

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

'HERE IS HER GLORY, EVEN TO BE UNDER HIM'

The Feminine in the Thought and Work of John Bunyan

'Upon a day' in the late 1640s or early 1650s,(1) when Bunyan found himself in Bedford, it happened that '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'.(2) This is an incident apparently inconsequential and unimportant. The encounter is introduced in a casual, off-hand way ('upon a day'). The meeting is by-the-by, incidental to Bunyan's business in Bedford: he was there 'to work at my calling' as a tinker. It was accidental: Bunyan is in no particular part of the town but merely passing along, on his way to his destination, what might equally well have been any other street in Bedford. And it was obviously not an encounter which mattered very much: these were only 'three or four poor women' sitting idly about when good citizens such as Bunyan were busy with their affairs. The lack of detail - no date, street name, description or identification(3) of the women whose very number is uncertain - conveys just that inattentiveness which characterizes workaday lives. These things do not deserve to be noticed.

The reader has, of course, been misled by Bunyan's text as Bunyan was himself misled that day. Trauma, disorientation and revelation wait in this street:

I drew near to hear what they said; for I was now a brisk talker also my self in the matters of Religion: but now I may say, *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 on their hearts... And me thought they spake as if joy did make them speak; they spake with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world, as if they were a people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their Neighbours, Num.23.9. At this I felt my own heart begin to shake, as mistrusting my condition to be naught; for I saw that in all my thoughts about Religion and Salvation, the New birth did never enter into my mind... (GA, §§ 37-9).

This is, literally, a revolutionary moment. Those so insignificant as not even to deserve naming enjoy, it now appears, modes of perception, levels of understanding and degrees of experience quite beyond the narrator's attainment. Whereas, at the beginning of the passage, the group had been introduced by the side of, and apart from, the protagonist's way, Bunyan is, at the close of the passage, left isolated and excluded from them, a 'people that dwelt alone', identified, by the allusion to Numbers, as God's chosen. Of course, such poor women as these might very well not be reckoned amongst one's neighbours; but it is a very different thing to find one is not fit to be reckoned - amongst theirs. The location which was peripheral and the people who were marginal have become central, the first-person narrator disconcertingly displaced by third-person nonentities. Nor do

these women, who ought to be in desperate need, show much awareness, sitting in the sun and talking with joy, of their impoverishment and dependence. Those defined initially by their lack, their want, their poverty in comparison with the narrator, are defined finally by possession, possession of a 'new world' beyond the narrator's means to acquire. No wonder Bunyan is left 'mistrusting my condition to be naught', for, if poverty be not poor, what price possession?

This sudden and bewildering sense of sinful exclusion from grace - most keenly caught in the later transformation of this meeting into the 'Vision' of the 'poor people of Bedford' 'on the Sunny side of some high Mountain' (GA, §§ 53-4) - involves other inversions. The Bunyan who had hitherto been a 'brisk talker' is dumbfounded, reduced to silence. For all his loquacity, he cannot participate in this conversation. These ignorant women (for, being poor, they certainly are, and probably illiterate(4)) are possessed of a language beyond Bunyan's comprehension: '*I heard, but I understood not*: for they were far above my reach'. Where did they learn their 'pleasantness of Scripture language'? Not at school: theirs is the fluency not of rhetoric, of tropes and schemes, but of experience, the experience of grace ('they spake... with such appearances of grace in all they said'). Thus qualified, they became Bunyan's instructors and teachers:

I left them and went about my employment again: but their talk and discourse went with me, also my heart would tarry with them, for I was greatly affected by their words, both because by them I was convinced that I wanted the true tokens of a truly godly man, and also because by them I was convinced of the happy and blessed condition of him that was such a one. (GA, § 40)

Bunyan, reduced to silence, to passivity, no longer the centre of attention 'mighty well' pleased with his reputation (GA, §§ 31-2) but an onlooker, has heard a crucially awakening sermon: and those who have assumed the dominant role of preachers to him are women. Of the many reversals in this episode, this reversal of gender roles is perhaps the most striking.

Down that Bedford street, then, Bunyan found a world turned upside down. Those words from Acts 17.7, themselves recalling Psalm 146.9 and Isaiah 24.1-2, supply the title to our most influential account of the radical and enthusiastic culture of the 1640s and 1650s,(5) and Bunyan's experience that day may be understood as an encounter with the revolutionary temper of the Interregnum times as described by Christopher Hill - egalitarian, anti-intellectual, 'experimental' (or 'experiential'), Dr Hill has himself shown(6) that many of its emphases became Bunyan's. His work is demotic in its dialectal forms, subversive in its suspicion of the gentry and the episcopal clergy, enthusiastic in its repudiation of learning(7) and radical in its evangelical commitment to the socially underprivileged. Rebuked at his trial for his audacity in explicating Scripture when ignorant of Greek, and taunted that only 'a company of foolish people', 'poor simple ignorant people' heeded him, Bunyan replied in language which was

now as incomprehensible to his examiners as it had previously been to Bunyan himself that day in Bedford:

if... none could understand the Scriptures, but those that had the original Greek, &c. then but a very few of the poorest sort should be saved, (this is harsh) yet the Scripture saith, *That God hides his things from the wise and prudent*, (that is from the learned of the world) *and reveals them to babes and sucklings...* God had rejected the wise, and mighty and noble, and chosen the foolish and base... it was the duty of people, (both rich and poor) to look out for their souls... (GA, p.111)

