

Group Reports

The group reports were received but not discussed
or approved in detail by plenary

REPORT OF GROUP I

Scripture and its Interpretation: Function and Purpose

Scripture is a record of experiences of reality expressed in literary form for the sake of the Community of Faith. It witnesses to the Tradition and history of the Community of Faith. It is the inspired Word of God and authoritative for the Community. It is the source of the Tradition and chief norm for further growth of the Community.

For Christians, Scripture constitutes the writings in which the action of God in Christ is experienced, expressed and anticipated. This includes primarily testimony to the experience and implications of the Christ-event and the long preparation for this.

The whole Bible is authoritative and significant but not all parts are equally significant in all situations or to everyone. Some passages are regarded as more significant depending on the background, tradition, community needs, and so on. The whole Scripture is received as an inheritance and so in selecting the passages the Christ-event must be crucial, central; the text has the potentiality to meet our needs, wants and problems in our own situation.

We interpret Scripture since it is written in ancient languages and the original context is different from our own context. The terms, idioms, concepts and ideas need to be interpreted. This historical document with its message must speak to our time and should be related to our context. The purpose of this interpretation is to evoke the experience of the Christ-event again in the present. It must lead to worship and obedience.

We need to relate our Scripture to the Scriptures of other religions in order to communicate the message to them. In relating to other Scriptures, we must try to understand the faith of other people and how God is working among and in others also. This helps us to understand our own faith. We can also relate to certain concepts in other religions such as *Om*, *Avatār* and *Īśvara* in order to interpret the message of our Scriptures.

Interpreting Scripture in Relation to Spirit, Community and Tradition

The role of the Spirit, Community and Tradition in interpreting Scripture is indeed decisive. The working of God the Spirit in our

hearts and in the life of the community makes this awareness of God real to us. Our indescribable experience of God is articulated in various church traditions. They represent the dogmas and practices handed down through the centuries. We use the word Tradition (capital T) to mean the beliefs of the New Testament Community handed down and dynamically developed through the centuries, and the word tradition (small t) to mean the practices and doctrines of a local group. The Holy Spirit created an awareness of the experience of God's working in us and leads us into all truth. These three, the Spirit, the Community and the Tradition, play a major role in interpreting the Scripture. The positive function of Tradition is in the identity and visibility of the Church expressed in Worship and Community life. Its danger lies in its potentiality to be reduced to static dogmas and human traditions leading to divisions and exclusiveness. The Tradition provides the focus and locus for our faith commitment in the hermeneutical act. This Tradition cannot be objectified and analyzed.

The genuine interpretation of the Scripture comes from the Holy Spirit working with the human spirit. The effectiveness of interpretation is the norm by which we know the leading of the Holy Spirit. Interpretation leads to communion and communion leads to interpretation.

The Socio-Economic Context

The socio-economic context of our people affects our interpretation of Scripture to a large extent. Not only the doctrinal formulations, but also the needs and wants of the people should be taken into serious consideration while interpreting the Scriptures. In the present context we need to present a Jesus that motivates us to a praxiologically relevant and existentially meaningful awareness. All the elements that hold us and hinder us from having wholeness of life in Jesus, such as the caste system, social injustice and communalism should be removed. The dominance of particular evils in a particular context has also its bearing on the interpretation of a given text.

The Hermeneutical Process

The interpreter's knowledge and experience and his cultural, social, linguistic pre-judgements determine the horizon of his understanding and help or hinder in this hermeneutical process. If the interpreter is aware of his own limitations, prejudices and interests, he can seek to revise his understanding or choose to retain them, thereby restraining himself from understanding better.

The interpreter's knowledge and skill in languages can equip him for a better understanding and interpretation of the Text. But our language itself significantly determines the categories in which we understand. In the hermeneutical process one must have openness to others' interpretation also. Faith commitment and personal experience are essential in this process. The present context should be

taken into consideration while interpreting the Text. Relating to other scriptures may be sometimes helpful to gain deeper understanding and better communication, but the whole process must be Christocentric and not syncretistic.

