CHAPTER 4 Images and Metaphors

Although philosophy is integral to a discussion of hermeneutics, a number of writers also employ images or metaphors. Lash,[1] Williams,[2] and Young[3] for example, all employ the image of the Bible as a score, and its reading as a performance of that score.[4] Barton points out that the assessment and development of this metaphor "has only just begun" in biblical hermeneutics, and he suggests that this may be because of the customary divisions of labour between biblical scholars and systematic theologians and patristic scholars, the last two being originators of the image of performance.[5]

This omission is surprising not only because of the extent to which images are employed in hermeneutics, (indeed it might be suspected that most hermeneuts have such images or metaphors in mind) but also because in fact all writing can be seen as metaphorical or figurative – even if its figurative nature has been forgotten. "Metaphor is a version of a basic way of knowing: we know something by seeing it *as* something. Theorists speak of metaphors we live by, basic metaphorical schemes, like 'life is a journey.'"[6]

Barton writes of the performance metaphor as having

> "significant potential for the revitalisation of NT interpretation, as of biblical interpretation as a whole … because it represents an invitation to locate our work as exegetes in a wider context of divine and human action"

– that is to jettison

> "'the gentleman's agreement' to keep firmly apart knowledge as something public and faith as something private, meaning as something objective and truth (or meaning for today) as a matter of pure subjectivity. In question is also the tacit agreement to

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1 Nicholas Lash: "Performing the Scriptures" originally published in The Furrow in 1982, and republished in Theology on the Way to Emmaus (SCM 1986) pp 37- 46

2 Rowan Williams: "The Literal Sense of Scripture" in Modern Theology, 7/2 (1991)

3 Frances Young: The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture (DLT 1990)

4 see Stephen Barton's article: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 pp 179 – 208

5 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 p 179.

6 Jonathan Culler: Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction (OUP 1997) p 68

> overlook our contested identities and to operate with a neutral, standardised discourse which masks and devalues the very things that make us who we are."[7]

These words could well apply, to a greater or lesser extent, to a number of other metaphors, and so, in this chapter, I attempt a brief survey of some of the images used to describe the Bible.

4.1 Witness

Perhaps the oldest metaphor is that of the Bible as a witness. Barton[8] quotes Irenaeus (c 130 – c 200) thinking of the Bible as evidence: that is: friends you can trust rather than sources you can torture. This image is perhaps not surprising, given the Bible's own interest in forensic matters. Barton himself uses the same image later in the book:[9]

> "Jesus did not rise from the dead to confirm the reliability of the gospels! The events in which Christians believe are logically prior to the book which records them; and the question of how accurately the Bible does record them is not crucial because it affects the status and authority of the Bible, as an end in itself. It is crucial because (since we happen to have virtually no historical sources besides what is in the Bible) it determines whether we actually possess any real knowledge of these events.
> This point is sometimes made by saying that the Bible matters as a witness to the events Christians regard as central, or that the Bible is our primary evidence for what Christians believe: it is not itself the object of that belief."

The image is also developed, for example, by R. P. C. and A. T. Hanson in The Bible without Illusions.[10] They make the distinction between oracle and evidence:[11] an oracle would be univocal, speaking entirely for itself, and beyond interrogation; on the other hand, witnesses may be mistaken in parts of their evidence without negating the value of all of it; witnesses usually have their evidence drawn out by the careful questioning of lawyers; witnesses should be multi-vocal: more than one witness would be expected to give weight to their testimony (the Bible's legal provisions require the

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7 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 pp 179, 180

8 John Barton: What is the Bible? (Triangle SPCK 1991) p 39 see above in Chapter 3

9 John Barton: What is the Bible? (Triangle (SPCK) 1991) p 81

10 R P C & A T Hanson: The Bible without Illusions (SCM Press/Trinity Press International 1989)

11 R P C & A T Hanson: The Bible without Illusions (SCM Press/Trinity Press International 1989) p 99

evidence of two witnesses, for example[12]). Dumas makes the point that a witness may be able to tell only part of the story.[13]