To the authorities, nervous after Thomas Venner's Fifth Monarchist uprising,(8) this was language indistinguishable from the language of sedition and insurrection (cf. GA, p.120).

One thrust in Bunyan's writings was, then, towards the liberation of those constrained and deprived by traditional authorities, conventions and institutions. His distrust of hierarchy, the 'vulgar' and 'seditious' aspects of his writing, are part of his debt to Interregnum Puritanism, and, ultimately, to those 'poor women' of Bedford. Since Keith Thomas's pioneering article,(9) we have known that the egalitarianism of Interregnum radicals and enthusiasts was associated with a move towards sexual equality, and subsequent studies have confirmed the significant part played by women in the life of the Civil War and Interregnum sects.(10) In the Bedford church Bunyan himself joined, two-thirds of the members were women.(11) They would include his second wife, Elizabeth. When, in August 1661, she petitioned for her husband's release, the judges heard from her just such potentially seditious sentiments as they had reproved in her husband: 'he is a Tinker, and a poor man; therefore he is despised, and cannot have justice' (GA, p.128). Her bearing was recorded by Bunyan (12) and it has been suggested that it is Elizabeth's 'strength of character' which he represented in Christiana.(13) In this strength of character Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress* originates. Part II has a greater interest than Part I in the corporate life of a gathered church, in supportive fellowship and pastoral care,(14) but the company through which these concerns are explored is brought into being by a woman's resolution. Furthermore, the crucial decisions in Part II are made by women separate from men: Christiana is a widow and Mercie, unmarried, is not in her father's care. The text's insistence on women's capacity independently to seek salvation seems to be entertaining that enlargement of woman's place which had become a revolutionary possibility during the Interregnum. Might Bunyan owe to those 'poor women' of Bedford and to radical Puritanism not only a general commitment to the underprivileged but more particularly what we would recognise as feminist sympathies? Is patriarchy, perhaps, one of the giants to be slain on the way to the Celestial City?

The opening pages of Part II suggest that it might be, for they insist less upon the isolation of Christiana and Mercie in their separation from men than upon the positive spiritual and emotional benefits of exclusively female friendship and company, on, as it were, the self-sufficiency of the feminine. Mercie has a 'two-fold reason' not

to share in Mrs Timorous's reviling of Christiana's decision to go on pilgrimage. The second is that 'her Bowels yearned over her own Soul', but the first is that 'her Bowels yearned over *Christiana*'. (15) Her affection for Christiana is given precedence. Friendship between women can no less serve as a means of grace than the love for a husband which draws Christiana. (16) Mercie herself doubts that such natural affection can constitute a true call, but she is later reassured by the Interpreter, that she is like *Ruth*, who did for the love that she bore to *Naomi*, and to the Lord her God, leave Father and Mother, and the land of her Nativity to come out, and go with a People that she knew not heretofore' (PP, pp.206-7). And this bond of friendship is reciprocal. Christiana's joy at Mercie's decision is first joy 'that she had a Companion' and only then that 'she had prevailed with this poor Maid to fall in love with her own Salvation' (PP, p.186). One means she had used to persuade Mercie was to propose to hire her 'as my servant'. Some such role would be necessary for a young, single woman making a journey, but the relationship between the two women is not that of employer and employee, superior and inferior: 'Yet we will have all things in common betwixt thee and me, only go along with me' (PP, p.185); 'Thou shalt be a sharer in all the good that I have, because thou so willingly didst become my Companion' (PP, p.217). It is in friendship between two women that the communal and co-operative ideal of the New Testament church (Acts 1.44-5; 4. 32) finds its fitting image.

