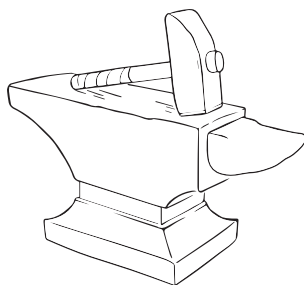
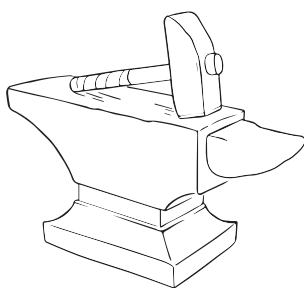


WORLDVIEW GUIDE

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

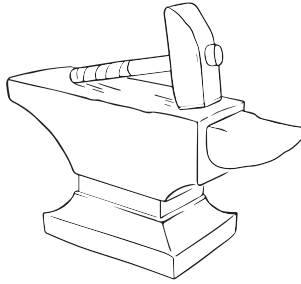


Marcus Schwager



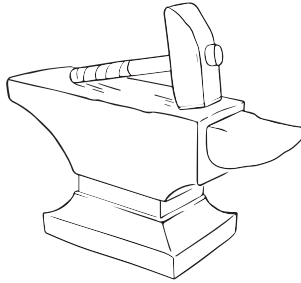
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INTRODUCTION

It's the early 1800s; you're a young boy growing up in the poor slop of the rural moors in England. You take a quick walk from your cottage to visit family graves and are caught up by a snarling, escaped convict threatening to have your beating heart dug out if you don't obey his every word. Now imagine, over the next few years, that you silently, privately hand your soul to the girl of your dreams . . . who delights in slowly, carefully breaking and digesting your heart for her own perverse pleasure. Then, as you approach adulthood, imagine that convict anonymously showering you with all the wealth he never had. And imagine that young woman finally, kindly, lovingly, restoring that pulpy, innocent heart to you. This is Philip Pirrip's life of *Great Expectations*. Join us as we wander through a rich masterpiece of England's wondrous storyteller, Charles Dickens.



WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

Charles Dickens was baptized and raised in the Church of England; aside from a Unitarian season in the 1840s, he attended Anglican services throughout his life and prayed each morning and evening. He deeply revered Christ Jesus and the teachings of the New Testament, but, sharing a common Victorian intellectual prejudice, showed little tolerance for church dogma, Old Testament morality, or sectarian zeal (whether Evangelical or Roman Catholic). For many Victorian thinkers, the Old Testament Jehovah represented a wrathful legal justice while Christ's New Covenant revealed the way of mercy and peace. While this reading is quite short-sighted and even anti-Trinitarian, it provided a means to cordon off aspects of traditional faith (whether hell, damnation, superstition, Judaism, capital punishment, the Genesis account of creation, or the sacrificial system) deemed obnoxious, evil, or outmoded

by Victorians who could not see a way to reconcile various biblical, historical, and scientific positions.

Dickens's faith clearly directed his labors, perhaps to a much deeper level than many readers imagine. Consider this excerpt from a letter he wrote to Reverend Macrae:

With a deep sense of my great responsibility always upon me when I exercise my art, one of my most constant and most earnest endeavours has been to exhibit in all my good people some faint reflections of our great Master, and unostentatiously to lead the reader up to those teachings as the great source of all moral goodness. All my strongest illustrations are drawn from the New Testament; all my social abuses are shown as departures from its spirit; all my good people are humble, charitable, faithful, and forgiving. Over and over again, I claim them in express words as disciples of the Founder of our religion; but I must admit that to a man (or a woman) they all arise and wash their faces, and do not appear unto men to fast.³

Thus, Dickens hoped to direct his readers' hearts toward Christ without obviously seeming to do so. He did write one overtly religious book, *The Life of Our Lord*, but did not intend it for his reading public.⁴

3. From David Cody's article "Dickens and Religion" (see victorianweb.org).

4. *The Life of Our Lord* was an account of the gospels for him to read to his children. He finished it in 1849, but requested that it not be made available to the public for eighty-five years.