

The Use of the Bible in Indian Christian Theology*

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Until the coming of Ziegenbalg to Tranquebar in 1706, there was no very strong tradition of Scriptural teaching in the Indian Church. To be sure the Syrian Church had the Bible—in the ancient Syriac Peshitta version which goes back to the very early days of the Christian Church.¹ Yet, the Scriptures remained a closed book for the ordinary believer—a book written in a language which he could not understand. The same was true of the Roman Catholic missions, from the time of the Dominican martyrs of Thana in 1321, through the Jesuit mission of Francis Xavier in 1542, and indeed right on until our own day, when things have suddenly begun to change with breath-taking speed.

One of the most important results of the 16th Century Reformation in Europe was the gift of the Scriptures to the laity—in their own language, and, thanks to the invention of printing, at a price and in a quantity which made it possible for every Christian to have access to the Bible for his own personal study. The great Reformation confessions of faith gave primary place to the doctrine of Scripture. The *Westminster Confession* of 1647, for example, begins with a Chapter on the Holy Scriptures, and only after this norm or *pramāna* has been established does it go on to deal with the doctrines of God and the Trinity. The Reformation fathers were convinced that the Bible is the key to our understanding of the Christian faith; the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, was for them the *only* rule to direct us in glorifying God and enjoying Him. They had seen all too clearly the corruption which overtakes a Church which neglects the Scriptures, and they were determined that in future such errors should be banished.

This assumption—and it is indeed a fundamental assumption for the Christian faith at all times and in all places—was inherited by the Lutheran missionaries who came to Tranquebar in 1706, and by William Carey who reached Bengal in 1792. And the logical consequence was that the first task which the missionaries set themselves, as soon as they had begun to understand the language, was the translation of the Bible. By 1711, Ziegenbalg had completed the translation of the New Testament into Tamil. Carey, within a few years of his arrival at

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¹ C. P. Mathew and M. M. Thomas, *The Indian Churches of St Thomas*, I.S.P.C.K., 1967, p. 45.

Serampore, had set up a large establishment for Bible translation, and was directly concerned with translation into more than thirty languages. And the evangelistic effort which accompanied this translation work was largely devoted to placing Scripture portions in the hands of the people and helping them to understand what they read, as Philip had helped the Ethiopian eunuch in the first recorded instance of literature-evangelism. This work was powerfully helped forward by the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, and by the subsequent setting up of auxiliaries in India.

Ram Mohan Roy (c. 1772-1833)

When Ram Mohan Roy first became interested in Christianity, it was with men of the calibre of Carey and Marshman that he entered into dialogue—men who were convinced of the divine inspiration of the Bible and of its primacy as the norm for all Christian belief and practice. And Ram Mohan Roy responded by making a deep and detailed study of the Bible, learning Greek and Hebrew in order to fit himself for the task. His studies and friendships, however, brought him at the same time into contact with Western Unitarianism (or Arianism as it was then usually called) and his view of the Scriptures tends to be strongly influenced in an Arian direction. In other words, he is very selective in his use of Scripture; and in the compilation of his book *The Precepts of Jesus* (1820), for example, he turns to the synoptic record of Jesus' teaching, but deliberately ignores the fourth Gospel with its high Christology. While later Indian theologians, under the influence of the *bhakti* tradition, have often found in St John their favourite Gospel, Ram Mohan Roy with his modern, sceptical and rationalistic outlook preferred the less speculative and more practical atmosphere of the Synoptics. Great social reformer that he was, he was interested in the Bible primarily as a handbook of ethics: 'I have found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles and more adapted for the use of rational beings than any other which have come to my knowledge'.² In this attitude we see the beginning of a tradition which still continues among many Hindu admirers of Christ, its most famous exponent being Mahatma Gandhi, in whose spiritual pilgrimage the Sermon on the Mount played such an important part.³

It is always dangerous to select one particular part of the Bible as our infallible guide—whether we be rationalistic moralists, like Ram Mohan Roy, or eschatological fundamentalists whose major concern is with the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Marshman and the other Serampore missionaries, no doubt, showed too little sympathy with Ram Mohan Roy in his quest for truth, yet surely they were right in insisting that selections from the Scriptures—like those of the *Precepts*—should not be taken as 'a substitute for the whole'.⁴ The Christian faith requires of us a deep and balanced study of the *whole* Bible.

² Quoted in C. F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India*, London, 1912, p. 110.

³ M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Madras, 1970, p. 204.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 7.

Nehemiah Goreh (1825-1895)

In Nehemiah Goreh, we find an Indian exponent of the point of view represented by Marshman and challenged by Ram Mohan Roy. Before his conversion, Goreh had been a Hindu *Shastri*, and his deep love for and knowledge of Scripture was carried over to his new faith. A trained scholar in the Biblical criticism of his day, he has nevertheless no sympathy for Ram Mohan Roy's scepticism, and in his many publications addressed to the members of the Brahma Samaj—who were his favourite partners in dialogue—he continually refutes the rationalistic standpoint. He makes a detailed critical examination of the Gospels—both canonical and apocryphal—and comes to the conclusion that the canonical New Testament documents are reliable, and so prove beyond dispute the verity of the miracles and resurrection of Christ. His examination of the credentials of Scripture thus leads him on to a full statement of orthodox Christian doctrine.

Goreh the Christian awards to the Bible the place given in Hinduism to the Vedas, that is as the 'unquestionable authority'⁵, the divine *śruti* given by God, while he compares the works of the Fathers of the Church to the *smṛiti*. The Bible, he holds, is divinely inspired, authentic and reliable in all its parts, and, unlike Ram Mohan Roy, he pays special attention to the Old Testament, seeing many of its characters and events as 'types' of the New Covenant, and giving great weight—after the fashion of his time—to the importance of the Old Testament prophecies as 'evidences' of the divine origin and truth of the Christian faith. He has a high doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible:

'I allow that these men have used their reason, their peculiarity of style etc., yet the Spirit of God so overruled and used their reason and all their individual peculiarities, as to accomplish his own purposes through them'.⁶

In his interpretation of Scriptural passages Goreh always goes straight to the clear and unambiguous sense of the words, and seeks to avoid allegorical interpretations. His general attitude to the Bible was, no doubt, closely related to that of his Anglo-Catholic friends, and we see little attempt in his writing to introduce specifically Indian methods of interpretation.

Krishna Mohan Banerjea (1813-1885)

In the '60s and '70s of the nineteenth century there emerged an interesting school of thought which saw in Christianity the fulfilment of the 'types' and prophecies of Hinduism. This attempt should be clearly distinguished from the later 'Crown of Hinduism' approach of J. N. Farquhar. These earlier writers saw in Christianity the clear and unambiguous fulfilment of *specific* Hindu prophecies and longings, and so the *shastras* of the different sects and traditions are seen as a clear *praeparatio evangelii*, almost indeed as an Indian Old Testament,

⁵ Nehemiah Goreh, *Rational Refutation of Hinduism*, Calcutta, 1862, p. 42.