REPORT OF GROUP II

I Scripture and its Interpretation

Though it is not possible *a priori* to provide a definition covering all scriptures, this may be done as far as the Scriptures of Christians are concerned.

This definition is based on the assumption that we believe in a God who communicates. Scripture is then understood as the deposit of a series of traditions where men in dialogue "heard" God speaking to them and "responded" to him. We understand hearing and responding as encompassing both verbal and non-verbal dimensions.

The Christ-event is extremely important, because we confess with the Church that God has spoken to men significantly and because we confess with the Church that the Christ-event is constitutive of the character of the dialogue. To be identifiably Christian is somehow to consider as normative God dialoguing with man in the Christ-event. In this way, interpretation of Scripture enables us to recall the constitutive event, to provide a possibility to participate in that event and to proclaim the reality of that event. It is evident that there have been communications before and after the Christ-event and these have to be integrated.

Our purpose then is to participate, insofar as this is possible, in this constant dialogue in such a way that in the present context we are able to listen to God. Participating in this dialogue constitutes our understanding of the ways in which God relates to men. This is what we mean by interpreting Scripture. We do not see this as a process involving reason only but as a process in which the whole of man's being is involved. The interpreting consists in participation in this dialogue and for this purpose we have to make use of all the skills at our disposal.

In this sense the Bible can be said to be normative. The dialogue as it is recorded is not normative, but dialoguing itself is.

It may be noted here that our interpretation is both of Scripture and of the reality to which Scripture testifies. The written Scriptures may be considered as a series of recorded formulations consisting of the beliefs, reflections and consequent didactic teachings of the writers. To listen to the dialogue we need to go beyond these formulations. The formulations themselves can be taken over or not.

As specified earlier, reason is not all. Often things are accepted not on the basis of pure logical consistency, but because they give wholeness. All people are brought up in a certain tradition. The meaning of a text is not something purely rationally discovered, though

reason has its role to play. The meaning is actually something inherited and lived in a tradition.

Interpretation constitutes an important need of human nature. Hence the need for the interpretation of Scripture. Man understands himself in relationships as he does not live in a vacuum. To fulfill this purpose he uses empirical categories coming from observations as well as faith-concepts.

"Listening" to the dialogue aims at (i) proclaiming the good news; (ii) building up the Church; and (iii) enabling man to live on earth meaningfully. This takes into consideration the proximate and the ultimate in a significant relationship.

If the concept of Scripture is to be understood, as said before, we can then "listen" to the dialogue between God and man in other scriptures also, though for us as Christians, our understanding of it will be determined by the Christ-event.

II Scripture in Relation to Spirit, Community and Tradition

Holy Spirit, Community of Faith and Tradition are not all at the same level.

Holy Spirit: In continuing the dialogue with God, the person of the Holy Spirit helps us to recognize God speaking to us.

Community of faith: Insofar as there is also a subjective element in listening it is possible for man to project his own meaning and interpret that as the work of the Holy Spirit. In this respect, the consensus of the community can constitute a means of control to check deviations. By this consensus, we understand the corporate experiences and understanding of the community of faith. The consensus of the community can have only limited value. We must note, however, that many consensuses were later found to be wrong and that prophets have arisen in the community who stood against consensus. Indeed, either prophets try to rediscover the truth of the Gospel forgotten by the community, or they find new and relevant meanings in the Gospel in a given context and in relation to life. But the prophetic reinterpretation also takes place as part of the life of the community. Both community and Tradition are eschatologically determined.

Tradition: Tradition is the continuation of the dialogue between God and man; the Christ-event continuing to work in the Church. The risen Christ is present in the community, purifying it and vivifying it. Through the Spirit the Tradition keeps the Scripture alive in the Church.

Tradition can be tested in terms of the constitutive character of the dialogue. But there can be few objective norms and standards. It is the community functioning together which has to evaluate and re-evaluate Tradition.

