Chapter Seven

SUMMATION

If you are the children of God live together lovingly
Dost thou see a soul that has the image of God in him?
Love him, love him. Say ‘This man and I must go to
heaven one day.’ Serve one another. Do good for one
another. If any wrong you, pray to God to right you and
love the brotherhood.

John Bunyan

The above mentioned lines that find their place in the last sermon of John
Bunyan at once breathe the catholic spirit and fraternity which Bunyan wants to
promote in this world, and the pragmatic manifestation of the divine state of
salvation and spirituality that one discerns in the trilogy of Bunyan. If at all one
thing worried Bunyan much in this world, it was the fear of the loss of the
salvation of the soul, be it his, or any other’s. The doctrine of salvation for the
sinners advocated by him in his ‘spiritual trilogy’, Grace Abounding to the Chief
of Sinners, The Pilgrim’s Progress and The Holy War frees him from any taint of
a narrow sectarian advocating salvation for a few, and it becomes salvation for all,
salvation for the entire humankind. Venables is clearly right when he says in his
Life of John Bunyan that “by the catholic spirit which breathes through his
writings, especially through The Pilgrim’s Progress, the tinker of Elstow has
become the teacher not of any particular sect, but of the universal church.”
Bunyan’s message stressing heart-holiness and dissuading works-righteousness
for attaining merits, but encouraging works as a manifestation of holy love, promoting God’s ways and expecting to show love and concern for the fatherless and widows keeping themselves unspotted from the world, (PP 220) cannot be the message of one who is obsessed with man’s depravity or incorrigible nature, but of one who looks at the positive side of man to do good to his fellow being.

To all those who love the good, his message will be always relevant.

As Bunyan says:

This is the sweetest study that a man can devote himself unto, because 'tis the study of the love of God and of Christ to man.

Studies that yield far less profit than this, how close are they pursued, by some who have adapted themselves there unto.

(qtd. in Michael Davies vii)

A study of Bunyan’s works in the light of his views on salvation and spirituality leads to the following conclusions. Salvation is universal in the sense it is open for all. Universal availability is best proved in the substitutionary ransom price transaction effected by Christ. Through imputation of Christ’s righteousness man can be saved. This righteousness is available to all, but effective only for those who accept it. Reconciliation is effected by willingness from both the sides. God is willing to accept any, even the chief of sinners, if only he is truly willing. Therefore, the will of man counts much in the salvation of the soul. But the problem is, whereas man falls freely into temptation and evil, he finds it difficult to will the good always, and even if he wills the good, finds himself unable to do good without evil mixed with it. Hence the helplessness of man taking recourse
to and the need to get the will sanctified. Grace alone can sanctify the will. Before God does the transformation work, he ‘kills’ man with the old covenant or Covenant of Works.

Man learns much from his realization of the futility of the old covenant, the need for Christ’s righteousness, the efficacy of Christ’s blood and the comforts and consolation in the new covenant or the Covenant of Grace. He learns that as long as he is in the world, he has to face temptations and evil, and battle against them. But he has to progress believing in the promises of the new covenant, not giving way to despair but believing his salvation will be complete, when all the saved who constitute the elect stand as the body of Christ with Christ as the head before the throne of God. And as long as he lives he need not have to worry about election but just believe that election is a guaranteed expression of the salvation granted by imputed righteousness.

The foregoing analysis in unequivocal and unmistakable terms establishes the fact that Bunyan’s views are based on apostolic doctrine as explained in the Scripture. And it is to Pauline doctrines that Bunyan mostly turns. There is nothing paradoxical when he reminds of the guaranteed promises, but at the same time issues warning against destruction, and also when he expresses belief in election, at the same time stresses the role of will in salvation. In spite of the many promises and assurance of salvation in the Scripture or Bible, there is a great deal which warns us of everlasting separation from the presence of the Lord, for those who willfully reject the gospel of salvation. For instance, Paul and Jude employ a similar paradigm of salvation lost by the Israelites, to warn
against presumption and apostasy, even though otherwise they speak of promises to assure the believer of his eternal security. In a similar vein, Bunyan too, who otherwise speaks about the promises of the new covenant, the promises of forgiveness and life to the chief of sinners, stringently warns against backsliding. It is because he is sure there is no hope for those willfully reject the salvation offered. There is also no contradiction as to how election and freewill go together in Bunyan’s works. Bunyan always stresses that assurance of salvation is the birthright of every human person. It would be only presumptuous if it rested in any way on works-righteousness. So, in Bunyan’s view, election is to be considered as an other expression of the assurance guaranteed to a believing sinner or one who relies on grace and not on works righteousness, and not to be considered as something leading one to turn God’s grace into lasciviousness.

