

# **The Bible as Canon and as Word of God: Exploring the Mystery of Revelation**

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## **Introduction**

The focus in this paper will be on the Bible and the way Christians speak theologically about its authority and function. This will be an exercise in systematic theology — that is, a rational exploration of revelation and authority from within the Christian faith. Thus my first purpose is not apologetic but doctrinal, concerned with exploring issues that arise for Christians in trying to understand the authority of the Bible. My hope is that this will raise questions for us all and that a fruitful discussion can happen as we gain a deeper understanding of each other's scriptures.

I want to begin by rejecting two philosophically oriented approaches to the theological theme of revelation that have developed within Modernity. Both of these restrict the notion of revelation too much for my purposes and thus do not allow full expression of the truth that Christians confess.<sup>1</sup> First, revelation is often understood as a feature of a generally theistic metaphysical outlook that could be explored generically without reference to the particularities of the Christian community's beliefs about God. In this approach, biblical revelation is usually evaluated in terms of that independent general definition, and the process of reading the Bible easily becomes one of separating the revelational or universal from the specific aspects of language and history. Revelation is then viewed as a deposit of knowledge about God that must by definition be universal. This creates a dualism between the particular and the universal that tends to undermine some of the most powerful teachings of the Christian faith, such as the incarnation and the sacraments. Both of these are relational notions that bridge the universal and the particular through the action of God.

A second, closely related direction taken by many contemporary theologians is to start with epistemological warrants accepted in philosophy in order to justify the possibility of revelation. In this model, revelation becomes the foundational teaching on which all subsequent teachings are erected. Deductive reasoning from that premise establishes the other teachings. When the Bible is then equated with revelation, its authority is directly dependent on

epistemological reasoning rather than on the acknowledgment of God's life-giving presence within the worshiping and witnessing community in the power of the Spirit. This makes the apologetic question more basic than an understanding of the God of the Christian faith who determines the community's own identity and mission.

Instead of these directions, I wish to explore the network of beliefs about God that are illuminated when Christians claim that the Bible has authority. Authority in this context refers to "that which (or the person whom) one has reason to trust": that is, it is a relational word.<sup>2</sup> When we are convinced that someone or something will lead us to truthful action and honest speech in tune with the true nature of reality, we accept that person or thing as having legitimate authority. This definition moves us toward an exploration of biblical authority within a view of the larger divine-human relationship.

I will begin with the notion of "canon" in order to focus on the "creaturely reality" of the Bible. I begin here, not because it is the most important way to begin, but because the natural way people of all religions meet the Bible for the first time is as a set of texts written by humans. Much attention has been paid in the age of Modernity to the historical process of canonization as well as to the final shape of the biblical canon. However, the theological implications of this fact have not often been explicated. I will suggest some of them for the theme of revelation and authority.

Secondly, I will explore the linguistic term commonly used of the Bible, "Word of God." I will suggest that this term is a metaphor. Again, much attention has been paid in Modernity to language and how it is used to give meaning to experience. I will explore the metaphorical nature of the linguistic term in order to help describe what is implied when I suggest that the Bible is a "sacrament" of God.

### **The Bible as Canon**

"Canon," used as a formal literary category, is not unique to sacred writings. The term originates from the Greek *kanôn*, a measuring rod or reed or standard. In classical Greek, it was applied to collections of authoritative writings and to several kinds of lists and tables. Its formal use as a designation for the collection of Christian biblical books began in the fourth century when the parameters of the collection were being settled by official action of the church. However, lists of books used authoritatively in the church have also been

discovered from as early as the second century CE. The notion of canon implies boundaries around a particular book designated for a particular normative purpose. The focus on the canonical process during Modernity has highlighted the need to look again at that process and to ask what it means theologically. A brief overview of how this collection came to be will highlight some of the important transitions in how Scripture was viewed.

We begin with the formation of the Christian Scriptures in the first Century CE.<sup>3</sup> The church inherited a canon from Judaism, the Hebrew Scriptures (later named the Old Testament), made up of several different collections of writings including the law, the prophets, wisdom, and the Psalms. Central to the notion of authority of these writings was their connection to the formation of a covenant community through God's saving intervention in the events of the Exodus from Egypt and the receiving of the law at Sinai. The foundational notion of Hebrew Scriptures was as Torah, understood as divinely issued decrees and commands, mediated through Moses and intended as a normative guide for the people. These laws were placed within a narrative context that firmly tied these writings to the community and its experience of God's saving presence at different stages of its life.

