

Pilgrim's Missionary Progress: contemporary evangelistic adaptations of John Bunyan's lingering spiritual classic for a Post-Secular West.

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Introduction:

This article examines two instances of evangelistic use of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Bunyan, (1678) 1960). If this lingering trickle of advocates were to become a stream, or even a river of *Pilgrim's Progress* proselytizers flowing through missions work, what would the result be? The judgement of this article, based on the two contemporary cases studies, is that adaptation to missionary use today must make greater strides to accommodate the gains made by contemporary missiology and missional practice in regard to the holistic gospel of the Kingdom of God. By holistic gospel, I mean to indicate an assumption that the good news of Jesus Christ is now, and eternally, a news embedded in the kingdom fulfilment of historical promise to the people of Israel. It is a socially determined reality. The gospel, and thus mission, calls people into the incorporating spiritual body of Christ as found in the human fellowship of local churches. This incorporation encompasses the diversity of embodied experience in all its political, economic, gendered, racialized elements, and is thus a missional call to address present inequities of human sociality as foretastes of a redeemed creation under God (Wright 2006, Samuel and Sugden 1999, Walls and Ross 2008). Preaching, proclamation, or evangelism will call for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ communicating this holistic walk of discipleship. This article thus concerns itself

with the question of whether *The Pilgrim's Progress* ought still have a role in missions in a much-changed context from that of its original publication. In particular, can it communicate to a post-Christian West? My suggestion is that the developments that recognize a post-secular imagination may enable this possibility. (While the scope of mission impact is limited by the author's context, it is hoped that the reader can imagine corresponding issues arising from *Pilgrim's Progress's* possible use outside of the West.)

A post-Christian context presupposes societies whose imaginative cultural production is no longer, but once was, shaped predominantly by Christian frameworks of thought. The term post-secular indicates the ways in which, despite the slippage of predominant Christian cultural influence, anticipated secularization has not arisen. The secularist position, that sees all metaphysical or religious claims give way to naturalistic materialism, does not explain the endurance of formal religion and informal spirituality in the West (Clark 2012). The post-secular imagination sees the post-Christian West re-enchanted (Veith, 2020). Religion and spirituality, as communal goods, have not withered on the vine, and literary and creative hope gestures toward the supernatural, the mystical, or fantastical (McClure 2007). The post-secular posture retrieves community traditions and shared imaginations over against the isolated modern individual (Branch and Knight 2018, Taylor 1989). It makes sense to examine literary imagination here as it is the use of a literary text in evangelism that is being canvassed.

The Pilgrim's Progress has never been out of print in the nearly 350 years since its original publication. It has seen thousands of editions in English, as well as translation into more than 200 languages (Hofmeyr 2007:119; 2004:12). The endurance of this story of an individual's journey from the City of Destruction through the dynamics and trials of Christian salvation until reaching

the Celestial City is testimony to its popularity among readers. Its publishing history, however, need not be understood solely as a tale of market demand. The ‘portable Bunyan’ of *Pilgrim’s Progress*’s global popularity owes a debt to the work of Christian missionaries (Hofmeyr 2004, Dixon 2012, Freeman 2017). Evangelistic use has targeted children in the homes of godly Christians (Murray 2018, MacDonald 1989, Brown 2004, Nord 2004, Greenby 2011) as well as reaching adults through missionary translations on the frontiers of Western Christian outreach (Brown 2018, Hofmeyr 2004, Dixon 2012)). Stephen Ney reports Robert Scott Oyebode’s autobiographical account of receiving the text of *Pilgrim’s Progress* in English, along with an English dictionary, in West Africa in the late nineteenth century. Oyebode writes of *Pilgrim’s Progress* that ‘I am glad to say that I went through the book with great benefit to my soul; it first gave me an enlightenment as to what a true Christian life is, and from that time I can date my conversion.’ (Ney 2018: 504) That Oyebode read in English is an instance of the translation of the individual from their native tongue and culture to that of the Anglophone missionary. In this article, I deal with evangelistic uses of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in English, but translation is never far behind. Noteworthy, but beyond the scope of this article, Isabel Hofmeyr documents subversive ways in which African translations proved culturally adaptable beyond missionary control. ‘Africa changed Bunyan’ (Hofmeyr, 2004:6). Chu (2019) and Liu and Li (2013) give details of the variety in the history of the translation for *Pilgrim’s Progress* into Chinese. Early translation into French has recently been documented (Harris 2018) and the book leads the way for other modern Western texts into multiple other languages, such as Armeno-Turkish (Mignon 2014) and Arabic (Hill 2015). In multiple instances the differences between original missionary translation and later literary translation are noted, which may speak back to the missionary uses of *Pilgrim’s Progress* in the contemporary West. That is, just as at its height Western missionary experience in global

