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JOHN BUNYAN'S CONVERSION

Sitting calmly on a ship in fair weather is not a metaphor for having faith; but when the ship has sprung a leak, then enthusiastically to keep the ship afloat by pumping and not to seek harbor - that is the metaphor of faith.... while the understanding, like a desperate passenger, stretches its arms towards land but in vain, faith works vigorously in the depths - joyful and victorious, against the understanding it rescues the soul.

Kierkegaard

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages aim to give a fresh reading of some of the texts relating to John Bunyan's conversion. Only two of his sixty writings contain an autobiographical account of the course of inner events which, in the retrospect, made up his conversion story. Bunyan first told the story in the short passage in 'Law and Grace' entitled 'a word of experience', and, seven years later (1666), he repeated it with many additions and alterations in his autobiography 'Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners'. And yet, though the strictly autobiographical texts make up only a minor part of his writings, there is a sense in which the basic drive of his authorship can be described as an attempt to translate into theological language the agonising experiences of his youth. 'Whenever he put pen to paper,' Dean Ebner writes, 'the result was usually another version of the conflict which he had found within his own soul since he was nine years of age.' (1).

Apart from 'Grace Abounding', 'The Pilgrim's Progress' and 'The Life and Death of Mr Badman' stand out as Bunyan's most striking interpretations of the spiritual experiences of his youth. (2) In the four chapters of this dissertation I have attempted to analyse some aspects of these three books. The first chapter deals with 'Grace Abounding' as a conventional and yet original expression of puritan culture and theology; the second chapter analyses the character of Mr Badman and the description of the pre-conversion Bunyan in 'Grace

Abounding'; the third is about the role of Scripture in the conversion experience, and the significance of the act of telling one's conversion story; and the last chapter compares the religious attitudes of Mr Badman on the one hand, and Christian and the narrator of 'Grace Abounding' on the other, arguing that the basic difference is that between security and assurance.

In chapters two and four stray parallels are drawn to the thoughts of Soren Kierkegaard, and even where his name is not mentioned, the analysis often echoes my understanding of his christian existentialism. There exists, I believe, a striking affinity between Bunyan's interpretation of his conversion experience and the theological anthropology expressed in 'The Sickness unto Death' and 'The Concept of Anxiety'. Without attempting to delineate a coherent existentialist or Kierkegaardian reading of 'Grace Abounding', I have from time to time involved these writings of Kierkegaard in the analysis, believing that this juxtaposition may reveal new aspects of Bunyan's authorship.

It could be argued that there are points of contact between the two, that Luther's influence on Bunyan made his theological outlook akin to that of Kierkegaard, or that Bunyan's books had a lasting and penetrating effect on the kind of Danish Pietistic milieu in which Kierkegaard grew up. But there seems to have been no direct link of influence: None of Bunyan's works are mentioned in the catalogue of Kierkegaard's library (3), and even if he did read Bunyan, there is no evidence (I believe) that this had a lasting

impact on his thought. Similarities between their interpretations of human experience, therefore, should not be explained as expressions of a historical connection, but rather as an expression of their shared preoccupation with describing, in psychologically convincing terms, the process of becoming a christian. Kierkegaard summarises his life's work as 'the task of translating into the terms of reflection what christianity is, what it means to become a christian.'

(4) It is this passionate interest in 'translating' 'what it means to become a christian' that makes the comparison between Kierkegaard and Bunyan obvious.

Notes

1. Quoted by Ann Hawkins who also noted 'the curious way in which he [Bunyan] attempts in book after book to formulate his conversion experience definitively', ('Bunyan's 'Grace Abounding'' pp.272-3)

2. It could be argued that 'The Holy War', even more than 'Mr Badman' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress', deals with conversion, and that it should therefore figure prominently in a discussion of Bunyan's conversion. However, 'The Holy War' seems to lack the deeply personal, almost autobiographical character of these other writings. It is too structured, too elaborate and sophisticated in its allegorical design to give an immediate impression of Bunyan's actual conversion experience. Though 'The Holy War' undoubtedly expresses Bunyan's understanding of what conversion is all about, the image of conversion as the happy outcome of the struggle between two competing powers for the possession of the human soul does not make room for the convincing psychological descriptions of which the other writings abound. It lacks the ambiguity of real human living.

3. H.P. Rohde (ed.): 'The Auctioneer's Sales Record of the Library of Soren Kierkegaard', Copenhagen 1967

4. Kierkegaard in 'The Point of View of My Work as an Author', quoted by John S. Tanner p.8

"GRACE ABOUNDING" AS SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Though Bunyan convinces his reader that 'Grace Abounding' is a straightforward account of his spiritual pilgrimage, written in utter sincerity, yet, it is also a work of art; and the frank, unsophisticated prose should not be allowed to hide the fact that it is a complex text that makes tremendous demands of its reader. 'The Pilgrim's Progress', with its changing scenery, the plain and cheerful conversations, and the constant sense of progress, is a much more accessible and friendly text. But the sharp and humorous insight into human characters and everyday life that often makes the characters of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' so irresistible, is not the appeal of Bunyan's autobiography. On the contrary, there is something insistent and tactless about the way in which 'Grace Abounding' describes a man who ignores the whole world and turns his eyes inwards in a destructive and self-consuming analysis of the soul.

This is the man that hath his dwelling among the Tombs with the dead; that is alwayes crying out, and cutting himself with stones, Mark 5.2-5. (para.186)

It may seem obvious to the modern reader that Bunyan's conversion story is interesting primarily as a case history, an extraordinary example of the religious frame of mind of seventeenth century puritanism, and it may be that, in some respects, this is a fruitful approach to his autobiography; but it was certainly not the approach which the author intended his reader to have. Bunyan did not devote the greater part of 'Grace Abounding' to the description of his prolonged struggle for assurance because he considered

his experiences unique or extraordinary, but, on the contrary, because he believed that his reader would discover and acknowledge himself in experiences described.

Remember your terrours of conscience, and fear of death and hell; remember also your tears and prayers to God; yea how you sighed under every hedge for mercy... Have you forgot the Close, the Mill-house, the Barn, and the like, where God did visit your soul? (Preface)

The Struggle for Assurance

Looking back on the years of spiritual struggle Bunyan wrote:

the ground of all these fears of mine did arise from a steadfast belief that I had of the stability of the holy Word of God, and, also, from my being misinformed of the nature of my sin. (para 184)

He wrote this about one specific sin, that of 'selling Christ', which he feared was the unpardonable sin. But this statement may also be read as an expression of a general theme in 'Grace Abounding': Bunyan's fears arose from the disharmony between the objective, 'steadfast' word of God and his ignorance about his own sinful self. 'Wo be to him against whom the Scriptures bend themselves.' (para 246) His conscience could not be silenced before there was established a definite correspondence between his own experience and the realities as posited in the Scriptures (1). What Bunyan so desperately longed for was therefore to reach the point where he could read the biblical descriptions of a christian with a sure confidence in his heart: 'That is me!' Or, to use his own words from one of his later works, he wished to hear, 'the echoing answer of a good conscience; ...for the man that hath a good conscience to Godward, hath a continual feast in his own soul.' (2)

The image of assurance as an echo of the word of God in the soul goes right to the heart of 'Grace Abounding'. Assurance is a conviction that comes when the objective truth of the word of God is appropriated in such a way, that it reverberates in the soul. The problem of appropriation is powerfully expressed in the imagery. Bunyan would depict himself as a horse that, yet sticking in the mire, is floundering towards sound ground (para 250); or a murderer trying to reach the 'city of rescue' before the avenger of blood would kill him (para 248).

Joan Webber makes, I believe, a significant point when she observes that one of the differences between the radical Puritan and the conservative Anglican autobiographer of the seventeenth century lies in the Puritan lack of humour and self-irony (3). The conservative could laugh at life and at himself because he knew and accepted his own insignificance. He smiles because he is a retired man, a shrewd spectator to the folly of the world and of his own life. He sees through every human pretence and disguise, even his own, and he knows the ambiguity of everything human and the inconsistency of human ideals with the real life - and therefore he smiles. Bunyan had the same experience of the discordance of the human existence, but he never allowed himself to smile. On other occasions he would laugh and show a sharp sense of humour and satire, but he never became a spectator of himself. 'Grace Abounding' depicts a man too passionately concerned with the integrity of his own self, too close to himself to be self-ironic.

Conventional and Original

since W. Y. Tindall in 1934 published his study of the uneducated lay preachers of the mid-seventeenth century, there seems to be a general agreement among Bunyan scholars that, from one perspective, 'Grace Abounding' is a quite traditional and conventional Puritan autobiography. According to Tindall

the idea of Bunyan's peculiarity must be abandoned upon acquaintance with the little-known preachers of the seventeenth century. Bunyan was one of a great number of eloquent tinkers, cobblers, and tailors; he thought what they thought, felt what they felt, and wrote according to their convention. (4)

and concerning Grace Abounding:

the details of Bunyan's conversion could be supplied by a diligent anthologist from the autobiographies of other preachers. (5)

And not the details only, also the order of the different stages of the conversion in Bunyan's account corresponds closely to a traditional Puritan Ordo Salutis. In the Puritan tradition conversion was conceived as life-long process consisting of four main elements: conviction of sin, calling or vocation, justification, and sanctification. As a result, Puritan autobiographies tended to conform to a standard pattern of four or five stages: 1. early providential mercies; 2. Unregenerate life; sin and resistance to the gospel; 3. Conversion, often ushered by an 'awakening' sermon; 4. Calling; vocation to preach the Gospel; 5. Account of the ministry. (6)

Thus, Puritan autobiographies were written with the confident assumption that the spiritual experience of the

elect, however differentiated it might be, would always conform to a certain pattern. And the writer offered his own experience as a helpful example and model for the next generation of self-scrutinizers. Accordingly, this framework of a Puritan Ordo Salutis, did more than impose a pattern, as Owen Watkins writes

it gave a man something to define his individuality against. With a map in his hands that identified the main landmarks, he could plot his own travels in relation to them in terms that were understandable to himself and others. The Puritan life pattern provided him with a stick to measure his growth against. (7)

The Puritan autobiographer insists on writing about himself, not as an interesting individual with certain peculiarities, but as a type, an example for imitation. The self-knowledge of this kind of spiritual autobiography has accordingly been defined by Joan Webber as 'an anxiety to determine whether one's experience fits the proper pattern (or, more accurately speaking, [a] zealous effort to make all experience fit.)' (8)

It is a curious fact that Bunyan's turbulent and in many ways disorderly autobiography in its overall design and content is a quite conventional book; but this does not necessarily mean that it is a less original work. The reader never has the feeling that Bunyan is artificial, forcing his experience to fit into a certain pattern, rather, as Watkins states, 'the structure is derived from the line of the narrative, and doctrinal points emerge out of events themselves.' (9) The descriptions in 'Grace Abounding' are more than the clothing of a dummy; they carry the conviction of an authentic portrait.

