A popular but erroneous view has been promoted in several quarters regarding the naturalness of separating gospel from culture, with the assumption that by that procedure Christians can get at the gospel pure and simple. However, this is no more possible than getting at the kernel of the onion without the peel. The pure gospel, stripped of all cultural entanglements, would evaporate in a vague abstraction, although if the gospel were without its own intrinsic power it would be nothing more than cultural ideology. If Christianity could be turned into a pure Platonic form, then it would be religion fit only for the elite, whereas if it was just a cultural disguise it would breed only manipulators. The real challenge is to identify this intrinsic power without neglecting the necessary cultural factor.

It is important to call attention to the fundamental character of Christianity as a force for cultural integration. Several paradoxes point to this fact. The first is that Christianity is almost unique among world religions for being peripheral in the place of its origin. Ever since Pentecost and the Antiochean breakthrough, Christianity has turned its back on Jerusalem and Bethlehem as secondary signposts, with the consequence of the religion becoming preponderant in regions once considered outside God's promises. The Christian religious psyche was purged of the "Promised Land" fixation, so that believers have almost to err to revert to any one center to the exclusion of others. The second paradox is that Christians are unique in abandoning the original language of Jesus and instead adopting Greek in its \textit{Koine}, and Latin in its \textit{vulgar} as the central media of the church.\footnote{For a scrupulous account of the language issue in the Bible see Matthew Black, "The Biblical Languages", \textit{The Cambridge History of the Bible: Vol. i: From the Beginnings to Jerome}, eds. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, repr. 1988), pp. 1-29.} Except in extremist sectarian groups, Christians never made the language of Jesus a requirement of faith or membership in the fellowship. It is this linguistic revolution which accounts for the entire New Testament canon being written in a language other than the one in which Jesus preached.\footnote{Edward Gibbon writes, "The authentic histories of the actions of Christ were composed in the Greek language, at a considerable distance from Jerusalem, and after the Gentile converts were grown extremely numerous" (Gibbon, \textit{Decline and Fall}, vol. i, 432).} Thus it is that translation, and the cross-cultural implications related to it, came to be built into the very fabric of Christianity. Another striking paradox is the contention by Christians that God's eternal counsels are compatible with ordinary, everyday speech. This view cuts across the tendency in some parts of early Christianity to cast the religion into an elitist gnostic discourse.
Christianity in the mouth of Jesus was the divulging of the secret design of God, and Christian faith the public attestation to that fact.

This view of religious language as belonging to the ordinary, commonplace world of men and women, and even of children, is not necessarily shared by the other religious traditions which in fact are inclined to make a virtue of elitist secrecy, of a professional cultic language understandable only to the elite, initiated few. The Christian attitude to religious language places right at the heart of things the idea that people, especially ordinary people, should understand, a view with momentous consequences for social and cultural awakening, with people feeling that the social enterprise as such is not


4 In his characteristically ebullient style, Erasmus (d. 1536) propounded this view in the context precisely of Scriptural translation. He wrote: "Indeed, I disagree very much with those who are unwilling that Holy Scripture, translated into the vulgar tongue, be read by the uneducated, as if Christ taught such intricate doctrines that they could scarcely be understood by very few theologians, or as if the strength of the Christian religion consisted in men's ignorance of it. The mysteries of kings, perhaps, are better concealed, but Christ wishes his mysteries published as openly as possible. I would that even the lowest women read the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. And I would that they were translated into all languages so that they could be read and understood by Scots and Irish but also by Turks and Saracens... Would that, as a result, the farmer sing some portion of them to the plow, the weaver hum parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveller lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind". Desiderius Erasmus, Christian Humanism and the Reformation, Selected Writings, with the Life of Erasmus by Beatus Rhenanus, ed., John C. Olin, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 96-97. See also Fr. Louis Bouyer, "Erasmus in Relation to the Medieval Biblical Tradition" in The Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. ii: The West From the Fathers to the Reformation, ed. G.W.H. Lampe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, repr. 1988), pp. 492-505.

5 In his study of the New Testament as enshrining the popular idiom of the age, Adolf Deissmann argued that the old literary style of classical Attic differed markedly from the New Testament style in its elaborate and cultivated refinement, whereas in the New Testament "the underground stream of the people's language springs up powerfully into the daylight". This prevented Christianity from becoming "a privileged esoteric affair of a small and exclusive upper class". Adolf Deissmann, The New Testament in the Light of Modern Research: The Haskell Lectures, 1929, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co. Inc., 1929), p. 80. Deissmann continued, "Jesus spoke of the light and the candlestick, of the city on the hill, of father and child, bread and fish, egg and scorpion, of asking and giving, of seed and crop, of hunger and thirst. No long sentences, no speculative questions, transparent, pithy, plastic... The Gospel, because it was the message of God to humanity, could only reveal itself in the simplest of garments... Whoever has eyes to see can learn much from the linguistic facts which meet us in the New Testament. The linguistic estimation of the New Testament shows us that our Holy Book in its classical, creative period is in close contact with the middle and lower classes and in sharp contrast to the old artificial Atticist culture which struggled for a new lease of life in the surrounding world. Had the Gospel leagued itself with this ancient culture from the beginning it would have endangered what is best in it, and, especially, its future as a message to humanity would have been impossible" (pp. 94, 105-6).