On the other hand, although a diversity of witnesses is bound to produce a diversity of evidence, the Hansons argue that there is a basic unity amongst the various different witnesses in the Bible. By now they are thinking not just of different accounts of the same events, but also of the whole range of Biblical material. The basic unity is a common main thrust (the Fathers called it 'scope'; Luther called it its 'drive'[14]) summed up in the Creeds.[15] An important consideration when dealing with witnesses is their closeness to the events in question: the Hansons argue that the New Testament is as early, and as authentic a witness as could be found, to the events of Jesus's life and death, and to the immediate response of men and women to these events: it is a unique witness.[16]

Something close to this image is also used by Josipovici in The Book of God.[17] "Perhaps instead of thinking about the Bible as a book to be deciphered or a story to be told, we should think of it as a person. We do not decipher people, we encounter them."[18] Vanhoozer also uses this image. He is asserting the importance of the author (as against the post-modernist "death of the author") and of the text as communicating something to someone:

> "On the one hand, if all language use is performative, then all communicative action is a kind of personal testimony whereby the author is implicated in what is said. This is especially true of biblical discourse, but I believe it applies to everyday discourse as well. We have only to recall Habermas's first and third validity conditions: authors must be prepared to defend the objective truth of their testimony and their truthfulness or sincerity in saying it. On the other hand, no authors speak about themselves only. The author is first and foremost a witness."[19]

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12 Is this one reason for the existence or persistence of two versions of the Creation, Flood etc and of four versions of the Gospel? I am indebted for this comment to Dan Beeby.

13 Andre Dumas : Political Theology and the Life of the Church (SCM 1978) p 55

14 R P C & A T Hanson: The Bible without Illusions (SCM Press/Trinity Press International 1989) p 25

15 R P C & A T Hanson: The Bible without Illusions (SCM Press/Trinity Press International 1989) pp 17ff, 25ff, 37ff etc

16 R P C & A T Hanson: The Bible without Illusions (SCM Press/Trinity Press International 1989) p 112

17 Gabriel Josipovici: The Book of God: A Personal Response to the Bible (Yale University Press 1988)

18 Gabriel Josipovici: The Book of God: A Personal Response to the Bible (Yale University Press 1988) p 307 Indeed, throughout the book, some of his language is more personal than impersonal: "it seemed quirkier, funnier, quieter, than I expected" p x

19 Kevin J Vanhoozer : Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 237

Finally, we may note that this is the model used extensively by Goldinghay in the first half of Models for Interpretation of Scripture,[20] in which he is concerned with interpretation for a purpose – communication to others, through preaching and Christian life, for example.

4.2 Mirror

A second image is that of the Bible as a mirror – again an ancient image:

> "Athanasius, the intrepid defender of the Nicene Creed in the Fourth Century, wrote a letter to Marcellinus on the interpretation of the Psalms. It begins by suggesting that the Psalms contain in embryo everything that the Scriptures contain: the creation, the patriarchal narratives, the exodus, the history books, the prophetic writings, the coming of Christ - all are there in the Psalms, and the grace of the Spirit is common to all the Biblical literature. But there is a difference:
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> > "In the other books, those who are reciting what the saints are saying or what is being said about them are proclaiming what has been written about these holy ones, but the listeners are well aware of themselves as other than the saints about whom the word is spoken..... However in ... the psalms, it is as if one's own words were being recited; while those who listen to the words are pierced to the heart and appropriate to themselves what is expressed in the songs as if the words were their very own ..... It seems to me as if the psalms are as a mirror in which you contemplate yourself and the movements of your own soul, and thus confess your understanding of them.""[21]

This quotation about the Bible as mirror dwells on the closeness of the Psalms to the reader, and the empathy that could be said to exist between the Psalms and the reader, and it is this which allows the Bible to function as mirror in the view of Athanasius.[22]

