



## CONTROVERSIAL PORTRAYAL OF THE LAW OF MOSES IN THE NOVEL THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

INGATAN GULÖ

English Linguistics, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia



INGATAN GULÖ

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### ABSTRACT

John Bunyan in his novel *The Pilgrim's Progress* gives his point of view on the Law of Moses in a very different and contradictory way. This fact and other related issues have become the writer's main reasons to conduct an analysis on the novel so that people fully understand the real implementation of the law and John Bunyan's perspective on it. The writer's primary data are written texts in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and his secondary data are related and supporting information taken from books, commentaries, and internet sites.

In analyzing this novel the present writer uses two approaches. The first is Generic Structuralism Approach which deals with intrinsic elements and compares to the extrinsic elements such as author's point of view, cultures, politics, beliefs, and economical aspects. The other one is Moral Approach which is concerned with the fidelity and significance of contents and values portrayed in a literary work. It is obvious throughout the analysis that John Bunyan is on the opposite side toward the implementation of the Law of Moses. He portrays that the law is cruel, enslaving, and no longer able to solve man's main spiritual problem.

**Key Words:** Controversial Portrayal, the Law of Moses, The Pilgrim's Progress

### INTRODUCTION

The Law of Moses refers to laws and ordinances given through Moses to the Jews for about three months after they were delivered out of the bondage of Egypt. The purpose of giving this law was to keep the blood line pure for the coming Messiah as the promise made to Abraham hundred years before.

The Lord had said to Abraham to get out of his country, from his father's house, and go to the land that He would show. The Lord promised that He would make him a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and in him all families on earth would be blessed. Then Abraham came out of the land and dwelt in Charran.

After living in Charran, he was told by the Lord to continue his migration into Canaan where Jacob, his grandchild, beget twelve sons. To survive from the sore famine in the land, Jacob and his eleven sons took a journey and lived in Egypt where his other son had been appointed a ruler over Pharaoh's house and over all the land. In Egypt, those descendants of Abraham increased abundantly, multiplied, filled the land, and became a nation known as Israel, the Jews.

Realizing that the children of Israel grew mightier than the native stocks, the new King of that land told his people to set laws that afflicted the people of Israel. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. Then the Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard

bondage in mortaring, in making bricks, and in all manner of vigorous services.

When the Lord heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, their ancestors, He had Moses get them out of that land and lead them to the promised land, Canaan. The people were brought out of Egypt by the Lord with mighty miracles and a powerful hand. He did great and awesome miracles before the Egyptians.

On their way to Canaan, the Lord called Moses to the mount of Sinai and gave him law, moral standard, and ceremonial to be obeyed by the people he led. He explained to Moses that the people of Israel had to keep His contract with them and obey all the laws and ordinances He gave, so that they would be His own little flock from among all nations on the earth. The law made them separate and peculiar people for His own possession. Known as the Law of Moses, this legislation had been a middle wall of partition between the Jewish nation and all others.

Adam Clarke says that the middle wall refers to that most marked distinction which Jewish laws and customs made between them and all other nations whatsoever (1832, p. 440). Wherever they went, their own rites, ordinances, and customs became a sufficient separation between them and others. It is clear, as Clarke explains, that the law was made merely for the purpose of keeping the Jews a distinct people and pointing out the Son of God till He came (1832, p. 441). Therefore when the Son of God, Abraham's promised seed came, the main purpose of the law was fulfilled. The Law of Moses has ended.

The problem is that most of Jewish people hold that this Mosaic system is still binding. Taylor in Brown says that they still teach and practice the principles of the Law of Moses (2004, p. 109-110). Ironically, many other people who were not physically born as Jews also teach and practice this law as if that were given to them to obey.

The novel *The Pilgrim's Progress* gives essential points related to this law and the people who practice it. Instead of compromising with these principles and the people, some accounts in the novel set forth different views on

this particular topic through the dialogues among the characters in the novel.

This literary work is an allegorical novel written by John Bunyan during his imprisonment for his nonconformist views. It describes the adventure of its hero, Christian, on his way from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City (Carruth, 1986, p. 1353). It has enough interesting accounts which obviously underline the fact about the characteristics of the law in the novel.

The author was a well known English preacher who had a very little formal education. It is said that all during his young manhood, he was repenting for the vices of his youth and yet he had never been either a drunkard or immoral (Forbush, 1967, p. 327). He was arrested and jailed for preaching without license. One of the most important books that he read during his imprisonment was the Bible. Other source says that he was really fond of Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* (Latham, 1982, p. 34) and other religion books.

