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EDITORIAL

Samvidhan Divas: Our Commitment to the Future of a Just and Inclusive India	
Abraham Mathew-----	577

ARTICLES

The Significance of Anecdotalism in a New Historicist Framework	
Yogapriya P. & Preya MNV-----	580
Appraisal of ‘Mountain Ravage’ in Joshua 17:14-18:	
An Ecological Biblical Criticism	
Santhosh G.-----	591
Integrating Spirituality and Psychological	
Capital to Enhance Well-Being in Christian Youth	
Bindu John & Preetha Menon -----	612
100 Years Ago – From NCC Review-----	632
NCCI NEWS -----	634
WCC NEWS -----	635
CCA NEWS -----	636
BIBLE STUDY	
‘More Than a Slave...–Beyond Master/Slave Identities	
Towards the Family of God (Philemon 1-25)	
Mathew Skariah -----	637

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EDITORIAL

Samvidhan Divas: Our Commitment to the Future of a Just and Inclusive India

On November 26 each year, India observes Constitution Day, or *Samvidhan Divas*, marking the adoption of the Indian Constitution by the Constituent Assembly in 1949. Though the Constitution was adopted on this date, it came into effect on January 26, 1950, giving birth to the Republic of India. Republic Day celebrated on January 26, commemorates India's journey as a sovereign democratic republic, with the Constitution as its foundation.

Constitution Day is more than just a commemoration of a legal document; it serves as a reminder of the visionaries who crafted the Indian Constitution and its enduring values. The drafting process, which took nearly three years, was a monumental effort to create a document reflecting independent India's diverse social, political, and economic realities. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee, played a crucial role in ensuring that the Constitution enshrined the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

India's Constitution is the longest written Constitution in the world, originally containing 395 Articles, 8 schedules, and 22 parts. Over time, it has adapted to the nation's evolving needs, expanding to include 448 Articles, 25 parts, and 12 schedules. This flexibility is a defining feature, allowing necessary amendments while preserving core principles. The adaptability of the Constitution has enabled it to address challenges in social, political, and economic spheres, ensuring its continued relevance.

A central theme of the Indian Constitution is unity in diversity, encapsulating India's pluralistic society. It guarantees every citizen equal rights, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender, or ethnicity. The Constitution also establishes India as a secular state, meaning the government does not favour any particular religion and ensures equal treatment of all religions. This secularism is not merely about non-

interference but also about providing protection and equality to all faiths.

The Constitution also lays out India's federal structure, balancing the autonomy of states with the authority of the central government. While India is a federation, the Constitution incorporates a unitary bias, allowing the central government to assert authority when necessary to maintain national unity. This balance ensures that the states have autonomy while safeguarding the nation's integrity. The Parliament, consisting of the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), represents the democratic nature of the Indian state, where laws are debated and enacted for the welfare of all citizens.

At the core of the Indian Constitution are the fundamental rights, which protect citizens from any abuse of power. These rights, including the freedom of speech, equality before the law, and the right to live with dignity, ensure that individuals' freedoms are safeguarded. However, these rights are not absolute and are subject to reasonable restrictions to balance individual rights with the greater good of society.

The Directive Principles of State Policy, included in the Constitution, outline the ideals the government should pursue, such as social justice, economic welfare, and the overall betterment of society, serving as a moral guide for governance. To ensure these principles are upheld, the Indian Constitution establishes an integrated and independent judiciary, with a unified system of courts that enforces both central and state laws. This judiciary operates autonomously, free from the influence of the executive and legislative branches, ensuring that governance remains in line with the Constitution's vision.

The Indian Constitution envisions a vibrant democracy where power is distributed among various branches of government. The independent judiciary plays a crucial role in safeguarding the Constitution, ensuring that laws and executive actions conform to its fundamental principles. The power of judicial review allows courts to invalidate any law or action that violates the Constitution, thus upholding the rule of law and protecting citizens' rights.

On Constitution Day, as we reflect on the values embedded in the Constitution, we are reminded of the responsibility we all bear in upholding ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Constitution is not just a legal framework; it is the embodiment of the aspirations of a free and democratic society. As India faces new challenges in governance, development, and social change, it is essential to remember that the Constitution is a living document that evolves to meet the needs of the nation while preserving its democratic ethos. NCC Review believes that Constitution Day is not only a celebration of the past but a reaffirmation of our commitment to the future of a just and inclusive India.

Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew

Managing Editor



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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANECDOTALISM IN A NEW HISTORICIST FRAMEWORK

- Yogapriya P.* & Preya MNV**

Abstract:

Anecdotalism plays a vital role in reshaping historical narratives by foregrounding personal experiences within broader contexts. This paper explores the significance of anecdotalism within a New Historicist framework, emphasising how these personal narratives illuminate aspects of history often overlooked by traditional historiography. As cultural narratives shape and are shaped by lived experiences, understanding this interplay is essential for a comprehensive view of history. This study argues that anecdotalism not only challenges dominant historical accounts but also enriches our understanding of power dynamics within society. The paper begins with an introduction that situates anecdotalism within New Historicist discourse. Following this, a concise literature review examines key texts addressing the relationship between personal narrative and historical analysis. The methodology section outlines the analytical approach used to assess selected literary works and historical documents. Findings reveal that anecdotal narratives serve as critical counterpoints to official histories, presenting alternative perspectives on cultural identity and power. The discussion highlights the implications of these findings for contemporary historiography and cultural studies. Ultimately, the conclusion underscores the transformative potential of anecdotalism in redefining our engagement with history, suggesting avenues for further research at the intersection of personal and collective narratives.

Keywords: Anecdotalism, New Historicism, Postcolonial narratives, culture, identity

Introduction

Anecdotalism – the use of individual stories extended to generalise a particular people’s history and/or culture – presents an engaging framework for studying history and culture. Conventional historical

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work has employed quantitative data and general historical paradigms, which disregard personal narratives.¹ This exclusion raises the lack of systematic knowledge on how social happenings affect individual existence and how individual experiences, in turn, shape association. Using anecdotes would enable scholars to raise layers of cultural meaning, which define people's identity and, thus, explain the state's history, which is seen as a rich tapestry. Anecdotes provide noteworthy and valuable examples of subordination to the large-scale idioms that shape historical scenes and demonstrate how people create meaning in the framework of history. However, in this regard, New Historicism is a remarkable theory that focuses on the relationship between literature and history. New Historicism as a critical approach grows from the premise that no text can be disentangled from the cultural and historical contexts in which it is created. The approach, therefore, encourages literature as a representation of social reality.² This postulate means that the historical approach brings value to the analyses of literary texts and the understanding of their functions in society. New historicist use of anecdotalism, as this paper will demonstrate, defamiliarises the anecdotal and subverts the process of narrativisation of culture and power relations by rendering personal stories as collectively empowering modes of reading historical circumstances. When incorporating anecdotalism into New Historicist reading, one can observe the major cultural and historical processes at work, along with the personal narratives inherent to this process.

Review of Literature

Stephen Greenblatt is acknowledged as one of the initiators of the New Historicist method. Through his work, he has proved the effectiveness of anecdotes as a tool for perceiving history and culture in a fresh, less prescriptive way. Anecdotalism is a mechanism of interlinkage with historical narratives, where personal stories gain meaning in power relations. His essay, "Fiction and Friction", about the appropriation of history with autobiography, attempts to express how true histories are filled with friction between cultures.³ This is important in making

¹ Wendy Cope, *Anecdotal Evidence* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 1-12.

² Jose A. Madrigal, ed., *New Historicism and the Comedia: Poetics, Politics, and Praxis* (Boulder: Society of Spanish & Spanish-American Studies, 1997), iii-vi.

³ Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 67.

this argument, which elevates the role of individual subjectivity, which silenced more potent narratives in historiography that exclude the powerless in society. Greenblatt's approach combines the literary approach with the historical: while analysing anecdotes, it is possible to shift from one angle to another more smoothly. The methodology places anecdotes not in the periphery of history but at the core of understanding the workings of power and authority in culture and society. More specifically, moving beyond Greenblatt's claims that accounts perform by formalising themselves, Michaels develops these ideas about anecdotes and their place in historiography. He writes that anecdotalism is central in determining the historical discourses as a literary form. Michael denies being intrigued by the idea that there are only anecdotes; instead, he goes on to show how anecdotes shape historical understanding and writing. His work is focused on the form of anecdotes, warning the reader about their potential to produce counter-narratives to the majority, top-down historical discourses, through short and personal stories. Michaels' technique is a meticulous examination of anecdotes' structural and contextual properties to illustrate how they function as compliant devices.⁴ Anecdotes, in his view, are essential in New Historicism because they provide an alternative to the often rigid and hierarchical structures of traditional historiography. By allowing personal experiences to shape historical narratives, anecdotes introduce a level of complexity and nuance that is frequently absent from official histories.

In his critical work, Habibullah analyses anecdotalism in the context of postcolonial literature with special reference to V.S. Naipaul.⁵ It is revealed that such anecdotes are a way to decolonise historical discourses and resist colonial narratives of self and power. Habibullah emphasises how these writers draw from their experiences to portray the continued social peculiarity of colonialism, which is not just a stylistic choice but a form of empowerment in the postcolonial world. Since the postcolonial world is dominated by the narratives of Western civilization and their colonisers, anecdotalism offers a voice to the periphery. In this respect, his study aligns perfectly with New Historicism, as he focuses on the

⁴ Wendy Cope, *Anecdotal Evidence* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 1-12.

⁵ Md Habibullah, "V. S. Naipaul's Travel Anecdotes and Daniel Pipes' Historiography: A New Historicist Reading," *Asiatic* 14, no. 2 (2020): 78, <https://doi.org/10.31436/asiatic.v14i2.1934>.

mechanisms that allowed individual stories to emerge, and shows how these provide distant historical voices that help historians elaborate enormously beneficial multiple perspectives. Through the selected pieces of literature, the authors demonstrate how anecdotes convey the multi-layered cultural identity processes and how biography intertwines with history. Anecdotes that put emphasis on a personal or individual experience are the best way to analyse the psychological relations implied in the construction of the cultural subject. This approach is consistent with New Historicism's preoccupation with the attempt to establish how individual cultures are influenced by their history and how that history impacts the cultural, broadening our understanding.

Asadullah and Iqbal carry forward the discussion about anecdotalism within New Historicism to the context of African literature and the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Other scholars criticising *Petals of Blood* show how the use of anecdotes as a mode of telling a story presents counter-narratives to the received postcolonial Kenya narrative.⁶ In sharing personal stories, the authors demonstrate how government documents can practically erase the experiences of the less fortunate. Asadullah and Iqbal argue that anecdotes in this context serve as a form of resistance against dominant power structures, offering alternative narratives that challenge the legitimacy of official historical accounts.⁷ Their research demonstrates the transformative potential of anecdotalism in reshaping historical narratives, particularly in postcolonial contexts. By foregrounding personal experiences, anecdotes offer a means of resisting the dominant narratives imposed by colonial and postcolonial power structures. This aligns with the New Historicist emphasis on the role of anecdotalism in revealing the complexities of power dynamics within historical and cultural narratives. These scholars argue that anecdotes are not merely illustrative devices but play a central role in shaping historical and cultural narratives. By foregrounding personal experiences, anecdotes challenge dominant historical accounts and provide alternative perspectives on identity, power, and culture. This

⁶ Asadullah, Muhammad, and Hafiz Muhammad Zahid Iqbal, "A New Historicist Study of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Anti-(Neo) Colonial Novel, *Petals of Blood*," *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 3, no. III (2022): 3, [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022\(3-iii\)07](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022(3-iii)07).

⁷ Asadullah and Iqbal, "A New Historicist Study of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Anti-(Neo) Colonial Novel, *Petals of Blood*," *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 3, no. III (2022): 3, [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022\(3-iii\)07](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022(3-iii)07).

literature review highlights the importance of anecdotalism in reshaping our understanding of history and its potential to reveal the hidden or marginalised aspects of cultural narratives. As a result, anecdotalism offers a transformative approach to historiography, allowing for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of history.

Although there have been numerous efforts to provide a classification of the phenomenon of anecdotalism and its capabilities of redefining the outcomes of historical processes, there are some ethnographic lacunae. Most of the previous research is dedicated to examining anecdotalism and its role in contributing to the works of literature under discussion and offsetting the overpowering historiographic narratives. Nonetheless, more research must target how these types of storying, or anecdotal narratives, shape contemporary cultural subjectivity and power dynamics in non-Western societies. Also, while it is possible to find significant efforts addressing the disruption of personal history to national narratives, the relationship between anecdotalism and other social dominances, such as gender, class, or ethnicity, is underdeveloped. Furthermore, most scholars focus on anecdotalism in the works of the literature of the West; however, there is potential for exploring how anecdotalism works in other chronological histories, especially post-colonial histories. The diverse value that anecdotalism holds for changing the lay perception of history in such places seems to make it a potential research topic for the future. Finally, while anecdotalism has been recognised as a counter-narrative to canonical history, relatively little has been done concerning its effects on modern digital narratives, specifically in how people's individual stories posted on the Web contribute to the formation of the historical memory. Studying these gaps will enhance knowledge about anecdotalism's role in history and provide the framework for analysing historical stories in various cultural and technological settings.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in textual analysis to explore the role of anecdotalism in postcolonial narratives, focusing on its influence on modern cultural identity, power structures, and its integration into contemporary digital narratives. The study draws from primary and secondary sources, including literary

works, scholarly articles, and digital media, to examine how anecdotal narratives intersect with issues of gender, class, and ethnicity, as well as how they shape collective memory in the digital age. By applying New Historicism as the theoretical framework, the research analyzes how anecdotalism serves as a form of resistance against dominant historical narratives, especially in non-Western contexts. The research also incorporates digital case studies, examining online personal narratives to understand their role in shaping historical memory and collective identity. This dual approach of literary and digital analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of anecdotalism's evolving role in both traditional and contemporary narrative structures.

Findings and Discussion

The focus on analysing the role of anecdotes in postcolonial contexts identified major lacunas in studying its impact on the modern cultural subject and power relations in non-Western societies. Anecdotalism has been shown to challenge mainstream historiographical accounts, but little has been done to examine how these narratives inform current cultural identities and power relations.⁸ Oral stories are invaluable in generic strategies for elaborating individual and shared histories in postcolonial cultures. Being so deeply focused on representing cultural experiences, they offer valuable ethnographic accounts of the subject in question and feature the process of constructing personal cultural identities concerning socio-political environments. Nonetheless, the current scholarship has been mostly preoccupied with analytical possibilities of anecdotal form to interrogate national histories and dominant power.⁹ This focus has regrettably obscured the complex relationship between anecdotalism and the postmodern characterisations of modern 'culture', particularly the 'new world' non-western cultures that have super-ceded the personal epic. In the present paper, one of the most significant neglected correlative analyses is the aspect of anecdotalism regarding marginalised communities. Anecdotalism effectively challenges official histories, but few sources explore how these narratives communicate

⁸ Md Habibullah, "V. S. Naipaul's Travel Anecdotes and Daniel Pipes' Historiography: A New Historicist Reading," *Asiatic* 14, no. 2 (2020): 77, <https://doi.org/10.31436/asiatic.v14i2.1934>.

