The uses of anxiety: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666)

Bunyan documents his spiritual anxieties in *Grace Abounding* (1666, 1688). To please God, he ceases bellringing, but returns to the 'steeple-house' (a name used by Dissenters for churches) as he 'hanckered' to watch others bellring. He imagines how the bells could kill him by falling, swinging, rebounding off walls:

> I had taken much delight in ringing; but my Conscience beginning to be tender, I thought such practice was but vain, and therefore forced myself to leave it, yet my mind hanckered; wherefore I should go to the steeple-house and look on, though I durst not ring. But I thought this did not become Religion neither, yet I forced my self, and would look on still: But quickly after, I began to think, *How if one of the Bells should fall?* Then I chose to stand under a main Beam, that lay overthwart the Steeple, from side to side, thinking there I might stand sure. But then I should think again, Should the Bell fall with a swing, it might first hit the wall and then re bounding upon me, might kill me, for all this Beam: This made me stand in the Steeple door; and now, thought I, I am safe enough; for if a Bell should then fall, I can slip out behind these thick walls, and so be preserved notwithstanding.
>
> So after this, I would yet go to see them ring, but would not go further than the Steeple-door; but then it came into my head, How if the Steeple it self should fall? and this thought (it may fall for ought I know) when I stood and looked on, did

> continually so shake my mind, that I durst not stand at the Steeple-door any longer, but was forced to flee, for fear the Steeple should fall on my head.[1]

The bells in Bunyan's Ellstow church were 27-36" wide and 22-28" high; the bell Bunyan seemingly rung was 28" by 35".[2] Standing beneath this massive bell whilst bellringing conceivably impressed Bunyan vividly with its size and weight; it took up a hefty proportion of the church door where he hid (figs. 1-2.). Bunyan's mounting anxiety about murderous bells and church architecture lead him to follow God's will and leave the steeple-house completely. This article examines Bunyan's interest in deliberately cultivating fear and low self-worth as a theological strategy to achieve salvation and conformity to God's will. Bunyan draws on Calvinist ideas of humanity's depravity and our inability to save ourselves; these leave Bunyan in an anxious state he feels unempowered to alleviate for himself.[3] The resulting keen consciousness of his sinfulness and his soul's peril renders him ready to receive God's Grace. Writers such as Richard Greaves, Laura Knoppers, Stuart Sim, Barry

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[1] John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 13-14. The 1666 edition does not include the bellringing passage; the expanded sixth edition (1688) does.

[2] Thomas North, *The Church Bells of Bedfordshire* (London: Elliot Stock, 1883), pp. 150-1.

[3] On Calvin's popularity in England, see Andrew Pettegree, 'The spread of Calvin's Thought', in Donald McKim, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 207-24 (210).

Hall, and Felicity Nussbaum identify Bunyan's anxiety as key to his spiritual life; I tease out what for Bunyan seem to have been the *uses* of anxiety.[4]

One such use of anxiety is diminishing Bunyan's will, making room for God's will to govern him. Bunyan tracks his increasing fear and waning agency throughout the bellringing passage. Initially, he writes, 'I chose' and 'I forced myself' to worry and fear; by the end the 'I' signalling his self-command disappears: he 'was forced to flee'. He frames his first decision to succumb to fear as a prudent choice, 'I chose to stand under a main Beam', before losing this control and moving purely reactively from increasingly-demanding compulsive fears that 'made [him] stand in the Steeple door'; finally, quaking, he states, 'I durst not stand at the Steeple-door'. The phrase 'I began to think' marks the turning-point between Bunyan's decision to worry and the period in which worry and fear cease to be optional for him and start to guide his decisions; it is unclear whether he is the source of the thought he 'began to think', or whether it is another agent such as God or Satan. 'It came into my head' further suggests that thoughts of murderous bells intrude into his mind like an external force. Eventually, rather than being discrete mental processes consciously guided by him, Bunyan's thoughts upsettingly take over the entirety of his mind and all his time: 'this thought…did continually so shake my mind', he writes, of his fear the church will fall on him. Mary Ann Lund explains, 'anxieties, terror, sudden frights, and phobias' were 'hallmarks' of early modern melancholy.[5] But here, cultivating fear until it is stronger than his desire to see the bells results in Bunyan obeying what he believes are God's commands: abjuring not only

[4] Felicity Nussbaum, '"By These Words I was Sustained"', *ELH*, 49 (1982), 18-34; Richard Greaves, 'Bunyan, John (*bap.* 1628, *d.* 1688)', *ODNB* (2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3949 and *Glimpses of Glory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 30-75; Laura Knoppers, 'Bunyan's Judges', *Bunyan Studies* 19 (2016) (53-75), 53-4; Barry Hall, 'Conflict, Closure, Dilemma', *Bunyan Studies* 16 (2012), 103-120.

[5] Mary Ann Lund, *A User's Guide to Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 21.

ringing, but even seeing bells. Cultivating a sense of physical danger enables him to appreciate the spiritual peril of vain bellringing. By acting on his fears, Bunyan validates what his conscience tells him: that bellringing is wrong and dangerous.

