

CHAPTER II

JEAN VALJEAN IN HIS PRE - CONVERSION

Since Adam fell into sin, the knowledge of good and evil has come to all men. Many times this two opposing forces are in battle within one's conscience;

... man can no longer gain a full knowledge of the world around him, nor is he able to reason without constantly falling into error, morally, man became less able to discern good and evil. Socially, he began to exploit his fellow man. (Sire, 1976: 36)

Rebellion and crime are common everywhere, man has no more fear of God. "Each has tried to be his own god and exalt his will above God's will....man lost the blessing and protection of God and came under a curse and the power of the devil." (Weiner, 1980 :1). Histories recorded incessant war; likewise, the mass media frequently reports various crimes. In short, man is enslaved by sin.

Jean Valjean and his sister's family with seven children live in profound poverty, that the children often starve. Jean, who is a poorly paid pruner, works hard to support them. "He did it naturally, as a duty, but with a trace of surliness." (Hugo, 1987; 83). He knows that he should be grateful to his widow sister who has reared him since their parents died when he was very young, yet it

seems that he does it insincerely. Jean also likes to grumble. When the children spilt the borrowing milk, Jean pays for the milk. Yet, he did it with grumbling: "Jean Valjean, rough and grumbler as he was, paid Marie Claude; their mother never knew, and so the children escaped punishment." (Hugo, 1987: 83). This shows man's sinful nature ; "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rome 3: 14, KJV). The condition of Jean Valjean, represents the condition of unregenerated man in general and what the sting of sin has done to him. As sin enters into this world, so does suffering. Much of this, is the result of the work of flesh: hatred, wrath, adultery, murders, envy, and others. Thus, injustice, cruelty and insecurity occur in the society. Jean Valjean is the victim of the cruel society and man's inhumanity to man. He is sentenced to five year imprisonment just because of stealing a loaf of bread. He is forced to do that, because he has no work at that severe winter while his sister and her children, have nothing to eat. When Jean enters the galleys, he wept as the guards riveting the bolt of his iron collar behind his head with a heavy hammer strokes. This is the beginning of Jean suffering as a prisoner of the unjust law. Jean Valjean nineteen years imprisonment and the cruel treatment during that time inflict a deep misery in him:

Oh, that red tunic, the ball and chain, the plank to sleep on, the heat, the cold, the work gang, back to the prison ship every night, the lash, the double

chain for nothing, solitary confinement for one word even when sick in bed, the chain. The dogs, a dog is happier! Nineteen years! (Hugo, 1987: 76)

Such cruel punishment gradually transforms Jean's body, soul and spirit. Physically, Jean becomes stronger :

His agility was even greater than his strength. Certain convicts, constantly planning escape, have developed a veritable science of strength and skill combined—the science of the muscles.... Given an angel in a wall, with the pressure of his back and his knees, with elbows and hands braced against the rough face of the stone, he would ascend, as if by magic, to the third floor. (Hugo, 1987: 91)

The soul of man is the place of man's personality. While personality consists of intellect, will and emotions. (Weiner, 1980: 33) Jean Valjean psychological disorder can be seen when he tries to escape several times as he can no longer bear the prison brutal treatment. He is more like an animal than human being:

He escaped impetuously, like a wolf on seeing his cage door open. Instinct said, "Go!" Reason said, "Stay!" But before so mighty a temptation, reason disappeared, and only instinct remained. The beast alone was reacting. When he was recaptured, the new punishment inflicted on him only made him fiercer. (Hugo, 1987: 91)

It seems that Jean's mind does not work as it should be, he could no longer think about the result of his trying to escape. Jean's personality has changed also, he talks little and never laughs. He seems continually absorbed in looking at something terrible. He becomes so indifferent, and at times, he does not even know exactly what he feels. When he is freed from the prison, he is given a yellow passport which says that he is a very dangerous man.

