a story until the end. But we are not in a position to see the end of the cosmic

story. The Christian faith is the faith that the point of the story has been disclosed: the 'end' has been revealed in the middle. The point of the story is not the triumph of human technology over nature, nor the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. There is one human family and it has one centre, Jesus Christ, one history, the history of the making of faithful relationships with its maker. To accept that means to live as part of a potentially universal community, looking towards a consummation whose character has been revealed in Jesus Christ, and of which we have already a foretaste in his risen Body.

How is this version of the human and cosmic story to be related to the version of the human story as it is told in our culture? That is the crucial question. To be human is to be part of a story, and to understand one's self is to understand the story. Our culture has preserved the biblical story as a way of expressing in symbolic terms a way of looking at the life of the individual person and his hope of some kind of future beyond death. It has not been allowed to challenge the dominant version of the human story. 'World History' is taught in our schools and universities without reference to the Bible, unless the Bible story appears merely as one small item in a larger picture. We have been trained, in other words, to look at the Bible version of the story from within another fiduciary framework. We include it in a syllabus for the comparative study of religions. It is as harmless, as powerless to question the dominant framework as is a stuffed tiger in a museum.

I have quoted two voices from Asia. Let me ask you to listen to a voice from Latin America. The important thing, says one of the Latin American theologians of liberation, is not to understand the text, but to understand the world through the text. We can study the text from within the fiduciary framework of our culture, using all its well-sharpened critical tools to dissect it into its smallest fragments (how I learned it). In that sense we may try to understand the text, but the text can no more question us than the stuffed tiger in the museum can frighten us. There is another possibility, as the Latin American theologian suggests. It is to interrogate the world from within the text. It is, to revert to Polanyi's language, to indwell the story as it is told in the Bible so that we are not looking at it, but looking through it to understand our world. That is what Christians did before they were trained in the critical method. It is how millions of Christians still use the Bible. It is how it is used in Liberation Theology – even if one has to make some criticisms of that. We are the Israelites who escaped from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, wandered in the desert, were guided by the pillar of cloud and fire. We are still part of that same story and that is how we understand the world. We dwell in the story a-critically and are therefore given a stance from which we can exercise a critical understanding of contemporary culture. The matter at issue is not whether we are critical or uncritical; it is the question of which is the fiduciary framework from within which we exercise our critical powers, for no criticism is possible except from within a fiduciary framework which we indwell a-critically.

To take this position means, of course, to be a minority in our culture. It means questioning the things that no one ever questions – like the Christian missionary in India questioning the law of karma and samsara. And it means, I believe, being enabled to find a more rational way of understanding and coping with our world than that which is offered in our contemporary culture, a culture which is enormously productive of means but unable to speak about ends, fertile-in finding new ways to do things, but incapable of answering the question: 'What things are worth doing?' It is not, let me insist, a matter of appealing to 'revelation' against 'reason'. This absurd opposition is, I am sorry to say, a commonplace in English discussions. Reason is not a separate source of knowledge. It is the power by which we seek coherence in the data of experience and it operates, can only operate, within a complex of language, concepts, symbols, images which make up the 'fiduciary framework'. No move towards understanding reality is possible except by the use of reason; the question is, 'Within what "fiduciary framework" is reason operating?' And when we offer a different fiduciary framework, alternative to the one which is dominant in our culture, we are calling for conversion, for a radical shift in perspective. We need the boldness of the foreign missionary who dares to challenge the accepted framework, even though the words he uses must inevitably sound absurd to those who dwell in

that framework. In the contemporary crisis of western culture there is a widespread failure of nerve. There is a widespread tendency to retreat from the whole splendid adventure of western culture and to look elsewhere – especially to the East – for something different. That is a terrible mistake. We cannot run away from our responsibilities. It is we in the West who have developed this culture which is penetrating the whole world under the name of modernization, It is we Christians who have failed to challenge its fundamental assumptions, who have allowed the Gospel to be co-opted into it instead of challenging it. It is upon us that there now rests the formidable responsibility for a task which is both intellectual and practical: to recover a concept of knowledge which will heal the split in our culture between science and faith, between the public world and the private; and to embody in the life of our congregations a style of life which expresses in practice the purpose for which God has created all things: to glorify him and to enjoy him for ever.