Bunyan's morbidly excessive scrutiny of his environment for threats and himself for weaknesses, and his worry about the future, might be recognised within a modern definition of anxiety.[6] Bunyan's Calvinist beliefs are crucial for understanding what such anxiety meant to him. Hall describes Bunyan's work as 'a startling insight into just how damaging Calvinistic doctrine could be to the Puritan mind', arguing that Bunyan's 'soteriological skepticism' means that he fails to achieve a sense of salvation, and that any relief from his spiritual anxiety is temporary.[7] For Sim, Calvinism 'encouraged' and 'intensified' what he identifies as Bunyan's manic depression but simultaneously 'gave him a narrative line to help deal with the experience', leaving it moot 'whether Calvinism creates manic-depressives or attracts them; whether it is to be viewed as cause or cure of personal despair and the breakdowns that can so often accompany this'.[8] I agree that Calvinism guides Bunyan's suffering. However, following Calvin, Bunyan finds harsh self-criticism and emphasising his own inability to help himself spiritually beneficial; blissfully receiving Grace is the result of cultivating fear and anxiety. Generating this bliss, for Bunyan, is what anxiety is for.

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[6] See Lisa Suárez et al, 'Understanding Anxiety Disorders from a "Triple Vulnerability" Framework', in Martin Anthony and Murray Stein, eds, *Oxford Handbook of Anxiety and Related Disorders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 153-72 (154); Richard McNally and Hannah Reese, 'Information-Processing Approaches to Understanding Anxiety Disorders', *Handbook of Anxiety* (136-52).

[7] Hall, pp. 110, 103, 115.

[8] Stuart Sim, ''Despair, Melancholy and the Novel', in Allan Ingram et al, eds, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1880* (London: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 114-141 (115).

Calvinism and scrupulousness–straws, pins, damnation

Bunyan reaches a morose state, believing all his deeds guaranteed to be sinful. He agonises over the smallest engagements with the most trifling objects, too afraid to touch a straw or pin (in Bunyan's work, an insignificant object *par excellence*) in case he does something wrong:

> I durst not take a pin or a stick, though but so big as a straw; for my conscience now was sore, and would smart at every touch: I could not now tell how to speak my words for fear I should misplace them: O how gingerly did I then go, in all I did or said! I found myself as on a miry bog, that shook if I did but stir.[9]

Perfect behaviour becomes a taunting (im)possibility stymying Bunyan. The bog 'that shook if I did but stir' evokes exhausting precarity. By implication, Bunyan's tiniest movements besmirch him with mud and, further destabilising his already-unstable world, threaten to sink him in this bog. Bunyan is perhaps here developing a proto-version of the Slough of Despond in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678-84): a 'bog' and 'miry Slough' that leaves Christian and Pliable 'grievously bedaubed with the dirt'.[10] The character 'Help' explains that the Slough is a confluence of sinners' despairingly-fearful thoughts, 'as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place'.[11] In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan is on the surface of this mire; his fear lest his movements perturb its surface and suck him in translates to a fear of sinking into hellish despair.

[9] Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 26-27.

[10] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 14.

[11] Bunyan, *PP*, p. 15.

Calvinism supports such a despairing worldview, emphasising that any attempt to exercise our own will results in evil and that only Grace can lift us to heaven, whilst also suggesting that in theory at least a person could perfectly follow God's law, meanwhile advising Christians not to scruple over every quotidian choice. Calvin writes in *The Institution of Christian Religion* (1536), translated by Thomas Norton (1561), 'the righteousnesse of works consisteth only in the perfect keeping of the Law. Whereupon followeth that no man is justified by works, but he that having climbed up to the highest top of perfection, cannot be proved guiltie of any offence, be it never so little': impossible for postlapsarian humans who *ought* to, but cannot, obey God in everything.[12] Earlier, Calvin notes that everyday life presents Christians with small choices between morally-neutral options, like choosing cloths for one's napkin; worrying about such things as if they were life-and-death decisions diverts Christians' minds from God. Calvin dangles the possibility of perfectly pleasing God before Bunyan's eyes, whilst simultaneously stating that any effort to please God is futile. Attempting diligently to obey God whilst immobilised by the anxiety that he corrupts everything he does and that his efforts are inefficacious, Bunyan falls into over-scrupulous fear about morally-neutral acts like lifting a straw. Bunyan finds relief only through Jesus, 'I saw that I wanted a perfect Righteousness, to present me without fault before God; and this Righteousness was no where to be found, but in the person of Jesus Christ'.[13] So far from God is the human mind, Calvin writes, 'that it conceiveth, coveteth, and enterpriseth all wickednesse, filthinesse, uncleannesse, and mischiefe'; in Norton's English (like Calvin's Latin) four unappetising nouns proceed from three verbs, evoking evil

[12] Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London: Anne Griffin, 1634), 3.15. Griffin's edition made *Institution* available to Bunyan's generation.

