

# The Conclusion

## A. Interpret *The Pilgrim's Progress* truthfully.

Now reader, I have told my dream to thee [you];  
See if you can interpret it to me;  
Or to yourself, or neighbor: but take heed  
Of misinterpreting: for that, instead  
Of doing good, will but yourself abuse:  
By misinterpreting evil ensues.

In other words, Bunyan holds us to the keeping of his original purpose and meaning as intended in his text. The invitation to recite back to the author, if it were possible, the carefully discovered interpretation, only reinforces our perception that he was in deadly earnest at this point. He would tolerate no revisionism, no supposed improvement of his doctrine, as some have arrogantly attempted to do. But then, how would Bunyan respond to today's enlightened editorialists who, while inwardly despising his doctrine, yet would deign to offer selective praise only on account of imaginative style? Of this we can be certain, that the aroused Bedford preacher would allow for no disjunction between truth and style, that is the rejection of one and the admiration of the other. In fact he would undoubtedly uphold the greater importance of truth over style. And this is precisely what his conclusion here is all about (cf. Chapters 1, 3, 16-18, 20, *Themes & Issues*).

## B. Interpret *The Pilgrim's Progress* substantially.

Take heed also, that you be not extreme,  
In playing with the outside of my dream:  
Nor let my figure, or similitude,  
Put you into a laughter or a feud [*dispute*];  
Leave this for boys and fools; but as for thee [you],  
Do yourself the substance of my matter see.<sup>1</sup>

Bunyan is only too well aware of the pitfall that his attractive style of writing may present, namely infatuation with the graphic language pictures, mere appreciation of the simple yet artistic manner of composition, and the sheer enjoyment of the apt illustrations. People quite naturally delight in skillfully composed literature, such as with a novel by a Charles Dickens. Ezekiel had this same problem with regard to the appeal of his prophetic preaching: *They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them* (Ezek. 33:31-32). Hence, we are here warned of being fascinated with signs while neglecting their significance. We are also warned about being amused and simply leaving it

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<sup>1</sup> Carefully consider what is the biblical substance of Bunyan's dream.

at that. It is difficult not to smile at the foolishness of Christian when his confident and accelerating pace causes him to race past Faithful, only to then stumble in abject humiliation. But truth is more important than titillation and entertainment. Our grinning must turn to serious personal analysis. Certainly let children enjoy the outward sense of adventure in the allegory in their own childish way. We expect that of them and understand. But for those who are adult, let them act in an adult manner, seeking to digest the meat and substance, the truth and reality that Bunyan intends should have priority.

**C. Interpret *The Pilgrim's Progress* allegorically.**

<p>Put by the curtains, look within my veil;          Turn up my metaphors and do not fail:          There, if you seek them, such things to find,          As will be helpful to an honest mind.</p>
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Thus effort and concentration and thought are required. There is a degree of mystery and intended concealment here that calls for unveiling. Such is the intention of Bunyan's purpose. He strews bait and unresolved situations along the way that can only be understood by means of deep, investigative reflection. But is there not a peculiar sense of satisfaction gained when an intricate puzzle is solved? *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not really intended for the lazy mind, yet such is its exceptional quality that it is able to arouse the lethargic and indifferent of this world to a sense of newfound curiosity and desire for spiritual enlightenment. So metaphors must be recognized and understood. And what better opportunity could there be to put such a skill to the test than in the following four lines?

**D. Interpret *The Pilgrim's Progress* discriminatingly**

<p>What of my dross you find there, be bold          To throw away, but yet preserve the gold.          What if my apple be wrapped up in ore?          None throws away the apple for the core:          But if you shall cast all away as vain,          I know not but 'twill make me dream again.</p>
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Addressed particularly to friends who were at the same time critics, this final verse by Bunyan calls for an eclectic and peaceable appraisal. It would at first seem that the author is confessing the lesser value of some parts of his allegory while vigorously upholding the enriching value of other segments. On the other hand, while he really is in no way of the opinion that his distinctive style of writing is of mixed value, could it not be that he is making a concession to his antagonists merely for the purpose of pressing home a reasonable point? Whatever the case may be, it must be admitted that Bunyan is going to great lengths to be conciliatory. Further, his metaphors are exquisitely appropriate and convincing. And history would seem to have judged that there certainly is a lot of gold in this rich literary ore. But then, there are always those whose supposed holy caution is really a stubborn rigidity that opposes any novel, though legitimate, means of communication. Bunyan seems to feel almost frustrated at this point. He might even have to dream once more and try

again! Perhaps this was a hint that Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was already germinating in his spiritually fertile soul.



