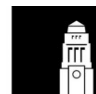
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CHAPTER 5

BUNYAN AND THE WORD

ALISON SEARLE

In a very real sense one can claim that the Bible authored the convicted, converted, imprisoned, and impassioned pastor John Bunyan and all his writings in numerous genres. Bunyan's emphasis on the centrality of Scripture in convincing him of sin, awakening his soul, and reconstructing his entire consciousness through the saving and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, was far from unique in seventeenth-century England. It is entirely typical of the Puritanism that was politically dominant during the Commonwealth and which formed a powerful, but suppressed, opposition subculture following the Restoration of the monarchy (1660) and the Act of Uniformity (1662). This chapter traces the diverse ways in which John Bunyan engaged with Scripture and its impact upon his life and writings. I will first examine the manner in which he read the Bible: understanding Bunyan's scriptural hermeneutic is crucial to coming to terms with his request that readers of *The Pilgrim's Progress* lay the book together with their head and heart. Secondly, I will consider how Bunyan appropriates and is appropriated by Scripture as he writes across a variety of genres including, for example, his use of typology, allusion, prescription, admonition, eschatology, proverbs, prophecy, metaphor, and emblems. Whilst many of these methods of engaging with Scripture are characteristic of Protestants of the hotter sort, Bunyan's intense imagination, pithy prose style, and effectiveness as a preacher distinguish

his writings in quality, though not in kind, from most of those produced by his fellow Nonconformists. I will focus on two key themes—marriage and pilgrimage—in order to explore the various ways Bunyan uses the Bible in his fictional writings, sermons, letters, and theological works (didactic and controversial).

HOW BUNYAN READ THE BIBLE

Bunyan offers a distinctively biblical account of his inspiration as an author in the 'Apology' that prefaces *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I (1678). As he was writing of 'the Way' he '[f]ell suddenly into an Allegory' and 'having now my Method by the end; / Still *as I pull'd it came; and so I penned*/ It down' (PP, 1–2). Envisaging himself as a passive receptacle he notes that his method is modeled on Scripture: the Old Testament set forth God's laws in 'Types, Shadows and Metaphors;' the prophets used 'Metaphors / To set forth Truth;' so did 'Christ, his Apostles too' (PP, 4). Bunyan's experience of passive reception as a writer becomes the paradigm for his ideal reader and leads him to make a bold claim for the authority of his own words: '*Would'st read thy* self [...] know whether thou art blest or not [...]? O then come hither, / And lay my Book, thy Head and Heart together' (PP, 7). Bunyan did not reach this position with ease; his retrospective account of his hard-won progress towards this assumption of pastoral authority is provided in his autobiography Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (1666). Specifically addressed to those whom 'God hath counted him worthy to beget to Faith, by his Ministry in the Word,' Bunyan—like his biblical predecessors Samson, Moses, David, and Paul—relates 'the very beginnings of Grace' in his own soul (GA, 2–3). He urges them:

> Remember also the Word, the Word, I say, upon which the Lord hath caused you to hope: If you have sinned against light; if you are tempted to blaspheme; if you are down in

> despair, if you think God fights against you, or if heaven is hid from your eyes; remember 'twas thus with your father, but out of them all the Lord delivered me. (GA, 3)

Here he outlines the pain and cost of his own struggle to embody a hermeneutic that enabled him to apply Scripture positively, rather than corrosively, to his soul. This also underwrites the key turn in his spiritual experience (a process that took several years)— from introspection to pastoral initiative— and which is mirrored in the two parts of The *Pilgrim's Progress.*

The changing contours of John Bunyan's approach to the written Word of God are vividly set out in his autobiography. As he began to awaken to the concerns of religion, though not of true sanctifying grace, Bunyan records:

> I fell in company with one poor man that made profession of Religion; who, as I then thought, did talk pleasantly of the Scriptures, and of the matters of Religion: wherefore falling into some love and liking to what he said, I betook me to my Bible, and began to take great pleasure in reading, but especially with the historical part thereof: for, as for Pauls Epistles, and Scriptures of that nature, I could not away with them, being as yet but ignorant either of the corruptions of my nature, or of the want and worth of Jesus Christ to save me. (GA, 12)

However, when Bunyan overheard the conversation of 'three or four poor women' in Bedford, who 'spake as if joy did make them speak [...] with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world,' he realized that there was something missing in his own experience of reading Scripture (GA, 14–15). Being providentially kept, as he records it, from the errors of the Ranters, he notes: 'The Bible was precious to me in those days' (GA,

17). Bunyan ‘began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before; and especially the Epistles of the Apostle S. Paul were sweet and pleasant to me: and indeed, I was then never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation, still crying out to God, that I might know the truth, and way to Heaven and Glory’ (GA, 17).

