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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbet-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbet-01.php)

# THE BIBLE AS SCEPTRE: AUTHORITY AND WORLDVIEW

JAMIE A. GRANT

HIGHLAND THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE UHI, HIGH STREET, DINGWALL, IV15 9HA  
jamie.grant@uhi.ac.uk

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

For the bulk of Christian history the authority of the Bible to rule over every area of thought, speech and practice was accepted without question. As David Jasper comments in his *Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, '[the] hermeneutics of faith can take many forms, but it was, on the whole, the predominant way of reading the Bible for at least the first fifteen hundred years of Christian history.'<sup>2</sup> Until the rise of the critical era, that is. With the Enlightenment desire to question all things, eventually the Bible too became subject to human intellectual critique.<sup>3</sup> Although not *the necessary* consequence of critical readings of Scripture, almost inevitably, the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment have ultimately led to the broad rejection of the authoritative role of revelation in our life and society.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the written form of a presentation made at the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society annual meeting in March 2014. SETS seeks 'to promote Scottish theology which serves the churches, is faithful to Scripture, grounded in scholarship, and catholic in scope' (<<http://www.s-e-t-s.org.uk/society>>, accessed 16.10.2015). The topic was assigned by the organisers and the audience at the event was mainly made up of pastors, church leaders and academics. So, inevitably, the content of this paper is shaped in part by the brief given to me.

<sup>2</sup> David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> See Jamie A. Grant, 'Scripture and Biblical Criticism', in Michael Bird and Michael Pahl, eds., *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), pp. 101–18, for a brief overview of the gradual application of Enlightenment, critical approaches to the study of the Bible, and Alvin Plantinga, 'Two (or More) Types of Scripture Scholarship', *Modern Theology* 14 (1998), 243–77, for an excellent discussion of critical and traditional approaches to biblical interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Tarnas' fascinating discussion of this process in *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World*

However, throughout that turbulent period of change in human history and ever since, many communities of faith, while often accepting the merits of critical approaches, have continued to hold to the idea that the Scriptures, as divine revelation, speak authoritatively into *every area* of human thought and praxis. Within the modern setting, for example, the UCCF Doctrinal Basis was often regarded as a bedrock of British Evangelicalism in the twentieth century. Its statement regarding the Bible contends:

The Bible, as originally given, is the inspired and infallible Word of God. It is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

In the more postmodern twenty-first century, it would probably be fair to say that the UCCF Doctrinal Basis does not command the same influential position that it once did within church circles. Equally, we would arguably have to acknowledge that approaches to Scripture among communities that self-describe as ‘evangelical’ are broader than they have ever been in the past.<sup>6</sup> However, even with this changing picture, it seems fair to suggest that ‘biblicism’ remains one of the key identifying features of evangelical theology and worldview.<sup>7</sup> The above statement on Scripture remains helpful because it outlines clearly the idea of the Bible as sceptre: it is from God, it speaks to all things and governs (or, at least, *should* govern) every area of our attitude and practice.

In this paradigm-challenging environment, evangelicals have come to argue over particular nuances in their defence of the concept of biblical authority (whether defined as inerrancy or infallibility or by the use of some other term) while quietly letting the Bible itself fall into relative disuse in our own congregations. Also, given secular scepticism with regard to the Bible, it becomes easy to view the text in a privatised

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*View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991). Tarnas comments that: ‘The modern mind required of itself, and exulted in, a systematically critical independence of judgement—an existential posture not easily compatible with the pious surrender required for belief in divine revelation...’ (p. 320).

<sup>5</sup> <<https://www.uccf.org.uk/about/doctrinal-basis.htm>> accessed 01.04.2015 (no joke implied!). UCCF is the Universities and College Christian Fellowship.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Harris, ‘Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era’, *Churchman* 122/3 (2008), 201–20.

<sup>7</sup> The term, of course, is David Bebbington’s and he describes this high view of Scripture as one of the four marks of evangelical religion along with conversionism, activism and crucicentrism; *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), pp. 2–3.

manner—the Bible speaks about *my* salvation and how *I* should live. However, it remains vitally important for those who adhere to a high view of Scripture to remember that the Bible speaks broadly and with life-affirming authority to every aspect of life and society.

