Wayfaring and Warfaring: Bunyan's Images of the Holy Life

by U. Milo Kaufmann

English Puritanism of the 17th century, especially as it found expression in the memorable allegories of John Bunyan, was ever careful to keep in the foreground of the Christian awareness two features of the holy life. One, holy living is necessarily and inescapably dynamic, to be imaged either as wayfaring or warfaring, with no attainment so final or so secure that vigilance and effort are not required to the end. Two, holy living is inseparable from moral earnestness, though morality must always be related descriptively rather than prescriptively to the Christian's practice in his pursuit of holiness. To prescribe morality is to become mired in legalism and a religion of works. But to describe any Christian's actual practice is to register the realities of moral earnestness as the believer responds in loving obedience to the holy God who calls him. "Nor can that man be esteemed holy," Bunyan declares, "whose life is tainted with immoralities, let him be what he can in all things else."[1]

In these pages I purpose to look briefly at two allegories by Bunyan which set forth the inescapable metaphors for this understanding of holiness and its relationship with morality: *The Pilgrim's Progress* of 1678 (Part Two, 1684), and *The Holy War,* published in 1682. Neither holy way nor holy war is a perfect metaphor for the Christian life, of course, but as we set these two works side by side, we shall be noticing how the two metaphors complement and reinforce one another.

We can be in no doubt that despite a judicious Calvinism which reserved true holiness to God and to those persons to whom God imputed holiness by Christ's merits (divorcing it from object, place,

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and ritual), Bunyan yet insists that the Christian life is a perpetual responding to the call to holiness.

So in *The Pilgrim's Progress,* when Christian encounters Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, Apollyon roars "I am come out on purpose to withstand thee," but Christian replies, "*Apollyon,* beware what you do, for I am in the Kings High-way, the way of Holiness."[2] A mighty battle ensues in which Christian is wounded, though he succeeds in putting Apollyon to flight. Bunyan is careful to add that it was only for a season that Christian would not see his adversary. This way of holiness which Christian travels is plainly one beset with grievous opposition from beginning to end.

In the case of the second allegory, one scarcely needs go beyond the title to glimpse the dynamics of the holy life. The full title runs: *The Holy War made by Shaddai upon Diabolus, for the regaining of the Metropolis of the World. Or, the Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul.* While the title may imply that all the dynamics of the story stem from supernatural agency, the truth is far otherwise. The "Holy" warfare is Mansoul's unceasing struggle for utter integrity under the rule of God. And the warfare itself is holy, even as the way to Heaven is holy for Christian and the other true pilgrims. Though no earthly place is holy for the thoroughly Reformed conscience, the processes of wayfaring and warfaring seem naturally to attract that epithet in Bunyan's descriptions.

Now we shall have a useful framework for understanding John Bunyan's contribution, by way of allegory, to the description of the holy life if we take a moment to outline the consequences which flow from the crucial claim that God is himself righteous. The claim is disputed by a host of metaphysicians and the preponderance of apologists in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism who argue that if God, or the Absolute, is infinite, He must transcend even the limits of good and of evil — so much so that evil is no better a clue to His absolute nature than is good. Alan Watts nicely sums up the Christian position, even though he goes on to condemn it for its philosophical asymmetry:

> Beauty has seemed a deceptive attribute, shared alike by God and Satan, who also knows the truth — and trembles. What belongs essentially and exclusively to God is inflexible righteousness, and historical Christianity simply has not tolerated any notion of God as an Absolute "beyond good

> and evil." Thus the Being of being, the Ultimate Reality, has — for the Christian mentality — a definite character, a specific and particular will, such that goodness does not exist merely in relation to evil but is, from everlasting, the very essence of God.[3]

Watts continues, in a note of mordant irony, that this conception is both "monstrous and sinister." It represents "the crucial point at which historical Christianity is 'aberrant.'" And by aberrant Watts seems to mean deviating from the perennial philosophy. Yet surely Christian orthodoxy can never abandon this stand. To claim that God is righteous is to say that all goods in human experience are better clues to His nature than are the evils, that love is a more perfect symbol of the vast depths of His nature than is hate, that justice is rooted in something more enduring than the convenience of human societies.

The glorious truth may well be, indeed must be, that the timeless, infinite, and non-relative are no more absolute than are the realities of time, form, relationship and morality. In a capsule, Christian faith has always absolutized the relative in affirming the finality of loving community and of communion between God and man. The old metaphors of Earth's marriage to Heaven, rooted of course in the central fact of Incarnation, point up this enduring claim. To say that God became flesh in Jesus Christ is to forever raise the relative to ultimacy.

