The essentiality and Authority of the canonical scripture for an actual Christian life in the world

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Abstract

Canonicity refers to the normative or authoritative books inspired by God for inclusion in Holy Scripture. Scripture are sacred texts that serve a variety of purposes in the individual and collective lives of a religious tradition. Scriptures may be used to evoke a deeper connection with the divine, convey spiritual truths, promote mystical experience, foster communal identity, and to guide individual and communal spiritual practice. This paper is a plea to rediscover the essentiality and authority of the Scriptures for an actual Christian life in the world. It begins with some clarification about the locus of authority, and then presents some key issues regarding the authority of Scripture. It is argued that the concept should be understood in close association with the authority of God, the authority of the true story of the world in Jesus Christ, obedience and transformed lives. Throughout the paper, special emphasis is placed on the authority of Scripture as the "living" and "active" word of God for an obedient and transformed Christian living in the world. The research has used conceptual research method which is carried out mainly through study of literature.

Keywords: *Scripture, authority, word of God, communication, obedience.*

Introduction

The Bible has exercised a great and positive influence upon civilization. For a long period of time, it was seen as the only source of truth and authority, not only for the church, but also for the life of society and culture in general. The authority of Scripture has been assumed throughout most of the history of the Christian church. It was only with the rise of the enlightenment and the rationalistic, historicist approach to the study of the Bible that the issue of authority was called into question. The Bible came to be treated as any other text, no longer with the assumption that it mediates God's authoritative word. It is indeed a disturbing reality that in the contemporary, increasingly secularized western world, the Christian heritage in general, and the significance of the Bible in particular, are fading away. Nowadays, a general rejection of any final authority is the trend, a phenomenon that has continued from modernity into post-modernity. It is in this context that, as Scripture-believing Christians, we make conscious efforts to bring back the essentiality and authority of the Scriptures for a meaningful and redeemed Christian life in the world. There is a great need to develop and sustain a biblical way of thinking as a solid foundation for a significant Christian impact on contemporary culture and society. To that end, it is essential, on the one hand, to be constantly engaged in promoting a responsible biblical interpretation, done not simply in an isolationist and abstract scholarship, but in dialogue with, and sensible to, the life of the church and her engagement with the world. On the other hand, it is crucial to bear witness to the lasting power of Scripture to speak afresh to every person in every generation, and especially to its lasting power to transform human lives. One specific aspect of this revitalization of the place of Scripture in the life of the individual Christian and of communities is the issue of the authority of the Scriptures. It is this particular aspect that this paper seeks to explore.

There is no problem with Christians accepting the Bible as the Word of God for humankind to which humanity should give total allegiance. Rather, the problem is on the full meaning of the authority of the scripture in the everyday life of the believer. What does it really mean for the Bible to have authority? How is it expressed, and how do Christians respond to it? Is the authority restricted to a series of propositional truths, or is it something that goes beyond that? What are the implications of the authority of Scripture for the life of a Christian in the world? These and similar questions will be explored in this paper.

The Authority of Scripture

The concept of the authority of Scripture is multifaceted and complex. The pertinent questions that emerge from this are on why, how and when is Scripture authoritative and on whether the teachings, morals and religious directives of the Bible are binding. John Bright asks,

> Does it suggest that a human being's deepest questions "have meekly to be suppressed whenever the preacher slams the desk and quotes a verse of Scripture? Does it mean that the Bible's doctrines, moral and religious directives must command our belief and practice to the last detail? Or is the Bible authoritative only in the sense that, as the primary witness to our faith, we may expect it to provide us with the broad, general principles that can guide us in our doctrinal and ethical decisions?" (1967:20, 24).

What, exactly, do we mean when we say that the Bible is the ultimate authority for one's personal life, and for the life of the church in the world? The following question is also important and urgent for the church, for those who minister from the Word of God and for those who listen to it: What does the authority of the Bible mean for the preacher and the believers alike, for the life of faith? How the authority of the Bible does relates to the moral and social challenges that Christians face in society today?

A further legitimate question beyond the level of the Bible's authority is the question of the scope of biblical authority: "What is it that we need an authoritative Bible for?" (Barton, 1997: 24-34). Is it only for the information it provides, including information about God's dealings with the world? Though it is for this, the authority of Scripture goes far beyond the information, and it offers a real "formation" towards the Christian life and obedience that God intends for his people to live out. Is it for the wisdom it provides? Though the Bible is full of wisdom, it is also more than that.

In the church, the authority of the Bible has been understood to refer to its right to be believed and obeyed, to the power of the Bible to compel one to believe, to give consent to its teachings. In other words, as the inspired Word of God, its witness is trustworthy and ought to be believed. But the question still remains as to what it ultimately is that actually constrains believers to give allegiance to the Bible as the ultimate authority for their faith and lives. What determines this belief? In answer to this, we can only say that even though there are numerous factors involved in the process of consent and belief, ultimately it is only the persuasive witness of the Holy Spirit to the trustworthiness of biblical revelation that constrains us to grant the Bible the ultimate authority.

It is the Holy Spirit who ultimately enables believers to accept Scripture as God's word, and to understand it:

> As the Spirit inspires our Christian living and thinking, leading us further into the experience of what the Bible teaches, so we find the Bible making more sense to us existentially, intellectually, imaginatively. As the Spirit actualizes the Word of God in our lives, so the Word of God authenticates itself to us (Bauckham, 1998:5).

As already mentioned, the issue of the authority of the Bible is a very complex and multifaceted one. However, whatever else may be said about it, one truth is established, namely that "the Bible provides us with the primary, and thus the normative, documents of the Christian faith; it has, therefore, normative authority over all who claim to be Christians" (Bright, 1967:30 - 40).

When referring to the Bible as Scripture, Christians express a strong conviction that it is the written Word of God, and they acknowledge a divine origin and normative dimension of the Bible. It is commonly accepted that talk of the authority of Scripture refers to something very precise, namely that the texts of Scripture mediate God's self-revelation and therefore are normative for the faith and practices of the Christian church. John Webster (2005:724) writes,

> As the instrument through which divine authority is present and operative in the church, Scripture is primary in the church's governance and fundamental to instruction in the Christian religion as well as to the church's theological self-articulation and its processes of discernment and judgment.

This is so because the authority of Scripture is not derived from external evidence, not even from the church, but is "rooted in Spirit-generated persuasion" and addresses the human condition in the most profound way: "Scripture's authority consists in its capacity to outbid and relativize human judgment, and to deliver a normative revelation that overthrows idolatry" (Webster, 2005:724).

The central presupposition of the authority of the Bible is not simply that it contains the revelation of God, but that this divine revelation is intelligible in nature, that is, the will of God is recorded in Scripture in the form of valid truths (Henry, 1992:19). This should not be understood, however, in a rigid or static way, but in synergy with the view that the authority of Scripture also makes a claim on the believer, a claim to faith and obedience. There is, indeed, much discussion as to the precise nature of the authority of Scripture, i.e. where the authority "resides": Is it in the text, in its function to point to God, in its witness to Christ, in its power to engender faith and obedience?

John Webster, for example, points to the instrumentality of Scripture in revealing the word of God. He notes:

> The authority of Scripture lies in its reference to the church's God and his gospel. Scripture is authoritative because it is instrumental in bringing the word of God to bear upon the thought and practice of the church. In this context, God's 'word' refers to God's self-communicative presence, through which he establishes the knowledge of himself in the face of defiance and ignorance; Scripture is the creaturely means through which the Word's activity is extended into the church (2005: 725).

The Authority of Scripture and Communication

In order to better understand the complex nature of Scripture and the various ways in which it manifests its authority, it might be helpful to recount the central elements of the use of language in communication: *locution* (the very act of speaking); *illocution* (the use of speech to perform actions); *proposition* (the act of presenting something for consideration); *per locution* (the effect that a statement has on the actions or beliefs of the hearer) (Schnabel, 2000:36). Schnabel points to the complex nature of Scripture and the significance of seeing it as speech acts in which the authority of Scripture is being manifested in various ways: Scripture contains authoritative doctrine, timeless truths and principles, and intellectual beliefs to which a response of assent is expected. However, Scripture also contains directives, and the authority of the Word of God requires categorical obedience or reflective observance. Scripture also contains "commissive speech-acts, in which God commits himself to a specific course of action in the future," and to which the proper response is trust. Finally, Scripture contains "expressive speech-acts" to which the proper response is "to follow the invitation implicit in these texts to share and participate in their normative response to God's glory and revelation" (Schnabel, 2000:39-40). In a more comprehensive way, it could be said that the authority of Scripture is found in the story of God and his redemption of the world, and in the capacity of the Scriptures to draw readers into this story, and in this way, to transform them.

To highlight the dynamics between the informative and performative aspects of the Scriptures as the Word of God, Kevin Vanhoozer employs the concept of "divine discourse" (2005:853). He points out that if illocutions ("what one does in speaking") are the key aspects of discourse, then we can understand the Bible as the Word of God, "not simply because of the information it conveys, but also because it is the means by which God promises, commands, warns, guides, and yes, reveals." He further states:

> The word of God is God in creative, communicative and self-communicative action, doing things in and with the word written and the word made flesh. The Bible, as comprised of divinely authorized illocutions, is the word of God, and that it becomes the word of God if and when the Spirit renders it perlocutionarily efficacious. In its fullest sense the 'Word of God' is something that God says, something that God does, and something that God is. The Scripture is the word of God because it is the chosen means through which the triune God presents Christ, ministers and administers the covenant of grace, and makes all things new through the ministry of the Word in the power of the Spirit" (2005:854).

The Bible, of course, points to the ultimate source of all truth and authority, God himself, the very author of the Scriptures, the God whom we worship and to whom we give our ultimate allegiance as the supreme authority. Again, this God is known through Scripture, therefore one has to keep these two aspects together when talking about the authority of Scripture.

The Authority of Scripture and the Authority of God

As has already been pointed out, the specific way in which the authority of the Bible is manifested has long been discussed. What is the exact locus of authority? Is it the timeless principles or truths, its witness to primary events, or is it in the function it performs for its readers? This way of phrasing the question might, in fact, illustrate a very low view of Scripture, of its authority and inspiration, as N.T. Wright argues. He shows that looking for the authority in any of those places implies that,

> …the real place where God has revealed himself, the real locus of authority and revelation is, in fact, somewhere else; somewhere else in the past in an event that once took place, or somewhere else in a timeless sphere which is not really hooked into our world at all or touches it tangentially, or somewhere in the present in 'my own experience', or somewhere in the future in some great act which is yet to come (Wright, 1991:9).

This view, insists Wright, does not do justice to the narrative nature of Scripture. Someone who holds this view should re-examine their very concept of authority. Following the Bible's own view of authority, we see that Scripture points to the authority of God himself, and thus to speak about the authority of Scripture is to speak about the authority of God. Perhaps no one should dispute the truth that all authority is God's authority, which God can delegate to whoever he wish. Jesus declared after his resurrection that "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). The authority of God thus challenges our own authority, the authority of the world, and even the authority of the church. This is, therefore, the authority of Scripture, its purpose and goal, its shape and character, the authority "to liberate human beings, to judge and condemn evil and sin in the world in order to set people free to be fully human" (Wright, 1991:10).

The Authority of Scripture as the Authority on the True Story of the World

The Bible presents us with the covenant story of creation, the fall, and redemption. This is not only our story, but the true story of the world, and that is why the biblical story is authoritative and must be observed and given an appropriate response. It is this authoritative story within the Spirit-inspired book that should confront the world with judgment and mercy, with God's authority. The way we do this is not on the world's terms, because "we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Co 4:2). It is only Scripture that can equip and continuously call the church to her task in the world. It is only Scripture that can challenge us repeatedly regarding our thoughts and lives, and is able to correct and judge us, bringing new life to us (Heb 4:12). Besides, the authority of Scripture is clear in the redemptive story of humanity and the renewal of the whole world through Jesus, the only story that challenges all other stories. N.T Wright rightly captures the authority of Scripture which constantly challenges us, but also gives us true hope, with the following words:

> In Romans 15 Paul says, 'That by patience and encouragement of the scriptures you might have hope'; because scripture brings God's order to God's world. And that order will forever be breaking in as a new word, recognizably in continuity with words heard from God before, but often in discontinuity even with the very traditions by which those older fresh words were preserved and transmitted. Scripture is the book that assures us that we are the people of God when, again and again, we are tempted to doubt. Scripture is the covenant book, not just in order that we can look up our pedigree in it and see where we came from (Abraham and so on), but the book through which the Spirit assures that we are his people and through which he sends us out into the world to tell the Jesus story, that is, the Israel story which has become the Jesus story which together is God's story for the world. And as we do that in the power of the Spirit, the miracle is that it rings true and people out there in the world know, in this or that fashion, that this strange story which we are telling does in fact run deeper than the world's stories. It does in fact tell them truths which they half-knew and had rather hoped to forget. It is the story which confirms the fact that God has redeemed the world in Jesus Christ. It is the story which breaks open all other world-views and, by so doing, invites men and women, young and old, to see this story as their story. In other words, as we let the Bible be the Bible, God works through us and it, to do what he intends to do in and for the church and the world (1991:14).

To live by the authority of Scripture means to allow ourselves to be permanently shaped and moulded by the story of the Bible, especially as we are constantly tempted to think and to do as the world is and does. It is only the Scriptures that can judge and redeem our own actions and lives. That is why we should allow Scripture to teach us, to guide us, to bring us back to the biblical view of the purpose and meaning of life.

That is why the issue of the authority of Scripture is so important. It is only the Bible that shows the true nature of God and his plans for the world; it is only the Bible that reveals the true authority of the cross, and challenges the world's authority and power of domination and control. It is only the Bible that reveals the true God who can redeem the world. That is why we have to read and tell the world the true story of God. There is no other way for the world to be redeemed than by hearing the true story of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. Scripture offers the only redemptive story which exists. That is why Scripture has authority, it is the only book which reveals the story of the redemption of the world, a story that has power on its own terms as the only true story of God for the world. We have to tell this story again and again, and let its power work as it reveals a God who is involved in the world and wants to save it. This is the only authoritative, true story of the world, and that is why Scripture is given ultimate authority.

The church needs to continually resist the temptations and the stories of the world by reading afresh the story and the message of Scripture, and by living a life under the Bible's authority. We should allow the Scriptures to speak to us, to challenge our own customary readings of specific passages; we should allow it to judge our life in totality, to shape and reshape our thinking and actions. This is how the Bible works out its authority. Wright is again to the point:

> God's own authority, exercised not to give true information about wholeness but to give wholeness itself, by judging and remaking the thoughts and intentions, the imaginations and rememberings, of men, women and children. There are worlds to be discovered here of which a good deal of the church remains sadly ignorant. The Bible is the book of personal renewal, the book of tears and laughter, the book through which God resonates with our pain and joy, and enables us to resonate with his pain and joy. This is the really powerful authority of the Bible, to be distinguished from the merely manipulative or the crassly confrontational 'use' of scripture (1991:19).

Scripture, Interpretation, and the Life of the Church

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, a very clear reason as to why Scripture is authoritative. It is inspired by God, thus being the work of God, or something that God has done through human agency. As such, it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." G. E. Ladd (2002:134-5) sums up the matter by writing that the Bible is "the Word of God given in human words." There are several important implications of this reality. As the "Word of God," the Bible has eternal relevance as it contains the revelation of the will of God for the world, for human beings, for the meaning of life, for all generations.

When we study it, we do so as if listening to a Word of God for humankind. But because it is given in "human words," this means that it can be understood by us, but also that it is historically conditioned and we need the work of interpretation.

There is a very clear sense in which the church represents a sphere of biblical authority as Scripture shapes and sustains the community. Thus, it is very important to think of the authority of Scripture not simply in formal terms, but also in relation to its use and influence in the life of Christian communities, in its "lawfulness with which it may command and elicit patterns of thought and action on the part of the church" (Webster, 2005:726). It is in this respect that the interpretation of the Scriptures is not done simply to derive doctrines and principles, but also to determine a certain way of life. John Webster captures this important truth very well:

> The act of interpreting an authoritative text involves the adoption of specific attitudes and virtues, as well as the performance of certain operations, as appropriate to the character of the text and its authoritative claim. Thus, for example, to interpret an authoritative text is not simply to be an agent acting upon a passive text that we summon before our minds and question; nor is it to handle the text as if it were an inert historical artefact. Because the text has authority, it makes certain claims upon the reader, claims to which the reader must attend if an appropriate response is to be made to the text. An appropriate response will be one of subordination, deference, or compliance as one stands beneath the claim that the text represents. Authority quickens action, directing it in ways that are fitting to the truth that is declared. The authority of Scripture thus includes its capacity to stimulate and direct interpretative action. Interpretative action is, however, rarely an end in itself; it is engaged in order to enable other kinds of action and judgment, intellectual, moral, political. In this way, therefore, the authority of scripture is formative for the life of the Christian community in which it presents the divine claim (2005:727).

It could be said that the articulation of the formal criteria for biblical authority are, in many instances, in tension with the actual practices of those affirming the authority (Brueggemann, 2005:3). What is the benefit of a firm and clear affirmation of the authority of Scripture for a particular community if that authority is not "translated" into its life and practices? However, another question is also valid: How can one live out the authority of the text without first knowing and understanding the authority? A way out of this either or type of reasoning, Brueggemann suggests, is to think of the question of the authority of the Scriptures in terms of authorization, and so the question becomes, "how, in a pluralist world like ours, concrete communities can be authorized to live, act, and hope in a manner that may at times oppose the accepted norm. What will provide energy, courage, and legitimacy for action against the destructive tendencies embedded within our civilization?" (2005: 6, 8).

The authority of Scripture for believers manifests itself not simply in its rules, advice and guidance, but also in the courage it requires to live in obedience to the text and to order our lives in opposition to the values of the dominant world system and in accordance with the central biblical values of mercy, justice, and peace. There is also the promise that "when responded to in trust and love by us, the revelatory, covenant-making act that God performs in and through Scripture can confidently be believed to be sufficient for salvation and for truthful, faithful discipleship of Christ" (Ward, 2005:730). It is because of the authority of the Scriptures that believers have the power and ability to look beyond the present reality of the world and see the new world of God, the new creation that is beginning to take place, and live according to this new reality. Indeed, it is in the community of faith that the authority of the Bible is manifested. Brueggemann concludes, "The book can be received and its authority evidenced only in communities of obedience and praise which act with power, courage, freedom, and energy towards a new world envisioned, imagined, and promised in this text" (2005:19).

The actual Christian life in the world

It is worth accepting the commonly held notion that life is divided between a sacred realm, limited to things like worship and personal morality, and a secular realm that includes science, politics, economics, and the rest of the public arena. Many Christians with strong religious convictions find themselves living in two separate worlds: the private world of family and church where they can express their faith freely and the public world where religious expression is strongly discouraged. The commonly held viewpoint is that the sacred and secular worlds are separate and distinct. Worship is for Sundays, but on other days one's thinking and behavior is set to conform to the secular world. (Fort, 1996; Pearcey, 2004). Those with deeply held convictions desire work/career to mean something more than earning a paycheck or impressing colleagues. They want to pursue life where the concerns of career and everyday life are interwoven through morality. But instead of leading whole and integrated lives, they find they must put aside their beliefs at work and instead put on a ''secular'' mindset. They have been taught that faith is strictly personal and that it has no place in the public arena. Furthermore, the purpose and meaning of career is defined in secular terms. It is all about climbing the corporate ladder, seeking prestige that comes with the job title, and making decisions solely on highest salary or compensation. Sometimes, it is doing what is best for the company even if it goes against one's deeply held beliefs (Chase, 2004; Pearcey, 2004).

Corporate life can be completely separate from their personal walk with the Lord. But no Christian, in any line of work, can be satisfied when torn in two different directions.

This division and conflict involving sacred life versus secular life is not new. Sermons exhort people to live out their faith in the secular marketplace. Numerous works offer insights of the roles and expectations of Christian employees, with particular attention paid to how they might serve God in the workplace (Mattox, 1978; Nash, 1994; Peabody, 1974). Researchers have addressed Christian perspectives in business ethics (Calkins, 2000; Kim et al. 2009; Rossouw, 1994), while others have explored the meaning and significance of work in light of the Protestant work ethic (Ryken, 1986). In 2004, an entire issue of Business & Professional Ethics Journal was devoted to highlighting the distinction between Christian and corporate ethics and ways to bridge the gap between them (Chase, 2004).

This distinction is based on the sacred/secular division in modern society that, in theory, clearly separates these two modes of existence. In practice, however, things can get messy. Is it possible to so precisely divide these two worlds in a person? Is suppression of one's deeper ideas, attitudes, and beliefs more often than not, grounded in religion possible or even completely desirable in secular institutions? While businesses frequently espouse how ethics are important and valued, many adhere to a strict policy of not admitting any personal moral viewpoints into the workplace. Is this a good, realistic practice, from a business ethics, human resource, and profitability perspective?

Serious questioning and rethinking of the sacred/secular divide is occurring not only from the sacred side of the divide, but from the secular side as well. In his recent book, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion* the renowned scientist Stuart Kaufmann (2010) works through the cutting edge of science to propose a deep connection between the natural world and religion. His work proposes a new partnership between science and religious values and shows how the division that existed between them is based on too simplistic and reductionist of an understanding. The champion of modernist thinking in the social sciences, Jurgen Habermas (2010) writes in *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* about the crucial global need for an open dialog between ''Reason'' and ''Religions.'' He contends that the secular and the religious have their roles but should more fully recognize their limitations.

This would have the effect of admitting that these need to work together to help solve some of our biggest, most stubborn problems caused by religious and ideological fundamentalism, of which he sees secularization as its own type of inflexible fundamentalism.

Berger (1977) describes a public/private dichotomy which is a division between the large institutions of the public sphere such as the state, academia, and corporations and the private sphere of family, church, and personal relationships. The large public institutions house scientific (value-free) and genuine knowledge whereas the private sphere is all about personal values, personal choices, and beliefs. The private sacred realm includes different religious views including Christianity, Jewish, Muslim, secular worldview, postmodern worldview, non-theistic worldviews who have constantly changed the authority of the bible, New Age, the resurgence of the African Traditional worldview which equally are opposed to the authority of the scriptures and the doctrine of the inerrancy of the scriptures and so forth. But the public secular realm is where everyone has access to neutral (value-free) knowledge. It is knowledge that is objective and free of any religion or ideology. An illustration of the public/private divide is found in the political-religious literature which discusses whether a public figure may rely on his religious beliefs in proposing policy or deciding cases (Fort, 1996). On a broader scale, because Christianity is simply a religion, it has no relation with objective truth to which we submit. Christianity is simply a chosen belief, or mere wish fulfillment (Pearcey, 2004). Our worldview affects all aspects of life, especially decisions related to job and career. It is not uncommon to find many well-meaning Christians who faithfully attend church but who have absorbed a worldview that makes it easy for them to ignore their Christian principles when it comes to do the practical business of work and daily living. Their sincerely held beliefs are held in one mental category (sacred) and practical decision-making is in another (secular). Christianity touches on all areas including social issues, history, politics, science and anthropology, morality and especially one's career and personal life.

Modernism

Our worldview forms the context within which we base our understanding of reality, knowledge, morality, and life's meaning and purpose (Sire, 1997; Walsh and Middleton, 1984). Our worldview has a profound impact on how we decide what is real versus unreal, what is right versus wrong, and what is important versus unimportant. It shapes our culture and expresses itself in all institutions including the arts, religion, education, media, and business.

Modernism, and increasingly post-modernism is the dominant worldview of our culture. The modern worldview rejects any notion of a supernatural or transcendent dimension that provides meaning, purpose and coherence beyond the physical events that we observe. Stated differently, modernism rejects all non-empirical ways of knowing or the possibility that there is more to the world than what we can directly access with our senses (Daniels et al. 2000; Yaman, 2003).

As modernism gradually replaced Christianity as the dominant worldview in the western world, it essentially eliminated God from the public arena. Modernists believed the growth of newly discovered facts based on human reasoning and the scientific method would yield a unified answer for all knowledge and life. Such thinking was not surprising given the rapid and impressive growth of modern science during the 1700s. Tremendous advancements in knowledge in fields like medicine, biology, anatomy, mechanics, and astronomy were the result of applying logic, observation, and experimentation as well as building on the works of other scientists and scholars (Hunt, 1991; Kim et al. 2009). The potential power of human reason and science seemed limitless. The success of the scientific revolution generated confidence that scientific reason could provide the path to authentic knowledge and truth. Christianity was no longer compatible with truth or answers for all knowledge and life (Pearcey, 2004).

This thinking, however, also effectively altered views about life's meaning and purpose, and morality. Over time, human reason essentially replaced God in determining moral laws. For instance, under utilitarianism moral issues were no longer based on God's Word, or transcendent truth but on practicality. Stealing was wrong not because it was against Scripture, but because it adversely affected the economic system (Dewey, 1922; James, 1907; Veith, 1994). We create our own morality and meaning through choices. This line of thinking has contributed to the value versus fact dichotomy that underlies public education. By the time students enter college, they believe in objective truth presented in science, and sometimes in history, but rarely in ethics or morality. Science is all about facts whereas morality is about values (Bloom, 1987; Pearcey, 2004).

In sum, modernism and the resulting sacred/secular divide simply changed our views regarding knowledge, truth, and morality. Although scientific reason held the promise of being able to explain everything, it could not resolve moral issues nor address fundamental existential questions (Starke and Finke 2000; Swatos and Christiano 1999). Today, many accept this framework at face-value, but a closer examination reveals flaws and limitations of such thinking.

Scripture has much to say about human nature and behavior that is consistent with what we observe in ourselves and others. Christian ethics founded on Scripture gives moral standards or a common platform that allow us to judge between right and wrong. For everyday vocational life, it teaches the value of practicing good stewardship of money and resources. God's word does not make a distinction between sacred versus secular work. It is not as though serving God requires full-time ministry, and that employment outside of church is worldly as some mistakenly assume. Instead, all lines of work should integrate spiritual and sacred aspects of work as illustrated by the Protestant work ethic and its concern for the common good, altruism and self-sacrifice (Calkins, 2000; Colson and Pearcey, 1999). For the Christian employee, a job is more than running a business or making a living. The New Testament encourages the believer to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5: 16) which requires relying upon the Holy Spirit in discerning God's personal calling. This will manifest itself in many ways such as the commitment to developing high quality products for consumer benefit, giving honest service, keeping one's word, and caring about the welfare of employees (Rossouw, 1994). This can also mean that the believer will stand up for what is right against injustice and make decisions that limits career success like recognition, advancement and pay. However, job achievement is never the ultimate goal of the believer's life. Instead, it is one where faith and work are interwoven through morality, where hour after hour, day after day, good work is evident to all (Peabody, 1974).

The Impact of scriptures on the African community.

The arrival of the Bible in Africa conjures positive reactions. Missionary "work and expansion closely followed or preceded the colonization of the continent and the establishment of European settlements and hegemony" (Mojola 2007:146). This is the Africa that birthed and bred the tall men of the continent like Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Festus Kivengere, and Okot p'Bitek. It was an Africa where such people read the Bible or grew up in schools where the Bible was taught to them by missionaries and where conflict of understanding and interpretation abounded. Their immediate contexts became the breeding grounds for their shifts in thinking about politics, governance, society, Christianity and even the economies of their nations, as seen in their writings and pronouncements or in what others have written about them (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986, 1993; Wendland and Loba-Mkole 2004; Vahakangas and Kyomo (2003).

There are many socio-economic ills and ethnic conflicts in many spots in Africa. The 2004 Rwanda genocide and the Kenyan 2007/8 post-election violence would seem to give the impression that the impact of Scriptures on socio-political and ethnic tensions does not count in Africa. Kenya and Rwanda are two nations which prior to their famous recent conflicts were generally described as Christian nations. However, what individuals did with fellow citizens (through murders, destruction of property and psychological trauma) have begged many questions: do the Scriptures have any impact in the lives of people in these contexts; do they have any role in preventing the occurrence of conflict or should it only be seen in terms of their role in helping people to cope and endure the damages from ethnic and/or political conflict?

A cry often heard in Kenya and other African nations is: 'How come we have many Christians but corruption is rampant in the country? How can we as Christians have greater socio-political impact? How is it that we are always a begging people?' These are hard questions that contemporary Africa must address in one way or another. Some of the answers proffered for resolving the maladies are clearly based on the word of God and such teachings continue to transform the minds of many as they aim high and work hard to address the issues. The ultimate impact of the Scriptures in Africa will continue to happen as believers engage with what the Word of God says to their various circumstances and situations.

The act and impact of Bible translation has brought about spiritual and social change in many African communities. In the 21st century the growth of the church is exponentially expanding and this can be attributed to the presence of Scriptures in languages the people understand best and to greater engagement with the Scriptures through teaching, preaching and theological reflection. According to Zogbo (2007:351) "Africa is, in fact, already becoming a center for Christianity and for theological thought". Also Bediako argues that African Christianity today is inconceivable apart from the existence of the Bible in African indigenous languages. The quest by African Christians today to understand better the message of the Bible with regard to economic and political life is in addition to what they already understand and embrace about the salvation of their souls, their journey through earth to heaven and the defeat of forces of darkness expressed in many ways including the occult.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to highlight the need for a continuous preoccupation with promoting the essentiality and authority of Scripture for the life of the church. If the church shall have any significant impact on contemporary culture and society, it must rediscover the authority and power of the Scriptures to affect and transform lives. Whatever view one holds regarding the different aspects of the authority of Scripture, it is never simply an intellectual and theoretical question. As argued in this paper, to acknowledge the authority of Scripture means also to live in obedience to God and under his authority. Thus, the authority of Scripture for believers manifests itself in the courage to live in obedience to the text which has the power to constantly challenge and order our lives in conformity with the central biblical values.

Our study has enabled us to conclude that we should never try to limit, to domesticate, or alleviate the power and authority of Scripture to address us afresh in every generation. Because the Word of God is "living and active," it maintains the power to challenge some of the very dogmatic doctrinal formulations that can be found in church as well as the ultra-rational, historicist, and rigid formulations of the academy. We should allow the living Word of God to constantly address and challenge our own formulations and interpretations of the text. The power and authority of Scripture repeatedly challenges our personal, ecclesial and political agendas. The living Word of God cannot be reduced or domesticated to our own advantages. On the contrary, because Scripture has the ultimate authority, it puts us under the judgment of God and gives us faith to live in faithful obedience to the Word who became flesh and lived among us. It gives us a foundation and a model for a new, authentic, and redeemed way to live in the world. Throughout the paper, special emphasis has been placed on the authority of Scripture as the "living" and "active" word of God for an obedient and transformed Christian living in the world.

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