

# Bunyan on the Christian Mind: Good Company and the Formation of Intellectual Virtue in *The Pilgrim's Progress*

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WILL TARNASKY

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a book that needs little introduction. It was an instant success when it was first published in 1678 and is still regarded today as a classic in Christian literature. As one of the most widely read works in the history of English literature, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been the object of serious literary, historical, theological, and even psychological analysis. While scholars have noted Bunyan's influence in several areas, he is often chiefly identified as a key figure in the development of early-modern individualism—particularly as offering an individualistic vision of the Christian life.<sup>1</sup> This historical reading of Bunyan has been challenged recently by Galen K. Johnson. Johnson does not deny that Bunyan participated in the trend toward individualism, but he does seriously qualify this interpretation. Johnson provides a thorough survey of Bunyan's writings to demonstrate how Bunyan was, in fact, "on the alert against subjectivist trends in his century."<sup>2</sup> Johnson dedicates a chapter of this study to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which he discusses the importance of Christian's (and Christiana's) desire for company. Johnson notes that the role of communal relationships in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is severely undertreated, even by the best Bunyan scholars.<sup>3</sup> This chapter highlights Christian's desire for company in Part I, but focuses primarily on Christiana in Part II. In this paper, I hope to further build on Johnson's observations by exploring

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1. In his monumental study, *The New England Mind*, Perry Miller notes, "the figure of the pious and trembling individual closeted alone with his Bible, of the solitary walker with God, is often taken to be the true symbol of the Puritan Spirit." Miller mentions Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* in relation to this claim, as it "records the inward quest with no reference to the external and social scheme." Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Eastford, Conn.: Martino Fine Books, 2014), 297.

2. Galen K. Johnson, *Prisoner of Conscience* (Carlisle, Pa.: Paternoster, 2006), 5.

3. Johnson, *Prisoner of Conscience*, 141–43.

the role of good company in the formation of the Christian mind. I argue that for Bunyan, good company is essential in the acquisition of intellectual virtue—particularly the virtue of prudence. I will begin by briefly demonstrating why Bunyan is a figure whom we can engage in the broader conversation of virtue ethics. I will then discuss the nature of prudence as it is historically understood in the virtue ethics tradition. Finally, I will conduct a close reading of Part I of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, paying close attention to Christian's friendship with Faithful and Hopeful, to establish the central role of company in the acquisition of intellectual virtue.<sup>4</sup>

### Virtue Ethics and John Bunyan

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is often compared with other Christian pilgrim narratives such as Langland's *Piers Plowman* and Spencer's *The Faerie Queen*. Given the centrality of virtue, both moral and intellectual, in these other two allegories, it is surprising that the language of virtue is almost totally absent from Bunyan scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Isabel Rivers notes that Bunyan, like some of his nonconformist contemporaries, disapproved of the vocabulary of moral virtue.<sup>6</sup> This is mostly due to the fact that the language of virtue was associated with the Latitudinarians, whom Bunyan and his allies opposed.<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that virtue ethics does, in fact, have a promi-

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4. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of company in the formation of the Christian mind. We will therefore not only be focusing on Christian's formation in the company of Faithful and Hopeful, but also Faithful and Hopeful's formation in the company of Christian. Christian's companions, as we shall see, are just as benefited from his company as he is of theirs. There is a certain tendency when reading *Pilgrim's Progress* to solely identify with Christian. Faithful and Hopeful are, however, also *Christians* on pilgrimage, whom we are supposed to learn from. Faithful, for example, is meant to show us that some pilgrims will be killed for their faith—a reality that all Christians must accept.

5. Barry E. Horner provides a helpful overview of Bunyan scholarship in his book, *Pilgrim's Progress: Themes and Issues*. He surveys the work of eight major Bunyan scholars. There is no reference to virtue in this overview. In his discussion of modern assessments of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the language of virtue is likewise absent. Horner summarizes twentieth-century Bunyan scholarship in the areas of literary criticism, historical investigation, psychological analysis, political and social theory, and theological appreciation. Bunyan's moral theology and his understanding of Christian intellectual life is not addressed. Barry Horner, *John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress: Themes and Issues* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2003), 380–414.

6. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: Volume 1, Whichcote to Wesley: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 141.

7. "The Latitudinarian view of morality... may be summarized as follows: men are by nature sociable and disposed to act well; sin is an unnatural deviation from this disposition;

ment place in Reformed moral theology, from the time of the Reformation to the present.<sup>8</sup> Despite Bunyan's hesitancy to use the language of virtue, there is evidence in his work that gives us reason to treat him within the virtue ethics tradition. While he viewed classical philosophy as heathenistic and suppressing to the gospel, Bunyan's work suggests that he was, perhaps, more absorbed in this tradition than he might have realized.<sup>9</sup> Rivers hints at this in her observations. She notes that Richard Baxter employs a principle reminiscent of Aristotle's golden mean when he warns his readers to beware of extremes. She sees Bunyan's image of the narrow path that lies between the ditch and the mire as another instance of this Aristotelian doctrine. Interestingly, Rivers does not mention Christian's first two "companions": Pliable and Obstinate. These vices, which are the vicious extremes of the intellectual virtue, firmness, have a secure place in the virtue ethics tradition, tracing back to Aristotle's *Ethics*.<sup>10</sup>

Christian's visit to the Palace Beautiful, an allegorical representation of the church, further suggests that Bunyan is operating from within the wider tradition of Christian virtue ethics. In Palace Beautiful, Christian meets three damsels: Piety, Charity, and Prudence. Bunyan was not careless in choosing these three figures. Charity and Prudence, above the other virtues, both have a special place in the virtue ethics tradition. Charity is understood in the Christian tradition to be the greatest of all the theological virtues. While faith, hope, and charity all have God as their object, faith and hope by their very nature imply a certain distance from their object; faith concerns what is not seen and hope what is not possessed. "But the love of charity is about what is already possessed, for what is loved is in a certain way in the one who loves, and also the one who loves is drawn by affection to a union with what is loved."<sup>11</sup> Whereas charity is distinct among the theological vir-

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men naturally pursue happiness, though they often miscalculate the method of attaining it; happiness is achieved through holiness, and understood properly is in fact the same thing; the religious life is the most advantageous because religion enables men to act according to their true nature and in their best interest by choosing the path that will make them holy and therefore happy." N. H. Keeble, ed. *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 51.

8. Pieter Vos, "Calvinists among the Virtues: Reformed Theological Contributions to Contemporary Virtue Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 28, no. 2 (2015): 201–12.

9. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 111.

10. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.7, VII.9. Also see Robert C. Roberts, and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

11. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)*, Question LXVI, Art. 6.

tues, prudence is likewise distinct among the intellectual virtues. Wisdom is upheld by Aquinas to be the greatest of the intellectual virtues. However, while wisdom is not necessary for the acquisition of moral virtue, prudence is.<sup>12</sup> Prudence and Charity are distinct, for both are virtues on which other virtues depend. One cannot be morally virtuous without prudence; likewise, one cannot be morally virtuous without charity.<sup>13</sup>

It is not insignificant that Piety accompanies Charity and Prudence, especially for John Bunyan, being a Puritan. While piety was considered *one* of the virtues for Aquinas, it had a more central role in Puritan moral theology.<sup>14</sup> Jerald C. Bauer notes that for the Puritans, virtue and piety were not the same; piety was the source of virtue. "Piety as understood by the Puritans was a person's essential religiousness which underlies all religious obedience, actions, and virtues."<sup>15</sup> Considering this observation, it is fitting that Piety not only accompanies Charity and Prudence, but that she is also the first to speak. Now that we have demonstrated that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a text that can be read from within the broader conversation of virtue ethics, we will further discuss the nature of Prudence, the main object of our discussion.

