

The Multiple Roles of the Roll in *The Pilgrim's Progress*

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Abstract

Since faith is an intangible theological concept, believers need concrete entities, such as the sacraments, as reminders of their faith. Story, with its ability to communicate truth subtly, is an ideal vehicle for encouraging faith, which is what John Bunyan does with his allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This essay focuses on the significance of the roll that Christian receives at the foot of the Cross. The main role of the roll is to remind Christian of his faith and assure him of his salvation. To this end, Christian's roll plays many other roles throughout the allegory, such as symbolizing encouraging words, memory, a key, armor, and the fellowship of believers. In the contemporary world, memoirs and autobiographies of faith play a similar role in the lives of believers today.

Keywords

The Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan, allegory, faith, assurance of faith, marginal notes, Anne Lamott, Kathleen Norris



Faith is an abstract noun—it cannot be seen, heard, tasted, smelt, or felt. Nor can it be tangibly defined, as seen in the definition given in Hebrews 11:1, “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Indefinite and elusive, faith escapes concrete explanations. Just as faith itself escapes explanation, the assurance of having faith can be even more intangible. Consequently, people who have faith need reminders of what they believe and why they believe it. The Gospels record Jesus Christ, who is aware of this forgetful nature in fallen humanity, urging his disciples to take bread and wine together, “in remembrance of Me.”¹ Since that moment, the disciples and then the Church developed this ritual into a sacrament, a way of remembering Jesus and salvation. This remembrance of

¹ “And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (Luke 22:19). All quotations from the Bible are taken from the New American Standard Version.

salvation is an essential part of faith, and the sacraments are a tangible form of encouraging that faith. Each sacrament is administered alongside the story of its origin, like that of the Last Supper. Thus it is seen that, following Jesus' example, contemporary Christians encourage one another with symbols, and often those symbols come in a general form of story.

The use of the word *story*, here, refers to a telling of events that include character and conflict. Though both can communicate ideas, story is different from exposition in that story does not examine the ideas directly, while exposition does. Though story is not always definitive, it often demonstrates truth in ways that are nearly inexplicable through exposition. This fluidity makes it an ideal mode for remembering and encouraging faith. Regarding story, Madeleine L'Engle writes, "Stories, no matter how simple, can be vehicles of truth; can be, in fact, icons. It's no coincidence that Jesus taught almost entirely by telling stories, simple stories dealing with the stuff of life familiar to the Jews of his day."² The truth is found behind the words. In the Old Testament, the prophet Nathan chose to help King David see the error of his ways with Bathsheba through a story about two men and a sheep. In his indignation about the man who stole the sheep, King David saw God's disappointment with David's own life, as he had stolen another man's wife.³ David had known the words of the law, the doctrine, but it took story to impact his heart with the truth of the law. Story has a way of sliding truth through the mind and into the heart of the listener, and in that way it is an invaluable encouragement to the believer.

In doing so, however, sometimes story takes liberties with the truth. In the story of David, the truth is that he stole another man's wife and therefore sinned. While Nathan's story about the man stealing the sheep communicated this truth to David, the analogy between stealing a sheep and stealing a wife is not a perfect one—a sheep and a wife are not equal items. In telling the story, Nathan took liberties with the details in order to communicate the truth of David's sin in an

² L'Engle 45.

³ 2 Samuel 12, *passim*.

indirect, effective way. If, however, David were to dissect Nathan's story in order to further analyze his sin, the sheep analogy would break down. For example, David's motives were perhaps different from the fictional man's motives. Therefore, there is a risk in using story to communicate a deeper truth: the reader may try to find truth in the story itself rather than in the truth beyond the story. This is a risk the storyteller is willing to take, however, for the truth communicated through story is sometimes more powerfully experienced through characters than through exposition. To eliminate story altogether is to lose an artistic exploration of truth, and thus to lose an invaluable reminder of the truth itself.