⁶ Goreh, *Letter to the Brahmos*, (1879), p. 77.

preparing the hearts of the people of India for Christ. A few missionaries⁷ noticed these strangely relevant Hindu prophecies, and drew attention to them, but on the whole the approach did not commend itself to missionary theologians at the time, and it was worked out by Indian thinkers. This was the period when Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, founder of the Arya Samaj, was proclaiming his teaching that the true religion of India is to be found only in the Vedas, and not in any of the later traditions. Christians, however, rightly questioned Dayananda's interpretation of the Vedas, and a number of Christian thinkers began to claim that the pure Vedic religion is, in fact, closer to Christianity than to any of the Hindu traditions. In the different languages of India, we find that at this period pamphlets were published describing 'the true Vedic religion', and showing how in Christ alone the prophecies of the Vedas are fulfilled.⁸ One may note also the interesting adoption by certain Christian families of the surname 'Satvedi', in pointed contrast to the Hindu names Trivedi, Chaturvedi etc., and demonstrating its possessor's belief that the Christian Scriptures are the true Veda.

Over the years, there were many attempts to relate the Hindu and Christian Scriptures in this way, and the attempt was not limited to the Vedas, for the sacred writings of a variety of traditions and sects were similarly interpreted. One might mention, for example, the book *Sources of the Kabir Religion* by Vahalji Bechar of Gujarat (1881), in which he reasons that 'Kabir Saheb' is none other than Christ.⁹ The *bhajans* of the *Nakalank Avatar* sect in Gujarat were analysed to demonstrate how their prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ,¹⁰ and the literature of the *Lingayats* of Mysore has been similarly examined.¹¹ No doubt, examples could be multiplied from other areas, and a similar approach has often been used towards the literature of Islam.

The most interesting exponent of this method of relating the Scriptures of Hinduism and Christianity was, however, Krishna Mohan Banerjea of Bengal. In 1875, after his retirement from a hitherto conventional career as a teacher of theology, he published a book entitled *The Aryan Witness*,¹² whose purpose was to show the striking parallels between the Old Testament, especially Genesis, and the Vedas. He wished to demonstrate that Christianity was more or less identical with the pure and undiluted original form of Hinduism which, like Dayananda, he found in the Vedas. He writes:

⁷ e.g., J. V. S. Taylor (1820-1881) in Gujarat.

⁸ e.g. *The Way of the Vedic Religion*, published in Gujarati in 1863.

⁹ K. Baago, *A Bibliography* (Lib. of Indian Christian Theology) Madras, 1969, p. 14.

¹⁰ R. H. S. Boyd, *Indian Journal of Theology*, (1963), p. 94.

¹¹ N. C. Sargant, *The Lingayats* (C.I.S.R.S., 1963), pp. 22 ff.

¹² K. Baago, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Banerjea's 'Aryan' witness (sometimes also spelt 'Arian') should not be confused with the Arianism of Ram Mohan Roy and his friends, which was a reversion to the fourth century heresy of Arius'.

'The fundamental principles of the Gospel were recognised, and acknowledged by . . . the Brahminical Aryans of India, and if the authors of the Vedas could by any possibility return to the world, they would at once recognise the Indian Christians . . . as their own descendants'.¹³

Banerjea draws parallels between Biblical and Vedic accounts of the creations, the fall, the deluge etc., mentioning the story of King Nahusda (Yudhisthira) in the 'serpent-section' of the *Mahabharata*, and the story of the flood in the *Satpatha Brahmana*, where he holds that the names Manu and Noah have the same root. More important than these Old Testament parallels is his comparison of the Vedic sacrifice of *Prajapati* with the death of Christ. The Lord of creatures is the sacrifice, but also the victim. Here, Banerjea feels, the Vedas come closer in atmosphere to Christianity than does even the Old Testament:

'The Vedic writers say distinctly that the Lord of Creation, himself a Purusha begotten in the beginning, offered himself a sacrifice for the Devas. . . . They add that the same Lord of Creation was "half mortal, half immortal". This is still nearer an approach to the ideal of our *Immanuel*'.¹⁴

Banerjea's conclusion is that 'the Vedas confirm and illustrate Scripture traditions and Scripture facts. . . . Christianity fills up the vacuum . . . in the Vedic account of the sacrifice, by exhibiting the true *Prajapati*—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world'.¹⁵

Exegeses like those of Banerjea and Vahaji Bechar carry little conviction for us today. We should remember, however, that in their period the 'argument from prophesy' was still one of the major forms of Christian apologetic even in the West. In addition, Christian apologists in India were anxious to hold a fruitful 'dialogue' (though they would not have used the word) with the many different traditions of Hinduism which were then very lively forces, such as the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Kabir Panth etc. Nor should we forget the undoubted fact that in at least some important cases the apologetic was successful and that Hindus did indeed come to the feet of Christ by way of a pilgrimage through the Brahma Samaj or the Kabir Panth.

Sri Parananda's Commentaries

In 1898, there was published in England a full-scale commentary on St Matthew's Gospel by a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Parananda. This was followed in 1902 by an exposition of the Fourth Gospel, in which the writer makes John out to be a Hindu following the *Sava Siddhanta* doctrine.¹⁶ These books are worth studying, as an illustration of the attempt to give a thorough-going Hindu inter-

¹³ K. Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, (C.I.S.R.S., 1969), p. 14.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ A. J. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bhakti Marga*, p. 18.

pretation of the Bible, as distinct from the numerous Christian attempts to give an 'Indian' interpretation.

Parananda's method is to force the text into conformity with the *advaita* mould of Vivekananda's teaching, or, if this is not possible, to declare the text unsound. Jesus is seen as a great Teacher of Wisdom, who in turn has received his wisdom from some unnamed Indian guru. By means of his teaching of wisdom, and his demonstration of the practice of *yoga*, Jesus is able to lead his disciples towards that union with God where all particularity is left behind. We have space here for only one example of his exegesis, dealing with Matthew 27:50—'Jesus yielded up his Spirit':

'In the practice of *yoga* (spiritual communion) speech and breath are suspended, but such loss of animation is not death, for we resume animation after a time. . . . Jesus himself explicitly declared the truth: "I have power to lay my life (*psyche*) down, and I have power to take it again" (10:18), having learnt this art of arts from his Teacher, who came in the name of God. Therefore, a more correct record would have been that "Jesus when he had cried with a loud voice *seemed* to die".'¹⁷

The work of Parananda is an indication of how important it is to determine the permissible methods of Scriptural exegesis, for there is a definite tendency among Indian theologians—and have they not Origen as an example?—to use allegorical or 'moral' methods of interpretation rather than seeking first the obvious literal meaning of the text. Here, Goreh's insistence on using the natural and literal interpretation is surely of great importance.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907)

A word must be said here about Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, for he was undoubtedly one of the most brilliant and original thinkers who have taken part in the evolution of Indian Christian theology. He was, however, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and that at a time when that Church did not encourage—as it does today—the study of the Scriptures by the laity. There is, therefore, no doubt a good deal of truth in the comment of a modern Roman Catholic scholar on the relative meagreness of the Roman contribution to Indian Christian theology: 'It may be due to the relative lack of familiarity with the Biblical Word of God resulting from an overstress on the Sacraments, and, perhaps, to the rigid enforcement of the use of Latin in the teaching of theology till a few years ago'.¹⁸ Brahmabandhab's theology, magnificent as it is, was not in fact a grappling with the Word of God as Goreh's was; Sankara and St Thomas fill the picture, and he has little to say about the Christian Scriptures, which for him, as for most Roman Catholics of his time, were marginal rather than central.