Despite the newly experimental quality of his reading experience, and his growing taste for the letters of Paul, Bunyan had not developed a comprehensive hermeneutic that enabled him to interpret Scripture as a whole. Rather, he was battered by apparently conflicting verses, incapable of drawing any certain conclusions from the nature of his own experience: was his faith in Christ genuine? Did he pray correctly? Was he elected to salvation? Had the day of grace passed him by? Had he committed the unpardonable sin? However, Bunyan gradually gained a greater knowledge of Scripture and a more personal experience of God’s love; he also situated himself in a community of like-minded readers. As he recounts it, this enabled him to focus more on the beauty and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He was less vulnerable to the threatening and interpretative challenges of individual texts which seized upon him, sending him into ecstasy or despair. Bunyan notes, for example, how an unknown verse ‘fell with weight upon my spirit, Look at the generations of old, and see, did ever any trust in God and were confounded?’ This encourages him and he decides to ‘Begin at the beginning of Genesis, and read to the end of the Revelations, and see if [he] can find that there was any that ever trusted in the Lord, and was Confounded.’ He goes to his Bible and finds ‘it [...] so fresh [...] that I was as if it talked with me.’ Ironically, though he ‘continued above a year’, he could not find the relevant verse until ‘casting my eye into the Apocrypha-Books, I found it in Ecclesiasticus 2. 10.’ He had learnt, however, to read individual verses in their specific context and interpret them in the light of the Bible’s overarching storyline.

Bunyan was daunted to discover, in this instance, that his key verse was in an apocryphal, rather than canonical, book of the Bible. However, he explains that

> by this time I had got more experience of the love and kindness of God, it troubled me the less; especially when I considered, that though it was not in those Texts that we call holy and Canonical, yet forasmuch as this sentence was the sum and substance of many of the promises, it was my duty to take the comfort of it, and I bless God for that word, for it was of God to me. (GA, 21–2)

Driven by his desperate sense of guilt and unsettled by the many different ways in which Scripture was read in the 1650s by religious radicals, such as the Quakers and Ranters, Bunyan undertook a 'narrow search of the Scriptures.' '[T]hrough their light and testimony,' he was 'not only enlightened, but greatly confirmed and comforted in the truth.' He learnt to see in the Bible 'the blood of Christ' which 'again, and again, and again' took off his guilt 'sweetly, according to the Scriptures' (GA, 39).

This hard-won understanding of how to read the Bible informed Bunyan's pastoral care, the fictional worlds he imagined, his evangelical fervency, and didactic instruction: it is set out at length in his exegesis of the parable of Dives and Lazarus in A Few Sighs from Hell (1658; MW, 1: 348–82). Michael Davies has observed:

> The kind of hermeneutics that Bunyan brings to Scripture acts as a blueprint for his reading of all things (and for our reading of his texts) because, in holding the key to the promises of salvation, it demands something deeply unworldly, experiential, and faithful from one's understanding [...]. The principal means by which Bunyan enacts this kind of a spiritual hermeneutics is through elaborate typological readings of Old

> Testament passages and events or, in the case of *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized* (1688), even whole buildings and objects.[1]

Though he provides a colorful and highly individualistic dramatization of his encounter with Scripture, Bunyan's way of reading was deeply influenced by the historical development of hermeneutics in the various ecclesiastical traditions of Western Christendom. Though there was a movement away from the fourfold system of biblical exegesis that prevailed during the medieval period as a result of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, in favor of the literal and historical meaning of the text, and though the Puritans, including Bunyan, were deeply indebted to the scriptural hermeneutic outlined by the likes of John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, their strong predilection towards typology renders the distinction—between Catholic and Protestant ways of reading Scripture—somewhat tenuous.

Typology views a person, object, or event outlined in Old Testament history as a prefiguring of some person or thing revealed in the new dispensation inaugurated by the gospel. Writers and preachers in the New Testament initiated this approach to the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus, for example, identifies John the Baptist as the Elijah that was to come (Matthew 11: 13–14); the image of the rough and strident Israelite prophet thus becomes key to the gospel definition of John. The apostle Paul likewise articulates this hermeneutic when writing to the church at Corinth about the historical record of God's dealings with the Israelites: 'Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come' (1 Corinthians 10: 11). Typology, as Davies notes above, is a peculiarly adaptable method of

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[1] Michael Davies, Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 70–2.

reading, and the Puritans, including Bunyan, applied scriptural events in this way in order to interpret their own individual experience, that of their church, and their nation (England, Ireland, Scotland, and the North American colonies in particular). Its attraction for radical Protestants, such as Bunyan, was twofold: there was scriptural precedent for the practice; and it enabled all events, personal and corporate, to be understood as chapters unfolding within the metanarrative recorded in the Bible.