There is an opposite, though complementary, understanding of the Bible as mirror: in its somewhat alien character, in the otherness of the commitment and agenda of its characters, in its capacity to

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20 John Goldingay: Models for Interpretation of Scripture (Eerdmans / Paternoster 1995)

21 see Frances Young: The Art of Performance (DLT 1990) p 141, 142 quoting Athanasius : Migne : Patrologia Graeca 27. 11-45

22 Of course the Book of Psalms is rather untypical of the Bible as a whole, though self-reflective and deeply personal passages may be found in the Wisdom literature (for example Job), and amongst the Prophets (especially Jeremiah of course, but elsewhere too). However, readers seem able to find themselves throughout the Bible. It is possible for a modern reader to identify with one of the characters in a parable (e.g. the woman sweeping her house to find a coin: Luke 15.8-10) or in the historical material (e.g. David mourning his rebellious son Absalom: 2 Samuel 18.33) or in the Apocalyptic books (e.g. comfort promised to the faithful in tribulation: Revelation 21.1-7).

surprise and to make us stop and think, we may see the Bible as holding up a mirror to us. A mirror may be ignored, we may not remark all that we see in it, what it shows us is not quite what others see, it may even distort, it is confusing as a guide to action (right and left being apparently reversed), but it does give a view. The Bible is all of these. Through it we may reflect upon and examine our own motives and actions.[23] Even the word 'reflection' which we might say the Bible produces in us, is reminiscent of a mirror.

It should be noted that the Bible seen as a mirror has at first no picture on it, is nothing in itself, (if we do not look at it, read it or confront it) but we give it our own image, and it looks back at us: each face asks the other - who are you? what are you? Another way of putting this is to say that what the Bible shows us is what already lies within us; and yet, by showing us ourselves the Bible does indeed introduce a new element into the situation. At the same time, even seen simply as an historical document, of course we are hearing other voices from other times. And behind them lies God, who at least from the point of view of those in the communities of faith, has some presence in the Bible. The 'other' is present in the Bible, but it is we, coming to the mirror, who bring that 'other' into play.

This image has also been used by medieval and modern writers: Smalley writes of the medieval view: "Scripture like the visible world, is a great mirror reflecting God, and therefore all and every kind of truth"[24] and Sanders writes of the Bible as a "mirror for the identity of the believing community which in any era turns to it to ask what it is and what it is to do, even today."[25] Ricoeur claims that texts mediate the reader to her/himself.[26] Iser writes:[27] 'The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own....'

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23 This image is from the viewpoint of an individual; it could as easily have been expressed from the viewpoint of a community, indeed an important exercise.

24 B Smalley: The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford 1941) p 218: quoted in Robert Grant and David Tracey: A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (SCM Press 1984) p 86

25 J P Sanders: Torah and Canon (Fortress Press 1972) p xv-xvi

26 Ricoeur : The Conflict of Interpretations ed Don Ihde (Northwestern University Press 1974) p 24

27 Iser : "The reading process; a phenomenological approach": quoted in Lodge (ed): Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) p 217:

4.4 Score

A third image is that, already mentioned, of the Bible as a score, and its reading as a recital or performance. Barton, as we have seen looks at Lash, Williams, and Young. For Lash, a good performer needs not only technical accuracy but also creative fidelity, not only academic training but also personal formation. The audience will also be part of the performance: this would be true of the performance of other works – Shakespeare or Beethoven, with which Lash draws parallels – but even more so of something like the American Constitution for, as Barton points out, the performance of the Bible is 'full-time.' "The fundamental form of the political interpretation of the American Constitution is the life, activity and organisation of American society. That society exists … as the enactment of its Constitution. Similarly we might say the scriptures are the 'constitution' of the church."[28] For Lash, the performative interpretation of scripture finds its focus in the celebration of the Eucharist and the liturgy of the Word.