¹⁷ Sri Parananda, *The Gospel of Jesus according to St Matthew*, London, 1898, *ad. loc.*

¹⁸ G. Gispert-Sauch in *Clergy Monthly*, Dec. 1969, p. 548.

Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929)

It was otherwise with Sundar Singh. As a boy, he had burnt the Bible, and all his life the memory of the incident haunted him. On his many travels, the only book he carried with him was the New Testament. Yet this was no Bibliolatry: the Bible was vital to him because of the witness it bears to Christ:

'It is not because I read the Gospel that I know Christ, but because he revealed Himself to me. . . . God's Word is only a hand stretched out to point the way to the Lord who is the Truth and the Life'.¹⁹

The basis of Sundar Singh's theology was his direct experience of Jesus Christ—an experience constantly repeated in mystical trances when he found communion with God in Christ, and enjoyed visions of the spiritual world. Yet, it is remarkable that these mystical experiences are invariably consonant with Biblical teaching. The Sadhu was so much steeped in the Bible that even his ecstatic experiences did not yield ideas or visions which could not be reconciled with the witness of Scriptures. 'He never loses himself in that barren meditation and self-absorption practised by so many holy Brahmans and Buddhists. . . . He begins every season of prayer with meditation on a passage of Scripture'.²⁰ In the words of Streeter and Appasamy, 'his teaching is the spontaneous expression of prolonged meditation on the New Testament by a man whose own personality has attained to inward unity'.²¹ His mind was well stocked with stories from the Hindu scriptures. The beauty of nature fascinated him, and provided him with many of his illustrations and parables. Yet, these parables always illustrated the central teaching of the Bible, for, as he said, 'the message of the Bible is simple, direct and straightforward, whereas the message of the Book of Nature has to be spelt out carefully letter by letter'.²²

Sundar Singh had himself come to Christ through a direct vision. But he realises that for most people the Bible is the primary means of God's self-revelation:

'God reveals Himself ever more and more through His Holy Word to all who seek Him with their whole heart. . . . Thanks to the Word of God, thousands have had the same experience as I have had, and have become united with their Lord and Saviour'.²³

Sundar Singh gives some interesting and characteristic illustrations of the nature of Biblical inspiration, and, in truly orthodox fashion, cites the analogy of the divine and human natures in Christ. He writes:

¹⁹ F. Heiler, *Gospel of Sundar Singh*, London, 1927, p. 194 f.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 103.

²¹ Streeter and Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, London, 1921, p. 53.

²² *ibid.*, p. 193.

²³ Heiler, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

'The Holy Spirit is the true author of the Holy Scriptures; I do not mean by that that every Hebrew or Greek word is of divine inspiration. Just as my clothes are not *me*, so the words of the Scriptures are only human words. . . . Christ Himself says: "Just as I clothed myself in human form in order to redeem the human race, so my Word, which is Spirit and Life, is written in human language" that is, it unites divinely inspired and human elements'.²⁴

From his own experience of communication with God during his 'ecstasies' he gives a very interesting analogy of the way in which he believes that the Bible was written by ordinary men under the inspiration of the Spirit. He writes:

'When I am in ecstasy and speak to the Angels and Saints, it is not in the language of this world, but in a spiritual language without words which seems to come quite naturally. Before I utter a word or move my lips the meaning is out; and this is the same language in which truth was communicated to the authors of Scriptures. Afterwards, they tried to find words to express what had been revealed to them. But often they may have failed to get just the right word, but the meaning they are trying to express is inspired'.^{25]}

As the Holy Spirit is the Inspirer of Scripture, so the help of the Spirit is needed for its correct understanding:

'The language of the Word of God is spiritual; only he who is born of the Spirit can rightly and completely understand it, whether he is a scholar or a child'.²⁶

The background and content of many of Sundar Singh's visions was provided by the Bible. We must not imagine, however, that he put his visionary experiences, his direct ecstatic intuition or *pratyakṣa* on the same plane as the Bible, in the way in which earlier Keshub Chunder Sen had given free play to his '*adesh*'. We may quote the testimony of his friend, translator and biographer, Bishop Appasamy, who says that he 'made it quite clear that even his *pratyakṣa* had to give way to the Bible. He only accepted it if it was in harmony with the Bible'.²⁷ For Sundar Singh, as for Appasamy himself, the Bible is the primary and decisive *pramāna*.

Like so many in India the Sadhu had a special preference for St John's Gospel, but this does not seem to have been caused by any special philosophical affinity. The reason is more simple: 'St John seems to me to have loved Christ more than the other Apostles'.²⁸

In brief, then, we may say that Sundar Singh's whole Christian experience is filled with Biblical content. The way in which that

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 198.

²⁵ Streeter and Appasamy, *op. cit.*, p. 198. Many members of the modern Charismatic movement would bear witness to similar experiences.

²⁶ Heiler, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

²⁷ In a letter to the present writer, 11-3-1966.

²⁸ Heiler, *op. cit.*, p. 200.]

experience was expressed was influenced by the background of *bhakti* passed on to him by his mother, and also by his own study of the Gita and Upanishads, as well as by the evangelical theology of many of his western friends. Yet, his teaching is firmly based on the Bible, and he never attempts to build a speculative theology. His 'Indian-ness' is mainly in his method of expression rather than in the content of the faith he expresses.