Tradition functions as an informative process and at the same time also as a check on our "listening." In this sense Tradition is a kind of "touch-stone," yet Tradition can also become stultifying. This

implies that it should be looked at critically. The process may be different, operating through memory, sacraments, and so on, but in a living Tradition, the eschatological element keeps it dynamically open to the new.

We have been talking of Tradition (note the capital "T"), but we have to relate it to the traditions. While accepting a legitimate distinction between Tradition and traditions in the Christian religious heritage, it is submitted that in the religious consciousness of individuals and particular groups, the symbols of traditions (for instance, attitudes towards women's ordination) may be seen by other individuals and groups, as connected with a group's particular religious consciousness.

III Socio-economic Context

There is no doubt that the socio-economic context of the interpretation affects the way the passages are selected and/or interpreted. To cite a few instances:

- (a) the various interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Ambrose interprets the oil as the oil of the Spirit and for Augustine it is the "comfort of the good hope");
- (b) the wide use of the event of Jesus overturning the tables at the Temple in justifying violence as a means of reformation;
- (c) the use of the Exodus tradition and the text of Luke 4:16-30 by the Liberation Theologians.

The "lobbying power" of the socio-economic context on the hermeneutical task has its own legitimacy.

Part of the hermeneutical task consists of relating one's listening to the socio-economic context in which the interpreter and the listener are. In this respect it must be noted that the meaningfulness of the Christian symbols as far as social values and meanings such as liberty, justice, equality are concerned can be sustained and experienced only to the extent that appropriate structures exist within a society as "vehicles" or "carriers" of these values. The hermeneutical task, therefore, should not be thought of exclusively as a conceptual task; it is also one of creating a structure which can sustain or aid us in experiencing these values.

IV The Cultural-religious Consciousness of the People, or Reality Framework

No man lives in a mental vacuum. In order to live, he needs a picture, however unconscious, of himself, of other people and of the world outside him. The picture a religious man has of himself, of other people and of the world is primarily mediated through his religious or ideological symbols. But the meaning content of these symbols in his religious or ideological consciousness is historically and culturally conditioned.

To the Christians in India, this historical cultural conditioning includes the fact of other religions, ideologies operating in our society

and the process of modernisation brought about through the empirical sciences. It follows from this that Christian symbols obtain their meaningfulness for Christians today only when they can relevantly and significantly interpret the whole of their reality or "life-world" which includes other religions, ideologies and the process of modernisation. Until this is done, we cannot sincerely claim that we experience in faith the fullness of the constitutive character of the Christ-event, because the whole of our reality or life-world is not experienced in Christ (example: our Hindu or Muslim or Marxist neighbour in his totality is not yet experienced in Christ by many Christians).

V The Hermeneutical Process

The interpreter's knowledge, experience and pre-judgements affect the hermeneutical process. The interpreter finds himself in a situation of tension. On the one hand, he has to make use of his knowledge and experience. On the other hand, he cannot abstract himself entirely from the pre-judgements resulting from his experience. The tradition to which the interpreter belongs also plays a powerful role.

For instance, in the mediaeval western Church, I Cor. 9:5 was interpreted as meaning that the apostles who were married before their call by Jesus had thereafter to live with their wives as brother and sister. The eastern Churches interpreted I Tim. 3:2 as meaning that a bishop whose wife had died was not allowed to remarry.

Another example of pre-judgement is found in the fact that Muhammad was able to justify his mission as being announced by Jesus on the basis of the *paraklētos* (advocate, strengthener) of Jn. 16:7 understood as *periklutos*, i.e., "the Noble One," "the Famous One," "the Praised One" which in Arabic would be Muhammad/Ahmad.

The Christian tradition by and large has interpreted the nature of the Christ-event in salvific terms. It is possible for someone coming to it from a Saivite religious background to see that the constitutive character of the Christ-event lies in the concept of Christ as the ever-living Guru. Therefore, in this case, while the salvific character is accepted, it plays only a marginal role.

