METAPHOR, SCRIPTURE AND EDUCATION

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Brian Hill has had long and close links with The Stapleford Centre. He has spoken at Stapleford conferences, and is a regular contributor to its journal, the Journal of Education and Christian Belief (formerly Spectrum). His collegiality and friendship with the authors spans several decades: John first met Brian while Brian was on a sabbatical in London in 1979-80; while Trevor drew extensively on Brian's writings for his Ph.D. dissertation. David has come to know Brian and interact with his work more recently.

In a paper entitled *Teaching as Reconciliation,* published in this journal in 1976, Brian Hill wrote:

> (Teaching) style is not just a matter of possessing certain skills, but of seeing the teaching situation in its wholeness. We depend on models and metaphors to bind together the bits of experience. . . (M)any dimensions of the teacher's task can be woven together by the biblical concept of reconciliation. (Hill 1976, p. 15)

At the time Hill's article was published, two of the present writers had recently survived their first year in teaching and were settling into developing our own personal teaching styles. In our teacher training, we had already come to realise that the prevailing philosophies of education of the time were not religiously neutral, and we had begun to wrestle with how to integrate our Christian faith with our thinking about education. It was then that we first came into contact with Brian Hill's writings. The youngest of us was a ten-year-old school pupil, still on the receiving end of somebody else's teaching style, when Hill's paper on reconciliation was published. In the years since then all three of us have found Hill's example as a Christian scholar in education a great encouragement and inspiration, and his work a particularly significant influence on our thinking. It has been an added pleasure to come to know him personally as a friend and colleague, and to gratefully acknowledge his foundational influence on the vision being developed at the Stapleford Centre, where we are currently working.

BRIAN HILL'S EXAMPLE OF METAPHOR: TEACHING AS RECONCILIATION
One of the research projects in which we are currently engaged is a study of a range of approaches which can be used – or are already used implicitly or explicitly – by Christian educators to move from the biblical text to educational thinking and practice. One of these has been suggested by recent discussions of the nature and role of *metaphor*. It was therefore with no little interest that we turned to Hill's paper on teaching as reconciliation; and there we have found an explicitly metaphorical move from the biblical idea of reconciliation to a Christian conception of the role of the teacher.

Hill starts with an identification of key features of the notion of reconciliation, keeping, as he says, "sufficiently close to scripture to give the word its biblical weight" (Hill 1976, p. 9). Reconciliation has to do with the ending, on God's initiative and at great cost to him, of an enmity between us and him which was caused by our race's rebellion against him. This reconciliation requires both the knowledge and the consent of the parties involved. Hill then suggests three areas in which this is relevant to Christian teaching style:

> first, in bringing the child to terms with society, with the hopes and enmities in himself and others, so that he may develop with a realistic view of his options; second, in achieving a better balance between thinking and feeling in the curriculum; and third, in being involved with, and mediating between, the various groups interested in making educational policy. (1976, pp. 15-16)

In response to the charge that this is a misapplication of scripture (because the emphasis in the Bible is on reconciling people *to God* and not to society or to themselves), Hill responds that Christian evangelism and witness is "inseparable from the more mundane details of our daily walk, including our professional life" (p. 13). The call of God is to "whole-of-life involvement" with people (p.14). In addition, it is apparent that he sees the extension of the idea of reconciliation by applying it *metaphorically* to these aspects of education as a legitimate application of scripture.[1]

Taking metaphor to be "that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another" (Soskice 1985, p. 15),[2] what we have in Hill's account is a way of extending our understanding of teaching by looking at it in terms of something else, namely, reconciliation. It is a case of 'seeing as' rather than simply 'seeing', which can deepen our understanding and enhance our practice. Or, in Hill's terms above, it "bind(s) together the bits of experience".

AN EXAMPLE FROM COMENIUS: TEACHING AS GARDENING
Our first example of metaphor as a bridge between the Bible and education took us back nearly a quarter of a century. Our next example has a modern ring to it, but it comes from a long way further back. For Comenius, the great 17th century educator, the garden was a favourite metaphorical image: each human person is to become "a garden of delight for his God" (Keatinge 1907, p. 11). He compared the school to a garden and suggested the books for different classes should have titles "to please and attract the young and… at the same time express the nature of their contents… the book of the lowest class might be called the violet-bed, that of the second class the rose-bed, that of the third class the grass-plot, and so on" (p. 270). The task of the teacher is to "water God's plants" (p.111).