With these challenges to the role of Scripture in mind, it seems appropriate to turn our minds to four specific aspects of this notion of the Bible as sceptre:

1. The range of Scripture;
2. The voices of Scripture;
3. The use of Scripture;
4. The doctrine of Scripture.

## 1. THE RANGE OF SCRIPTURE

The evangelical community's unhelpful focus on the *precise description* of the Bible's authoritative nature has contributed towards a great disservice in terms of our awareness of its role as *kanōn* in shaping the believer's holistic world and life view.<sup>8</sup> Discussion of descriptors often seems to outweigh reflection on content. So we bat about the specifics of 'inerrancy' over 'infallibility' as appropriate badges of membership while there is a general failure to understand the full ramifications of the Kingdom of God as it unfolds in the pages of the Bible. If Scripture is the ultimate authority for those of us who self-describe as evangelical then we must allow its voice to speak into every area of life and being, rather than wasting time defending the particular semantics of our high view of Scripture.

Even a cursory analysis of the biblical text shows its comprehensive nature.<sup>9</sup> We readily come across verses or passages of Scripture that speak to areas of life as wildly diverse as the following:

<sup>8</sup> The concept of canon implies that the Scriptures become a 'rod' or 'rule'—a governing document by which the community of faith lives. See Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) for a full and helpful discussion or R. T. Beckwith's helpful article on the topic, 'The Canon of Scripture', in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Leicester: IVP, 2000), pp. 27–34.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, I run the risk of being accused of proof-texting here and this would be fair comment. My point here, however, is not to model a particular approach to hermeneutics and interpretation of the text. It is, simply, to

- human nature and the basic questions of anthropology (Psalm 8)
- politics and societal justice (Psalm 72)
- law and justice (Prov. 21:3; 28:15-16)
- art and artizanship (Prov. 22:29; 31; Eccl. 2:1-11; 9:10)
- ethics (Job 31)
- family (Prov. 10:1; 15:20)
- trade (Prov. 11:1)
- sex and sexuality (Song of Songs)
- paradox in our life experience (Ecclesiastes)
- mourning, loss, doubt and theodicy (Psalm 88; Job)
- meaning in life (Eccl. 1:1-11)
- the cosmos and the environment (Ps. 97:6)
- and much, much more besides.

The obvious point is that the Bible speaks to much more than just questions of spirituality, salvation and relationship with God. The canon does, of course, speak to these key matters but it addresses so much more besides. In fact the Bible presents the reader with thought-provoking discussion that speaks to the whole spectrum of life and experience.<sup>10</sup> In short, it is legitimate for us to conclude that the Scriptures confront the reader with the presentation of a holistic and comprehensive world and life view. To view the canon as less than this is a gross misrepresentation of the concept of the Bible as sceptre. If the enscripturated word of God

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provide a superficial scan of the diversity of subject matters addressed in the Bible.

<sup>10</sup> In so saying, I am not implying that there are simplistic hermeneutical lines to be drawn between the world of the Bible and every detail of our modern life. I mean, rather, that the variegated voice of the Scriptures speaks into all of the foundational issues and experiences that are common to human beings.

speaks to humanity today, then we must accept that it speaks into *every* aspect of human life and not just to questions of salvation, spirituality and privatised religion. The Bible as spectre gives us a theology of Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

Every time that the believer prays, 'Your *Kingdom* come, your *will* be done, *on earth*, as it is in heaven,' there is, in fact, a request for radical societal transformation and the complete change and renewal of known realities. We are asking for the total metamorphosis of life as we know it.

