

CONCLUSION

Several observations can be offered in conclusion to this study. The work of C. A. Evans raises the level of interpretive integrity that any scholar now brings to the reading of Isaiah 6:9-10. However, within the particulars of his study certain conclusions are not beyond criticism. His work on 1QIsa^a offers a plausible picture of a scribal transmission which subtly but deliberately alters the text's meaning. Evans' reading views the text as making a plea that the people turn from engaging in their sins. This reading completely removes the action of God as an agent in the hardening of the people for judgment. The problem with accepting this reading comes on the basis that all of Evans' points can be justifiably explained in terms of natural scribal mistakes. Set in the broader context of the unity of 1QIsa^a with the MT it appears that Evans may be guilty of establishing a voice not sourced in his text. The remainder of Evans' work, though in need of tempering at times, establishes what has also been demonstrated here. The interpretive history of Isaiah 6:9-10 does not come to us a monolith. We have received no "conservative" translations of this text. Even the most recent of popular translations demonstrate this.¹ This passage engaged the minds and pens of those who sought to transmit it and their influence remains on it. With the incorporation of Vanhoozer's model this study demonstrated

¹ See above page 58 n.37. It should also be recalled that no English translation can account for the irony of the passage as articulated by Landy; See above page 37.

that though we may not have uniformity in early interpretation (agreeing with Evans) we do have a high level of interpretive unity (departing from Evans) found in the early readings.

Vanhoozer claims that God provides language in a manner reflecting his trinitarian nature. Every meaningful expression of language comes from an author. Vanhoozer parallels this to the created world which derives meaning from its created source known as God the Father. Once an act of language comes into existence it carries with it an intended (illocutionary) force. This intended communicative act can range from the nonsensical to the precise; however, it is *the author* who determines that function. Jesus the Son or Word of God parallels this aspect of language. God has spoken to us in his Word, Jesus, and so we attend to him if we desire to hear God. In the same way an author provides us with their word and so we must attend to the text in order to hear them. When a communicative act finds reception by a reader or hearer it has an (perlocutionary) effect. The author intends this act to have a certain effect, though he or she cannot control that reality. The Holy Spirit acts as the power of God in lives of believers delivering the effect of God's Word.

Vanhoozer claims that this understanding provides an ethical framework in which to address the plurality of interpretations. He does not reject this plurality, in fact he embraces it.² His model recognizes and accepts the plural readings found in the early interpretive traditions. They can be viewed as contributing to a “thick” reading of Isaiah 6:9-10. The Septuagint and Targum of Isaiah 6:9-10 left traces of their own context in their interpretation. The Septuagint attempted to communicate

² Kevin Vanhoozer *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), 419ff.

the guilt of the people. And in light of their post-exilic restoration the notion of God's salvation found more prominence. The same can be said for the targumic tradition which already understood the guilt of the people and emphasized the remnant in verse 13. Both readings reflect a deep understanding of their own theological context as well as the context of Isaiah.

The New Testament readings of Isaiah 6:9-10 provide a great example of Vanhoozer's concept of a "plural unity."³ Taken as a whole they provide a nuanced and detailed reading and application of Isaiah's message to the people. These readings stress the role of God in the obduracy of the people (Mark and John), the responsibility and guilt of the people (Matthew), as well as the hope of salvation (Luke-Acts). An interpretive solo performance can "never wholly recover the selfsame original."⁴ However, an interpretive orchestra can begin "to develop [a text's] full potential . . . [in that its] true identity only becomes apparent in the full range of relationships."⁵ The canon itself provides an example of the humility with which we should approach it. Vanhoozer notes that "the Bible has a number of built-in strategies that challenge the will to power."⁶ Both the content of Isaiah 6 and its application in the NT display both the powerfully relevant and elusive manner in which God communicates.

With respect to the diversity of early interpretations another point should be added. The community which preserved and transmitted Isaiah 6:9-10 never abandoned the Hebrew text. Further, in light of various readings which "softened"

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 392.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 464.

the tone of the passage the Hebrew text itself was never altered in conformity to those readings. In this way the early interpreters of Isaiah 6 had immense respect for the authorial intention of the passage. If this were not the case then their interpretation would have supplanted the text. Even the church which had high regard for the Septuagint and the later Vulgate never completely severed ties with the Hebrew tradition.

The concept of canon also applies when sifting through recent interpretations of Isaiah 6:9-10. Several *perspectives* on how to read Isaiah 6 were offered. Roy Melugin states correctly that Stanley Fish does offer insight into this condition. Scholars may well read Isaiah 6 as a political treaty or a theological memoir. *Within* those perspectives there are certainly legitimate readings. However, these readings, admittedly or not, deviate from the Isaiah of the biblical canon. These scholars are now reading new texts. I am in no way denying the value of the historical study of the Bible. In many instances this study can illuminate the genre of a given passage in order to understand the whole.⁷ However, to have interpreted only the “Isaiah memoir” is not the same as interpreting Isaiah within the context of the Bible. To claim this would be unethical.

Vanhoozer’s model understands that if the Bible can indeed be understood as a book then this “requires the concept of the author as its controlling presence, the one who intends a discourse as a meaningful whole.”⁸ The canonical text and its historical process offers an image of this understanding. The Bible *is* a collection of writings. Much like a well edited compilation with a consistency to the contributions.

⁷ Tremper Longman, “Form Criticism, Recent Developments in Genre Theory and the Evangelical,” *WTJ* 47 (1985): 46-67.

⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 104.

However, the Bible is not only a compilation of once distinct writings. The Bible also reads as a narrative with a beginning (Genesis) and an end (Revelation). The New Testament writers already recognized this. The writer of Hebrews generally prefaced his quotes with a general voice of one (often God or the Holy Spirit) *having said*. Other NT books often clarified the source of their citations (see John's use of Isaiah 6:9-10). And who has taken responsibility for this compilation? The pages of the Bible are replete with fingers pointing to God. Vanhoozer recognizes this and sees divine inspiration as the only explanation for the authorship of the Bible. In this understanding the Bible becomes a unified context in which every part must be read. "It is in relation to its intentional context that a text yields its maximal sense, its fullest meaning. . . . If God is taken to be the divine author . . . then it is the canon as a whole that becomes the communicative act that needs to be described."⁹ Citing Iain Provan Vanhoozer writes that "we cannot do justice to the Old Testament . . . unless we recognize that each text was intended by its authors to be read as Scripture along with other Scripture: 'To ignore the scriptural context in which the book now sits is to ignore something which is fundamentally important about its nature.'"¹⁰

The theoretical and theological framework that Vanhoozer offers can function as a valuable corrective and benchmark for Bible readers serious about understanding our God-given ability to hear God's voice. Many of his contributions find strong accord with those taking the biblical canon seriously. Unique to Vanhoozer's contribution is his thoroughly articulated theological framework from which he works. All his work can be traced from a fundamental belief in the personal God of

⁹ Ibid., 265.

¹⁰ Ibid., 313.

the Trinity. Within the context of this acknowledged strength some observations and critiques should be offered.

1. Over time it would be worthwhile exploring the implications and tensions of his stance on dynamic and formal equivalence in translation (especially in light of diverse cultural expressions).¹¹ Can a translation take *any* form so long as the correct effect is produced?¹²
2. As mentioned above in Chapter 1 Vanhoozer appears content dealing with the limitations of categorizing Derrida and Fish. However, more attention to the subtleties of a writer such as Derrida would be worthwhile.¹³ Though Vanhoozer leaves room for the eschatology and plural nature of interpretation he gives the impression that textual meaning should find relatively neat categorization. Anthony Thiselton states it well in saying, “I wish that the issues were as clear-cut as Vanhoozer often seems to imply.”¹⁴
3. With the concept of canon functioning significantly Vanhoozer would do well to continue to nuance an appropriate historical understanding of canon.¹⁵ To what extent does “final form” inform our readings? Does the ordering of books alter our reading strategies? If so, how do we integrate the various historical orders of the biblical books (i.e Hebrew vs. Greek OT; the various NT lists preserved)?
4. In working through Vanhoozer’s text one has to wonder, especially in relation to the Bible, whether the idea of author really needs to be maintained. Vanhoozer moves with relatively little fanfare from human to divine authorship of the Bible.¹⁶ This position remains inadequately developed. If human authorship is primary we may be forced back into competitions for synchronic and diachronic readings. If divine authorship is primary then we must ask the *usefulness* of Vanhoozer’s contribution. Divine authorship in Vanhoozer’s project moves “God” dangerously close to being that *principle* which allows his system to *work*.¹⁷ This distracts from the intensely personal, elusive, and de-centering God of the Bible. From this perspective we might consider looking to others discouraged with those considered by Vanhoozer

¹¹ See above page 25.

¹² Refer to clarification in Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002), .

¹³ For a helpful balance see A. K. M. Adam, “Author,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, Miss.: Chalice Press, 2000), 8-13.

¹⁴ Anthony Thiselton, review of *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, Kevin Vanhoozer, *JTS* 51 (2000): 705.

¹⁵ For a positive contribution to this discussion which asks important questions of the project endorsed by Childs see John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 151ff.

¹⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 263-5.

¹⁷ This is alluded to most clearly as Vanhoozer employs Kantian language appealing to God as the *transcendental condition* for language; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 456.

and Users and Undoers.¹⁸ Including these works might develop, in addition to Vanhoozer's *covenant* of language, the *mystery* of language. And if mystery, then even Vanhoozer's theory, though admittedly eschatological, may need to make room for not only a plurality of readings, but also a plurality of theories.

Accounting for these important inquiries we would still be wise in taking seriously his contribution and consider carrying on and developing the trajectory of his work.

In conclusion, accepting Vanhoozer's model enables us to pursue (or perhaps return to) reading the book of the Church. In this process we need to keep the critical tools gained in the history of biblical studies. However, if our goal is to understand the meaning of the Bible, then to the Bible as a whole we must apply these tools. Modern scholarship has rightly shown the difficulty of this undertaking. And we will be frustrated too if we wish to master this text.¹⁹ Isaiah 6:9-10 offers a prime example. This passage carries within itself a message which denies hermeneutical capture. *To understand is to disobey? To misunderstand is to obey?* The risk of ethical reading, as Vanhoozer describes it, is the risk that we may actually hear something from beyond ourselves. Perhaps in understanding this risk we can take one step closer in posturing ourselves to read carefully and receive an understanding of God's Word.

¹⁸ Two examples worth noting are the hermeneutical frameworks of Slavoj Žižek and Katherine Pickstock. See Slavoj Žižek "The Obscene Object of Postmodernity," in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 37-52; Katherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). In addressing this criticism I can't get away from the image of someone needing to play Kierkegaard to his Hegel.

¹⁹ For survey of the attempts, frustrations, and rejections of biblical theology see Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 3-102.