Williams has a similar point: the dramatic / liturgical reading of the scriptures – supremely the Passion narratives leading to Easter – embodies all aspects of our lives. It resists a too quick softening of the harshness and tensions of the text worked through in its time, a time which we must share.

> "… Christian interpretation is unavoidably engaged in 'dramatic' modes of reading: we are invited to identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to re-appropriate who we are now, and who we shall or can be, in terms of the story. Its movements, transactions, transformations, become ours; we take responsibility for this or that position within the narrative… Dramatic reading, then, … assumes … that the time of the text is recognisably continuous with my time."[29]

The main (at least in terms of length) exponent of this image is Young in The Art of Performance.[30] She looks at the problems posed by the almost dual nature of the Bible as a holy book, seen as a

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28 N Lash: "Performing the Scriptures" in Theology on the Way to Emmaus (SCM 1986) pp 43

29 Rowan Williams: "The Literal Sense of Scripture" in Modern Theology 1991 7/2 p 125

30 Frances Young: The Art of Performance (DLT 1990)

revelation of God by the Christian and Jewish communities and used in liturgy, yet subject to historical criticism; and also at the problems posed by the understanding (gained through historical criticism) of the Bible as both rather more and rather less than history and of the Bible as a book of its time trying to speak to our time. She finds some illumination shed upon these questions by the early Church Fathers,[31] but uses at the same time an analogy with the performance of music and drama. Although the gap is not as great as between our own and biblical times, much music and drama was written a long time ago; there are parallel problems in the establishment of a text or score; there are debates about authenticity of performance;[32] there are enormous varieties of interpretation;[33] there is a sense in which all three aspects need to be 'live', to be performed, rather than left as words or notes on a page. So, the canon encompasses diversity and complexity, just as the classical repertoire does – and it also has a history of interpretation which is an influential part of its story. Therefore tradition – an extra-textual framework – is important in current interpretation. Extending the image further, Young suggests that preaching, for example, is like the cadenza in a concerto, where the performer is faithful to the style and theme of the work performed, and yet brings their own inspiration and personality to the performance.[34]

Barton writes approvingly of this metaphor as going with the grain of the New Testament, and the Bible as a whole, for "the New Testament is an 'open text' that invites completion in the lives of its readers."[35] He offers some further reflections: he argues that "the resurrection can be perceived only by faith, by becoming ourselves part of the story, performers of the story;"[36] he suggests that the saints can be seen as particularly good performers of scripture;[37] he questions the enterprise of New Testament Ethics if it is just a strategy for avoiding the New Testament's challenge to us that we

31 her own field of study

32 for example the rapid recent growth in the performance of, say, Monteverdi or Bach on original instruments.

33 for example in tempi and dynamics in a piece of music. But diversity of performance is constrained at several levels, from the notes (words) on the page upwards (eg doctrine). Young: Art of Performance (DLT 1990) p 105

34 Barton also mentions the example from N T Wright, likening the interpretation of the New Testament to the improvisation of a lost fifth act of a Shakespeare play. Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology Vol 52 No 2 1999 p 196

35 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 p 195

36 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 p 198 (he cites in support G Loughlin : "Living in Christ : Story, Resurrection and Salvation" in G D'Costa ed : Resurrection Reconsidered (Oneworld, Oxford 1996)) pp 124 - 125

37 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 pp 199 ff

ourselves should change. His conclusion is that the performance model can enliven not only departments of theology, but also seminaries, churches, and society as a whole.