## The Nature of Prudence

For our discussion on prudence, we will be relying primarily on Roberts and Woods' study on the intellectual virtues. Prudence, as stated above, has a privileged place in the array of virtues. Along with love of knowledge, prudence, or practical wisdom, serves as the prerequisite for the other virtues. It is also unique in that it is historically understood as a hybrid virtue, being counted as both an intellectual and a moral virtue. Specifically, "it is the intellectual dimension of the moral virtues."<sup>16</sup> Aristotle defines prudence as the means by which we deliberate well about what is good and expedient

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12. "Since prudence is concerned with human affairs, and wisdom with the highest cause, it is impossible for prudence to be a greater virtue than wisdom." *ST*, Question LXVI, Art. 5. "Moral virtue can exist without some of the intellectual virtues, such as wisdom, science, and art, but not without the virtues of understanding and prudence." Aquinas, *ST*, Question LVIII, Art. 4.

13. Aquinas *ST*, LXV, Art. 2.

14. Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 264.

15. Jerald C. Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 56, no. 1 (1987): 39–58.

16. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 305.

for the good life in general. Hence, Roberts and Woods establish prudence as an “aiming virtue.” It is the ability to deliberate well about what actions ought to be taken in order to achieve a certain end. Because actions are always particulars, prudence is virtue that is concerned with the particulars in any given situation. “Because of the great variability of situations in their details, even the best formulas do not by themselves determine what is to be done. Instead, the determiner is the person of practical wisdom, the agent who interprets and applies the formulas (if such there be) and judges what is particularly to be done in these situations.”<sup>17</sup> It is noted that unlike courage, which is a particular intellectual virtue, prudence is, in a sense, the whole of intellectual virtue.<sup>18</sup> Prudence is chiefly concerned with right action and therefore it always functions hand in hand with other intellectual virtues. For this reason, prudence cannot be spoken of completely divorced from other intellectual virtues such as firmness, humility, and generosity. It works alongside these virtues, in order to deliberate how these virtues are best practiced in particular circumstances to achieve a certain end. Therefore, in our discussion, although we are primarily concerned with prudence, we will speak of other intellectual virtues, for there is a certain extent to which all intellectual virtues are informed by prudence. It is important to note the moral component of prudence. Insofar as it is also a moral virtue, prudence presupposes a morally good end. Someone who deliberates well how to achieve an evil end is not properly called prudent. For someone to act prudently, one must choose the right action, toward the right end, and with the right intention. Finally, prudence is a virtue that is acquired by experience.<sup>19</sup> While Christian is first introduced to Prudence at Palace Beautiful, his own acquisition of the virtue, we shall see, is an ongoing process over the course of his pilgrimage.

### **Christian’s Companion, Faithful**

Now that we have a grasp on the nature of prudence, we turn to our text. In Bunyan’s allegory, company is no minor theme. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is indeed about a pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. However, it might just as well be called a pilgrimage from the city of bad company to the city of good company. When Christian asks Hopeful how he came to begin his pilgrimage, Hopeful replies that he had to escape from

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17. Roberts and Woods, *Intellectual Virtues*, 306.

18. Roberts and Woods, *Intellectual Virtues*, 310.

19. See Aristotle, *Ethics*, VI.8.

“not only my sins, but sinful company too.”<sup>20</sup> When Christian is asked by Prudence why he wants to go to Mount Zion, he replies,

Why, there I hope to see him *alive*, that did hang *dead* on the Cross; and there I hope to be rid of all those things that to this day are in me, an annoyance to me; there they say there is no death, and there I shall dwell with such a Company as I like best...I would fain be where I shall die no more, and with this Company that shall continually cry *Holy, Holy, Holy!*<sup>21</sup>

And again, when Christian and Hopeful approach the Celestial City, we read, “Here also they had the City itself in view, and they thought they heard all the Bells therein to ring, to welcome them thereto: but above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever.”<sup>22</sup> This pilgrimage begins and ends with company, and the actual journey itself is full of shifting company. Christian is constantly graced with good company, while, at the same time, is in ever-present peril of bad company. As stated above, the goal of this discussion is to further challenge the accusation that Bunyan’s vision of the Christian life is thoroughly individualistic. The following close reading of key passages in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* will demonstrate the centrality of good company in the formation of the prudent Christian mind.