A kingdom has its own political system of rule. A kingdom will tend to share a common language. A kingdom implies shared cultural norms and expectations. A kingdom will often have its own take on everything from art to trade, from food and drink to sense of humour. A kingdom implies citizenship and belonging—rights *and* responsibilities, laws and privileges. The concept of kingdom is far-reaching and necessarily impacts upon almost every area of life, both individual and corporate. However, most of all, the concept of kingdom implies a king!<sup>12</sup>

Our contemporary and democratic concepts of kingdom are somewhat pale in comparison to the understandings that would have been shared by Jesus' original hearers of the Lord's prayer. They would view kingdom as all-encompassing, the king as all-powerful and his stated word as an unquestionable absolute. I fear that our contemporary understanding of and response to Scripture is both monochrome and anaemic by comparison. If, then, the Bible speaks authoritatively to every area of life, our preaching of it and response to it should be equally holistic. James Orr is helpful here:

Everything depends here on what the Revelation of the Bible is supposed to be. If it is a few general elementary truths of religion we are in search of, it may freely be conceded that these might be given in very simple form. But if we are to have a Revelation such as the Bible professes to convey, a Revelation as high as the nature of God, deep as the nature of man, universal as the wants of the race, which is to accompany man through all the ascending stages of his development and still be felt to be a power and an inspiration to him for further progress—it is absurd to expect that such a Revelation will not have many profound and difficult things in it, and that it will not afford

<sup>11</sup> The discussion of the Bible and worldview in N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) is helpful in this regard.

<sup>12</sup> G. E. Ladd phrases this in admirably succinct terms: 'The Kingdom is God's kingly rule', in his classic text *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised edn; ed. by Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 58.

food for thought in its grandest and highest reaches. ‘Thy judgements are a great deep.’<sup>13</sup>

Orr would have us consider the Bible as a complex text. Not just in the sense that aspects of it can be difficult for the reader to understand but in the deeper sense that it is multi-layered, technicolour and polyphonic, speaking in glorious, Dolby-stereo, surround-sound into every aspect of our life and being.<sup>14</sup> This is beautifully illustrated for us in Psalm 19’s description of the torah—God’s teaching and instruction to humanity—as being *tāmīmāh* (19:7). Our English translations tend to opt for the translation ‘perfect’ which, in many ways, is fair and reasonable. However, it is also important to remember that the use of this word in the Old Testament normally tends to revolve around the idea of ‘holistic completeness’.<sup>15</sup> The psalmist points to the vivifying power of the Scriptures’ all-encompassing voice.<sup>16</sup>

So, if the voice of the Bible speaks to the totality of human life and experience, so too should our teaching and preaching of it. It seems all too often that our evangelical community, with its high regard for Scripture, fails to allow the text to speak into every area of life and being. Our reflections frequently tend to be spiritualised, individualistic and limited in scope to matters spiritual. The good news is of a *Kingdom* and that Kingdom impacts everything—our reflections on Scripture should match that range.

## 2. THE VOICES OF SCRIPTURE

A second aspect of the authoritative nature of the Bible that seems relevant to the current cultural setting and the challenges that we face is the polyphonic nature of God’s Word. The Scriptures contain a wide variety of textures and types—poetry and philosophy, law and apocalyptic, narrative and letter—yet, somehow, our preaching and teaching often fails to reflect that diversity. A sermon on a psalm often looks and feels much like a sermon on a short pericope from Ephesians. A message from Judges

<sup>13</sup> James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> See the helpful discussion of how the Bible shapes worldview in Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See HALOT, תָּמִים, s.v. This is reflected in the numerous footnotes to the EVV suggesting the alternative translation of ‘blameless’.

<sup>16</sup> A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 104.

tends not to differ much from a homily based on Ezekiel's apocalyptic visions. Why is that?

The careful reader will note that all of the verses given above to illustrate the comprehensive range of Scripture's voice are drawn from the Old Testament's poetic literature. This is a fascinating insight in itself. Would we, today, desiring to shape the worldview of our generation, communicate essential truths through the medium of poetry? I suspect not. Yet the Bible speaks *authoritatively* through the poetic, with all of its metaphorical vagueness and lack of precision! The fact is that a massive section of revelation is written in poetic form, especially when we note the close similarities between the prophetic and poetic literature of the OT. Bartholomew and O'Dowd sum up the conundrum:

Poetry, like wisdom, has a rich, renewing, healing and unifying power, which largely goes unnoticed or unappreciated today. Aside from a few select psalms, few of us give much attention to biblical poetry.<sup>17</sup>

My suggestion is that, in relation to the authoritative voice of the Bible in today's world, the evangelical community is overly focussed on the propositional and often either fails to reflect or simply flattens the diverse voices found in the text. It strikes me that this is a problem that we need to address if the church is to fulfil its missional calling.