Bunyan frequently claimed that the Bible was the sole source of his authority, inspiration, and instruction as a pastor, writer, and theologian. He states, for instance, in The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded (1659): ‘I never went to School to Aristotle or Plato, but was brought up at my fathers house, in a very mean condition [...] But if thou do finde a parcel of plain, yet sound, true, and home sayings, attribute that to the Lord Jesus, his gifts and abilities, which he hath bestowed upon such a poor Creature, as I am, and have been’ (MW, 2: 16). He writes similarly in 1675: ‘I have not writ at venture, nor borrowed my Doctrine from Libraries. I depend upon the sayings of no man: I found it in the Scriptures of Truth, among the true sayings of God’ (MW, 8: 51). His claim is somewhat tendentious. Though Bunyan never attended university, his writings evidence his reading of commentaries and controversial works by earlier theologians, such as Martin Luther, and his contemporaries, like Edward Fowler. However, there is no doubt that it was Bunyan’s vivid and visceral engagement with Scripture that primarily shaped his imagination and worldview as a whole. Richard Greaves has demonstrated that Bunyan accessed the Bible in several English translations, including the Authorized and Geneva Bibles: ‘the extensive marginalia in the latter provided a running commentary in its own right.’ Greaves speculates that Bunyan’s ‘pronounced interest in typology’ meant that he

had probably read works by William Guild, Thomas Taylor, or John Everard on the subject.[2]

Produced by English Protestants who had fled to Switzerland to escape persecution, the Geneva Bible (1560) was respected for its excellent scholarship, but Elizabeth I and James I regarded its paratextual material as objectionable, even inflammatory. Despite this, it continued to be the translation of choice for several generations of English Protestants. It was eventually overtaken in popular usage by the Authorized Version (AV), translated by a team of scholars during the reign of James I (and thus also known as the King James Bible (KJB)) and first published in 1611. The AV was printed without the marginalia included in the Geneva Bible and placed in all English parishes in an attempt to foster uniformity within the state church. Despite being familiar with several versions, as Greaves indicates above, scholarly consensus suggests that the AV/KJB was the biblical text that Bunyan cites most often,[3] though he definitely knew and referred to the Geneva Bible as well (MW, 12: xxxvi–vii; 13: 533–34). Bunyan was a biblical literalist and, to some extent, an autodidact, but his reading of Scripture was inevitably informed by the work of various translators, theologians, and commentators.

MARRIAGE

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[2] Greaves, Glimpses, 604–5. See also Roger Pooley's chapter in this volume.

[3] Hannibal Hamlin, 'Bunyan's Biblical Progresses,' in Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones (eds.), The King James Bible after 400 Years (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 202–18 (212); Michael Davies, 'The Wilderness of the Word: John Bunyan and the Book in Christian's Hand,' BS, 15 (2011), 26–52; W. R. Owens, 'John Bunyan and the Bible,' in Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 39–50.

Bunyan's exegetical and symbolic uses of marriage demonstrate the complexity of his approach to Scripture.[4] It can function, for example, in an eschatological sense, as in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 21); in a typological sense, representing God's relationship with Israel, or the Church's relationship with Christ; in a prescriptive and admonitory sense, as illustrated by the cases of conscience and discipline that are recorded in the Bedford Church Book (CB); or in an illustrative, even proverbial, sense, as Mr Badman's two marriages and the discussion of Mercy's relationship with Mr Brisk in The *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II (1684) demonstrate. I will briefly examine some of the uses of marriage in Bunyan's writings across a variety of genres, before focusing on his detailed fictional treatment of marriage in The Life and Death of Mr Badman (1680).

In The Advocateship of Jesus Christ (1688) Bunyan extends Paul's allegorical use of marriage—illustrating the difference between the Old and New Covenants, or Law and Grace (Romans 7: 1–4)—to demonstrate the third privilege of the office of Jesus Christ as the believer's advocate, namely, that Satan cannot plead their former guilt against them. For, as 'a Woman, a Widow, that oweth a Sum of Money,' cannot be prosecuted for debt if she remarries, because 'she is not who she was, she is delivered from that State by her Marriage,' so the believer is delivered by Christ from 'what the Law can claim' (MW, 11: 163). In Christian Behaviour (1663), Bunyan's imagined reader is distinctly male—'Hast thou a Wife?' If so, Bunyan asks, is she one who believes, or not? If she is a true Christian,