[13] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 27.

multiplying from and beyond the human mind.[14] Calvin adds that the human 'heart is so thoroughly soked in poyson of sinne, that it can breath out nothing but corrupt stinke', which Bunyan echoes when comparing himself to a polluted fountain, 'sin and corruption…would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain'.[15] By changing Calvin's image of breath to one of thoughtless water (perhaps echoing Norton's sinners bringing 'dirtie and bitter water' to God's wine), Bunyan dehumanises himself in accordance with Calvin's belief that humans' seemingly self-directed plans are in fact indicators of their lack of freedom.[16]

Bunyan's straw occupies the ridiculous end-point of Calvin's list of items the morose Christian might fuss over. Calvin writes,

> If a man begin to doubt whether hee may occupie linen in sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and napkings, neither will he be out of doubt whether hee may use hempe [Calvin gives several more examples, concluding:] Finally, at the length he will come to this point, to thinke it unlawfull (as the common saying is) to tread upon a straw lying a crosse.[17]

Norton's 'crooked' straw makes a significant translational shift from Biblical authority to popular superstition. Calvin wrote 'un festu de travers'/ 'festuca transversa' which, like the then-current English word 'fescue', is an awry straw, stalk, small stick, or anything unimportant; it evokes the Vulgate's hypocrite condemning a 'festuca' in his brother's eye

[14] Calvin, *Institution*, 2.5.

[15] Calvin, *Institution*, 2.5; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 27.

[16] Calvin, *Institution*, 2.5.

[17] Calvin, *Institution*, 3.19

when he has a beam in his own (Matthew 7:3). By writing 'straw' not 'fescue' and suggestively deploying the phrase 'a crosse', Norton introduces the not-uncommon fear (as his inserted reference to 'the common saying' signposts) of blasphemously treading on Christ's Cross as it appears symbolically in everyday arrangements of objects.[18] Though Calvin intended to mock people overly-concerned about straws, Norton's 'straw lying a crosse' is a compelling image of a tiny object looming eschatologically large in a religiously-anxious mind.

In *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (1680) and *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan narrows debates about humans' corrupt actions and attempts to be good, and God's providence, to the question of whether improperly picking up a pin can damn one's mortal soul. In *Badman*, Mr Attentive relates a story of a man waiting to be hanged for theft, who confesses,

> that that, which had brought him to that end, was his accustoming of himself, when young, to pilfer and steal small things…he began the trade of a Thief by stealing of Pins and Points, and therefore did forewarn all the Youth, that then were gathered together to see him die, to take heed of beginning though but with little sins, because by tampering at first with little ones, way is made for the commission of bigger.[19]

The condemned man's acknowledgement that he brought his fate upon himself is consonant with an odd asymmetry in Calvin's writings. Calvin views sinful people as culpable for their

[18] 'Festue: A feskue; straw, rush, little stalk or stick…' Randall Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Adam Islip, 1611), Oo4v.

[19] John Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*, ed. Roger Sharrock and James Forrest (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 22-3. In 1928 GB Harrison affirmed *GA* and *Badman*'s congruence, publishing them together.

sins (because they will them), whilst the good are not to be praised for their goodness (because they cannot will good things), only God is due this praise.[20] Voluntary sinning, and choosing morally-neutral napkin-cloth, is the most free will that Calvin allows humans. Bunyan concentrates on the role of miniscule sins in forming bad habits; to 'pilfer' is specifically to steal petty items, as Bunyan tautologously emphasises, the Thief would 'steal small things' including 'Pins and Points' [ribbon-fastenings for clothes and shoes]. 'Little sins…the little ones' initiate a life-long habit of theft resulting in execution-worthy 'bigger' sins, propelling him hellwards. In *The Strait Gate* (1676) Bunyan admonishes, 'Beware of little sins, they will make way for great ones, and they again will make way for bigger, upon which Gods wrath will follow'.[21] In *Badman*, Bunyan suggests that the Thief was predestined for hell because he was a bad person, 'they be not bad deeds that make a bad man, but he is already a bad man that doth bad deeds. A man must be wicked before he can do wickedness'.[22] This somewhat undermines the Thief's advice to the children to mind their smallest actions; the children can change neither their own natures nor their souls' destinies. If they are predestined for heaven and steal a pin, Grace will intervene to save them from damnation; if they are predestined for hell, their corrupt volition will find some way to damn them, including through 'Pins and Points'.

Belief in his own futility prevents Bunyan enjoying the dignity and satisfaction of choices well made, afflicting him with a deeply shameful sense of his own wickedness. Nevertheless, this Calvinistic idea offers Bunyan opportunities for joy: in this model of the

[20] Jean Calvin *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, trans. Graham Davis (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996 [1534]), 1.256-7, 2.263. Cf. Tomis Kapitan, 'A Master Argument for Incompatibilism?', *Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 127-157.

[21] John Bunyan, *The Strait Gate* (1676), ed. Graham Midgeley, *Misc. Works*, vol. 5, p. 122.

[22] Bunyan, *Badman*, p. 86.

will, the best course of action is to recognise that by themselves human wills tend only to evil, and to give God control of one's will. Bunyan creates parallels between himself and Badman in that several of Badman's activities, like swearing and cursing, reflect Bunyan's own 'sinful' behaviours in *Grace Abounding*.[23] Whilst Badman's bad habits accumulate and consolidate until he arrives in hell, God lifts Bunyan from his wicked ways. *Badman* does not afford space for sympathy with Badman's life-circumstances (his alcohol addiction, the wicked friends obstructing his reform); each misfortune and mis-step is a step on Badman's inevitable road hellwards. Lifting (stealing) a pin ultimately has huge eschatological consequence to Badman because it helps damn him. Because he spends a substantial period believing himself a hell-worthy sinner and later becomes assured of God's Grace, Bunyan reads small actions both as damning and as immaterial in *Grace Abounding*. In *Grace Abounding*, a small action like picking up a pin or straw does not ultimately matter: God has already decided Bunyan will go to heaven, thus even if Bunyan did lift the pin sinfully this would have no power to change his blessed fate. The action is inefficacious, but happily so.