At first hearing, this sounds like an anticipation of the child-centred progressive education theories which we met in our teacher-training and which were then linked not with the Moravian Christian Comenius, but with the Romantic philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau and his fictional ideal pupil, the boy Emile. It would be easy to read back into Comenius a view of children as tender plants which, given space and left as nature has made them, will blossom into well-formed adults. However, despite similarities between Comenius and Rousseau, there are significant differences which place Comenius in an educational tradition deeply influenced by Jewish and Christian thought and associated more with such as Pestalozzi, Froebel and Buber than with Rousseau and Dewey.[3]

Comenius had an understanding of nature which was quite different from that of Rousseau. Nature, for Comenius, is the creation of God, originally good but corrupted by the Fall, and restored through God's redemptive activity. In God's redeeming and transforming work, the processes of education play a part. We should not therefore leave natural processes to proceed on their own; rather we should actively intervene to discipline and train. Thus he wrote:

(A) wild tree will not bring forth sweet fruits until it be planted, watered and pruned by a skilled gardener, so does a man grow of his own accord into a human semblance (just as any brute resembles others of his own class), but is unable to develop into a rational, wise, virtuous and pious creature, unless virtue and piety are first engrafted into him… this must first take place while the plants are young. (Keatinge 1907, p. 57)

Comenius derived the metaphor of the garden directly from the Bible, in particular from the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden. The 'Dedicatory Letter' at the beginning of *The Great Didactic* abounds with references to the Paradise which God planted. His use of the garden metaphor is also based in his experience of the gardens of his day, and our interpretation of the metaphor for education today needs to take that into account. This was brought home to one of the present writers through a visit to a medieval stately home. He observed that the garden was an island of culture in the sea of nature, a place where disciplined beauty was brought forth from the unruliness of nature. It was not, as a progressive educationist or a modern city-dweller might see it, a small intrusion of nature in the territory of human culture and artefaction.

So we have in Comenius, as in Hill, an example of the use of metaphor to enhance our understanding of education. Teaching is *seen as* the tending of a garden. That could be a case of keeping it free from harmful adult intervention – as in Rousseau – but we find something rather different in Comenius. His use of the metaphor was shaped by his reading of the Bible. Like Hill, he kept close to scripture to give the image both a biblical weighting and the possibility of imaginative development along biblically oriented lines.

METAPHOR AND UNDERSTANDING

It would be easy to say that this is all very interesting but surely we could cut out the decorative imagery and go *directly* from what the Bible says to how we should teach children. Even though it might deprive us of the experience of a more 'scenic route', the motorway would get us there more quickly and with less likelihood of our going astray on the way.

It would be altogether unacceptable to some that we make use of metaphor in these ways in thinking about education or about any other area where reasoning and clear communication matter. They would erect large 'no entry' signs to prevent us from taking the scenic route. This is illustrated from another educational philosopher, John Wilson:

> The beliefs of men, and perhaps particularly their religious beliefs, tend to seek expression in the most poetic form. The greatness of the Bible, for instance, lies not least in its high literary value. Prayers, political songs and slogans, proverbs and moral injunctions, and formalised ritual sayings of all kinds tend to acquire poetic force. This is desirable for many reasons, provided only that we do not lose sight of their prose meaning. Pure poetry is one thing; nobody "takes it seriously". Pure prose, such as a scientific text-book, is another; nobody feels inclined to read it in the sing-song, faintly mystical voice which we reserve for poetry. But mixed communications are dangerous, for we may easily allow their poetic force to blind us to the prose meaning… Prose communication consists of words of which we are intended to make logical sense: words which we are supposed to understand with our reason, not appreciate with our feelings. It is with this sort of communication that we shall be concerned, because this is the type of communication which we ought to use in arguing, discussing, solving problems and discovering truth. (Wilson 1956, pp. 49-50)

However, tempting as it is to opt for the direct deductive or inductive route, it is not always the most helpful. The view of language advocated by Wilson fails to take account of how metaphor can function more centrally in thought and communication. Seeing electricity as current, or light as wave or particle, are not mere poetic embellishments of our theories but ways in science of extending our knowledge and deepening our understanding. Undoubtedly some metaphors may be one-off interesting images used by a particular person, but others come to occupy a more pervasive place in our thinking.