These decrees required interpretation, traditionally given by scribes and based on applying the law to present circumstances. But it was the prophets who carried the authority of divine speech more directly. They were recognized as inspired by the Spirit of God speaking as God's messengers for specific situations. The collection of their writings was second only to the Torah in authority. The rest of the Hebrew Scriptures was made up of a miscellaneous collection of writings of multiple genres and voices. Included were practical wisdom teachings, needed by the community as it interacted with the society around it, as well as Psalms of praise and lament that testify to the close relationship between God and people.

Thus Christians inherited a diverse and dynamic group of texts, read and interpreted within a "text-centered" community.<sup>4</sup> These scriptures were not handed down from heaven in a single moment, but were made up of texts selected over time amidst controversy about exactly which books should be considered sacred Scripture. Regardless of where the boundaries were placed, the Hebrew Scriptures were viewed as witnessing most centrally to the one eternal unchanging God within the dynamic of the history of God's revelation to, and salvation of, God's people. The unifying factor of the Bible as canon

was not a theme or concept but the “Integrity of Reality, the oneness of God, to which all the parts, in one way or another, when joined together, point and testify.”<sup>5</sup>

Christians accepted this view and saw the function of these writings as a witness to God’s active presence among them through the inspiration of the Scriptures, which were therefore useful in learning how to live a God-pleasing life as individuals and as community. II Tim. 3:16 in the New Testament supports this view:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.<sup>6</sup>

But with the coming of Jesus, the notion of Scripture needed to be transformed in order to witness to this startling new reality. The book of Hebrews in the NT suggests that God had spoken in a new way through Jesus:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb. 1:1)

For early Christians the primary agent of divine revelation was not Scripture per se but Jesus Christ to whom Scripture bears witness. They were convinced that they were living in a new age of the Spirit, that God was not just a God of memory of the past but a God active in the present through Jesus. Although the earthly Jesus was no longer present, these Christians were certain that the risen Christ, the living voice of God among them, was still there through the apostolic witnesses and the preaching by the early leaders. The collections of narratives about Jesus, the sayings of Jesus, and the pastoral letters written to groups of believers were circulated as testimonies to the presence of the living Christ through the Spirit. The notion of the inspiration of these witnesses made explicit a comparison to prophetic literature that closely associated the authoritative reading aloud of the Scriptures with the prophecy spoken by God through the Holy Spirit.

It wasn’t until the time of Irenaeus (180 CE) that we can speak with any confidence of a Christian Bible seen as a selection of authoritative writings

that incorporated the new understanding of God's will through Jesus Christ directly into the existing Scripture. The involvement of the Christian community in the selection process is clear. Phyllis Bird suggests that "Truth in representing the tradition and suitability for meeting the current needs were the twin tests of authority in the creation of the Christian Bible."<sup>7</sup> This is not to deny that official recognition included a political process of human decision making.

As we move to a more directly theological account of this activity, we will not deny this human, creaturely process. We will admit that it is vulnerable to abuse and misuse. However, we will focus on God and try to understand this process within the larger context of how Christians see God's relationship to the creaturely world. The central question is, Who is this God who would trust a human community and a human process to be the witness to the eternal presence of God in the world? Or, put another way, What is it about the canonical process that would make Christians trust it to be a faithful witness to God's activity in the world?

The answer Christians give to this question is congruent with the description of God given in the substance of the Bible itself. The Christian picture of God is not of invulnerable divine power, a God without passions committed only to control and judgment of creation. Instead, both the content and the shape of the canon witness to a God whose perfect love makes God vulnerable and willing to be rejected, a God who invites reconciliation but does not force it on his creatures.<sup>8</sup> This is characteristic of love, which is willing to put itself in danger for the other. This kind of love is most clearly embodied in Jesus, who endured suffering and the cross in order to make God's love concretely present in the world. This is a radical, surprising idea, a notion that humans would not have naturally assumed to be true. This picture of God could come about only through God's own self-disclosure.