It is interesting to conduct a research on this because John Bunyan has bravely come out with blunt and outspoken statements about the Law of Moses before his readers who mostly are the adherents of the law. The fact that this law was designed by God to be temporary, has also become the writer's interest and starting point to conduct a research on this topic.

#### METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research which combines two approaches. The first is Generic Structuralism Approach which deals with intrinsic elements and compares to the extrinsic elements such as author's point of view, cultures, and belief systems. The other one is Moral Approach which is concerned with the fidelity and significance of contents and values portrayed in a literary work. Thus, there is an emphasis on meanings that are vigorously explained and not measured in terms of quantity, amount, or frequency.

By using these methods, the researcher deals with books and reports the result of his analysis in a descriptive qualitative paper. Thus, the important needs in this method are library,

books, and other written forms of information sources.

In this research, the writer obtains a deep understanding of the topic explained in the introduction, tries to put an interpretation on them, and draws conclusions by studying the information and data from written sources. In other words, he is not going to find out the cause and effect experimentally. Instead, he uses the descriptive qualitative method of research

The writer's primary data to analyze are written texts such as dialogues among the characters and narrations in the novel. They are taken from John Bunyan's novel *The Pilgrim's Progress* as the data source. Related and supporting information in forms of texts such as definitions and examples of the Law of Moses, the principles of the law, and Bunyan's biographical sketch are also important.

In effort to collect the data, there were some steps done. First, the writer read the data source for two or three times in order to understand and comprehend its contents correctly and thoroughly. Second, he wrote down on papers all important data. Third, he classified those data into logical order and based on the level of importance. Fourth, he looked for secondary data by reading relevant topics in particular books and internet sites. Fifth, he also classified those secondary data orderly so that he could use them easily in his analysis.

In processing the data obtained, here are the steps. The writer re-read all the data carefully. Then, he studied and comprehended all of the data gathered. In the following step he examined the data in order to find the answer for the questions underlining the research. The next step was to evaluate the answer and conclusions found. The last step was to write the result of the analysis into a descriptive qualitative report.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the beginning of the novel, the main character is introduced as someone beginning his long journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City with a great burden.

... I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his

own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back .... I saw him open the book ... and as he read, he wept and trembled ... (Bunyan, 1978, p. 9).

The man answered, "Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave and I shall fall into Tophet ... and the thought of these things make me cry (Bunyan, 1978, p. 11).

These two quotations present the condition of the main character, especially the burden he is carrying. The interesting one is that the burden is not in form of material or touchable thing. Available proof for this idea is seen in the conversation between Worldly-Wiseman and the main character.

When Worldly Wiseman in page 21 asks how Christian, the main character gets the burden, he answers, "By reading this book in my hand." It is obvious from the answer that the burden is figuratively referred to and spiritually felt by the main character.

Other reason for drawing this conclusion is authentically based on the way the burden taken off from his back.

He run thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below in the bottom, a Sepulchre .... Just as Christian came up with the Cross his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back; and began to tumble, and so continue to do, till it came to the mouth of the Sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more (Bunyan, 1978, p. 45).

First, the burden came on his back by reading the book in his hand. Second, it fell off by seeing a cross. The question should be asked is about the essence of the burden. If it is a spiritual and untouchable burden, comes by reading a book, and falls off by seeing a cross, what kind of burden is that?

The only answer for this question is sin. It is said in the novel that being freed from his burden, his sins, the main character is glad, lightsome, and eased. While he is rejoicing at

these fact and feeling, he hears a voice which tells that his sins are forgiven. Then, he continues his journey to the Celestial Gate.

There appears other implication that is needed in order to have this point well explained. Because the book which is in the main character's hands reveals his sins, tells what will happen to the creatures, teaches to go to better city which is spiritual as portrayed in the beginning of the novel, it can be concluded that the book is the Holy Bible in which the Law of Moses was included.

Thus, how can the book, especially the Law of Moses gives the main character such a big burden? The understanding of this point is placed upon a principle that the law makes someone see and realize that his deeds are against the law and that he is to be condemned as the consequence. Romans chapter three verse twenty one says that the knowledge of sin comes through the law and chapter five verse thirteen of the same book explains that sins is imputed when there is a law.

The phase at which someone realizes his sinful deeds is considered a benefit because only by this he can change his mind and his sinful actions into lawful ones. Here we come to a point that one of purposes of giving the Law of Moses is to make the people able to differentiate between right and wrong at the sight of God.

However, related to the main issue in this study, there are some controversial statements both from the conversations among the characters and the narratives in the novel about this Law of Moses discussed and analyzed here. The result of the analysis is divided into three parts.