Before we treat any particulars, there is one important image that we must keep in mind. We know that the path to eternal life is a narrow one. For Bunyan, the way is narrow because Pilgrims are constantly in danger of two perils: moral and doctrinal error.<sup>23</sup> These two dangers, for Bunyan, are equally deadly to the soul. The Christian on pilgrimage, therefore, must be on constant alert against these two perils. We mentioned above that prudence is an “aiming virtue.” It is the virtue of the mind which allows one to deliberate how to act in particular circumstances, in order to achieve a certain end. The end for Christian is safe arrival to the Celestial City. In order to reach this end, Christian and his companions must deliberate well on how to protect their souls from the constant threats of moral and doctrinal error.

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20. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, ed., W. R. Owens, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133.

21. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 51.

22. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 152.

23. The danger of moral and doctrinal error is the allegorical interpretation of the Ditch and the Quag. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 62–63.

While there are many figures of good company in the course of Christian's voyage, Faithful and Hopeful are his two most consistent companions, and will therefore be the chief objects of our study. It is not until after his stay at the Palace Beautiful that Christian has any permanent company. Up until his arrival at Palace Beautiful, Christian has been traveling alone, with the exception of a few brief interactions. It is important to note that it is in his solitude that Christian is led astray by Worldly Wiseman. Christian leaves Palace Beautiful with a sudden desire for companionship.<sup>24</sup> He hears from the Porter that another Pilgrim called Faithful has passed by the Porter's house and Christian sets out to find him.

When Christian and Faithful meet, they immediately share with one another what they have experienced in their respective pilgrimages. Here we see one instance of how prudence is acquired amongst good company. If prudence, as we have noted, is acquired through experiencing different particularities, then the sharing of past experiences can result in mutual acquisition of prudence. In this exchange, Faithful tells Christian of his encounter with an old man, whom Christian identifies for Faithful as Moses. We know that Faithful passed by Palace Beautiful, without going into it. Christian tells Faithful, "But I wish you had called at the house; for they would have shewed you so many rarities."<sup>25</sup> These "rarities" that Christian speaks about are the lessons and stories from the Old Testament that Christian received at Palace Beautiful. Christian thus passes this wisdom along to Faithful for his own intellectual formation. Christian is demonstrating the virtue of intellectual generosity, but this virtue cannot be separated from prudence, since prudence directs the intentions and navigates the particularities of other intellectual virtues.<sup>26</sup>

The clearest example of the intellectual formation in Christian and Hopeful's friendship comes with their encounter with Talkative. Talkative tells the two friends that he too is traveling to the Heavenly City, and Faithful suggests the three enter into profitable discourse. Talkative replies that there is nothing more pleasant and profitable than discussing the things of God. He tells them that through such talk, one can arrive at the knowledge

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24. Stevenson notes that at Palace Beautiful, three privileges are disclosed to Christian. The solace and inspiration of Christian friendship is one of these three privileges. Robert Stevenson (1861–1947), *Exposition of the Pilgrim's Progress, with Illustrative Quotations from Bunyan's Minor Works* (Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Library Editions), 1977, 117.