Christians confess that God has always chosen to make God-self present through particular revelatory actions. Revelation is regarded as self-disclosure through divine presence: "To speak of revelation is to say that God is one whose being is directed toward his creatures, and the goal of whose free self-movement is his presence with us."<sup>9</sup> Revelation is not so much information, though it includes that. It is rather God presenting God-self as outgoing and communicative, willing to address the creaturely reality of humankind. Thus revelation is cognitive, but also moral and relational. The trinitarian formulation of the one God is a way Christians speak about this

mystery. They confess the origin of this self-presence in the free action of the Creator God, the actualization of this presence through the incarnated Christ, and the ongoing effective presence of God within human history through the Spirit, who will bring all things to an eschatological and eternal perfection.

This revelation is purposive, but also mysterious and beyond human comprehension. Its purpose is the overcoming of human opposition, alienation, and sin and their replacement with knowledge, love, and fear of God. It creates the possibility of communion between God and God's creation by positively inviting reconciliation through the removal of human barriers such as ignorance, self-centeredness, and sinful rejection of God's way. Yet it is not direct or without ambiguity. The revelation of God is not merely a means of dealing with epistemological questions, but is rather a divine action of mercy throughout time and eternity directed toward reconciliation of God's creatures. It is a "setting apart" or "sanctification" of creaturely reality (including the Bible) to serve God's particular disclosive purpose.

### **Authority of the Canon**

How then do we speak about the canon's authority? Perhaps one of the best terms is as "testimony" or "witness" to God's presence in particular moments within a larger context of relationship. As testimony the Bible points to a reality beyond itself, that is, to God. But as testimony it is also a fitting creaturely servant of God in its vulnerability. It witnesses to a God who has chosen not to dominate human creatures but to invite their free response in loving obedience to God's loving actions.

This ties the Bible very closely to the community of faith, the church. This community confesses its purpose is to listen expectantly for the Word of God as the Bible is read; rejoices in worship as God's presence becomes a reality among the people through the Spirit's activity; and discerns the particular word for the present time and place through that activity among the people. This creaturely activity of hearing continues the human role of recognizing God's revelation and salvation, much as was done through the canonization process. However, this too cannot be spiritualized; it includes reading the Bible using all the usual tools—construing the meaning of words and sentences, following arguments, grasping relationships, and making reasoned judgments about the truth of the statements and their relevance for the present situation.

At the same time, the expectation and hope is affirmed that God will bring all creaturely reality and activity to its fulfillment within God's eternal purpose, because God has chosen to be in relationship with his creation. All of this is part of the larger human response to God that we call discipleship — that is, a faithful following in the way of Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

At least two important consequences follow from this way of looking at the authority of the canon.

(1) The inherent authority of the canon will always be somewhat unsettled, never completely secure or totally exclusive, because it admits there is divine disclosure beyond what can be enclosed in a human book. This will always make the Bible less than absolute, because it can only witness to God's presence but not control it. God is free to extend God's presence within history when and where God wills. The temptation is to try to make the Bible totally secure by insisting it is a divine book and thus has absolute authority. The church has often used external means such as coercion, domination, and suppression to ensure the Bible's authority. As Christendom became a reality, church and state joined hands in ensuring its authority was extended to all nations. One aspect of this domination was the forced conversion of the so-called barbarians. Later, both the Inquisition (with its authority to stamp out heresy) and colonial expansion (with its authority to impose Christian rule) sought to spread the Bible's authority using coercive methods. Mennonite forebears, the Anabaptists, experienced some of this violent oppression in the name of Biblical authority. So did many Muslims at various times in history.

As a result of the Enlightenment and its focus on humanistic approaches to knowledge, the western church has struggled to find ways to express the relationship of God to the Bible. As the church splintered into various communities, it began to develop confessions of faith arranged systematically and comprehensively in order to secure and defend the divine voice against what were considered heretical interpretations. Timeless truths were abstracted from the multiple voices within Scripture and given absolute authority. Gradually, new terms such as "inerrant" and "verbally inspired" were used to insist on the technical accuracy of the biblical words. The work of the Holy Spirit was now seen as primarily securing the accuracy of those words. As John Howard Yoder shows, these attempts were all ways of making the creaturely Bible as secure as God.<sup>11</sup> They became idolatrous when they

insisted on boundaries that were too fixed and static, unable to point beyond themselves to the God who was using the Bible for God's own purposes.