#### **The Law is Cruel**

Long before his burden is taken away, on his journey for an ease for it, Christian – the main character – meets Mr. Worldly-Wiseman. Being terrorized by the consequence of his sin, he is in need of help. This situation gives chance to Mr. Worldly-Wiseman to counsel Christian about what to do, where to go, and whom to look for. He tells Christian to go to a very judicious man whose name is Legality and whose house is just on the foot of a high hill.

... whose name is Legality, a very judicious man, and a man of a very good name, that has skills to help men off with such burdens as thine are, from their shoulders.... To him ... thou mayest go, and be helped presently (Bunyan, 1978, p. 22). By that hill you must go, and the first house you come at is his (p. 23).

Just like the other characters of this novel, Legality is also set forth as an allegory by John Bunyan. This man has a role to be judicious, aware much of morality, but is in bondage. On page 27, it is obvious that the high hill mentioned previously refers to Mount Sinai which also seemingly brings up the same role as Legality's.

He to whom thy was sent for ease being by the name of Legality, is the son of the bond-woman which now is, and is in bondage with her children; and is, in a misery, this Mount Sinai, which thou has feared will fall on thy head (Bunyan, 1978, p. 27).

For the counsel of Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, Christian has been looking for this man and the high hill in order to have his burden taken away from his shoulder. But in fact, both Legality and Mount Sinai have deepened his problem. Instead of making him feel safe, they put him in danger.

These are all allegorical terms used to refer to the same thing which is the Law of Moses. As the writer continues to present proofs from the intrinsic elements of the novel and compare to the extrinsic ones, the sub conclusion drawn will become more convincing.

Another crucial account on the Law of Moses written in the novel is about its real nature. One of the main characters named Faith has bad experiences with the law. He admits,

Now, when I had got about half way up, I looked behind me, and saw one coming after me, swift as the wind; so he overtook me just about the place where the settle stands .... Soon as the man overtook me, he was but a word and a blow; for down he knocked me, and laid me for dead (Bunyan, 1978, p. 86).

In this quotation, the one striking Faith down is not mentioned. Yet, his action to knock him down is frightening enough, especially because he is a stranger to the victim and seems to be a murderer. Struggling with pain, the victim asks why he is treated so. As the man answers, he strikes Faith another deadly blow on the chest. He beats him down backward.

Then Faith cries for mercy but the man says that he does not know how to show mercy. In fact, as he answers, he knocks him down again. Faith thinks that he is facing death.

In the conversation between Christian and Faith, there is an explanation about who the man is. The former says that he who overtakes and strikes Faith is Moses. This quotation will show what the real temper of Moses is, as well as his law.

That man who overtook you was Moses. He spareth none, neither knoweth he how to show mercy to those that transgress his law (Bunyan, 1978, p. 87).

This underlines the cruelty of the law. It does not show mercy on those who disobey it. This fact correlates to what Unger says in his book that the law's intention is to extirpate evil and produce reverence for the righteousness of the Holy God in the heart of the people. It commands with unsparing severity the punishment of all presumptuous disobedience to God and His holy ordinances (Unger, 1985, p. 647).

This describes what John Bunyan says about the cruelty of the law as a source records,

... here is a curse, in the first place, if all things written in the book of the law be not done, and that, continually too that is, without any failings or one slip, as I said before. Now there is never all in the world but before they did begin to yield obedience to the least command, they in their own persons did sin against it by breaking of it (Bunyan, 2000, p. 2).

That is the first point about the Law of Moses portrayed in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The second account on the law is now presented below.

### Those under the Law are Slaves

The idea discussed so far is only a small part of the novel's accounts on the Law of Moses. In addition to its frightening nature and characteristic, it is also said to enslave people, in sense that those who follow the law are slaves and live in bondage.

Firstly, on page 26 and 27, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's advise to send Christian to Legality whose house is on the foot of the hill, which is allegorical term for the law, is considered an action to lead him into destruction. This implies that if Christian continues to ask for freedom to the law, he will not get it, but death.

Thou must hate his (*Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's*) setting off thy feet in the way that leadeth to the ministration of death (Bunyan, 1978, p. 27).

Secondly, on the same page, Mount Sinai is figuratively said to be in bondage with her children.

... is the son of the bond-woman which now is in bondage with her children .... Now if she (*Mount Sinai*) with her children are in bondage, how canst thou expect by them to be made free? (Bunyan, 1978, p. 27).