4.5 Mosaic or icon

A fourth metaphor is that of the Bible as a mosaic of pictures, an image employed by Tillich, as reported by Kelsey.[38] Tillich argues that a task of the theologian is to show that Christian symbols (biblical images – the authoritative elements in scripture) contain 'answers' to existential 'questions' men are asking today.[39] So the theologian must conceptualise symbols – that is, show the relation of the symbols to each other and to the whole; the theologian must explain the symbols – that is, show its relation to that to which it points; the theologian must criticise the symbols – that is, show that they are adequate (and of course some symbols will be more adequate than others.) Tillich is therefore

> "concerned to show how the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ is uniquely adequate to express the Christ event. To make his point, Tillich draws our attention to certain formal properties of the picture and compares them with the formal characteristics of several styles of painting. It is an apt and accurate picture of how the original revelatory event took place, but not in the way 'realistic' paintings are accurate. It does not even attempt to report in a photographic way surface details of Jesus' career or personality. Nor is it like a portrait in an 'idealistic' style that might represent Jesus as embodying the highest aspirations and ideals of the first century men who created it. Instead the picture deliberately distorts and exaggerates. In that respect, it is like a picture painted in the 'expressionist' style."[40]
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> "It is as though Tillich construed the New Testament materials as a kind of verbal equivalent of a very complex Byzantine mosaic. The mosaic might consist of a number of separate, highly stylised – indeed expressionistic – images, whether of Old Testament figures or New, angels and saints, set in a formal pattern such that together they constitute one composite icon."[41]

38 Kelsey: The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Fortress 1975) pp 64 - 74

39 P Tillich: Systematic Theology (University of Chicago Press 1963) vol I pp 6-8.

40 Kelsey: The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Fortress 1975) p 69

41 Kelsey: The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Fortress 1975) p 70

The use of the word icon is important here, drawing as it does on the theology of icons: they can be seen as windows to heaven, and doors to perception: "Icons form a door into the divine realm, a meeting point of divine grace and human need; moreover they are also a way by which we enter more deeply into our interior life."[42] They are respected, even venerated – though not worshipped, for this reverence is directed beyond - to that which the icon represents, not to the icon as an object. Icons are rich in layers and complexity, they are part of culture with traditions and conventions, which has to be entered into in order for there to be understanding. That culture belongs to a Christian community, as do the icons themselves. Indeed the relationship between the written word and the painted image is explicitly recognised: "That which the word communicates by sound, the painting demonstrates silently by representation."[43] The picture of the icon complements the word, and the pictures of these metaphors complement the philosophy of hermeneutics.

Again, Vanhoozer deals with the image of icon:

> "Seen from an explicitly Christian point of view, the text is more like an icon than an idol. While the icon is also an 'image' it is an image that opens onto an infinite depth to which one's gaze has ultimately to surrender, not a surface on which the reader writes…. Where the idol is a projection, the icon is a revelation: in the icon something comes to us from beyond….. The task of interpretation is to get beyond oneself by attending to the form of a literary act in order to encounter an embodied intention…. Similarly the posture demanded by the icon is that of 'watchful calm'. One cannot wrest its meaning from it; one does not master an icon or a text so much as attend, and pay attention to it. To claim that the Bible is a verbal icon thus leads not to bibliolatry, but to the idea of *Holy* Scripture and to the idea that the text points away from itself."[44]

Vanhoozer makes one further point: icons typically depict faces : "Could it be that the goal of reading Scripture is to have our gaze drawn and directed to the face of Christ?"[45]

4.6 City

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42 John Baggley : Doors of Perception – icons and their spiritual significance (Mowbray 1987) p 4

43 The Seventh Ecumenical Council, quoted by Baggley: Doors of Perception – icons and their spiritual significance (Mowbray 1987) p 40

44 Kevin J Vanhoozer : Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 460

45 Kevin J Vanhoozer : Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 461

Our fifth image is that of language as a city, and the authors and readers as its citizens. This is a metaphor employed briefly by Vanhoozer.[46] Language, says Vanhoozer, is our environment – not an open field, nor a prison house, but with limits within which speakers have freedom. (Augustine, Vanhoozer points out, sees the purpose of the city of language as leading to the city of God, for language exists for the sake of communication.) The citizen of language has responsibilities and rights: the reader has responsibility to the author – to receive his or her communication without revision; the author has rights – to be received without revision – and responsibilities – to stand by his/her words, to be a communicative agent.

