

# Religion in oliver twist essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens was published as a serial in 1838. This novel was not an exception in comparison to his other works and also draws the public attention to social evils like workhouses or child labor. The author manages to apply to serious and important themes at the same time using his sarcasm and dark humor. There are several major themes highlighted in the novel: charity, individualism, purity, but the novel mostly studies the exposition of Christian doctrines during the Victorian age.

The author uses Christian sense and language for workhouse, for the criminals' world, and finally bourgeois, checking their ability to keep the Christian values. He wants to show the pretence and contradictions of his society. The distortion of Christian senses is presented through the different worlds in the novel. There are strong borders between the world of poor houses, of the criminal world of Fagin and the world where people like Maylie or Mr. Brownlow live, their comparison would be the basic element of presentation of Christian doctrines in Oliver Twist.

Some critics even call the novel Good Samaritan Tale, in reality it could serve as presentation of the famous Biblical tale about Good Samaritan but in Victorian age. There is an example with Mr. Bumble, the beadle, of pretence of Church regarding its own principles. In the fourth chapter Mr. Sowerberry pays attention to a huge button worn by beadle: " 'Yes, I think it is rather pretty,' said the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large brass buttons which embellished his coat. 'The die is the same as the parochial seal- The Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man..."

I put it on, I remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight. ” (48). Here the author shows us how much is Mr. Bumble admired his own “ Samaritan” buttons, although he received them on a night, when a man was not allowed in and had to die in the street. But for workhouse, Samaritanism lost its value and became more of ornament, and real fulfillment of it would be considered by Mr. Bumble absolute nonsense. Mr. Bumble considers the buttons to be pretty and nice, but little attention does he pay to their real meaning.

The Board of warehouse is very careful about Christian language. They asked Oliver if he prayed, meaning “ voicing of religion”. But nevertheless their demands of prayers are not connected with education – they don’t teach their pupils to pray, but to pick oakum. Mr. Bumble, a deeply biblical persons says about Oliver: “ a dead-weight; a millstone, as I may say; round the parochial throat”, thus misinterpreting the text from Bible: “ But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believes in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 8: 6).

Thus, he has his own interpretation of words from Bible, and draws his own conclusion about the guilt of the boy. When Mr. Gamfield came to take Oliver to work for him, he is not refused due to some moral reason, connected with child labour or with his severe and brutal attitude to his employees, but due to the fact that “ chimney sweeping is a nasty business”, and thus the board doesn’t give the boy “ unless Chimney sweep will take less than the premium” (19).

The next “ world” the main hero has to meet is the world of Jew Fagin, no wonder that this world is not more Christian than the previous. Here Oliver is starving and trying to catch the pennies that the passengers of the coaches showed him in order to entertain themselves, looking how a poor dirty child would run for them. Artful Dodger is the man who takes Oliver to an Inn and offers him food, he is also ready to help him in London: “ I know a ‘ spectacle old genelman, as lives there, wot’ll give you lodgings for nothink, and never ask for the change... (64).

Of course this sounds much more pleasant for the boy than the words of the beadle from workhouse. But soon Oliver has to be disappointed in this good samaritanism again as soon as learns more about the laws of thieves: “ Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he [Fagin] would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed” (76). Fagin generally is an important figure and far not simple one.

It is clear that he is a criminal, with evil soul and intentions, but he still takes up the role of Good Samaritan. From one side he pushes the boy to become a criminal and from other side he is the only one trying to create domestic comfort and even giving food to Oliver from his hands. He has his own religious laws and he explained them to Mr. Bolter: ‘ Only to show you my meaning clearly,’ said the Jew, raising his eyebrows. ‘ To be able to do that, you depend on me. To keep my little business all snug, I depend on you. The first is your number one, the second my number one.

The more you value your number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so we are come at last to what I told you at first- that a regard for number one holds us all together, and must do so, unless we would all go to pieces in company. ' (381). This is his interpretation of well known biblical law about treating your neighbors the way you would like to be treated yourself. But for Fagin people next to him mean only his own interests, thus he takes care for Oliver not due to his humanity, but as he knows that the boy is able to bring him money. This is the primary rule of Fagin's personal religion.

His den in its turn likes to distort Christian terminology. Dodger states that all people around are thieves and for him they stand on the same line like the dog of Sikes. The dog is said to " given to preaching", and an " out-and-out Christian" (154). When Sikes says to Fagin " Don't come between me and my dog! there is certainly comparison of the whole gang with dog, another religious distortion done by the Fagin's den. The dog starts to occupy the center place of the underworld, the dog can better than police find everything and everybody in the dirty labyrinths of underworld streets.

When he finds Sikes and looks at him after a " dismal howl", " striking his head against a stone, dashing out his brains" (453). For the den the Number One Rule of Fagin becomes the main and thus Fagin is the head of this " religion". Moreover, he creates his own rituals - for example " pocket picking game" and his wish is to teach Oliver. " If you don't take pocket-handkerchers and watches," says the Dodger, " some other cove will; so that the coves that lose 'em will be all the worse, and you'll be all the worse too, and nobody half ha'p'orth the better, except the caps wot gets them- and you've just a good a right to them as they have.

Here, the Dodger talks about individualism being the thief's right to get the other's property; Fagin calls this the "catechism" of "the trade" (156-157). Thus the two surroundings – workhouse and underworld of thieves are used by the author in order to show the distortion of Bible texts and laws in society during Victorian period. He presents allegories of Bible tale about Samaritan and the false samaritanism of the real world.

Before meeting the third "world" Oliver is left wounded in a ditch, practically with zero chances to survive: "The air became more sharp and piercing, as its first dull hue: the death of night, rather than the birth of day: glimmered faintly in the sky" (239). But instead, Oliver is given a chance to live, moreover to live in a better world of Maylies. Now, Rose uses the religious language in the direct and correct meaning already: "... think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the comfort of a home... Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy's sake, think of this, before you let them drag this sick child to prison" (252).

She is the person who is able to show sympathy and mercy to her neighbor. Mr. Brownlow, doing everything in order to help the boy to keep his status and money, is also a positively shown example from Samaritan tale. However these two heroes are in a way idealized, it is clear that in reality, this is much more difficult to be a part of that bourgeois society and living according to all Christian laws to keep one's own life. The example of Nancy proves it, as soon as she tried to help Oliver, she had to sacrifice her life. With this character the author himself doubts his own parable.

Overall, in the novel *Oliver Twist* Dickens pays attention to the sophisticated issues of religious language and compassion among people, the place in the Victorian society that these issues occupy and the way they can be distorted by people. The society during this historical period was strongly divided into classes – to the highest class belonged gentlemen, people who were born aristocrats and who didn't have to earn money through hard work, the second was middle class – these people claimed work to be a moral virtue, and the third class – of poor people, who had to suffer from cruelty of the above standing society layers.

Thus in the whole society wealth was considered to reflect the moral values, virtues, meaning that financial success was the God's will to honor somebody's efforts and personal virtues at the same time poverty only proved the moral weakness of third class people. The author chose religious aspects to present in the best way the distortion of the universal moral principles and rules by Victorian society.