This shared and sharing commitment of faith enables Christiana and Mercie to take a step whose impropriety is an affront to the received notion of gender roles. The prolonged 'conversation which detains Christiana from departure underlines the unconventional assertiveness of her determination to depart. Mrs Timorous puts to Christiana the very sensible reflection that if Christian 'tho' a man, was so hard put to it, what canst thou being but a poor Woman do?' (PP, p.182). She is imploring Christiana to behave like a woman, insisting that tasks which tax a man must be quite beyond her. The received view of feminine weakness and incapacity leaves Mrs Timorous in no doubt that Christiana's enterprise is doomed: she will but '*cast away*' herself (PP, p.183). And Christiana's self-destructive refusal to recognise the limitations placed upon her is, precisely, '*unwomanly*' (PP, p.181): women stay safe at home. Yet the text rejects Mrs Timorous's commonsense: 'tempt me not, my Neighbour' (PP, p.183) is Christiana's reply. This startling identification of Mrs Timorous as Satan's agent and of her patriarchal arguments as temptations disconcertingly presents woman's weakness not as naturally womanly but as a cloak for spiritual sloth and carnal self-interest. It is not the temerity with which Christiana leaves behind the docility and passivity of the feminine gender role (17) but Mrs Timorous's adherence to that role which is condemned by the text.

The oft-made comment that Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress* lacks the intensity and drama of Part I, and so is inferior to it, (18) misses the way the text foregrounds the boldness and audacity of what Christiana and Mercie are about. 'Come let us venture' (PP, p.187) says Mercie at the Slough of Despond: they are upon an adventure, (19) an adventure which requires them to make the most of their own resources and which demands of them not submissive

self-negation but self-assertion. At the Gate, 'Mercie did stand without, trembling and crying for fear that she was rejected' (PP, p.189). Such timidity is not recommended as a becoming female trait. On the contrary, it is disabling: 'Courage' (PP, p.191) is demanded of Mercie, the courage herself to knock, which she does so loudly as to startle those within (PP, pp.189-90), but the Keeper of the Gate '*When he heard your lumbring noise, he gave a wonderful Innocent smile. I believe what you did pleas'd him well enough*' (PP, p.192). This is, of course, an allegory of the effectiveness of prayer, but the vehicle of that allegory remains a woman whose refusal to be ignored wins approval. And Mercie is sufficiently independent to put off Mr Brisk, undaunted by the prospect of becoming an Old Maid (PP, pp.226-8). '*I might a had Husbands afore now*', but their inadequacies are such '*I am for none of them all*' (PP, p.228). This, it seems, is an adventure a woman can face alone.

The sustained defence of women made by the innkeeper Gaius thus takes its place within a text which apparently seeks to enable, rather than disable, women. His speech, 'on behalf of Women, to take away their Reproach' (PP, p.261), is a direct retort to the misogyny which would brand all women with the culpability of Eve. The plural pronoun of Genesis 5.2 ('called their name Adam on the day when they were created') leads Bunyan in his own voice, following Galatians 3.28 ('there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus') to argue for an androgynous ideal of sanctity and for the full and equal admission of women to the ordinances and life of the church; 'For the Holy Ghost, in the work of the new creation [i.e. regeneration], of which this creation was a type, counteth not by male and female'.(20) Indeed:

you stand fixed for ever by faith upon the same foundation with US... the Lord doth put no difference betwixt male and female, as to the communciations of his saving graces, but hath often made many of your sex eminent for piety; yea, there hath been of you, I speak now of ordinary Christians, that for holiness of life have outgone many of the brethren... The love of women in spirituals, as well as naturals, oftentimes outgoes that of men. (*Works*, ii.659a)

Why, then, is everyone so surprised to find Christiana on pilgrimage? and why has Gaius need to take away the reproach of women? That they have an equal claim on grace and may in faith and holiness surpass men hardly seems to be received wisdom on the road to the Celestial City. The reproach Gaius has in mind is, of course, that 'Death and the Curse came into the World by a Woman'. To Eve, following St Paul (I Timothy 2.14) was most commonly ascribed if not sole, then certainly primary, responsibility for the Fall.(21) And so it is by Bunyan. What the pilgrims are shown in the House of the Interpreter is not 'Adam and Eve's Apple' but 'Eve's *Apple*' (PP, p.233 marg.). Bunyan's summary statement that Genesis 3 records 'that woful tragedy that was acted between the woman and the serpent' (*Works*, ii 431a) allocates to Adam the role of tragic victim rather than protagonist. This is a fate which can await any man. In Part I, Faithful tells how he was assaulted by Wanton with her 'flattering