P. Chenchiah (1886-1959)

With Chenchiah, we find a return to the selective use of the Scriptures which characterised Ram Mohan Roy. His interest, however, extends beyond the Gospels to the Pauline epistles, where he finds, especially in 2 Cor. 5:17—'if any man is in Christ there is a new creation'—the basis of his 'New Creation' theology. He is less than enthusiastic about the Old Testament, and his views can with some truth be classified as Marcionite. Indeed, he quotes Marcion with approval:

'As for Jehovah and the father of Jesus, it requires some audacity not to agree with Marcion that they have not even the remotest resemblance to each other'.²⁹

Briefly, Chenchiah's view is that the Old Testament is far inferior to the New, and in the last resort is scarcely necessary for an understanding of the Christian faith, and definitely unnecessary for salvation. He pays tribute to the ethical teaching of the Old Testament, especially the prophets and some of the psalms. But his verdict is:

'What is there in the teachings and acts of Jesus which a Roman or Greek could not understand? Why should it be necessary to understand the Old Testament to grasp the Sermon on the Mount? . . . Why should a Hindu understand the complicated Pauline theology to follow Jesus?'³⁰

The Old Testament, he says, does not in the least help our understanding of the Incarnation, which can, in fact, only be grasped through Greek or Hindu thought-forms, as it is a conception totally alien to Jewish thought, as it is also to Islam. He believes that the decision of the Council of Jerusalem against circumcision for Gentile converts implies that Paul felt that the whole Old Testament was unnecessary for Christians who came from a non-Jewish background.

'The Law for the Gentile was not Mosaic Law, but a law written in their hearts. The point of the whole controversy between St Paul and St Peter was whether a Christian need be a Jew in faith in order to be a Christian. The early Church joined St Paul in saying 'no' emphatically'.³¹

This leads Chenchiah on to ask why the Hindu Scriptures should not be regarded as God's chosen *praeparatio evangelii* for the people of India:

²⁹ *Guardian*, 20-2-47.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

'Why in the name of reason and good sense should not God's dealings with my race be my Old Testament even as God's dealing with the Jew was the Old Testament of the Jewish Christian?'⁸²

He argues that the prophetic references to Jesus given by Matthew and others were selected after the event, and claims that similar prophecies of the coming of Christ could be found from the Hindu Scriptures (as men like K. M. Banerjea and Vahaji Bechar had suggested fifty years earlier). He writes, 'I can pick up material for an Old Testament in Hinduism making selections in the light of what Jesus said and did. That was exactly what early Christians did and later Hindu converts ought to do'.⁸³

It cannot be denied that Chenchiah's Biblical scholarship and critical sense were not comparable to his theological insight. To give only two examples of his limitations, he expounds a rather futile idea that Indian translations of the New Testament should try to go back beyond the Greek to the Aramaic original of Jesus' words.⁸⁴ Again, he makes the rather strange statement that 'apart from the Sermon on the Mount and a few sayings of the Lord, we cannot get any guidance for our social, economic and political problems from reading the Bible'.⁸⁵ This shows an inadequate understanding of the Old Testament, especially of the prophetic books, and Chenchiah is definitely open to the criticism that his use of the Bible is highly selective, and that he does not attempt to understand the underlying unity of the whole. At the same time we must remember the original and forceful interpretation he gave to what he regarded as the core of Paul's teaching—the fact of faith-union with Christ, issuing in a new humanity and a new world. His interpretation of Paul is no doubt influenced by his own interest in Sri Aurobindo, in Bergson, and in his own guru, 'Master CVV' of Kumbakonam. His use of the Bible here links him definitely with the 'Eastern' tradition of the Church, with its interest in creation, in the doctrine of the Person of Christ, in the Trinity and in the Holy Spirit, while the western, Augustinian, atonement-centred type of Biblical exegesis has little appeal for him.

'The theological structure which makes Resurrection the corner-stone (as Indian theology proposes to do), must differ vastly in structure and pattern from Roman theology which makes the Cross central even though both systems may use both terms but with different co-efficients, for different ends'.⁸⁶

Chenchiah's theology is often characterised by the term 'new creation'. Jesus, he writes, is 'the latest revolution in the creative process... He is *adi-purusha* of a new creation'⁸⁷. This insight is of

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Guardian*, 27-2-47.

⁸⁵ *Rethinking Christianity* (1938), p. 175.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Quoted in *N.C.C. Review*, (1943), p. 363.

course dependent on 2 Cor. 5:17, and it is perhaps typical of Chenchiah that he seizes a key-phrase from the Bible, gives it a new and perhaps somewhat strained interpretation, and makes this concept—here the Greek word *ktisis*—into an organising principle for his theology. Whether it is, in fact, admissible to use the word *ktisis* of Christ—as opposed to man—is a debatable question.

Another text which is important for Chenchiah's idea of new creation through union with Christ is Matt. 28:20, 'Lo, I am with you always'. His Christology lays great stress on the humanity—the still continuing humanity—of Christ. God became man in Christ, and still continues his work *as man*. "'Lo, I am with you always" does not mean the aid of God from heaven but an installation of God on earth'.³⁸ Here, we find an interpretation of this text very different from that given by the Hindu reformers, or even by Appasamy. Chenchiah is convinced that there can be no union with God which short-circuits Christ, the 'God man'. He rejects what he feels to be a Semitic transcendence in favour of his own kind of 'Aryan' immanence, and in so doing comes rather close to some recent western understandings of Christ as 'the man for others'.

Chenchiah never shrinks from admitting that he sits lightly to the traditional Protestant doctrine of Scripture. He is eager to accept the findings of the more radical Biblical critics when they chime in with his own theological views, for example, on the sacraments. 'It may be doubted', he writes, 'whether Jesus instituted any sacraments or left any testament to his disciples',³⁹ and goes on to argue that baptism and the Lord's Supper may well be dropped, as barriers which—like the written Word!—prevent the Christian from having free access to 'the raw fact of Christ'. This raw fact of Christ is, for him, independent of both Word and Sacrament, and is in some way communicable by direct intuition or *pratyakṣa*. If God speaks to us today, why hear His words through a book written about twenty centuries ago?⁴⁰

To sum up Chenchiah's use of Scripture, we must admit that he cannot be called a Biblical theologian! He never really attempts the task of direct wrestling with the Biblical text, and is content rather to select a few key-sentences, interpreting them in the light of his own understanding of the Christian faith. His work is always stimulating, but—perhaps like Keshub Chunder Sen—his own *adesh* seems often to carry for him a higher authority than that of Scripture!

V. Chakkarai (1880-1958)

Compared with many Indian theologians, Chakkarai's attitude to the Bible—which he delights to call the Christian *śruti*—may be described as conservative. He accepts the Old Testament unreservedly, saying that 'without it I cannot understand the New'.⁴¹ Indeed, he claims to be closer to the fundamentalist than the 'modernist' position,

³⁸ *Rethinking*, p. 160.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁰ *Guardian*, 13-2-47.