This discussion highlights one of the central debates surrounding John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, where some critics perceive Bunyan's allegorical doctrine to be in conflict with the doctrine he presents in his expositional books. For instance, on a superficial level, one cannot actually walk to heaven in the way Christian does. On a doctrinal level, the scene where Christian forgets his roll on the Hill of Difficulty might imply that Bunyan believed a person could lose his or her salvation, which would have been contrary to Puritan belief. Thus, the critical debate about *The Pilgrim's Progress* centers on allegory, a type of story that uses analogy to communicate a moral or truth outside the story, and the literary concepts represented by the Greek words *mythos* and *logos*, the simple meanings of which are 'myth' and 'word,' respectively. Some critics, like Vincent Newey, claim, "to fictionalize is to secularize."⁴ These critics question why Bunyan—a staunch Puritan—would use *mythos*, story, as a method for communicating when, like Thomas Luxon says, "no mode of discourse is more consistently vilified by Reformation authors from Tyndale to Milton than allegory."⁵ U. Milo Kaufmann demonstrates that Bunyan, in his "Apology" (the introductory poem to *The Pilgrim's Progress*), was acutely aware of this tension between *mythos* and *logos*, and holds that:

Some passages speak clearly his sympathy with the traditional

⁴ Newey 27.

⁵ Luxon ix.

Puritan orientation toward an understanding of truth as *logos*, while others speak with equal force his appreciation of his narrative as myth. The apparent contradiction, however, does not obscure one's understanding of the narrative which follows; it rather illuminates it, for the tension which appears in the Apology as apparent antinomy appears in the body of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a continuing dialectic among modes of exposition and narration.⁶

Bunyan in the "Apology" explains it differently: "Use it [metaphor] I may then, and yet nothing smother / Truths golden beams; Nay by this method may / Make it cast forth its rayes as light as day."⁷ If Bunyan's own words are not enough, he includes marginal notes with his text, referencing multiple verses with nearly every paragraph. Indeed, the marginal notes allow for that exploration in the sense that Bunyan wrote a *mythos* that defends its *logos* through those notes. Maxine Hancock notes that Bunyan's works can be seen as "interactive dual texts in which marginal notes interact with the main narrative."⁸ When the text is examined alongside the marginalia, the *mythos* and *logos* synthesize, providing a reading experience that is both engaging and informative.

Perhaps one of the trickiest readings of *The Pilgrim's Progress* regards the roll that Christian carries, which was previously mentioned as an example of a confusing doctrine in Bunyan's allegory. For this reason, most critics have curiously avoided explanations of Christian's roll, and yet a study of the roll reveals both a synthesis of allegory and doctrine and the valuable element of story that encourages today's contemporary pilgrim on his or her journey of faith. Christian's roll with a Seal goes beyond symbolizing faith—it is a tangible testimony to his faith, and with its fluidity of usages and meanings it provides a rich example for faith in the life of the contemporary pilgrim. In a way, Bunyan's

⁶ Kaufmann 15.

⁷ Lines 7-8.

⁸ Hancock 25.

book itself is a roll to the real pilgrim outside the book.

As an object in an allegory, the roll is a symbol for a concept beyond itself. In the case of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, this is a theological concept: the roll symbolizes faith. In his essay, "The Theology of *The Pilgrim's Progress*," Gordon Campbell uses the roll as his clinching argument for his case that Bunyan's imaginative work confuses the theological truths he attempts to explicate in other works. He claims, "More often the narrative triumphs to the extent that [...] we cannot translate the narrative of the soterial journey back into the precise language of Bunyan's theology."⁹ While it is true that symbols in a fictional narrative are difficult to translate back into clear doctrinal truth, it is also not the object of allegory to explicate doctrine. Allegory directs its doctrine to a different part of the person than does knowledge—it appeals to the indirect, often deeper, understanding of the heart, not just the understanding of the rational mind. Near the end of his essay, Campbell more specifically describes the confusion surrounding the roll:

This summary of the appearances of the roll shows that it does not merely serve as an allegorical representation of some doctrinal truth. Indeed, although we are told at one point that the roll represents assurance, one clearly does not submit one's assurance at the Heavenly Gate. And poor Ignorance, who brims with confidence, is not given a false roll to represent false assurance, but is not given any roll at all. The narrative function of the roll has superseded its allegorical function.¹⁰

Throughout the essay, Campbell wrestles with the roll and other allegorical symbols in the story, and ends his discussion with this conclusion: "The metaphor is sufficiently free from a specific meaning to allow it to function in several ways."¹¹ Though he explains that it cannot be seen as any one doctrinal truth, these

⁹ Campbell 259.