While some elements of the Christian tradition have insisted on a radical dichotomy between a Christian community and a non-Christian community, the experience of many Indian Christians may be quite different. They may experience the character of the Christ-event without necessarily feeling any radical dichotomy between their previous religious experience and community and their present position within the Christian community, after accepting Christ as Guru.

Not only is the *interpreter* influenced by these various elements; the *listener* also is influenced. Indeed, whatever is said or preached can be understood only within a certain context in a certain framework of thinking.

We find some examples of this in the New Testament itself. In the interview between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn. 3:4), Nicodemus does

not understand what it means to be born again or born from above. The Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:15) does not understand Jesus' words about the "living water" because of her thought pattern.

The interpreter may be influenced also by his personal interests as well as by those originating from his socio-economic background. This is also true for the hearer. In fact, the hearer is also an interpreter in the process of hearing and understanding.

We find an example of this in the rejection of the *Bhagavad Gītā* by some Marxists who argue that it encourages capitalism and exploitation. If people are encouraged to practise *nishkāma-karma*, they say, it is only so that somebody else may enjoy the fruit of their work.

Knowledge and skill in language are necessary, yet they may be misused. Thus, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiya Movement, could claim that Jesus did not die on the Cross but in Srinagar (Kashmir) on the basis of his etymology of this name (*Siri*=Skull; *nagar*=city; *S(i)rinagar*=Golgotha).

One more word about the Jesus-event as a category of interpretation. We understand the constitutive character of the Jesus-event in the following manner. The hermeneutical key plays a capital role and the Jesus-event is such a key. God's activity in Jesus constitutes the key to human existence. When Jesus is proclaimed as Messiah to the Jews, Jesus is proclaimed as the key to their existence. When Jesus is proclaimed as *logos* to the Greeks, Jesus is proclaimed as the key to their existence. The early Church combined both, though Messiah and *logos* had no relation to begin with.

REPORT OF GROUP III

I Scripture and its Interpretation: Function and Purpose

Scripture constitutes the written documents about the experience of Reality by a community or individual which has later become authoritative for faith and conduct of a community.

Scripture for Christians is the Bible. The whole Bible is necessary for a meaningful understanding of Christ who is the principle of selection. The whole or part becomes significant so far as it helps to evoke faith. We interpret the Scripture in order that Reality may be unfolded through Christ to human beings in their existential and historical context. The specific function of Christian hermeneutics is proclamation of the good news, edification of the faith-community and ministrations to the world so that the community may know and be what it should be in the economy of God. By this the community becomes the instrument in the salvific purpose of God.

In our hermeneutics we relate to other scriptures in order to expound God's salvific purpose in a given religious context and also to deepen our faith and widen our horizon in that religious situation.

II Interpreting Scripture in Relation to Community, Tradition and Spirit

Tradition is a living social process. It includes the first witness to the Christ-event which has been passed on by the living community itself. The positive function of tradition is to put us in living contact with the Christ-event. It gives us a framework to approach Reality. Tradition cannot be objectified, but we can subjectively analyse it because we are part of it and involved in it. Tradition can be tested by Scripture and can be accepted so far as it testifies to and is in conformity with Christ.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to empower and inspire and sometimes to act as a judge and even to divide for cleansing. The Holy Spirit is the Hermeneut of Christ. So, in the hermeneutical context the function of the Holy Spirit is Christological.

The Indian Christian hermeneut has to encounter a spiritual text from two perspectives, viz., the Christian and his complex Indian traditions. God the Holy Spirit may make the text alive and meaningful to him and the text thus becomes the *Word of God now*. The mere text does not become meaningful apart from the Holy Spirit of God, under whose inspiration and guidance the text received its form. Since the new light comes to us in a flash exactly when we need it most, we call it *inspiration* or *revelation* (the terms are non-technical). In this sense the text becomes meaningful to an Indian Christian when the two realms interact and fuse together in such a way that the hermeneut and the listener see Christ afresh under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

III The Socio-economic Context—The Cultural Religious Consciousness of the People

The socio-economic context does affect the interpretation of Reality as testified in Scripture. The proximate, that is, the immediate socio-economic situation has to be taken seriously along with the need for a structural change in society which should be able to appropriate for society the fruit of hermeneutics. Man in an oppressive structure has to understand Reality as liberation and *shalom* (salvation) in his immediate socio-economic context. But the Christian hermeneut has to recognize the relation between proximate and ultimate concerns in eschatological tension.