⁴¹ *Guardian*, 2-12-43.

and accepts the doctrine of verbal inspiration.⁴² The Bible is for him the supreme and only *pramāna*, which can never be made dependent on the Church but stands alone:

‘My view is the downright Indian view which, I think, is also the older Protestant view,—that the Holy Scriptures are the only authority for the determination of the Christian Faith; it is the supreme *Pramana*. . . . Indian Christians recognise the supreme and infallible authority of the *Sruti*, though theological schools and sects may wrangle about the interpretations’.⁴³

This acceptance of the primacy of Scripture is based upon his own personal experience, for it was through the reading of the Bible that he had come to a personal confrontation with Christ. ‘My own experience centres round the Holy Scriptures primarily, and secondarily round other helps’, he writes.⁴⁴ And he tells how, through reading the Bible, ‘the person of Jesus Christ laid its spell on me, and by slow degrees, the grandeur, and ineffable charm, calm serenity of the Galilean, stole on my mind and imagination. The historical became the living’.⁴⁵ Here we have an almost Barthian exposition—admittedly with Schweitzerian undertones—of the presence of the Living Word in the written Word; it is in Christ the Living Word, and only in Him, that the true meaning of the Old Testament is to be found:

‘To the Jews of Christ’s time, the Torah became the voice of God and embodied His will. The Law as revealed in the Old Testament and interpreted by the scribes became a substitute for the living voice of God, a substitute for the Incarnation. Therefore Israel instead of being the *people of God* became the *people of the Book*. It was then that ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth’, as the great *ṽnani* declared. The interpretation of a dead word gave place to the incarnation of the eternal Word’.⁴⁶

Chakkarai is very strong in his defence of the Old Testament, which he feels is of great value to the Indian Church, and on no account to be discarded. Himself a man of action, deeply involved in political and civic life and in the labour movement, he turns repeatedly to the Old Testament for guidance in the fields of moral action and social justice. The Old Testament has special value through its demonstration of ‘the moral government of the world by a moral governor’,⁴⁷ and he speaks of the establishment of God’s righteousness in the world as *sanātana dharma*—so giving a new and dynamic meaning to this concept.⁴⁸

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Guardian*, 29-5-47.

⁴⁶ V. Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, Madras, 1932, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Guardian*, 16-6-47.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

So too he turns with delight to the *bhakti* of the Psalms, which take us so deep into the heart of the devotees of Israel. 'This is religion', he writes.⁴⁹

Having established very clearly his claim to be thoroughly Biblical in his theology, Chakkarai goes on to show his 'Eastern' tendency by his statement that in interpreting Scripture, India prefers the mystical to the logical meaning, the spiritual to the historical.⁵⁰ At the same time, he is very careful to avoid forced exegeses, as we can see for example in his exposition of Eph. 5:31-33, where he resists the obvious temptation to develop a *bhakti* image of the Lover-beloved relationship, and instead rightly stresses the priority of the relation of Christ to the Church.⁵¹

Far more than his brother-in-law Chenchiah, his theology has a Scriptural basis. To give just a few examples, his mysticism—and he is indeed a *bhakti*—is always Cross-centred, and he gives an interesting exposition of the Pauline teaching on justification by faith in terms of *bhakti*.⁵² His assessment of theories of the atonement includes an interesting study of the Temptation narrative in terms of a *Christus Victor* interpretation of the struggle with Satan, and profound expositions of the term 'ransom' (Mark 10:45) and sacrifice (Psalm 2, Isaiah 42 and 53). Or again in a deeply interesting discussion on the relation of the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith he finds his clue in the cry of dereliction, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34), and goes on to expound this in terms of the *kenosis* of Philip-
pians 2.⁵³

Again, his characteristic 'identification' of the Holy Spirit with Christ is given a definite Scriptural basis. When he says, 'the Holy Spirit is Jesus at work in the human personality',⁵⁴ he is really expounding 2 Cor. 3:17, 'the Lord is the Spirit'. He feels that Indian Christians, whose minds have not been conditioned by western Trinitarian theories but who have had a personal experience of Christ and have submitted themselves to the New Testament, have generally felt that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, simply Christ at work within them as *antaryāmin*. This leads him to his well-known formulation:

'Jesus Christ is the Incarnation or Avatar of God; the Holy Spirit in human experience is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ'.⁵⁵

Chakkarai gives great importance to the Resurrection, which demonstrates how the love or *bhakti* of the incarnate Christ is suddenly transformed into the vast spiritual power (*śakti*) of the Spirit. Here his key passage is Rom. 1:4: 'Jesus Christ was declared as the Son of God with power (or *śakti*), according to the Spirit of holiness, by the

⁴⁹ *Rethinking*, p. 75.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵¹ V. Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought*, Madras, 1932, p. 238 f.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 234; 206 ff.

⁵³ *Guardian*, 20-4-44.

⁵⁴ *Avatar*, p. 117.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 121.

resurrection from the dead'.⁵⁶ This interpretation draws also on the Johannine description of the Spirit as Comforter, Guru and Revealer, as well as on the Lucan description of the Spirit (in the account of Pentecost) as 'the materialised energy of the Spirit of the Master . . . accompanied by physical manifestations'.⁵⁷ Chakkarai's Christology can be described as a Christology of the Spirit, and the basis of his teaching is always sought in the Bible—not in any other cluster of ideas or thought-patterns.

In his earlier writings, Chakkarai showed that he had mastered the teaching of the 'Jesus of History' school of the 'twenties, and his own careful study of the New Testament is also clearly evident. Unlike Chenchiah, however, he avoids extreme critical conclusions, and firmly asserts the truth of the miracle stories and of the resurrection.

We may say, then, that Chakkarai's theology—while in many ways as radical as, and certainly no less Indian than that of Chenchiah—is firmly based on the Bible. Some of his exegeses may be questionable, but he never fails to make the Scripture his point of departure. Here is a man who starts from the *śruti* and the direct *anubhava* of Christ, and proceeds to elucidate his theology on that basis, using a fully Indian terminology in the process. It is a very illuminating demonstration.

A. J. Appasamy (b. 1891)

Bishop Appasamy's major work in his earlier period was a two-part study of the Johannine writings, viewed in the context of Tamil *bhakti*-poetry—*Christianity as Bhakti Marga* (1928) and *What is Moksa?* (1931). For him the classical expression of the personal experience of Christ is to be found in the Fourth Gospel, above all in what he calls the *Mahāvākya* 'Abide in Me and I in you' (John 15:4). In his exposition of this conception he develops the tendency—which we have already noticed in Ram Mohan Roy—of describing the union between the Father and the Son, and then going on to posit a similar union between Christ and the believer.⁵⁸ For Appasamy, however, the union in both cases is regarded as a *moral* rather than a metaphysical or ontological one. Here we see the influence of the *bhakti* strand of Indian thought: Appasamy challenges the advaitic tendency to identify Father, Son and believer, and turns rather to the *bhakti* type of *Viśiṣṭādvaita* seen in Ramanuja. We see this both in his exegesis of John 17:21 ('That they all may be one, as Thou, Father art in Me and I in Thee'), and of the 'subordination' passages, e.g., John 14:28, 'My Father is greater than I'.⁵⁹

Appasamy gives much attention to the Logos-doctrine of the Johannine Prologue, and expounds John 1:10 ('He was in the world') as meaning that even before the coming into the world of the incarnate Christ the Logos was already present in the world as *antaryāmin*, giving inner guidance to men of all faiths. As the 'immanent Christ'

⁵⁶ *Avatar*, pp. 148, 9.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁸ *What is Moksa?* pp. 56, 7.