[4] It is important to note the way Bunyan used early modern English translations of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures to construct his understanding of marriage. Naomi Tadmor has argued that English translations from the Hebrew played a significant role in synthesising a variety of terms that created 'a discourse pertaining to monogamous Christian unions' in seventeenth-century England. This demonstrates in a very tangible way how Bunyan and many of his contemporaries were authored by the early modern English Bible, before they even started to write themselves. See Naomi Tadmor, The Social Universe of the English Bible (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 81.

the husband is required to thank God for her (Proverbs 12: 4; 31: 10; 1 Corinthians 11: 7). He is to love her both as his own flesh (Ephesians 5: 29) and as a fellow-heir of the kingdom of heaven (1 Peter 3: 7). Finally, in addition to these prescriptive elements, the believing couple are to image forth the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5: 28, 29), which Bunyan underscores by referring to 'Solomon and Pharaoh's Daughter,' who 'had the art of thus doing, as you may see in the Book of Canticles.' If the wife is not a believer, however, he is to walk with love and seek to save her soul (MW, 3: 26–28).

In Come, & Welcome, to Jesus Christ (1678) Bunyan uses marriage analogically. Just as a man gives his daughter, 'first in order to marriage, and this respects the time past; and he giveth her again on the day appointed, in marriage,' so the Father gave all the elect to Jesus 'before the world was' and 'he giveth them again to him, in the day of their espousals' (MW, 8: 248). Bunyan's biblical justification for this analogical reading is Psalm 45: 14: 'She shall be brought unto the King, in raiment of needle work. That is, in the righteousness of Christ' (MW, 8: 248). In A Confession of my Faith, and A Reason of my Practice (1672) Bunyan conflates the allegorical or typological and the didactic in his treatment of marriage. He emphasizes the importance of abstaining from communion or fellowship with individuals who are openly profane and, in order to justify this practice biblically, he refers both to the union of the sons of God with the daughters of men, which resulted in the Flood (Genesis 6 and 7), and to God's command to the Israelites to refrain from intermarrying with Gentiles (Numbers 25: 1–5; Joshua 22: 17; Deuteronomy 7: 1, 2, 6; 12; 32: 16, 19; Psalm 106: 30, 40; Nehemiah 1: 26). Solomon's decision to marry many foreign women supplies the clinching example (MW, 4: 158).

By contrast, in The Holy City (1665), marriage functions eschatologically. The bride on her wedding day is used to symbolize both the heavenly Jerusalem and the individual believer in their perfected state:

> this City at her appearing is said to be adorned and prepared, as a Bride is for her Husband; which we all know is the most perfect and compleatest Attire that is possible to be got: And therefore it is again, that at the coming of the Lord, those that go in with him to the Marriage, are said to be ready beforehand, Rev. 21. 2. Matth. 25. 10. (MW, 3: 126)

The same biblical passages inform the conclusion of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I, in which Christian and Hopeful are met by a Heavenly Host near the gate of the city with 'a great shout, saying, Blessed are they that are called to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb,' for which Bunyan provides a marginal reference to Revelation 19 (PP, 160). In Part II, the references to marriage demonstrate Bunyan's deepened pastoral experience and his concern for the spiritual health of those under his care. Christiana's fellow pilgrim, Mercy, is courted by Mr Brisk—'A man of some breeding, and that pretended to Religion; but a man that stuck very close to the World' (PP, 226). After consultation with 'the Maidens that were of the House,' she discovered that 'he was a very busie Young-Man, […] but was as they feared, a stranger to the Power of that which was good' (PP, 227). Mercy therefore resolves to have nothing to do with him, 'for I purpose never to have a clog to my Soul' (PP, 227). She later marries a godly husband, Christiana's son, Matthew, and there is the clear implication that they have children who are raised in the context of a community of believers (PP, 260–61, 269, 277, 287).

Bunyan's most detailed biblical examination of marriage, however, occurs in his didactic allegory, The Life and Death of Mr Badman. This work demonstrates the multiple ways in which Scripture was used to develop a prescriptive approach to marriage in

Bunyan's congregation during the Restoration. The pastoral application of the Bible to particular cases of conscience can be fleshed out further by an analysis of the Bedford Church Book. Thomas Luxon has argued that Bunyan's writings do not celebrate the model of companionate marriage promoted by other Puritans such as William Gouge. Instead, Bunyan presents subjection as the first duty of a Christian wife. She is also to refrain from wandering and gossiping, to keep at home, master her tongue, dress modestly, and manage the home in her husband's absence. Never, Luxon claims, does Bunyan 'encourage [the wife] to become a fitter companion by endeavoring to approach her husband's level, to regard herself as his spiritual equal and companion; in fact he does quite the opposite.' Nor is there anything in Bunyan's printed writings about marital sex, though it is referred to often in connection with Mr Badman's adulteries.[5] In these terms, Bunyan's construction of human marriage could be seen as primarily negative (as a preventative to sin) and defined as earthly (and therefore temporary and, in a sense, dispensable). The eschatological dimension that Bunyan recognizes in Scripture's depiction of marriage encourages him to disparage the present in the light of the future, rather than sanctifying the present as a sign of the future.