For Bunyan, his conversion meant that puritan theology had become the hermeneutical key to his experience, and any account of his life would therefore also be an exposition of his religious convictions. He wrote his autobiography out of his sincere heart, without being conscious of any doctrinal tie or constraint; but his deep convictions arranged all his scattered and disorderly recollections after a certain pattern. As Roy Pascal writes: 'We not only tend consciously to rationalize our lives, but memory ... operates unconsciously to the same end.' (10) As an attempt to contemplate the self as an object distinct from the beholder, a spiritual autobiography will always contain an element of self-construction. There is an agenda in 'Grace Abounding' which was hidden for Bunyan himself: Below the most harsh self-accusations lies an unconscious instinct of self-defence, and the most sincere expression of christian humility has often this indistinct ring of self-importance about it. Is not, for example, the claim of being the chief of sinners, at once a sincere self-denial and a claim of being a humble and honourable christian?

But the evidence of repressions and rationalisations which one may find in 'Grace Abounding' - does it undermine its message? On the contrary, as Watkins argues, it would only confirm Bunyan's conviction that the heart of man, even the regenerate man, is never reliable. Had not years of self-examination uncovered layer upon layer of self deception?

(11)

The Confession of a Prisoner

When Bunyan in 1666, after six years of imprisonment, published his autobiography his main concern was to encourage and support 'the weak and tempted People of God.' He knew the power of the personal testimony: A turning point in his own development was that day in Bedford when he saw 'three or four poor women sitting at a door in the Sun', talking about 'a new birth, the work of God in their hearts', 'how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature' and 'how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus.' (para 37) Bunyan wished his account to be for his weak and tempted reader what his encounter with these poor women had been to himself: a disclosure of his own deceitful religion and an encouragement not to despair, but to go on in the struggle to become a christian. (12)

However, Bunyan's passionate style and his merciless self-revelations seem to indicate that something else is going on in the text, that he was concerned with his own salvation as well as with that of his congregation, and that, so to speak, the act of writing was an anticipation of judgment day. Sitting in the county gaol, unsure about his future, and facing the possibility of a sudden death, Bunyan strives to review his life from the point of view of eternity. 'Grace Abounding' would undoubtedly have been a very different book, had it been written six or seven years earlier by the young succesful preacher, 'Bishop Bunyan'.

Dr. Johnson once remarked that when a man knows he is going to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his mind

wonderfully. This is the kind of acuteness that seems to characterize Bunyan's prose. The pages are written with a steady hand: Describing the years of consuming inner struggles, the author reveals no fear or restlessness himself. Was it the exterior adversity for his faith's sake that gave him this calmness? Was it ultimately his persecutors who made him feel assurance that he was one of the elect? We do not know; but one perceives that the author relates his struggles with a gratefulness which only applies to past fights

I can remember my fears, and doubts, and sad moneths; they are the head of Goliah in my hand. (Preface)

Bunyan had won the great struggle for assurance, and yet the greatness of his narrative is that he did not become triumphant or secure. The victorious image from the preface of 'the head of Goliah in my hand' is, as we shall see, moderated if not directly contradicted by his confession of present doubt and temptations in the conclusion.

The Way of Salvation

It is possible to trace the different stages of a traditional Puritan Ordo Salutis in 'Grace Abounding', and thus to see in it a conventional spiritual autobiography of seventeenth century England; but this is not necessarily the most fruitful approach to the text. Obviously, there must be some sense of progress in the narrative; the whole point of giving a conversion account, is to describe a change, a 'before' and an 'after'; but progress is perhaps not the most fitting term to describe the course of religious experience described in

'Grace Abounding'. (13) There is a sense in which the course of Bunyan's spiritual development can be described as a perpetual zigzag movement between despair and consolation, awareness of God's wrath and awareness of God's love, rather than a straight forward progress through the well-defined stages of the conversion. And thus, it can be argued that 'Grace Abounding' displays an interpretation of the conversion experience in terms of a basic dichotomy between law and gospel rather than in terms of stages in a continuous and well-defined process.

That Bunyan did not perceive his spiritual experience as a progress in any simple sense of the word is clear: The first temptation described after his awakening (paras 23-24) is basically the same as the one described in the very last paragraphs before the conclusion (paras 333-339) viz. the temptation to despair when faced with the reality of death. And when, in the conclusion, he sums up the worst temptations there is a revealing shift in tense from past to present:

Of all the temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question God, and the truth of the Gospel is the worst, and worst to be born...

Bunyan is in 'Grace Abounding' not so much concerned with the different stages in the christian conversion; all his doubts and temptations emerged from the same agonizing either-or.

Little attention has been paid to the fact that the first published account Bunyan gave of his conversion is part of his most extensive theological treatise 'The Doctrine of Law and Gospel Unfolded' from 1659, seven years before 'Grace Abounding'. The treatise consists mainly of sermon material

from the preceeding years. Probably, the preaching of these sermons, and perhaps even the writing of this book were some of the last steps on his long way to assurance. Thus, not only the autobiographical passage, 'A Word from Experience', but the treatise as a whole can be viewed as an attempt to survey and interpret his spiritual experiences, especially the great crisis nine to six years earlier. The fact, for instance, that he deals at length (pp. 200-210) and with much sympathy with the problem of the unpardonable sin suggests the experienced and personal character of the treatise.

Greaves has showed that though only four pages (pp. 156-160) directly relate Bunyan's own experience, surprisingly many elements from 'Grace Abounding' are present in germ in 'Law and Grace'. Both works portray a sinful youth much inclined to the company of evil companions (p.157 and para 11, 43). The young Bunyan was given to swearing (p.156 and para 26), games (p.157 and para 21), dancing (p.157, para 35), and music (pp.70,124 and para 298). Both works record the sabbath incident when a heavenly voice interrupted his game of cat (p.157 and para 22); the initial, hypocritical turning to religion (pp.157-8, para 30); his encounter with the Ranters (pp. 209-10, para 44-45); the pressing question of assurance of election (pp. 214-15, para 59); dread for the unpardonable sin (p.201, paras 148ff); his bout of consumption and the following spiritual crisis (pp. 147-8, para 255-9) (14). A detailed study of the scripture passages used would probably reveal further connections between the two works.

With all this in mind it is not too far to describe 'Grace Abounding' as an extension and an elaboration of the autobiographical material in 'Law and Grace'. Moreover, from the context it appears that the autobiographical passage (pp. 156-160) is used as an example confirming the understanding expressed on the preceeding pages, that God works on the soul first through destruction and 'killing' (pp. 137-46), and then through Grace by the gift of imputed righteousness (pp. 146-155). Thus, this treatise is of significance for the understanding of Bunyan's conversion, not only because it provides the reader with some further details about the course of the conversion, but mainly because it places his conversion in a certain theological framework: The dichotomy between law and gospel. The implications of this dichotomy will be explored in a later chapter; here suffice it to state that Bunyan interpreted his spiritual development in terms of a dialectic between the 'castings down and raisings up' rather than as a progress.

NOTES

1. O. Watkins: 'The Puritan Experience' p.106
2. 'Paul's Departure and Crown', Works vol.1 (by Offor) p. 740
3. Joan Webber: The Eloquent 'I' p.8
4. W. Tindall: 'John Bunyan, Mechanick Preacher' p. viii
5. *ibid* pp. 33-4
6. R. Sharrock: Introduction to Grace Abounding p. xxix
7. O. Watkins p. 55

8. J. Webber quoted by Watkins p.228
9. O. Watkins p.102
10. R. Pascal: 'Design and Truth in Autobiography' p.15
11. O. Watkins p. 236
- 12 para 37: Note the many similarities between the women's description of their experience and the purpose of 'Grace Abounding' as described in the preface.
13. Neither is the concept of progress in 'The Pilgrim's Progress' a simple one, cf. Keeble p.327 and n.24
14. Greaves: Introduction to 'The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded'.

THE UNREGENERATE MAN

The Message of Mr. Badman

I

If, in 'Grace Abounding', Bunyan is setting forth his own example in order to encourage and console those 'poor and tempted people of God' who would be able to recognise themselves in his spiritual struggles, 'The Life and Death of Mr. Badman' on the other hand is an attempt to set forth a warning example, a model not to be emulated if one wishes to escape hell.

My endeavour is to stop an hellish Course of Life, and to save a Soul from death....I must remember the man in the dream [The Pilgrim's Progress], that cut his way through his armed enemies, and so got into the beauteous Palace; I must, I say, remember him, and do myself likewise. (p.5, 1.31-36)

The 'beauteous Palace' is here (unlike in 'The Pilgrim's Progress') the lost soul, and Bunyan's aim with the book is to 'cut his way' into this imprisoned soul and strip it of the deceit of false religion and security. As in 'Grace Abounding', the example of Mr. Badman is meant to reverberate in the soul of the reader, not by 'the ecchoing answer of a good conscience', but rather as a voice of doom to wound the indifferent conscience and force it to plunge into an anxious self-scrutiny.

Twenty years had passed since Bunyan had published his autobiography, and things had changed. The historical context of the popish plot (1678) probably intensified the sense of eschatology throughout the narrative:

England shakes and totters already, by reason of the

burden that Mr. Badman and his friends have wickedly laid upon it: yea our Earth reels and staggereth to and fro like a drunkard... (p.2, 1.27-31)

Bunyan himself was no longer a prisoner, constantly facing the possibility of death, and his non-conformist congregation in Bedford no longer the same 'poor and tempted people of God' for whom he had described his years of spiritual struggles in 'Grace Abounding'. The 'Church Book' of his Bedford Congregation, often written by Bunyan's own hand, has recorded several instances of misbehaviour of the individual members of the congregation, strikingly similar to those of Mr. Badman (1). No doubt, Bunyan was first and foremost alluding to his own church when he claimed that 'all the things that here I discourse of... have been acted upon the stage of this World, even many times before mine eyes.' (p.1, 1.19-21)

But Mr Badman was not merely an invention, constructed from different characters and occurrences among Bunyan's associates. The key to Mr. Badman's character, as Talon argues, lies in Bunyan's own adolescence as described in the first paragraphs of his autobiography (2), and vice versa: Mr. Badman has a good deal to tell us about Bunyan's understanding of his own pre-conversion life. They not only have several vices in common, such as swearing and sabbath-breaking; but even when Badman surpasses the unregenerate man of 'Grace Abounding' in ungodliness, when he steals, goes out with whores, swindles in his trading etc., Bunyan, in using characters from his congregation is also portraying himself as he imagined he would have been, had not 'the merciful

working of God upon his soul' made everything new.