In the Indian context, the hermeneut has also to be aware of the religious pluralism and the secular ideologies which shape his own identity as well as the identity of the people with whom he communicates.

IV The Hermeneutic Process

The interpreter's knowledge, experience and pre-judgements are integrally related to the hermeneutic process. This is true of the listener too. The personal and communal or class interest of the interpreter and the listeners colour any hermeneutical process.

Interpretations may vary, but their validity can be judged on the basis of the following tests :

- (a) their faithfulness to Tradition;
- (b) their immediate relevance to the proximate concerns of man;
- (c) their ultimate concern for the salvation of the world.

REPORT OF GROUP IV

I Scripture and its Interpretation: Function and Purpose

A. *What is Christian Scripture?*

The Scriptures are those books in which the Church recognizes the distinctive inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These books are collected together in the Bible and we recognize them as authoritative. We realize however that certain portions of the Bible are used in our Christian Community more often than others. The judgement which determines this frequency of use is based upon the importance of the passage in relation to the Christ-event and the needs of the community.

B. *What is the Function of Scripture?*

Scripture serves a communal function. It is used to build up the Church, to proclaim the good news of Christ and to assist the community of faith in its task of living and ministering. Scripture is of value also to the individual. It builds up the Church and gives a person spiritual nourishment, guidance in loving his neighbour and an understanding of the love of God particularly in the Christ-event. It gives us knowledge and assurance of personal salvation. It relates our experience to the work of God in the world. Scripture seeks to involve both the individual and the community in working to establish justice and *shalom* for the needy in the world. We interpret Scripture, and reality in the light of Scripture. This hermeneutical task should be done not only through verbal means but also through the fine arts, liturgy, and the witness of the way we live.

C. *How and Why Do We as Christians Relate to the Scriptures of Other Religions?*

We must relate to the Scriptures of other religions because they are a part of the context in which the task of Indian hermeneutic takes place. We should become familiar with them and what they mean and how they are interpreted by the members of their own religious community. To love our neighbours in Christ is first to understand them as well as we can, including these scriptures which are the inspiration of their life. We must also open our eyes to the revelation of God through other means than those of our own Scriptures.

II Interpreting Scripture in Relation to the Holy Spirit, the Christian Community and Tradition

A. *The Holy Spirit*

We often hear the injunction that the Holy Spirit should be our guide in interpreting Scripture. Unfortunately what this means is

seldom spelled out. Our discussion has brought us to the conclusion that there is no one way that the Holy Spirit helps in interpreting Scripture; it helps in various different ways. Some examples of the aid of the Holy Spirit are the following: a religiously mystical experience or revelation, the sudden discovery of an idea in one's mind which we call "intuition" or inspiration, through the skills of intellect that God has granted us, through the traditions of the Church, through the words of great Christians of the past and through the contemporary Church and scholars at work in biblical studies today. We can also find the light of the Holy Spirit by comparing the passage we are interpreting with other biblical passages that concern the same subject-matter as our text. The needs of the world such as economic exploitation, poverty and social injustice can also be the directing power of the Holy Spirit in interpreting Scripture. Finally, and perhaps most important, the Holy Spirit can help us in our hermeneutical task through the Person of Christ to whom the Spirit witnesses.