25. Stevenson, *Exposition of the Pilgrim's Progress*, 70.

26. For more on the relationship between intellectual generosity and prudence see Roberts and Woods, *Intellectual Virtues*, 319.



of the necessity of the new-birth, the insufficiency of works, the need for Christ's righteousness, the vanity of the world, and what it means to believe, pray, and repent.<sup>27</sup> Faithful is beguiled by Talkative's fair speech and his knowledge of spiritual things. He tells Christian, "what a brave companion have we got! Surely he will make a very excellent pilgrim."<sup>28</sup> Christian, however, is able to discern Talkative's falsehood. He tells Faithful that Talkative is all tongue; he has no place for religion in his heart. "For my part I am of the opinion, that he has, by his wicked life, caused many to stumble and fall; and will be, if God prevent not, the ruin of many more."<sup>29</sup> If weren't for Christian's discretion, Faithful would have been led astray by Talkative's *fine* speech.

After Christian explains Talkative's error to Faithful, Faithful is able to make his own Old Testament application. He recalls Moses (whom Christian has told him about) and likens Talkative to the unclean animals in the Mosaic law. The clean animals are those which chew the cud and have a parted hoof. Talkative is like the hare—"he cheweth upon the Word, but he divedeth not the hoof, he parteth not with the way of sinners; but as the hare he remaineth the foot of a dog, or bear, and therefore is unclean."<sup>30</sup> This demonstrates how Faithful's intellect has been formed in company with Christian. Christian teaches Faithful the "rarities" that he learned at Palace Beautiful, and now Faithful can prudently apply these lessons to avoid being led astray.

Faithful's discourse with Talkative further establishes this scene as one of intellectual formation. Christian suspects Talkative of falsehood, but encourages Faithful to enter into discourse with Talkative to test him. This is itself a prudent maneuver on Christian's part, for it displays his ability to deliberate what action to take in a particular situation. Faithful too, displays discernment in his exchange with Talkative. Faithful, per the advice of Christian, presses Talkative, asking him how God's grace is made known to the human heart. Talkative answers confidently, "where the grace of God is in the heart, it causeth there a great out-cry against sin." While this answer appears orthodox on the surface, Faithful, having been warned by Christian, is able to detect the subtlety of the error. Faithful replies, "I think you should rather say, it shows itself by inclining the soul to abhor its

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27. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 75.

28. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 76.

29. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 77.

30. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 79.



sin.”<sup>31</sup> Talkative does not see a difference between crying out against sin and abhorring sin. Faithful reminds him that there is a great difference. One can cry out against sin in the pulpit and yet abide with it in the heart, home, and conversation.<sup>32</sup> Faithful here uses another Old Testament application: Potiphar’s wife, who cried out against sin as if she was holy, and yet would have committed sin with Joseph. Finally, Faithful explains that a mother can cry out against her child one moment in an instance of frustration, and then in the next hold the child close again.<sup>33</sup> Hence we see significant intellectual formation as a result of the friendship between Christian and Faithful. Faithful learns the Old Testament and is able to prudently apply its teaching. He also goes from being almost deceived by Faithful, to discerning the subtleties of his errors and rebuking them.

To conclude our discussion on the companionship between Christian and Faithful, we will consider one of the most iconic scenes in the whole text—the visit to Vanity Fair. We will engage Augustine as a conversation partner in this section, to help with our analysis of intellectual formation. We are told that the fair was erected in the town, Vanity, in the ancient days. Its founders, Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion, saw that all pilgrims must pass through Vanity on their way to the Celestial City and elected to build a fair. The fair would last all year long and therein would be sold “*all sorts of Vanity*.”<sup>34</sup> We are also told the variety of merchandise sold at the fair: houses, lands, honors, trades, whores, husbands, pleasures, children, bodies, souls, silver, and gold. As Christian and Faithful pass through the fair, they incite a great commotion among the people. There are three reasons that are said to have sparked the “hubbub.” First, for the townspeople, the pilgrims are very strange. They are clothed with a certain raiment that is sold nowhere in Vanity Fair. Secondly, their speech is unintelligible for the townspeople. Thirdly, the pilgrims walk through the fair without paying attention to the things sold. When a merchant asks Christian and Faithful what they will buy, they reply, “We buy the Truth.”<sup>35</sup> Their response causes an uproar in the town, for now the townspeople have an occasion to despise them even more.

31. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 79.

32. “Conversation” as Bunyan uses it, refers to behavior, not spoken conversation as it is commonly understood today.

33. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 80.

34. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 85–86.

35. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 87.

Christian and Faithful are arrested for their crime (causing the hub-bub), and Faithful is given an opportunity at his trial to give an account. The formal accusation states “that they were enemies to, and disturbers of their Trade; that they had made Commotions and Divisions in the Town, and had won a party to their own most dangerous Opinions, in contempt of the law of their Prince.”<sup>36</sup> To the accusations, Faithful replies, “that he had only set himself against that which had set itself against him that is higher [than] the highest.” Faithful claims that he made no such disturbance, for he is a man of peace. In regards to the Prince of Vanity Fair (the devil), Faithful concedes that he must defy him and his angels, for this Prince is an enemy of the Lord. At the trial, Envy, Superstition, and Pickthank all testify against Faithful. It is Envy’s accusation, and Faithful’s response, that we will focus on. Envy testifies before the Judge,

My Lord, this man, notwithstanding his plausible name, is one of the vilest men in our Country; He neither regardeth Prince nor People, Law nor Custom; but doth all that he can to possess all men with certain of his disloyal notions, which he in general calls Principles of Faith and Holiness. And in Particular, I heard him once my self affirm, *That Christianity, and the Customs of our Town of Vanity, were Diametrically opposite, and could not be reconciled.* By which saying, my Lord, he doth at once, not only condemn all our laudable doings, but us in the doing of them.<sup>37</sup>

Faithful is thus accused of rejecting all laws and customs of the town, by setting them in stark opposition to his duties as a Christian. To answer this accusation from Envy, Faithful replies, “I never said ought but this, *That what Rule, or Laws, or Custom, or People, were flat against the Word of God, are diametrically opposed to Christianity.*”<sup>38</sup> This echoes back to Faithful’s initial defense—he does not oppose *everything* in the town, but only that which has set itself against “him that is higher than the highest.”

This episode could be read as Bunyan’s own application of Augustine’s call in *De Doctrina Christiana* to “take the spoils of the Egyptians.” In this text, Augustine addresses the relationship between pagan and Christian wisdom. To advance his position, Augustine provides an allegorical interpretation of the Exodus story. When the Israelites fled Egypt, they were commanded by God to salvage from the Egyptians’ treasures all that could

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36. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 90.

37. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 91.

38. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 92.

be claimed for good use. This meant that gold, silver, clothes, and various vessels could be taken from the Egyptians, this being done not under their own authority, but the authority of God.<sup>39</sup> Augustine uses this event to establish an analogous relationship between the treasures of Egypt and the wisdom of the pagans. In the Exodus account, the Israelites were commanded to take the treasures that could be salvaged for good use and to leave behind and shun those items that were used explicitly in pagan worship. Augustine exhorts Christians to a similar task: to search through the wisdom of the pagan world and claim for God what can be salvaged. If all truth is God's truth, then Christians have, according to Augustine, the duty to find this truth (even if it be among pagans) and claim it for good use. This likewise means rejecting the teaching of the world that is directly contrary to the wisdom that comes through revelation. Augustine writes that the true claims found among the pagan philosophers are like treasure—"silver and gold, which they did create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence." Much of this wisdom can be claimed by Christians and "applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel."<sup>40</sup>

Faithful's defense at his trial in Vanity Fair resonates with this teaching from Augustine. Faithful is clear that Christians do not reject *all* of the laws and customs of the world, *only* those that are in direct contradiction to God's will. There are significant implications here regarding the formation of the Christian mind. The Christian life, as we have seen, for Bunyan, is a pilgrimage along a narrow way between the two dangers of moral and doctrinal error. The Christian must therefore be prudent in discerning this fine line. Faithful here provides Christian with invaluable wisdom. The laws, customs, and wisdom of the world can be both greatly beneficial as well as treacherous to the Christian. The Christian must therefore search and carefully consider what can be salvaged for good, and what ought to be rejected altogether. Faithful's trial at Vanity Fair is therefore yet another critical scene where we see the role of company in the formation of intellectual virtue.