tongue... promising me... all carnal and fleshly content' (PP, p.68). By her, observes Christian, recalling the story of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39.7-20) 'Joseph was *hard put to it*' (PP, p.68). In the feminist apologia, if such it be, of Part II, Stand-fast recounts as his most searching spiritual trial his encounter with Madam Bubble, who 'offered me three things, to wit, her *Body*, her *Purse*, and her *Bed* ... said she... men are made happy by me' (PP, pp.300-1). This 'Gentlewoman', for she is another of Bunyan's suspect characters of gentle birth, to whom is devoted a page of condemnation as 'a bold and impudent Slut' (PP, pp.301-2) is glossed in the margin '*this vain World*' (PP, p.301). Madam Bubble derives from the 'subtle whore' of Proverbs 7 whom Bunyan took as an emblem of all that impedes the saint's progress in sanctity.(22) When in need of a comprehensive image of temptation, it is to a woman Bunyan turns.(23) What the saint is above all required to resist is a promiscuous woman. Women may become saints, perhaps, but it is 'wicked women' who, above all else, are the 'snares of death' to such exemplary ones as Solomon (*Works*, ii.438b-9a). Indeed, in Genesis 6.1-5 Bunyan found reason to ascribe to the seduction of men by women all the malignity drowned by the Flood. 'And daughters were born unto them': Bunyan's comment, 'A snare that was often used in the hand of the devil, to intangle withal the church of God' is patriarchally confident of the church's gender. 'And they took them wives': Bunyan's gloss, 'First the eye saw them, and then their heart lusted after them', moves with masculine ease from the perception of women to the experience of sexual desire. The 'effect of this degeneracy' being that 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great', it is androcentrically certain that what led to the Flood began when 'men began to multiply and daughters were born unto them' (*Works*, ii.459b, 461a). Having lost men paradise, women then drowned their world.

The figurative usefulness of the feminine to Bunyan's texts is thus frequently to supply images of temptation, and in this guise it exerts a baleful fascination and enjoys a malignant power. Their conception of feminine psychology tends, however, to deny women either mystery or power. Women can so tempt men because they are themselves peculiarly vulnerable and susceptible to temptation: 'the devil doth easier fasten with them than with men' (*Works*, ii.438b). Eve is again the proof-text: Satan 'made the weakest the conveyance of his mischief' though his 'chief design ... was at the head' (*Works*, ii.430b). As that suggests, Bunyan used the 'weaker vessel' of I Peter 3.7 as an exegetical key to Genesis 3:

When our first mother... stept out of her place... you see how she was baffled, and befooled therein; she utterly failed in the performance, though she briskly attempted the thing. Yea she so failed thereabout, that at one clap she overthrew, not only, as to that, the reputation of women for ever, but her soul, her husband, and the whole world besides. Ge.iii.1-7. The fallen angel knew what he did when he made his assault upon the woman. His subtilty told him that the woman was the weaker vessel. (*Works*, ii.664b)

In Bunyan, 'womanish' means 'susceptible to temptation', 'impressionable', 'weak-willed' (*Works*, ii.435a).(24) It is an epithet

which, like Milton's phrase 'effeminate weakness', (25) distances sinfulness from, as foreign to, manliness, and associates it with, as intrinsic to, womanliness. Bunyan's denunciations of such abstract moral failings as pride hence particularize themselves as denunciations of shameless women, drawing their force from the apocalyptic imagery of the scarlet woman and the great whore (eg. MW, iii.51; *Works*, iii.644a-5b). Small wonder that 'Such a thing may happen, as that the woman, not the man, may be in the right, (I mean, when both are godly) but ordinarily it is otherwise' (*Works*, ii.439a).

Christiana and Mercie are not, through grace, 'womanish' in this sense, but their vulnerability and weakness is axiomatic throughout Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Indeed, in the narrator's comment that, when the pilgrims are about to leave Vanity Fair, their friends 'brought them of such things as they had, that was fit for the weak, and the strong, for the Women, and the men' (PP, p.279) the parallelism creates a metonymic relationship between gender and capacity. The primary sense here is simply of physical limitation, of which we are often reminded, but woman's weakness is mental as well as physical: the Interpreter has 'easie' rooms especially for women (PP, p.202), for theirs is 'a simple and weak sex' (*Works*, ii.429a). It has an emotional aspect also: the descent of mist in the Enchanted Ground means 'but sorry going for the best of them all, but how much worse for the Women and Children, who both of *Feet* and *Heart* were but tender' (PP, p.296). For all the boldness of their departure, it would seem that Christiana and Mercie are not among the best equipped to undertake a pilgrimage.

This they themselves very quickly discover. Immediately upon leaving the Gatekeeper's House, Christiana and Mercie are forcibly confronted with their vulnerability in the episode of the attempted rape (PP, pp.194-5).(26) The most dramatic and frightening encounter on the women's pilgrimage is not, like Christian's, an emblem of fitness but of unfitness to continue in the way. Boldness in venturing forth is no safeguard against such assaults. 'I marvelled much', says the Reliever, 'when you was entertained at the Gate above, being ye knew that ye were but weak Women, that you petitioned not the Lord there for a Conductor: Then you might have avoided these Troubles and Dangers' (PP, p.196). Mercie takes the point: 'by this neglect, we have an occasion ministred to us to behold our own imperfections' (PP, p.197). 'Imperfections' is unexpected: it suggests not so much that Christiana and Mercie were vulnerable to attack as that they are in some way responsible, if not guilty, for the attack. Stand-fast cannot be blamed for the attempt made upon him by Madam Bubble, but Christiana can, it seems, be blamed for putting herself in a position to be raped.(27) As a woman, she should have known better than to go alone, for her kinship to Eve both encourages and renders her defenceless against the grasp of evil. To make up for the imperfections confessed by Mercie requires, as the Reliever had gently expostulated, a conductor or guide. For a woman, conversion brings immediately after it not merely the duty but the necessity of submission to masculine authority. And so Great-heart enters the story. Christiana and Mercie's part diminishes from that of the leaders to the led. Their story becomes a man's story; her story, his story.(28)