The idea of language generally, or of the Bible particularly, as a place[47] resonates with Newbigin's idea of indwelling:

> ".. it is ... possible to indwell the Bible story so that you do not so much look *at* the Bible from without as look at the world from within the Bible, through the lenses that the Bible gives you. As one Latin American Theologian has said, the business is not so much to understand the text as to understand the world through the text. ..... I am suggesting ... that our use of the Bible is analogous to our use of language. We indwell it rather than looking at it from outside."[48]

A citizen needs to belong, to be encultured, to learn the ways of the city, to become acquainted with the other citizens, and eventually friends. Citizenship is a process, indeed for some a lengthy one; there are 'milestones' during that process, as stories (of the citizens with each other and with the city) become intertwined.

4.7 Horizon

A sixth image is that of horizon – as used most notably by Gadamer and Thiselton.[49] Thiselton writes:

46 Kevin J Vanhoozer : Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 202

47 Jeanrond: Theological Hermeneutics : Development and Significance (Macmillan 1991) p 66 uses the image of language as the ground between two people.

48 Lesslie Newbigin: Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth (SPCK 1991) p 47 Lindbeck also uses the idea of the Bible as a lens: "Scripture ceased to function as the lens through which theologians viewed the world and instead became primarily an object of study whose religiously significant or literal meaning was located outside itself." George Lindbeck: The Nature of Doctrine (SPCK 1984) pp 118 & 119

49 A Thiselton: The Two Horizons (Paternoster Press 1980) and New Horizons in Hermeneutics (Harper & Collins 1992)

> "even in popular parlance 'horizon' is used metaphorically to denote the limits of thought dictated by a given viewpoint or perspective. The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to bring about an active and meaningful engagement between the interpreter and the text, in such a way that the interpreter's own horizon is re-shaped and enlarged. In one sense it is possible to speak, with Gadamer, of the goal of hermeneutics as a 'fusion' of horizons. In practice, because the interpreter cannot leap out of the historical tradition to which he belongs, the two horizons can never become totally identical; at best they remain separate but close….. Nevertheless…. there is always progress towards a fusion of horizons. The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter's own horizons."[50]

'Horizon' has now become a technical term in hermeneutical theory, particularly through Gadamer's and Thiselton's work..

4.8 Others

One image we should look at very briefly is developed by Muddiman:[51] he contrasts the image of the Bible as a fountain (fresh, accessible, with its own power) with the image of the Bible as a well (deep, inaccessible, needing laborious extraction). There are biblical references: Genesis ch 29 (Jacob and Rachel at the well) and John ch 4 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman at – presumably – the same well). It is a more felicitous image than of the Bible as a quarry – or even a building which one must demolish in order to extract certain things!

Finally for the sake of greater completeness, it is worth mentioning in passing some other images, less graphic, but nevertheless shedding light on possible understandings of the Bible. The Bible can be seen as story;[52] it can be seen as a (complex) set of doctrinal propositions; it can be seen not so much as a record of God's dealings with His people, but rather as the Revelation itself – the Word of God. It can be seen as a Holy object to be venerated – an item of liturgical significance with its own

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50 A Thiselton: The Two Horizons (Paternoster Press 1980) p xix

51 John Muddiman: The Bible: Fountain and Well of Truth (Blackwells 1983)

52 The ideas of Salvation History, or G Ernest Wright and Reginald Fuller: The Book of the Acts of God (Pelican 1965) are examples, to which narrative theology can be seen as a successor

procession, or even something upon which people take oaths, an object whose pages are not to be defiled.[53]

4.9 Analysis

This brief survey has established the pervasiveness and richness of the use of metaphors or images for thinking about the Bible. They are not just an 'optional extra' for hermeneutics, but an integral part of the way in which we can understand the process of interpretation. This provides some justification for pursuing a further metaphor as a model by which to look at the use of the Bible. An additional justification is that metaphors can operate on different levels, and we could say that a good metaphor would be accessible, useful, offering new insights, not only to academic theologians but also to those without formal theological training. We therefore turn now to an analysis of the metaphors I have described to see their strengths and weaknesses, their similarities and differences, so that this further metaphor can be adequately thought through..