This does not necessarily imply that Bunyan's view of marriage is entirely antifeminist or misogynistic. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II, which is widely held to reflect his changing view of the communal dimensions of the Christian life as a result of his pastoral experience, presents a far more positive portrait of marriage and procreation amongst the second generation of believers than does the relationship between Christian

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[5] Thomas H. Luxon, 'One Soul Versus One Flesh: Friendship, Marriage, and the Puritan Self,' in Vera J. Camden (ed.), Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008), 81–99 (85). Michael Davies also notes Bunyan's failure to discuss marital sex and his abstention from the Puritan celebration of sex in marriage; see 'Bunyan's Bawdy: Sex and Sexual Wordplay in the Writings of John Bunyan,' in Camden (ed.), Trauma and Transformation, 100–119 (108–09).

and Christiana in Part I (PP, 260–61, 269, 277, 287).[6] Likewise, Bunyan depicts two kinds of marriage in The Life and Death of Mr Badman. Although neither is ideal, nevertheless the primary purpose of these portraits is pastoral rather than misogynistic, and is driven by Bunyan's resolution to apply Scripture to every aspect of life—spiritual, moral, and practical. Bunyan's determination to demonstrate the problems inherent in mixed marriages (the union of a believer with an unbeliever, in Badman's first marriage) and in self-centered lust (the union of a philanderer and a whore, in his second) is a reflection of his biblically informed concern for vulnerable young people and his appreciation of the implications of self-centered indulgence in a relationship as intimate as marriage.

Badman's first wife, then, is a godly woman who possesses a reasonable competence—the main object of Badman's ambition. She is also an orphan, and therefore unprotected by those most likely to have her interests (spiritual and worldly) at heart. She is indicted in the narrative for her failure to seek godly counsel and to make sufficient enquiries as to Badman's character and business before marrying him. However, Wiseman does note that 'As to his Person, there she was fittest to judge, because she was to be the person pleased, but as to his Godliness, there the Word was the fittest Judge, and they who could best understand it, because God was therein to be pleased' (BM, 73). The element of physical attraction in this marriage is important; the primary decision-maker here is to be

[6] N. H. Keeble, '"Here is her glory, even to be under him": The Feminine in the Thought and Work of John Bunyan,' in Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens, and Stuart Sim (eds.) John Bunyan and His England, 1628–88 (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), 131–47; Galen K. Johnson, Prisoner of Conscience: John Bunyan on Self, Community and Christian Faith (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 143–54. Tasmin Spargo has explored Bunyan's careful attempts to restrict the role of women within his congregation and, to some extent, within his texts, as a way of underwriting his own pastoral authority and helping to establish the respectability and good order of Nonconformists in a period of renewed persecution; see The Writing of John Bunyan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 68–95.

the woman herself. However, failure rightly to discern, assess, and evaluate the character of the man under consideration is also critical.

Here, then, the future Mrs Badman, however godly she may be, is held up as a deterrent. But this first wife's erroneous decision-making and her vulnerability both to the shrewd hypocrisy of Mr Badman and to his external show of godliness is still depicted with sympathy and understanding. Bunyan is not simply presenting an exemplum, like the monument to Lot's wife that Christian and Hopeful encounter in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (PP, 108–9); he is demonstrating the pain incurred by a young woman who, without family support, is susceptible to the solicitations of a plausible fortune-hunter. Through the words of Attentive (Wiseman's dialogue partner and audience in Mr Badman) Bunyan also outlines the conjugal opportunity that this first wife has and which conveys something of his ideal of a Christian, if not a companionate or equal, marriage:

> It is a deadly thing, I see, to be unequally yoaked with Unbelievers. If this woman had had a good Husband, how happily might they have lived together! Such a one would have prayed for her, taught her, and also would have encouraged her in the Faith, and ways of God. (BM, 72)[7]

[7] In some respects Mrs Badman's dilemma mirrors that of Agnes Beaumont, 'a devout daughter who attempts to negotiate a position of dutiful obedience to two opposing fathers, her biological father and her spiritual father, Bunyan. Her mother is dead, her father refuses to allow her to attend a meeting at which Bunyan is to preach—she has work to do, looking after her father. To obey her father would be to deny her duty to her divine father, God, figured to her in Bunyan;' Spargo, Writing of John Bunyan, 87. On the scandal created by Beaumont (and Bunyan) in the Bedford church, see Greaves, Glimpses, 309–12. See also Elspeth Graham, 'Authority, Resistance and Loss: Gendered Difference in the Writings of John Bunyan and Hannah Allen,' in Laurence, Owens, and Sim (eds.), John Bunyan and His England, 115–30.