Thereafter, a reiterated contrast is drawn between Great-heart, who is strong and unafraid, and the women, who are weak and nervously apprehensive (e.g. PP, pp.218, 219, 234, 241). So, too, are most of the other pilgrims in Part II, which seems addressed particularly to those oppressed by a sense of their own unworthiness or fears of adversity: 'I have it in Commission', says Great-heart, 'to comfort the *feeble-minded* and to support the weak' (PP, p.270); 'you are welcome to us', say the Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains, 'for we have for the *Feeble*, as for the *Strong*' (PP, p.284).(29) Mr Fearing is accepted, despite his timidity (PP, pp.249-53), as is Mr Feeble-mind despite his scrupulosity (PP, pp.270-1). Part II's band of infirm, aged, melancholic, apprehensive and inadequate pilgrims is gathered by the story to reassure readers that 'my strength is made perfect in weakness' (II Corinthians 12.9). This is compassionate counsel, but the inclusion of women within the company brings within its compass those whose debilitating weakness 'is, simply, their sex. Women, that is to say, have a kinship with men crippled by their defects. Christiana and Mercie each recognise in Mr Fearing's biography a story akin to their own (PP, p.254); there is a natural affinity between the women, who 'being weakly... were forced to go as they could bear', and Mr Ready-to-halt and Mr Feeble-mind, who 'by this means... had more to sympathize with their Condition' (PP, p.279). Such narratorial comments underscore the implication of the composition of Great-heart's company, Christiana and Mercie can be accepted in this company, belong within it, for they share the defect which afflicts and inhibits all these pilgrims: effeminacy.

'To be a Pilgrim' is, then, to be a man: '*Who would true Valour see/ Let him come hither*' (PP, p.295). The part of a pilgrim is defined in terms of the masculine gender role, which is why Christiana and Mercie cannot, without Great-heart, meet its demands. When the company asks Gaius if it may stay the night at his inn, he replies, 'Yes Gentlemen, if you be true Men, for my House is for none but Pilgrims' (PP, p.259). The narrator is unaware of any solecism in this exclusion of women, for in the very next sentence he has them silently acquiesce in Gaius's identification of 'Pilgrims' with 'true Men': 'Then was *Christiana* [and] *Mercie*... the more glad, for that the Innkeeper was a lover of Pilgrims' (PP, p.259). Valiant-for-Truth's fortitude, his combative delight in his '*right Jerusalem Blade*' that will 'cut *Flesh*, and *Bones*, and *Soul*, and *Spirit*, and *all*' (PP, pp.290-1), represents the ideal. In him, Great-heart, who 'loved one greatly that he found to be a man of his Hands', instantly recognises an equal. Women may never share the camaraderie of this inner company: when, hearing of Honest's pugnacity, Great-heart salutes him as 'a Cock of the right kind' (PP, p.247), the kind he hails is gender-specific. Women are accordingly never so recognised, never so welcomed or saluted. Rather, they are saluted in a man's name. Throughout Christiana is greeted as 'Christian's wife': she is less a protagonist in her own right than she is the '*Wife of that Good Man*' (PP, p.221).(30) If her name is known, it is because 'good *Christian* was my Husband' (PP, p.248), 'that famous Pilgrim' (PP, p.274). Enquiry is made not whether the children with her are her own, but whether they are 'her Husbands Sons' (PP, p.274). It is Christian's pilgrimage which inspires her, his example which safeguards her, his renown which gains her entrance. Christiana's desire to sleep in the same room as

Christian at the House Beautiful (PP, pp.221-2) is natural and affecting, but it is also a reminder, one of many, that her story derives from, and is modelled upon, a man's story. Feminine story depends upon masculine story as woman depends upon man.

Part II has consequently no fictional independence or integrity; it cannot aspire to a unity of its own any more than Christiana can aspire to travel alone, nor can it achieve independent closure any more than Christiana can complete her pilgrimage unaided. When, finally, Christiana enters the Gate of the Celestial City, it is 'with all the Ceremonies of Joy that her Husband *Christian* had done before her' (PP, p.306). The climax of Part II is rendered not in terms of Christiana's own, separate experience but in terms of her husband's pilgrimage. What she may have felt is silence. Her story closes not in the culmination of its own narrative but in recollection of Christian's prior story and in the subsuming of the woman's story into his. As her story can find its conclusion only in the man's, so the woman can find fulfilment only by rejoining her husband. That had been Christiana's desire throughout. In her unregenerate days she did never '*think of seeing his Face with Comfort, and of Worshipping the Lord the King with him*' (PP, p.222) as, converted, she does. This allegory of a saint's progress to glory is also a fiction of a woman's return to her husband. Feminine story proves to be less a sequel to masculine story than a digression from it which is resolved into an interlude within it. The separate textual identity of Part II is no more self-sufficient than is Christiana separated from Christian: both achieve completeness in what 'her Husband... had done before her'.