(2) The nature of the canon as testimony means it will always invite further interpretation as God's activity of self-disclosure is continually being extended into human time and space. The ambiguity and complexity of the narratives, commands, wisdom, and prayers in the biblical material means no one text can be allowed to overpower all others, nor can one interpretation be the final one. As Brevard Childs puts it, readers of the Bible, fully aware of their own frailty, await "in anticipation a fresh illumination through God's Spirit, for whom the Bible's frailty is no barrier."<sup>12</sup> The Bible becomes the arena where God continually invites humans to be transformed into loving people responding in obedience to God's presence. The Bible is not a fixed, frozen, readily exhausted read; it is rather a "script," always reread, through which the Spirit brings forth new possibilities to live life in God's presence. There is an open dynamic in the text itself, so that nobody's reading is final or inerrant. God is always beyond us in "holy hiddenness."

The multiple interpretations of the Bible were threatened in Modernity by a new locus of interpretation, one largely outside of ecclesial control whether Catholic or Protestant. The Enlightenment gradually gave authority to the secular university, where the biblical book was treated much as any other historical book. Historical critical studies threatened to undermine any divine voice at all within the Scriptures. Attention was on historical fact, attempting to separate it from interpretation and to find the one meaning intended by the original author. One disastrous legacy of the Enlightenment was the new confidence that humans could stand outside of the stream of time, and with clear rationality distinguish truth from error and light from darkness. The focus was now not on recognizing God's self-disclosure but on analyzing the human events behind Scripture. Various exegetical methods were employed to get to the original historical events, including those of Jesus' life and death. In that context, the authority of the Bible for faith became more and more elusive.

Yet, throughout this time many churches kept on testifying that the living God became present in their midst as the Bible was read within a community committed to hearing the witness to God through the Bible. Also, those formerly excluded from biblical interpretation—for example, women, and persons from different cultures and languages—began to lift up passages



long ignored. The living God continued to be present with his creatures through a variety of interpretive activity, as God's dynamic Spirit moved among God's people.

What then can we say about biblical authority that arises from a theological understanding of the canon? We are left with the particularity of human interpretive activity within history, which can never guarantee God's presence but witnesses to the promise that God will again and again reveal and save. According to John Howard Yoder, that is precisely where we ought to be, "since that is where God chose to be revealed in all the arbitrariness and particularity of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah, Jesus and Pentecost, Luke and Paul, Peter and John."<sup>13</sup> As Christians stand within that large tradition of receiving God's revelation, they are continually tested and judged in terms of the witness of the past. Thus the Bible's authority is expressed most often in terms of challenges for transformation and renewal. The God who has chosen to reveal God-self through the particular mediation of creaturely beings made useful through the Spirit is the same kind of God who was vulnerable to human rejection on the cross. What seems at first to be weakness is strength, because God's willingness to be vulnerable calls forth a willing human response of love. Within that relationship of love, people become convinced of the inherent authority of the Bible. They recognize its congruence with how God's presence always comes to God's people, not overpowering or domineering but inviting, moving us beyond our present understanding into God's mysterious presence.

### **The Bible as "Word of God"**

Faith affirmations such as affirming the Bible as God's word are of a different nature than merely scientific or philosophical truth statements. They are more akin to poetic discourse, which arises from the experience of historical reality but moves to the realm of the unseen. The term "sacrament" is a traditional way to speak of these realities.

The expression "word of God" is first of all metaphorical. It cannot be taken literally, for God is Spirit and therefore it is absurd to suggest divine speech is the same as human speech. Recent semantic studies of metaphor have helped us see its potential in religious language about God. Since understanding metaphor and symbol will be helpful in understanding sacrament,

I will briefly summarize the work of Sandra Schneiders (based on that of Paul Ricoeur) to point out some key characteristics of this kind of language.<sup>14</sup> Metaphor is not merely a contracted simile or a literary ornament, an illustration or a substitute for a literal meaning. It is a powerful form of language in its own right, a power gained because of the irresolvable tension within the term itself. In a metaphor, an affirmative proposition is given, but simultaneously a negation is implied in the likeness between the two terms. For example, in the terms of the metaphor “the Bible is the word of God,” the tension implies that the Bible is, but also is not, the word of God. This tension makes the metaphor alive and calls forth its strong meaning.