Faithful and Christian's friendship comes to an unfortunate end when Faithful is martyred at Vanity Fair. Even this event, however, can be seen as an instance of formation for Christian. Until Faithful's death, Christian, had not experienced the true cost of going on this pilgrimage. Faithful's

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39. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II.144–46.

40. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.145.

martyrdom is, in a sense, the greatest act of prudence, for by becoming a martyr he makes the ultimate sacrifice to achieve his intended end. Christ tells His disciples to be “wise as serpents.” In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine helps us understand the meaning of this command.

The well-known fact about the snake, that it offers its whole body to assailants in place of its head, marvelously illustrates the meaning of the Lord’s injunction to be wise as serpents, which means that in place of our head, which is Christ, we should offer our body to persecutors, so that the Christian faith is not as it were killed within us when we spare our body and deny God.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine shows us while martyrdom does indeed require the virtue of courage, it is also an act of prudence—practical wisdom. Faithful did not lose sight of his true aim and was, therefore, willing to die for it, lest his soul be lost by denying his faith.

After Faithful’s death, Christian is immediately introduced to Hopeful, who will be his companion throughout the rest of his pilgrimage: “thus one died to make testimony to the truth, and another rises out of his ashes to be a companion with Christian.”<sup>42</sup> We will turn our attention to Christian and Hopeful’s friendship and continue to consider the role of company in acquisition of intellectual virtue.

### Christian’s Companion, Hopeful

Christian and Hopeful’s imprisonment by Giant Despair in Doubting Castle is perhaps the greatest scene of formation in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Despair locks up the pilgrims for trespassing in his land. His wife, Diffidence, counsels Despair to have the pilgrims kill themselves. He brings the pilgrims a knife, a noose, and poison, and allows them to choose the manner in which they want to end themselves. “For why should you choose life, seeing it attended with so much bitterness?”<sup>43</sup> Christian asks Hopeful, “Brother, what shall we do? The life that we now live is miserable: for my part, I know not whether [it] is best, to live or to die out of hand. *My soul chooseth strangling rather than life*, and the grave is more easy for me than this dungeon. Shall we be ruled by the Giant?”<sup>44</sup> Christian says his soul

41. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II.59.

42. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 97.

43. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 110.

44. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 112.

chooses death. We might therefore say that had he been alone, he would have killed himself.

Hopeful is able to “moderate the mind” of Christian: “Indeed our present condition is dreadful, and death would be far more welcome to me than thus for ever to abide: but let us consider the Lord of the Country to which we are going.”<sup>45</sup> He reminds Christian that they are commanded by their Lord not to murder, and that taking their own life would break that commandment. Hopeful also reminds him that the Lord is sovereign and He could cause either their release or the giant’s death. With these words, Christian makes it through the first night without taking his life.

Giant Despair returns to the cell the second night to see if the pilgrims have taken his counsel. When he sees that they are still living, he falls into a “grievous rage” which causes the pilgrims to tremble greatly. We are told that Christian again contemplates suicide, but Hopeful comforts him with his second reply. He beseeches Christian to *remember* his encounter with Apollyon, his passage through Vanity Fair, and the many other trials Christian has faced on his pilgrimage. He tells him too to remember that he is not alone but that Hopeful, who is far weaker than he, is with him. These promptings stir patience in Christian and he lives through the second night.

The third night the Christians spend in prayer, and at the break of day Christian bursts out in passionate speech, “What a fool I am, thus to lie in a sinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty? I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will (I am persuaded) open any lock in Doubting Castle.”<sup>46</sup> The key (God’s promises) does indeed open the lock and the pilgrims escape Doubting-Castle.