Christiana's progress is, then, a return. She is in the process of becoming again the wife that everyone she meets says she in fact is. No other role for women is envisaged in the text. Mercie is married in the course of the story (PP, pp.260-1), and becomes pregnant (PP, p.287). Both women are caught in the collocation 'Women and Children'. If not domestic, their situation is certainly familial. The care, upbringing and education of children, though not included in Valiant-for-Truth's hymn to saintly qualities, is what Prudence commends Christiana for (PP, p.224). Indeed, Gaius's defence of women itself follows immediately upon a recommendation that women should marry (PP, p.260) and proves to be less a feminist apologia that an appreciation of female fecundity which conceives of woman's place in terms of I Timothy 5.14 ('I will therefore that the younger women marry') on the grounds of I Timothy 2.15 ('she shall be saved in childbearing').(31)

The independency of the opening episode is consequently short-lived, for to return to a husband is to return to obedience to patriarchal authority. 'Women, therefore, whenever they would perk it and lord it over their husbands, ought to remember, that both by creation and transgression they are made to be in subjection to their own husbands' (*Works*, ii.438a-b). Bunyan is glossing Genesis 3.16. This does present women's inferiority ('he shall rule over thee') as divine judgment for Eve's transgression, but it offers no authority for Bunyan's belief in the prelapsarian inferiority of women. Androcentric assumptions about the divine intent in creation persuade Bunyan that 'Doubtless the woman was, in her first creation, made in subordination

to her husband' (*Works*, ii,438a), but, should anyone doubt it, there is only Paul's observation that Eve was created second to adduce (I Timothy 2.11-14). Given this double inferiority, obedience and submissiveness are naturally the defining wifely virtues in Bunyan. Women are expected by him to be the dutiful and acquiescent wives which Richard Allestree's *The Ladies Calling* (1673), like many another conduct book and guide to godliness, said they should be.(32) Bunyan reprimands boldness and assertiveness quite as keenly as they.(33) 'The head of the Woman is the Man' (MW, iii.32), to whom she should submit, though he be 'a sot, a fool' (MW, iii.36). And the husband? 'Wherefore bear with their [i.e. wives'] weaknesses, help their infirmities, & honour them as the weaker vessels, and as being of a frailer constitution, I *Pet.* 3.7.' (MW, iii.27).

Bunyan was, then, no less than consistent when in 1683 he resisted moves to establish separate women's meetings in the manner practised by the Quakers.(34) The proposition was literally a nonsense: for the naturally inferior and incapable to assume the authority exclusively vested, whether in family or church, in the man is to go the way of Eve (*Works*, iii.664b-5a). Women are, after all, only children: 'If children are not thought fit to help to guide the ship with the mariners, shall they be trusted so much as with a boat at sea alone?' (*Works*, iii.665a). The Civil War, separating wives from husbands, had in Bunyan's own youth challenged women to forgo the passivity and submissiveness supposed to be naturally womanly and to assume instead an unnaturally masculine courage and resolution in meeting its threats. Their response to this challenge had shown them quite capable of assuming and exercising authority,(35) but this his ideology will not allow Bunyan, usually so realistically sensitive to the facts of experience, to acknowledge. Nor will Bunyan allow women to adduce their own experience of spiritual succour in support: shall they be 'judges in their own cause' (*Works*, iii.670a) as Bunyan had himself been in *Grace Abounding*? This repudiation of the experiential and subjective epistemology of enthusiasm shares more with the convictions of Locke(36) than those of the Interregnum, and Civil War enthusiasm is far behind when Bunyan dismisses the case of Miriam as an exception and an irrelevance since 'none of our women will pretend' to be prophetesses (*Works*, iii.666b). Women may have so pretended not many years since,(37) but Miriam was afflicted with leprosy when she began to 'perk it' before Moses, admonishes Bunyan, neglecting to add that Aaron also 'spake against' Moses in Numbers 12. Galatians 3.28 has, after all, only a limited application: 'this is spoken of that church which is his true mystical body, and not of every particular congregation of professing Christians' (*Works*, iii.671b). In those, 'order and discipline' is required, and where there is 'order and government, there must, of necessity, be also a distinction of sex, degrees, and age' (*Works*, iii.671b-2a). Male and female are not yet quite one in Christ Jesus.(38)