So, for all, any serious reader of the trilogy may perceive that Bunyan is not strictly Calvinistic, though like the Calvinists he believes in the depravity of humanity, eternal election, and understands covenant as a promise not a contract between God and man, nor is he a moderate Calvinist even though he understands the covenant as promise but still lays emphasis on the role of will in salvation, nor antimonian completely even though he stresses free grace, and not Armenian completely even though he stresses the importance of will. Neither can he be categorized as Lutheran, even though he advocates imputed righteousness. His is of a distinctive tradition, and as has been shown in this thesis, a tradition that offers absolute space for a complete reflection of Scripture. His theology is not based on assumptions either. There is, therefore, textually no ground to
denominate Bunyan as a bigot. And the spiritual trilogy, not employing hermeneutic or exegetic theological meta-language, but employing in the simplest way possible, the common man’s idiom, drives home the process of evolution of salvation and spirituality which is scriptural, that is biblical. Similarly the transformation tending to salvation, or liberation from sin is also traced and woven into human biblical terms, so that the spiritual trilogy becomes a life-time spiritual companion of every man, every woman, every human in their quest for salvation and spirituality.

But this is not to deny that Bunyan was completely insensitive to the religious and political controversies of the age. He was a writer of his age. Definitely his works reflect the religious controversies and politics of the Restoration Age. They show his antagonistic feeling towards the Quakers, especially George Fox, and also the Latitudinarian Edward Fowler. But as he says in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, when he found people unable to see as he did “what sin, death, hell and the curse of God is, and also what the grace, and love, and mercy of God is through Christ . . .” he wanted to confirm them in the truth (125).

As a matter of fact Bunyan’s faith was built “. . . upon the factual importance of Christ’s death within a grand historical scheme of salvation” (M. Davies 220). That was why he couldn’t tolerate the Quakers who laid more stress upon the inward light and less upon historical fact, and was pleased to contend with them. Their idea of “a Christ within, a resurrection within, a light within” was opposed to Bunyan’s idea of “a historic Christ, the historic facts of
the Christian faith, or the scriptures of revelation by which to guide and test the inward light” (McNair). He was equally pleased to contend with Fowler also who described Christ’s life as a pattern for others, and who encouraged reading the gospel as a conduct book in civility and good manners, and interpreted Christ’s work from a purely historical and biographical understanding, complementing his work-centred moralism. Bunyan, who had a firm grip of the significance of the person of Christ as well as the spiritual significance of Christ could not let go either. That is why his works stress the person of Christ, his death and imputation of righteousness. But his aim was not polemical.

The trilogy quite artistically brings home the point that what Bunyan had in mind while writing was always the possibility of the writing being read, even though he says he wrote “to gratify” (PP 32) his mind. That is why as James Forrest says “… an intense awareness of the reader and the need to stimulate his mind, adequately underlie the artistic procedure of all Bunyan’s imaginative works” (qtd. in McCollister). And Bunyan used mainly allegory to convey the truth. That was how The Pilgrim’s Progress and The Holy War found a place in English literature. And coming as it were from a creative genius, the various figures of speech used, style followed and musical rhythm created, different methods and techniques adopted lend vigour and vitality to his writings. Talon is therefore right when he comments: “The Pilgrim’s Progress is not wrapped up in the history of its time like a larva in its cocoon. Like any work of art it has an autonomous existence and lives on independently of the life of its author” (23-24).
As the title of the thesis focuses on a re-reading in relation to the theme of salvation and spirituality, it does not give room for advanced discussion on the literary techniques, narratology and critical tools employed, though they are stressed in so far as they are relevant to the present study. Nevertheless, the present study lends scope for further advanced studies on the allegorical and metaphorical aspects of Bunyan’s works, having Bunyan’s vision of salvation and spirituality in focus. The works also provide ample scope for analysis and approaches from various perceptions applying equally appropriate critical theories. Taking into consideration the impact of Bunyan on contemporary writers as for instance ‘Margaret Atwood adapts John Bunyan’ by Simpson, and also the establishment of International John Bunyan Society, and the various Bunyan studies and scholarship, a comprehensive study of Bunyan’s influence on writers and their works, right down from his time up to the present time, is inevitable.

In this context it is worthwhile pondering over Pooley’s comment: “. . . for the modern literary critic the ‘classic’ is the text that bears re-reading. For previous generations it meant the great works of Greek and Latin that had been the foundation of humanist education, and by association those works which had a similar authority” (Introd. xx). Taken either way, the works of Bunyan are classics. Bunyan’s love and concern for his fellow beings, in other words, his human interests can be best proved by his choice of a permanent medium to convey the truth. In fact he enriches the literary world by his ‘spiritual trilogy’, which as long as man lives and as long as literary art persists can never become out of place because it is nothing but a translation into literary art and a bold
proclamation of the wonderfully comprehensive message of salvation of humankind contained in the scriptures and man’s unending, eternal quest for spirituality which is all inclusive universal and transcends time and space. What Pooley says about *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in his introduction (xxxiii) holds good for Bunyan’s other works as well. They have a life and usefulness beyond their own. They help the readers to live more godly or less materialistic lives, go beyond an inherited faith into something deeper and in that way serve as spiritual classics. All the three works, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War* are Christian books and could be read as spiritual as much as literary classics.