¹⁰ Campbell 260.

¹¹ Campbell 260.

several ways remain unexplored in Campbell's discussion. He is right—the freedom of the metaphor of the roll means that the symbol can function in several ways, but it does not necessarily detract from the significance of the roll.

The roll is mentioned by several names and forms, each somehow relating to faith. As a written object, it does not 'stand in' solely for Scripture, although Scripture encourages faith as well. Scripture is already specifically mentioned and is symbolized by the book that convicts Christian of his burden at the beginning of the story. Therefore, the roll and its associates are free to symbolize a different element of faith on the general pilgrim journey. In its various forms, the roll symbolizes both faith and the assurance of faith for the pilgrim; in order to emulate such abstract concepts, the roll plays many roles throughout the story, reflecting on the various roles that faith play in the life of the pilgrim outside the book.

While Christian is still in the City of Destruction, Evangelist gives him a "Parchment-Role" tract, which reads, "Fly from the wrath to come," and gives him a direction in which to go with his burden.¹² Though this passage does mention a roll, it is not the roll that this paper addresses. This first parchment is not the roll of faith, but does lead Christian to a physical place where he demonstrates his faith and is given the roll under discussion. This first parchment whets Christian's appetite for faith, for hope in something he cannot find in the City of Destruction. Marginal notes claim that the first roll's message comes from Matthew 3:7, where John the Baptist says to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Christian hears the warning and heeds it: his book warns him and the Parchment urges him to go. This parchment directs Christian to seek faith and salvation, which he receives after he passes through the Wicket Gate.

After Christian is admitted at the Wicket Gate, he is given a roll (the roll under discussion) at the Cross. In the presence of the Cross, his burden rolls away, and "three shining ones" come to Christian. In the following quote, Bunyan describes

¹² Bunyan 11.

the scene:

[B]ehold three shining ones came to him, and saluted him, with *Peace be to thee*: so the first said to him, *Thy sins be forgiven*. The second stript him of his Rags, and cloathed him with change of Raiment. The third also set a mark in his forehead, and gave him a roll with a Seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate: so they went on their way.¹³

The use of the number three here echoes the Trinity: the first, the Father, forgives Christian; the second, Christ, exchanges Christian's position in faith; and the third, the Holy Spirit, both *seals* and *encourages* the pilgrim in faith. It is important to note that the third gives Christian both the mark and the roll—by being given by the same hand, these two symbols are connected, possibly even interchangeable. According to the Bible, the faith of the believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit,¹⁴ just as Christian's act of walking through the Wicket Gate—his act of faith—is confirmed by a mark and a sealed roll. The sealed roll seems to be the sacramental, tangible promise of the mark. Indeed, the mark and the seal are connected in Revelation 9:4, where the men of God who have “the seal of God on their foreheads” are not to be touched in tribulation.¹⁵ In the Bible, the two symbols are one and the same, but in the allegory, the mark and the seal take two different forms.

Marginal notes on this third shining one and his gifts include Ephesians 1:13 and 2 Corinthians 1:22-23, both of which mention the sealing of the believer and the giving of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ These verses, connected with the marginal notes

¹³ Bunyan 37.

¹⁴ “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30).

¹⁵ “They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (Revelation 9:4).

¹⁶ “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14); “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a

included in Christian's conversion passage, focus on the seal that Christian is given, which is symbolized by both the mark and the roll—testimonies and evidences of Christian's saving faith. While the mark follows the *logos* of the doctrine of Eternal Security (or Calvin's Preservation of the Saints), the roll, in *mythos*, does not so clearly adhere to doctrine, but takes a more fluid, yet no less important, form.