missions shaped ‘home’ Christian practices (Case, 2012), so Western evangelical theological vision is made aware of holistic corrections to its cultural individualism through global encounter (Tennent, 2007, 2010). This reciprocal gain for a holistic gospel is not yet evident in the uses of a classic of Western Protestant spirituality for evangelical mission examined here, yet the cultural move to the post-secular invites engagement with *Pilgrim's Progress's* allegorical, in some ways fantastical, depiction of the Christian life. Another way of pointing to the prospects of *Pilgrim's Progress* for contemporary mission is by observing that, just as translation into other languages spurred the vernacular literary developments that, in elite circles, tended toward secularization (Hofmeyr 2004:217-227 , Kim 2019:63-88), so literary developments toward the post-secular, filtering through popular fiction, can find *Pilgrim's Progress* a renewed place of cultural contact.

Below, two instances of the lingering use of *Pilgrim's Progress* in evangelism in the early twenty-first century are presented. The reader is invited to consider whether such uses are faithful to the holistic gospel orientation of contemporary missions. That is, I ask whether these uses of *Pilgrim's Progress* replicate culturally specific post-Christian individualism. If so, missionally attuned evangelist ought to pause before adopting these as central tools to their proclamation.

Pilgrim's Progress is often read as an early harbinger of modern individualism. Read as the narrative version of the spiritual auto-biography of an anxious, even tortured Puritan, it offers a vision of internal struggle toward faith and epistemic certainty (Stachiniewski 1991). This individualism leads to the proliferation of consumerist capitalism (Branch 2007) and the disenchanting secularism that is engendered by such commodified materialism (Boscaljon 2013, Crawford 2017). The idea is that the individual, who sees the world as open to their own self-creation, is alienated from and thus can commodify and sell everything. We will pay attention to

John Bunyan's oblique commentary on this in his Vanity Fair episode for each of the case studies. For the perspective of missions, the experience of conversion has become a more rapid or instant experience under evolving Protestantism since the seventeenth century, especially the evangelical expression that shapes so much missions practice (Smith 2007, James 2014). Recent theology has been shaped by wider trends in the humanities and the social sciences to take back up its ecclesial belonging as worthy of serious reflection.¹

Missionary Use of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Case Study 1: Evangelist J. John's contemporary retelling

J. John (2012) publishes *Pilgrim. John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. A contemporary retelling* through his own ministry's non-profit organization, Philo Trust. The inside bibliographical index indicates the text is '[a]bridged and rendered into modern English by Canon J. John'. (John 2012: 2) His website showcases an evangelist committed to training others in evangelism, and engaging in direct proclamation of the good news of Jesus at stadium events in the UK and beyond. John's publications, both for children, or adults, comprise evangelistic booklets around the topics of Christmas or Easter, or entitled 'Jesus Christ. The Truth'; or training resource booklets on 'Natural Evangelism. The Practice of Praying, Caring and Sharing' (Philo Trust Website, nd.) This is the company that the book *Pilgrim* keeps in John's online bookstore. The website's blurb for the book reads as follows: 'Whether you are already a pilgrim or are considering the Christian journey, this story will inspire and instruct you through life's adventures and obstacles. It's not just the story of a man called Christian, it is also a mirror that reflects something in everyone's soul journey' (Philo Trust Website, nd). There is no doubt that internet browsers and recipients of the book are meant to understand that *Pilgrim's Progress* is an evangelistic text. The past identification of evangelical

Protestants with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as the story of *their* gospel, and the use of it in evangelism, lingers on.

