



## Jornades de Foment de la Investigació

# **THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: ALL IS VANITY**

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This paper wants to demonstrate that the allegorical journey of Christian in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an exemplification of the principles observed throughout "The Book of Ecclesiastes." Thus, in my opinion, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an extension of the Ecclesiastes "vanity of vanities; all is vanity." (1990, 1.1-2). In other words, both works find the life in Earth vain and meaningless and will try to find a higher meaning in God. This process is seen as a journey, which is both mental and physical, i.e., man has to undergo an inner conversion at the same time he goes through a series of steps in order to experience that conversion.

Before explaining the similarities between these two processes of knowledge, I will centre on the meaning of the word **ALLEGORY**, a concept paramount to this paper.

Northop Frye has defined allegory as "a special form of analogy, a technique of paralleling metaphorical with conceptual language in which the latter has the primary authority." (1992:10)

Frye also relates the concept of allegory to that of myth by stating that "allegory is normally a story-myth that finds its true meaning in a conceptual or argumentative translation." (1992:85) Therefore, allegory implies a relationship between two areas or faces, a surface level or a literal level and a level corresponding to the implied meaning the literal text gives us.

The book we are analysing deals with Christian, a man who decides to start a pilgrimage in order to reach "the Holy City." However, this physical journey involves an inner mental journey. Christian transforms his own self so as to become one of those **elected by God**. In other words, he is going to leave this world's misery for "life, life, eternal life." (1994:13)

Thus, allegory would be the means of relating two areas of knowledge: the literal meaning-the physical journey- and the allegorical meaning-the inner journey. As Gabel (2000) names it as a kind of device used to relate these two areas of meaning.

Nevertheless, we could ask ourselves why is allegory necessary in order to portrait this "inner journey" or conversion? A good explanation with which I quite agree is that given by Frye (1992), according to him those principles in the OT were not longer understood by Bunyan's readers and had to be explained in another way called allegory.

After introducing the concepts of allegory and our aims in this work, i.e., to demonstrate that the truths expressed throughout the "Book of Ecclesiastes" are developed allegorically in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we will begin contrasting both works in order to demonstrate it.

At the beginning of "The Ecclesiastes" it is stressed the meaningless, vain life man leads on Earth, "what profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun." (1990, 1; 1. 3-4) In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian discovers that he lives in "The City of Destruction". Moreover it "will be burned with fire from Heaven" (1987:11) Then the reaction of Christian before all this is similar to that expressed in the book of "The Ecclesiastes": "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." (1990 )

Later, a man called Evangelist appears to him and gives him a paper roll with the following words written in it: "fly from the wrath to come." (1987:12) Evangelist is a character, which etymologically means "the one bringing good news". Thus, allegorically this character stands for "life, life, eternal life" (1987:13). Then, we appreciate that allegory is not just reduced to the level of the journey but also to the naming of characters, so Christian is called in that way because he represents the ideal "Christian".

After his first meeting with Evangelist, Christian will begin a journey at the end of which he hopes to find a new life as a converted "Christian". Nevertheless, this journey will not be an

easier enterprise, Christian will find certain obstacles or enemies which at the allegorical level represent his religious doubts.

Apart from the obstacles and the character's names, one of the main allegories in the work is the "burden" Christian carries over his shoulders. This weight is not only a physical one but also the weight of Christian's sins, which will make his journey even more difficult of what it actually is. This is clearly appreciated throughout the book of "The Ecclesiastes" where is constantly stressed that the way to salvation is a steep one full of "travails".