B. *Tradition of the Church and Interpreting Scripture*

As we look at our various Church traditions, we are aware that we have differences in outlook about some matters. Yet there are certain basic beliefs which all Christians hold to, such as our belief in God, in the event of Christ, and in various statements of faith found in the historic creeds of the Church, the power of prayer, the confidence that we have the guidance of God in the Scriptures. We call those principles agreed upon by the universal Church "Universal Traditions." No interpretation of the Scripture can be held as correct which is contrary to these "Universal Traditions." There are other practices or Church traditions which are held by one section of the universal church, such as the celibacy of the clergy, the number of sacraments, the ritual of a given communion, or particular theories of atonement or about the Bible. We call these traditions of the individual denominations "local traditions." These cannot be contrary to the "Universal Traditions" of the Church. These "local traditions" are often used by the denominations that hold them in the interpreting of Scripture for the people within that denomination. Such local traditions have come from the councils, conferences, founders and leaders of the Church that holds them.

C. *The Community of Faith and Interpreting Scriptures*

The Community of Faith has the task not only of preserving the Christian traditions, including Scripture, but also of proclaiming these traditions and Scripture, both to itself and to the world-wide community around it. The Community of Faith collectively can share in the interpretation of Scripture. Sometimes the Community can confirm the work of an individual hermeneut. At other times the Community can act as a corrective to the individual hermeneut if it feels that the latter has departed from the "Universal Tradition" of the Church. In a more active way the Community of Faith can give witness to the

power of the Holy Spirit and so make the Gospel more credible in the contemporary context.

III The Indian Socio-economic Context and Interpreting the Scriptures

As we look at the poverty, exploitation, corruption and injustice in the Indian socio-economic situation, it reminds us that the proclamation of the Gospel is still needed as the Kingdom of God certainly has not come on earth. There are various ways in which such a situation can affect people when they hear the Gospel. To some, it shows God's concern for the exploited and can lead them to revolution as in liberation theology. Others may find comfort in the eschatological messages of the Gospel and so continue to live in oppression, harbouring the comfort that they will be liberated after the Judgement of God, because their faith overcomes their suffering in this life.

The socio-economic situation in India helps us determine where we start with the hermeneutical task. It can direct us to a starting-point such as the concern for social justice in the Old Testament prophets and the teachings of Jesus; to a passage such as Luke 4:18 where Jesus quotes from Isaiah that he is to preach to the poor, heal the broken-hearted and deliver the captives; or to a passage such as James 2:5 where it speaks of God choosing the poor to be heirs of the Kingdom.

The socio-economic situation gives us the hermeneutical task of challenging those in places of economic privilege and exploitation to follow the biblical teaching of loving one's neighbour.

IV The Cultural-Religious Consciousness of the People

A. The Effects of Cultural-Religious Consciousness on Indian People

We must be aware how much the Indian cultural consciousness affects our own mind and how it also affects the thought processes of those to whom we address ourselves. Yet we must also beware that in seeking to rediscover our roots in Indian culture we do not create a syncretistic faith by compromising the "Universal Tradition" of Christianity. We need to keep in mind that, to some in India, Christianity is an outside religion which seeks to eliminate the sense of being Indian. But Christianity is an Asian religion and has an ancient tradition in our country itself. We can look to the approach to religious pluralism in the Bible as our guide in our own pluralistic religious situation and discover in the Bible how to deal with it without losing the particularity of the Christian Faith.

In our way of life often there is little difference between the Indian Christian and his neighbour, but when we go to worship many differences become apparent. Nevertheless some of the practices or religiousness of our neighbours also are similar to ours, for example, that it is expected of a "religious person" both to appear different and to live more closely in accordance with the tenets of his religion than the "ordinary man."

B. *The Effect of Secular Civilization*

Secular civilization has not affected all of us in the same way. For some it has caused loss of interest in religion as they become caught up in materialistic world views and secular ideologies. On the other hand it has made others take a greater interest in the world, to see its condition of oppression and injustice and to increase their social concern. In this era with the increasing influence of modern science it is no longer easy to hold the "simple faith" of former times. This lays upon us the necessity of seeing that our religious leaders in their training are equipped to meet the more complex needs of today's society. Secularism has increased the interest of some members of the Christian Community in political reality and processes. There is also the tendency and temptation to use the same methods in Church politics as in secular politics, to the detriment of the Church. There are experiences in some parts of our country where secular political rivalries have caused disagreement and tensions among people in the same congregation. In such a situation, the pastor needs skill and concern to promote open communication and to foster love in the Church and community, without imposing any one political view on the parish.