"I durst not"–feeding fear

By scrupling over small items, Bunyan aims to attract God to him: his worry is a magnet for Grace. Cultivating fear is an important, and appropriate, feature of Bunyan's narrative of grace. Thoughts of murderous bells 'shake [Bunyan's] mind'; later in *Grace Abounding*, contemplating his spiritual state leaves him viscerally terrified, with 'such a clogging and heat in my stomach by reason of this my terror', fearing his 'breastbone would

[23] Patricia Bell argues that Badman represents Bunyan's son Thomas, 'Thomas Bunyan and Mr Badman', *Bunyan Studies* 2 (1990), 46-52. Perhaps Bunyan represented both himself and Thomas in Badman. Cf. Vera Camden, 'Blasphemy and the Problem of the Self', *Bunyan Studies* 1 (1989), 5-21.

split in sunder'.[24] In *Good News for the Vilest of Men* (1688), Bunyan advises working oneself up into an acute consciousness of one's sins in order to attract Grace and be saved 'as soon, and as heartily' as the biggest sinners.[25] For Bunyan, presenting oneself before God as one of the worst sinners makes one a more urgent case for Grace. Bunyan advises the person who sins but little,

> Little sinner, when therefore thou goest to God, though thou knowest in thy conscience, that thou, as to acts, art no Thief, no Murderer, no Whore, no Liar, no false Swearer, or the like, and in reason must needs understand, that thus thou art not so profanely vile as others; yet when thou goest to God for Mercy, know no mans sins but thine own, make mention of no mans sins but thine own. Also labour not to lessen thy own, but magnifie and greaten them by all just circumstances, and be as if there was never a sinner in the world but thy self. Also cry out as if thou wast the only undone Man; and that is the way to obtain God's mercy.
>
> It is one of the comliest sights in the world, to see a little Sinner commenting upon the greatest of his sins, multiplying and multiplying them to himself, till he makes them in his own eyes bigger and higher than he seeth every other mans sins to be in the World, and as base a thing it is to see a man do otherwise.[26]

[24] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 50.

[25] John Bunyan, *Good News for the Vilest of Men* (1688), ed. Richard Greaves, *Misc. Works* vol 11, p. 71. On godly sorrow and broken-heartedness, see John Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice* (1689); Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 151. On fear in Bunyan's work and its contexts, see Anne Dunan-Page, *Grace Overwhelming: John Bunyan, the Pilgrim's Progress and the Extremes of the Baptist Mind* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 195-244.

[26] Bunyan, *GN*, p. 73.

Repeating 'as if', Bunyan emphasises that the sinner should ignore what seems to be reality (that they are not really a great sinner); instead, in competition with other sinners, they should anxiously construct a sense of themselves as an 'undone Man'. Bunyan repeats this advice in *The Strait Gate* (1676). Deliberately amplifying thoughts of their vileness is something the sinner can *do*, in a Calvinistic universe where they can do nothing much else to help themselves. Nevertheless, as the popular case of sixteenth-century religious melancholic Francesco Spiera shows, early moderns understood that loosening one's grip on reality when believing a horribly worsened image of oneself comes with its own dangers, including suicidal despair. Lund explores the connections between predestinarian paranoia and suicidal despair in her reading of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).[27]

Even in the throes of terror Bunyan makes space for self-critical self-scrutiny. In *Treatise of the Fear of God* (1679), he cautions against fostering 'ungodly' fear of God based around guiltily dreading God's laws and judgements; such fear encourages humans to remain in their comfort zone, far from God.[28] Bunyan suggests that this ungodly fear is seen in performing the wrong rituals, linking it to Catholic practices like self-flagellation and pilgrimages, 'this ungodly fear of God, is that which will put men upon according to the revealed Will of God, their own inventions, and their own performances of them as a means

[27] Lund, pp. 135-52. See John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

[28] Bunyan, *Treatise of the Fear of God* (1679), ed. Richard Greaves, *Misc. Works* vol. 9, p. 22ff. This tradition of welcoming uncomfortable fear of God remains alive, Michael Reeves, *Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021) and Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, *John Bunyan and the Grace of Fearing God* (P&R, 2016) draw on Bunyan.

to pacifie the anger of God'.[29] He may well have understood his own unnecessary activities, like worrying about handling pins, as falling within this remit. Calvin recognises how despairing his theology might make his readers, even those destined for heaven, because uncertainty about salvation 'either perpetually vexeth the miserable man with terrible torments, or utterly dismayeth him'.[30] Seventeenth-century 'dismay' was an utter loss of moral courage. Bunyan lives out what Calvin acknowledges are the potential effects of his theology: feelings of low self-worth and anxiety regarding whether he is saved. In a typically Calvinist twist, Calvin suggests in *Institution* 3.9 that the elect should not fear death but be ready for it because it brings them to heaven. Even cultivating appropriate fear of God, and of bells, generates more anxiety for Bunyan: anxiety that his fear indicates that he is not elect.

