

**COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS
DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)**

**VOLUME 1
B. THE SCRIPTURES**

A consensus statement on Holy Scripture

After being submitted to the 1984 General Pastors Conference and General Synod to subsequent District Pastors Conferences and District Synods, and to congregations, this statement was adopted by the General Synod at its 1987 Convention.

A. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE THESES OF AGREEMENT (TA) AND THE THESES OF AGREEMENT AND INERRANCY (TA I)

1. The authority and Christ-centredness of Holy Scripture

- 1. The proper and essential content of the Holy Scriptures is the eternal Son of God** (TA VIII, 2, 4).
This does not mean that we may disregard any part of the prophetic and apostolic Word.
- 2. Scripture is the Word of God** (TA VIII, 3, 9, 10).
This does not mean that the binding nature of the Word of God allows us to disregard its central purpose (TA I, 6).
- 3. All Holy Scripture is equally the Word of God** (TA VIII, 3, 8, 10).
This does not mean that we may not distinguish between matters of more or less importance (TA I, 6).
- 4. The centre of Scripture is the witness of the Spirit to the Son** (TA I, 4b; VIII, 2,4,5).
This means that the centre of Scripture may not be ignored in the interpretation of any part of Scripture.

2. The divine and human side of Holy Scripture

- 1. Holy Scripture as the Word of God written by men is at the same time both divine and human** (TA VIII, 9).
This means that we must not attempt to separate the divine and the human in Scripture.

2. **In defining the relationship between the divine and human side of the Bible we could use the analogy of the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate** (TAVIII, 9).

This does not mean that some sections of Scripture may be disregarded, or that they are less Word of God than others, or that it is legitimate to speak of errors in Scripture.

3. **The Bible has a truly human side. The holy writers, whom God used, retained the distinctive features of their personalities (language and terminology, literary methods, conditions of life, knowledge of nature and history as apart from direct revelation and prophecy** (TA VIII, 9, 10).

This does not mean that we may reject the normative authority of any part of Scripture, on the ground that it presents only the author's view, his personal bias, his worldview, or contemporary conditions.

3. The truth and clarity of Holy Scripture

1. **There are difficulties in Holy Scripture, eg errors that found their way into the sacred text, seeming deficiencies relating to and caused by the fact that the holy writers retained the distinctive features of their personalities** (TA I par. 2)

This does not mean that we may use the difficulties which people find in Scripture to contradict its clear statements about itself and to postulate that it is mistaken, erroneous, or deficient.

2. **The Bible has a truly human side (TA VIII, 9, 10), and natural limitations belong to the human mind** (TA VIII, 10).

This does not mean that God's revelation in Scripture is bound to the limited understanding of its human authors (TA VIII, 10).

3. **Holy Scripture is God's Word.**

This does not mean that the truth of the Gospel cannot be clearly conveyed by human language.

4. **Within the Holy Scriptures there is theological diversity** (TA VIII, 10).

This does not mean that there can be contradictions in doctrine.

5. **Holy Scripture is the book of divine truth** (TA VIII, 10).

This means that it is not proper, when dealing with the divine truth of Scripture, to place personal and propositional truth into conflict with each other.

4. The inspiration of Holy Scripture

1. **Holy Scripture is given by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. Inspiration is the unique action by which God the Holy Spirit gave his Word of revelation to us** (TA VIII, 6–8).

This does not mean that for a right interpretation and application of any part of Scripture it is unnecessary to take into consideration its literary and social context.

2. **Holy Scripture is the Word of God to us in writing** (TA VIII, 2).

This does not mean that the Christian interpreter may read the Scriptures like all other ancient writings, without the presupposition that they have been uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit.

B. WAYS OF SPEAKING TO BE AVOIDED

1. There should be no use of terms like 'fundamentalist' or 'liberal' to designate one another.
2. The use of particular Bible passages to support statements of doctrine and the use of the formula, 'It is written', should not be disparaged. On the other hand, when passages of Scripture are quoted to support doctrinal statements, care must be taken to quote them according to their context.
3.
 - a. In view of our particular history, it should not be said that the term 'inerrancy' may be dispensed with without possibly affecting believers' confidence in the Scriptures.
 - b. On the other hand, it is wrong to concentrate the special nature of the Scripture as the Word of God in the term 'inerrancy'.
4. It should not be asserted that to accept the inerrancy of Scripture necessarily means to force upon Scripture preconceived notions of a perfect book.
5.
 - a. Attempts to harmonise Scripture should not be rejected as necessarily showing an incorrect understanding of the nature of the Scriptures.
 - b. Neither should those be censured who content that much of such harmonisation is unnecessary, and not demanded by the fact of the inspiration of Scripture.
6. It should not be asserted that the acceptance of inerrancy involves first having to remove every problem in Scripture or that inerrancy needs to be proved to human reason.
7. Reference should not be made to contradictions, deficiencies, or mistakes in the Scriptures without the use of qualifying additions like 'apparent'.