There is also the strong suggestion in the narrative that if she had not committed the error of entering into a mixed marriage more than one of her seven children would have been whole-heartedly godly.

Mr Badman's second marriage depicts, not the sorrow that comes to those unequally yoked in biblical terms, but rather the self-induced punishment of those who live for their own lusts, rejecting the fidelity and integrity essential to maintaining a healthy relationship. Wiseman recounts how Badman and his second wife 'would fight and fly at each other [...] like Cats and Dogs' living 'in a most sad and hellish manner.' Badman comes to regret the death of his first wife, not out 'of love that he had to her Godliness [...] but for that she used alwayes to keep home,' whereas his second wife 'would goe abroad' and be 'a Whore of her body;' the first 'loved to keep things together,' but the second would whirl things 'about as well as he;' the first was 'silent when he chid' or 'abused her,' the second 'would give him word for word, blow for blow, curse for curse' (BM, 146–47). This is poetic justice: Badman has met his match. Whilst his first wife is held up as an ideal for her patience under injustice, it is obvious that both Mr Badman and his second wife have failed to do as they ought: their marriage is consequently a self-determined hell. But the ideal is implied through the negative archetype: a union of peace, love, and mutual edification that may be hierarchical, but not necessarily misogynistic.

The cases of discipline recorded in the Bedford Church Book likewise demonstrate that in Bunyan's congregation pastoral concerns over mixed marriages were rooted both in actual experience and in a determination to ensure that all aspects of life in the Church were shaped by biblical moral imperatives. However, real-life situations could be even more complex than the down-to-earth fictional descriptions that characterize Bunyan's pseudo-novel Mr Badman. What did a pastor and congregation do, for example, if a believer who has entered into a mixed marriage did not regret her decision and respond

repentantly to biblical correction, as does the first Mrs Badman? Moving from the realm of fictional narrative to pastoral practice and congregational discipline entails recognizing the complexities of such relationships. Despite what Beth Lynch has described as the 'sheer inquisitional energy that Bunyan's congregation invested in monitoring, interrogating, and punishing errant individuals,'[8] discipline in such cases was only effective if the individual concerned—like Mr Badman's first wife—eventually concurred with the congregation's judgment. The Church Book records, for example, the admonition of one woman, Mary Gates, on 27 April 1698, who 'had marryed a carnall man,' even though 'she was (besides the strict prohibition of the word of God) charged to the contrary by her parents and told of the greatness of the evill by our brother Chandler [the pastor] and by him earnestly pressed to decline it' (CB, 115–16). On 3 January 1699, it is further recorded that Mary Gates was now frequently attending Church of England services despite being under admonition, more messengers having been sent to her by this point. These messengers reported back to the church on 31 January 'that they had been with Mary Gates, but found her very senceless under her sins; 'twas concluded to exercise some patience towards her' (CB, 121). Gathered congregations had to ameliorate their passion for biblical discipline, then, with an awareness of their embattled minority position in a state that continued to mistrust them, despite the provisions of the Act of Toleration (1689).

Bunyan's treatment of marriage demonstrates the manner in which the Bible dominated every aspect of his life and thought. Despite his humble background as a tinker, he absorbed the complex and multilayered scriptural hermeneutic that dominated godly circles in mid-seventeenth-century England. However, his commitment to the Word of God went further than this. As his didactic writings and the records of meetings at his gathered congregation in Bedford demonstrate, he held the Bible to be sufficient for all

[8] Beth Lynch, John Bunyan and the Language of Conviction (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 112.

matters of practice, as well as of faith, according to the Reformed doctrine of sola scriptura: by the Word alone. Consequently, it shaped Bunyan's own walk as a believer, and it also informed his pastoral care over the decades in which he ministered to Dissenters in both Bedford and beyond.