Correct fear of God can be a 'grace' keeping people on the right path, valuable for its ability to destabilise humans' confidence in themselves, forcing them to trust wholly in God. 'This Grace of fear; is that which maketh men excel…in the account of God' because 'FEAR takes off a man from trusting to himself', Bunyan explains.[31] Such fear enables Bunyan to preserve a place for his soul in heaven by invalidating himself before God. Calvin states that if we want to find God, we must 'mislike' ourselves, ideally being timorously insecure to the extent that we 'in manner are destroyed with feare of death':

> Hereof proceedeth that trembling and amazednesse, wherewith the Scripture in many places reciteth that the holy men were stricken and astonished so oft as they perceived the presence of God. For when wee see that they which in his absence did stand assured and unmoved, so soone as he discloseth his glory, beginne so to quake, and so

[29] Bunyan, *Treatise*, p. 29.

[30] Calvin, *Institution*, 3.24.

[31] Bunyan, *Treatise*, pp. 52, 72.

> are dismayed, that they fall downe, yea are swallowed up, and in manner are destroyed with feare of death: it is to be gathered thereby, that man is never sufficiently touched and inwardly moved with knowledge of his own basenesse, untill hee have compared himselfe to the Majestie of God.[32]

Even people who do not consciously ponder their own 'basenesse' will lose identity and control when facing God: they 'fall downe', 'quake', then are 'swallowed up…and destroyed'. Significantly, it is not God who annihilates humans; their own fears annihilate them. Bunyan agrees with Calvin on the importance of fear to religious practice, arguing that fearing God is 'our highest duty'.[33] It is not only an appropriate reaction to God, but a way of triggering bliss.

Compulsive religion

Bunyan's anxieties extend to scrutinising and blaming himself for what goes on in his mind, in an attempt to ensure that not only his deeds but his thoughts please God. 'I could not now tell how to speak my words, for fear I should misplace them'. Like Badman, Bunyan swears: an insult against God. Bunyan implies his swearing was an involuntary tic or pleasurable verbal stim, which involves (in a suggestion of neurodiversity) 'playing the mad-man', 'it was my delight, to be taken captive by the Devil…cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy Name of God'.[34] Preaching as an adult, he is tempted to spout blasphemies to his congregation.[35] Though Michael Davies suggests that Bunyan deploys

[32] Calvin, *Institution*, 1.17, 1.1.

[33] Bunyan, *Treatise*, p. 5.

[34] Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 11, 6.

[35] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 90.

bawdy language controlledly in texts like *Pilgrim's Progress* as part of a didactic project 'to make it work in converting ways' and 'turn the reader away from sexual transgression', in *Grace Abounding* Bunyan emphasises his difficulties controlling his crude, blasphemous speech.[36] Reprimanded by passersby, Bunyan begins to resist temptations to blaspheme and curse; 'provoked' by Satan to sin against the Holy Ghost, Bunyan physically holds his own mouth closed, explaining that he would rather 'leap with my head downward into some Muck-hill-hole or other, to keep my mouth from speaking'.[37] This abject image may incorporate the self-deprecating comedy found in other seventeenth-century non-conformists' writing (Hannah Allen is a good example) who retrospect to moments of distress from their safe position as confirmed members of the Elect, re-framing what once were huge fears and shameful feelings as moments of ridiculousness in the new context of securely-predestined grace.

Attempting to control his thoughts, Bunyan confronts his inefficacy. He experiences physically-painful ('torture'-like), repeated thoughts of selling Jesus to the devil, externalising them as an 'assault' from Satan. Resisting the intrusive thought takes hours of his time as he repeats 'I will not' hundredfold and involves bodily and spiritual effort as he positions the thought as an external opponent he spiritually and bodily pushes 'against', 'continually leaning and forcing my spirit against it'.[38] In this episode, as in the bellringing passage, Bunyan is both 'forced', and an agent of 'forc*ing*'. Bunyan experiences this as an exhausting passivity: he is forced vigorously to force himself against Satan. Nevertheless,

[36] Michael Davies, 'Bunyan's Bawdy', in Vera Camden, ed, *Trauma and Transformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 106-119 (118).

[37] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 33.