⁹ Asadullah and Iqbal, "A New Historicist Study of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Anti-(Neo) Colonial Novel, *Petals of Blood*,"

the experiences of people of various gender, class, and ethnicities.¹⁰ For example, many postcolonial societies have living cultures and structures that force women, the lowest economic class, and ethnic groups to live their lives a certain way.

From these viewpoints, the researchers could explore how and why personal stories are or can be as relevant as historical ones when defining cultural identity. In addition, as a mode of writing, anecdotalism allows a qualitative view of power relations within contemporary cultural narratives. Personal narratives can counter not only national histories but also the dominant narratives that regulate existence. For example, cultural features of patriarchal societies may be depicted through narratives of individual female subjects, enhancing the understanding of cultural subjectivity.¹¹ This combination of anecdotalism concerning gender and power relations motivates further research, potentially enlightening us on identity development in non-Western societies.

Anecdotal narratives also make ethnicity play a crucial role in the construction of cultural identity. In most postcolonial societies, ethnic minorities face challenges in their countries and societies in the struggle to achieve recognition. Anecdotalism can offer a place where people can present these voices, opening space for discussions of cultural experiences that run counter to those depicted with hegemonic narratives within official historical records. As highlighted in the literature review, lying within the redeeming potential of personal stories is the potential to challenge the hegemonic story of disability.¹² Investigating how anecdotalism intersects with ethnic identity will deepen our understanding of cultural narratives in non-Western contexts. Moreover, while the existing literature acknowledges the significance of anecdotalism, there is a notable gap in examining its role in contemporary digital narratives. The rise of social media and online platforms has transformed how personal stories are shared and consumed, enabling a broader array of voices to participate in cultural

¹⁰ Md Habibullah, "V. S. Naipaul's Travel Anecdotes and Daniel Pipes' Historiography: A New Historicist Reading," 3.

¹¹ Hina Ali et al., "Transcultural Narrative in Khalid Hosseini's and the Mountains Echoed: A New Historicist Analysis," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (2022): 650, <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2022.1002.0228>.

¹² Md Habibullah, "V. S. Naipaul's Travel Anecdotes and Daniel Pipes' Historiography: A New Historicist Reading," 77.

discourse. Future research should explore how these digital anecdotal narratives contribute to collective historical memory, particularly in marginalised communities. Understanding this dynamic will enhance our comprehension of anecdotalism's impact on cultural identity in the digital age. In conclusion, while existing scholarship has laid a foundation for understanding the role of anecdotalism in postcolonial narratives, significant gaps remain in exploring its influence on modern cultural identity and power structures, particularly in non-Western contexts.

While anecdotalism is still slowly appreciated as an effective form of a historiographical counterpoint, few have shifted towards investigating how it works in and through digital cultures. Personal narratives shared and published in the digital age reflect how the personal has become a powerful tool for distribution that subverts hegemonic dissemination today.¹³ However, more needs to be done on mapping out the way these digital anecdotal narratives construct and influence collective history, particularly in non-Western societies. Today's global village has embraced social media platforms and online forums, important platforms where people share experiences. These platforms allow those from different cultures to share their stories, making our identity more representative. A micro-narrative written on the Web 2.0 platform will be able to tell a first-person account of colonialism, discrimination, and indigenous culture rather than the traditional hegemonic mode of writing using different sources.

Furthermore, it is tempting to observe that digital storytelling empowers the fast sharing of personal narratives characterised by closeness. Such dynamics enable the construction of a history that contains and valorises many experiences instead of just one, which might often become hegemonic. Digital anecdotes regarding the historical and cultural experience can be seen in how such narratives shape the popular perception of history and identity.¹⁴ For example, viral stories and posts on websites such as Twitter and Instagram are often stories about social issues, with the conversation that turns around historical paradigms and cultural memory. Moreover, the function of digital anecdotalism as the

¹³ Wendy Cope, *Anecdotal Evidence* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 1-12.

¹⁴ Bryan Alexander, *The New Digital Storytelling: Creating Narratives with New Media--Revised and Updated Edition*, 2nd Edition, 2nd ed. (California: Praeger, 2017): 72.

reinforcement of marginalised individuals' hearings is crucial. This is depicted by many ethnic minorities, women, and individuals of lower socioeconomic status who narrate their histories by telling their own stories online. Anecdotalism serves as a means of resistance against dominant narratives. In the digital realm, this resistance is amplified, as personal stories can quickly reach a global audience, fostering greater awareness and understanding of diverse cultural identities¹⁵. The intersection of anecdotalism with contemporary digital narratives also raises important questions about authenticity and representation. As individuals share their personal stories online, they navigate the complexities of identity and the potential for misrepresentation. The act of storytelling in digital spaces can be influenced by various factors, including societal expectations, cultural norms, and the desire for validation. This complexity necessitates a critical examination of how personal anecdotes are constructed and received in digital contexts, as well as their implications for collective memory and historical understanding.

Furthermore, the influence of new literary microhistory digital anecdotalism regarding history and historical writing is linked to a concept of collective memory. Since personal stories are posted on the Web, people embrace history as a constantly changing process that is seen from different viewpoints. It is for this reason that acts as a powerful point of mobilisation for change with an understanding that it helps to focus on the collective memory of the hitherto oppressed and marginalised people and communities. The potential anecdotalism offers for such transformation in digital contexts also poses questions about the ways that developments in technology affect stories. With the help of multimedia platforms, people can use different types of files in the stories they tell, including images, videos, and audio tracks. These transformations of the narrative's form have important consequences for how history is remembered and, in a way, lived. The analysis of the trends of the utilisation of anecdotalism in modern post-Soviet digital storytelling is considered an interesting and lucrative area of further research. Though prior research has recognised anecdotalism

¹⁵ Hina Ali et al., "Transcultural Narrative in Khalid Hosseini's and the Mountains Echoed: A New Historicist Analysis," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (2022): 652, <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhs.2022.1002.0228>.

as a counter-history that aligns with historiography, prior findings of digital anecdotalism are limited. Exploring the ways in which narratives posted on the Web help construct historical memories and inform cultural identity as a subject of study helps scholars better comprehend the phenomenon of anecdotalism in history. Filling these gaps will give a richer and more nuanced perspective to the analysis of history in relation to cultures and technologies in the globalised post-colonial world and, therefore, aspects of identity and power.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of anecdotalism in reshaping historical narratives, particularly in postcolonial contexts. By examining the intersection of anecdotal narratives with modern cultural identities and power structures, we identify significant gaps in existing literature, especially regarding marginalised voices and contemporary digital narratives. The findings reveal that personal stories shared online can challenge dominant historical accounts, amplify underrepresented experiences, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of collective memory. Moreover, the digital age has transformed how these narratives circulate, offering unprecedented opportunities for diverse voices to engage with and reshape cultural discourse. This underscores the need for further research into the dynamics of anecdotalism in digital contexts, particularly regarding its impact on identity formation and social change. Addressing these gaps will enhance our understanding of how personal narratives inform historical consciousness and cultural identity, ultimately providing a more inclusive framework for studying history. As anecdotalism continues to evolve, it remains a vital tool for resistance against dominant narratives, fostering richer, more varied understandings of history and cultural identity in the postcolonial world.

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APPRAISAL OF ‘MOUNTAIN RAVAGE’ IN JOSHUA 17:14-18: AN ECOLOGICAL BIBLICAL CRITICISM

*- Santhosh G.**

Introduction

God’s beautiful artistry is manifested in the creation, particularly in the case of mountains that have long been revered for their religious and ecological significance as sacred entities in various cultures, symbolizing strength, stability, and divine connection. Mountains hold a pivotal place in the scriptures of the Ancient West Asian (AWA) myths and the Old Testament (OT). Mountains symbolize strength, stability, and divine connection, though in the wake of human exploitation and disregard for the environment, these natural wonders face unprecedented threats of destruction. Remarkably, the pronouncement “Go for mountain forest, clear the forested hill country and settle there” in the book of Joshua 17:14-18 picturizes the way mountains are vulnerable to destruction. Similar circumstances abound in the ongoing ecological crisis. However, the aim of this study is to focus solely on the destruction of mountains not on occupation/settlement, to contextualize it in the present, and come up with some suggestions for redress. Therefore, this paper embarks on an exploration of the multifaceted importance of mountains, shedding light on their symbolic, religious, and ecological dimensions. Furthermore, it delves into the challenges confronting mountains, particularly their destruction, which poses a threat to the intricate balance of the natural world.