Though Bunyan is, to a certain extent, writing about himself, his anti-hero lacks much of the genuineness and conviction of his self-portraits in 'Grace Abounding' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress'. The prose of 'Mr. Badman' has much of the colloquial vigour of 'The Pilgrim's Progress', but the narrative wants the inner necessity and continuity that makes Christian appear as a whole person. We are offered a series of realistic and striking pictures, but, as Talon notes, they are juxtaposed, rather than interwoven, and do not form an authentic character (3). The reader is not, and is not meant to be, challenged by the enviable life of a real and vigorous sinner.

If, nevertheless, at some point he might feel attracted by Mr. Badman, the lengthy dialogues between Mr. Wiseman and Attentive will soon set him right. Mr. Wiseman, a mature and supposedly wise christian tells the story of the anti-hero to the inexperienced Attentive, but a great part of the dialogues consists of grave and warning lectures on the misery of Mr. Badman, illustrated by anecdotes about God's judgment upon ungodly people. These judgment stories, which Bunyan borrowed primarily from Samuel Clarke's 'Mirrour or Looking-Glass for both Saints and Sinners', or from his own recollections, are a peculiar and, in a way, disturbing trait in the narrative. The problem with these stories is that they are added to the events of the narrative as admonitory appendices without correspondence to the life of Mr. Badman. We read about

that dreadful Judgment of God upon one N.P. at Wimpleton in Surrey; who, after a horrible fit of Swearing at, and Cursing of some persons that did not please him, suddenly fell sick, and in little time died raving, cursing and swearing (p.32)

- but nothing of that kind happens to the swearing and cursing Mr Badman. We are told about Dorothy Mately who stole 'two single pence' from a lad and sank into the earth (p.32); and about the man that 'committed the act of Uncleaness, whereupon he fell into such horror of Conscience that he hanged himself' (p.56); but Badman unruffled continues in his vices. He is seemingly not visited by any judgment, nothing supernatural interrupts him in his trivial and monotonous wickedness; but at the end of narrative it becomes evident that exactly this undisturbedness is God's awful judgment over the inpenitent sinner. Thus, 'The Life and Death of Mr. Badman' is itself a new and more convincing kind of judgement story.

Bunyan was, as J.B.Wharey has shown (4), in his way of using the dialogue-form much influenced by Arthur Dent's 'The Plaine Man's Path-way to Heaven', one of the two books he received with his first marriage, and perhaps also by Baxter's 'The Poor Man's Family-Book' from 1674 (5). The narrative was, in Dent's words, 'set forth Dialogue wise, for the better understanding of the simple' (6). For Bunyan the dialogue-form was a means of education: He simply wanted his book to be easy to read, and did not explore the possibilities of this literary form. As a result, the two dialogue partners became so united and so much the same that there is in fact only one voice, that of John Bunyan. No

fruitful 'clash of personalities', no movement in the relationship between the two partners interrupts the tedious series of replies, affirming and elaborating what the other person had just said. At one point it even seems that Bunyan for a moment confused his two characters (7).

Forrest and Sharrock argued that the lack of literary quality in Mr Badman can be ascribed to the fact that some people thought that Bunyan had 'laughed too loud' in 'The Pilgrim's Progress'. 'To such critics' they argued 'Bunyan offered in Badman a book consistently vehement and explicit in its moralizing.' (8)

II

However much we may regret the literary shortcomings of this work, there can be no doubt that exactly the monotonous and yet uneven style, the lack of continuity and inner necessity in the narrative, and the unconvincing character of Mr Badman underline, in their own awkward way, the message of Mr. Badman.

In order to avoid the misunderstanding that this work is merely a moralistic lecture, one must carefully pay attention to the prefatory passage 'The Author to the Reader'.

As I was considering with my self, what I had written concerning the Progress of the Pilgrim from this World to Glory... It came again into my mind to write, as then, of him that was going to Heaven, so now, of the Life and Death of the Ungodly, and of their travel from this world to Hell. (p.1)

Mr. Badman ought to be placed in the context of 'The Pilgrim's Progress', as the counterpart of Christian. Comparing these two figures it becomes evident that the decisive concepts for the understanding of the relationship between Christian and

Badman are not virtue contrasting vice, but faith contra unbelief, life as a venturesome pilgrimage or life as self-indulgent apathy. This difference appears when one compares the attitudes which the two characters adopt to their fellow creatures and to death.

The reader of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' is struck by the direct and insistent character of the conversations between the true pilgrims and the hypocrites. The replies between Christian and Ignorance and between Faithful and Talkative, for instance, are very provocative, almost impudent. Christian is never merely conversing with his fellow travellers about religious subjects as they walk along side by side; he is constantly facing them, earnestly searching in their words and behaviour to find the ring of truth which is peculiar to the true pilgrims. And thus, it is no surprise that Mr Civility is a fraud whom Christian must avoid; a true pilgrim is far too passionately interested in the spiritual state of his fellow travellers to be sociable in a pleasant way. Faithful accurately expresses his and Christian's relationship to their fellow travellers in his reply after Talkative has left them: 'I have dealt plainly with him; and so am clear of his blood if he perisheth.' (PP. p.70)

In Badman we find a very different way of relating to other people:

he began to study how to please all men, and to suit himself to any company; he could now be as they, say as they...when he perceived that by so doing, he might either make them his Customers or Creditors for his Commodities....

This was now the path he trod in, and could do all artificially, as any man alive. And now he thought himself a perfect man, he thought he was always a boy

till now....

He would often-times please himself with the thoughts of what he could do in this matter, saying within himself; I can be religious, and irreligious, I can be any thing, or nothing; I can swear, and speak against swearing; I can lie, and speak against lying...: Now I enjoy my self, and am Master of mine own wayes, and not they of me. (pp.83-85)

If, for Christian, all conversation ultimately became a means of earnest self-scrutiny, Mr.Badman's interacting with other people on the contrary was a way of being taken out of himself. Applying Kant's classical definition, that ethical behaviour is when we treat our fellow creature as a goal rather than as a means, it might be said that the basic difference between Christian's and Mr.Badman's way of living is the difference between ethical and un-ethical behaviour. In the passage quoted (largely overlooked by the critics) Bunyan gives his most profound portrait of Mr.Badman as a man who has escaped the fundamental ethical character of human existence and thus has lost his true humanity. Nowhere in 'The Pilgrim's Progress' or 'Grace Abounding' has Bunyan with so incisive irony unveiled the deceit of a comfortable and complacent existence, as in Mr. Badman's concluding remark: 'Now I enjoy myself, and am Master of mine own ways, and not they of me.' The irony, of course, lies in Bunyan's seemingly innocent way of reporting Mr.Badman's self-satisfied assertion. But in fact Badman was in this reply, unknowingly, passing sentence on himself. The awful tragedy of Mr. Badman was not his sinful and ungodly life, not even his desperately wicked soul; the real tragedy and the dreadful judgement of God lies in the fact that he enjoyed himself. 'God gave him over' (p.164): No angst, no supernatural occurrence disturbed

his somnambulistic course. 'He was as secure now as if he had been as sinless as an angel.' (p.150)

The descriptions of Christian's and Mr.Badman's death reveals a similar contrast. 'Christian began to sink' (PP, p.128); the reader will recall how this 'sinking' in 'Grace Abounding' repeatedly is used as a metaphor of Bunyan's angst. The dying Christian, tortured by the 'troublesome thoughts of the sins he had committed, both since and before he began to be a pilgrim' (p.128) reminds us strikingly of the man clothed in rags and with a great burden upon his back from the opening of the allegory. Christian's whole pilgrimage from this opening scene can be interpreted as an anticipation of that solemn moment at the dark river. He continually forced himself to look into the dark abyss; and, in a sense, it is this intense awareness of the inescapability of death that makes a true pilgrim - though this is not the whole truth.

It appears from the opening dialogue and from the whole design of Mr.Badman that the moral of the narrative lies in the description of his death (9). He died

As quietly as a Lamb. There seemed not to be in it, to the standers by, so much as a strong struggle of Nature: and as for his Mind it seemed wholly at quiet. (p.157)

Later the reader is told that 'this was a sign of God's anger.' (p.164)

In the description of the life and death of Mr Badman an inherent ambiguity in the understanding of sin, Hell, and God's anger becomes evident. On the one hand sin is the way in which we imprison and burden our selves; God reveals (or

conceals) his anger and judgement by withdrawing and letting a human being have his own way without being made aware of his fearful state. And the sufferings of Hell are the vengeance of a neglected soul. 'His sins went with him to be a worm to gnaw him in his conscience for ever and ever.'

(p.165) 'Let him alone' (p.163): This is the essence of perdition. And yet, on the other hand the damned is never alone. One of the main themes in both *Mr Badman* and *'Grace Abounding'* is the inescapability of the relationship to God. Man is never on his own: even swearing and cursing are ways of relating to God. And thus, the sufferings of Hell arises from the fact that God is present, even there.

Bunyan never portrayed a vigorous and enviable worldly character. In *'The Pilgrim's Progress'* all the worldly persons apart from Giant Despair, Appolyon, and perhaps Mr. Atheist, are more or less pitiful characters who lack the straightforwardness and brawn of the true pilgrims. But this is a quite deliberate - or rather, unavoidable - weakness, for, in Kierkegaard's words, 'you can only possess the world by being possessed of it yourself.' (10) The fact that Mr. Badman fitted so well to the world, that life was no longer an on-going struggle for him, shows that he had lost his autonomy and thus the ordering power of the soul. As Milo Kaufmann puts it 'the characterizing design of Badman's life is its lack of design, its departure from that Gospel-order which is the sign of the Spirit's hand in ordering the believer's life.' (11)

By escaping the enormous burden of the soul and by living

'artificially, as any man alive' he, so to speak, became absorbed by the world as a cog in a huge machine. And thus the figure of Badman corresponds to Kierkegaard's understanding of 'the spiritless' as the people who 'join in life's game but never have the experience of putting everything together, never come to a conception of an infinite consistency in themselves.' (12)

If one were to portray such a person in an imaginary construction, he would be a satire of what it is to be a human being...Yet no one would hesitate to consider him an actual human being....although he would be more like a puppet character that very deceptively imitates all the human externalities - would even have children with his wife. At the end of his life, one would have to say that one thing had escaped him: he had not become aware of God. (13)

Obviously, Badman was a sinner, but what made his tragedy complete was that his whole life had sunk so low in frivolous imitation of other people that it seemed as if the christian doctrine of sin and grace made no sense in his life.