A few observations will underline the manner in which *Pilgrim's Progress* is used by John for evangelism. John reveals the character of his own winsome evangelistic appeal when he summarizes *Pilgrim's Progress* in terms of the abiding and accompanying love of God,

'From the first scene onward, Bunyan affirms that human beings are not lonely captains of their destiny. Behind the lives of each character, another figure lovingly walks with them and is in fact the final destination itself. *The Pilgrim's Progress* tells tales of individuals on the road of life and the story of how a loving God constantly teaches, loves and draws people to himself. Every step of the way, God accompanies each person, revealing the way of salvation.' (John 2012: 10)

Just when John might have sounded the churchly notes of Christian's fellowship with Evangelist, who guides him along the way, with companions Faithful and then Hopeful, and with the gathered family of the Palace Beautiful and the shepherds of the Delectable mountains, the individual seeker is given direct access to God but little notice of the gathered saints of the kingdom to accompany them. This 'way', keeping in step with Bunyan, is also one of difficulty and hardship. So that we are told, for instance, that the 'wicket-gate' is not easy to find or open (John 2012: 11) Albeit, in Bunyan's original, it is not the pilgrim who opens the gate in any case, but Goodwill who admits him upon his knocking. John does not alter that Bunyan detail in his abridgement (2012: 31) but, in his boilerplate evangelistic 'Preface,' the emphasis is on the human responsibility of the seeker. This fits with the moral anthropology of a modern agent (Taylor, 1989). An individual life is lived through willed autonomy, making decisions, choosing sociality as part of hyper-mobility, rather

than being subject to divine providence and a call to obedience, in community. J. John's gospel hovers in this liminal space between his modern audience and his Puritan source. In many ways, John is faithful to not excise Bunyan's convictions. He keeps references to divine wrath, the burden of conviction of sin, and does not smoothe over the repeated failures of Christian to be Christian.

The text that remains through abridgement speaks of the same gospel, albeit in another register, than does John himself. This change of register is particularly to be noted in John's treatment of the Vanity Fair episodes from both Parts I and Parts 2. These are recognized as the sites of Bunyan's clearest social critiques and so attract our attention as episodes where the holistic rather than individualistic surfaces. As Bunyan relates his authorial dream, Christian and Faithful, having been warned by Evangelist, arrive at Vanity and immediately create a 'hubbub' by their differences of clothing, of speech, and of comportment, refusing to buy the Fair's wares. They cry out that they will only buy the truth. Fights break out around them, they are arraigned, caged, brought to trial. Faithful is eventually martyred, before Christian escapes. For Bunyan, this episode takes up nine pages of text in modern full editions, compared to John's one-page rendering. With John, Faithful is still martyred but the reasons are left mysterious. All we are told 'Now while they were there, Faithful and Christian were both imprisoned and brought to court' (John 2012: 70). Faithful is found guilty, although we do not know of what, and sentenced to death. The gory details of his death, however, that Bunyan borrows from Hebrews 11, Micah 3 and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, remain in the adaptation. Aside from an illustrated frontispiece of the dreaming Bunyan, the first ever illustration of the narrative was the fifth edition's inclusion of a woodcut of Faithful burning at the stake (Milne 2015) This Vanity Fair episode is significant for a reading of *Pilgrim's Progress*, yet John downplays it. Why might John not consider this substantial abridgment a loss for his

narrative? What does it tell us about his gospel? The answer, I suggest, has to do with the social aspects that for John are outcomes of the gospel rather than its kingdom core.

The abridgment of the Vanity Fair episode removes the class-conscious critique, of the wealthy and aristocratic, and of the sycophantic aspirations to worldly status of the perjuring witnesses. Bunyan is very clear in his marginal notes that ‘Sins are all Lords and Great ones’. An accuser reports Faithful and Christian’s alleged ‘railing against’ Price Beelzebub, Lord Old-man, Lord Carnal-Delight, Lord Luxurious, Lord Desire of Vain-glory, Lord Lechery, Sir Having greed and ‘the rest of our nobility’ (Bunyan 1960: 94). Faithful denies the railing, but simply points out ‘the Prince of this Town, with all the Rablement his Attendants, by this Gentleman named, are more fit for a being in Hell, then in this Town and Countrey; and so the Lord have mercy on me’ (Bunyan, 1960: 95). That the presiding magistrate is Judge ‘Hategood’ tells us that the institutions of human government wherein justice is meant to inhere cannot be trusted with the truth and with life. Bunyan’s pilgrim gospel is one that turns the conventional and institutional confidences of the world upside-down.