Method of Study

This study adopts Ecological Biblical Criticism, which aims to avoid androcentric, patriarchal, and anthropocentric interpretations of the biblical text, acknowledge people’s role in ecological crises, and treat Earth as a subject for empathy rather than rational analysis. This approach seeks to address the ecological crisis and promote justice for

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Earth.¹ Further, this method analyses the Bible and its interpretation in relation to ecological science and eco-justice principles. It addresses moral dilemmas related to life hazards from human devastation of the biosphere.² This task encourages interpreters to go beyond conventional interpretations of biblical texts to explore new interpretation possibilities. Ecological hermeneutics³ seeks to reclaim ecological wisdom from biblical traditions in response to the ecological crisis, while also reinvestigating and renewing Christian traditions.⁴ Norman C. Habel suggests that the ecological crisis has led to a new 'Earth consciousness,' encouraging Earth community members to return to the Bible and explore its kinship with Earth.⁵ Habel⁶ developed six guiding principles to accomplish the aims of ecological biblical criticism.

¹ Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, edited by Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 1.

² Arthur Walker Jones, "Ecological Biblical Criticism," in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Biblical Interpretation* Vol. 1, edited by Steven L. McKenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 249.

³ The field of ecological hermeneutics began to emerge during early 1960s in the writings of Joseph Sittler and Richard Baer, however it gained more interest with the publication of Lynn White's article "The Historical Roots of Ecological Crisis," Hillary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets: Contemporary Environmental Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), 82.

⁴ Ernest Conradie, "What on Earth is an Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, edited by D. G. Horrell, C. Hunt, and C. Southgate, (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 295.

⁵ Norman C. Habel, "Introducing the Earth Bible," in *Reading from Earth Perspective*, edited by Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 26.

⁶ 1) The principle of intrinsic worth: The universe, Earth, and all its components have intrinsic worth/value; 2) The principle of interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival; 3) The principle of voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice; 4) The principle of purpose: The universe, Earth and all its components, are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design; 5) The principle of mutual custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community; 6) The principle of resistance: Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans but actively resist them in the struggle for justice. Habel, "Introducing the Earth Bible," 25.

Significance of Mountains in Ancient West Asian (AWA) Myths

Mountains have served as centres of fertility, primordial hillsides of creation, gathering places for gods, abodes of high gods, points of convergence between heaven and earth, effective pillars supporting the order of creation, sites of divine encounters with humanity, and sites of theophany in ancient civilizations.⁷ The distinction between the world of the divine and the mountains was typically ambiguous in the Ancient West Asia (AWA). Especially in the Ugar writings, mountains are described as the gods' dwelling place. For example, it was believed that El and Baal resided on separate mountains, and the deity of death Mot was connected to a subterranean mountain. The fact that Baal lived on the top of Mount Zaphon implies that the mountain was revered in and of itself. About twenty miles north of city of Ugarit, Mount Casios, also known as Jebel-el-Agra, has been identified as this Zaphon.⁸

An additional noteworthy finding concerning the symbolism of temples in the Ancient West Asia (AWA) is that the deities were linked to the mountains, and typically, temples were built atop mountains. De Vaux states that "since the mountains reached up to heaven, they were considered as the dwelling place of the gods."⁹ This is probably to be related to the belief that gods had their real dwelling in heaven or realms near the heaven. The remarkable variation on the same theme is that the great gods of Mesopotamia, such as Enlil and Ashur, were often referred to as 'great mountains.' According to both Syrian and Mesopotamian thought, the gods also held their great divine assemblies on mountains. Not all gods, however, were inextricably linked to mountains. It was a distinction between "the gods of the lands" and "the gods of the mountains" that the Mesopotamians and the Syrians made.¹⁰ Thus mountains have great significance in Ancient West Asian myths which enhances our understanding of the importance of mountains.

⁷ R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 5.

⁸ Daniel Jones Muthunayagam, *The Relations between Election and Israel's Attitude towards the Nations in the Book of Isaiah* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 2000), 197.

⁹ Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: E. T. John Mchugh, 1961), 279.

¹⁰ Talmon, "har," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. III, edited by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1978), 427-47.

Theological and Religious Significance of Mountain in the Old Testament

Mountains and upland regions were crucial in ancient biblical societies due to their higher elevation, precipitation, and cooler temperatures.¹¹ Moreover, mountains and upland regions played important roles in the lives of the people in the ancient biblical world.¹² The Israelites' cultures valued mountains for their physical presence and theological significance. Their names were central to their story, resembling great moments from the biblical narrative, and their role was so significant that their names were often mentioned. For instance, the mountain identified as the resting place of Noah's ark is the mountain of Ararat (Gen. 8:4). In mount Moriah, Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:2). This mountain became the site where Solomon built the first temple to Yahweh (II Chron. 3:1).

Mount Horeb, the mountain of God, was chosen by God to deliver God's people from captivity (Exod. 3:1) and to communicate the decalogue to the Israelites through Moses (Exod. 19-20). Mountains were cultivated for vineyards (Jer. 31:5) and provided a secure habitat for a wide variety of fauna (gazelles - 1 Chron. 12:8; wild goats - Ps. 104:18; young stags - Song. 2:17; leopards - Song. 4:8; patridges - 1 Sam. 26:20; sheep - Matt. 18:12). Moreover, mountains were a place to hide and take refuge (Judg. 6:2; Luke 21:21), the place where Jephtha's daughter wandered (Judg. 11:37), an ideal setting for signalling (Isa. 18:3), a place for sacrifice (Hos. 4:13). However, the use of these symbols as vivid representations of God's attributes is more striking than their physical presence in the biblical narrative. Both God's creation (Amos 4:13; Ps. 95:4) and God's dwelling place (Ps. 74:2), mountains were frequently used to exemplify God's sovereignty over the natural world.

Mountains are said to quake (Judg. 5:5; Isa. 5:25; Nah. 1:5), tremble (Ps. 18:7), and shatter before God (Hab. 3:6). They melt like wax in

¹¹ Mark D. Green, "Mount, Mountain," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* vol. 4, edited by Heather R. McMurray (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 159. The Palestinian highlands, with their well-forested and grassy landscape, symbolize prosperity and fertility. David J. A. Clines, "Job 21-37," in *Word Bible Commentary*, edited by Bruce M. Metzger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 608.

¹² Mark D. Green, "Mount, Mountain," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* vol. 4, edited by Heather R. McMurray (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 159.

God's presence (Ps. 97:5; Mic. 1:4), smoke at God's touch (Ps. 104:32, 144:5), and can be removed at God's will (Job 9:5). Further, mountains symbolize the eternal nature of God (Gen. 49:26), righteousness (Ps. 36:6), persistent love (Isa. 54:10), and majesty (Ps. 76:4). In addition, mountains are portrayed as places of worship, and as places for pilgrimage (Ps. 24:3-6). Pilgrims approached the Lord's Mountain, symbolizing the earthly kingship established by God through God's creative acts. This holy place symbolizes God's creation and order.¹³ Van Gemeren asserts that in the wisdom literature, mountains and hills evoked images of antiquity, stability, refuge, provision and primeval order.¹⁴ Hence, mountains are given greater religious significance in the Old Testament.