Ricoeur has explored what happens when one makes a proposition in a sentence such as “the Bible is the word of God.” The sentence makes sense grammatically but not literally. Thus the imagination must be engaged in a cognitive and affective exploration of the two terms in order to move to a different level of understanding. That is when a new meaning emerges. We therefore resort to metaphor in order to bring to speech something that cannot be expressed in literal speech. If either the “is” or the “is not” is suppressed, the metaphor becomes only literal or an exercise of sheer fancy. Though most metaphors are unstable and become banal and trite through repetition, some retain a perennial power to evoke response. They are root metaphors that draw out rich understandings of the most complex realities of our life.

It is helpful to see that we are dealing with metaphor in order to explore the referent of the sentence, “The Bible is the word of God.” This referent is divine revelation—a revelation not restricted to the confines of human language. For some people, this metaphor is dead because they can see the Bible only as another religious book. The “is” has ceased to function for them. For others, the metaphor becomes literalized. They have ceased to hear the whispered “is not” that a live metaphor always carries in its affirmation. They regard every word as equally and fully divine and thus absolutely true. Interpretation is reduced to finding this literal meaning of every word, suggesting that then they can perfectly grasp the divine meaning. The mystery of divine revelation is improvised and distorted by limiting it to a human proposition.

Because of the metaphorical nature of the Bible as word of God, the language of the Bible invites and indeed requires interpretation and translation.

The object of interpretation is revelation in all its richness and complexity. The significance of revelation always overflows the boundaries of our own language. Therefore, we are free to translate the Bible into many tongues and cultures, confident that God's disclosure is not limited to one particular articulation of it. In addition, if we define revelation as self-disclosure, we realize immediately that the word of God cannot be only rational but must be more holistic than that. In personal disclosure we share with another something of ourselves, whether physical, emotional, or intellectual. Language is the symbolic medium of that self-disclosure. So, too, with God's self-disclosure: something true is shared but the disclosure goes beyond rational discourse alone.

Symbol and metaphor are related, in that both include the affirmation and the negation within themselves. What is important to understand is that a symbol is a perceptible reality that points to what is otherwise imperceptible. A symbol embodies and brings to expression reality that it can never fully say. It moves into the area of the unseen and the inexpressible. Thus symbols hide more than they reveal, and there is always ambiguity about a symbol's meaning. We use expressions such as "nature speaks to us" or "history teaches us," knowing they are symbolic expressions putting into language what is often inexpressible. Thus our theological expressions are, at their linguistic level, symbolic.

Theologically, we also say that to be accessible to us, God approached us symbolically through perceptible reality. God opened a locus of encounter through created nature, historical events, oracles of the prophets, wisdom of the sages, and prayers of the people. Christians recognized Jesus, the living Word, as the definitive revelation of God, the very presence of God in human form. The proclamation of this event by the early witnesses was itself revelatory, because it invited those who heard the preaching to respond to God's self-disclosure. The term "word of God" embraces and integrates this whole range of God's symbolic self-disclosure.

Christians believe that Jesus as "Word of God" is the "paradigmatic instance of divine revelation" and the scriptures are the privileged medium of God's gift of God's self to humankind. Historically, the church has used the term "sacrament" to denote this kind of symbol. A sacrament articulates the mystery of the divine encounter in a particularly clear, powerful way. As a

visible sign of invisible grace it witnesses to the presence of God. Therefore, the church as worshipping community and the Bible as witnessing Word can be seen as God's sacrament to the world. The proper reference of the church as "body of Christ" (a term the New Testament uses) and the Bible as "word of God" is God's presence with God's people.

**Bible as Sacrament**

The tension noted earlier when discussing metaphor remains when we speak of the Bible as sacrament. The Bible is not revelation in its fullness, but a symbolic witness to the self-gift that has been taking place since creation and will continue to the end of time. Because symbols are inherently ambiguous, interpretation will always be a challenging work, simultaneously revealing and concealing. Perhaps that is why, within the Bible, the concern is not on whether God reveals but on human openness to hear and believe that revelation. The gospel of John puts it this way:

But these (signs) are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

Throughout his life Jesus challenges his disciples to hear the word at a deeper level: "Let anyone with ears to hear, listen" (Mark 4:9). Hearing and seeing are used metaphorically for the disciples' sensitive openness to the gospel message and their obedience to it. The Bible is a medium of God's self-revelation in this sense, so that those with ears to hear will encounter the living God. Yet, this also means that revelation is inaccessible to those not open to hearing the "unseen reality" there to be understood.