Social and political persecution are in Bunyan’s view. I do not want to suggest that John presents an ethereal gospel of gnostic spirituality that is all comfortable metaphor. It could be that he deemed the communication of the core of the Christian gospel transformation wrought by salvation need not be encumbered by social critiques that are historically located in the past. What difficulty there is for a follower of his twenty-first century pilgrim way is primarily private, personal and epistemic. It is a person’s internal world of belief that is being challenged in evangelism, and only secondarily, as a possible consequence, their orientation to the social setting of discipleship. If

evangelism presents a gospel refracted through this abridgment of *Pilgrim's Progress*, it points to a mode of Christian discipleship marked by agency of decision and action. John's plot moves quickly. Bunyan's original is far more passive. The abridgments of the Vanity Fair episode in Part II illustrates this point.

In Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan famously lessens the drama of the journey providing. Great-Heart is provided to guide and protect the womanly, childish, and weak traveling party of Christiana and company. although John still has, in his Part II, Christiana bequeathing her few worldly goods to the poor (John 2012: 186) and Mercy still occupied with serving the needy (John 2012: 170), he cuts the service that Great-heart and his company do to Vanity. The valiant pilgrims rid the town of the troubling apocalyptic seven headed, ten horned serpent monster 'governed by a Woman'(Bunyan 1965: 277-278). Notably, in Bunyan's original, compared to other giants met along the way (and there are there is much giant-slaying (Sharrock 1966:49)), the monster is wounded and forced to beat a retreat rather than killed outright. For Bunyan, the godly Christians, though few in number, are still, at certain seasons, committed to protecting the people of Vanity Fair from the monster's weakened assaults. Bunyan holds up, in this transformed Vanity of Part II, a representation of settled pilgrimage among an ungodly people. Christians positively serve the good of the city (Jeremiah 29:7, 1 Peter 2:11-12). John is less interested in conveying a gospel of social obligation and community participation.

John follows the tradition of abridgers and re-tellers who have little patience with the testifying and catechizing that comprise many an edifying 'godly conference' in Bunyan's text. If we truly live in an age where distraction and the virtual world of social media inhibit us from being

communities of meaningful conversation, it is remarkable that retellings cannot commend this counter cultural patience with conversation (Jung 2018). For example, the account of Hopeful's conversion is related until the turn to discussing reasons for Temporary's falling away or backsliding. (Bunyan 1960: page 152-154). In the original text, Temporary's slide backwards is, in Christian's judgment, in part by forsaking 'godly conference'. Does this suggest that the speedy action narrative, with reduced dialogue, designed to attract hungry souls to conversion in modern evangelical framing is what drives John's abridgment? This would then be opposed to a concern for a more pastorally 'slow' evangelism of discipleship, represented by Evangelist's reappearances through *Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan's Evangelist pastorally accompanies those who heed his words, as he plays the role of the reformed pastor commended in the emblem of the Interpreter's house. He is the 'only one whom the Lord of the Place whither thou art going hath authorized, to be thy Guide in all difficult places thou mayest meet with in the way' (Bunyan, 1960: page 29). John, in his Preface, has not recommended a local church pastor under whom one must gather for authoritative guidance, ascribing this directly to God. An evangelism for which the life lived under the authority of a gathered church, so important to Bunyan, is in danger of becoming an advocated lifestyle option for the utilitarian good of hanging with others of like decisions for mutual encouragement – a club, or a doctrinal grouping, and not the church. The loss of ecclesial mediation in the preaching of the word would disturb Bunyan, and is in danger of fostering too great an individualism in the intended convert.

John's evangelistic use of *Pilgrim's Progress* contextualizes through abridgement. What is lost is the gospel's social character calling disciples to gather in mutual fellowship and to testify in conduct that challenges entrenched structures of oppression and greed. What is emphasized is a

dramatic journey whose individualistic pilgrim agency is brought to the fore. As we turn to the stand out narrative medium of the West in the form of a movie, we ask whether that form of adaptation can escape the pitfalls identified in John's *Pilgrim* (2012).

Case Study 2: Revelation Media and the CGI animated *Pilgrim's Progress* movie.