Bunyan, then, welcomes women on pilgrimage, but he welcomes them not as fellow wayfarers, not as Christian welcomes Faithful or Great-heart Valiant-for-Truth, but as persons in need of especially solicitous ministerial care and guidance. His discourse habitually construes and images the spiritual life in terms of masculine achievement, and often in terms of masculine resistance to the

blandishments of the feminine, and so fails to offer a positive view of femininity to set beside the dynamic image of masculinity. His imaginative sympathy for women is never so intense as to jeopardise patriarchy. He concedes to his 'beloved sisters' that 'this inferiority of yours will last but a little while' (*Works*, iii.672a), but the man convinced that prelapsarian Eden was hierarchical and who began his career in refutation of Quakers cannot entertain Fox's vision of men and women restored to equal relations through Christ.(39) On the contrary, Bunyan is puzzled why women should be unwilling to accept their inferiority 'since the cause thereof arose at first from yourselves. It was the woman that at first the serpent made use of, and by whom he then overthrew the world: wherefore the woman, to the world's end, must wear tokens of her underlingship' (*Works*, iii.673a). This is a formulation more concerned to insist upon continuing subjection than upon its eventual remission. Divine and masculine perceptions happily agree in finding women loveliest when most sensitive to their lesser status and their inherited guilt: the more modesty and shamefacedness there is in their bearing in acknowledgement that 'by the woman sin came into the world', 'the more beautiful they are both to God and men' (*Works*, iii.673a). The degree to which they chafe at their underlingship is consequently a measure of their Satanic allegiance. The liberty wherewith Christ hath made women free (Galatians 5.1) does not offer any freedom from, or revolutionary redefinition of traditional gender roles:

Nor, do I think, that any woman that is holy and humble, will take offence at what I have said; for I have not in anything sought to degrade them, or to take from them what either nature or grace, or an appointment of God hath invested them with: but have laboured to keep them in their place.
(*Works*, iii.674b)

NOTES

- 1 No more precise dating is possible: see B. R. White, 'The Fellowship of Believers: Bunyan and Puritanism', in N. H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, 1988, p.3, and, for the dating of this incident, N. H. Keeble, *ibid.*, p.241.
- 2 John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, (= GA in references) ed. Roger Sharrock, 1962, §37.
- 3 'These poor people' of Bedford (GA, §41) are subsequently identified as members of John Gifford's Bedford church (§77), first gathered in 1650; the names of the 'poor women' are hence probably amongst those on the church's earliest membership list; see H. G. Tibbutt (ed.), *The Minutes of the First Independent Church (now Bunyan Meeting) at Bedford 1656-1766*, 1976, pp.214-6.
- 4 For literacy rates in the late seventeenth century see David Cressey, *Literacy and the Social Order*, 1980, pp.73-4, 118-74, and Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 1981, pp.1-82.
- 5 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 1972, rpt 1975.
- 6 Hill, *op.cit.*, pp.404-9; *id.*, 'John Bunyan and the English Revolution', in *The John Bunyan Lecture 1978*, 1978, pp.15-21.
- 7 See N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in later seventeenth-century England*, 1987, ch.v, esp.pp.156-60.
- 8 This occurred on 6th January 1661: see P. G. Rogers, *The Fifth*