[38] Hannah Allen experiences Satan's 'blasphemous thoughts and injections' quasi-medically inserted into her mind, *Satan: His Methods and Malice Baffled* (London: John Wallis, 1683), D8v.

perhaps the fact that Bunyan cannot help but resist Satan is the first inkling that he is one of the Elect. Bunyan again focuses on pins, which become additionally meaningful as objects that, because so small and worthless, would be especially insulting were Bunyan to exchange one for his infinitely-precious Christ:

> …. I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, *Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that*; *sell Him, sell Him.*
>
> Sometimes it would run in my thoughts, not so little as a hundred times together, *Sell Him, sell Him, sell Him*: against which, I may say, for whole hours together, I have been forced to stand as continually leaning and forcing my spirit against it, lest haply, before I were aware, some wicked thought might arise in my heart, that might consent thereto; and sometimes the tempter would make me believe I had consented to it; but then I should be, as tortured upon a rack for whole days together.
>
> This temptation did put me to such scares, lest I should at some times, I say, consent thereto, and be overcome therewith, that by the very force of my mind, in labouring to gainsay and resist this wickedness, my very body would be put into action or motion, by way of pushing or thrusting with my hands or elbows; still answering, as fast as the destroyer said, *Sell Him*; *I will not, I will not, I will not, I will not*; *no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands of worlds*: thus reckoning, lest I should, in the midst of these assaults, set too low a value on Him; even until I scarce well knew where I was, or how to be composed again…
>
> one morning as I did lie in my bed, I was, as at other times, most fiercely assaulted with this temptation, *To sell and part with Christ*; the wicked suggestion still running in my mind, *Sell Him, sell Him, sell Him, sell Him, sell Him*, as fast as a man could

> speak: against which also, in my mind, as at other times, I answered, *No, no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands,* at least twenty times together: but at last, after much striving, even until I was almost out of breath, I felt this thought pass through my heart, *Let Him go, if He will*; and I thought also, that I felt my heart freely consent thereto. Oh! the diligence of Satan! Oh! The desperateness of man's heart!
>
> Now was the battle won, and down fell I as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree, into great guilt, and fearful despair.[39]

This experience 'scares' Bunyan because he worries that if he does nothing to 'gainsay and resist' the thought he may put it into action, 'consent thereto, and be overcome therewith'. That Bunyan uses both hands and elbows to ward off Satan suggests Satan attacking Bunyan from various angles.[40] Bunyan describes this fight as his own effort, rather than something God guides: '*my* spirit', '*my* hands or elbows'. Bunyan's lone efforts are insufficient. He assumes responsibility for ultimately wearily consenting to sell Christ, occasioning 'great guilt'. His 'consent', though, lays the ground for spiritual rebirth: Bunyan does not phrase it in active terms 'I sell Christ', but leans on Christ's agency: '*let* Him go, *if He will*'. Nussbaum argues that here Bunyan tests God's patriarchal authority.[41] However, I read this moment of passivity and failure to be good as a moment when Bunyan—however tentatively—leaves everything up to Christ.

Bunyan's Christianity gave him reason to believe thoughts as bad as deeds. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ states that refraining from murdering is insufficient; anger is also wrong (Matthew 5:21). He adds that we should avoid not only adultery but also lustful

[39] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 42.

[40] Satan further triggers Bunyan's bodily motion when Bunyan attempts to dine, *GA*, p. 43.

[41] Nussbaum, 21.

thoughts, which constitute committing adultery in our hearts and warrant plucking our eye out—perhaps to prevent the thought becoming a deed or perhaps in recognition that the thought is as punishably-bad as a deed (Matthew 5:28). In *Badman*, thoughts are integral to a person's identity; wicked 'desires and intentions' should be checked because they are as worthy of criticism and judgement as 'the act of wickedness itself',

> the Law Judgeth man, as I said, according to what they would be—He that looketh after a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. By the same rule, he that would steal, doth steal; he that would cheat, doth cheat; he that would swear, doth swear—and he that would commit adultery, doth do so. For God Judgeth men according to the working of their minds, and saith; *As he thinketh, so is he*. That is, so is he in his desires, in his endeavours, and God's Law, I say, lays hold of the desires, intentions, and endeavours, even as it lays hold of the act of wickedness itself.[42]

Bunyan shies from publishing his worst thoughts. He states that he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* 'to divert myself in doing this| From worser thoughts which make me do amiss'.[43] In *Grace Abounding*, he remembers 'many other [blasphemous thoughts], which at this time I may not, nor dare not utter, neither by word or pen'.[44] Under the 1650 Blasphemy Act, blasphemous words, beliefs, and opinions could lead to imprisonment. This cultural context, and Bunyan's interpretation of Christianity, entail that for him not resisting the thought 'sell him' is in itself

[42] Bunyan, *Badman*, p. 86.

[43] Bunyan, *PP*, 1.

[44] Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 31-2.

a sin, equivalent to actually selling Christ. Bunyan's capitulatory 'let him go if he will' is moreover a kind of action: a performative utterance that puts Christ up for sale.

Bunyan's belief that thoughts are equivalent to deeds, positioning of unwanted thoughts as external to his (ideal) self, feeling of deep responsibility for terrible events outside his control, and attempt to suppress thoughts and prevent these events through neutralising rituals like repeating 'I will not', have led several historians, psychologists, and OCD organisations to posit that he suffered from OCD.[45] Psychological studies suggest that OCD obsessions frequently feature religious content; some indicate overlaps between OCD rituals and religious rituals and see religiosity as providing fertile ground for OCD to develop.[46] Diagnosing Bunyan retrospectively with a particular anxiety disorder is impossible and undesirable, not least because of the contingency and instability of modern diagnostic criteria.[47] In Bunyan's own words, drawing on his seventeenth-century Dissenting belief-