Revelation Media secured a national US theater release for their CGI animated movie *The Pilgrim's Progress* over the Easter weekend of 2019 (Fernandez 2019). UK theater release followed in October 2019. Trailed, and followed, by screenings offered to local churches, and a nationwide US promotional bus tour, the momentum sought by the movie's producers was not, however, to achieve domestic box office success. For the producer, Steven Cleary, and director, Robert Fernandez, the movie is not just a creative venture in Christian film-making. Rather, it represents a world-wide missionary endeavor. They aim to make the product movie available for free to missions staff and ministries across the world, and to have the movie translated into one hundred languages, claiming thereby to be capable of reaching, in first or second language, some 98% of the global population. (Revelation TV 2019, Revelation Media, nd) The producers explicitly take the 1970's *Jesus Movie* as their benchmark. Concerns have been raised about the use of that movie, chief among which is that the literalism of attention to verbal translation ignores the visual translation and contextualization necessary for communication in this movie media format (Merz 2010). This critique must stand also for a movie of *Pilgrim's Progress* intended to communicate Christian transformation and identity. Relevant research, for example, shows how Chinese illustrations have drawn *Pilgrim's Progress* into their own imaginary in relation to the Gate image (Chu 2019), even though specifically Western animation styles are recognized by

many and appreciated by the older generation in China (Jiao et al. 2017). Wherever this movie is seen its reception will necessarily be complicated.

John's adaptation from text to text via abridgment is a different use than an adaptation from text to movie. There are several comparison movies in animated and live action versions of which this chosen example is the most professionally produced (Carrales 2008, Bilen 2020, Brasseur 2017). If heroic action won the day with John's adaptation, surely this will be the case with the movie? And the answer is yes... but... There are creatively introduced plot devices in the movie that are not Bunyan. Gone is the dream vision structure of the original, and in comes a fantasy movie world. Recalling an earlier artist of *Pilgrim's Progress*, William Blake's vision of Satanic mills, the City of Destruction is under the dehumanizing mechanized rule of Beelzebub's underlings – flying dragon-like demons who take on human appearance (Collé-Bak, 2012). They are at once evil, and in relation to Christian's escape from their control, at the same time deliberately comical. Still, the social and institutional oppression of sin and evil is foregrounded visually.

The movie is creative in presenting some of Bunyan's original emblematic scenes in the Interpreter's House, as a floating dream-like experience guided by the female Interpreter. There are nice touches too in her placing her hand on Christian's chest in farewell. The touch is illumined by a golden glow – just where Christian will discover the key of promise to give he and Hopeful freedom from Giant Despair later in the narrative. All visual depictions of *Pilgrim's Progress* that I have seen have to work out how to resolve the plot issue of Christian remembering a key on his person in Doubting Castle that he has never actually been given. The animators do a good job of representing this spiritual and yet material key of Scriptural promise with this non-Bunyan detail.

While departing from the text, there is here a faithfulness in the necessary adaption from the word to the visual. The visual effect also gives a strong sense of physical connectedness through touch that the book may not convey – such is the translation value of visual over literary communication.

The community character of this journey to the city by way of the cross is reflected in giving life to Christian's companions, Faithful and Hopeful. There is also good coverage of the episode most evocative of local church belonging in the Palace Beautiful. Furthermore, although the movie does not include words from Bunyan's Author's Apology, it does have a visual prologue where renowned modern hymn-writer Kristyn Getty argues for the importance of imagination and cultural participation by Christians in the light of the gospel (Fernandez, 2019). All these are laudable gestures toward a holistic rather than individualistic gospel.

When examining the Vanity Fair episode a few observations are necessary. The social potential of the confrontations at Vanity Fair are given some menace but set within a comic context. The town's judge is exaggeratedly short, sat in a fairground helter-skelter seat with a piping voice. The original's dimension of social confrontation and the question of belonging to truth are somewhat joked away with the slapstick treatment. Interpreting Vanity's Fair as a theme-park fairground rather than a market of wares and delights as the seventeenth century context demands (Milne) also affects the mood of the adaptation. While persecution is evident, the family friendly presentation elides the seriousness of Vanity's injustice and exploitation as Bunyan lists in his text. That said, the production's social awareness addresses contemporary concerns about the 'whitewashing' of movies. Christian's second companion with whom he reaches his destination,

Hopeful, is a black man. That this could be considered tokenistic is borne out by the reader's lack of surprise that all other characters have been rendered white by default in this Western product.