Along the road, shortly after his conversion experience, Christian is laughed at by Formalist and Hypocrisy for the story of his salvation and gifts. Christian then walks alone, reading the roll and being refreshed, until halfway up the Hill of Difficulty, where he rests, reads, and falls asleep. Here the roll slips from "out of his hand,"¹⁷ coming to rest out of Christian's sight. This is where the symbolism of the mark and the roll divide: the mark (evidence of faith) cannot be lost, but the roll (reminder of faith) can. Christian, oblivious to his loss, meets Mistrust and Timorous, who shake his confidence. Christian then reaches into his bosom for the roll, "that he might read therein and be comforted; but he felt, and found it not."¹⁸ Herein is revealed the most crucial point regarding the roll: it cannot symbolize actual salvation or faith, for neither can be truly lost. Yet the roll cannot solely represent Scripture either, for if one should lose a Bible, one's salvation is not lost. Also, as Campbell was quoted as saying earlier, assurance of salvation is not presented at the Celestial Gate; a person is admitted into heaven through faith in Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life,"¹⁹ a.k.a. 'the Wicket Gate.' The roll is all of these—salvation, faith, Scripture, assurance of faith—and none of these, simultaneously. If a pilgrim, fictional or real, forgets his or her salvation or experiences great doubt about faith, then he or she feels lost and questions the route to salvation. Christian, however, has a clear path and must present his roll, so he turns back and begins searching. As I will point out below, often the

pledge. But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth" (2 Corinthians 1:21-23).

¹⁷ Bunyan 41-42.

¹⁸ Bunyan 44.

¹⁹ "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

contemporary pilgrim does the same, and searches for assurance of faith both in history and surrounding environments.

Christian's behavior, the marginal notes, and Scriptural allusions in this passage are critical concerning the significance of the roll for Christian. Christian walks back over the Hill of Difficulty, "bemoaning his sinful sleep," and mourning the fact that he will have to walk this path three times.²⁰ Marginal notes cite Revelation 2:2, discussing Christ's knowledge of deeds and perseverance, and 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8, urging sleep by night and alertness by day.²¹ These passages convict Christian of his sin, aggravating his distressed mindset. Neither of these passages, however, pertains to the italicized allusion within the text, "*O wretched Man that I am,*" which is a direct quote from Romans 7:24.²² This verse follows the Apostle Paul's similar distress in that he does what he does not want to do and he does not do what he wants to do. After Paul's struggle in Romans 7, though, comes his description of living in the freedom of the Spirit of Christ, which is echoed by Christian when he finds his roll again. Bunyan narrates, "but who can tell how joyful this man was, when he had gotten his roll again? For this Roll was *the assurance of his life*, and acceptance at the desired Haven."²³ Christian later calls the roll his "evidence,"²⁴ which is the crux of what the roll symbolizes—evidence of salvation and a reminder of faith. Whatever is written in that roll grants Christian joy and freedom. No matter if he treads the Hill of Difficulty one, three, or ten times, if he arrives at the Celestial Gate with the roll, he will be admitted. The roll is Christian's tangible reminder of freedom from his burden and assurance of passage to the Celestial City. It is a physical reminder of the seal on his forehead, thus fulfilling multiple roles.

²⁰ Bunyan 44.

²¹ "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:2-3); "For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of {the} day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:7-8).

²² "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

²³ Bunyan 45, emphasis mine.

²⁴ Bunyan 47.

The subsequent references to the roll continue to emphasize this symbolism. After Christian's next stop, the House of the Porter (where he shares what he experienced while standing at the Cross), the roll is rarely mentioned again until the end of the Part I. However, at the House of the Porter Christian is shown the armory of Ephesians 6: 13-17: "which their Lord had provided for Pilgrims, as Sword, Shield, Helmet, Breast plate, *All-Prayer*, and Shooes that would not wear out."²⁵ While the text does not explicitly state that Christian receives the armor, Christian does fight Apollyon later with a sword and shield that he did not have previously. This armor now protects the roll with the Breastplate of Righteousness, the Sword of the Word of God, and the Shield of Faith. Perhaps this explains the absence of the roll for the remainder of Christian's story—he now protects his evidence of salvation.

Although this is a possible explanation for the subsequent absence of references to the roll, another explanation can be that the roll now begins to more fully assume its basic allegoric role as a symbol. Thus, the symbol of the roll reconfigures into forms that fulfill the same function even though they do not physically resemble a roll. In this way, it is able to represent the different functions of faith in the life of the actual pilgrim outside the book. For example, in *Doubting Castle*, Christian finds another object in his bosom, which might be the roll in disguise. Neither at the Cross nor in the armory is Christian given a key of promise, but after some time in Giant Despair's dungeon, he finds he has one.²⁶ Marginal notes reference Acts 12:6-10, where Peter is released from prison, and Matthew 16:19, where Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."²⁷ This key of promise appears to function as the roll, which critic Brian

²⁵ Bunyan 54. "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:13-17).