But let us return to the crucial claim for God's righteousness. This "eccentricity" in God, this "relativity" — that He should be right and not left, good and not evil, light with no darkness at all — while it props up every precious human value, creates at once a formidable problem for the religious life. For plainly, if God is righteous, His worshippers must be righteous too, else He cannot enjoy their presence and fellowship. The apparently inescapable first impulse of man, wherever and whenever the righteousness of God is glimpsed, is to decry his own unrighteousness (cf. Isaiah in the temple), to want to be left alone by such a righteous God, and — alas for the agelong repetitiveness of this next blunder — to attempt to correct the asymmetry by adopting strict moral and devotional requirements for oneself. The worshipper must make himself good somehow. Failing at that, he must have propitiating sacrifices.

This impasse, we understand, was centrally addressed in human

history by the Incarnation. Men and women observed a truly good life being lived before their eyes — a life of profound moral earnestness, justice, and obedience to the divine will. What's more, they heard from the lips of Jesus that the Father, whose perfection they were to seek for themselves, expected no man to *earn* his favor with God. That favor was already extended, only to be accepted in repentance and in faith for new life.

I have taken this much space to review what for many must be utterly familiar, because I want to be certain that the reader appreciates the challenge which Bunyan, or any Christian allegorist, confronts in imaging the holy life. That life is by nature a moral one, since God is by nature righteous; furthermore it is moral because moral will is being exercised. But the artist must ever guard himself against mistating the paradox. *For morality is both absolutely central, and absolutely peripheral to holiness.* One must be righteous, for God is. Yet one's righteousness effects nothing.

With such caution in mind, we may turn to image and meaning in Bunyan's greatest allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

At the beginning of Bunyan's century, the primary meaning for the noun "progress" was a journey, especially through the countryside, such as the King or Queen might make to some nobleman's estate in the shire. It carried no denotation of advance. The dramatic shift to its present primary sense, of improvement and upward movement, was doubtless much helped by the entire drift of Bunyan's allegory.

For Christian's pilgrimage is *par excellence* a progress. It is unlike that primary pattern of romance, the quest-myth, in which the hero goes in quest, finds (or fails to find), and returns. This primary pattern is well summed up in the subtitle of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy *The Hobbit* — viz., *There and Back Again.* This is the motif of Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea, Moby Dick,* and indeed the sage of Jacob-Israel, who leaves the Promised Land for Egypt, only to return again, by great pain and effort in the person of his descendents.

This is the pointed motif of the ten Oxherding Pictures of Chinese Buddhism, which portray a boy or man searching for his lost ox through a multitude of landscapes, only to find the object of his quest upon his return home. This is, moreover, the motif of the Gnostic, and Neo-Platonic system, which describe creation an emanation, with the eternal soul's descending into dark matter, and returning again to its source.

All such plots have a transparent symmetry about them: trip out, trip back; descent, ascent; loss, recovery. One ends where he began. Historically, it has been easy for such plots to represent a zero-sum conclusion. One ends with no more and no less than what he began with. Ascent cancels descent. Recovery cancels loss.

This is, however, most emphatically not the shape of Christian's pilgrimage. The pilgrim gains a heaven he never had. Even if one supposes that all men had, in the person of Adam, enjoyed the Paradise of Eden, Heaven is yet far more than what any earthly paradise offers.

Christian's journey, then, is a positive vector. It is unidirectional, and if not strictly irreversible, at least in fact unreversed. He does not end where he began. His home in the City of Destruction he left, never to return. Indeed, to return would have been the cancellation of all the positive values of his wayfaring.

This journeying is patently asymmetrical. No compensating return balances the trip out. The Christian cannot, in Thomas Wolfe's phrase, ever "go home again." Nor does he want to, since his true home represents a fulness of reality he has not hitherto known.

Now it takes no great imagination to see that the blessed asymmetry of such a true "progress" is the perfect vehicle of a vision of Christian life as *moral* career. For the moral life is also asymmetrical. It stresses exclusions; every authentic moral decision implies a cutting away (the root of *decision* being the same Latin stem which *incision* and *excision* show). The moral life is not all-inclusive. It is not 'ambidextrous'. It does not struggle to balance every ray with a shadow, as the aesthetic vision often undertakes to do.

And, of course, this moral construction of the holy life which is Christian pilgrimage, Bunyan is quick to stress at every point. One of Christian's companions for a time is one Talkative, a prattler who is all talk and imaginings. In discussing him with Christian, Faithful observes (with the sort of ingenious biblical exposition of Old Scripture much loved by Puritans):

> The Hare cheweth the Cud, but yet is unclean, because he parteth not the Hoof. And this truly resembleth *Talkative*; he cheweth the Cud, he seeking knowledge, he cheweth upon the Word, but he divideth not the Hoof, he parteth not with the way of sinners; but as the Hare he retaineth the foot of a Dog, or Bear, and therefore he is unclean.[4]

Christian had a moment earlier pointed out that "The Soul of Religion is the practick part." And after his witty exegesis, Faithful adds:

> There is therefore knowledge, and knowledge. Knowledge that resteth in the bare speculation of things, and knowledge that is accompanied with the grace and faith of love, which puts a man upon doing even the will of God from the heart. (p. 82)

Talkative, of course, is disgusted with it all and we surmise that at some point he will abort his pilgrimage.