The movie's visual aesthetic is indeed born of Western imagination. There are nods toward the monolith of Western fantasy genre's captivation of global vision through cinema, echoing visual effects conveyed in questing blockbusters like *The Lord of the Rings*. Fidelity to Bunyan is kept in terms of his western imagination, updated through images and technology, while also holding out in that cultural form the universal tropes of an 'everyman' Christian allegory. We might ask whether mission is best served telling a Western story of a man's conversion and sanctification journey when the burgeoning missionary context today is of a non-western church reaching non-westerners with the gospel. This critical questioning might imply that *Pilgrim's Progress* could not lead others to embrace Christianity. It is not, after all, *the* gospel. Bunyan understood that his original intended audience was made up of non-conformist, gathered Christians, in need of encouragement. His wider audience, just as all the human characters populating his allegory (all but Atheist, and even then he is distinctly a not-Christian atheist), understood themselves to be Christian too, at least culturally. So the original missionary context for *Pilgrim's Progress* is one of high biblical literacy, and a social experience and expectation of weekly church fellowship, in which the journey of growth into and in faith is mapped.

The technology of a streamed movie could contradict the social gains of the visual presentation. This social reality of a gospel community is one an internet streamed consumable movie cannot foster alone. Its very consumption as another Western hero story points to the uphill communicative task to allow the divine action necessary for Christian conversion and

sanctification to be discerned above the visual communication of adventure. Interestingly, and open to interpretation in a number of ways, the most prominent ideological theme of the movie that exaggerates Bunyan is that of family. As the culmination of much emphasis, the movie has Christian reluctant to cross the river of Death to the Celestial City because he wants to go back and save his family. This very clear ‘family-values’ emphasis is both communal as well as individualist. The Western nuclear family, of individually contracted marriage, is in view - potentially over against, rather than for, wider ties to society.

Missiological Critique

Post-secular theorists suggest that the western imagination is opening up to re-enchantment. We might say that the modern lonely individual has become re-bound to her social setting in the turn to the stories that always already shape linguistic participation in life. This renewed social reality is being given a metaphysical, if not specifically Christian boost, in the post-secular turn. The popularity of fantasy genres in the mode of Tolkein and Lewis, even the quest motifs and superhuman qualities of heroes in movie franchises from *The Avengers* to *Star Wars*, point to an openness to a post-materialist, spiritual conception of life and its good. Christians will want to combat the late romantic Hollywood myth that all one needs to do is find the god within and be oneself (not too dissimilar, ironically, to Bunyan’s polemical rejection of Quakerism (Johnson 2003)). This kind of spiritual heroism also finds its extreme reverse in the assertive spiritual individualism of the Prosperity gospel where individual faith needs to be seeded for the miraculous to be unleashed – a painfully lonely individualist gospel, even within the massive mega-churches serving it up (Bowler 2013). Neither of the *Pilgrim's Progress* tools for missions fall into these categories, but to the extent the individualist agent is the object and product of the gospel propounded, these dangers lurk.

As I have indicated throughout, one way in which the missionary uses of *Pilgrim's Progress* fall short of a holistic gospel is in reticence about the social dynamics, of both church, and missional interaction with structures of God's world. A great burden of contemporary evangelical missiology has been to move away from highly individualistic accounts of a gospel of solely personal transformation. Evangelical advocates of Bunyan's vision of the Christian life *Pilgrim's Progress* will want to hold onto the gospel charge to individuals under conviction of their own sin to repent and confess Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. The pilgrim journey that missionary evangelism holds out is never not individual. But missiological critics will observe that being birthed again of the Spirit is always already more than individual. It is incorporation into the Kingdom of God through union with Christ and fellow citizen saints in the church (Eph 2:13-22). The gospel is an an ethos to be lived (Draycott and Rowe 2012, Stone 2006). This corresponds with the driving desires of a post-secular culture for '[p]ersonhood, communion, community, and conversation' (Branch and Knight 2018:506). This fits the identified need a Western context, if not global, to develop a 'prophetic imagination' (Brueggemann 2001) in order to deconstruct loyalties to other visions and goals, including contemporary commodification, consumerism, nationalism or individualism, so as to then live in embracing the astonishingly diverse global church in its local contexts.

