

Editorial

Dan Epp-Tiessen

Humanity does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (*Deut.* 8:3; cf. *Matt.* 4:4)

Our human need for God's life-giving word stands at the centre of all the articles in this issue of *Vision*. The original goal for this issue was to focus more narrowly on the authority of scripture, but for a variety of reasons the topic became broader, and I think the results are better. Each of the articles comes from a different angle, but each contributes to a conversation about how we might hear and experience scripture as God's life-giving word. Not surprisingly, the question of authority still remains central. Why should

Each article in this issue contributes to a conversation about how we might hear and experience scripture as God's life-giving word. Not surprisingly, the question of authority remains central.

we read and reflect on scripture, and why should we orient our lives around the story it tells, unless we believe that it is authoritative in some way?

Just as the order of some biblical books is deliberate and hermeneutically significant (see the conclusion of Waldemar Janzen's article), the order of articles in this issue is deliberate and intended to guide the reader's experience and interpretation. I believe that reading the articles in order will allow them

to speak cumulatively, so that their message and impact become more than the sum of the parts.

Gerald Gerbrandt's lead article begins by noting the decline of biblical authority over the last decades, and it documents various Christian attempts to rescue this lost authority. He observes that theoretical arguments about the inerrancy or authority of scripture rarely convince anyone (except those already convinced). Biblical authority, he suggests, can best *be demonstrated* by a

Christian community for whom scripture *has authority* in matters of faith and practice. “The challenge for the church then, is to be a community within which scripture has authority, which practices scriptural authority, which responds with trust to the invitation of scripture to be an authority” (10). Gerbrandt then asks, “How might the church become this kind of community?”—a key question to which all the other articles respond in one way or another.

Karl Koop explores the promise and problems of the Protestant Reformation’s rallying cry, *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), a principle originally intended to ensure the primacy of scripture but not to deny the importance of tradition in interpreting scripture. In many cases, tradition represents the collective wisdom of past generations, and by protecting the church from false beliefs and false ways of reading scripture, tradition can assist the church in practicing biblical authority. Waldemar Janzen analyzes how two hundred years of historical-critical study of the Bible tended to direct attention away from scripture as the word of life. Instead, many biblical scholars mined the text for data about ancient Israelite and Christian history or traces of earlier oral and written sources. Janzen highlights the promise of recent canonical approaches that focus on the shape and content of the final biblical text, and once again ask how scripture addresses the community of faith as life-giving word.

Following these more theoretical articles are several that reflect on how the church actually uses its scripture and is thereby shaped into a community that practices biblical authority. The way we read scripture aloud in worship communicates what we believe about it, Mary Klassen reminds us. Therefore, public reading of scripture should be done with expression, sensitivity, passion, and careful preparation that “begins with seeing the scripture reader as one who speaks God’s word to the people” (33). Lois Siemens offers a theological basis and many practical suggestions for allowing scripture to infuse all elements of our worship.

June Alliman Yoder begins by asking what we mean when we speak of “biblical preaching,” and then she explores the interplay between different elements responsible for the authority of our preaching. She concludes that the Holy Spirit predominates,

because the Spirit has given us the biblical text, makes the scripture's message known to the preacher, and assists the preacher in knowing what the congregation most needs to hear. Mary Schertz makes an impassioned (and sometimes humorous) case for learning the biblical languages. Among the benefits she cites of knowing Greek and Hebrew are greater sensitivity to nuances of meaning in the text, respect for the otherness of the text so that we do not domesticate it, and finding our voice and authority as interpreters.

From the perspective of many years of pastoral ministry, Menno Epp reflects on how scripture can be the means whereby God speaks a word of healing, strength, and guidance into human pain, brokenness, and longing. Dan Nighswander points out that sometimes the biblical witness contains a diversity of perspectives on events or moral issues. Rather than seeking to eliminate this diversity or treating it as a problem to overcome, Nighswander suggests that we honour the diversity and allow it to inform our life as a community endeavouring to practice biblical authority.

Poet Jean Janzen's piece artfully traces how the "intersection of the Story and my story has grown during my lifetime" (78). Through Janzen's insightful testimony, we develop deeper appreciation for how the story of our lives can be shaped by God's larger Story, and we are reminded that it is precisely through such shaping that the authority of scripture is demonstrated and practiced. Ruth Preston Schilk's sermon continues the theme of scripture's power to transform. The Bible is "dangerous" because it has the power to change us, to challenge our worldview, to make us see and hear things we prefer to ignore, and to make us cast off old masters. Because of the Bible's power, Schilk challenges us to "consume" this dangerous book hungrily.

May this issue of *Vision* assist the church to practice and demonstrate the authority of scripture, and also to experience scripture as the word of life we cannot do without.