Jesus as a human person could be perceived by everyone. However, Jesus as the revelation of God, the living Word of God, was only "seen" and "heard" by those open to that reality. The kind of authority that the Bible as Word of God has is therefore authority within a divine-human relationship that transforms our hearing ability to an openness to the unseen. To respond to God's word is to be changed, to be initiated into a reality that one can participate in, at deeper and deeper levels. Thus we do not speak only about the Bible's normativity as a source for dogma or commandments. Instead we affirm that the Bible is a primary symbolic invitation into relationship with the

divine being. It is a sacrament by which God's grace is made present through the Living Word.

The Bible can be studied as a human text without the transformation of the human person that results when the Word is truly heard. The anti-sacramental views of the early Anabaptists, forebears of the Mennonites, had to do with how the sacramental actions of the church were being set apart and used by the hierarchy to control access to God. These Anabaptists insisted there was no power in the physical elements themselves. The bread used in a ritual was just ordinary bread. So, too, no one group of interpreters should be given the authority to control access to God; nor should the Bible be seen as a supernatural or exclusive book. However, the Bible does become a sacrament of God when persons faithfully interpret the words and the congregation is open to God's presence through the Word.

The Bible can also be spiritualized so that the actual ordinary meaning of the words is unimportant for what individuals understand as spiritual interpretation. This was a temptation for the spiritualists among the early Anabaptists. This would suggest that God cannot enter the created world in order to communicate with his creation but must remain separated from it. Mennonites in their own ongoing history have struggled with this view as well. What they have insisted on is that God does not force a response of faith but issues an invitation to those who would listen. God's authority is like the claim of a friend to fidelity and love—always on the level of an appeal that can be responded to or resisted. The “word of God” as sacrament implies that the Bible is the word of God but can also be used so that it is not the word of God. The Bible as sacrament therefore points to God's willingness to become vulnerable to human response. Yet that vulnerability creates the willing and loving response of God's people.

### **Conclusion**

I am not sure how the term “canon” and the expression “word of God” resonate with Muslims. However, whether these terms have parallels in Islamic writings is not the most crucial item for discussion in a Mennonite–Shi'ite dialogue. Instead, I hope we can focus our discussions on our understanding of the attributes and activities of God that we see in our respective scriptures and that we associate with revelation. In addition, I hope we can begin to

address those times when our misuse of our scriptures has led to domination and abuse of the other.

I have tried to say there is vulnerability about the way Christians speak about the Bible as canon and as word of God. This vulnerability is there because the Bible is human, historical, and linguistic; but it has not always been understood and has led to misuses and abuses. Yet this very vulnerability contains within itself a powerful witness to the kind of God that Christians worship and obey. It testifies to God's revealing and reconciling presence in history, a presence calling forth a free response of love and obedience by God's people. By acknowledging the authority of the Bible, Christians witness to what they consider the most basic truth of all: that the powerful, omnipotent, and merciful God initiates relationship with his creation through his revealing and reconciling presence. I hope that this paper and the discussion to follow will help create mutual understandings between Mennonites and Shi'ites. May God be acknowledged and praised through our dialogue.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Webster, *Holy Scripture* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Karlfried Froehlich, "The Inspired Word of God: Authority and Inspiration," in Terence E. Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich, *The Bible as Word of God* (Fortress, 1998), 14.

<sup>3</sup> A good overview of this process is found in Phyllis Bird, "The Authority of the Bible," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol.1, 33-64.

<sup>4</sup> Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>5</sup> James Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Augsburg Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Holy Bible, NRSV. I use this translation throughout the paper.

<sup>7</sup> Bird, 49.

<sup>8</sup> See William Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God* (Westminster/John Knox, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Webster's articulation of this also in the following section.

<sup>10</sup> I have explored biblical interpretation as discipleship in my book, *Obedience, Suspicion and the Gospel of Mark* (Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Wipf and Stock, 2001), 85-106.

<sup>12</sup> Brevard Childs, *Old Testament in a Canonical Context* (SCM Press, 1985), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Yoder, 100.

<sup>14</sup> In this section I am indebted to the discussion of "Word of God" by Sandra Schneiders in *The Revelatory Text* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 27-59.