Ecological Significance of Mountains

Because of their higher elevation, mountains frequently brought greater amount of precipitation and cooler temperatures than neighboring plains and valleys. Mountains are considered the world's 'water towers,' providing 60-80% of our planet's freshwater resources. At least, half of the global population, for their survival, depend on the ecosystem services of mountains, including water, food, and cleans energy. According to David J. A. Clines,¹⁵ mountain rains are the heaviest and most violent. The mountain rains are the most important source for water, streams and rivers in mountains. In the ecological process mountains play a major role in producing rain. Mountains give rise to rivers, which are used for irrigation and electricity production. Some of the forests in the mountains provide wood for houses and herbs. The Palestinian highlands, characterized by their abundant forests and high grass cover, were often seen as symbols of prosperity and fertility.

Mountains are essential to the tourism industry. Mountains provide a viable home for wildlife and forest. They also preserve water and allow migratory birds to use them as navigational aids. Mountains have also become places for adventures; they provide ores and minerals, protect

¹³ Peter C. Craig, "Psalms 1-50," in *World Biblical Commentary* Vol. 19, edited by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Baker (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 115.

¹⁴ W. A. VanGemeren, "Mountain Imagery," *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom Poetry and Writings*, edited by Temper Longman III and Peter Enns (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 481-83.

¹⁵ David J. A. Clines, "Job 21-37," in *Word Bible Commentary*, edited by Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 606.

wildlife, provide food for people and livestock, and are essential to human well-being and economic prosperity. Mountains are also natural pharmacies as they allow a host of medicinal plants to flourish, and they conserve biodiversity. Elen F. Davis¹⁶ observes that mountains are places for agricultural activities and they are natural pharmacies, allowing medicinal plants to flourish and conserving biodiversity. Moreover, mountains offer numerous mineral resources. They provide habitat for wildlife and forests. They preserve water and serve as navigational aids for migratory birds. Numerous mineral resources are available in the mountains and they also offer ores, minerals, food, and economic prosperity. Humans explore the mountains in search of precious metals and stones. Overall, mountains are essential for human well-being and economic prosperity. Sadly, the effects of climate change, land degradation, over-exploitation, and natural calamities pose a threat to mountains.

Exegesis of Joshua 17:14-18

Generally, Joshua 17:14-18 is understood as the complaint of the Josephites,¹⁷ which is told in dialogue style, that is so common to ancient Israelite narrative. This pericope poses the challenge to dispossess the enemy and possess the land.¹⁸ In fact, the Josephites came to Joshua with a demand of more land. So, Joshua suggested to the people of Joseph to go to the mountain,¹⁹ clear the forested area and settle there,

¹⁶ E. F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.

¹⁷ Marten H. Wouldstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 267. Disappointed with the size of their allotment, the people of Joseph, i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh, approach Joshua and complained about insufficiency of land. Helene Dallaire, "Joshua," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 991.

¹⁸ Josephite's expansion tradition deals with the part of land which proved most troublesome for Israel to conquer, namely the city of Beth Shean and the valley of Jezreel Trent Butler, "Joshua," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, edited by John D. Watts (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publisher, 1983), 187.

¹⁹ The basic Hebrew word for mountain is הָרַ (har) and it has wider meanings such as mountain, hill country, stony ground, desert, territory or boarder, grazing-places for cattle, a place of field, vineyards and forests. Francis Brown, "הָרַ," in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, edited by Francis Brown (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 1029. Further, har in singular and harim in plural can refer to both individual mountain peaks and mountain ranges. Moreover, har has the counterpart in Greek horos which means territory, boundary or high elevation in a

so that it would be available for human occupation,²⁰ to its farthest extent. Pondering upon some of the terminologies would further help us to understand how the Josephites exploited the ecosystem over the traditional understanding of capturing the promised land.

i. Go to the Mountain

Gordon H. Mattier²¹ says that there were two challenges put before the Josephites: 1) The meek wood land to be encroached and cleared up for the settlement. 2) Attacking and driving out the mighty Canaanites and capturing the land in the valley. W. C. Blakie²² says that instead of attacking the enemies, the Josephites opted for encroaching the meek forested mountains. Wouldstra,²³ opines, “As Joshua is the Ephramite, he commanded to occupy the forested mountain area plus the adjoining valleys.” Because of the fear about the Canaanite kings, and their inability to retain control over the plain, they wanted to take over the meek mountain. Now Joshua permitted the Josephites to encroach the meek mountains according to their whims and fancies. Therefore, Josephites enter into the mountains, which is the home of other living and non-living beings and begin to take control over it.

particular region. Talmon, “הַר,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. III, edited by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1978), 427-28. A mountain is a high elevation in a specific region, with no consensus on the height difference between a mountain and a hill. Mark D. Green, “Mount, Mountain,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* vol. 4, edited by Heather R. McMurray (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 159.

²⁰ K. Jesurathnam, “Joshua,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, edited by Brain Wintle (Udaipur: Open Door Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2015), 288.

²¹ Gordon H. Mattier, *Joshua* (Virginia: Herald Press, 2012), 309. Carolyn Pressler says that the enemies of Israelites were too powerful and they possessed superior technology. Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Loisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 97. In fact, the Josephites feared the Canaanite kings. Though the Ephramites and Manassites described themselves as ‘a numerous people,’ abundantly blessed by Yahweh; yet when the time comes to defeat the Canaanites, ironically, they see themselves as too weak to overcome their foes. Dermot Nestor, “Joshua,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty First Century*, edited by John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt. Ltd., 2022), 396. Because, the Israelites were primarily on foot, so the thought of facing warriors on wheels was particularly alarming to them. R. Drews, “The Chariots of Iron of Joshua and Judges,” *JSOT* 45 (1989): 15-23.

²² W. C. Blakie, *The Book of Joshua* (USA: Holder & Stoughton, n.d.), 306.

²³ Wouldstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 269.

ii. Cut down the Trees

In Joshua 17:18, Joshua command the people of Joseph and Manasseh to cut down the trees in the forest and to settle down in the forested hill country. In the Hebrew context, mountains and forests were seen as part of God's good creation, and described as the glory of the land. By allowing more space to the Josephites in the mountain forest, Joshua breaks the glory of the land.²⁴ Here, the imperial groups oppressed and subjugated the mountains and cut down the trees. Thus, the text in Joshua 17:18 exhibits an abusive attitude towards the natural world.

iii. Clearing the Ground

The gaining of second lot allows the Josephites to 'create' (בָּרָא - *bârâ*)²⁵ a place in the wooded hill country. Thus the Josephites will extend beyond hill country to Ephraim to control the entire hill country.²⁶ Before rock terracing or water channels or cistern for irrigation could be arranged for, there was the difficult task of clearing away forest thickets that covered the land.²⁷ So, they were commanded to clear up the forest for their occupation/settlement and usage.²⁸ In order to

²⁴ When the proper relationship between God, people, and land (water, wooded areas, cultivated land) is broken, the fruitful land, noble forest-the glory of the land becomes uninhabited wilderness. E. John Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 127-28. Monodeep Daniel believes that the Israelites had a privileged position in determining land distribution, similar to the Brahmins in *Aryavrata*, who allotted land to superior Aryas, leaving others with useless or landless land. Monodeep Daniel, "Joshua," in *Dalit Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, edited by James Massey (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2015), 331.

²⁵ The Hebrew term 'to create' (בָּרָא - *bârâ*) is in the *Piel* form rather than the normal *Qal* form and it indicates the meaning 'to divide, cut, clear, clearing the ground, etc. Butler, "Joshua," 182. In fact, the verb *bara'*, in *Qal* form means to co-create or participate in God's creative act by transforming the forest thicket into a life supporting, and inhabitable. E. John Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 129.

²⁶ Butler, "Joshua," 192.

