

# Hypocrites in Puritan Doctrine

*Macario Olivera Villacampa*

UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA

## PILGRIMS

One of the first episodes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* gives the tone of the whole work. The author, sleeping by a cave, sees in a dream a man clothed in rags, turning his face from his own house, a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. To everyone's amazement, he is preparing to leave his own town, for he knows it to be threatened by the wrath divine. His family and friends refuse to follow him, so he sets out alone (Keeble, 1984). We are not told who this man is. Actually, it is *he*, a vague pronoun that stands for any Christian. He is a Christian who starts a pilgrimage, and teaches thus that everyman should be on the march, stumbling but picking himself up again, because his gaze is fixed upon far horizons which are for ever extending. The translation from a physical or geographical pilgrimage to a spiritual pilgrimage, the pilgrimage of the soul from a state of sin to a state of grace, through multiple temptations, so that the pilgrim can attain salvation eventually, is but obvious. Christian's path is strewn with obstacles: a door to be opened, a hill to be climbed, a dark valley to be crossed in the fear of death, and a fair, rank with the corruption of a world hostile to pure hearts. The road also has its pleasant resting places: the Palace Beautiful, the Delectable Mountains... these rare moments of repose offer the traveller rather the encouragement of a vision than the sweetness of rest. It is a solitary journey. Christian's two companions, Faithful and Hopeful, are really only two other aspects of himself, or a personification of the two most needed qualities for the solitary journey (Talon, 1972).

Christian, shortly after his entering upon the way to life, encounters two travellers, named *Formalist* and *Hypocrisie*, who are on the road by virtue of having *tumbled over the Wall, on the left hand of the narrow way; and they made up a pace to him* (Keeble, 1984: 32). A heated dialogue ensues in which Christian wonders at their access to the road, which is not considered an event of good omen. What is more, their wish to travel to Mount Sion for praise makes their motives as suspect as their origins. Still, they tell Christian *as to Law and Ordinances, they doubted not, but they should as conscientiously do them as he*; and therefore, *we see not wherein thou differest from us, but by the Coat that is in thy back*. To which Christian replied that *by Law and Ordinances you will not be saved, since you came not in by the door* (Keeble, 1984: 33,34). These two are representative of a host of false pilgrims, characters who are actively involved in travelling the way to life and who pose in sundry forms the question of what in fact does constitute taking the Christian way.

*Ignorance* is another of those false pilgrims, and one who has received the most attention by scholars (Draper, 1927; Hussey, 1949). It is most probable that *Ignorance* is to be seen as a *hypocrite* in the seventeenth century Puritan feeling, at least in their relation to the mystery of divine election. Apparently, and quite contradictorily, *Ignorance* knows Lord's will and practises the commandments of the Law: *I*

*pay every man his own, I pray, fast, pay tithes, and give alms, and have left my cuntry, for whither I am going* (Keeble, 1984: 101). Even so, Christian gives him a severe warning, that *when the reckoning day shall come, thou wilt have laid to thy charge, that thou art a thief and a robber, instead of getting admittance into the City* (ibid.). And *Hopeful* adds these beautiful verses:

Let Ignorance a little while now muse  
 On what is said, and let him not refuse  
 Good counsel to imbrace, lest he remain  
 Still ignorant of what's the chiefest gain.  
 God saith, Those that no understanding have,  
 (Although he made them) them he will not save (Ibid. p. 102)

The great question is, therefore, that *Ignorance*, even if he knows and practises several things, does not know *the chiefest gain, he has no understanding, and he will not save*.

It is absolutely clear that Bunyan uses an allegorical language, and, as Levin points out (1981), the staple of allegory is personification. The rhetorical function allegory traditionally draws on most is prosopopoeia, which is the activity of making present in a discourse things, or concepts, or people normally characterized by invisibility, or abstraction. Keeble (1988) explains that prosopopoeia is a textual practice of old-fashioned presenting that, just as it was the rhetorical device that sanctioned the presence on stage and in the poem of ancient deities, is, in the case of Christian writers like Bunyan, a recipe for the practice of the presence of God, a method for actualizing the Christianly transcendent. We have already noticed the personification of abstract concepts such as *Hypocrisie, Ignorance*; and, probably with a lesser degree of abstraction, but still not concrete enough, or *invisible people*, concepts such as *Formalist, Christian, Faithful, Hopeful...* and there are many more of the kind in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