To the extent that either of these adaptations of *Pilgrim's Progress* can be envisioned as a communication of the truth of Christian living that commends this gospel by opening up imaginations and inviting participation, they participate in mission. John's evangelistic re-telling is the most likely to fall foul of contemporary missiology in the aspect I have highlighted. Precisely because it is directed at, chiefly, an English-reading cosmopolitan audience, its inculturation

inclines it to land on the good news as transforming individual *belief* toward God in Christ. It envisions the Christian life as a solo voyage, perhaps alongside other voyagers, but scarcely with them. In my judgment, the loss of the socially combative elements from *Vanity Fair*, and the cutting of dialogue that so exercised Bunyan, leads to this. Rather than the original counter-cultural non-conformist gospel, we have an essentially Christendom model of social acceptability subtly held out to the socially and materially comfortable. To this end, then, his *Pilgrim's Progress* is softened in its prophetic stance for the sake of accessibility for individual seekers.

What of the *Pilgrim's Progress* animated movie? Can an animated movie carry dialogical hooks into post-secular contexts? Given the global consumption of movies, there may be grounds to suppose that this adaptation is more likely than a written text to find an audience. Indeed, perhaps a fantasy world that is not seventeenth-century England more readily invites comparison to the situation of the viewer. Furthermore, it is likely the movie's frank adherence to Bunyan's convictions about the existence of Satan and demons may be important in communicating to a post-secular West as well as to other cultures. This is also why the prophetic element of the movie may actually, for all the zeal to have it translated for worldwide consumption, have its greatest impact in the post-Christian West. If *Pilgrim's Progress* the movie is to resonate as a dissenting gospel challenge perhaps it will do so as it ekes out audiences among the curious in a post-Christian West, from whose Protestant non-conformity within Christendom the story originally arose.

Pilgrim's Progress, in its original context, is a call to faithful discipleship to people who were already inculturated in the broad outer shape of Christianity. Its missionary prospects are best judged alongside clearer gospel communication about the source of that Christian life, namely

Christ – whose work upon the cross is assumed in *Pilgrim's Progress*. The book is then, arguably, a tool for reaching the reached rather than unreached people groups. Its prophetic role is not going to be, as I judge, in pioneering evangelism to the unreached, but in accompanying the disciple-making and mentoring in Christian growth that deepens the commitment to faith already graciously born. This is not to say *Pilgrim's Progress* on its own cannot be used of God to draw an inquirer with spiritual thirst closer to Jesus through an enlarged imagination. It can, and it has. Rather, like any tool of missionary evangelistic communication, it requires the accompaniment of scripture-soaked believers who are living the path that Bunyan's Christian has allegorically walked before them; Philips (Acts 8), as it were, for those who come across this text pointing to the Christian hope ultimately laid out in the Bible.

This article has not argued the substantive question as to whether Bunyan in writing *Pilgrim's Progress* himself well represents the gospel as configured by current missiological concerns. If *Pilgrim's Progress* becomes individualistic in its evangelistic use, judgments will be made as whether the fault is in the hands of the adapters or, finally, in the work being adapted. Further critique beyond the scope of this paper will ask questions of the disposition of *Pilgrim's Progress* toward contemporary questions of equity in terms of race and ethnicity or gender or even disability that will affect the judgment as to its helpfulness in mission. I have suggested that elements exist in the narrative, focusing on the town of Vanity, that point in this direction of holistic social awareness. The individualism evident in these early 21st century adaptations could communicate distortion of the gospel or misappropriation of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

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¹ Bunyan scholarship also reflects these developments. If earlier scholarship saw little of community in *Pilgrim's Progress* (White 1988), Galen Johnson (2003) has substantially refuted a reading of *Pilgrim's Progress* as manifesto for the modern individual – my critique of the handling of Vanity Fair in the case studies leans on this work. The key for Johnson is Bunyan's debt to Luther whereby salvation is external gift, by grace, and not internally worked up by the individual. Whatever the recognized failings of Protestant ecclesiology, Bunyan has community life decisively in view – for his gathered seventeenth dissenting community, as well as for the larger order of society.