No reader is surprised to find that at the end of his journey, Christian finds this in letters of gold over the gate to Celestial City: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life; and may enter in through the Gates into the City" (p. 161). Christian and Hopeful enter together, for Heaven's King had commanded the gate to be opened "That the righteous Nation . . . that keepeth Truth may enter in."

The moral earnestness of this all is obvious. For Bunyan, clearly, holy wayfaring is a matter of personal righteousness, or personal right-doing.

It is further noteworthy that as *The Pilgrim's Progress* portrays the holy life, neither election nor moral activity by itself is adequate. The two are inseparable. The folly of imagining that the elect man will make it to the end of the Highway of Holiness without in fact making difficult moral decisions and winning skirmishes all along the way — he must advance; he dare not tarry or move back — is one with the folly of those of Bunyan's wayfarers who travel all or part of the road, making, we must suppose, at least some moral choices along the way, but never beginning with God in election.

When well along in the story the two interlopers, Formalist and Hypocrisy, come tumbling onto the way near Christian and Hopeful, a debate ensues in which the true pilgrims argue with the false ones whether in fact the latter are upon the way. The interlopers make bold: "If we are in, we are in: thou art but in the way, who, as we perceive, came in at the Gate; and we are also in the way that came tumbling over the wall: Wherein now is thy condition better than ours." (p. 40)

This is a fair question, to which Christian replies, "I walk by the

Rule of my Master, you walk by the rude working of your fancies." In due time, they all come to the hill Difficulty. One false pilgrim takes the sideroad called Danger, and the other, one called Destruction, which leads him into a "wide field full of dark Mountains, where he stumbled and fell, and rose no more." (p. 42)

This is the end of those who have no true calling from Christ, who have not repented and truly believed, and whose moral choosing — implied in the names Formalist and Hypocrisy — are not equal to the challenge of the way of Holiness. The most dramatic and summary version of this truth is to be seen in the case of one poor fool named Ignorance who in fact takes the Pilgrim's way to the very end, crossing the River of Death at the same ford where Christian does. But the City's King will not come down to welcome Ignorance, and we learn in the last paragraph of Part One that the angels descend, bind Ingorance hand and foot, and carry him to the door which opens in the side of Heaven's Mount. "Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of *Destruction.*" (p. 163)

Ignorance, of course, represents one of those who never knew Christ, though he had the language right and must have made a thousand proper moral choices to get as far as he did.

Then there is Atheist. This boisterous fool meets Christian and Hopeful after they have enjoyed a prospect of Heaven from the peaks of the Delectable Mountains. Atheist is in fact going the wrong way on Heaven's road and heading back to the City of Destruction. He assures the travelers there is no Mount Zion, though they have just glimpsed it.

All these spurious pilgrims have in common the lack of true calling from Christ — election — and hence of repentance and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, however fully they make the moral choices which keep them in the company of true pilgrims

One must choose to stay in the way, not leaving it for ease of diversion as the pilgrims do in crossing By-Path Meadow and so ending in Doubting Castle. One must choose to fight every evil along the way. The wayfaring is also warfaring. So often as new evils appear — giant, flatterer, alluring siren, wild beast — one must do battle.

Yet in authentic pilgrimage the morality of right choice must be the response to the divine call or election. Bunyan is expert in keeping before his reader the truth that without the action of God all the

seeming conformity of the wayfarer to the way of Holiness, all the morality which can so ingeniously ape holiness, is as pointless and tragic as the pilgrimage of Ignorance, or as absurd as the "Halfway There and Back Again" quest of Atheist. (N.B. The journey of Atheist, like those of the early wayfarers Pliable and Obstinate, represents just that sort of "Zero-Sum" quest discussed above.)

In the imaging of the holy life, Bunyan's *The Holy War* is an apt complement to *The Pilgrim's Progress.* For while the latter places the pilgrims in 'an ever-changing' landscape with all adversaries external to the traveller, *The Holy War* identifies the human soul with landscape so that the enemies *within* the self may be presented in careful detail. In a work which is now, it is feared, little read, Bunyan is able to make winsome, and at points compelling, a vision of the holy life as the self undergoing lifelong integration.

This allegory pictures the condition of the city Mansoul after it is taken captive by Diabolus. Shaddai makes a counterattack, and through the efforts of His son Emmanuel, regains the city. Emmanuel lives in the city for a time, but its residents begin to slight him, and the Diabolians who have remained unnoticed all the time within the city walls gradually reassert their influence, with the result that Mansoul falls once again to Diabolus. Prince Emmanuel returns and recovers his charge. The traitors are judged and condemned, and a clear promise is extended that soon Mansoul will be rebuilt.