A helpful example comes from Lakoff and Johnson's classic work on metaphor (1980) where they point out that, in the western world, we see argument and debate as warfare. We "win, lose, attack, defend, shoot down, demolish" arguments. How would the practice be different in a culture where the dominant metaphor for argument was dance rather than warfare? It might highlight the role of co-operation, rhythm, turn-taking, reaching a mutually satisfying resolution: these are all elements obscured by the warfare metaphor.[4]

The influence of particular metaphors in our thinking may or may not be helpful in generating new practices and solutions to problems. Donald Schön (1993, pp. 139-141) relates how a group of designers were failing to perfect a synthetic fibre paintbrush. They had tried all kinds of variations of bristle length and thickness, but the brush still achieved 'blobby' results. Then someone said, "A paintbrush is a pump, isn't it?" Suddenly the designers began to think not of the brush wiping the paint onto the surface but of the flow of the paint between the bristles, and the change of frame led to a successful redesign.

The scenic routes may open up new, surprising and exciting vistas, or they may, despite their initial promise, lead us into ugly terrain. For example, the growing dominance of discourse about education by a cluster of metaphors from the marketplace may be viewed by some as 'generative', i.e., as forwarding our understanding and practice of the process. However, others of us may view this development as a possible case of a *degenerative* metaphor, one which takes us into less desirable terrain: Christians, for example, may well want to argue that the school is, or should be, sufficiently unlike a modern marketplace to make talk of 'clients', 'consumers', 'products', 'delivery', 'quality control' and such terms quite inappropriate or undesirable.[5]

Another example comes from Parker Palmer's (1983) *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality Of Education*, in which Palmer questions the dominance of the metaphor of knowing as power and suggests its replacement with that of the biblical metaphor of knowing as loving. Following Francis Bacon, from whom the power metaphor derives, reality is seen as something to be mastered, analysed, formed and shaped to our ends. Learning becomes a matter of 'mastering' ideas, 'grasping' concepts, 'wrestling with' problems and 'cracking' them. Palmer goes on to suggest that

> another kind of knowledge is available to us, one that begins in a different passion and is drawn toward other ends… This is a knowledge that originates not in curiosity or control but in compassion, or love – a source celebrated not in our intellectual tradition but in our spiritual heritage. (p. 8)

Palmer continues, "the act of knowing *is* an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own" (p. 8), and it is clear that this extends to impersonal reality as well as to other persons. Again, as in Comenius and Hill, the metaphor has a theological basis, and is taken directly from the text of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13 (from which Palmer also takes the title of his book).

BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR EDUCATION?

There are several features shared by the three examples of metaphors for education which we have looked at above (teaching as reconciliation, teaching as gardening, and knowing as loving).

First, they are all taken from the text of the Bible. Reconciliation is a biblical idea which Hill is careful to use metaphorically in a way that stays close to scripture. The metaphor of the garden is taken directly from the Bible, as is the metaphorical linking of knowing with loving.[6] However, it does not follow from this that just *any* biblical concept or image can be

used legitimately or fruitfully as a metaphor for an aspect of education. It may not be appropriate or helpful to think of the teacher as, say, a vine or a consuming fire.[7]

Second, all the metaphors are theologically important. Reconciliation, the Garden of Eden and the love of God are all fairly central to Christian theology. However, a metaphorical approach to relating the Bible to education is not simply a matter of using an image as a decorative vehicle to move from one to the other. It is not a simple replacement for deduction from theological principles to educational applications. The metaphor matters as a metaphor. It cannot be reduced *without loss* to discursive language. It has a power to engage the readers, to invite them to elaborate imaginatively on meanings and associations, to change their perspective. 'Seeing as' can become 'seeing differently'.

Third (and closely related to the other two), the metaphors form part of clusters or networks of related metaphors. Some contemporary writers talk of 'root metaphors' which occur at the hearts of such clusters and which orient other, less central metaphors in a particular network of meaning. One writer on metaphor in religion has suggested that

> not only is every major religion grounded in certain root metaphors, but Western religions are also "religions of the book" – books which codify root metaphors through various linguistic and generic strategies. For Judaism, Christianity, and Islam certain texts serve not only as charter documents for the religion but as "scripture" in the strict sense: that is, as *normative* for the religious community's basic understanding and control of its root metaphors and thereby its vision of reality. (Tracy 1979, p. 90)

He goes on to suggest that "God is love" is one of Christianity's root metaphors (p. 100). Teaching as reconciliation could be seen as a part of a cluster which has this at its root.

CONCLUSION

Brian Hill's writings reflect a deep concern to think Christianly about education. Taking our cue from one of his many published articles, we have sought to sketch a particular way in which this vision can be further realised.

We have looked above at examples of, and explored some implications of, one way of relating the Bible to education. It is far from being the only way.[8] It has its limitations and its pitfalls: its openness to invite, engage, and lead into new ways of seeing is also an openness to misunderstanding and misuse. But we cannot ignore the role of metaphor and its deep pervasion of educational thinking and practice. If we cannot, as Christians in education, creatively engage with others in transforming the discourse of education into more biblical ways of seeing the process, we may find ourselves increasingly squeezed into the mould of a way of thinking and seeing which does not fit easily with a Christian worldview and lifestyle.

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ENDNOTES

1. It is possible to question some of the detail of Hill's application, e.g., is "bringing the child to terms with society" a case of reconciliation in the biblical sense if there is no change on the part of society? However, the purpose of this article is not to scrutinise the detail of particular applications but rather to point to some examples of this kind of approach to linking the Bible with education, for which Hill's article provides a informative starting-point.

2. Soskice's comparatively recent definition is but one of a whole range of sometimes competing, sometimes compatible, definitions of metaphor. To advance any one of them without argument is bound to seem stipulative. To adequately discuss the differences among them would be to move

into discussion of the different philosophies of language, epistemologies and anthropologies in which they have their homes. This is not possible within this paper – and would probably not be universally compelling anyway. We are using Soskice's definition as a tentative 'rough-and-ready' definition in the hope that it covers what many people would recognise to be examples of metaphor. Our main purpose here is to draw attention to the existence of this kind of approach to thinking Christianly about education rather than to engage in detailed analysis of concepts. As a contested concept, 'metaphor' hardly stands alone – it keeps company with ideas of 'education' itself and such everyday notions as 'time' and 'freedom'. Our focus here is on how metaphor can function in orientating educational praxis rather than on its explanatory role or its truth conditions.

3. See an important recent study of Comenius in Murphy (1995).

4. For a book-length sociolinguistic exploration of this point, see Tannen (1998).

5. See, for example, Hukins (1993).

6. Note that, even though a metaphor comes directly from the Bible, its use need not be identical with that in the Bible but it does need to be consistent with or faithful to the Bible's teachings.

7. Any approach we adopt in linking the Bible with education must come labelled with a 'Please handle with care' notice. The Bible does not directly and openly address many of the issues of contemporary education. Still less does it say directly to us, "here are the metaphors you should use in educational discourse"! Some metaphors used in the Bible to describe the church (e.g. as a body) may or may not prove helpful when used to describe the school. Generative metaphors orient us to a different and helpful perspective on an issue but they are only partial perspectives. If we say, "come over here and look at our practice in this way" and this proves fruitful, it does not follow that it is the *only* way of looking at our practice. In drawing attention to this link between the Bible and education, we are suggesting neither that it is itself problem-free nor that it is *the* way, *the* answer to all our problems (see note 8 also).

8. In our research project on the Bible and education, we have so far identified, in addition to this metaphor route, five other possible models or approaches: a logical link (of various kinds) between general biblical principles and educational applications; the Bible as part of the content of education; the life and character of the teacher as mediating between the Bible and educational contexts; narrative in scripture and education; and the significance of the pedagogical models of scripture for education today. We have found these to be not discrete and mutually exclusive alternatives but closely inter-related in various complex ways. A possible metaphor for the whole relationship is that of the strands of a rope rather than a set of independent links.

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