Slavery is a bad system of a very mean government that takes away the freedom of a group of people or a nation so that the whole enslaved people work hard for the sake of others who are far more powerful. People in slavery are not given the right that they should have. There is no better life and no one loves to be there. What come every day are only sufferings, hungers, violations, big burdens, and other similar cruel things which lead the slaves to only one destiny, death! That is what the novel tells on page 28 as quoted here, "Those under the law are under the curse!" (Bunyan, 1978, p. 28).

It is surprising to see that the Law of Moses is viewed to have the same meanness over people as a slavery does. However, based

on the quotations given and the points discussed, John Bunyan is telling this truth. It has been explored previously that Mr. Legality and Mount Sinai are allegories of the law. And, when the main character goes to find a way out of his spiritual problem to the law, as he was told to, all he gets is condemnation.

### **The Law is Unable to Wash Sin Away**

This is the third characteristic of the law set forth in the novel. People may address John Bunyan a lot of critics of setting forth such perspective toward the law which undoubtedly given by the Almighty God. The new point brought up here, however, relates to a further acceptable objective reason why he portrays the law that way.

It is clear on page 27 that the law, allegorically mentioned by the name of Legality, is not able to set people free. Here is the quotation of long advise given by an appropriate person to the main character due to his defiled turning to the law from the journey he ought to take:

Legality therefore is not able to set thee free from thy burden. No man was as yet ever rid of his burden by him, no, nor ever is like to be; ye cannot be justified by the works of the law; for by the deeds of the law no man living can be rid of his burden; therefore, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman is an alien, and Mr. Legality a cheat; ... and cannot help thee ... there is nothing in all this noise ... (Bunyan, 1978, p. 27,28).

There is the key reason for giving negative comments on the law in this passage. All is about its inability to give freedom to people who are looking for it. This can be easily understood by referring to a quotation before that the children of the law themselves are in bondage. The law does not provide such helpful guides like what Mr. Worldly-Wiseman has misleadingly talked about.

Regardless of people's belief in the present effect of the law as mentioned above, John Bunyan through one of the novel's character explains that the law itself cannot justify people. It is now answered why Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's counsel to Christian to be

freed by the law is considered a counsel leading to death (Bunyan, 1978, p. 26,27). The law is unable to heal and ineffective to take away people's spiritual problem.

More than that, the law is figuratively spoken of as an alien and a cheat. It is addressed as an alien due to its tendency to severely rule over people. A cheat in this context is also a relevant sobriquet to its nature of being hoped for as way out of spiritual problem whereas in reality far of being true. The label given to it by Mr. Worldly-Wiseman undoubtedly deludes the people.

On different pages of the novel (Bunyan, 1978, p. 34-36), John Bunyan puts forth his point of view about this Mosaic system by using an illustration.

The main character is taken into a very large parlor that is full of dust. When a man starts to sweep the floor, the dust begins abundantly to fly about that Christian is almost choked by it. After the man is stopped to sweep, a dandelion is to sprinkle water, by which the room is cleansed well.

Interpretation of this illustration is explicitly explained on page 35 in the novel. A man who accompanies Christian explains that the parlour is the heart of a man and the dust is the sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the whole man. He who begins to sweep at first is the law but she who brings water and sprinkles it is the gospel.

The man continues to describe the inability of the law that when it is used to solve a person's inward problems, it can do nothing but makes the condition of the person worse. He says that the law, instead of cleansing the heart from sin, it revives, strengthens, and increases it in the soul. Even if it discovers and forbids, it does not have power to subdue sin.

Now whereas thou sawest that so soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about that the room by him could no be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choked therewith; this is to show thee, that the law, instead of cleansing the heart from sin, doth revive, put strength

into, and increase it in the soul ... (Bunyan, 1978, p. 36).

In contrary, the cleanness of the room after being sprinkled shows the influence of the gospel which purifies the heart effectively. As it is written, "So is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean" (Bunyan, 1978, p. 36).

The very point of this good illustration lays on fact that the law cannot set people free. This correlates one of purposes of giving the law that has been brought up in the beginning of this study. It is only effective to make people realize what sin is and how their inward conditions are.

### CONCLUSION

The main character in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is misled by other characters who have mistakenly understood the Law of Moses. They think that the law is still in effect and that people have to obey it. Being astray with this system of belief, they seriously and sincerely have tried to persuade the main character in order to obey and practice the ordinances of the law.

The novel portrays that such practice and belief are wrong. Moreover, John Bunyan through the conversations and narrations even bravely shows the inability of the law to solve man's spiritual problems and its meanness in sense that it does not know how to show mercy to those who transgress its precepts.

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