Vincent Newey sees Christian’s escape from Doubting Castle as a quintessentially individualistic episode. The fact that Christian realizes that the key lies entirely within himself is, according to Newey, a testament to this individualism.<sup>47</sup> I argue that this is an unfair reading of this event. It does not take into account Hopeful’s critical role in the affair. In Hopeful’s first two speeches, his approach to counseling Christian is to prompt his memory. He reminds Christian of God’s law and His providence in the first speech and Christian’s past trials in the second speech. What is more, Christian and Hopeful were praying together when Christian remembered the key he possessed. It should also be noted, that Christian was first shown

45. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 112.

46. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 114.

47. Johnson, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 142.

the Promises by Help when he was rescued from the Slough of Despond.<sup>48</sup> We thus cannot ignore the importance of Hopeful prompting Christian's memory in Doubting Castle.

We must also say a brief word about the nature of memory as it relates to prudence. Aquinas writes, "memory, intelligence, and foresight, as well as caution, docility, and the like, are not virtues distinct from prudence but are in a certain way connected with prudence as integral parts, insofar as they are required for the perfection of prudence."<sup>49</sup> This scene is, therefore, a fitting example of prudence being formed in the context of good company. Without Hopeful's prompting, Christian would not have exercised his memory, which is what ultimately led to their rescue.

While there are many more passages we could treat, we will conclude our discussion by considering Christian and Hopeful's journey across the Enchanted Ground. The pilgrims have been instructed by the shepherds to beware of flatterers and to take heed not to fall asleep on the Enchanted Ground.<sup>50</sup> When Hopeful and Christian enter the Enchanted Ground, they are immediately overcome with drowsiness. Christian remembers the shepherds' warning and suggests he and Hopeful "fall into good discourse" to keep themselves from falling asleep:

When saints do sleepy grow, let them come hither,  
And hear how these two pilgrims talk together:  
Thus to keep ope their drowsie slumbring eyes.  
Saints' fellowship, if it be manag'd well,  
Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell.

There are two things to be noted from this episode. On the one hand, we see a clear display of Christian's prudence. Christian deliberates well as to which action should be taken to travel across the Enchanted Ground. He recognizes that by conversing with one another, the two pilgrims will be able to overcome their drowsiness. On the other hand, Bunyan is making a comment on the importance of Christian companionship. The nature of their discourse is also important to note. Among other things, Christian and Hopeful discuss with one another what the true fear of God consists in. The fear of God is called the beginning of wisdom. Christian and Hopeful arrive at an understanding of this fear through discourse. This further

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48. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 16.

49. Aquinas, *ST*, LVII Art. 6.

50. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 119.

establishes that for Bunyan, wisdom is not something acquired in solitude. Pilgrims acquire wisdom by deliberating with one another in discourse. It is precisely in these moments of discussing past experiences and contemplating with one another the things of God that prudence is acquired. As demonstrated in the verse above, well-managed fellowship guards Christians against spiritual drowsiness. Spiritual drowsiness can lead to moral and doctrinal error. Company is, therefore, for Bunyan, necessary for pilgrims who wish to guard themselves against these perils.

While Christian and Hopeful make it in the end to the Celestial City, it is safe to say that they would not have made it had it not been for their good company. In this paper we have considered some scenes of key intellectual formation, in which virtues of mind, namely prudence, were acquired in and because of good company. Bunyan imagines the Christian life as a pilgrimage along a narrow path. This path is narrow, for the pilgrims are constantly threatened with the peril of moral error on the one side, and doctrinal error on the other. The last thing we see in Part I of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not Christian and Hopeful entering the City, but rather Ignorance, the one who prides himself on preferring to travel alone, being led away to hell. Bunyan's vision of the Christian life is far from solitary. For Bunyan, the life of Christian is a life of carefully deliberating a fine line. The virtues of the mind that allow pilgrims to carefully navigate this fine line are acquired, cultivated, and practiced not in isolation, but rather in the presence of good company.