## PURITAN DOCTRINE

To assess the true character of the Puritan movement we must free our minds from the present popular use of the term, deriving in large part from the satires directed against Victorian religious hypocrisy. This movement, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sought to purify the Church of England from remnants of Roman Catholic Church that the Puritans claimed had been retained after the religious settlement reached early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Or, as Trevelyan put it, Puritanism was the religion of all those who wished either to purify the usage of the established Church from the taint of popery, or to worship separately by forms so purified (Dickens, 1993). Some of these Puritans sought parliamentary support for an effort to institute a presbyterian form of polity for the Church of England. Others, concerned with the long delay in reform, decided upon a reformation by themselves. These, called separatists, repudiated the state church and formed voluntary congregations based on a direct covenant with God. Both groups, but especially the separatists, were repressed by the state authorities and were denied the opportunity to reform the established church. So, they turned to preaching on their own account, and had a very intense religious feeling, believing that conversion was necessary to redeem one from one's sinful condition, that God had chosen them to reveal salvation through preaching,

and that the Holy Spirit, rather than reason, was the energizing instrument of salvation. Conversion of people ought to be the result, which, combined with the doctrine of predestination inherited from Calvinism, should produce a sense of themselves as elect spirits chosen by God to revolutionize history.

Puritanism was a radical form of Protestantism. Much in the same way as one of the chief goals of the Reformation was to sweep away Catholic rituals, the Puritans intended to sweep away the rituals of the Church of England. In their place, Luther, Calvin, and the other reformers such as the Puritans, substituted language, the word of the Bible (Bainton, 1972). The new ritual, so to speak, was reading and interpreting the Bible.

Puritanism, in England as well as in America, was in the main Calvinistic. The Puritans did not simply borrow Calvinism without alteration, although they maintained the central concept of the Calvinistic God, who was a mysterious unknown to mankind:

The object of our faith, as far as His personal character is concerned, is an utter blank to human comprehension; He is a real of mystery, in whom we are sure that all dilemmas and contradictions are ultimately resolved, though just now, we shall never in this world even remotely fathom (Miller, 1956: 51)

In Calvinism, man is immediately confronted with an all-powerful, vengeful God who is beyond human understanding. In other words, Calvin demanded that men should worship and obey God without understanding Him at all. He emphasized the doctrine of election, claiming that God, in His infinite wisdom, predetermined the eternal fate of all men, their salvation or condemnation. Man could only wonder at all this, for it was beyond his reason to understand. All he could know of his fate for eternity and God's wisdom was what he read in the Bible, for *to desire any other knowledge of predestination than what is unfolded in the word of God, indicates as great folly as a wish to walk through unpassable roads, or to see in the dark* (Calvin, Allen, 1813: III, XXI, 2).

It was this concept of God that the English Puritans imported from the Continent and made central to their theological system, although they found that concept too unpredictable and were uncomfortable with God's tyrannical power. They were especially uncomfortable with the doctrine of predestination and election, which in Calvin's theology provided no means for a believer to gain a working knowledge of his eternity and thus subjected him to divine whimsy. This principle provided no grounds for moral action either. In practice, it would be easy for people to take this attitude: "It has already been decided whether I am an elect or not, and, therefore, there is nothing I can do about that". But the English Puritans, who were largely working ministers, felt the necessity for a solution to the dilemma of election and predestination, a solution that would both preserve the power, mystery and majesty of God, and would, at the same time, provide grounds for moral actions. Furthermore, they felt the need to devise some means whereby a believer could gain a working knowledge of his election. This meant that they had to explain and justify God.

To try to find a solution to the dilemma of the doctrine of election and predestination, the Puritans introduced the concept of the covenant of grace, as distinguishable from the covenant of works. It is God who always takes the initiative, who gives the grace of faith, the power to believe. A man can feel the power of God in his heart, and he accepts or rejects that saving power. Thus, in a single semantic stroke, the dilemma of election and predestination was solved, for man can now have the assurance of sal-

vation and a grounds is provided for moral actions. At the same time, the covenant of grace maintains the essence of the Calvinistic God, for, as an initiating agent in the covenant, God's action was voluntary. As a result, much of the writing about God is a curious mixture of contradiction and theological hedging. This is clear in the same fact that the Puritans attempted to describe God, while their basic premise was that He was indescribable, and that the dilemma of predestination and moral actions was solved, while faith was given by God's power, and those who were not given that gift could never attain salvation. A real mixture of contradictions.

Basic to the Puritan conception of God's grace was the idea of original sin. In the Fall the state of complete harmony with God was lost, and now the state of sin is the natural condition of man. In addition, the Puritans demanded that men be constantly aware of their everyday personal sins. A believer was expected to examine his every thought and deed, to scrutinize every sign of his sinfulness, and be worried about resulting God's displeasure.

