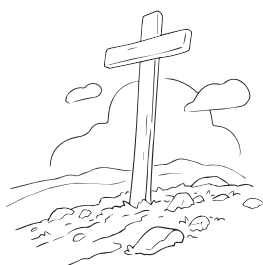


WORLDVIEW GUIDE

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS



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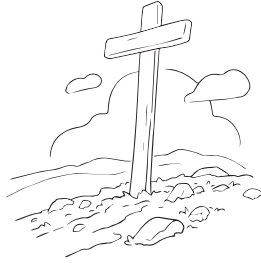
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INTRODUCTION

The Pilgrim's Progress is a classic of classics. If we exclude sacred texts (the Bible, the Koran, etc.), liturgical texts (*Book of Common Prayer*), and political books that Chairman Mao might take a dim view of your family not owning (political propaganda), *The Pilgrim's Progress* is arguably the best-selling book of all time. It has never been out of print, and has been translated into over 200 languages. If you have not read it, you cannot be said to be educated in Western letters, and if you did not read it *appreciatively*, we might still have our doubts.



WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

The book is not a suspense, although there is (mysteriously) plenty of suspense in it. It is an allegory related in the circumstances of a dream—a common enough device—and the allegory is about as straightforward as it is possible to get. The City of Destruction is on one end, and the Celestial City on the other. The protagonist is named Christian, and so *that* is cleared up. We don't have to wonder about the character of any individuals we meet—we don't need to concern ourselves, for example, with whether or not Pliable is going to make it. When we first meet him, his doom is written in the name Bunyan gives him. And yet, despite this, the narrative holds our attention. We know *that* Christian is going to make it, but how he is going to make it is the true mystery.

An allegory is a story with two “stories,” stories of another sort. The first story, the ground floor, is the story of the characters or individuals involved. The second story is the floor of abstractions. Talkative on the ground floor is

that particular character, occupying *that* particular place in the story. On the second story, he becomes all who share in those characteristics. On the second story, he is the abstraction of talkativeness.

Allegories lend themselves to stiffness, and when it comes to the allegorical part, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is no exception. But the thing that makes it come alive, and indeed to stand out from other allegories, is the *life* in the dialogue. As C.S. Lewis points out, Bunyan had almost perfect pitch when it came to recapturing the kind of conversation that would have occurred every day in the streets of Bedford.

The theology portrayed is Puritan theology, and of the stoutest sort. But we may make the additional observation that it is what we might call blue-collar Puritanism. Bunyan was a genius, but he was not formally educated or a university man. He was the kind of man schools are named after, not the kind of man who goes to them. If you ever read John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, it will be brought home to you that conversion for Bunyan was "agonistic." There was a great deal of *wrestling* involved. This is the way it was for Bunyan himself, and this is the way it is for Christian, the protagonist in his great allegory.

So then, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the story of Christian's conversion. Christian comes under conviction of sin. He lives in the City of Destruction and he knows for a fact that it is going to be destroyed. He knows that he himself