Nineteen years imprisonment has made him capable of two types of crimes:

... first, a sudden unpremeditated act, rash, instinctive, a sort of reprisal for the wrong he had suffered; second, a serious, premeditated act, debated in his conscience and mulled over with the false ideas such a fate will produce. His premeditations went through the three successive phases to which certain natures are limited- reason, will, and obstinacy." (Hugo, 1987: 93)

Jean Valjean's such mental distortion could not be separated with his spiritual decline as well. Through suffering he begins to condemn God. The spirit of man, deals with the spiritual realm. It is divided into three parts: intuition, conscience, and fellowship. The conscience is the door of one's spirit. From this part then the guilty feeling may occur, because it tells man about right and wrong. The intuition is the knower by which man perceives circumstances or things, the fellowship is the area to have fellowship with God. The conscience will become dull and not sensitive to the Spirit of God if one keeps committing sin. (Weiner, 1980: 33). As for Jean Valjean he could no longer discern the right and the wrong. His conscience has become dull.

The Scripture states that any unregenerated men is at war with God. They are in darkness, no hope and like strayed lamb. Spiritually, they are in bondage and are a captive of sin. Jean Valjean's condition is a reflection of this. He is at war with God, he does things according to what his human nature tells him to do. This, according to

what the Bible says about the sinner : "Those who live as their human nature tells them to, have their minds controlled by what human nature wants... and so a person becomes an enemy of God when he is controlled by his human nature" (Roma 8:5a, 7: GNB). In fact, Jean Valjean knows God only in name. At times, in the midst of his misery, he cries to Him but finds no answer. "They know God, but they do not give him the honour that belongs to Him, nor do they thank Him. Instead, their thought have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness." (Rome 1: 21: GNB) Jean is also said to be in darkness he does not know where he is and what he does: "Jean Valjean is in the dark, suffering in the dark, hating in the dark. He lived constantly in darkness, groping blindly like a dreamer." (Hugo, 1987: 90).

After his release from the galleys, Jean Valjean is still a spiritual prisoner, still in bondage of hatred, despair, bitterness and pain. His suffering increases as nobody welcomes him in Digne.

Around him, darkness, storm, solitude, wild, unconscious tumult, the ceaseless churning of fierce waters. within him, horror and exhaustion. beneath him the devouring abyss. No resting place. He thinks of the shadowy adventures of his limp body in the limitless gloom. The biting cold paralyzes him. His hand cramp shut and grasp at...nothing... "What can he do? He yield to despair; worn out, he seeks death, no longer resists, gives up, lets go, tumbles into the mournful depths of the abyss forever. (Hugo, 1987: 95)

What he undergoes and how his state is in accordance with what the Bible says about the state of those whose life is

under the power of sin, (Isaiah 1:5-6, Psalm 38:3-8, 18). Many of them are feel depressed, broken, rejected, hated vindictive and bitter. They are in bondage and imprisoned to many bad habits and thought patterns. Without spiritual help, such kind of person is dangerous both for himself and for others. Jean Valjean's attitude and behaviour are influenced by the inhuman treatment in Toulon. His deep hatred has led him to want to revenge. "As motives, he had habitual indignation, bitterness, a deep sense of injury, a reaction even against the good, the innocent, and the upright, in the unlikely event he encountered them." (Hugo, 1987: 93). Hence, the first time when Jean meets the bishop who generously helps him, he pays him back with a crime. Before he decides to steal the bishop's silverware, Jean's mind wavers and struggles but he could not resist the temptation:

Many thoughts came to him, but one kept reappearing, driving out all others. That thought was this: He had noticed the silver place settings and the large spoon that Madame Magloire had put on the table. (Hugo, 1987: 97)

Likewise, when he meets Petit-Gervais, he robs the child's money. Jean does all this spontaneously, influenced by his bad habits and thought pattern which are molded during his imprisonment.

That is why a man who is enslaved by sin needs to be restored and transformed by God; and only God is able to restore man's spiritual death to life. In the novel, Hugo shows this truth: the terrible condition of Jean is

impossible to be cured by man:

Certainly, a doctor would have seen in Jean Valjean an incurable misery; he would perhaps have pitied those men sickened by the law, but he would not even have attempted to cure; he would have turned from the side of the caverns glimpsed in that soul; and, like Dante at the gate of Hell, he would have erased from that existence the word that the finger of God has nonetheless written in the brow of everyone—*Hope!* (Hugo, 1987: 90)

Jean Valjean is terribly in need of help, as he cries: "Men are gone. Where is God? He screams. Help! Someone Help! He screams over and over" (Hugo, 1987: 95). All of Jean Valjean's experiences is a symbol of the state of the unregenerated. Their sins could destroy them soon if nobody helps them and if they do not come to the Providence.