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Gospel And Culture

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The Gospel is an account of facts, in the original sense of that word. Factum is something which has been done and, having been done cannot be changed or undone. Of course the record is an interpretation of what has been done, as all historical record is. One can dispute the interpretation and propose another. But interpretation is not imagination or invention. It has to be checked all along the line by the known facts.

The story told in the Gospel is essentially the story of a people chosen and called by God to know his will, to do it and to be the witness to the world of his will and the purpose of all nations and for all creation. The central motif of the bible is the agonizing question: How shall the righteous and holy God be vindicated in a world which always and everywhere flouts his righteous purposes and dishonours his holy name? The Psalms are full from end to end of this agonized and agonizing question. The centre of the story is the account of the liberation of an enslaved people and of their being brought out from under the power of unrighteous rulers to be bound by covenant to the rule of the righteous and holy God.

But almost from the moment of liberation Israel was stubborn and unbelieving. The promised land is entered at last, but the nation soon falls into chaos. There is a tale of apostasy, disaster, repentance, rescue and renewed unfaithfulness told generation after generation. A kingship is established to make Israel like other nations, but – in spite of a brief interlude of worldly power and glory – we are soon back again in the same sorry tale. There is a second exile, humiliation and slavery. The mocking cry goes up: 'Where is that God of yours now?'. There is a partial restoration, but from now on Israel is a subject people and the holy land is trampled by pagan armies. There is a long silence when God has no word for his rebel people. The silence is broken by the voice of John the Baptist. A movement of repentance gathers strength, and Jesus, coming forward to be a part of it, is baptised among a crowd of repentant sinners, is declared to be the Son of God and is anointed with the Holy Spirit. His ensuing ministry is the final call to Israel to repent or to have final disaster. That call is decisively rejected. Jesus is condemned, humiliated,

crucified dead and buried. That act, however, is not the act of Israel alone. The pagan world, represented by the Roman Empire, is part of the drama. It looks like the final answer to the cry of the Psalmists. 'How shall God be vindicated?'. The final answer, apparently, is 'He will not, God is dead. There is no God'.

So, as far as public history is concerned, it seems. What follows is also history. God raised him from the dead. That is fact – factum – but it is a fact entrusted to the company of those whom Jesus had chosen and called to be its trustees and interpreters. It means that God does indeed reign, that his reign is the final reality, but that it is a reality known by faith and not by common sight. If God's vindication were to be public in the same way that the death of Jesus was public, that would be the end of history. God's only answer would be the destruction of this rebellious creation. But a time and a space is given for repentance. Human culture is unmasked as enmity against God, but God gives a time and a space in which human culture can be renewed by the power of the Spirit given to the community which has been entrusted with the good news, the Gospel. The message, with its centre in cross and resurrection, is one of judgment and hope in continuous tension. All human culture is under God's judgment. The cross is, as Jesus says, the judgment of this world. The resurrection is the manifestation of the fact that the last enemy is conquered; that God's reign is the reality with which we have finally to do, and that God's grace is available for the renewal of all human culture.

The events which constitute the substance of the Gospel took place within a particular culture. All events in history are specific to a particular time, place and culture. Only that which is non-historical is supra cultural. That is obvious. The dissemination of mathematics, for example, does not raise problems of inculturation. We can understand mathematics without knowing the history of its origins and development. The Gospel, as news about things which have been done, requires that – whatever our native culture – we pay attention to writings originally composed in Hebrew and Greek in that particular part of the world which centres on the Mediterranean Sea. Later we shall have to look at the unique role played in subsequent world history by this particular part of the world. At the moment it is enough to note that peoples in all the six continents are being shaped by ideas and practices which had their origins here. More of that later.

The Gospel spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean world, having multiple launching points in the synagogues which everywhere continued to affirm God's unique covenant with Israel. The communication of the Gospel involved the crossing of cultural frontiers. From our point of view the most significant frontier was that between the culture of Israel and the culture of the classical world of antiquity, having Greek as its lingua franca. The story had to be told in Greek. But the Greek words which the evangelists had to use were already weighted with meanings formed within a totally different world-view. As a missionary working in India, often preaching in villages where the Gospel is unknown, I have been acutely aware of this problem. I cannot preach the Gospel without using the word 'God'. There are many words in Tamil which can be used to translate God. But I know that, when I use one of these words, my hearers will be thinking of Siva, or Vishnu, or Murugan or Ganesh. The world will evoke in their minds a picture quite different from the image in my own mind of the one whom Jesus knew as 'Father'. There is no way of evading this problem. It is only, and slowly, resolved when the hearers have heard over and over again both the stories which the Bible tells about God's doings and sayings, and when they have glimpsed the shape of the total story which the Bible as a whole tells. They come to see that 'God' is different from the image of God with which they had been familiar. In my own experience I have found that this new understanding is really established when they come to the point where, as a community in one village, they stand together and say of God that, for us and our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, dead and buried, descended into hell, rose again and ascended into heaven. Now 'God' has a new meaning.