²⁶ Bunyan 114.

²⁷ "On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up,

Nellist refers to as “the roll of Promise”²⁸; here Nellist connects the roll and the key of promise as the same item. In Acts 2:33, another verse regarding the seal of the Holy Spirit, Paul writes of God giving “the promise of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ The Holy Spirit is described as a seal and a promise, and in Bunyan’s allegory, the Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who grants Christian his roll. This passage demonstrates that the Holy Spirit can use any object as the roll to remind the pilgrim of his or her salvation.

At the end of Part I, the roll is needed for presentation at the Celestial Gate. Christian and Hopeful give their “Certificates” at the Gate, the certificates are carried to the King, and they are admitted into the City.³⁰ Ignorance, however, is turned away—as the narrator-dreamer reports observing. When Christian and Hopeful first met Ignorance, they asked him what he had to show at the Gate, and Ignorance responded, “I know my Lords will, and I have been a good Liver, I pay every man his own; I pray, Fast, pay Tithes, and give Alms, and have left my Countrey, for whither I am going.”³¹ Since Ignorance did not enter through the Wicket Gate, he also does not have the faith in the Cross that stands there, and he holds no sealed roll to testify to this faith. He believes firmly that his good works will warrant him a spot in the Celestial City, but though that faith is strong, it is not the right kind. Vincent Newey notes the Reformed emphasis in this scene: “In consigning Ignorance to Hell Bunyan of course adheres to a creed—the harsh Calvinist doctrine of ‘predestination’ and ‘reprobation.’”³² Whether predestined or no, at the Celestial Gate Ignorance does not have the roll of promise of faith. It is as if he believes that the practice of the sacraments will save him without the true

saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. And he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him” (Acts 12:6-10); “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

²⁸ Nellist 145.

²⁹ “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

³⁰ Bunyan 152.

³¹ Bunyan 120.

³² Newey 43.

function behind them, wherein he would have received the roll. The roll is not a list of deeds to be done along the way; it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit that this pilgrim has been sealed in faith.

In Part II, the roll does not have a dominant presence. Christiana, her children, and Mercie begin their journey with a letter of invitation from the King to Christiana and her children. Christiana is commanded to keep the letter close and to read it aloud to her children until they all know it "root-of-heart."³³ She invites her friend Mercie to journey with them. At the Wicket Gate, Mercie is admitted without a letter because she believes—whereas Ignorance did not see the Wicket Gate. At the Cross, while the entire company marvels at what happened to Christian here, none of them experience a burden lifting and none receive a roll. They have each other; they later receive the conductor, Great-Heart; and in Beulah-land, they receive letters of invitation to cross the river. Perhaps these letters are their rolls for the Celestial Gate, but since the other side of the river is not discussed in Part II, this is unknown. If the main purpose of Christian's roll was to assure him of his faith and salvation, then the assurance and encouragement given to the pilgrims in Part II was found in their fellowship and letters of invitation.

As John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* to be an allegory for the story of the pilgrim, so do contemporary pilgrims write their memoirs to be an account of that same journey. If the role of the roll in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is faith and her company of salvation, assurance, and encouragement, then the role of the roll in modern pilgrimages would be similar. The beauty of Bunyan's allegory is that in a story, the roll can be a tangible personal reminder of faith, but reality is not so kind to the pilgrim, for faith is not tangible. The unknown writer of Hebrews defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen."³⁴ All of the other roles of the roll, the various elements of faith, come in different packages in the life of real individual pilgrims. Quite possibly, the roll is to remind the reader and oneself of the promise that writers share their spiritual

³³ Bunyan 171.

³⁴ Hebrews 11:1.

journeys. In a way, *The Pilgrim's Progress* itself is a roll to its readers, reminding them of their faith in the real Keeper of the Gate, he who is the way, the truth, and the life. Bunyan's spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, functions in much the same way—as an encouragement to pilgrims along the path.