Bunyan before the Conversion

When Bunyan in the first paragraphs of 'Grace Abounding' penetrated into the shadowy memories of childhood and adolescence he found no golden age, no original state of innocent immediacy. What he found at the recesses of his mind was the memory of a divided childhood: There was one Bunyan of the day and another Bunyan of the night. As long as it was day, and he had the stimulating awareness of being part of the human tide, he would swear and curse and show a the-Devil-may-care attitude; but when night came and the ten year old John lay in his bed, he would in dreams be 'greatly

afflicted... with the apprehensions of Devils, and wicked spirits, who still, as I then thought, laboured to draw me away with them.' (p.8)

It may seem obvious to the enlightened reader to regard this part of the narrative merely as Calvinistic rationalisations or as evidence of a certain kind of pathological predisposition in Bunyan. It seems to be an inherent temptation for some modern readings of 'Grace Abounding' to disarm Bunyan by benevolent compassion or by a charitable shaking of the head, ignoring the fact that he is relating his disintergrated childhood, not as a peculiar example, but as part of a pattern in which the reader is expected to recognise himself. How much more engaging - and how much more manageable - would not Bunyan appear to be if only one could call him 'Poor Bunyan'. (14)

There is no original or immediate wholeness of the soul: This is the underlying message throughout the first paragraphs of 'Grace Abounding'. Like Kierkegaard, Bunyan believed that the human soul is always in a highly serious condition.

Just as a physician might say there isn't a single

Human being who enjoys perfect health, so someone with a proper knowledge of man might say there is not a single human being who does not despair a little, in whose innermost being there does not dwell an uneasiness, an unquiet, a discordance, an anxiety in the face of an unknown something, or a something he doesn't even dare strike up acquaintance with, an anxiety about a possibility in life or an anxiety about himself, so that as a physician speaks of one's going about with an illness in the body, he goes about weighed down with a sickness of the spirit, which only now and then reveals its presence within, in glimpses, and with what is for him an inexplicable anxiety. (15)

The notion of a basic disintergratedness of the human self has been explored by several other puritan autobiographers. Recent scholars have pointed out the striking similarities between Bunyan's autobiography and 'The Journals of Richard Norwood' (16). For Richard Norwood the ground of his years of torturing doubt lay in his nightly 'fits' and 'mares'. As the princes in the fairy tales, he would change completely when the darkness and silence of the night surrounded him; the young, self-confident adventurer would suddenly turn into a horror-stricken child, haunted by demons and by the image of his angry father.

sometimes I seemed to see a thing on my breast or belly like a hare or cat etc.; whereupon I have sometimes taken a naked knife in my hand when I went to sleep... (17)

He would, alternatively, be

possessed with much inward pride and vanity of mind, and yet on the contrary....as often subject to a very dejected and despairing mind without any very notable cause for either. (18)

Norwood could not come to grips with himself; something drove him up and down in self-contempt and self-infatuation. Deep in his soul there was a incomprehensible chaos that disturbed him in his self-relation, like a dreadful monster which only rose to the surface in the silent hours of the night (19). He never fully overcame this monster, but he learned to call it original sin, and in doing this he tamed it. And thus, for Norwood and Bunyan the doctrine of original sin, paradoxically, became the starting point of an integrated self.

When Bunyan began his spiritual pilgrimage he had not yet grasped the universality of sin; he thought that his swearing

and sabbath-breaking were the reasons for his sense of guilt and inner chaos. Could he just overcome these sins and become more pious then his mind would be in peace. And thus, by pitching into some catalogued sin, he tried to drown the unnamed discordance of his soul. But later in his life, Bunyan thoroughly appropriated the protestant doctrine of original sin which dissolves any graduation of sins and makes every person a chief of sinners. Like the scientists' claim that the whole genetic material of a human being is contained in every little cell of the body, so Bunyan would claim that every human action, every thought and pleasure voices the same all-embracing depravity of the soul. It is this strong adherence to the doctrine of original sin that explains the seemingly conflicting fact that swearing and sabbath-breaking were the most serious sins in the life of 'the chief of sinners'.

The reason why swearing and sabbath-breaking are accentuated as the crucial sins in 'Grace Abounding' seems to be that these two sins - and especially that of swearing - had an almost bewitching power over the young Bunyan.

it was my delight to be taken captive by the Devil at his will...I had but few equals...both in cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy Name of God.
(para.4)

Evidently, the sin of misusing and cursing the name of God became a kind of mania for the adolescent. The long period of torturing doubt after his conversion arose from his fear of having committed this kind of sin (cf paras 147-8); and even as a preacher he would be tempted in the middle of his sermon to curse Christ before the congregation (para 293).

Undoubtedly there was, as Talon argued, an element of restless self-assertion in his swearing:

He swore because for him swearing was a kind of affirmation of virility. He swore, too, to attract attention. (20)

But Bunyan clearly wants his reader to understand that there was also something demonic about his swearing, something far more profound than the loudness of an insecure adolescent.

'Swearing' we read in Mr. Badman, 'flows from that daring Boldness that biddeth defiance to the Law that forbids.'

(p. 29) Thus, Bunyan's swearing ought to be taken literally, as a bold and defiant self-assertion in his relationship to God. Far from being an expression of atheism in any modern sense of the term, his swearing was a bitter and hostile way of paying tribute to the God who persecuted him, comparable, perhaps, to the roars of a wild animal against the hunter who has maimed it. Even in his greatest moments of the-Devil-may-care, Bunyan had a gnawing feeling that somebody was watching him, somebody whom he knew he would meet again when night came and he lay alone in his bed, or, if not before, at the day of judgment.

It seems that much of Bunyan's attitude toward life in this period flowed from the same source of 'daring Boldness' and 'defiance'. A striking example is his almost suicidal play with an adder:

being in the field, with one of my companions, it chanced that an Adder passed over the High way, so I having a stick in mine hand, struck her over the back; and having stounded [stunned] her, I forced open her mouth with my stick, and plucked her sting out with my fingers, by which act had not God been mercifull to me, I might by my desperateness have brought myself to an end. (para.12)

Bunyan relates this occurrence as an instance of God's merciful providence towards a desperate sinner, but in fact he provides his reader with one of these 'unfathomable obscurities' which according to Roy Pascal is a true mark of sincere self-revelation (21). What makes this incident so stirring is the way in which it reveals the ability of completely unreserved acting, or rather, the ability of serious acting against reason. Obviously, we can't be sure what made a young man trifle with life in the way described: Was it the feeling of staking everything on one throw, a tower experience similar to Dostoyevski's casino-madness? Was it the sense of despair and boredom that made Graham Greene play Russian Roulette as an adolescent, the experience that 'it is possible to enjoy again the visible world by risking its total loss'? (22) Or was it simply a kind of show-off, done in order to gain recognition from his companion? In any case, it was an action of a desperate and deeply distracted person, and this little incident is like a window into the shaken and stormy universe of the teenage Bunyan. It throws a new light on Bunyan's life before his conversion. Like his play with the adder, his swearing and sabbath-breaking must be seen as painful and daring acts of protest.

And with this, we have reached the crucial difference between 'The Life and Death of Mr. Badman' and the first paragraphs of 'Grace Abounding'. While Mr Badman enjoyed himself as he indulged in his vices, the young Bunyan remained an unhappy sinner, or, to use his own words, 'a desperate sinner'. And nowhere is this difference more

clearly revealed than in the image of the teenage boy forcing the adder to open its mouth in order to pluck out her fang.

Notes

1. Forrest & Sharrock: Introduction to 'The Life and Death of Mr. Badman' p. xiii
2. Talon: 'John Bunyan' p. 227
3. *ibid* p. 228
4. J.B. Wharey: 'Bunyan's Mr. Badman'. Wharey has convincingly proved Bunyan's stylistic dependence on Dent. Bunyan himself is indirectly acknowledging his debt to Dent when he in the preface to 'The Pilgrim's Progress' as a kind of justification for his colloquial style writes

I find that men (as high as Trees)
will write Dialogues-wise...

However, Wharey seems to be pushing the comparison too far when he in 'The Life And Death of Mr Badman' traces the whole moralistic system of 'The Plaine Man's Path-way to Heaven'.

5. Forrest & Sharrock p. xviii
6. The title-page of 'The Plaine Man's Path-way...'
7. p. 26 where Bunyan let Attentive relate about Mr. Badman's behaviour on sabbath days forgetting that Attentive is supposed to be ignorant about the life of Mr. Badman.
8. Forrest & Sharrock p. xviii
9. cf. p. 2, 1.35-36 & p. 26, 1.34
10. Somewhere in Kierkegaard's 'Edifying Discourses'
11. U. Milo Kaufmann: 'Spiritual discerning: Bunyan and the mysteries of Divine will' p. 184. Essay in Keeble: 'John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus'
12. Kierkegaard: *Sickness unto Death* p. 140
13. Kierkegaard: *Unscientific Postscript* p. 244

14. It seems to me that some recent psycho-analytical and sociological readings of 'Grace Abounding' such as Hill's and Stachniewski's have succumbed to this temptation. This appears e.g. from the following suggestion by Hill: 'Conversion perhaps played a role like that of the drug culture in our similar age of economic crisis, personal insecurity, and degredation.' (Hill p. 68) Even Talon whose study contains a very helpful and lucid reading of 'Grace Abounding' at times lapses into a kind of know-all attitude: 'Like Luther, he [Bunyan] never really recovered from his childhood.' (p. 40) A fundamental problem of this kind of approach is that 'I', the reader, so to speak, becomes the doctor, and Bunyan the patient, whereas in fact the book is meant to be medicine for the wounded conscience. By creating a certain professional distance between the 'I' of the enlightened reader and the 'I' of the book, Bunyan is disarmed and, even more fatal, the reader has in a way cut off himself and is no longer vulnerable to Bunyan's message.

This is not to say that the actual course of inner events is psychologically inexplicable, or that Bunyan could not, to a certain extent, have been helped by modern psychiatry (though - could he?). Rather, as Watkins writes, 'to label him as a pathological case may not be medically unjustified, but far from discrediting his heroism this would underline it.' (Watkins pp. 118-119)

15. The Sickness unto Death p.52
16. e.g. Watkins p. & Stachniewski p.
17. The Journal of Richard Norwood p. 27
18. ibid p. 12
19. For Thomas Goodwin eager self-scrutiny unveiled a sight comparable to that of Norwood: 'I can compare this sight, and the workings of my heart rising from thence, to be as if I had in the heat of summer looked down into the filth of a dungeon, where by a clear light and piercing eye I discerned millions of crawling living things in the midst of that sink and liquid corruption.' Quoted by Stannard: 'The Puritan way of Death' p. 41-42
20. Talon p. 53
21. R.Pascal p. 186
22. Graham Greene: 'A sort of Life' p.128.
Bunyan's frame of mind after he had picked out the fang of the adder may well have been similar to Graham Greene's ecstatic feeling of joy and freedom when he heard the click of the revolver: 'I remember an extraordinary sense of jubilation, as if carnival lights

had been smitten on in a dark drab street. My heart
knocked in its cage, and life contained an infinite
number of possibilities.' (p.128)

SCRIPTURE AND EXPERIENCE

I dreamed, and behold I saw a Man clothed in Raggs standing on a certain place, with his face from his own House, a Book in his Hand, and a great burden upon his Back. I looked, and I saw him open the Book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled: and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry; what shall I do?

The burdened figure from the opening lines of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' stands out as one of the most universal and penetrating interpretations Bunyan gave of his conversion crisis. It is an archetype, a man stripped of any individual characteristics, even his name, expressing only the restless, painful outcry which, according to Bunyan, lies on the bottom of every human soul. But at the same time it is a highly personal, almost autobiographical, portrait. All the main themes of Bunyan's conversion lie in these lines: The sense of desertion and isolation, his angst, the awareness of sin. But first and foremost this passage expresses the complex and tensed relationship between two of the main components of the narrative: The burden, representing the painful experience of inner chaos and guilt, and the book, containing the word of order and wholesomeness. The burden comes from behind, from the dark memories of sin and failure, and from the constant sense of God's anger. The book comes from in front, as a message from eternity to a human being in distress. And not being able to bring into a happy relation his own burdened soul and the book of truth he cries out: 'What shall I do?' The meaning of this question is, as we are later told (p.9), 'What shall I do to be saved?' And salvation is, as the imagery suggests, getting rid of the burden of sin and

becoming a free and whole human being.

U. Milo Kaufmann has rightly pointed out an underlying inconsistency in this picture.

If, as we must suppose, the book is the Bible, then on the common Calvinist understanding, the book has no more, no less than the detailed answer to the ragged man's question. (1)

Or, to put it in another way, if his reading of this book is the only means by which to remove the burden from his back, why then, the following perilous pilgrimage, the sufferings, and the struggles? And why the frank self-revelations in 'Grace Abounding'?

This complex relationship in 'The Pilgrim's Progress' and 'Grace Abounding' between the book and the burden, Scripture and experience, appears more clearly when compared with the journal of Bunyan's contemporary, the founder of Quakerism, George Fox.

George Fox and Bunyan

"All must first know the voice crying in the wilderness in their hearts." (2) These words from the journal of George Fox immediately suggest a connection to the ragged man from the opening of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'. And the reader of Fox's journal will know that they are spoken out of an experience similar to that of Bunyan, and that Fox's cry in the wilderness voices a sense of desolation and forsakenness similar to that of Bunyan. And yet, this man has got no book in his hand. His cry, provoked neither by any reading, nor by human interaction, is an entirely inward phenomenon; it is the voice of God speaking directly in his heart.

Fox always showed sincere devotion to the Bible as a book containing the word of God. As an adolescent he would often take his Bible and go and sit 'in hollow trees and lonesome places til night came on.' (3) But at the end of the day it was not the Bible but the inner voice, the immediate, personal revelation that gave him comfort and assurance.

My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. For though I read the Scriptures that spoke of Christ and of God, yet I knew him not but by a revelation, as he who hath the key did open, and as the Father of life drew me to his Son by his Spirit. (4)

Though Bunyan ascribed to the Quakers little but 'errors' and 'abominable things', and though he devoted at least two of his writings to a vigorous refutation of their heresies (5) yet, unmistakably there is, in their understanding of the inwardness of true christianity, a certain kind of relatedness which Bunyan never realized. There is in 'Grace Abounding' an insistence on the necessity of personal revelation and appropriation which, at times, sounds quite similar to some of Fox's early records:

in those dayes, let men say what they would, unless I had it with evidence from Heaven, all was nothing to me...
(Para 122)

The much discussed dialogue between Christian and Mr. Ignorance in 'The Pilgrim's Progress' elucidates this kinship between Bunyan and Fox (6). On Christian's insistent question how he can be so sure about his spiritual state Mr. Ignorance's repeated answer is 'My heart tells me so.' To which Christian remarks that 'Except the word of God beareth witness in this matter, other Testemony is of no value.'

However, the ultimate test imposed on Ignorance is not that of Scripture, but that of experience: 'Ask him if he ever had Christ revealed from Heaven?' And thus, it may seem that Christian, by pointing to his experience as the decisive indicator of the truly regenerate state, unintentionally subverts his first reply. This is the position taken by Felicity A. Nussbaum in her provoking analysis of Bunyan's use of Biblical passages in 'Grace Abounding'. She claims that, under the surface there exists an intrinsic rivalry between the text of the Bible and Bunyan's own autobiographical text, so that

while Bunyan seems to proclaim God's Word, the force of the autobiographical text suggests that Bunyan is creating a substitute personal text to replace the Scriptures as a devotional guide. (7)

It seems, however, that this view which makes Bunyan appear more as a crypto-Quaker than a Protestant, overlooks the intrinsic connection between Bunyan's reading of the Bible and his spiritual experiences.

Experience and Scripture are so closely knit together that the whole narrative in 'Grace Abounding' can aptly be described as the story of 'a man with a book in his hand'. As he reads, his appearance changes: The vile and untamed adolescent becomes a burdened and wounded sinner who, at last, changes into a true christian. And all this is the result of his reading. Far from being a substitute to the biblical text, Bunyan's account is, so to speak, a transformation into flesh and blood of the biblical words of salvation. Bunyan read his Bible, then he read his own life, and then he told his story: This is the way of self-knowledge

and self-realisation in 'Grace Abounding' (8). And this is the basic difference between Fox's Journal and 'Grace Abounding': Bunyan depicts himself as 'a man asinking' who stretches out his arms and catches out in the dark in order to get hold of something outside himself that will keep him from the abyss (para 248).

... a Word, a Word to lean my weary soul upon that I might not sink forever! 'twas what I hunted for.
(para 250)

And it always had to be a word from the Bible. Bunyan could take no comfort from a sentence which he could not find in Scripture. ... Once, 'that word fell with weight om my spirit, 'Look at the generations, and see, did ever any trust in God and were confounded?'' (para 62) But he dared not take any consolation of it, since he could not find where in the Bible it was said. And thus he spent a year reading through all of the Bible, until at last he found the quote in one of the Apocryphical books. Fox, by contrast, being convinced that his inner voice was in accordance with the Bible, did not care much about the exact wording of Scripture. He would certainly not have understood Bunyan's desire to see it in print, to have it in his hand and touch it with his fingers. While George Fox turns inward in silent meditation, expecting to hear an inner voice speaking precisely to his condition in a way which - so he believed - was impossible by means of letters and printing ink, Bunyan turns to the objective world, to the visible, never failing word of Scripture.

For Bunyan Scripture was all address. Every passage from the Bible, even those passages from the Pentateuch about the

cities of refuge or about clean and unclean beasts, were applied immediately to his actual condition as a direct, personal message from God. Biblical texts play an important role in 'Grace Abounding' not only as objects for study and scrutiny, but as almost audible voices that cry aloud to him and squeeze into his mind in order alternately to console and threaten him.

If the modern scholarly attitude to the Bible is a calm and objective reading of the text, Bunyan, by contrast, is utterly subjective and passionate in his approach. Scripture is not only 'a lamp for his feet', but rather he is a hare that has been caught by a cone of light which he cannot escape.

Then did that Scripture Seize upon my soul... (para 182)
that piece of a sentence darted upon me... (para 203)
now it was as if it [the word] had arms of grace...
(para 204)

The biblical texts are the actors and the narrator is the one acted upon. It is the text working with Bunyan, rather than Bunyan working with the text. And thus Stranahan seems to be right in his suggestion that the real events in the conversion narrative are the coming of words from Scripture.

(9)

I was much followed by this Scripture "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you", Luk. 22.31. And sometimes it would sound so loud within me, yea, and as it were call so strongly after me, that once above all the rest, I turned my head over my shoulder, thinking verily that some man had behind me called to me... (para 93)

O, one sentence of the Scripture did more afflict and terrify my mind... than an army of forty thousands men that might come against me. Woe be to him against whom the Scriptures bend themselves. (para 246)

Exterior events such as his time in the army, his first marriage, his wife's labour pains etc. are often mentioned, but always en passant, as the wings against the background of which the real drama, the encounter between the word of God and a human soul, is played. (10)

As the direct link between man and God, it is instrumental of bringing about a certain kind of contemporaneousness: The reader of the gospel is, in a mystical way, put back to the time of Jesus, and Jesus is present to the reader, speaking the old words anew (11).

me thought I was as if I had seen him born, as if I had seen him grow up, as if I had seen him walk thorow this world, from the Cradle to his Cross; to which, also, when he came, I saw how gently he gave himself to be hanged and nailed on it for my sins and wicked doings. (para 120)

Bunyan even imagines that 'the Lord Jesus should think on me so long agoe, and that he should speak them words on purpose for my sake...' (para 69)

This understanding of the Bible as direct speech is part of the answer to the contradiction of the ragged man from the opening of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'. For Bunyan every part of the Bible was objective, infallible truth (cf para 245), but first and foremost Scripture was perceived as individual, subjective address. And thus, the book not only contains the answer to the ragged man's question; it has itself changed him into a burdened sinner and provoked his outcry. For this is the only way in which the Word comes to a human soul: by addressing the reader directly, as a single human being in front of God, by burdening in order to unburden. It does not suffice to read and understand the content of the words; the

reader has to become contemporary with Christ and to hear Him saying to him or her personally 'My Love', 'My Grace is sufficient for you', 'Thy righteousness is in Heaven' or the like. In other words, he or she has to have a story to tell about a personal encounter with God.

The conversion narrative as story telling

The ability of viewing one's past as a story of such a personal encounter with God in his word is itself a reward of the struggles, sufferings and defeats. Moments of doubt and inner chaos make sense when they are seen in retrospect as part of a story about 'the merciful working of God upon [the] soul.' (para 1)

Temptations when we meet them at first are as the Lyon that roared upon Sampson; but if we over come them, the next time we see them, we shall finde a Nest of Honey within them. (Preface)

One of the very few places in 'The Pilgrim's Progress' where Bunyan tells his reader that 'Christian smiled' is in the House of the Interpreter when he sees the Valiant Man pressing forward against the armed enemies, 'receiving and giving wounds', until at last he reached the Stately Palace. (PP p.27-8) Why did Christian smile? Because, at once he understood that he was the valiant man, and that his whole life since his departure from the City of Destruction: the Slow of Dispond, his encounter with Evangelist, Pliable and Mr Worldly-Wiseman, all this formed a story, a coherent narrative of his personal journey to the stately palace. He smiled because he realised that his life hung together like

the events in a well-told story.

It is also suggestive that Bunyan's restless mind was silenced, not only by his reading of the Bible, but with the beginning of his preaching ministry. He knew the biblical truths of salvation, but he could find no steady rest in them before he had started telling his story to others.

I have gone full of guilt and terrour even to the Pulpit-Door, and there it has been taken off, and I have been at liberty in my mind until I have done my work, and then immediately, even before I could get down the Pulpit-Stairs, have been as bad as I was before. (para 277)

For Bunyan the preaching of the Word was always indirectly a way of telling his own story, a repeated exposition of his experience and of his whole life in biblical terms. In reflecting on and expounding his experience while preaching, Bunyan distanced himself from his personal history and thus made it a recognizable and manageable reality. He felt people looking at him and listening to him, and he heard himself speaking out of his own experience about the biblical truths of sin and grace, and suddenly all was peace. He told the story of God's merciful workings on the soul, he saw that people believed it, and at last his own restless conscience was silenced.

The point I am trying to make with these examples is that a conversion story is not completed before it is told, that there is a sense in which the act of telling of the story itself possesses the redeeming power which the story ascribes to the christian message, and that therefore it could be

argued that it is the story-telling rather than the gospel that saved John Bunyan from 'the bottomless pitt.' In this perspective, the words of the Danish author Karen Blixen (aleas Isac Dinesen) could be applied to Bunyan's narrative.

...within our whole universe the story only has the authority to answer that cry of heart of its characters, that one cry of heart of each of them: 'Who am I?' (12)

In the act of relating his conversion the narrator places himself in an orderly universe where nothing happens by accident and everything serves a higher purpose; and thus he escapes despair and chaos.

A rather different view of the role of story telling is taken by Gabriel Josipovici who argues that the peculiar emphasis on the conversion narrative in the Puritan tradition should be seen as a result of the internalisation of religion.

when everything vital happens inside a person it is only by giving public expression to it that we can convince ourselves that it did indeed occur; and when what is of crucial importance in our lives takes place in an instant it is vitally important to find a way of spreading it out and fixing the stages that led up to it in such a way as to give it objective status. (13)

The problem with both of these views on the role of story telling is that they either fail to see or deny the existence of an intrinsic link between the internal world of subjective experience and the external objective reality. Bunyan is not merely telling a story about his subjective and purely internal experience of conversion in which case he would indeed, as Josipovici suggests, need to find a way of giving it objective status. But for Bunyan the very core of his conflict was to bring into harmony the objective truths of

Scripture and his subjective experience. It seems to me extremely important to grasp that his conversion story is not completely internalised, that the ragged man has a book in his hand and that 'Grace Abounding' is basically the story of Bunyan's encounter with this book. However, this is all very dim to me. More work should be done on this fascinating aspect of Puritan autobiographies.

The battle of the texts

Bunyan called his autobiography 'a relation of the merciful workings of God upon my soul', but the text itself seems to suggest that this is only half of the truth, and that a more adequate heading would be 'a relation of the never ceasing battle between the tempter and the merciful God in my soul'. As later in 'The Holy War', Bunyan describes in 'Grace Abounding' his early life as a warfare, an on-going inner dialogue between two contrary powers. Consequently, there are only two kinds of events in his autobiography: The merciful workings of God and the temptations of the Devil. When he finds himself doubting the authority of Scripture and questioning the uniqueness of the christian religion, this is all considered temptations (paras 96-97). There is nothing called honest doubt, no 'No Man's Land' between the two powers, for the sincere seeker. As for Christian in 'The Pilgrim's Progress', every thought and every deed is a step in one or the other direction.

It is, however, a peculiar fact that quite a few of the

temptations described in 'Grace Abounding' came from the reading of certain Bible passages. At times it seems that Scripture is as much on the tempter's side as on God's side. Words of despair and words of consolation clash against each other (14), with the result that Bunyan would 'be sometimes up and down twenty times in an hour' (para 191). Above all, the often quoted word from Hebrews 12 about Esau's selling of his birth-right and his eternal, irremediable damnation became, during the prolonged crisis that followed his conversion, a persistent source of despair. It was as if there were 'a pair of scales' in his mind on which every word of hope and encouragement had to be weighed against the word about Esau's condemnation. (para 205) Whenever a comforting word came to his mind, the memory of Esau who 'found no place for repentance' would drive him back in the dark. At last, the word from 2 Cor.12 about the sufficiency of Grace met with that about Esau like two armies.

they bouted both upon me at a time, and did work and struggle strongly in me for a while; at last, that about Esau's birthright began to wax weak, and withdraw, and vanish; and that about the sufficiency of Grace prevailed, with peace and joy. (para 213)

Bunyan's struggles are here represented as reflecting an inherent tension between two contrary and irreconcilable lines in the Bible. To his question 'whether the Scriptures could agree in the salvation of my Soul' (para 211) he had answered no (though later he would claim that so they did). And thus, Scripture was considered a source of both of the two kinds of events in 'Grace Abounding': Temptations, angst, despair, and condemnation as well as confidence, joy,

assurance, and encouragement.

This underlying dichotomy, and the consequent dialectic of the narrative is a feature of Bunyan's autobiography which clearly differentiates it from the conventional pattern of Puritan autobiography, and shows Bunyan's profound indebtedness to Luther's commentary on Galatians (15). Unlike the traditional Calvinist autobiographies in which the different stages of spiritual development are described in terms of God's providence guiding and preserving them, Bunyan depicts himself as an apprehensive sinner, full of angst and defiance against the holy God, and yet passionately attracted by His words of grace. While Bunyan believes in divine providence, and perceives God's guiding hand in many occurrences, his narrative is not - or, not primarily - the story of a man who follows a determined, though hidden, path. Rather it is, to use his own favourite picture, the story of a man in deep waters struggling between the dark abyss of divine wrath and eternal condemnation and the light of grace and salvation. Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians which Bunyan read in a critical period of his spiritual development, and which he openly professes to be 'the most fit for a wounded conscience' (para 130), is characterized by a powerful and pastoral exposition of the reformer's new understanding of justification and the distinction between law and gospel. At first it seemed strange to Bunyan that the law of Moses should be the source of 'temptations... Blasphemy, desperation, and Hell', but in the end Luther won. His understanding of law and gospel as two diametrically

opposite teachings in all of Scripture, was a fitting message to a man despairing under the burden of certain biblical words of condemnation. In Luther's commentary he would read that

The greatest knowledge ... and the greatest wiseedome of Christians is, not to know the law..., especially when the conscience wrastleth with the judgement of God. (16)

And he would be admonished

when thou art beaten downe, tormented and afflicted by the law then say: Lady law, thou art not alone, neither art thou all things: but besides thee there are yet other things much greater and better than thou art, namely grace, faith and blessing. This grace, this faith and this blessing do not accuse me, terrifie me, condemne me: but they comfort me, they bid me trust in the Lord, and promise to me victorie and salvation in Christ. (17)

It seems probable that Bunyan was recollecting passages like these, when later he saw the word about Esau draw back in favour of that about the sufficiency of Grace. And does not the distinction in the Preface between the Word that caused 'terreur of conscience and fear of death and hell', and the word 'upon which the Lord hath caused you to hope' ecco the message from Luther's commentary on Galathians? This, of course, is not to say that Bunyan became a Lutheran, or that, apart from 'Law and Grace' and 'Grace Abounding', the distinction between law and gospel became a crucial point in his theology. But in a critical period of a very strong awareness of his own sin and God's anger, Bunyan learned to separate the word of condemnation from the word of grace, and to say with conviction 'goodbye Lady Law' to all the words that made him despair and doubt his own salvation.

So ultimately Bunyan was right in calling his

autobiography 'a relation of the merciful workings of God upon my soul'. For even the prolonged assaults of the tempter turned out to be part of the general dialectics of God's workings in a human soul 'for he woundeth, and his hands make whole.' (preface)

NOTES

1. In N.H.Keeble (ed): "John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus" p. 172
2. "The Journal of George Fox", Introduction p. xxvi
3. *ibid*, p. 9
4. *ibid* p. 11
5. viz. 'Some Gospel Truths Opened' (1656) and 'A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened' (1657)
6. "The Pilgrim's Progress" pp 118-21.
Since J.W.Draper's discussion of 1927 Mr Ignorance has been object for various interpretations. Whether one goes along with Richard R. Harden's understanding of Mr Ignorance as a deliberate representative of Quakerism, or, in accordance with Maurice Hussey and U.Milo Kaufmann, sees him as representing hypocrisy in the seventeenth century understanding, it is evident that his answers reveal a certain affinity with Quakerism. J.W.Draper: "Bunyan's Mr Ignorance", MLR 22 (1927), 14-27; Richard R. Harden: "Bunyan, Mr Ignorance, and the Quakers", SP 69 (1972), 496-508; Maurice Hussey: "Bunyan's Mr Ignorance", MLR 44 (1949), 483-89; and U.Milo Kaufmann: "Spiritual Discerning: Bunyan and the mysteries of the Divine Will" in "Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus" pp. 173-75.
7. Felicity A. Nussbaum: "By these words I was sustained": Bunyan's "Grace Abounding", ELH 49 (1982), pp 18-34
8. Cf. Dayton Haskin: Bunyan, Luther, and the Struggle with Belatedness in "Grace Abounding", University of Toronto Quarterly vol. 50 no.3 1981, p.310
9. Brainerd P. Stranahan: 'Bunyan's Special Talent: Biblical Texts as "Events"', ELR 11 (1981), pp 329-343 That the quotations from Scripture are on their way to becoming personified, even within the limits of the autobiography has been suggested by Roger Sharrock. "John Bunyan" pp 64-65

10. There is another sense in which the inner events in Bunyan's development are peculiarly externalized. Not being a man of theological abstractions, Bunyan was constantly in search of something visible, tangible, and audible by which he could explain and express his spiritual experience; and thus he developed the powerful, rural imagery. There is through the whole narrative a sense of being inescapably tied up with the concrete world of "the Close, the milk-house, the Stable, the Barn, and the like" (Preface). An inner experience is often placed in a definite context:
 "...as I was going home..." (para 91)
 "...as I was sitting in a Neighbours House..." (para 113)
 "...as I sat by the fire..." (para 116)
 "...as I did lie in my Bed..." (para 139) etc.
 It may well be that this constant movement from the sphere of theological abstractions to the concrete, tangible world, is part of the reason why "Grace Abounding" seems to be speaking more directly to the modern reader than many other seventeenth century Puritan writings.
11. Bunyan may in his emphasis on this experience of contemporaneoussness with Christ, be inspired by his reading of Luther's commentary on Galatians in which Luther speaks of faith as the present Christ. "Faith taketh hold of Christ, and hath him present, and holdeth him enclosed, as a ring doth a precious stone."
 (Commentary on Galatians, quoted by Greaves p.72)
12. Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen): 'The Cardinals First Story' in 'Last Tales', Penguin Classics 1986
13. G. Josipovici: 'The Book of God' p.248
14. Cf. paras 58-62; 66-68; 74-76.
15. While Bunyan's early biographers and critics tended to refer to him simply as a Calvinist more recent scholars have discussed the Lutheran traits in his theology. T.S.Coleridge was, I believe, the first to emphasize - and overstate - these traits: "Bunyan may have been one [ie. a Calvinist], but I have met with nothing in his writings (except his Anti-paedobaptism, to which too he assigns no saving importance) that is not much more characteristically Lutheran." (Quoted by Greaves p.153) A penetrating and more balanced analysis has been given by Richard Greaves who stated that "Luther exercised appreciable influence on Bunyan in the closely related areas of the nature of God, the basic concept of salvation per se, the necessity of justification sola gratia and sola fide, and the unalterable opposition of law and grace...
 On this Lutheran foundation Bunyan built an essential Calvinistic superstructure..." (Greaves p. 156)

A small but significant addenda to this summary is the question raised in Gordon Wakefield's recent biography: "Was the seed sown from Bunyan's reading of the preface to Galathians that all Scripture is of equal authority, as the Calvinist Puritans believed, but that the word of Grace annuls the word of Law?" (p.26)

16. *Commentarie of Master Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of Sct. Paul to the Galathians*, p.6
17. *ibid*, p.170

SECURITY AND ASSURANCE

It was argued in chapter two that the contrast between Mr. Badman and Christian is revealed primarily in their self-understanding. While in 'The Life and Death of Mr. Badman' Bunyan portrayed a man in the process of losing his soul until, at last, he would be like an actor on the stage doing everything 'artificially as any man in the world', 'The Pilgrim's Progress' and 'Grace Abounding' depict the opposite process through which the protagonist becomes a concrete human self accountable for God, and thus is saved from the artificiality of life. The contrast is not primarily that between an ungodly and a pious life, but between a life in security and a life leading to assurance. These two terms, security and assurance, represent in Bunyan two contrasting outlooks and two entirely different modes of existence.

What is assurance? A firm, yet often faltering, reliance on the promises of the Bible (para 249); a readiness to die (para 259); a sense of being utterly dependant on a holy, yet merciful God (para 337). Bunyan twice speaks about assurance by the image of a purse:

all those Graces of God that now were green in me [the scriptures that convinced him of his regenerate state], were yet but like those crack'd-Groats and Four-pence-half-pennies that rich men carry in their Purses, when their Gold is in their Trunks at home.
(para 232)

And similarly in 'The Pilgrims Progress' Mistrust, Faint-heart, and Guilt robbed from Little-faith his purse (1). The imagery is clear: Assurance is a costly treasure which the

believer is allways in danger of losing, but even without the sense of assurance a person can be a true pilgrim. The state of security, by contrast, is presented by the image of an ox that is walking "to slaughter: senselessly and securely" (2), or a man who "sleeps on the top of a mast." (3) The tragedy of such a person is that he is mistaken in himself: There is no consistency between his undisturbed self-reliance and his highly perilous existence.

Mr Byends is probably the figure who most clearly expresses this contrast between security and assurance:

They [the true pilgrims] are for hazzarding all for God, at a clap, and I am for taking all advantages to secure my life and estate. They are for holding their notions, though all men are against them, but I am for Religion in what, and so far as the times, and my safety will bear it. They are for Religion when in rags, and contempt, but I am for him when he walks in golden slippers in the sunshine, and with applause.
(The Pilgrim's Progress p. 83)

The contrast between the "golden slippers" and the rags is revealing: Far from being some pleasant state of undesturbed rest or carelessness, assurance is for Bunyan a state of passion. While security is always calculating, comparing oneself with others, weighing for and against, and never staking everything "at a clap", assurance is essentially the result of a leap in the dark, a conviction against the odds. And thus, a person, assured of his own salvation, will be able to claim, as Mr. Blank did to Richard Norwood, that "if there were but one man in all the world to be saved he would certainly believe that he was that man." (4) A reader of puritan autobiographies will know that statements like this are not expressions of a headstrong confidence or obduracy,

rather they are to be seen as an example of Sibbes word that "nothing is so certaine as that which is certaine after doubts." (5) Assurance is beyond all reason and calculations of probability: Had Bunyan been convinced that all human beings apart from one would be saved, this conviction would not have shortened his long way to assurance. It might well have given him a sense of security and well-being, but still this would be the security of the man sleeping in the mast. Assurance is a case that is settled only when there are no statistics and no other people to lean on, but only a sinner and a saviour.

"To become yourself is to become concrete" says Kierkegaard (6), and Bunyan expresses the same thought when he depicts his experience of assurance as the waking up after a dream (para 258). This, however, is not to say that the conversion is, in any immediate sense of the word, an act of self-realisation. Indeed, a first reading of 'Grace Abounding' might rather seem to prove E.D. Starbuck's general definition of conversion as 'a process of unselfing' (7): Bunyan had to give up all his pleasures and inclinations such as swearing, sports, bell-ringing etc.; he had to be lonesome and despairing before his pilgrimage could begin.

I must first pass the sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon my Self, my Wife, my Children, my health, my enjoyments, and all, as dead to me, and my self as dead to them. (para 325)

The critics are, naturally, divided in their attitude to this intrinsic element of self-renunciation in Puritan autobiographies. Roy Pascal, for instance, claimed that one

of the characteristics of religious autobiographies from the this period is that "the intensity of religious experience is followed by a loss of individuality" (8). Talon, on the other hand, argues that Bunyan "by each renunciation he made, by his tears and voluntary sufferings... was ceaselessly individualizing himself, giving himself a soul, creating himself." (9)

It is, obviously, true that Bunyan shows little interest in giving his reader details about himself as a recognisable and distinct individual character. His time in the army, his family life, his interest in music etc., all this is only hinted at or mentioned en passant. It was not Bunyan's aim to tell the life story of an interesting individual; he simply wanted to tell the story of how it came about that he, the chief of sinners, after a series of inner crises and decisions, found himself again as a safe child of God. While 'Grace Abounding' is strikingly indifferent when it comes to the individuality of the narrator, there is an almost exclusive concentration on the self in the process of becoming.

This ambiguity in the understanding of conversion at once as a renunciation from the self and the becoming of the self is, I believe, the reason why "Grace Abounding", as several scholars have noted, somehow seems so cognate to Augustine's Confessions (10). "I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity," Augustine wrote, describing the days of his conversion "I was dying a death that would bring me life" (11). Like the Confessions, 'Grace Abounding' is

about the madness that brings sanity and the death that brings life; and like Augustine, Bunyan succeeded supremely in making his reader feel that the story of his conversion is not only the story of some event in the past or of one aspect of his personality, but that of his whole being.

The deserted self

Something radical happened to Bunyan that Sunday afternoon as he was playing cat in the lane and suddenly heard the voice from heaven (paras 20-23). What happened in his mind can be described by the above mentioned picture of a man awaking from a dream: The sense of being part of a cheerful and lively interaction with other people suddenly vanished, and he realised that 'in the midst of the game at Cat' he was utterly isolated from the others, relating only to the threatening eyes in the sky. 'I counted myself alone', he would later write, for the painful sense of isolation followed Bunyan for a long time (para 87, cf para 105). Indeed, many of the events in the narrative such as his bell-ringing, his first encounter with the ladies in Bedford, his confidence to 'an ancient christian' in the congregation etc, bear in different ways evidence of the same sense of desertion. His whole process of conversion could be paraphrased (but only superficially) as a continual fight against this feeling, a fight that was finally won when he entered into the close community of the small non-conformist church in Bedford.

'The Pilgrim's Progress' begins with a similar sense of desolation: a man, removed from the city and crying out in

the wilderness; and the reader will note that Christian gets his name only then (previously he was called Graceless, PP p.38). It is here, in the wilderness, with the realisation of his own insuperable isolation, that the pilgrimage begins; and it ends with the very intimate scene where Hopeful is helping and encourageing the despairing Christian as they walk together through the river of death.

It is a simplification of this profound longing for human fellowship to claim, as Felicity Nussbaum does, that "to be converted is to be a social being" (12). Christian shows little social skill, and for the narrator in 'Grace Abounding' the sense of security and safety which he receives from the relation to other people is often deceptive. He begins to look at himself with the eyes of other people; he knows himself as he is known by the others, is alternately satisfied and displeased with himself; and insensibly he forgets about the eyes in the sky that are constantly watching him (cf paras 30-32). On the other hand, 'The Pilgrim's Progress', especially the second part, bears evidence of a close community between all true Pilgrims; and the modern reader of 'Grace Abounding' will, again and again, be impressed by the very intimate fellowship Bunyan seems to have enjoyed with his readers. The autobiography is certainly evidence that Bunyan overcame his paralyzing sense of desolation, and reached a firm belief in meaningful communication and human interaction.

Bunyan's first encounter with the poor women in Bedford and his subsequent vision show how the need of salvation was

somehow linked to his need for intimate human fellowship. This happened at the time when Bunyan as 'a poor painted hypocrite' lived the life of religious reformation.

a day, the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford, to work on my calling; and in one of the streets of that town, I came where there was three or four poor women sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God... I heard but I understood not; for they were far above my reach, for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God in their hearts.... (para 37)

And me thought they spake as if joy did make them speak... they were to me as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their Neighbours... (para 38)

The conversation between these women confronted Bunyan not only with a new message, but with a new and more sincere way of interaction. What made these poor women so appealing to Bunyan was not only the words he heard, but also, and perhaps even more, the spectacle he saw: "Three or four women sitting at a door in the Sun", "they spake as if joy did make them speak". A small intimate group of joyful people talking out of their personal experience. Being despised by this world, they seemed to be living as cheerful and confident children in "a new world" of meaningful communication.

This aspect becomes still more evident in the vision that followed shortly after Bunyan had joined these people. Evidently this vision is closely linked to his first encounter with the poor women, perhaps as a kind of theological exposition of the event.

I saw as if they [the four women or some other members of Gifford's congregation] were set on the sunny side of some high mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow

and dark clouds; methought also betwixt me and them I saw a wall that did compass about this Mountain; now thorow this wall my soul did greatly desire to pass, concluding that if I could, I would even goe to the midst of them, and there also comfort myself with the heat of their Sun.

... at last I saw as it were, a narrow gap, like a doorway in the wall, thorow which I attempted to pass: but the passage being very straight, and narrow, I made many offers to come in, but all in vain, even until I was quite beat out by striving to get in: at last, with great striving, me thought I at first did get in my head, and after that, by a side-ling striving, my shoulders, and my whole body; then I was exceedingly glad, and went and sat down in the midst of them, and so was comforted by the light and heat of their Sun. (paras 53-54)

Bunyan himself provides a detailed interpretation of the vision as signifying the hard transition from the state under God's anger to the state of grace (para. 55). In the imagery this is depicted as a transition from isolation to fellowship and from frigidity to warmth. It is significant that the contrast caused by the sun beams is not primarily that between light and darkness but between warmth and frigidity. And it is also significant that the conclusion of the vision is not his participation in their godly conversation, but simply that he "went and sat down in the midst of them". Bunyan's prolonged inner struggles were his strivings to pass through the "narrow gap" from a cold world where all communication, friendship, and love is only a glossing of the never ceasing, merciless fight for survival, to a new world of confidence and fellowship.

The conversion experience began with the sense of isolation. The feeling of being alone which was ultimately a sense of being isolated by some undefinable, personal guilt, grew big and turned into a desperate sense of being an

outcast. He was the man who had committed the one unpardonable sin. Separated and removed from the rest of the human race by his act of 'selling Christ' he had become a stranger and an enemy wherever he came, a man 'dead before Death came' (para 260). Haunted by the severe eyes in the sky that did never totally leave him since that Sunday afternoon, he was always on the run; the avenger of blood was close behind him (para 218). It was perhaps the same sense of being watched which, in the case of Richard Norwood, manifested itself as an aggressive fear of other people who looked at him, so that, in a period, he had to take his hiding by day and travel by night. (13) For Bunyan, however, not only the fellow creatures, but even the sun and the houses seemed to be reflecting the reproachful eyes in the sky:

I saw as if the Sun that shineth in the Heavens did grudge to give me light, and as if the very stones in the street, and the tiles upon the house, did bend themselves against me, methought that they all combined together to banish me out of the world. (para 187)

Bunyan realised that he himself was the problem. The young George Fox could put the blame on the ignorant clergy, but Bunyan never sought to explain his temptations in terms of the circumstances. Augustine knew the same kind of inwardness: "I have become a problem to myself, like land which a farmer works only with difficulty and at the cost of much sweat." (14) Three times Bunyan expressed the wish that he could somehow cease to be a man. (paras 104, 149, 187) "Anything but a man!" (para 149) He would envy a dog and a horse for "they had no Soul to perish under the everlasting

weights of Hell and sin, as mine was like to do." (para 104)
(15)

The leap in the dark

In this state of utter desolation Bunyan depicts himself "as a Bird that is shot from the top of a Tree..." (para 140). The sinking feeling of falling down from high or struggling in deep water was the image he most frequently used in describing this experience. The things that formerly kept him up and made him enjoy himself suddenly vanished when he felt the eyes in the sky watching him. A pat on the back, a compassionate embrace, a calming promise of friendship and love - nothing can help a man feel secure who is being watched from the sky; for he knows that he is nothing but what he appears to be in these eyes. Having lost the reassuring feeling of being part of a human community, there was no safty net streched out under him. This is the kind of life Kierkegaard depicts in the preface to 'Philosophical Fragments'.

I have only my life, and the instant a difficulty offers I put it in play. Then the dance goes merrily, for my partner is the thought of Death, and is indeed a nimble dancer. (16)

It is against this background we ought to understand why Bunyan twice in 'Grace Abounding' describes faith by the image of a leap.

I was glad to catch at that word, which yet I feared I had no ground or right to own; and even to leap into the Bossom of that Promise. (Para 249)

Again it appears that the imagery is often the most direct

way to a clear understanding of Bunyan's spirituality: While 'sinking' is a continuous process of being absorbed, a leap is an instantaneous act of disengagement; and while 'sinking' is a movement of necessity, a leap is a venture.

The other place where Bunyan uses this image is the paragraphs 335-7. Sitting in the prison many years after his conversion he suddenly becomes overwhelmed by doubts and fears as he muses on the possibility of impending death at the gallows. It comes in the very end of 'Grace Abounding'; and though Bunyan states that this happened in the beginning of his imprisonment, the powerful prose with clefted and abrupt sentences suggests that he was still under the impression of this temptation when he wrote his autobiography.

I was... so really possessed by the thought of death, that oft I was as if I was on the Ladder, with the rope about my neck...

I was bound, but he [Christ] was free: yea it was my dutie to stand to his Word, whether he would ever look upon me or no... the point being thus, I am for going on, and venturing my eternal state with Christ, whether I have comfort here or no; if God doth not come in, thought I, I will leap off the Ladder even blindfold into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; if not, I will venture for thy Name. (paras 335 & 337)

What makes this passage so compelling is the intrinsic sense of uncertainty, overcome only in the moment of decision, the leap in the dark. Objective uncertainty and inner assurance were not incompatible qualities for Bunyan. Far from being the result of some profound considerations or a new evaluation of his own state, his ultimate sense of assurance was, to use Kierkegaard's words, the result of his "daring venture of choosing the objective uncertainty with

the passion of the infinite." (17) For Bunyan, the dark into which he leaped was not some unknown land, it was the wellknown promises of the Bible about the forgiveness of sins and the sufficiency of grace; but still, he had to leap blindfold. In a moment he took off, let go the calming, but never fully reassuring, calculations of security, and in the next moment he found himself again in the "bottom of promise".

"Spiritual existence... is not easy", Kierkegaard writes in 'Stages on Life's Way',

...the believer continually lies on the deep, has 70.000 fathoms of water beneath him. However long he lies out there, this still does not mean that he will gradually end up lying and relaxing onshore. He can become more calm, more experienced, find a confidence that loves jest and a cheerful temperament -but until the very last he lies out on 70.000 fathoms of water.
(18)

NOTES

1. The Pilgrim's Progress p. 103, cf Kebble's note p.275.
2. The Life and death of Mr Badman p.169
3. ibid p.46
4. The Journal of Richard Norwood p.69
5. Quoted by Owen Watkins in 'The Puritan experience' p.9
6. Sickness unto Death p.59
7. E.D. Starbuck: The psychology of religion, quoted by Talon p.53
8. Roy Pascal: 'Design and truth in autobiography' p.97
9. Talon pp 81-82
10. Eg Robert Bell: 'Metamorphoses of Spiritual Autobiography', ELH 44 (1947); Talon pp.17-18; Sharrock: 'John Bunyan' p.58; Greaves: 'John Bunyan' p.155.

11. Augustine: Confessions book viii, para 16 (p.171)
12. Felicity A.Nussbaum: "By these words I was sustained": Bunyan's 'Grace Abounding', ELH 49 (1982) p.31
13. The Journal of Richard Norwood p.22
14. Confessions book X, para 16 (p.223)
15. Bunyan was not the only one to make this strange admission. Henry Alline, evangelical of Nova Scotia, had a similar feeling: "Often I looked at animals with a feeling of envy. I ardently wished to be in their place, so as not to have a soul to lose." (Quoted by Talon p.65n)
16. Kierkegaard: 'Philosophical Fragments' p.3
17. Kierkegaard: 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments' p.203
18. Kierkegaard: 'Stages on Life's Way' p.444

CONCLUSION

Having thus attempted to make a fresh reading of some of the most important texts relating to Bunyan's interpretation of his own conversion the result of this reading can be summed up in two points.

Firstly, to Bunyan the experience of his spiritual development was not, in any immediate sense of the word, an experience of progress. He considered his conversion to be a radical change and a completely new beginning, and yet, he would openly admit that he remained asking the same questions and struggling with the same temptations after the conversion. Though the development described in 'Grace Abounding' follows the conventional Puritan Ordo Salutis, this is not the only, perhaps not even the best, framework for an understanding of his conversion. Instead of reading Bunyan's autobiography primarily as a historical document in which we can trace the different stages of an elaborate 'way of salvation', it can be read simply as the story of 'a man clothed in rags and with a book in his hand'. The tension between Scripture and experience, subjectivity and objective truth is the starting point; and the end of the struggles is the moment when it appeared to Bunyan that Scripture fitted his experience, or perhaps rather, when his experience was of such a character that it seems to correspond to the Biblical description of a true believer. The Bible was a very powerful book for Bunyan; it was not only a book with a powerful message, but the words themselves were like mighty armies that met in his mind. In this understanding of the two

opposing works of God in Scripture, the wounding and the healing, Bunyan seems to be much indebted to Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians.

The second point is the distinction between security and assurance. In chapter two it was argued that the tragedy of Mr Badman lies in the fact that he was undisturbed and secure and that he 'enjoyed himself'; and similarly, it was argued in chapter four that one important characteristic of Bunyan's heroes is that they escape this world of security and complacency. While Mr Badman became an actor on the stage, continually constructing himself in different roles to please his fellow creatures, Christian and the narrator of 'Grace Abounding' would only acknowledge one spectator to their lives. The fundamental difference between the security of Mr Badman and the assurance of Christian lies in this awareness of being a pilgrim, accountable to God.

No Lyon can him fright,
He'l with a giant Fight,
But he will have a right,
To be a Pilgrim.

(PP p.247)

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