⁵⁹ *Bhakti Marga*, p. 70 f.

God is from the beginning present in all men. But men have not yet fully understood him, and so Christ becomes incarnate as a more effective means of God's self-revelation.⁶⁰ We see here an exposition of the Fourth Gospel which harmonises with the more recent view of R. Panikkar in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964).

Appasamy's solution to the problem of the relation of God to creation—worked out in the form of an exegesis of John 1 with the help of Ramanuja's philosophy—is an interesting one, and forms the key to his thought in a number of related spheres, for example, Christology and the doctrines of the Church and of the eucharist. Briefly his solution is this—that God is not identical with the cosmos, but is rather present and active within it as *Logos*, related to it in somewhat the same way as the human soul is to the body. He writes:

'The Force or Energy that is immanent in the universe guiding it at the moment of creation and continuing to guide it ever since, became flesh and dwelt among men as Jesus. . . . What we see in the Gospel records is but a glimpse of a tremendous relation stretching back to the very beginnings of time, yea, even when there was no time'.⁶¹

A second point at which Appasamy gives an original exegesis of the Fourth Gospel is in his exposition of the meaning of 'knowledge'—Greek *gnosis* or Sanskrit *jñāna*. He rightly distinguishes this Johannine *jñāna* from the *jñāna mārga* of Hinduism, and shows how it is much closer to the personal relationship of *bhakti*; the way of *mokṣa* lies not in speculation or even meditation but through personal knowledge and growing love for God in Christ.⁶²

As might be expected, Appasamy's emphasis on the Johannine teaching leads him to lay much more stress on faith-union with Christ than on atonement. In his exposition of John 6, for example, he points out that while the Synoptic account of the institution of the Lord's Supper emphasises the fact that Christ's blood is shed for many for the remission of sins, the Fourth Gospel—which is closer to 'Indian' theology—gives no such information, but concentrates rather on the nature of union with Christ, eternal life, and the way in which that union is to be maintained. 'It is wholly concerned with the teaching that the body and blood of Christ become the food and drink of man'.⁶³

Perhaps the most enlightening reflections of Appasamy on the authority of the Bible are to be found in his discussion of what he calls the *pramānas*.⁶⁴ He accepts the three traditional *pramānas* of Hinduism—Scripture (*śruti*), experience (*anubhava*) and reason (*anumāna*), and among these unhesitatingly gives priority to Scripture. The question which gives rise to Appasamy's study is one put by

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶¹ *Moksa*, p. 169.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶³ *Bhakti Marga*, p. 134.

⁶⁴ A. J. Appasamy, *What shall I Believe?* (A Study of Christian Pramānas), C.L.S., 1971.

Chenchiah: 'Can we have direct, unmediated knowledge of Jesus, or must such knowledge always come to us mediated by Scripture and Church tradition?' The query is an important one, and leads Appasamy to affirm that 'the primary task of Christian theology in India is to settle the sources of our authority'. His own solution is clear. The Scripture is 'the standard of our faith. It is the first and foremost *Pramana*, the highest court of appeal for everyone'.^{64a} For him the primary revelation comes in the Gospels. The 'interpretation' offered by Jesus' followers, especially St Paul and St John, is also fundamental, though not necessarily of the same importance as the life and teaching of Christ. The Old Testament also is of value as giving us the background in which the historical Incarnation took place'. In an attractive picture he writes:

'Sanskrit books speak of a shining light on the threshold of a house which sheds its rays on either side. The life and death and teaching of Christ is such a light illumining the long historical processes of revelation both before and after Him. In the light which radiates from Him we see what is valuable and worthwhile in the intuitions of sages and prophets both before Him and after Him'.^{64b}

This is a good illustration of the Christocentricity of Appasamy's thought. Christ is the centre of Scripture; it is in his light that we read both Old and New Testaments, and because all Scripture bears witness to him the Bible is our primary 'Rule of Faith' or *pramāna*.

In *Christianity as Bhakti Marga*, we find a fairly detailed treatment of the doctrine of Scripture where, from orthodox beginnings, we find ourselves led to some rather unorthodox conclusions. Appasamy begins with the text 'the Father which hath sent me hath borne witness of me' (John 5:37), and goes on to discuss the nature of that witness. The Christian revelation, he holds, is primarily the revelation through Scripture: 'The witness of the Father is not so much in any direct and immediate revelation which he gives from time to time as in the historic revelation which has been embodied in the Scriptures'.⁶⁵ The chief importance of the Bible is, then, that in it we come face to face with Christ, for 'The fundamental import of the Christian Scriptures is that they record the story of Jesus. They enable us to get in touch with the historic manifestation of the Divine'.⁶⁶ The Bible has no intrinsic 'life' in itself, but rather bears witness to the historic revelation of God in Christ: 'The Scriptures themselves do not possess life. It is folly to think that there is some inherent power in them to give us life. Their most important function is to lead us to the manifestation of the Divine in time'.⁶⁷

Unlike Chenchiah, Appasamy gladly accepts the Old Testament, which is on no account to be rejected or replaced by Hindu Scriptures.

^{64a} *op. cit.*, p. 13.

^{64b} *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Bhakti Marga*, p. 155.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 161.

Yet, the Hindu *Sastras* too have their place, and they can throw fresh light on different parts of the Bible. They may suggest new emphases on some of the truths of the Christian faith. But they cannot take the place of the Old Testament. 'In a word, they will supplement, not supplant the Old Testament'.⁶⁸ 'There are', he writes, 'elements in the ancient Scriptures of India which have to be fearlessly given up. But there are also many doctrines and ideals in them which have to be as zealously assimilated and carried on to their natural culmination in Christ'.⁶⁹ It was in pursuit of this ideal of 'assimilation' that Appasamy published in 1930, *Temple Bells*, a selection of readings from Hindu religious literature, which many Christians have found to be very helpful for the devotional life.

What of the 'finality' of Scripture? Appasamy warns against a too rigorous devotion to the mere letter of Scripture, and is anxious to ensure that the way should not be closed to new revelations. He writes:

'The Scriptures have an important function in that they prepare the heart to love God wholly. But to suppose that they form an irrevocable standard of morals and religion which holds true for all time and for all men whatever might happen is to go too far. The letter kills but the Spirit quickens. It is then the Spirit of the Scriptures which we should seek with all eagerness to understand and practise, and not the letter. To follow the letter of the Scripture at any cost is to go into slavery'.⁷⁰

What, then, is the meaning of John 16:13, where Jesus says that the Spirit 'shall guide you into all truth?' Is *new* truth to be revealed in future? Are there to be further revelations, or are we to be limited to the exposition of the Scriptures which we already possess? Appasamy writes:

'If they are absolutely new truths, what reason have we to suppose that they may not supersede some of those which have already been embodied in the Scriptures? . . . We must not be limited by the past, but inspired and guided by it to realms of infinite grandeur. The Holy Spirit, with whom we may directly commune, not only interprets the ancient Scriptures but leads us to unexplored realms of thought, enabling us to deal with new problems in new ways and opening up vistas of endless beauty'.⁷¹

We are left asking, 'What is to be the *pramana* for such new revelations? Is it to be simply what the Reformers called the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit?' But is not this inconsistent with what Appasamy has previously said about the Scriptures as the *primary pramana*?