The same struggle is involved with the other great words of a culture. The early Christian theologians used, as they had to use, the great words of Greek philosophy. This could, and sometimes did, mean that the old meaning of the word suppressed the new meaning that the

Gospel gives it. The Gospel then becomes domesticated in the culture and loses its power to transform it. That has happened on a massive scale in the attempt of Protestant Christians in Europe during the last two centuries to make the Gospel 'relevant' to modern thought. But this does not have to happen. When the Fourth evangelist writes that the logos became flesh, and proceeded to set forth the true meaning of the word logos by telling the story of Jesus true inculturation has taken place. The Gospel transforms culture by transforming it from within. In a real sense the miracle of incarnation is re-enacted. The seed of the word has to fall into the ground of another culture and die in order that a new reality, a renewed culture, may come to life. The missionary may, and often will, lament that his words are completely misunderstood. But as the story is told and re-told, as it is (even falteringly) re-enacted in the life of the believing community old concepts are re-shaped, old images fade. A story begins to shape the mind of a community into a new way of understanding who we are, whence we came, where we go, and what are the choices available.

This is what happened as the old classical world disintegrated, lacking the resources to meet its deepest needs. As the outward counterpart of this inner disintegration the barbarian hordes swept into Europe, wiping out much of the old civilization of the Roman Empire. The thought of antiquity, especially in its platonic form, continued to influence the minds of learned scholars, but for the mass of the people it was now to be the story told in the Bible that became the major formative influence. Carried by the Benedictine monks into the remotest

part of Europe, read in churches, illustrated in the art, music and architecture of the churches, celebrated in the annual festivals and folk drama, this story shaped the minds of these barbarian tribes for more than a thousand years. For practical purposes there was only one book, the one which was simply called 'The Book', the Bible. The classical world of antiquity, like the world of Asia with which it was continuous, sought reliable certainty in the timeless entities grasped by the mind in reasoning and soul by the disciplines of meditation, prayer and worship. For them, as for much of Asian thought, history – being the realm of the transient – could not be the place where certainty is found.

Ultimately, reliable reality must be beyond history. This is what distinguishes Europe from Asia and justifies us in thinking of Europe as a separate continent. From the point of view of geography Europe is not a separate continent: it is just the western end of Asia. From the point of view of history likewise, Europe is simply the cul-de-sac into which the surplus population of Asia has been emptied for countless millennia. If Europe is a distinct society it is because for almost a thousand years its people were taught to understand themselves, the world, the present and the future, in the terms set by the story which the Bible tells. This is the reality which has shaped Europe, and it is blindness and folly to pretend otherwise.

The Gospel spread, of course, outwards along the coasts of Africa and eastwards far into the heart of Asia. It is highly probable that it reached India within the first century. The story of this eastward expansion is a fascinating one, too little told in our western seminaries. But this global expansion was suddenly and catastrophically checked by the rise of the Muslim faith, the sweeping advance of the Arab armies and the destruction of the ancient Christian civilisations of North Africa and Western Asia. Eastern Christendom was almost neutered by encapsulation in the enclaves which the millet system provided for Christians and Jews, while western Christendom, though finally halting the military conquest in France, was henceforth cut off from the worlds to the south and east. Whilst the Islamic world developed during the next five centuries into an immensely powerful and brilliant civilisation, western Christendom remained a relatively backward enclave, squeezed between Islam and the sea and effectively cut off from Asia and Africa.

Islam had borrowed from both Jewish and Christian sources, but it did not inherit the biblical vision of universal history as Christendom had done. It was much more shaped by the Aristotelian version of the philosophy of antiquity. When the illiterate Arab armies became the rulers of what had been eastern Christendom, their subject peoples became their tutors. Nestorian Christians were extensively employed in the service of government. These eastern Christians had

already translated Aristotle and the classics into Syriac. They now translated them into Arabic, and the Aristotelian form of rationalism became an integral part of Islamic philosophy. When, as the result of the inter-mingling of Muslims and Christians in Spain, Aristotle and the great Arabic commentaries of Avicenna and Averrhoes, were translated into Latin, their impact upon western Christendom was immense. With these came Arabic mathematics and the medical science which the Arabs had inherited from Greece and developed. How was this 'new science' to be related to the biblical faith which had shaped Europe? The great apologetic task was to be undertaken by Aquinas. Augustine, the major influence on the development of western Christianity, had learned to regard faith as the way to knowledge. *Credo ut intelligam*. The biblical story, accepted in faith, was to open the way to true knowledge. Faith was not a substitute for knowledge but the only way to knowledge. Aquinas, in his work of synthesis between the old learning and the new, had to distinguish between two modes of knowing. There are things which reason itself can find out and which may be proposed for faith; there are other things which can only be known by divine revelation received in faith. Among the first are the existence of God and the soul; amongst the second are the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement.

What Augustine had thus held together, Aquinas thus begins to hold apart. Faith and reason are formed apart. The way is open for Locke's definition of faith as 'a persuasion which falls short of knowledge'. Western Christendom is set on a course which would lead to the demand for a kind of certainty which rests on something more secure than faith, for 'objective truth' of a kind not dependent on the faith of the knower, a kind of knowledge in which the subject is not personally involved and committed. The *lingua franca* of this knowledge was to be that most precious gift from the Arab world - mathematics. We come eventually to Renee Descartes with his 'critical method' designed to eliminate everything that is merely faith and not knowledge, and offering a picture of reality having the clarity, exactitude and certainty of mathematics.

From this comes the 'Age of Reason' and the birth of what we call modernity. The claim here is for a kind of knowledge which is supra-cultural. The new science, with mathematics as its language, is equally accessible to all. It is what every human being needs to learn and can learn, irrespective of any cultural peculiarities. It is 'the coming world civilisation'. From this point of view there are no different human cultures with different but equally valid ways of understanding the world. The use of the word 'culture' in the plural is, as far as popular speech is concerned, an affair of the last 50 years. Before, at least, the 1914 war, people did not talk about 'many cultures'. They talked of peoples who were more or less civilised. Europe was the home of civilisation and the task of Europe was to bring the blessings of civilisation to all peoples. In so far as their traditional ways of thinking and acting were 'uncivilised' they would be gradually abandoned. The whole world would be made one family, rich prosperous and peaceful, set free at last from the age-old bondage of tradition and superstition. Religions, with their rival and incompatible claims for divine revelation, would no longer dominate public life. Men and women would be free to believe as they wish provided that their practices do not harm society. Public affairs would be conducted in accordance with a scientific rationality which is available to all human beings, provided they are given a proper education.

We are familiar with the ensuing story – the story of the advance of European science, technology, economics, political and military power throughout the world. We recognise its positive achievements in advancing human welfare in many respects, and on disseminating the concept of universal human rights and of freedom of thought and conscience. We are familiar with the present situation, so full of paradox, in which the peoples of Asia and Africa have thrown off European political control but are eager for what is called 'modernisation' – the replacement of traditional cultures by this dominant culture of Europe. And we know that, here in Europe, the Enlightenment vision has faded into the nightmare of bloody wars and ruthless tyranny, and the dream of a fully coherent, rational and certain model of reality is unravelling under the assault of deconstruction so that our vision of reality is more like an ever – changing kaleidoscope of shifting images and sensations.

The modern concept of 'culture' understood in a way which makes it possible to speak of 'cultures' in the plural, and to speak of multiculturalism as a proper ideal for society, arose in the mid-10th century as part of the romantic reaction to the overimperialist claims of the Age of Reason. The tension between these two movements could be contained within the resilient society of Europe, formed as it had been by the Christian story. But when the 'civilising' drive of the European nations struck and overwhelmed the ancient societies of Asia, Africa and the Pacific in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the reaction was more violent. The latter part of the present century has seen the rise of vigorous movements throughout the 'Third World' asserting the claims of traditional cultures. On the global scene there is no common cultural heritage to moderate the conflict between 'modernity' and ancient cultures such as the Christian tradition provided for Europe.