4.9.1 Personal Images

"Human understanding is akin, in Schleiermacher's judgement, to what is involved in seeking to understand a friend"[54]

It seems to me that the most decisive factor in judging the success of these metaphors is the extent to which they are personal. A text is not a person, of course, and the distance between authors or editors and their texts cannot be ignored. Indeed Ricoeur sees this distance as the space where understanding can take place. [55] More theologically, the Word proceeds from the Father: the doctrine of the Trinity depends on the distance here between the persons of the Trinity. However, the Word became flesh, or less theologically: behind every text there is at least one person, and in

53 see Kelsey: The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Fortress 1975) p 172 For the fear of defiling the Bible, cf R L Stevenson: Treasure Island (many editions eg: J M Dent & Sons 1928) p 206 : "Why, hillo! look here, now: this ain't lucky! You've gone and cut this out of a Bible. What fool's gone and cut a Bible?"

54 Thisleton: New Horizons (Harper Collins 1992) p 205

55 NB see above in Chapter 2 section 2.1.3.2 – on the critical space between a text and its interpreters.
see also John Barton's view in People of the Book? (SPCK 1988) of the need for a distance between the Bible and Christianity.

front at least the implied reader. We are therefore engaged in a deeply personal business; the liberation theologians who reject bloodless and impersonal readings are in the right.

More positively, this personal image does justice to the individuality and inconsistency of the Bible[56] and to our encounter with it.[57] The image of the witness, for example, allows for diversity between different parts of the canon, and gives a way of thinking about the uniqueness of the Bible. On the other hand the image of the city (which out the outset refers to language generally, rather than the Bible particularly) has a degree of impersonality about it – in much the same way that many modern cities are the similar: one would need to look at details of architecture and geography to be certain which city it was.

4.9.2 Performance Images

At first sight it might seem that the image of a score, and its performance, was the closest parallel to the Bible, and certainly it has, as we have seen, provided useful provocation for three significant theologians. The example of the American Constitution is very helpful, bringing into the discussion the idea of a community shaped by a text, and performing it as part of the community's identity, a feature not present in the example of the classic musical repertoire. That we find it a more accessible example than those based on music may say something about us and our relationship with words.

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56 see above in note Error: Reference source not found for Josipovici's comments.

57 The story of Jacob wrestling (with God? with an angel? or with himself?) at the Jabbok in Genesis 32. 22-32, has been considred by a number of writers: e.g. for a Jungian view - John Sandford: The Man who Wrestled with God (Paulist Press 1981); e.g. for discussion of Roland Barthes structuralist view, together with some bibliographical references - John Barton Reading the Old Testament (DLT 1984) pp 116-119. The story can provide a number of additional insights into our encounter with the Bible. Just as Jacob wrestles in this holy place, with this unknown man/angel/God, so we wrestle in and with the Bible. Just as at the end, Jacob tries to learn a name which will give him power, so we, in reading the Bible, are looking for words and images and stories to express and interpret and control our experiences. Just as Jacob is marked (with a limp) by his opponent, so we too will be scarred and changed by our wrestling with the Bible. Jacob also has a new name. The new name (Israel - He who strives with God) is a positive thing, the limp perhaps negative. Of course our encounters with the Bible will not be without their dangers, and the changes in us will (we hope?) mark us as those who have wrestled with the Bible. Just as Jacob understands that he has met God face to face (though that is far from clear whilst he is wrestling) so we may come to feel that we have met God face to face in the Bible. Just as Jacob's opponent is trying to escape from him (before daybreak), so we may find God (?) elusive. And again, although Jacob succeeds in holding on to him, he does not answer Jacob's question - at least not directly. This too may be part of our experience. Just as there is an attempt to hold on to the experience - by re-naming the place and by the tradition about the sinew, so there are attempts to institutionalise encounters with God through the Bible (though of course both attempts end up fossilising that which was originally living).