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 169.

It is perhaps necessary to add that despite Appasamy's real devotion to Scripture, there are places where his own exegesis of Biblical passages gives the impression of being forced. Examples will be found in his expositions of John 1:11, 'He came unto his own'; John 1:13, 'begotten . . . of God'⁷²; Isaiah 57:15, 'I dwell *with* him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit', interpreted as though the text were '*in* him'—i.e., in terms of God's immanence.⁷³

Some Modern Trends

We shall now glance briefly at a few more recent writers, and note some of the tendencies which their work reveals.

In Bishop S. Kulandran⁷⁴ we find a present-day representative of the Paul-Augustine-Luther tradition, and his exposition of the Pauline teaching on grace is especially valuable. The element of Indian insight in his exegesis is, however, intentionally kept at a very low level. The writings of Prof. Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai⁷⁵ give a much more Indian presentation, while at the same time they are thoroughly Biblical, and indeed this was a writer who scarcely ever wrote a sentence of theology unless he could support it from the Bible. His use of the Bible is, however, primarily devotional rather than exegetical.

The evangelical tradition, which in recent years, has become very clear and articulate in India, partly through the work of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, and such seminaries as Yeotmal and Bangarapet, tends to follow a Biblical exegesis which closely reflects western evangelical models. There are, however, men like Paul Sudhakar and Brother Bakht Singh whose exegesis has a definitely Indian flavour.⁷⁶ Bakht Singh's 'Indian-ness' lies mainly in his illustrations, but Sudhakar, while remaining thoroughly Biblical, is prepared to be fairly radical in his use of Hindu terminology.

On the whole, it must be confessed, however, that India has not yet developed any strong school of Biblical exegesis, and this is a very grave lack. Some useful commentaries have indeed been published—for example in an earlier generation the *Indian Church Commentaries* series, or in more recent days the commentaries of the *Christian Student's Library*, though the authors of nearly all of these have been foreigners. Perhaps some of the most significant commentaries are those now being produced under textbooks programmes in the various regional languages.

Another tendency which may be noted is that of what we may call the 'cosmic covenant' school, found especially among Roman Catholic scholars like Panikkar, Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths.⁷⁷ This

⁷² *Moksa*, p. 72.

⁷³ *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, London, 1942, p. 78.

⁷⁴ S. Kulandran, *Grace: a Comparative Study of the Doctrine in Christianity and Hinduism*, London, 1964.

⁷⁵ Especially *Khristopanishad*, C.I.S.R.S., 1965, and *The Philosophy of Love* I.S.P.C.K., 1966.

⁷⁶ Bakht Singh, *The Skill of His Loving Hands*, Bombay, 1961.

Paul Sudhakar, *The Fourfold Ideal*, Bombay, n.d.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram*, London, 1966, pp. 194, 219, 247.

group of scholars seeks to find, especially in the Old Testament, the theological justification for dialogue with men of other faiths. There is, therefore, a special interest in passages dealing with the 'cosmic covenant—with Noah, Melchisedek etc.,—which preceded the covenant with Abraham, as well as with passages like Isaiah 65:1, Romans 10:20, Acts 17:23ff etc., which speak of the universal search for God. This approach is, no doubt, perfectly legitimate in its proper context and promotes a close and sympathetic understanding of Hindu spirituality. It should not, however, be allowed to divert attention from the primary task of understanding and expounding the *central* message of the Christian Scriptures. It is all too easy to limit one's interest and attention to some particular aspect of Scripture, whether that be futuristic prophecy and apocalyptic, or spiritual gifts—like the gift of tongues'—or 'cosmic liturgy', or incarnation, or atonement, or political involvement. We greatly need that solid, balanced attention to the *whole* of Scriptures which characterised the Church at the time of the Reformation.

Bible-translation and Theology

The work of Bible-translation into the languages of India began, as we have seen, with the Tranquebar missionaries in 1706, and has continued ever since. The earlier translators were on the whole reluctant to use terms which carried definite Hindu overtones. For example, Dr John Wilson protested against the use of the word *svarga* for heaven, on the ground that it represented the sensual heaven of Indra. He proposed the more neutral word *devloka* instead.⁷⁸ Eventually, however, *svarga* found its way into the Bible in many languages, and it is now an accepted—'baptised'—Christian term.

The Biblical vocabulary with which people are familiar from childhood tends to become firmly entrenched in their minds, and any move to change it is resented. So, it comes about that in each language area Christians are prone to use a 'language of Canaan' which non-Christians find difficult to understand and often positively misleading. In recent days, Bible translators have become more adventurous, and new translations—especially Roman Catholic ones, where the question of devotion, to an earlier version does not arise—have a wider, richer, and more 'Indian' vocabulary than the older translations. In all Bible translation there is a dialectic between faithfulness to the Greek or Hebrew original and faithfulness to the current idiom of the language concerned. A third element can and should enter this dialectic, namely the theological and philosophical terminology of the cultural milieu. In a land like India, where this cultural milieu is unusually rich and varied, this is a constant challenge to the translator; a challenge also to the theologian who has to work out his formulations in relation both to the Biblical witness and to the cultural context—and if possible to do it in terms which the modern reader will understand. Thus, Indian theology is constantly being enriched by the ongoing work of Bible-translation, and Bible-translation should, in turn, be influenced by the increasing richness of theological vocabulary.

⁷⁸ *Oriental Christian Spectator*, Nov. 1830.

Conclusion

What then, in conclusion, are some of the 'new lights' which Indian theology has been able to shed on the doctrine of Scripture?

First in importance, perhaps, is the idea of Scripture as *Śruti*. The concept of *śruti* is an interesting and useful one, lending itself to a meaningful Christian usage because of its double meaning of 'Scripture' and 'revelation', both of which have their origin from 'hearing' (*śruti* from root *śru*, 'to hear'). Indian tradition—including Christian tradition—does indeed give an honoured place to revelation by sight (*revelare*, 'to unveil'), as for example in Sundar Singh's *darśana* of the risen Christ. Yet, the *norm* of Christian revelation is by hearing, the hearing of the written Word, which was originally 'heard' by the writers from the 'speaking' of the Spirit, just as the Hindu *śruti* is supposed to have been 'heard' by the rishis. There is much to be said for the view that the word *śruti* is more satisfactory in many contexts than the word *revelation*, with its purely visual connotation.