- Monarchy Men*, 1966, pp.110-22. Bunyan was himself susceptible to Fifth Monarchist ideas: see Richard L. Greaves, 'John Bunyan and the Fifth Monarchists', *Albion*, xiii, 1981, 83-95.
- 9 Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past and Present*, 13, 1958, 42-62, esp.p.47.
- 10 Phyllis Mack, 'Women as Prophets during the English Civil War' in Margaret and James Jacob (eds.) *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, 1984, pp.214-30; Jerome Nadelhaft, 'The Englishwoman's Sexual Civil War: Feminist Attitudes towards Men, Women and Marriage 1650-1740', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xliii, 1982, 558-9; Richard J. Vann, 'Towards a New Lifestyle: Women in Preindustrial Capitalism' in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 1977, pp.210-12; Dorothy Ludlow, 'Shaking Patriarchy's Foundations: Sectarian Women in England, 1641-1700' in Richard L. Greaves (ed.), *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, 1986, ch.iii; Christine Bery and Philippa Berry, '"Spiritual Whoredom": An Essay on Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century' in Francis Barker et al. (ed.), *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century*, 1981, pp.37-54.
- 11 GA, p.137, n to §14.
- 12 See Roger Sharrock, 'The Origins of A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr John Bunyan', *Review of English Studies*, ns x, 1959, 250-6.
- 13 John Brown, *John Bunyan (1628-1688)*, rev. Frank Mott Harrison, tercentenary edn. 1928, p.260; Henri Talon, *John Bunyan, the Man and His Works*, trans. Barbara Wall, 1951, pp.202-3.
- 14 See on this aspect John R. Knott, Jr., 'Bunyan and the Holy Community', *Studies in Philology*, lxxx, 1983, 200-25.
- 15 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (= PP) ed. James Blanton Wharey, rev. Roger Sharrock, 2nd edn., 1960, p.183.
- 16 On the significance of Christiana's love for her husband see N. H. Keeble, 'Christiana's Key' in Vincent Newey (ed.), *The Pilgrim's Progress: Critical and Historical Views*, 1980, pp.9-13.
- 17 For this role in the seventeenth century see Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, Urbana 1956, esp. pp.5-37, 78-135; Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 1975, pp.77-136, 196-231; Roger Thompson, *Women in Stuart England and America*, 1974, pp.8-12 and *passim*; and for the later period, Katharine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*, 1982, pp.7-51.
- 18 See e.g. J. A. Froude, *John Bunyan*, 1880, pp.171-2; Brown, *John Bunyan*, p.265; E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background*, 1954, p.393; Talon, *John Bunyan*, pp.57, 158n, 159, 164-5, 219; Roger Sharrock, *John Bunyan*, corrected reissue, 1968, pp.138, 141.
- 19 For discussions of the significance of 'adventure' in the nonconformist conception of the life of faith and in literary depictions. (including Bunyan's) of it, see Valentine Cunningham, 'Glossing and Glozing: Bunyan and Allegory', in Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan*, esp. pp.230-1, and Keeble, *Literary Culture*, pp.266-8.
- 20 George Offer (ed.), *The Works of John Bunyan*, (= Works) 3 vols., 1860-2, ii.455b.
- 21 Margaret Olofson Thickstun, *Fictions of the Feminine: Puritan Doctrine and the Representation of Women*, 1988, pp.2-36, discusses 'the Pauline Precedent' for the Puritan view of women.

- 22 *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (= MW) gen. ed. Roger Sharrock, 12 vols. in progress, 1976-, v.157-8.
- 23 Contrast the much more restricted signification of Mr Worldly-Wiseman (PP, pp.17-20), who, as Evangelist later explains (PP, p.22), represents the specific 'wordliness' of moralism, which Bunyan associated with latitudinarianism (Isabel Rivers, 'Grace, Holiness and the Pursuit of Happiness: Bunyan and Restoration Latitudinarianism', in Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan*, pp.45-69, esp.pp.63-4.
- 24 Derogatory use of the word was not, of course, peculiar to Bunyan: see *Oxford English Dictionary* for comparable examples.
- 25 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, XI.634.
- 26 See Thickstun, op.cit., pp.94-100 for a forceful analysis.
- 27 Thickstun, op.cit., p.104, makes this point.
- 28 Cf. Thickstun, op.cit., p.88: 'Bunyan's firm belief in the social and spiritual inferiority of women requires that he restrict the heroic activity available to Christiana until her story can no longer sustain his attention'; and p.102: 'Bunyan multiplies these secondhand histories because he has exhausted the range of spiritual experience his ideology will allow women'.
- 29 Keeble, *Literary Culture*, pp.229-35, quoting these, relates this bias in Part II to 'the nonconformist hero' at large.
- 30 Mercie similarly became 'the wife of Matthew' (Thickstun, p.103).
- 31 More fully discussed in Thickstun, op.cit., pp.10-15, 101-2.
- 32 [Richard Allestree] *The Ladies Calling*, 1673, pt.ii, p.33. Cf. e.g. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 1673, p.531, §§ 1-6. See also the discussion of William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 1622, and Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentlewoman*, 1631 in Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century Feminists*, Urbana 1982, pp.51-2.
- 33 E.g. [Allestree] *Ladies Calling*, Pt.i, pp.29-47 ('Of Meekness'); Baxter, *Christian Directory*, pp.531-2, §§ 7-8.
- 34 See William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, rev. Henry J. Cadbury, 2nd edn., 1961, rpt.1979, pp.270-4, and, for more detailed accounts, the references there given.
- 35 See Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel; Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England*, 1984, pp.163-221, for examples.
- 36 Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, 1975, rpt.1979, pp.697-703 (IV xix 1-11: 'Of Enthusiasm').
- 37 For examples see the Berg & Berry and Mack essays cited above, n.10.
- 38 In this Bunyan again reproduces a Pauline emphasis and tension. Cf. Thickstun, op.cit., p.6: '[Paul's] visionary proclamations about a genderless life in the Spirit coexist with his proscriptions about the place of women in the church'.
- 39 See Braithwaite, *Second Period*, p.273. Hill, 'Bunyan and the English Revolution', p.25, conjectures that Bunyan's traditionalist opposition to sexual equality was 'no doubt in part because Diggers, Ranters and Quakers' had advocated it.

N. H. KEEBLE *Department of English Studies, University of Stirling*

[This paper was presented at the Society's Summer School in June]