This quote from a recent book on the ontological nature of the Bible helps to illustrate the problem and its implications:

The Bible is an oracular book, through which the living God speaks. The language of the Bible is, generally speaking, ordinary language. The words of Scripture *include* propositional statements that are meant to be believed and affirmed with full propositional force.<sup>18</sup>

On one level, this is statement that many evangelicals would affirm as their own. However, the key term in it is the word 'includes'. The Bible does indeed *include* propositional statements but it is not *limited* to these alone. Therefore, necessarily, the Bible cannot be reduced to a set of propositional statements. Unfortunately, our treatment of the Scriptures would

<sup>17</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011), p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Al Mohler, Jr., 'When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy', in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. by J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garret (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), p. 45 (emphasis mine).



often lead one to believe that the Scriptures are little more than that—a set of propositions that can be readily agglomerated into a neat system.<sup>19</sup>

Poetry is, by definition, ambiguous. Metaphors are necessarily vague. Paradox is, of course, complex. Apocalyptic is other-worldly. Wisdom is reflective. Proverbs are pithy and deliberately partial statements on an issue. Biblical history (indeed, all history for that matter) is biased. Songs are emotive. Laments are painful. Prophecy strikes at the conscience. These voices cannot and should not be presented in the same way. We should not treat proverbs as if they were law or songs as if they were letters. A poem cannot be reduced to a few propositional statements. The pain of a lament cannot be rendered as a short intellectual thesis.

The challenge for the church is this: are we preserving the teaching practices of modernity in a post-modern world? If so then, in our communication, we fail to allow the authority of Scripture to speak in the natural forms that it takes. When we reduce the Bible to propositional statements (except in so far as these are the direct statements from the text) then, inevitably, we rob the Word of an element of its communicative power because form and content always go hand in hand in any communication. C. S. Lewis's oft-quoted thoughts regarding the psalms are worth hearing again:

What must be said, however, is that the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung; not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons. Those who talk of reading the Bible 'as literature' sometimes mean, I think, reading it without attending to the main thing it is about; like reading Burke with no interest in politics, or reading the Aeneid with no interest in Rome. That seems to me to be nonsense. But there is a saner sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are. Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licences and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood; no less than French must be read as French or English as English. Otherwise we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.<sup>20</sup>

If we do not reflect properly on the message of the Bible *in its given forms* then we will actually miss the communicative intent of the text. Our belief

<sup>19</sup> In so saying I am *not* having a pop at systematic theology. My primary concern here is our handling of the Bible as God authoritative word in the 'pulpit' setting.

<sup>20</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: G. Bles, 1958), pp. 2–3.

that the Bible is authoritative must shape our forms of communication as well as the content of our worldview. Where the Scriptures communicate in bitter lament, we must never minimise or pacify the text. Where the Word of God reflects doubt and conflict we should never explain that away with more acceptable platitudes. While it is not an argument that I can develop in detail here, I would contend that the books of Job and Ecclesiastes are among the most significant evangelistic texts for a post-modern generation. Our task, metaphorically-speaking, is to allow the sceptre to strike in all of its power and that must include attention to and appropriate expression of form.