Bunyan's birthplace at Elstow

## A FURTHER DEFENSE

Some say the *Pilgrim's Progress* is not mine,  
 Insinuating as if I would shine  
 In name and fame by the worth of another,  
 Like some made rich by robbing of their brother.  
 Or that so fond I am of being sire,  
 I'll father bastards; or, if need require,  
 I'll tell a lie in print to get applause.  
 I scorn it: *John* such dirt-heap never was,  
 Since *God* converted him. Let this suffice  
 To show why I my *Pilgrim* patronize.

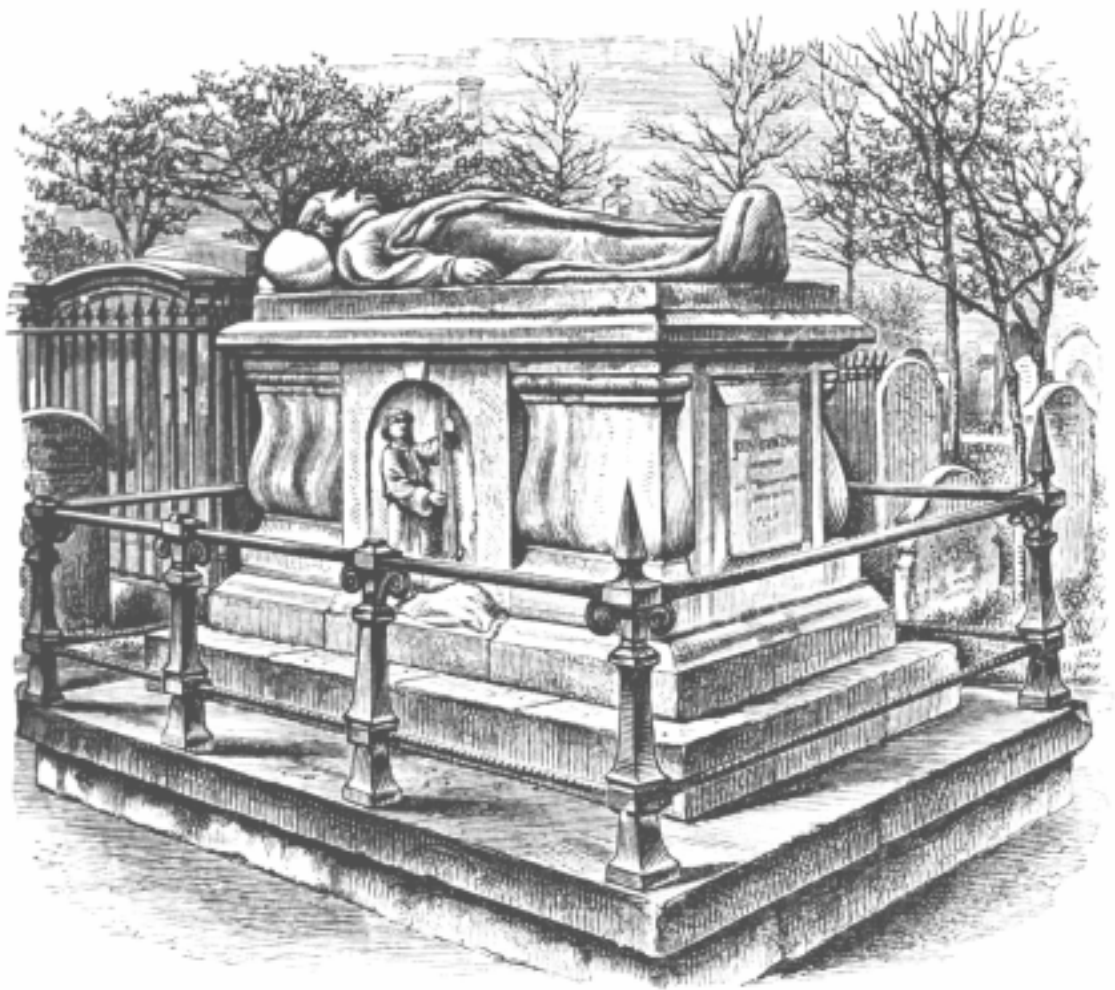
It came from my own heart, so to my head,  
 And there into my fingers trickled;  
 Then to my pen, from where immediately  
 On paper I did dribble it daintily.

Manner and matter too was all my own,  
 Nor was it unto any mortal known  
 Till I had done it; nor did any then  
 By books, by wits, by tongues, or hand, or pen,  
 Add five words to it, or write half a line  
 Thereof: the whole, and every part, is mine.

John Bunyan, *The Holy War*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 374.



Bunyan's tomb, Bunhill Fields, London