[45] E.g. John Sneep and Arlette Zinck. 'Spiritual and Psychic Transformation' *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 24 (2005), 156–164; https://www.ocduk.org/ocd/history-of-ocd/john-bunyan/, https://www.ocdhistory.net/firsthand/bunyan.html. For critique see Joanne Edge, 'Diagnosing OCD in the Past' https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XPouXRIAADXIjwu5 [all links accessed March 15 2021]. On thought-action fusion and ego dystonia in OCD, see Suárez et al, p. 167; Christine Purdon, 'Psychological Approaches to Understanding Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder', *Handbook of Anxiety*, pp. 238-49 (239-241); Carol Mathews, 'Phenomenology of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder', *Handbook of Anxiety*, pp. 56-64 (57). Other critics speculate that Bunyan had depression or 'manic depression': Greaves, *Glimpses*, pp. 30-75; Sim, 114-5.

[46] Suárez et al, p. 167; Purdon, pp. 241, 247. Jina Pagura et al highlight perfectionism's importance in OCD and anxiety, 'Personality Factors in the Anxiety Disorders', *Handbook of Anxiety*, pp. 190-208. Sigmund Freud links 'Zwangsneurose' (obsessive-compulsive neuroses) with religious and folk ritual, *Hemmung, Symptom, und Angst* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992 [1926]), p. 65.

[47] For Michael Davies, deeming Bunyan to have any mental illness aligns us with the rational medical discourses Bunyan 'competed' with and obscures the fact that (as Greaves also argues) in the bellringing passage Bunyan was stereotyping his legalistic attempts to please God; I disagree that such readings are

system, his fearful recognition of his own wickedness and the futility of his efforts to combat blasphemous thoughts, lay the ground for Grace to flourish in his life.

The rewards of anxiety

Grace is the payoff of Bunyan's anxiety. Its bliss contrasts with the short-lived peace and self-esteem that resulted from giving up dancing and bellringing, 'I had great peace in my conscience…I thought no man in England could please God better than I'.[48] Bunyan's proliferation of 'buts' in the bellringing passage demonstrates how temporary this peace is; his imperfect acts of obedience are never quite enough: he watches bellringing *but* a bell might fall; he stands under the beam *but* worries a bell could still kill him; he moves to the doorway *but* the church could fall. Towards the end of *Grace Abounding*, God's voice comforts Bunyan at his lowest point, as he contemplates how futile his religiosity has been: 'my soul was never the better':

> one day, when I was…full of sadness and terror; for my fears again were strong upon me; and, as I was now thinking, my soul was never the better, but my case most sad and fearful, these words did with great power suddenly break in upon me; *My grace is sufficient for thee, My grace is sufficient for thee, My grace is sufficient for thee,* three

'uncharitable': Bunyan may simultaneously have been mentally ill and in control of his spiritual narrative, *Graceful Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 18, 93-4 104-6; Greaves, *Glimpses* pp. 38-41. Sullivan explains different early modern 'emotional communities' interpreted symptoms differently: what doctors deemed humoral diseases, religious communities may deem pious experiences, p. 18. On contentions within Bunyan studies over the relationship between mental health conditions and Puritanism, see Dunan-Page, pp. 150-151. Tanya Luhrmann discusses spirituality's relationship to mental illness, analysing modern Evangelicals' voice-hearing, *When God Talks Back* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 227-66

[48] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 14.

> times together: And oh! methought that every word was a mighty word unto me; as *My*, and *grace*, and *sufficient*, and *for thee*; they were then, and sometimes are still, far bigger than others be.[49]

Voice-hearing is central to many religious traditions including Christianity.[50] Elsewhere, a voice saying '*This sin is not unto death*' and '*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*' extricates Bunyan from his worries.[51] Bunyan hears two types of voices: Satan's, angrily barking orders, and God's 'mighty' reassuring voice suffusing Bunyan with salvation. Simon McCarthy-Jones, Amanda Waegeli, and John Watkins discuss research on modern voice hearers, suggesting that positive spiritual and divine voices speak more soothingly and at more length, using complete sentences, whereas negative voices heard within psychotic disorders 'are often terse [repeating single words and/or short phrases], extremely negative [antagonistic, malevolent, anti-religious], and issue direct commands'.[52] This latter describes Satan's voice in *Grace Abounding* with its wicked short phrase *sell him*, in comparison with the soothing complete sentences 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love', 'my grace is

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[49] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 65.

[50] Christopher Cook, *Christians Hearing Voices* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2020), *Hearing Voices* (London: Routledge, 2018). Luhrmann emphasises deliberate training involved in interpreting part of one's mental experience as God's voice, p. xxi. On voice-hearing communities more generally, see Akiko Hart, 'A New Alliance?' in Anna Stenning et al, eds, *Neurodiversity Studies* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 221-225 and https://hearingthevoice.org/.

[51]Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 59-60.