### 3. THE USE OF SCRIPTURE

It seems to me, thirdly, that we diminish the authority of the biblical text when we make it something that it is not: boring! The Bible is a fascinating and variegated book of books and we marginalise its communicative effect and authoritative power when we make our use of the text in the ecclesial setting singular. We must do more with the Bible than just preach it. Not to be misunderstood, preach it we must and expository preaching has a biblically-privileged position, but this should never be our sole public use of Scripture in the church setting. If anything is going to diminish the authority of the Bible in the life of the church, it is making the Scriptures seem boring and irrelevant.<sup>21</sup>

So, preaching is central to the life of the church but there is much else that we can and should do with the Bible in our communities of faith. Here are a few ideas but this list is far from exhaustive:

**i. Reading the Word:** Most churches do this every week. Some church tradition will always have a set reading from the Old Testament, the New Testament and a Gospel. However, more often than not, we do the public reading of Scripture poorly. It is seen as the necessary prelude and background to the sermon rather than the vivifying Word (Ps. 19:7). It is almost as if the reading is secondary to our analysis of it. Surely, there is something backwards about that? We need to be both creative and contemplative in our public reading of Scripture. Our reading should reflect the inherent drama of the text and time should be given for the congregation to reflect on the text. Instead of a prayer meeting, why not co-opt the youth group to read the text of Romans as it would have been originally

<sup>21</sup> Again, just to be clear, I am not suggesting that preaching *per se* makes the Bible boring and irrelevant. My argument is simply that we run that risk if preaching is the *only* public encounter with the Word that we offer our church communities.

read—as a letter to a community of God’s people. Reading Romans out loud, with all of the dramatic emphasis it deserves, will take around fifty minutes and the impact of reading a letter as a letter can be huge. It is a different form of engagement with Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

**ii. Teaching the Word:** There is an important distinction between preaching and teaching and teaching also has its place within the church family. The adult Sunday schools of the North American church provide a great opportunity to go deep in the Word of God as a community of God’s people. I have yet to see these successfully replicated in the Scottish church scene but there are other creative ways to incorporate teaching into the life of the congregation (e.g. a hour on a Saturday morning with the promise of bacon rolls or, occasionally, giving over a Sunday evening service to a more informal teaching-type encounter with the Word).<sup>23</sup>

**iii. Meditating on the Word:** Psalm 1 describes the blessed (happy) person as being one who both ‘delights in’ and ‘meditates’ on the torah of Yahweh. The practice that is encouraged is to *hāgāh* on God’s teaching and the Hebrew verb implies something more than just reflective contemplation. The verb is somewhat akin to ‘muttering over’ the text.<sup>24</sup> Reading silently is often said to be the peculiar product of modernity. There is some evidence that both reading and praying in the ancient world tended to be done out loud.<sup>25</sup> The significance seems to be based in the vocal repetition of the text as a stimulus to the ear. The seeing and hearing of the text combined inculcates a greater engagement with and appropriation of its message. *Lectio Divina* is a popular and useful tool to encourage this type of engagement with the Scriptures that can be used in a congregational, as well as small group, setting.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The same is true of the Gospels. Mark could easily be read in one sitting or John in two and this gives an encounter with Jesus that is quite unique.

<sup>23</sup> In a cultural setting where biblical literacy is on the decline the importance of teaching is elevated.

<sup>24</sup> *HALOT*, מַחַמֵּה, s.v. Koehler and Baumgartner offer the translation options ‘to read in an undertone’ or ‘to mutter while meditating’.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the discussion of reading groups in William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the discussion of *Lectio Divina* on the Bible Society website <<http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/our-work/lectio-divina>>.

**iv. Contextualising the Word:** The general lack of biblical literacy is a huge problem in terms of the Bible's authoritative communication in this generation. By and large people in the church struggle hugely with the Old Testament because of the interpretative difficulties caused by gaps of history, culture, language and worldview. In any teaching setting, if the Scriptures are going to speak clearly, it is important to bridge these gaps in clear and manageable ways. Just three minutes on the impending Assyrian crisis—or a half-page handout—gives great insight for understanding Isaiah. The same is true of the challenges of Gnosticism when preaching through 1 John or explaining the OT wisdom background to the parables, and so on. Contextualising the Scriptures helps people to see the meaning of the text for themselves and respond to it.<sup>27</sup>

**v. Unpacking the Interpretative Toolbox:** How often does a preacher hear the words, 'I don't know how you got all of that out of *that* text!' To the 'person in the pew,' it seems like a magic trick. Here's the text and suddenly, *abracadabra*, here's the application! It strikes me that this is a somewhat inadequate way to go about unpacking the text of Scripture if we truly believe that it is the authoritative Word of God that shapes our worldview. As with the above discussion of contextualisation, it is not difficult to incorporate brief insights into the hermeneutical process as part of our teaching. Along the way we teach people how to fish rather than simply fishing for them.