Contemporary spiritual autobiographies and memoirs that are written today share the same function as Christian's roll. According to William Spengemann, there are three forms these spiritual autobiographies can take, "historical self-recollection, philosophical self-exploration, and poetic self-expression."³⁵ While *The Pilgrim's Progress* is certainly poetic self-expression, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* would be more of a philosophical self-exploration. Contemporary memoirs, though written poetically and creatively, fall more along the lines of historical self-recollection, like *The Long Loneliness* by Dorothy Day or *The God I Love* by Joni Erickson Tada, and philosophical self-exploration, like *Traveling Mercies* by Anne Lamott or *Dakota* by Kathleen Norris. Rarely do writers of today use allegory in their own recollections. Regardless of historical self-recollection or philosophical self-exploration, each of these authors mentioned here use nonfiction exposition to recount their spiritual lives. Between all of these modes, there is much overlap; all of these memoirs trace the coming to faith of each writer, and describe many of the major historical and philosophical hurdles faced along the way. Like John Bunyan in *Grace Abounding*, these writers remember their own paths of faith to the Town next to the River. Significant events or long nights of the soul translate from the life of the memoirist into Hills of Difficulty, Doubting Castles, Valleys of Humiliation, and other major landmarks easily, but the role of the roll is much harder to find, and is unique to the individual. Yet the roll is the pivotal point of the journey, for the roll reminds the pilgrim of the grounds in which he has assurance that the faith he has is sanctifying faith and will be sufficient at the end of the journey.

For these contemporary memoirists, the roll is anything that tangibly

³⁵ Spengemann qtd. in Swaim 145.

encourages their faith, like a person, a book, or a knick-knack. For example, in Anne Lamott's *Traveling Mercies*, the roll takes many forms, usually the form of other people, which aligns her story with that of Christiana's almost more than Christian's. Lamott experiences the Cross like Christian, but it is over a period of years that she struggles to shed her addictions. She finds her roll when she lets "Christ the kitty" into her home,³⁶ but does not mention reading Scripture in order to refresh herself on her journey. The people in her life, specifically her church, assure her of her salvation and faith: "no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home."³⁷ Lamott's 'roll' is people, much like Christiana. In *Dakota*, Kathleen Norris finds the barren Dakota landscape and her grandmother's church as her invitation to the Wicket Gate. The Benedictine monks in Dakota and their desert wisdom encourage her faith. In describing the sometimes literal, sometimes figurative desert she is in, Norris writes that "a healthy ascetic discipline asks you to rejoice in these gifts of deprivation, to learn from them, and to care less for amenities than for that which refreshes from a deeper source. Desert wisdom allows you to be at home, wherever you are."³⁸ Norris' roll is finding assurance of faith in the "desert places"—those places where encouragement is hard to come by.³⁹ The roll of faith, of assurance of salvation, is individual to each life. This, perhaps, is part of the marvel of believing in an incarnate God—he individualizes each roll to each pilgrim who traverses his land via whatever path their journey might take them.

Here is where the role of the material roll in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is significant for the contemporary pilgrim. The actual roll is not faith itself—that the pilgrim cannot lose. The pilgrim can, however, forget his or her faith. The paper roll is a reminder, a symbol, a testimony to Christian's faith. He learned to protect it with the armor, and it became a key of promise; in Part II, the roll was found in

³⁶ Lamott 50.

³⁷ Lamott 55.

³⁸ Norris 23-24.

³⁹ Norris 14-24.

the encouragement of the believers. The contemporary pilgrim has the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, the community of other pilgrims, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who brings to mind those memories and symbols that are important on that individual's path. In many ways, the spiritual memoir functions as a contemporary roll, for through the reading of another's journey, the pilgrim is reminded and assured of faith and salvation. The Holy Spirit seals and walks with each pilgrim, guiding him or her along the way. By focusing on his or her own roll—as the assurance of faith, faith itself, the promise of salvation, or just plain encouragement along the journey—the writer of the spiritual memoir in turn gives a roll to the reader. Through *mythos*, Christian's roll (and by extension the rolls of Bunyan, Lamott, Norris, and others) urges contemporary pilgrims to be reminded of faith always, that they might not doubt and need to retrace their steps. Through *mythos*, pilgrims are reminded of the *logos* that is the Wicket Gate of Christ Jesus.



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