Barton makes a point about the performance model getting away from the idea of consumers and customers, and moving to the idea of apprentices to masters found trustworthy.[58] Even in the arena of music there does seem to be an air of consumerism about, say, Classic FM; post-modernists have pointed out the parallels between the market place and the literary world, with authors as producers, and readers as consumers. Again the example of the American Constitution, with its ideas of citizenship with rights and responsibilities, perhaps resists this consumerism better.

Another point made by Barton is that the hermeneutics of suspicion devalues the text. He says: "the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' will be seen as not suspicious enough, as foreclosing on the meaning and truth of the text by failing to attend with love to what lies sharply etched on the surface."[59] Perhaps it would be better to say "suspicious of the wrong thing." Certainly the performance metaphor takes us back to the text in a helpful way.

One possible weakness is that there could be questions as to the extent to which the image really provides useful insight into meaning. Does it not simply say that the text (score) has some gaps which the performer is to fill? Further, would we wish to allow on the Bible the drastic editing which sometimes is applied to, say, Shakespeare in more radical productions, as directors try to make it address more current situations? Even the American Constitution has been importantly amended – though of course the Bible is less fixed than is sometimes thought : there are after all three versions of the canon (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant).

4.9.3 Visual Images

The metaphor of the mirror (like that of the icon) has a visual quality which at one level perhaps sits slightly uneasily with the idea of the word; however, it can also be argued that the two complement each other, as we have seen.[60] The real difficulty with the metaphor is that it gives basically an individualistic view of the relationship between the Bible and its readers. It works well, I think, at that individual level, but not at a communal level. Holding up a mirror to a group of people might tend to invite each of them to look at their own reflection. It ought to be possible to hold up a

58 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 p 208.

59 Stephen Barton: "New Testament Interpretation as Performance" in Scottish Journal of Theology 1999 Vol 52 No 2 p 206.

60 see above: page 82

reflection to a group of people, and is surely sometimes necessary, but perhaps each would say, "I'm not like that." Vanhoozer has a further difficulty: that in a mirror one sees only oneself; he however, wishes for an understanding of the Bible in which a reader sees beyond that.[61]

The problem with the icon / mosaic image is that it does not resonate with our experience of pictures: it is a picture of a picture which doesn't exist. There have been some jigsaws on sale which use a mosaic of hundreds of faces to build up a single face – of the Mona Lisa – but they are not familiar visual currency. Second, the unifying principle is not obvious; the separate pieces of the mosaic do not give shape to the whole as, say, the facets of a diamond do. Third, watchful calm before the icon does not really reflect the reality for some of wrestling with the challenges of the Bible.

The last metaphor, 'horizon,' is in some ways the most impersonal of all, for a horizon is distant, its details unclear. There is no foreground at all. Does this really describe the qualities of a text? The fusion of horizons does not necessarily illustrate understanding, unless one were to be standing in the identical place : as Vanhoozer points out, such a position is destructive of dialogue.[62] If the idea is to give an image of seeing things the way the text sees them, or of seeing the things the text sees, surely the metaphor of a lens would be more helpful?[63]

I have argued that the use of a metaphor is helpful (to a range of people), and that the most helpful metaphors are those with a personal element, although certainly there are elements of other metaphors which are also useful. We therefore turn now to my own suggested metaphor, using also the series of requirements outlined in Chapter 3.

61 Vanhoozer: Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 405

62 Vanhoozer: Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 390

63 see Newbigin's image above at footnote Error: Reference source not found page 83
cf Lindbeck : "Scripture ceased to function as the lens through which theologians viewed the world and instead became primarily an object of study whose religiously significant or literal meaning was located outside itself." George Lindbeck: The Nature of Doctrine (SPCK 1984) pp 118 & 119