²⁷ Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land*, 127.

²⁸ Archaeological investigations suggest the development of hundreds of villages in the highland/mountain/forested hill in the period that follows with the development of terracing on the western slopes. John Goldingay, "Joshua," in *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Historical Books*, edited by David G. Firth and Lissa M. Wray Beal (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2023), 314.

construct dwelling places a great number trees have been uprooted, the animals, birds, and other living creatures had been forced to leave out. The hill country and mountains had been levelled up. This became a scar on the mountain. Accordingly, the mountains had been suppressed and wounded in the name of construction or abode.

iv. Accumulating More

In Joshua 17:14-18, the half-tribe of Manasseh, a tribe of Joseph,²⁹ requested more land from Joshua. The Hebrew term used for ‘more’ in this passage is *ad* (אֲדָ), which can also be translated as ‘still’ or ‘yet.’³⁰ This implies that the half-tribe of Manasseh already had a significant amount of land, but they wanted more. Their dissatisfaction urged them to go to the mountain and subdue it. Thus, through the pronouncement go to the mountains, clear the ground and settle there, Joshua permitted his own tribe to intrude on the mountain and plunder the resources.³¹ To be precise, though, they had enough space for living, Joshua allows more space on the mountain forest. As a leader Joshua fails to maintain justice and shows favour to his own tribe and expresses partiality.

Findings

- The Josephites are not in real need of land, as they already had land, but for comfortable living or for being free from enemies they wanted to occupy the mountain region.
- Through the permission of the leader, the encroachment of mountains, and their violation was carried out further. The permission is a well-planned pronouncement and favour towards the leader’s own tribe to encroach and plunder the natural resources.
- Through the occupation, it is presumed that they were authorized to plunder, and exploit rather than protect the nature. Thus, they failed to maintain the rhythm of co-creation with nature.

²⁹ The biblical account presents Joseph’s tribe both as a single unit- the people of Joseph (Josh. 16:1-3; 17:14-18; 18:5, 11; Judg. 1:22, 35; 2 Sam. 19:20) and as two separate tribes (Josh. 16:4; 17:9-10; 1 Chron. 9:3).

³⁰ Butler, “Joshua,” 182.

³¹ Wouldstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 269.

Mountain Ravage: A Growing Concern

Mountain ravage, a pertinent issue across the globe, is the destruction of mountain ecosystems, habitats, and landscapes due to human activities like mining, deforestation, pollution, tourism, hiking, trekking, wild fire, over exploitation, invasive species *i.e.*, replacing non-native species, and drilling activities. It results in soil erosion, water pollution, and biodiversity loss.³² Natural disasters like landslides, avalanches, and rock falls also contribute to mountain ravage, causing loss of life and infrastructure damage.³³ To be precise, mountain ravage is a growing concern that requires not only attention but also action.

Consequences of Mountain Ravage

Mountains are frequently vulnerable to a variety of dangers. Extreme occurrences, including storms, landslides, and rock falls, are anticipated to grow more regularly and intensely in mountainous areas due to climate change, endangering infrastructure and livelihoods.³⁴ For much of the modern world's history, coal has been both a destructive and a creative force. Electricity, scientific advancements, economic expansion, labour disputes, forest loss, global climate change, smoke pollution, mortality, the rise of industrial capital, and environmental disasters are all related to it.³⁵

As the name implies, the multi-stage procedure known as 'mountaintop removal' entails cutting away the mountaintops to access coal seams buried in thin layers beneath rock and soil. Bulldozing first clears the mountain of all vegetation, including trees, shrubs, and dirt.³⁶ The removal of woods on top of the mountains negatively impacts

³² R. Singh, "Environmental Impacts of Mining in Mountain Regions," *Journal of Environmental Science and Health* 34 (2020): 53-64. Over-tourism, in particular, can lead to soil erosion, litter, and habitat disruption, degrading the natural beauty and ecological integrity of mountains. R. Steven, "The Impact of Over-tourism on Mountain Ecosystems," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 28/1 (2020): 1-15.

³³ The degradation of mountain landscapes can have long-term impacts on ecosystems and human well-being. S. Garcia-Ayllon, "Landscape Degradation in Mountain Regions: A review of the Evidence," *Journal of Landscape Ecology* 33/1 (2018): 1-15.

³⁴ Thomas Kohler, Markus Giger, Hans Hurni, "Mountains and Climate Change: A Global Concern," *Mountain Research Development* 30/1(2010): 53-55.

³⁵ B. Freese, *Coal: A Human History* (Cambridge: Perseus, 2003), 55.

³⁶ Kelly Austin, "Tearing Down Mountains: Using Spatial and Metabolic Analysis to Investigate the Socio-Ecological Contradictions of Coal Extraction in Appalachia," *Critical Sociology* (2011): 456.

numerous bird species because they depend on mature forest habitats. In waterways downstream of mountaintop removal sites, fish have seen habitat degradation, diminishing populations, and an increase in occurrences of developmental defects. When mountains are cleared and levelled as part of the mountaintop removal process, interconnected ecosystems are destroyed, and hazardous chemicals are released into the air, water, and landscapes.³⁷

Extracting boulders and rocks from mountains destroys habitats and landscapes, causing erosion, soil instability, and harm to bird species because they depend on mature forest habitats.³⁸ Further, mountain destruction causes pollution, and health issues for residents, including allergies, headaches, rhinitis, eye irritations, bronchitis, shortness of breath, asthma, and chronic cough.³⁹ Thus, serious health issues and other problems arise due to mountain ravage. Moreover, mountain ranges and deep dark forests are lost as a result of widespread commercial deforestation.⁴⁰

In addition, there are lots of negative effects due to the destruction of mountains. Most of the effects are experienced by the people who live near quarries. The two major effects are the rise in humidity and irregular monsoon. Some other effects are: houses with cracked walls, people experiencing sleepless nights, climate change, heat stroke, water pollution and scarcity, drought, diseases, breathing problems due to

³⁷ J. Fox, "Mountain Top Removal in West Virginia: An Environmental Sacrifice Zone," *Organization & Environment* (1999): 163-184. V. Smil, *Energy in Nature and Society: General Energetic of Complex Systems* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 40. Ignacio Palomo, "Climate Change Impacts on Ecosystem Services in High Mountain Areas: A Literature Review," *Mountain Research and Development* 37/2 (2017): 179.

³⁸ The use of explosives in quarrying causes shivering in houses, cracks, and noise disturbances. Heavy-loaded and over-speeding vehicles from quarries cause accidents daily. *Daily Thanthi* (Nagercoil), 30 April 2024, 1. Clearing vegetation for construction negatively impacts soil stability, destroys interconnected ecosystems, and releases hazardous chemicals into the air, water, and landscapes through bulldozing. Ignacio Palomo, "Climate Change Impacts on Ecosystem Services in High Mountain Areas: A Literature Review," *Mountain Research and Development* 37/2 (2017): 179.

³⁹ Interview with Jeyasekhar, 26 May 2024.

⁴⁰ <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/unseasonal-showers-crops-lying-in-mandis-farmers-across-india-fear-the-worst-as-imd-predicts-more-rainfall-89071> (03 May 2024).

dust and accidents because of the heavily loaded lorries. The quarry pits are filled with greenish-colored water, indicating the existence of a once-existing hill.⁴¹

Appropriating Ecological Principles

i. The Principle of Intrinsic Value

The universe, earth, nature, and all its components have intrinsic worth/value. Nothing in the universe is a waste or useless. When the hill country or mountain forest is encroached or ravaged it drastically affects the biodiversity. God has provided an ecosystem suitable for its intrinsic value.⁴² The mountain ravage account in Joshua doesn't shy away from the harsh realities of ecological crisis. Instead, it encourages us to see the pericope as a guide to addressing environmental issues due to mountain and forests destruction, and points to the need for promoting sustainability, and engaging in conservation efforts.

ii. The Principle of Purpose

The universe, and all its components are parts of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design. God designed each component to play a role in the total well-being of the earth. Everything created by God has a purpose, and nothing in the universe is neither a waste nor useless.⁴³ Thus, the hill country or mountain forest has multiple purpose for the well-being and biodiversity of the planet and human beings as well. But the ravaging of mountains causes serious issues like water scarcity, contaminated water, pollution in water etc.,

⁴¹ John, "The nightmare of living in a Tamil Nadu quarrying hub," accessed 08 June 2024.