Secondly, Appasamy's use of the Hindu concept of the *pramānas* is a useful one, which can carry considerable weight in explaining the Christian faith to Hindus. The four *pramānas* accepted by Appasamy—*śruti*, *anubhava*, *anumāna* and what he calls *sabhā* (the Church and its doctrines) make up a useful yard-stick for testing doctrines. As we try to evaluate any doctrine we are faced with the questions:

- (i) What does the Scripture (*śruti*) say?
- (ii) What does my own experience of Christ say?
- (iii) What have the great theologians of the past said?
- (iv) What is the recognised teaching of the Church?

The application of such tests can rule out a great deal of theology which is merely speculative and non-scriptural. It is interesting to note the unanimity of Appasamy and Chakkarai—despite their radicalness in some directions—in assigning first place among the *pramānas* to Scripture. Indeed Chakkarai, stressing the fact that this is a definitely Indian way of looking at things, speaks of Scriptures as the *only* authority, and the supreme and infallible *pramana*.⁷⁹

Thirdly, we must consider the question of the Old Testament, and also the possible use of Hindu Scriptures as vehicles of Christian devotion. It is perhaps unfortunate that Chenchiah's Marcionism has attracted so much attention, for it is by no means typical of Indian Christian theology. However, it is well that the issue has been raised in a clear form, and has been dealt with by other Indian theologians. In its extremist form Chenchiah's view was that the Old Testament, with its portrayal of a warlike, vindictive Jehovah, and with its total lack of any foreshadowing of an incarnation, was unnecessary for Indian Christians, and that indeed their own Hindu *Śāstras* formed a better *praeparatio evangelii*. Like Marcion, too, he sought to reject even from the New Testament such passages as did not fit in with his ideas. He felt that it was quite feasible to reconstruct, from Hindu prophecies and devotional Scriptures, a new, 'Indian' Old Testament.

⁷⁹ *Guardian*, 2-12-43.

It is necessary only to say that Chenchiah's idea has not proved acceptable to the Indian Church as a whole. Chakkarai, for example, realised the importance of the Old Testament in all questions of social justice and world order. On the whole, however, Indian theologians seem to have underestimated the importance of the Old Testament, and this is perhaps a tendency which needs to be corrected. The Old Testament is of fundamental significance for the understanding of the New, and in India there is a need for a specially clear understanding of its teaching on such subjects as creation, personality—both divine and human—justice, and the meaning and purpose of history.

Though Chenchiah's idea of a 'Hindu Old Testament' must thus be rejected, a somewhat different idea has proved helpful to many—namely the use, as an aid to private or public devotion, of selected passages from the Hindu Scriptures, especially from the Upanishads and the *bhakti* poets. The well-known collections of Appasamy, Winslow, Kingsbury and Phillips, and Nicol Macnicol are good illustrations of this approach, and familiarity with these lofty Hindu Scriptures has often proved useful to those engaged in Christian witness, as did Paul's knowledge of Aratus and Epimenides in Athens.⁸⁰ The Hindu scriptures cannot, for Christians, form part of the *śruti*. But as aids to devotion, as 'quarries' whence precious stones may be dug which will shine more brilliantly in their new setting, they are of great and permanent value. The depth of devotion and faith so beautifully portrayed in these poets is something which can pass over into the hymnody and devotion of the Indian Church.

Finally, something must be said about the need for the emergence of good Biblical exegesis in the Indian Church. The really great movements in Church history have all been undergirded by solid, honest and massive Biblical exposition, whether in the time of Origen, or Augustine, or Calvin, or Wesley or Barth. The Indian Church has, indeed, a fine tradition of devotion to the Bible, which can be seen in the deep Bible-knowledge of thousands of humble Christian folk, as well as in the straightforward Biblical preaching of hundreds of pastors, to say nothing of the massive work of translation and revision of the Scriptures which is going on all the time. Yet, it cannot be denied that at present there is a dearth of good, honest expository writing and even of expository preaching. Much of what passes for 'evangelical' preaching is merely pietistic rather than truly Biblical.

What is needed is not just an 'Indianised' exegesis, say like that of Sri Parananda, who had no conception of what it means to wrestle honestly with the original text in the attempt to find out what God is saying to us today. Karl Barth brought a real and vital message to the Europe of the '20s, '30s and '40s because he inherited a tradition of deep and honest textual exegesis, and because also he lived fully in the situation of his time, and was able to proclaim the Biblical message—or at least get others to proclaim it!—in a way that people could understand. Today, Indian theological students are under a double pressure from the West. On the one hand, there are the heady winds of extreme radical

⁸⁰ Acts 17: 28.

Biblical criticism, and on the other an equally radical fundamentalism. This tends to produce an unhealthy polarisation—between so-called modernists and fundamentalists—which has little or nothing to do with the real needs of the Indian Church. We need a new, quiet, balanced Indian Biblical scholarship, well equipped to read and understand the original texts, and to interpret them against the background of Indian culture, and against the foreground of the ferment of India today.

This is a very great need, for theology grows best in an atmosphere of accurate and 'existential' Biblical scholarship. The *Śruti* of the *Satveda* needs its Upanishads and Bhasyas, and little progress can be made until the work is undertaken by Indian scholars with a deep knowledge of Greek and Hebrew as well as of the Indian cultural background. Signs are not lacking that such a tradition of scholarship is arising.

What are the principles to be followed in Indian exegesis? There is an obvious need for much straightforward exegetical writing, expounding the clear, historical meaning of the text, in the manner indicated by Goreh. At the same time, as Chakkarai explicitly stated, and as Sundar Singh demonstrated in practice, there is room for an interpretation which is spiritual and mystical rather than logical and historical. There will be many contexts, especially perhaps in apologetic literature, where exegesis of this 'analogical' type may meet a need which the more prosaic western methods would fail to serve. Finally, Indian exegesis if it is to be effective must be made in a real existential context, whether it be that of dialogue with Hinduism, or of the building up of a young Church in a Hindu cultural environment, or simply of the developing secularism of modern India. Bishop Westcott looked for an Indian commentary on St John, and Bishop Appasamy has in effect filled that need. Perhaps the time is now ripe for an Indian equivalent of Barth's *Romans*!⁸¹

⁸¹ This idea has been somewhat developed in the author's article 'The Shape of Indian Christian Theology' in I.J.T. Vol. XXII, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1973), pp. 15-20.

We use cookies to make interactions with our website easy and meaningful, to better understand the use of our services, and to tailor advertising. For further information, including about cookie settings, please read our [Cookie Policy](#). All three form a significant part of the Third World theology, where the Bible is read from the point of view of marginality. Important issues they are dealing with are class, gender, race and ethnicity. Dalit theology is a definite breakthrough from the earlier and traditional Indian Christian theologies. There is also an attempt to relate Dalit theology to the liberation theology of Latin America and black religio-cultural and socio-economic interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan.