

# Biblical Authority in Recent Evangelical Books

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Three recent books by leading evangelical Anglican scholars all address the issue of the Bible's authority. This article will review and analyse the approach taken in each of these works by writers John Stott, Alister McGrath, and James Packer. Each book will be examined in turn, followed by a brief conclusion.

## John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity*

This book is consciously structured around the Trinity. The central chapters reflect Stott's initial insistence that evangelical priorities should be limited to: 'the revealing initiative of the God the Father, the redeeming work of God the Son, and the transforming work of God the Holy Spirit.'<sup>1</sup> This Trinitarian structure is more a presentational device than a theological statement about the Trinity. The place of the Son and the Spirit in the work of revelation are not ignored, and revelation is not seen as the work of the Father alone.<sup>2</sup> Stott's discussion of revelation begins by acknowledging that '[t]he primary question in every religion relates to the topic of *authority*,' and seeks to answer the question, 'Why do evangelicals attribute *authority* to Scripture?'<sup>3</sup> This he answers with reference to three key words: revelation, inspiration, and authority. Some discussion of perspicuity, sufficiency, and inerrancy is also added after these major headings, but Stott's concern is with questions of authority rather than with questions of epistemology: not how we know God but why we obey Scripture. The argument is cumulative: 'Because Scripture is the revelation of God by the inspiration of the Spirit, it has authority over us.'<sup>4</sup>

After establishing from Scripture<sup>5</sup> that God's self-revelation is necessary if we are to know him, he considers four categories of revelation: general, special, progressive, and personal. The climax of God's special revelation was the Christ and 'the total biblical witness to him'<sup>6</sup> which is the only way that subsequent generations can have access to him. He thus ties knowledge of the incarnate Word to knowledge of the inscripturated word, in such a way that revelation can be said to be personal without being less than propositional.<sup>7</sup> This leads to a discussion of the 'words' and the conclusion that God himself has spoken through the words of the apostles and prophets. A brief discussion

of progressive revelation (relying, I think spuriously, on Is. 28:13 but more firmly on Heb. 1:1) leads to a distinction under the heading ‘Personal revelation’ between revelation and illumination as ministries of the Holy Spirit.

Stott’s concern is with more than epistemology: ‘Evangelical Christians emphasize that without revelation the knowledge of God is impossible...[they] also emphasize that what God has revealed to us is true, and that our only reaction must be to listen, to believe and to obey,’ since the truth revealed by God is ‘absolute, binding and universal’.<sup>8</sup>

Stott then proceeds to the topic of ‘Inspiration’. This indicates how God has revealed himself in Scripture. The double authorship of Scripture entails a double approach to it which is both critical and reverent. A mechanical theory of inspiration by ‘dictation’ is rejected in favour of a concursive theory of inspiration, where the end result of the human authors’ active work remains ‘the Word of God’.<sup>9</sup> A confessedly imperfect analogy with the two natures of Christ is brought forward, with the concomitant application that neither the human nor the divine nature of Scripture should be emphasized at the expense of the other.<sup>10</sup> The discussion of the ‘critical’ approach to Scripture interacts with what Stott sees as the sub-Christian presuppositions of Enlightenment-inspired scholarship, but he is careful to point out that these are not a necessary part of the ‘critical’ task.<sup>11</sup> Humility and dependence on the Spirit through earnest prayer are also necessary for ‘a true and balanced approach to Scripture’.<sup>12</sup>

Stott then comes to the crucial subject of authority and relates it to the previous discussion: ‘Because Scripture is the revelation of God by the inspiration of the Spirit, it has authority over us.’<sup>13</sup> He ties the authority of Scripture to its role in making Christ known (revelation) and to its status as the ‘Word of God’ (inspiration). Scripture has authority because it is a witness to Christ inspired by the Spirit himself. The discussion of authority begins, however, with the assertion that ‘our day detests authority’ which is seen as antithetical to freedom.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, theological confusion reigns in the churches because there is a ‘lack of agreement on how to agree, that is, on the question of authority’.<sup>15</sup> Thus the discussion of authority is related to the purpose of the book itself, which is a plea for unity amongst evangelicals and hence a plea for a united evangelical approach to this subject.

This leads into a discussion of four rival approaches to authority in the Church. Stott examines how Catholics, Liberals, Anglicans, and Evangelicals answer the question of how Christ exercises his authority and governs the Church. No comment is passed on the Catholic and Liberal approaches but with reference to Hooker he declares that the Anglican ‘threefold cord’ of Scripture, tradition, and reason is ‘unworkable’ in practice.<sup>16</sup> The evangelical answer is (to use a vivid image borrowed from Calvin) that ‘Scripture is the sceptre by which King Jesus reigns’.<sup>17</sup> Hence the question of authority is answered by reference to the biblical theme of the Kingdom of God. This is not developed beyond the initial assertion but it naturally flows out of Stott’s previous teaching on Scripture as the Word of God. Tradition, reason, and experience are considered important, but secondary. The use of John 16:12-13 by Catholics and Liberals is considered before he shows from the context of the passage that it was the apostles who were led by the Spirit into ‘all truth’ and that this promise was fulfilled in the writing of the New Testament.<sup>18</sup>

Stott goes on to expound what I will call the ‘Wenham defence’ of Scriptural authority, which was most ably expounded (in this country) by John Wenham.<sup>19</sup> Stott avers: ‘The reason why the church has historically submitted to Scripture, and why evangelicals continue to do so, is that our Lord Jesus himself did.’<sup>20</sup> He then deals with the different case for the authority of the New Testament along the same lines as Wenham, showing how Jesus deliberately made provision for it. Stott’s conclusion is that ‘if we wish to submit to the authority of Christ, we must submit to the authority of Scripture’.<sup>21</sup>

Then follows a discussion of perspicuity, sufficiency, and inerrancy. The question of inerrancy receives the longest treatment and there are a few inconsistencies which could be noted. However, the main point is that Stott does not believe a prior commitment to inerrancy is required for the authority of the Bible to be effective: ‘The hallmark of authentic evangelicalism is not subscription but *submission*. That is, it is not whether we subscribe to an impeccable formula about the Bible, but whether we live in practical *submission* to what the Bible teaches.’<sup>22</sup> Authority is not, therefore, tied to inerrancy. Stott’s prior statement that ‘what God has revealed is true, and... our only reaction must be to listen, to believe and to obey’<sup>23</sup> does, however, seem to link the trustworthiness of the Bible to its authority. He agrees with Packer that the Bible is ‘totally trustworthy as a consequence of its entire

truthfulness,' and urges all evangelicals to likewise agree on this principle.<sup>24</sup> The problem is that what Packer means by 'entire truthfulness' is in fact inerrancy.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Stott is distinctive in calling for 'an advance resolve to submit to whatever [Scripture] may later be shown to teach'.<sup>26</sup>

**Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism***

This book 'aims to explore the coherence of evangelicalism by bringing out the inner consistency of the evangelical approach and demonstrating the internal contradictions and vulnerabilities of its contemporary rivals'.<sup>27</sup> This is with particular reference to the uniqueness of Christ and the authority of Scripture.

**Scripture and Jesus Christ**

Evangelicalism is not a 'religion of the book', asserts McGrath, but 'focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ'. There is, however, an 'inextricable and intimate connection between the word of God incarnate and the word of God in Scripture'.<sup>28</sup> The link is that 'Christ can be known properly only through Scripture'.<sup>29</sup> McGrath is wary, however, of equating Scripture with revelation, and claims that evangelicalism has resisted this temptation, citing the work of D. G. Bloesch in support of this.<sup>30</sup> Evangelicals have, however, made this equation (see Stott above, and Packer below!).<sup>31</sup> This statement does show that McGrath (if not 'evangelicalism') resists this move, as do other 'postconservative evangelicals'.<sup>32</sup> 'Scripture,' he comments, 'is not Jesus Christ.'<sup>33</sup> He appears to be working with Barth's definition of the 'threefold word of God'; indeed, Barth is quoted in support of this point immediately afterwards.<sup>34</sup>

Despite his obvious debt to neo-orthodoxy, McGrath goes on briefly to outline the classic 'Wenham defence' of scriptural authority in much the same way as Stott.<sup>35</sup> Several times we are informed of the 'inextricable and intimate connection', the 'organic and essential connection', and 'the most intimate and natural of connections between Scripture...and Christ', so that we are left in no doubt that 'Christology and scriptural authority are inextricably linked'.<sup>36</sup> The basic connection is that Scripture brings us knowledge of Christ, and we honour Scripture because Christ did. Although it is 'a misleading and unhelpful false dichotomy' to set the question up as 'either the Bible or Christ'<sup>37</sup> this appears to be what McGrath himself has done by resisting the 'temptation' to

identify Scripture with revelation. Stott begins from ‘the revealing initiative of God the Father,’<sup>38</sup> who reveals his Son by the inspiration of the Spirit; McGrath’s discussion is intensely Christological, with only one mention of the Father (in a quote from Calvin)<sup>39</sup> and one of the Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

### The authority of Scripture

McGrath notes that the non-Christian world (the ‘Academy’) finds the notion of authority repellent.<sup>41</sup> He declares that the Church has always regarded Scripture as authoritative, but that it has not always articulated how and why.<sup>42</sup> He expresses misgivings concerning ‘one particular manner of grounding and expressing’ Scripture’s authority, namely the approach of B. B. Warfield, since it is said to rely on inadequate rationalistic foundations.<sup>43</sup> This opposition to ‘old Princeton’ becomes more significant for McGrath later in the book and has led others to criticise him for not actually engaging with the primary sources of this ‘school’.<sup>44</sup> The critique of Warfield is not developed here, but it enables McGrath to redefine the foundations of scriptural authority along different lines from Stott, who has great respect for Warfield.<sup>45</sup>

### The liberating dimension of scriptural authority

The basic thesis in this section is stated immediately: ‘The evangelical insistence upon the authority of Scripture reflects a determination not to permit anything from outside the Christian heritage to become the norm for what is truly ‘Christian’.’<sup>46</sup> The Christian tradition itself must exercise a ‘controlling influence’<sup>47</sup> over theology which would otherwise become captive to other prevailing ideologies such as ‘imperial theology’ or Nazism. To acknowledge the foundational authority of Scripture is liberating for the church and for theology (the individual is not mentioned) because ‘[i]t frees us from the slavish demand that we follow each and every cultural trend, and offers us a framework whereby we may *judge* them’.<sup>48</sup> This is developed further with reference to former Bishop Spong who, McGrath claims, has enslaved the Bible to ‘the latest cultural norms prevailing among the Greater New England liberal élite’.<sup>49</sup> Theology is to be controlled by ideas and values whose origins lie within the Christian tradition; more particularly, it is to be controlled by ‘the self-revelation of God in Scripture’.<sup>50</sup> Only this foundation will maintain the Church’s liberty and provide theology with its ‘public legitimation and justification’.<sup>51</sup>

McGrath thus expounds the authority of Scripture in such a way as to provide theology with public legitimation and a means of judging prevailing cultural norms. He does not provide reasons why the Bible should occupy such an authoritative position other than the fact that this liberates theology from ideologies it seeks to oppose. The only factor in favour of scriptural authority then, is seen to be the fact that it is a distinctively *Christian* ‘controlling influence’. This is clear in the next section on “Rival approaches to authority” where he states quite clearly that ‘the authority of Scripture *rests* in the universal acceptance of that authority within the Christian church... In ascribing authority to Scripture, we are thus not merely recognizing and honouring God’s decision to reveal himself to us...we are also honouring a living tradition’.<sup>52</sup> So Scripture is authoritative not because of what it is or does but because its authority is a recognisably and traditionally Christian authority.

Rival approaches to authority are eruditely critiqued. Culture, experience, reason, and tradition must not, concludes McGrath, be allowed to become normative.<sup>53</sup> Biblical criticism, in the sense of hard study of the Bible as a human book, is a valid exercise, yet it does not necessarily undermine ‘the historic Christian conviction concerning the authority of Scripture’.<sup>54</sup> Like Stott, McGrath criticises modern scholarship for its un-Christian presuppositions.<sup>55</sup>

In a short section on authority and experience McGrath outlines what he sees as the relationship between doctrine and experience. Jesus’ own authority was, he explains, ‘in the first instance experienced, and only in the second explained, by his followers’.<sup>56</sup> This is in line with his earlier insistence that ‘theories of how Scripture possesses such authority are posterior to the recognition of such authority in the first place’.<sup>57</sup> Experience is here made primary, the articulation of it secondary, and hence this is the distinction which allows him (and others)<sup>58</sup> to re-articulate the doctrine of the authority of Scripture. This approach (which McGrath uses elsewhere also)<sup>59</sup> sounds convincing, if only because the development of the doctrine of Scripture chronologically post-dates the coming of Christ. Yet this approach can be criticised because ‘the apostles’ experience of Jesus was not simply some existential ‘I-Thou’ encounter which led them to search around for appropriate concepts to express that experience. Rather, the experience itself involved hearing propositional truths’<sup>60</sup> which, we might add, included Jesus’ own statements about his authority (e.g. John 8:26, 28, 31).

Interestingly, and perhaps unexpectedly, the opposite approach is taken by charismatic Nicky Gumbel in *Questions of Life*. After describing the experience he had of reading the Bible, and expounding the ‘Wenham defence’ he concludes, ‘It is very important to hold on to the fact that all Scripture is inspired by God... If we do, it should transform the way we live our lives... If we accept that the Bible is inspired by God, then its authority must follow from that. If it is God’s word then it must be our supreme authority.’<sup>61</sup> This is not the way he apparently first experienced the Bible’s authority,<sup>62</sup> but it is the way he articulates it.

McGrath is correct to say that although doctrines of Scripture attempt to explain why Scripture is authoritative, they do not establish Scripture’s authority.<sup>63</sup> His own explanation is that Scripture is authoritative because it is a distinctively Christian norm. Although this is fine when it comes to constructing a theology (it is desirable to have a ‘Christian’ theology!), it does not help to authoritatively evaluate and critique the many variants of ‘Christian Theology’ on offer since they all claim some foundation in tradition.<sup>64</sup> Very little is made of the ‘Wenham defence’ whose inclusion may itself be due to the dual authorship (with David Wenham) of the original draft of this chapter which appeared elsewhere.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps this is left undeveloped because of its strong affinities with the position of Warfield (whom John Wenham admired).<sup>66</sup> Evangelicals, McGrath repeats, are increasingly ‘expressing misgivings concerning the approaches to biblical authority associated with the Old Princeton school’.<sup>67</sup> The evidence for this claim, contained in a footnote, is a series of articles by J. D. G. Dunn from 1982,<sup>68</sup> articles which were, however, directly refuted by another evangelical in the same journal (*Churchman*).<sup>69</sup> Indeed, these articles were a contributory cause of a split in evangelicalism and the founding of a new journal (*Anvil*).<sup>70</sup> It is clear that McGrath distrusts the Princetonian approach and has sought to develop his own. Whether he would agree with Dunn that Jesus was a ‘liberal’ rather than a ‘fundamentalist’ in his view of the Bible is debateable.<sup>71</sup>

### J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life*

Packer’s chapter on biblical authority is entitled, ‘God’s Freedom Trail’. He justifies his approach saying, ‘[b]iblical authority is often expounded in opposition to lax views of truth. Not so often, however, is it presented as the liberating, integrating, invigorating principle that it really is’.<sup>72</sup> In an involved and well-argued chapter he makes three basic points: true freedom is only

found under the authority of Christ; that authority is mediated through Scripture; and the full authority of Scripture relies on its inerrancy.

### Freedom and Authority

Packer begins with the by now expected remarks about how authority has ‘become almost a dirty word in the Western world’.<sup>73</sup> He expands this by claiming that the modern dislike of authority stems from the fact that ‘freedom is today almost a magic word’.<sup>74</sup> His conclusion, however, is that ‘real freedom is only ever found under authority’.<sup>75</sup> Authority is a relational word signifying ‘the right to rule’<sup>76</sup> and is carefully distinguished from authoritarianism which implies a demand for submission without the justification of truth or morality.<sup>77</sup> This last point has some bearing upon the later argument concerning inerrancy. Authority gives life ‘a goal and shape’.<sup>78</sup> In application, he shows how the Christian ‘authority-principle’ underlies some secular values (on the dignity of women and the sanctity of life).<sup>79</sup> True freedom is not merely external, and brings integrity, spontaneity, and contentment. This is illustrated from Scripture, supremely from John 8:31-36.<sup>80</sup>

The link between the modern dislike of ‘authority’ and the quest for freedom is well observed. Careful caveats concerning authoritarianism and the juxtaposition of different authority-principles make this a compelling section which presents authority as something sought by all. A rhetorically powerful case for the Christian authority-principle is made through the use of examples, while everything is carefully explained from the Scriptures themselves.

### Authority and Scripture

Packer relates the concepts of authority and freedom to Scripture using the thesis that freedom is found only under authority. This authority must, for the Christian, be God himself through Christ to whom all authority has been given.<sup>81</sup> Christ’s authority is exercised through Scripture, which is not merely a witness to, but the instrument of authority.<sup>82</sup> The Bible is not only a revelation of God’s character, but a revelation of ‘his mind and will’ and hence claims authority over us.<sup>83</sup> ‘Modern theology,’ he warns us, ‘will oppose the authority of Christ to that of Scripture, but in the New Testament bowing to Christ’s lordship and believing God-taught doctrine entail each other.’<sup>84</sup> This tendency in modern theology was observed in McGrath’s chapter, and Packer’s rebuttal of it is given ample biblical support alongside the coherence of his



logical inferences. Possession of ‘God-taught doctrine’ gives certainty, which brings with it strength and the responsibility of obedience. Packer could have added that certainty also brings joy, but only hints at this.<sup>85</sup>

Packer assesses rival claims: the Church (the Papacy or any denomination), the individual using Scripture and tradition as ‘resources,’ and the Bible, are considered as possible sources of authority over Christians.<sup>86</sup> In order to decide between them, Packer expounds the ‘Wenham defence’.<sup>87</sup> Distinctively, he describes Paul’s view of the Bible as equating Scripture with ‘God preaching’.<sup>88</sup> He then moves on to spell out theological implications to be drawn from biblical authority. Particularly interesting here are the pneumatological implications (submitting to the authority of Christ through Scripture is what it means to be ‘Spirit-taught and Spirit-led’).<sup>89</sup> Also of note is his insistence that Scripture is not a ‘code of mechanical, impersonal do’s and don’ts’.<sup>90</sup> Rather, he insists, it promotes ethics by promoting creative obedience. This does not answer the actual objection, however, and it may have been more profitable to focus on the creative presentation of Scripture as a counter to the ‘rule-book’ caricature, perhaps discussing (as Stott and McGrath do) the narrative element of Scripture which is not addressed.

### Authority and Inerrancy

Packer states that, ‘[t]he inerrancy debate about whether we should treat all Bible teaching as true and right is really about how far we can regard Scripture as authoritative’.<sup>91</sup> He reiterates that ‘authority belongs to truth and truth only,’<sup>92</sup> an assertion which was part of his argument against authoritarianism. To assert inerrancy is, however, unfashionable in view of the ruling paradigm in critical scholarship. Packer discusses the place of critical scholarship. He is critical of Enlightenment presuppositions, which deny key Christian doctrines such as revelation. This, he claims, is unnecessary. In order to counter claims that Scripture cannot be regarded as wholly trustworthy he points to the wealth of evangelical scholarship in print which proceeds from wholly different premises.<sup>93</sup> This tactic, of relying on the credentials of ‘Bible-believing scholarship’<sup>94</sup> of a similar standard to that of the critics is somewhat flawed. It has a long pedigree, having been used by the authors of ‘The Fundamentals’ to answer the critics of their day,<sup>95</sup> but inerrancy does not require adherents in order to be true, whether they be authors of academically respectable commentaries or uneducated believers.

All the same, this is a rhetorically powerful argument, which one might have expected McGrath to have utilized also in his quest to prove the intellectual coherence of evangelicalism.

Packer asserts inerrancy despite sympathizing with some of the objections which have been raised to the use of the word. He responds to the objections (which are similar to those Stott expounds)<sup>96</sup> by declaring that he wishes to uphold the traditional view of the infallibility, inspiration, and authority of the Bible but that in the present climate of ‘linguistic devaluation and double-talk’ to affirm these things in their historical sense he must use the word inerrancy.<sup>97</sup> This is wise considering the prevalence of ‘studied ambiguity’<sup>98</sup> in theological discussion, and he is careful to clarify the implications of inerrancy for exegesis and theological method.<sup>99</sup> In essence, Packer ties the full authority of the Bible to its inerrancy. He does not claim that those who deny inerrancy forfeit all knowledge of God, but that ‘Christ is most fully known, and in this God-given freedom most fully enjoyed’ only under the authority of ‘a fully trusted Bible’.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

There are many similarities in the approaches taken by Stott, McGrath, and Packer to the subject of biblical authority. All three employ the ‘Wenham defence’ linking what they see as the normative attitude to the Bible’s authority with Christ’s own view, although this is less developed in McGrath. All three discuss the place of biblical criticism and the problems with Enlightenment presuppositions. Stott and McGrath discuss the role of narrative; Stott and Packer discuss inerrancy and speak of Scripture as the instrument by which God rules; McGrath and Packer speak of the liberating dimensions of biblical authority. All three authors are convinced that ‘authority’ is a ‘dirty word’ to modern ears, and they consider the various approaches to it taken by Christians. In an interesting use of tradition, each author finds something in the Westminster Confession worthy of quotation!<sup>101</sup>

There are also differences of approach. Stott gives us a ‘conference address’ consciously aimed at a diverse group of evangelicals which consequently skates over the surface of some divisive and difficult issues. He begins with the Bible and quotes it throughout, while also engaging with the wider debate. McGrath delivers a lecture which although erudite, stimulating, and scholarly, does not engage with the mainstream of conservative evangelical scholarship or the

biblical texts which address the issue. Despite his mention of the ‘Wenham defence,’ presumably he regards a study of what the Bible itself says on this subject an exercise in ‘an Enlightenment-type of common sense philosophy’.<sup>102</sup> Yet the approaches of Wenham, Stott, Packer, and Warfield too,<sup>103</sup> all rest on a detailed study of Scripture which McGrath does not indulge in. Packer’s approach is biblical in its aim as well as its content: he preaches an evangelistic sermon calling for commitment to biblical authority, offering freedom as an incentive and exposing the hollow nature of the alternatives. It would be well for evangelicalism if we had more sermons of this nature.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. J. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), p. 28.
2. See Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 52 for an example of revelation being ascribed to the Spirit; Cf. P. F. Jensen, “The Spirit of Revelation” in B. G. Webb (ed.), *Spirit of the Living God* (Homebush West: Lancer, 1992).
3. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 43 (emphasis mine).
4. Stott, *op. cit.*, page 65.
5. 1 Cor. 1:19-21 and 2:7-10.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
7. See especially *ibid.*, p. 49.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61. For a good critique of the analogy with Christ’s natures see B.B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield volume 1: Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) pp. 108-109.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 66. Cf. the similar thought of D. G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), p. 184.
16. See, of course, Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997) for Hooker’s doctrine of the supremacy of Scripture, which is in line with the Reformation tradition.

17. Stott, *ibid.*, p. 67. This picture is borrowed from Calvin, who wrote, ‘To sum up, since the church is Christ’s Kingdom, and he reigns by his Word alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words [cf. Jeremiah 7:4] by which the Kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from his sceptre (that is, his most holy Word)?’ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) John T. McNeill (ed.,) and Ford Lewis Battles (trans.,) vol. 2, p. 1046 (*Institutes* 4.2.4). See also, ‘Now, because the word of God is like a royal sceptre, we are bidden here to entreat him to bring all men’s minds and hearts into voluntary obedience to it.’ (*Institutes* 3.20.42; *ibid.*, p. 905). See also the pointed ‘Prefatory Address to King Francis I’ of France where Calvin bravely states, ‘Furthermore, he is deceived who looks for enduring prosperity in his kingdom when it is not ruled by God’s sceptre, that is, his Holy Word.’ (*ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 12).
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
19. See John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* 3rd ed. (Guildford: Eagle, 1993), esp. chs. 1, 5.
20. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 70. See Wenham, *op. cit.*, ch. 5. See also Peter F. Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester, IVP, 2002), especially p. 153 who adds, ‘To accept him as Lord and yet not to accept his word on this subject is absurd.’ Jensen’s very helpful book is well analysed in Simon Vibert, *By Word and Spirit: Two Archbishops on the Doctrine of Revelation* ORTHOS 19 (FWS, 2003), which is why it is not explicitly considered here.
22. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp.73-74 (emphasis mine).
23. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
25. See below.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
27. A. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), pp. 23-24.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
29. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
30. He cites D. G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) vol.1, pp. 52-6.
31. Cf. the strong criticism of McGrath on this point in Carl R. Trueman’s review of this book in *Westminster Theological Journal* 59.1 (1997), p. 137. (Trueman wrongly cites Bloesch’s volume 2 as McGrath’s source).
32. For the same move in Bernard Ramm for example, see M. J. Erickson, *The*

- Evangelical Left* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 70.
33. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
  34. *Ibid.*, p. 55. Obviously no evangelical actually thinks the word of God is God! See, for instance, Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 148 who quite clearly says, 'The word has God's authority, although it is not identical with him.'
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
  36. See, *op. cit.*, 'an inextricable and intimate connection' on p. 53; 'the most intimate and natural of connections between Scripture...and Christ' on p. 55; 'organic and essential connection' and 'Christology and scriptural authority are inextricably linked' on p. 56.
  37. McGrath's words in *ibid.*, p. 56.
  38. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
  39. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
  40. *Ibid.*, p. 54, the footnote for which links to the Peter Jensen article, "The Spirit of Revelation" cited above (fn. 2).
  41. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 65; McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
  42. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
  43. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
  44. See Trueman's review again, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-7.
  45. See, for example, his laudatory comments in Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 155 fn. 7.
  46. McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9. This is repeated almost *verbatim* ('evangelical' becomes 'Christian') two sentences later.
  47. The phrase is found in McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 59 and 60.
  48. *Ibid.*, p. 62 (emphasis original).
  49. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
  50. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
  51. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
  52. *Ibid.*, p. 97 (emphasis mine).
  53. See *ibid.*, p. 71 on culture for example.
  54. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
  55. See *ibid.*, p. 100.
  56. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
  57. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
  58. See the similarities between McGrath here and the assertion of S. Grenz as narrated in Erickson, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
  59. See, for example, A. E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 66-72.

60. M. Tinker, "Currents of Change: Trends in Anglican Evangelical Theology Today," in Tinker (ed.), *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1995), p. 48. Cf. pp. 47-50 for a sustained critique of McGrath.
61. N. Gumbel, *Questions of Life* (Eastborne: Kingsway, 1993), pp. 75-76 (emphasis mine). Wenham's *Christ and the Bible* is footnoted at n. 26, p. 74.
62. See Gumbel, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
63. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
64. For a similar critique of Grenz, see Erickson, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
65. See Alister McGrath and David Wenham, "Evangelicalism and Biblical Authority" in R. T. France & A. E. McGrath (eds.), *Evangelical Anglicans: Their Role and Influence in the Church Today* (London: SPCK, 1993).
66. See his own comment in J. Wenham, *Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) p. 92.
67. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, p. 116.
68. J. D. G. Dunn, "The Authority of Scripture According To Scripture," *Churchman* (1982): 104-22, 201-25.
69. See R. Nicole, "The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture: J. D. G. Dunn versus B. B. Warfield," *Churchman* (1983): 98-215 and (1984): 198-216. Cf. also R. T. France, "Evangelical Disagreements About The Bible," *Churchman* (1982): 226-40.
70. See the Editorial of *Anvil* 1.1 (1984). See also Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), p. 144.
71. Murray states that in his 1987 Griffith Thomas lectures at Wycliffe Hall, 'Dunn argued that Jesus was a "liberal" rather than a "fundamentalist" in his view of Old Testament Scripture.' See Murray, *ibid.*, p. 184 citing Dunn, *The Living Word*, pp. 46-55.
72. J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton: H. Shaw, 1996) pp. 44-45.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 11. See the similar remarks of Stott and McGrath above.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 26 and the announcement of this thesis on p. 13.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
77. See *ibid.*, p. 14.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.
80. See *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.
81. Matthew 28:18, quoted on *ibid.*, p. 16.
82. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 25. This no doubt owes something to Calvin's language of the Bible as

- God's sceptre of rule, on which see fn. 17 above.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
  84. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
  85. See Jesus' 'duty and delight' on *ibid.*, p. 26.
  86. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-33.
  87. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-8.
  88. *Ibid.*, p. 38; See also J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), p. 91 for this excellent phrase.
  89. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3.
  90. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
  91. *Ibid.*, p. 14 (earlier in the chapter).
  92. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
  93. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.
  94. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
  95. For example, see Dyson Hague's remarks in 'The History of the Higher Criticism' in R.A. Torrey (ed.), *The Fundamentals* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1917, 1998), pp. 40-41.
  96. See Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.
  97. See Packer, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.
  98. For 'studied ambiguity' in liturgical use see *An Order for Holy Communion* (London: SPCK, 1966), p. viii; R. T. Beckwith & J. E. Tiller (eds), *The Service of Holy Communion and its Revision* (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1972. Latimer Monograph III), p. 28; R. C. D. Jasper & Paul E. Bradshaw, *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book* (London: SPCK, 1986), p. 172. Packer describes the phenomenon on *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.
  99. Packer, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52; Cf. also *idem*. "Encountering Present-Day Views of Scripture" in Packer, *Honouring the Written Word of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), pp. 20-21 for similar clarifications.
  100. Packer, *Truth and Power*, pp. 54-55. For more on the link between trusting God and trusting his word see the excellent *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture* edited by Carl Trueman and Paul Helm (Leicester: Apollos, 2002).
  101. Stott quotes I.7 on pp. 71-2; McGrath quotes I.6 (p. 53); Packer quotes I.10 (p. 31).
  102. The quotation is from McGrath, *op. cit.*, fn. 142 on p. 263 referenced from a discussion of the 'old Princeton' approach on p. 117.
  103. See B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1948) which is full of interaction with the Bible itself, in the original Hebrew and Greek. See particularly chs. 5-8.

Download Now. saveSave Biblical Authority in Recent Evangelical Books For Later. 15 views. 00 upvotes00 downvotes. Biblical Authority in Recent Evangelical Books. Uploaded by. Mark Pit.Â Evangelicalism This book aims to explore the coherence of evangelicalism by bringing out the inner consistency of the evangelical approach and demonstrating the internal contradictions and vulnerabilities of its contemporary rivals.<sup>27</sup> This is with particular reference to the uniqueness of Christ and the authority of Scripture.



Biblical inerrancy is the belief that the Bible "is without error or fault in all its teaching"; or, at least, that "Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact". Some equate inerrancy with biblical infallibility; others do not. The belief is of particular significance within parts of evangelicalism, where it is formulated in the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy". I am very grateful for the invitation to give this particular lecture, I should perhaps say that my reflections here arise not so much from reading lots of books about the authority of the Bible—though I have read some of the recent ones—but from the multiple experience I find myself having, of studying and teaching the New Testament at an academic. This will involve looking at biblical authority in relation, particularly, to the church's task and to the church's own life. An authoritative book? Authority? Our generation has a problem about authority. Evangelical Views. Most heirs of the Reformation, not least evangelicals, take it for granted that we are to give scripture the primary place and that everything else has to be lined up in relation to scripture.