**vi. Pray and Sing the Word:** If the Bible is to shape every aspect of our thought world, it is important to give people a spiritual vocabulary that addresses every life setting. Therefore, the biblical text must shape our prayers and our songs as well as our teaching. As human beings we are more than just intellects and the Scriptures should form our emotive responses of joy and sorrow and every hue in between. Indeed, is this not the very reason why the Psalms have communicated with such power to generations of believers throughout many ages and cultural settings? They transcend the particular environment of both author and reader by giving expression to thoughts, emotions and experiences to which we can

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<sup>27</sup> In the same vein, we have a wealth of great study bibles available in the UK setting. These are helpful tools in bridging the hermeneutical gap, with bite-sized pieces of Bible background information made available at those points in the text where these details are most relevant for accurate interpretation. I would argue that the days of giving people just the simple text of the Bible have long since passed. Such study aids are essential if people are to be encouraged to grapple with the whole of Scripture in a meaningful way.

all relate.<sup>28</sup> The Psalms give a spiritual vocabulary that aids our expression of biblical truth in every setting. Having the right vocabulary available to us is an important aspect of worldview formation.<sup>29</sup>

This is far from being an exhaustive list. There are many more approaches to the Scriptures that will prove helpful in encouraging engagement with the text. We face a constant battle with boredom in our congregations and diversity of approach is one way to counter that challenge. If we truly believe that it is the Word of God that speaks to change lives and attitudes then we must maximise encounter with that Word.

#### 4. THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

One final comment on the role of the Scriptures in shaping the worldview of our communities of faith. It seems singularly unproductive to waste time quibbling over the semantics of our high view of Scripture rather than unpacking the text for a generation of people that desperately needs to experience its power to change lives. The strong focus of discussion on questions of ‘inerrancy’ compared to ‘infallibility’ in recent years has unnecessarily subverted our attention from questions of praxis to issues of ontology. Our shared ontological understanding of the role of the Bible in the life of faith is actually clear within the evangelical community, regardless of the incessant debates of over the particular semantics of our high view of Scripture. I find myself in substantial agreement with my former colleague and good friend, Michael Bird, when he notes:

[D]iscussions over how to express the truthfulness of Scripture might be better served by defining Scripture’s veracity as opposed to the means of its incapacity for error... Thus, in seeking to define the way in which the Bible is true, or not untrue, there is the danger that one opts for a definition that is detailed and robust but thereby becomes so specific that it fails to reflect the breadth of Christian tradition, historical and global. For that reason I prefer stating the truthfulness of the Christian Bible in positive terms.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 18–28.

<sup>29</sup> David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 185–6.

<sup>30</sup> Michael F. Bird, ‘Introduction: From Manuscript to MP3’, in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. by Michael Bird and Michael Pahl (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), pp. 14, 17.

The evangelical community of all brands shares a high view of Scripture, a positive belief that the Bible shapes and changes lives in their every aspect. Our focus, therefore, should not be derailed by debates on the minutiae of how we define the veracity of the biblical text. We should, rather, be focussed on our shared desire to bring the worldview-challenging truth of the Bible to the 95% of the population in Scotland who seldom, if ever, encounter the Scriptures in any sort of meaningful way.

## CONCLUSION

Some modest suggestions, therefore, in conclusion. Firstly, the evangelical position regarding the supremacy of Scripture needs no more debate. Secondly, our shared focus should be fully fixed on questions of praxis in terms of proclamation both within and outwith the church. Thirdly, this praxis should have a broad vision of the full range of the Bible's voice which encompasses a holistic, Kingdom-based world and life view. Fourthly, our encounters with Scripture should be as varied as the text is itself. And, fifthly, the Bible cannot be reduced to a set of propositions but must be encountered as it is written, as song, poem, proverb, parable, philosophy, history—and so many more.