PILGRIMAGE

In Bunyan's works pilgrimage operates as a narrative structure; as a hermeneutic approach to life and writing; as a sermon topos; as an imaginative experience; as a way of understanding time in relation to eternity through typological readings of the Old and New Testaments; as a means of distinguishing between the godly and the unrighteous; and as a help in understanding the biblical doctrine of sanctification. Bunyan's decision to represent life as a journey is not unique to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, then, nor is it in and of itself a specifically biblical concept. However, his appropriation of the biblical usage of the terms 'way' and 'race,' imaginatively fused together in his central figure of the Christian as a pilgrim, juxtaposed alongside the unremittingly eschatological orientation of his tale, transforms the universal narrative motif of the pilgrimage or quest into an unmistakably biblical journey.[9]

Bunyan's use of the term 'Way' to describe the spiritual pilgrimage of the believer from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City is drawn directly from the earliest references to Christians in the New Testament, as people of 'the way.' For instance, Saul 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the

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[9] For an analysis of how the concept of a literal pilgrimage was transformed into a metaphorical, literary motif that was eagerly adopted by zealous Protestants, see N. H. Keeble, '"To be a pilgrim": Constructing the Protestant Life in Early Modern England,' in Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (eds.), Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 238–56.

high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem' (Acts 9: 1–2). In Ephesus, 'there arose no small stir about that way' (Acts 19: 23). The apostle Paul picks up the same term in his defense in Jerusalem: 'I persecuted this way unto the death' (Acts 22: 4), and before the Roman governor, Felix: 'this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets' (Acts 24: 14). Felix himself is described as 'having more perfect knowledge of that way' (Acts 24: 22). In the 'Apology' prefacing his most famous work, Bunyan states that he was 'writing of the Way / And Race of Saints' (PP, 1) when he suddenly fell into an allegory. Indeed, the term 'way' occurs over two hundred times in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I and over one hundred times in Part II.

In the instance cited above—'the Way / And Race of Saints'—the biblical echo is enriched by a reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author admonishes: 'let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God' (12: 1–2). This biblical image of the pilgrimage as a journey that is to be run by the determined athlete shapes Bunyan's narrative at several levels. Jesus is the model, mediator, and ultimate goal or reward of the pilgrims: literally, 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14: 6). The journey they pursue is arduous and filled with obstacles, yet there is an engaged audience consisting of those who have gone before, or who travel alongside the pilgrims, testifying to the nature and truth of God's word.

Bunyan found pilgrimage, like warfare, a congenial unifying motif that enabled him to fuse his personal experience as a Christian, his role as a pastor, and his imaginative engagement with the Bible into a dynamic and powerful allegorical narrative. The typological hermeneutic he employed was crucial to this artistic achievement. Christian's journey is informed, for example, by the Old Testament types of Israel's exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Abraham's journey from pagan Ur to the Promised Land. Christian's journey also maps out Bunyan's theological understanding of the process of individual salvation and sanctification, as derived from his reading of the New Testament, particularly Paul's epistles. The pilgrimage undertaken by Christian's wife, Christiana, their children, and the various other individuals that they collect in The *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II is an imaginative representation of the gathered church on their collective pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem. The Life and Death of Mr Badman, by contrast, fleshes out the journey of a reprobate actively pursuing the broad way to damnation and who, throughout his life, avoids reading Scripture, mocking rather than 'reverencing the Word' (BM, 39–40, 126–28).

Mr Badman offers, in this sense, a fuller, more grossly corporeal portrait of characters like Talkative and Ignorance in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Though respectful of faith and religion in a way that Badman is not, nevertheless Ignorance, chillingly, holds to an incorrect view of how one can be saved (according to Bunyan's theological reading of Scripture), and after Christian and Hopeful have been accepted into the Celestial City with rejoicing, the narrator comments:

> I […] saw Ignorance come up to the River side: but he soon got over, and that without half that difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened, that there was then in that place one Vain-hope a Ferry-man, that with his Boat helped him over [...]. When he was come up to the Gate [...] they asked him for his Certificate, that they

> might go in and shew it to the King. So he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. [...] Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the Hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. (PP, 162–63)

This final image in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I demonstrates that Bunyan was committed to maintaining his theological reading of Scripture uncompromisingly, even when envisaging the pilgrimage of the believer in fictional form. Failure appropriately to seek and receive the Bible's offer of salvation through Christ led to damnation, even if one had reached the very gates of heaven itself.

It can be typical of critical readings of Bunyan's work to examine his writings in other genres—theological, devotional, and controversial—as mere precedents or source materials that help to illuminate his 'true literary' achievements—*The Pilgrim's Progress*, Grace Abounding, and, at a stretch, The Holy War. The difficulty with adopting this approach in a chapter on Bunyan's relationship with the Bible, however, is that it anachronistically projects contemporary preferences for the literary and artistic over the theological and didactic in its reading of Bunyan's oeuvre. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous formulation, it privileges the inspired writer of 'Parnassus' over the preacher of the 'conventicle.' For many of Bunyan's contemporaries, though, it was his imaginative fiction, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that was suspect and not, for example, his devotional works, or his critical interventions in controversies over baptism and the identity of his church. I would, therefore, like to conclude this section on Bunyan's use of pilgrimage by analyzing its occurrence in two treatises directed specifically towards professed believers who were in danger of hypocrisy, formalism, or practicing merely outward piety, both of

which have a direct bearing on the biblical shape of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: The Heavenly Foot-man (1698) and The Strait Gate (1676).[10]