⁴² For poisonous animals, God allotted Shola forests. The human beings entered the ecosystem of poisonous animals. Hence, the poisonous animals are now coming to the plains Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, "Introduction," in *A Call to Stand with Nature: Eco-Reflections from the Bible*, edited by Mathew Koshy Punnackadu (Delhi: ISPCK, 2024), xx.

⁴³ Mountains are the world's 'water towers,' providing freshwater resources. At least half of the global population relies on their ecosystem services, including water, food, and clean energy. Some forests provide wood for houses and herbs. Steven, "The Impact of Over-tourism on Mountain Ecosystems," 1-15.

iii. The Principle of Interconnectedness

Every animal and every plant rely on other plants and animals to survive in the web of life. All animals and plants, in a sense, work together to survive in the cosmos.⁴⁴ A variety of habitats, people, a vast number of plants and animals are all interconnected in a fragile web of life called biodiversity. And every member is important in keeping this web in stability. But the Josephites failed to keep that rhythm and they demonstrated themselves superior over mountain and other living beings.

iv. Principle of Voice

The planet raises its voice in celebration and against injustice. When the planet celebrates, we are blessed with good harvest, rain, pleasant climate, etc. Alike, the planet raises its voice against injustices through floods, droughts, climate change, unexpected climate, heat stroke, etc. Earth is a living creature which can express its feeling.⁴⁵ Ironically, as human beings encroach upon forests or mountains and deny food and shelter to animals they are forced to enter our living spaces. However, without compassion, they are labelled as wild animals and end up being killed.

v. Principle of Mutual Care

Earth is a balanced and diverse domain that requires responsible custodians to act as partners⁴⁶ rather than rulers to maintain its balance and diversity, fostering a harmonious and diverse Earth Community. The land, mountains, the water bodies, human beings and the fellow creation also yearn for such a harmonious coexistence.

⁴⁴ Green plants are the only living organisms that can harness the sun's energy to produce food, which can be consumed by plants or animals. However, humans cannot replicate the process, as they cannot hold their hands to the sun. Thousands of species are lost annually due to pollution, over-harvesting, habitat degradation, and human activities. The interdependent web of life, created by God, is fragile, and the loss of one species could weaken the entire web's harmony. Punnackadu, "Introduction," xxii-xxiii.

⁴⁵ Human beings invaded the land of animals, which God allotted for them. Moreover, human beings destroyed the habitats and climate. Punnackadu, "Introduction," xxiii.

⁴⁶ Genesis 1:26-28 is interpreted as the basis for stewardship - human as stewards ruling on behalf of God. The image of stewardship comes from the feudal background. As an absentee landlord, God put humans in charge of God's property.

vi. Principle of Resistance

Earth will protest the increased pressure on the landscape and natural resources. Commercial tourism focuses only on the tourists' convenience, comfort, and luxury. To make tourist places attractive, the landscape's natural setting is altered. We have to understand that earth will protest against this injustice. Deforestation leads to landslide. Commercial activities are one of the main reasons for natural calamities.

11. Implications: Prophetic Consciousness towards the Healing of Devastated Mountain

i. Reimagining Roles: Prophetic, Messianic and Guest

The prophets were the upholders of social morality, and denounced acts of outrage and oppression committed by the powerful upon the weak. The task of the prophetic ministry is to speak up in crisis situations.⁴⁷ So, imagining the prophetic role and acting accordingly will help to prevent the mountains from various ways of ravage. Taking Jesus' role at the temple, driving out the robbers, Christians have the role to resist the exploiters so that the mountains will exist for the future generations too. A powerful weapon to eradicate this problem will be protest. Moreover, the world is our Common Home⁴⁸ and House of God⁴⁹ in which human beings are the invited guest to meet in this sacred space for a while.

ii. Reclaiming Eco-Sophia:⁵⁰ Towards a Planetary Existence

Stevenson says that we must "see the mountains as mountains."⁵¹ This will be a fine response to those who destroy the mountains. All life

⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 17.

⁴⁸ Kureethadam, *Rebuilding Our Common Home*, 33-35.

⁴⁹ Living in harmony, peace, and fellowship with God and all our fellow beings without doing violence to anything or anybody must be our common value of life. Thomas Manikam, "Hindu-Christian Values of Life: A Holistic Ecological Perspective," in *Eco-Philosophy and Harmony of Nature*, edited by S. Alakapally (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019), 142.

⁵⁰ Sophia is a Greek word which means wisdom.

⁵¹ Kalinda Rose Stevenson, "If the Earth Could Speak: The Case of the Mountain against YHWH in Ezekiel 6; 35-36," in *The Story is Psalms and Prophets*, edited by Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001), 168.

today is endangered to a far higher degree than the past. People are fearful about even more brutal facts from now. Human knowledge may turn out to be exploitative, but it is “knowledge of Yahweh” that inspires everyone towards a planetary existence.

iii. Adhering the Environmental Laws

India’s 1950 constitution mandates the protection of the environment as a citizen’s duty. The government has enacted laws, such as the Environment Protection Act of 1986 and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, the Biodiversity Conservation Act of 2002, to protect the Western Ghats. Article 51A of the constitution encourages citizens to improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wild life, and show compassion for living creatures.⁵² However, violations of these laws have led to the collapse of mountains and the ravage of natural resources. So, by returning to those environmental laws, to a certain extent, the natural resources-forests, mountains, biodiversity, etc., can be protected.

iv. Christian Responsibility towards Stewardship

The Christian approach to protecting the mountains has consistently highlighted the stewardship requirement. According to R. J. Berry, a thoroughly Christian attitude to the mountains and environment should be based firmly and squarely on our divine duty to be stewards and accountable to God, the creator, redeemer, and sustainer.⁵³ R. Dubos emphasized the Genesis theme of stewardship, referring to the description of the garden in Genesis 2 as a place that sustains life, provides materials for human industry, facilitates advancement in science and technology, and preserves its beauty for future generations.⁵⁴

⁵² Gayathri Nayak “Need of The Hour: India, leave those forests on the mountains alone, lest you want to drown,” *Quartz* (13 Sep 2019), <https://qz.com/india/1708552/destruction-of-indias-western-ghats-causing-devastating-floods/>; <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1644544> (10 Jun 2024).

⁵³ R. J. Berry, “Creation and the Environment,” *Science & Christian Belief* (1995): 21- 43.

⁵⁴ According to R. J. Berry, a thoroughly Christian attitude to the environment should be based firmly on our divine duty to be stewards and accountable to God, the creator, redeemer, and sustainer. R. J. Berry, “Creation and the Environment,” *Science & Christian Belief* (1995): 21- 43. R. Dubos, “Franciscan Conservation versus Benedictine Stewardship,” in *Berry Environmental Stewardship*, 56-59.

Genesis 1:26-28, therefore, does not imply that human beings have more worth than the rest of creation, nor can human beings take it as an excuse to destroy the Earth for their ends. The role of stewardship is to consider and protect every creature's rights. It should not be taken as the dominion over ecology, but humans as kin and members of the earth community, sharing the problems and benefits. Eco-stewardship should overcome the prevalent system of hierarchy and domination creation.

