

# **1. THE PROBLEM WITH BIBLICAL MISINTERPRETATION**

The Bible is not to be interpreted literally

The most important truth of Catholic faith is our belief in the incarnation of the Son of God. We believe that he is fully God and fully Man. He is the way, the truth, and the life: in him we have the fullest and complete revelation of God. All the four Gospels testify that Jesus is the foundation and centre of our belief in God. This primary truth is shared by all Christians whatever their denominational affiliation may be. The second most important truth of the Catholic faith is our belonging to the Catholic Church. We believe that the Catholic Church is the believing community with the privileged vocation and mission to share and transmit the revelation of Jesus for the world.

## **The Essence of Catholicity**

Some questions we ask about the Bible and Christian practices and the answers we give may be debated among Christians but they should not hinder us from clinging to our faith in Jesus and living our communion with the Catholic Church. These are the essential aspects of our faith. Other issues are just a manner of trying to understand this faith. In fact, focusing on Jesus and his Gospel as the central figure of our faith will enable us to clarify many questions that seem to obscure our faith.

A major problem of perplexity in Christianity is the incomprehensiveness of many Old Testament texts. The

theology of an angry and punishing God and the elitist morality are parts of the Old Testament writings that are incompatible with the teachings of the Gospel of Christ. Yet, many Christians are hesitant to renounce these Old Testament views because they are supposed to be the inspiration of God. We fail to distinguish between the acts of writing that are inspired and the contents of the writing, which are grounded on man's experiences and knowledge. That is, God inspired Old Testament people to write about their faith experiences, and what they had written reflect the authenticity of their faith as well as the inadequacy of their understanding of God, man and the world.

## **Two Major Misconceptions**

There are two major misconceptions with regards to Biblical inerrancy. Firstly, the belief that everything the Bible says cannot be wrong, and secondly, the belief that everything the Bible writes must be understood and accepted literally.

With regards to the first point, when some Christians realise that certain passages of the Old Testament contradict our moral sense, they try to justify and explain them away, often in ways that they themselves find unsatisfactory. For example, the Levitical laws mention stoning to death as a punishment. They claim that these laws express how intensely God hates sin, such as the sin of adultery, and therefore the punishment mete out is justifiable. When we read John 8:1-11 and examine how Christ dealt with this problem when a woman caught in adultery was brought before him, we immediately realise that the above-mentioned justification is totally misguided.

We should honestly and immediately admit that the Old Testament prescription of stoning a person who committed adultery is wrong. Ancient Israelites perceived that law to be right, but Jesus' teaching clearly shows it to be wrong.

Regarding the second point about the literal interpretation of the Bible, we may take for example, the accounts of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. Some people wonder how true it is that Eve was created out of Adam's rib, whether the snake spoke to Eve, and after that, whether God really walked in the Garden crying, "Where are you?" They sense that these descriptions are fictitious and yet, they are afraid to admit it. The fact is the entire account of Adam and Eve is told in figurative language, and the detailed features of the story are not intended to be taken literally. It is a literary genre, where the detailed narrations are manners of conveying the truth, and the lessons to be drawn from them are the actual messages of truth.

Accepting the irrelevancy of certain Old Testament texts to Christianity has no negative impact on our faith in Jesus and our communion with the Church. We should have the courage to discuss, debate, and clarify these questionable texts. Our discussion is not detrimental. Rather, it enhances our belief in the fullest revelation of God in Christ, and our belonging to the believing community of Christ.