At the present stage of civilization, for a man of our time, it is almost impossible to comprehend the extent to which a believer was expected to carry this constant examination of his spiritual health. The Puritans were caught up in what Haller (1972:157) calls the *drama of sin and repentance*. Indeed, it is the continual tension between sin and grace that makes up their typical spiritual behaviour. The examination of the soul had to be repeated over and over again, and, after all, they could never be sure about the real inner state in the face of God. Thus, determining whether or not one had experienced God's grace was a very tricky business, and even the most reliable signs of grace and true faith could be thrown into doubt. There was always the fear that Satan was the power behind a feeling, and not God. Furthermore, some believers might be in the hands of the Devil all their life and not know it until too late; they might be convinced that they are on the road to salvation, while actually they are not elect and therefore are on the road to damnation.

It is in the context of doubt and fear, and not knowing whether one is among the elect actually, that the concept of *hypocrisy* is to be placed.

## HYPOCRITES

In modern usage, *hypocrite* denotes a person who misrepresents himself to others in an attempt to deceive. In seventeenth century Puritan religion this meaning was one of the three with wide currency, and it was not the most important at all in the doctrinal field. The doctrine of the perseverance of the elect till the last minute rendered especially troublesome the case of those believers who did not persevere; these were lapse, who had experienced only a temporary faith, who had been called, but the calling was ineffectual. In the language of the time, such people were designated *formal hypocrites*, that is, those who deceive others as well as themselves about their true state of grace. Yet, a third category, with no specific name, included those people who, without the intent of deceiving others, through inadvertency, carelessness, or sloth, contrived to remain ignorant of their own true state (Keeble, 1988).

Robert Bolton, in his *Discourse about the State of True Happiness (1611)*, gives his own terminology for the three kinds of hypocrites: *Privie, Grosse, Formal*. The first deceive only themselves, the second deceive others but not themselves, the third deceive themselves and others. According to Keeble (1988), especial attention should be paid to *formall hypocrisie*: it is a frame of heart in which *a man*

*doth not only deceive others with a show of piety and outward forme of Religion, but also his own heart, with a false conceit and perswasion that hee is in a happie state* (Keeble, 1988:174). A bit later, he takes up the matter of *temporary faith*, and compares the person in such state with the hearer in Jesus's parable of the sower who is likened to stony soil: *some seed fell upon a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture* (Lk. 8, 6). Now, such a man is, for Bolton (1611), the *formall hypocrite*, who is there said to believe for a time. The formal hypocrite is, therefore, associated with the temporary believer.

Needless to say that the previous conceptual explanation about *formall hypocrisie* is quite confusing, and it exercised an influence on Bunyan, who apparently is not always constant in using allegorical terminology. Now, on one hand, *formall hypocrisie* is applied to those who deceive themselves and others, but are sincere; they do not want to deceive, but simply they believe they are *in a happie state*, that is, on the road to salvation, but this is not true because they are not among the elect, and in this sense it can be said that they are deceived and that they deceive others who believed it too. In this case, I'd rather use the word *ignorant*, or *Ignorance*, who, we should remember, is a pilgrim whom Christian and Hopeful foretell that he will not be saved because of his lack of *understanding*: Even if he does everything right, he does not understand the real situation, he has not scrutinized his soul properly, he is not an elect. On the other hand, *formall hypocrisie* is associated with *temporary faith*, and in this sense it is better said that the *temporary believer*, *the Formalist*, who is a pilgrim as well, deceives himself and deceives others.

What Bunyan seems to be commending to his readers in his juxtaposing of pilgrims is the closest possible scrutiny of the personal will, of the personal soul. Kendall (1979) explores in Bunyan's England the pastoral response to Calvin's clear teaching about temporary faith. Calvin insisted that even the reprobate might have a calling of a sort, which meant that for a time they would be indistinguishable from the elect; experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feeling as the elect, so that even in their own judgement they do not in any way differ from the elect; and the inverse, the elect one might discern that he did not in any way differ from the reprobate. To affirm this was to make problematic the whole matter of Christian assurance. The result was a vision of the church as a mixture, with elect and reprobate side by side in the way, with neither certain how to discern which was which.

As a consequence, the Puritans were in constant anxiety about their spiritual health. They were required to seek God's grace, and when they believed they had experienced it, they were compelled by their doubts to examine that experience over and over to ascertain whether it had really come from God or was a Satanic illusion. It is interesting to note that the Puritan anxiety over their conscience, their continual searching for grace only to question the experience and begin over again, is a pattern that, from a psychoanalytic point of view, may be found typical of neurotic defensive structures. That is not to say that all Puritans were neurotic or to suppose that their religion produced neurosis, or at least not any more than some religious beliefs do today. It is simply an indication that we are dealing with a very developed defensive structure, perhaps necessary for religion to endure, or perhaps necessitated by the fact that religion is more comprehensive in life than any other doctrine.

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