[52] Simon McCarthy-Jones et al, 'Spirituality and Hearing Voices', *Psychosis* (2013) (247-58), 253. On voice-hearing and anxiety, see Matthew Ratcliffe and Sam Wilkinson, 'How anxiety induces verbal hallucination', *Consciousness and Cognition* 39 (2016) (48-58), 57. Luhrmann cites a Vineyard worshipper equating questioning her 'unconscious' to talking with the Holy Spirit p. 83.

sufficient for thee', and 'this sin is not unto death'. Bunyan remembers God's comforting words in order successfully to resist later temptations, writing, 'but he [Satan] could by no means do it…for this good sentence stood like a mill-post at my back'.[53] A mill post is a massive wooden post supporting a windmill. This image both emphasises the strong support of God's word and implies that there is a windmill whirring above the post: Bunyan's whirling mind, still anxiously alert enough to ensure he does not slip into sin. Bunyan lives out the script he recommends in *Good News*: descending to a point where he finds his own agency futile and himself a hopelessly-great sinner, then attracting Grace precisely whilst in this (for Calvin) appropriately self-critical, trepidatious state.

Experiencing the payoff of anxiety changes the way Bunyan reads. Newly sure of his Elect status, he no longer uses the Bible to goad his anxiety but finds comfort in it as a reader who can evaluate different interpretations. Bunyan starts to unpick the fusion of thought and deed, using Biblical examples that had previously dismayed him and in particular Esau selling his birthright for pottage (Genesis 25:29-34):

> as touching that in the twelfth of the Hebrews, about Esau's selling his birthright, though this was that which killed me…yet now I did consider, first, that his was not a hasty thought against the continual labour of his mind, but a thought consented to, and put in practice likewise, and that too after some deliberation.[54]

Having previously seen himself as blameworthy as Esau, selling Christ just as Esau sold his birthright for a nugatory meal, Bunyan reflects that 'a hasty thought against the continual labour of his mind' is actually not so bad, and does not indicate that the thinker is wicked.

[53] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 60.

[54] Bunyan, *GA*, p. 71.

Rather, a consciously deliberated, willingly consented-to, and deliberately carried-out sinful thought is wicked. 'A hasty thought against the continual labour of his mind' accurately describes Bunyan's intrusive idea 'sell him!', which he describes 'labour[ing]' against. Bunyan develops a liberating logic: he does not willingly consent to sell Christ but is browbeaten into it; he does not deliberate about how to sell Christ and then carry out the sale. He is not as blameworthy as he believes Esau to be, because Esau calculatingly and willingly implemented his sale. In *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace* (1659), Bunyan differentiates between 'wilfully, despitefully, and knowingly' sinning and sinning 'through ignorance or through some sudden violent change breaking loose from Hell upon [the sinner]', irresistible without God's help.[55] In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan learns to make this distinction; initially seeing a sin against the Holy Ghost as a matter of speaking one word wrongly, then realising that unpardonable sin is actually chronic, thorough resistance to the Holy Ghost.

Conclusion

In *Doctrine*, Bunyan asks about blasphemous thoughts, 'Dost thou delight in them?'; his ideal reply prefigures *Grace Abounding* 'O no, neither would I do it for a thousand worlds', tellingly adding 'But how and if I should delight in them before I am aware?'[56] Freud identifies a warped satisfaction, almost completely unrecognisable as such, in the punishing rituals of people with compulsive neuroses.[57] Bunyan affirms that Grace brings his only true satisfaction. For Davies, Bunyan experiences never-ending spiritual setbacks, rather than

[55] John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659), ed. Richard Greaves, *Misc. Works* vol. 2, p. 59.

[56] Bunyan, *Doctrine*, p. 202.

[57] 'die Triebregung zwar trotz der Verdrängung einen Ersatz gefunden hat, aber einen stark verkümmerten, verschobenen, gehemmten. Er is auch als Befriedigung nicht mehr kenntlich', p. 41.

abundant Grace. I do not argue that Bunyan progressed from spiritual setbacks to no spiritual setbacks.[58] Rather, he progresses from uncertainty about the sufficiency and abundance of Grace to certainty thereof, even though he still sins. Bunyan's radical dependence on God comforts him, and is followed by what William James calls a 'spiritual birthday': total acceptance of God's will. [59] Though this bliss descends when God decides, Bunyan, anxiously, carefully tried to provoke it.

[58] Davies, pp. 115-6.

[59] 'There is a state of mind, known to religious men, but to no others, in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God. In this state of mind, what we most dreaded has become the habitation of our safety, and the hour of our moral death has turned into our spiritual birthday. The time for tension in our soul is over, and that of happy relaxation, of calm deep breathing, of an eternal present, with no discordant future to be anxious about, has arrived. Fear is not held in abeyance as it is by mere morality, it is positively expunged and washed away', William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Martin Marty (London: Penguin, 1982 [1902]), p. 47. Sophie Mackintosh describes a similar feeling; worried about her mother dying, she puts faith in horoscopes, 'What else is there in this slippery world? We all want to be told how the story will end…It is very soothing sometimes to feel that I am putting my trust in something bigger than myself. It's a second off from the responsibility for my life and all that is contained within it', *On Anxiety*, ed. Clare Bogen (London: 3 of Cups, 2018), pp. 27-33 (30-31). Camden notes that Bunyan's physical wellbeing also improved as his life progressed, 'Introduction', in *Trauma* (pp. 1-13), 3.

Fig. 1 (left) the church door. Fig 2 (right) the clapper of ‘Bunyan’s bell’

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