Perhaps the most impressive truth that emerges from the allegory is that the Christian's safety lies in the indwelling Christ, Emmanuel. He it is who will live within, undertaking in His grace and energy to live out the moral life's demands, as the Christian wills His will. In *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659) Bunyan had said:

> They that are in this Covenant are in a very happy state; for though there be several conditions in the Gospell to be done, yet Christ Jesus doth not look that they should be done by man, as man, but by his own Spirit in them, as it is written, *Thou hast wrought all our works in us and for us.*[5]

This is not the whole of the matter, even so, for another divine gift is an altered human will: "So also by vertue of this Covenant, we have another nature given unto us. Whereby, or by which we are made willing to be glorifying of God both in our bodies and in our spirits,

which are his."[6] (pp. 165-166) The nerve of this regenerate nature is the new love of God. Holiness and morality become altogether *relational.*

So, after Emmanuel's first conquest of city Mansoul, the residents come out to entreat him to "please his Grace to come unto Mansoul with his men, and there to take up their quarters for ever."[7] (p. 126) They are only too aware that if "now after all this grace bestowed upon us thy miserable town of Mansoul, thou shouldest withdraw, thou, and thy captains from us, the town of Mansoul will die." (p. 127)

Here, in a few phrases, is presented the touchstone of Holiness, and its adjunct morality. One's love for Emmanuel entails the moral life. True morality is ever the result, never the cause of holiness, and only through the beloved Emmanuel and His Spirit can the inner adversaries finally be overcome.

After Emmanuel does move in, he is careful to instruct the residents of their continuing responsibilities. The town yet conceals resistant elements: "I am now sure, and you will know hereafter that there are yet of the Diabolonians remaining in the town of Mansoul that are sturdy and implacable . . ." (p. 163). They are not to be utterly extirpated, "unless you should pull down the walls of your town, the which I am by no means willing you should." What is the necessary course of action, then? "Why, be diligent, and quit you like men; observe their holds, find out their haunts, assault them, and make no peace with them" (p. 164). And the three redoubtable captains who will best serve Mansoul in the continuing conflict are Lord Mayor, Lord Willbewill, and Mr. Recorder. The first of these, Lord Mayor, is the Holy Spirit, "a person of no less quality and dignity" than the Father. The third is Conscience.

But Lord Willbewill is the one to notice here. His name is, one surmises, a shortened form of the hortatory "Let will be will." That is, let will do what will can. In contrast to the ever popular *"Que sera, sera,"* or what will be will be, Willbewill points up man's freedom to act out of love to Emmanuel and to deal boldly with the Diabolonians yet in Mansoul, and so achieve lasting peace.

So Bunyan delineates in the allegory of *The Holy War* the indispensably relational cast of the holy life. God may choose His own but it is only as man responds in love that God is pleased to maintain His dwelling within the believer. The agony of Mansoul's long second occupation by Diabolus in the story is Bunyan's

instructive warning against a conception of the Christian life as so static that will has no continuing role, and against that shallow notion of morality which overlooks the profundity of man's residual sin. Emmanuel's exhortations to Mansoul, while pointed in their acknowledgment of the adversaries yet within, make His presence in Mansoul contingent not upon their total extirpation in life, but upon the continuing intent to love and to obey Shaddai's great prince.

In wayfaring and warfaring, then, we have two inevitable and complementary metaphors for the holy life. Such a life is righteous, with all the asymmetry which pilgrimage so well represents, but righteousness is never attributable to man outside of his relationship to God and the divine calling. Holy way and Holy war — both describe a sanctifying process which for Bunyan is lifelong, with final results too glorious even for the storyteller's art to more than hint.

Footnotes

[1]This is cited from Bunyan's *A Holy Life the Beauty of Christianity: or, an Exhortation to Christians to be Holy,* first published in 1684, the year also of the publication of Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Bunyan's 19th century editor the Rev. Mr. George Offor found it to be the most searching treatise on the subject he had ever encountered. In Offor's edition the passage quoted appears in *Works* (London: Blackie and Son, 1856), vol. II, p. 503.

[2]*The Pilgrim's Progress* ed. James Blanton Wharey. Second Edition revised by Roger Sharrock (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 59.

[3]*Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 45.

[4]*The Pilgrim's Progress,* p. 80. All further references to this work will be included parenthetically in the text.

[5]*The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659) ed. Richard L. Greaves in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan* under the general editorship of Roger Sharrock, vol. II, p. 165. This volume, which includes also *I will pray with the Spirit,* was published at the Oxford Clarendon Press in 1976.

[6]Bunyan, *Doctrine of the Law,* pp. 165-166.

[7]*The Holy War* ed. James F. Forrest (New York University Press, 1967), p. 126. Further references will be included in the text.