V **The Interpreter and the Listener in the Hermeneutical Process**

Anyone involved in interpretation begins with his own prejudices. We must take care that we do not distort the Gospel by our prejudices or our preferred way of living. We, as hermeneuts, interpret utilizing our own experience and knowledge, and should be conscious of our own limitations of experience and perspective.

Our institutions of theological training need to work to improve the hermeneutical skills of our interpreters of the Gospel. We need to be familiar with the source languages of the Bible, to acquire the other skills and tools of exegesis as well as master the techniques of communication. In the Indian religious communities there is a tradition that the community religious leaders are familiar with the language of their scriptures, for example, Sanskrit, Arabic, Gurmukhi. We would be in line with this Indian tradition if our hermeneuts also know the language of their Scriptures. A better ability to interpret the contents of Scriptures can be gained with a knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

On the other side of the communication process, that is, of those who listen, the hermeneut needs to familiarise himself with the language of his listeners and acquire skill in expressing himself in terms and categories that make sense to his community. Skills in non-verbal communication methods such as art, music, symbols and drama can aid in the hermeneutical task.

We need to be familiar with the listener, his knowledge, experience and prejudice, so that we can communicate with him in an appropriate way. This knowledge can help us in the community of our listeners

to seek together the guidance of the Holy Spirit in directing our lives in the ways of Christ.

REPORT OF GROUP V

I What is Scripture?

(a) What constitutes "Scripture"?

(i) The faith of a religious community accepts a body of writings as Scripture because it mediates the revelation of Reality, and provides meaning for existence; hence it has authority for that community.

(ii) The Bible is the *Christian Scripture* because it is the original response and witness to the *Christ-event* which constitutes the faith-community through the centuries.

(b) What is the function of Scripture?

Scripture enables

- active remembrance of the constitutive events of God's saving and sustaining relation to the whole of creation, in Christ.
- present participation in God's continuing acts,
- and vital *witness* through proclamation and praxis.

(c) Scriptures of other Religions

Scriptures of other religions in India are an integral part of the Indian reality in which we participate and they also partly constitute our heritage as Indian Christians. For Christians in India, therefore, they are related to the Bible in a single continuum, though certainly not without certain radical discontinuities.

II What is Interpretation?

(a) Because of the inexhaustible nature of the Reality and the historicity of the community, interpretation is necessarily an ongoing process.

(b) In every creative interpretation, either *a new meaning* is mediated, or an anterior meaning is qualitatively enriched, and made to come alive in and for a particular situation.

(c) Insofar as the scriptural (written) *text* mediates the revelation of Reality, the scriptural (written) text must be taken seriously. Textual exegesis is, therefore, a necessary step in the process of interpretation.

(d) The possibility of arriving at *the original meaning* of the text as the author intended is recognized as problematic; while some members of the group felt that one could never be sure about it, others felt that it is not a total impossibility, and the exercise remains worthwhile and fruitful. The contribution of the community's own effective horizon to the understanding process and content should not be mini-

mised. Nor should we exaggerate the subjective element in all interpretation.

(e) In the process of interpretation, the interpreter plays a central role. He does so, being rooted in the *community of faith*, in the wider *religio-cultural* context, and in the socio-economic political situation as well as his own existential background, history and training. His interpretation arises out of, and addresses the very same contexts.

III What is the Goal of Interpretation?

(a) The General Goal of Interpretation is the transformation of the above three contexts, in the light of our understanding of Reality.

(b) In specific terms, we affirm that our interpretation must result in transforming action in concrete historical situations, for example, in the structures of poverty and exploitation in India today. Such action must in turn enable new interpretations of the text.