We come now to the role of the Christianity in the events of the last two or three centuries. These have witnessed not only the world-wide expansion of European power in the form which was earlier called 'civilisation' and is now called 'modernisation'. The same centuries have seen the greatest expansion of the Christian Church in its entire history. Plainly these two things are connected. Until as recently as the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 it was possible to talk of the 'civilising' role of Christian missions. Modern missions have been and are among the main carriers of 'modernisation' to the Third World. Long before the phrase 'World Development' was used by politicians (roughly from the 1950s onward), Christian missions with their thousands of schools, colleges, hospitals, technical schools and agricultural programmes, were busy bringing 'modernity' to the peoples among whom they preached the Gospel. Perhaps one should exempt the early missions sent by the King of Denmark to Danish colonies in Tranquebar and elsewhere. But certainly William Carey, usually regarded in Anglo-Saxon countries as the pioneer foreign missionary, was essentially a man of the Enlightenment. The teaching of modern science was an integral part of his programme at Serampore, and his example has been followed by most of his successors.

If we have understood the history of Christianity in Europe during the same period, this will not surprise us. In spite of many exceptions, and in spite of the refusal of the Roman Catholic Church until the second half of this century to come to terms with 'modernity', the efforts of Protestant teachers and preachers has been to accommodate the Gospel within the worldview of modernity. So powerful was the movement of Enlightenment that the only possible future for Christianity seemed to be as 'Religion within the bounds of Reason'. Christianity, to put it bluntly, became thoroughly domesticated within the culture of post-Enlightenment Europe.

While this culture was in its phase of supreme confidence, offering itself as 'the Coming World Civilisation', Christianity, as the religion of Europe, could share this confidence. The collapse of one has led naturally to the collapse of the other. Europeans apologise for their colonial past (unlike the other great contemporary world power, Islam), and Christians apologise for foreign missions. Missionaries, it is widely held, were a terrible mistake. They did not understand other ancient cultures and so destroyed them. In a naive and simplistic form (one frequently encountered) this leads to a conclusion something like the following. European culture is just one among the many cultures of the world. We must value them all equally. To assert the superiority of one culture over another is unacceptable. Multi-culturalism is the way for the future. So also to assert the superiority of Christianity over other religions is unacceptable. We must accept all religions as ways to God.

It is not difficult to point out the logical absurdities into which this leads. It is rather a way of feeling than a way of thinking. It is dangerous because it can easily lead to the repetition all over the world of the mistake which has led European Christianity into its present mood of timidity, the almost total collapse of confidence in the truth of the Gospel. Before developing some suggestions about our response to this situation, we should look at another way of seeing recent history as it has been spelled out by the African (formerly Muslim) Professor of World Religions at Yale – Professor Lamin Sanneh. He has drawn attention, in the context of the discussion of Gospel and Culture, to the enormous importance of the fact that Protestant

missionaries took it as one of their first tasks to translate the Bible into the languages of the peoples among whom they lived. In this respect, Protestants followed the example of Orthodox missionaries in contrast to those of the Roman Catholic Church which (until recently) did not do so. This practice had two very important and (probably) unexpected and unintended results.

The first was the creation of new and vibrant cultures. For many hundreds of people in both early and modern periods, the Bible has been their first introduction to literacy. And the move from an illiterate to a literate culture is a move of seismic significance. It opens the life of a people to new worlds, both because of what happens within the world of that society itself, and also because literacy introduces them to the cultures of other peoples and of other ages. To take the example which Lamin Sanneh specifically refers to, the move of literacy has brought into being the explosion of new thinking and experience among the peoples of Africa. Missionaries have been, probably unintentionally, the great creators of new cultures. From my own experience in South India I can point to another example. When, in 1968, the Congress government of Tamilnadu was replaced by a government representing the Tamil cultural heritage, the Dravida Munerrum Kazhagam, one of their first actions was to erect a series of eight magnificent statues along the Marina, the splendid sea-front of the city. Three of the eight statues are those of European missionaries.

The second result of the early translation of the Scriptures was, perhaps, even more surprising to the missionaries. They may have been, and usually were, men and women shaped by the Enlightenment. The Bible is not. When the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, became available in their own tongue, the new Christians had a new point of reference, one which enabled them to compare what they had learned from the missionaries with what they now found in Scripture. The result was often, mainly in Africa, the large-scale development of churches independent of those founded under missionary leadership. David Barrett, in 'Schism & Renewal in Africa' has documented the close relationship between the translation of the Bible and the development of the independent churches. But even where such schisms did not occur, the way was open for the development, both in the independent and in the 'main line' churches, of a spirituality markedly different from that of the churches from which the missionaries had come. It seems difficult to doubt that the present contrast between the explosive growth of Christianity in Africa and its declining fortunes in Europe has something to do with these facts. To put it simply, the Bible, a pre-modern book, is able to address the pre-modern peoples of Africa and other areas not yet dominated by modernity in a way which the societies of contemporary Europe have ceased to understand.

But 'modernisation' is the grand theme of most of the peoples of the 'Third World'. They have been liberated from the political control of the former colonial powers, but they are under the relentless pressure of the global world economy, represented by such agencies as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to 'modernise' their economies and therefore their cultures.

If we now step back and look at these developments as a whole, it seems to me that four things are clear.

Firstly, whatever we may think of the 19th century dream of 'the coming world civilisations', the dream has been remarkably powerful. Almost the whole world, even including small and hitherto isolated communities, has been, and is being, drawn into a single global city (not a global village) dominated by the science, technology, economic power and political ideas which originated in Europe in the Age of Reason. There is no single or simple reaction to this in the 'Third World'. Much in the total package of modernity is very attractive, and that has brought tangible benefit. Western liberals, disillusioned with European civilisation, may deplore the eagerness with which some elements of western culture are adopted by peoples of the former colonies, but people must be free to make their choices even if European liberals think them mistaken. But there is also, of course, a powerful counter-movement of revolt against the imperialism of western culture. There is a very painful dilemma here. How does one accept the good gifts that 'modernity' brings without being sucked into the whole 'meta-narrative' of

modernity? It is easy to smile at the spectacle of a European apostle of multi-culturalism sitting in his air-conditioned room pounding away on his word-processor about the superiority of 'native' cultures to that of Europe. But the smile should not be too condescending.

The second fact is that western Christianity has, in general, been so domesticated within 'modernity' that those at the receiving end of the great missionary expansion of the 10th and 20th centuries received, in effect, a package in which the Gospel was so 'inculturated' into modernity that the two appeared to be one. As the movement of reaction against the pretensions of western power grew in clarity and strength, the Christian message as delivered by western missionaries was quite inevitably brought into question. As always in such cultural encounters, it is those leaders of the churches of Asia and Africa who have been most thoroughly formed intellectually by western ideas, typically as products of western universities who have articulated most clearly and forcibly the demand for a Christian message expressed in forms drawn from their own cultures rather than from the west. The third point is that, because western Christianity had become so thoroughly domesticated within the thought-world of modernity, the contemporary collapse of modernity has carried much of European Christianity with it. This was inevitable. To put it in the terms used by our post-modernist contemporaries, Protestant Christians in Europe were, with the exception of those labelled as 'fundamentalists', eager to place the story of the Bible within the meta-narrative of modernity. But the movement of 'deconstruction' has drastically undermined confidence in modernity's narrative. The French writer Derrida has defined post-modernity as a 'scepticism towards all meta-narratives'. In the great days of the 'coming world civilisation' the name of the meta-narrative was 'progress'. We no longer believe in progress. We apologise for our attempt to bring all the world into our triumphant procession. Western liberals in particular have a profound sense of guilt, and this also deeply affects Christians. We apologise for world missions. We do not like now to speak of 'the evangelisation of the world' in this generation, and this 'western guilt complex' as Lamin Sanneh has called it, has a paralysing effect. It is good to confess our sins if we seriously mean repentance. It is also, I fear, rather easy to confess the sins of our forefathers for we do not have to repent of them. But unforgiven guilt is a paralysing, and not a creative, factor in human affairs. Our calling now is to recover confidence not in our civilisation but in the Gospel.

The fourth point, therefore, concerns our present task. We have to recognise the big element of illicit syncretism in European Christianity, to recognise that the meta-narrative of modernity is incompatible with that of the Gospel, to recover our confidence in the Gospel and thus to articulate the challenge and the hope which the Gospel brings to modernity.

I began this talk by speaking of the Gospel as fact, as the narrative of what has been done, and having been done cannot be undone, altered, reconstructed. The question, the only important question, is the simple one 'Is it true?'. Is it true that almighty God, creator, source and goal of all that is, has been made flesh, part of human history accessible to our knowledge, and that he has given his life in the humiliation and agony of the cross and has risen in triumph over death to reign for ever? It is easy to disbelieve it. But if it is true it can only be the starting point of all our thinking and doing, the datum from which all reasoning must begin. In the terms that Athanasius used, it must be the new arche, the new starting point for all philosophy. In the words of scripture it must be either the corner-stone or the stone of stumbling. It cannot be one brick fitted into a structure built on other principles. We cannot do, as the 'modernisers' of Christianity tried to do, adapt it so that it fits the assumptions of 'modern' thought. Our task is not to make the Gospel 'acceptable to modern thought'. It is to show that the Gospel is the only starting point from which the world and human life can be made intelligible. This calls for a radically new turn in the thinking of European Christians. If the story which I have been telling is true, it must be clear that the first question for us as Europeans as we take part in the study of Gospel and Culture is to recognise the extent to which European Christianity has been guilty of the wrong kind of inculturation, of an illicit syncretism.

Perhaps the most important first step must be the recovery of an intellectually coherent doctrine of the authority of Scripture. For much of the past two centuries the Bible has been

treated not as Holy Scripture but as a collection of ancient documents to be dissected, analyzed and criticised in the light of the assumptions of modernity. The so-called historical-critical method of biblical study has brought illumination in many ways, but it is coming to the end of its usefulness. When the basic principles on which the method rests are brought into the open for scrutiny, it becomes clear that they are the assumptions of modernity and are open to radical criticism. As we have found in all our history since Descartes, the critical principle must inevitably turn upon itself and destroy itself. Unfortunately the fundamentalist attack on modern interpretations of scripture have fallen into the same trap set by Descartes. The idea of verbal inerrancy is an idea derived from Descartes' quest for indubitable certainties, and is illegitimately imposed upon the Bible. We must learn what the phrase 'Word of God' means from the Bible itself, not from other sources.

My proposal will, I know, be criticised as Euro-centric, but this must be rejected. We cannot disown our responsibility as Europeans within the whole evangelical fellowship. It is simply a fact that it is ideas and practices developed in Europe over the past three centuries which now dominate the world, for good and for ill. It is the 'modernisation' which is going on all over the world, under the relentless pressure of a global economic system developed from European roots, which now sets the agenda for peoples everywhere. But this same modernity has suffered an inner and spiritual collapse. European churches will play their proper role in the ecumenical discussion of gospel and cultures if we tackle the results of a false inculturation in Europe, learn from our mistakes, share with our brothers and sisters in the 'Third World' the task of recovering the gospel in its integrity from its false entanglement with European culture, and so seek together to find the true path of inculturation.

And can we say anything of a general kind about what will be the mark of true inculturation? Here I go back to what I said at the outset. And in what I am saying I am repeating what that great ecumenical leader W.A. Visser 't Hooft used to say on this subject. The one essential is to tell the story of the mighty acts of God. The Gospel is a story. We must tell it in the language of every people. In telling it we must (there is no alternative) use the idiom, concepts, images, which the culture provides. We will know that risks misunderstanding, because all these words and concepts derive their meaning from the thought world of which they are a part. There is no way of evading this risk. We have confidence, however, that the telling and retelling of the story, its embodiment in the life and behaviour of the community that tells it, will over time bring about a change in the meaning of all these words and concepts. This will take time, but in the end they will become filled with the new meaning which the new narrative gives them.

In all this development the work of Bible translation has a central role. We know already in the experience of the ecumenical movement, how central is the place of the Bible. In direct rebuttal of the challenge of post-modernity, we affirm together that the story which the Bible tells is the true meta-narrative, the true account of the origins, journey and goal of all humanity and all creation. We tell this story and celebrate it through the words and concepts and images which our different cultures provide. Because all our cultures are part of our fallen humanity, it is always possible that we distort by our language the true meaning of the story. But it is precisely the glory of the ecumenical fellowship that we can challenge and correct one another in the light of the one story. My brother from Africa, my sister from Asia, will convince me that in my reading of the story I have allowed the assumptions of my culture to distort or smother the meaning of the story. It is here that I believe the heart of the ecumenical movement lies. There is one story, for there is one God, one Lord Jesus Christ and one Holy Spirit who leads us to confess the one Lord Jesus to the glory of the Father. All our telling of the story, and all our living of it in our several cultures, are subject to the judgment of the One whose story it is.

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