The first obstacle found by Christian is "The Slough of Despond". Christian falls into a miry well into which he begins to sink quickly due to the burden he carries over his back. This physical danger is allegorically:

The descent wither the scum and filth continually run, and therefore is it called the Slough of Despond: for still as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place, and this is the reason of the badness of the ground. ( 1987:17)

Therefore, a physical place which is in itself a peril, "a miry well" is an allegorical representation of Christian's doubts, fear or faithlessness. In the book of "The Ecclesiastes" this is also seen: "therefore I went about to cause my heart to despise of all the labour which I took under the sun"(1990; 2, 1. 20)

After a man called Help takes him out of the well, Christian arrives to "the House of the Interpreter". There he becomes acquainted with the glory of the world to come and the vanity of this world: "the glory of the next world will never wear out; but these are suddenly gone."(1987:30) This is a rephrasing of the Ecclesiastes: "vanity of vanities."

Once Christian leaves "The House of The Interpreter" he becomes a new man. So, one day he arrived to a place and "upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below in the bottom, a sepulchre (...) his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back."(1987: 35) This nicely embroidered image of the forgiveness of Christian's sins brings to our minds the death of Christ in the Cross and the fact that one's sacrifice can redeem the rest of mankind.

Nevertheless, this is not the end of Christian's plights but just the beginning of them. Once converted, Christian's faith will be tested through a series of perils or obstacles.

Shortly after, the first difficulty appears, "the hill of difficulty." Christian has to climb up this hill in order to go on with his journey. Nevertheless, the way is steep and difficult. Moreover, two easier ways exist though they lead to danger and destruction. This is again an example of the Ecclesiastes' idea that the way to salvation is not an easy one, but narrow and difficult.

After the "hill of difficulty", Christian will have to cross two valleys: "The Valley of Humiliation" and "The Valley of the Shadow of the Death".

Barely has Christian entered the first valley when a "foul enemy" comes to greet him. He is Apollyon who "had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was the mouth of a lion."(1987:51) Apollyon is the counterpart to God in the sense that as God rules over angels, Apollyon rules over demons. Moreover, he is the reincarnation of every sin.

Apollyon, etymologically, means "destroyer." He tries to tempt Christian in order that he might leave God and turn into one of his subjects. Christian will reject this and a cruel and hard battle will take place between both of them. The battle is won by Christian with the help of God.

The next peril is “The Valley of the Shadow of the Death”. Christian has to cross the valley completely in darkness and moreover he will be tempted by some hell-like voices. As darkness surrounds him, he does not know where he is going to. Nevertheless, once the day breaks all doubts are unveiled. This is another biblical image related to the creation of the Earth in which God divided days and nights by separating light and darkness.

Later, Christian will meet Faithful who will go with him in his pilgrimage until they arrive to “Vanity Fair.” This fair is placed in a town called “Vanity” “because the town where ‘tis kept is lighter than vanity; and also, because all there is sold, or that cometh thither is vanity.”(1987:78). Thus, if the reader has not clearly understood that life in Earth is meaningless, as the Ecclesiastes says, the naming “Vanity” makes a direct reference to “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”(1990;1, 1.2.)

Christian and Faithful are not given a hearty welcome to the town because their beliefs in a better life than the vanity of this world goes against their concept of life. A trial will be held in which both are convicted and Faithful will be tormented in a way that he will die.

However, Christian will be able to escape and will find a new companion, Hopeful, and old inhabitant of vanity who after watching Faithful’s torment will experience conversion. Both of them will be trapped by Giant Despair who lives in Doubting Castle. There, they will be inflicted several punishment in order to kill themselves. When all hope is lost, Christian discovers “I have a key in my bosom called promise, that will open any lock in Doubting Castle.”(1987:103)

Once the last obstacle is passed, they arrive to the “Delectable Mountains” where some shepherds show them the gates of “The Celestial City”. Therefore, they will finally get the so longed for “Heaven” after all the obstacles, doubts and plights they have endured.

So as to conclude, it might be said that the allegories in the Pilgrim’s progress stand for Christian’s religious doubts, mainly his moments of faithlessness which are represented by dangerous places or by fiery enemies. However, those believing in God can solve the obstacles. All this demonstrates the connexion between Bunyan’s work and the principles set up by the Ecclesiastes summed up in that the next world is everlasting whereas this world is meaningless, vexing and vain.

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