The Strait Gate is a treatise based on the well-known exhortation of Jesus, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it' (Matthew 7: 13–14). Here, in seminal form, is the concept of the Christian life as an arduous pilgrimage on which one must embark and ultimately complete if salvation and heaven are to be enjoyed at last. Bunyan's focus throughout this treatise is on the image of the gate, rather than the journey, particularly the duty to examine oneself in order to prove that one is neither a hypocrite, nor a formalist, so that entrance into heaven following the Day of Judgment is assured. Bunyan's key concern, communicated here in the epistle to the reader, is to ensure that his representation of the 'gate of heaven' is neither 'too wide' nor 'too narrow;' 'I have here presented thee with as true a measure of it as by the word of God I can: reade me, therefore, yea, reade me and compare me with the bible; and if thou findest my doctrine, and that book of God concur; embrace it, as thou wilt answer the contrary in the day of Judgment' (MW, 5: 69).

The Heavenly Foot-man, by contrast, concentrates on and develops the image of the journey (as the title suggests) and draws its inspiration primarily from two texts: a typological reading of the Old Testament narrative detailing the flight of Lot and his family from Sodom (Genesis 19: 17) and the exhortation of Paul to the church in Corinth, 'So run, that ye may obtain' (1 Corinthians 9: 24). It is possible that this is the treatise detailing 'the Way / And Race of Saints' that Bunyan was working on when he 'Fell suddenly into an Allegory / About their Journey and the way to Glory,' culminating in his most famous

[10] Graham Midgley, 'Introduction,' MW, 5: xvi, xxxviii–xxxix.

work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.[11] However, it is arguable that we get closer to Bunyan's heart and literary intentions in the direct closing exhortation of this treatise, than we do when he is attempting to bait the most difficult fish in his more developed allegorical treatment of the biblical concept of pilgrimage:

> Well then, Sinner, what sayst thou? where is thy Heart? Wilt thou Run? Art thou resolved to Strip? Or art thou not? Think quickly Man, it is no dallying in this matter. Confer not with Flesh and Blood, look up to Heaven, and see how thou likest it; also to Hell [...] and accordingly Devote thy self. If thou dost not know the way, inquire at the Word of God. If thou wantest Company, cry for God's Spirit, if thou wantest Incouragement, entertain the Promises: But be sure thou begin betimes, get into the way, Run apace, and hold out to the end. And the Lord give thee a prosperous Journey. (MW, 5: 178)

This is Bunyan the minister of the Word aiming to pierce his reader's heart by a direct, personal address, vividly applying Scripture through urgent rhetorical questions. Both evidence his unshaken conviction that the Word and Spirit of God are essential if pilgrims are to complete the journey safely by getting into the right way, running speedily, and continuing until the end.

For Bunyan, the Word of God was most emphatically not the subjective and volatile 'inner light' of either the Quakers or any others on the more radical wing of the Puritan revolution, but neither did his strongly held conviction that every word of the canonical Scriptures was literally inspired by God result in the bibliolatry of later

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[11] Midgley suggests that this treatise was probably composed c. 1671 or earlier and therefore was written at about the same time as The Strait Gate and possibly *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I; 'Introduction,' MW, 5: 134. Greaves argues for a composition date between December 1667 and February 1668; Glimpses, 211.

conservative Christian proponents of the doctrine of inerrancy. Rather, Bunyan’s imagination was saturated in and gripped by the storyline, types, and similes of Scripture; his conscience was captivated by its moral imperatives; and his pragmatic approach to its application resulted in a personal and congregational discipline that attempted to implement these doctrines in every part of life—including marriage and pilgrimage. This ideological and imaginative commitment to the Bible produced both a life and corpus of work that attempted to see the Word made flesh in seventeenth-century England—a mini-incarnation modeled on the divine prototype: ‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth’ (John 1: 14).

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Keywords

Bible, Scripture, Word of God, hermeneutics, marriage, pilgrimage, typology

Abstract

This chapter examines the changing nature of John Bunyan's relationship with the Word of God as expressed in the Bible and the way it shaped his life and writing in a range of genres. Bunyan's own conversion experience, engendered by his violent encounters with the Word of God both personally and communally, is considered first. This experience shaped Bunyan's future readings of Scripture as an author and pastor. His biblical hermeneutic is then analyzed. Finally, the ways in which Bunyan appropriated and was appropriated by the Bible in his life and works is explored by focusing on two themes that consistently characterize scriptural aspects both of his pastoral practice and of his entire oeuvre: marriage and pilgrimage.

Biographical summary

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