C.B. DeWitt⁵⁵ states four fundamental ecologically significant principles:

Earth-keeping Principle: We are responsible for maintaining and protecting the creator's creation just as the Creator does for us. Sabbath Principle: We must accommodate for Creation's Sabbath Rests. Fruitfulness Principle: We should enjoy creation's abundance but not harm it. Fulfilment and Limits Principle: Creation should be fulfilled but within its bounds.

To do ecological justice, retrieval is required. The voice of the Earth is prevented from rising to God in a song. It does not imply that only humans may glorify God through music or singing. Psalm 66:4 says, "All the Earth worships you. They sing praise to you; sing praise to your name." Humans must make space for other creations to glorify God in various ways. The land should not be destroyed. Instead, it should be protected and preserved for future generations. The land was a gift from God in the first place, intended to provide for God's people. The Lord God owns the land in perpetuity. However, there is an ongoing disagreement over who owns the land.

As God's creation, the forest should allow maximum growth without interfering. However, dominant powers have almost completely devastated original forests. Without the harsh hand of humans, the mountains should provide natural resources that sustain the animals and humans, but the natural resources are slowly dwindling due to different factors. The right to eat is a legal right. International human rights, humanitarian law, and the corresponding governmental obligations guarantee the right to food. The ecological catastrophe is one of the

⁵⁵ C.B. DeWitt, "Ecology and Ethics: Relation of Religious Belief to Ecological Practice in the Biblical Tradition," *Biodiversity and Conservation* (1995): 838-40.

primary causes of famine. If this issue is addressed, humanity will live a better existence.

v) Radical Participation of the Church in Protecting the Environment

The church plays a crucial role in protecting mountains and forests, involving spiritual and theological foundations, practical actions, and advocacy. Some of them are as follows:

- Churches can provide theological reflections on the interconnectedness of all life, promoting a sense of sacred duty to care for the environment. The preaching should bridge the gap between religious teachings and environmental ethics rather than emphasizing tithe, prosperity, material blessings etc.
- Churches can advocate for environmental justice and sustainable policies at local, national, and global levels, influencing policymakers and mobilizing public support. The policy making can be crafted to reflect ethical principles derived from theological teaching such as justice, compassion, and common good.
- Churches can educate their congregations about mountain destruction and promote sustainable practices and a deeper understanding of the impact of human activities on the planet. Churches can incorporate ecological concerns into their liturgy and worship, particularly by educating children through Sunday School and Christian Endeavour, designing specific curricula about the effects of mountain destruction, so that the sense of protection can be inculcated from the childhood. Some churches observe ecological Sunday once a year, and saplings are given to the congregation, encouraging ecological sustenance. However, the CSI Synod has a vibrant ecological department which is carrying out the eco concerns in a respectful way to protect the environment.
- Initiating or supporting community projects focused on environmental conservation, environmental justice, environmental stewardship initiatives such as tree planting, clean-up campaigns, and promotion renewable energy use. Pre-marital counselling sessions can be used to raise awareness in

the couple about the significance of taking care of the nature, its importance, etc. Providing pastoral care and support to communities affected by quarrying, mountain destruction, deforestation etc., advocating for their rights and well-being.

- Churches can conduct awareness programs and protest for the preservation of mountains and forests from ravage. Many a time, the church restricts its activity to essay competitions on ecological issues. In connection with this matter, churches can be partnering with other religious and secular organizations that can amplify efforts and create a broader impact.
- Churches can promote climate-sensitive tourism. Protecting mountains and promoting climate-sensitive tourism can help minimize climate change effects. A comprehensive plan based on modern principles is needed, with frequent monitoring of tourism effects. Empowering mountain dwellers to regulate tourism development and implementing national and provincial laws are crucial steps. Strengthening public-private partnerships can innovate and develop year-round tourism offerings. Replanting trees and removing encroachments from rivers can help preserve mountains, hills, and forests. By observing those principles, to a certain extent, many vulnerable parts of creation, particularly the mountains, hills, and forests, can be preserved.

By integrating these roles, churches can significantly contribute to the protection and preservation of the environment, fostering a culture of care and responsibility towards creation.

Conclusion

The world is currently experiencing a severe ecological crisis. The variety of all living creatures in our world, known as biodiversity, has been alarmingly dropping in recent years, primarily due to human actions, including pollution, land use changes, and climate change. Healthy biodiversity and ecosystems protect humans from natural disasters, regulate climate, provide food, fertile soil, and healthcare. Unsustainable human actions and behaviour are the primary grounds of biodiversity loss. It is important to promote the adoption of more

responsible and sustainable methods that protect the soil, the water, the forests, and the wildlife. The ecological catastrophe and related loss of biodiversity are great tragedies with potentially extremely serious repercussions because humans are interwoven with nature. Deforestation can be rectified by planting more trees. If water bodies are destroyed, dams can be created, but, if a mountain is destroyed, it can never be replaced by any means. If the degradation of the mountains continues, the next generation will confront even more severe natural disasters. All life relies on healthy ecosystems and interdependent living webs. Promoting responsible and sustainable methods to protect soil, water, forests, mountains, and wildlife is crucial. Earth is a gift of God, and everyone has the right to eat its fruits, but destroying its intrinsic values is a violation of human rights.

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INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL TO ENHANCE WELL-BEING IN CHRISTIAN YOUTH

- Bindu John* & Preetha Menon**

Abstract

This paper explores the role of spirituality in developing Psychological Capital (PsyCap) among Christian youth, with a focus on the influence of Church leaders and mentors. The PsyCap dimensions of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, are key resources for boosting well-being and performance in individuals. It fosters a positive psychological state, enabling youth to face challenges with confidence and perseverance. Drawing from the Bible, the paper examines how within the Church, the resources of hope, optimism, resilience and efficacy can be fostered through positive interventions. By integrating spirituality into the development of PsyCap, Church leaders and mentors play a pivotal role in shaping the mental and emotional well-being of youth, helping them navigate life challenges with faith and confidence.

Key Words: Psychological Capital, Spirituality, Hope, Optimism, Resilience, Efficacy, Positive Psychology Interventions

Introduction

The importance of a well-rounded personality with emotional as well as spiritual capacities is stressed more than before, for today's youth. The college years, which ideally must be a time for hope for the average Indian student, witnesses increasing distress and mental health issues. In India, studies reveal the prevalence of psychological distress to be 34.8% among college students with higher prevalence among the female college students.¹ Increased alcohol and tobacco use among

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¹ Jaisoorya Ts, Anjana Rani, Priya G. Menon, Jeevan Cr, Revamma M, Vineetha Jose, Radhakrishnan Ks, Anupam Kishore, Thennarasu K, and Sivasankaran Nair B, "Psychological Distress Among College Students in Kerala, India—Prevalence and

young college women, especially in urban areas, along with substance abuse is more common among those experiencing high psychological distress, suicidal ideations, and a history of sexual abuse.²

Following the recent World Mental Health Report³ there has been a call for the development of interventions that go beyond the traditional clinical interventions, and which can help with common mental disorders like anxiety, stress, eating disorders, and substance abuse that plague the youth.⁴ Prevention and promotion strategies that pivot around mental health are not the responsibility of mental health professionals alone. There is mounting evidence of the considerable improvement in mental health status of youth through Positive Psychological Interventions (PPIs),⁵ in educational settings. Just as colleges and universities provide ideal settings for imparting PPIs, there emerges a need for the spiritual leaders and mentors to also step in to mentor the youth for building psychological capacities in addition to catering to their spiritual needs.

In this context, the Church, as a pillar of support and guidance within the community, has a significant role to play in fostering the psychological well-being of Christian youth. While Christianity offers a framework for identifying valuable virtues, it may not always provide concrete methods for their cultivation. Conversely, PPIs offer empirically based strategies for developing positive capabilities like character strengths or virtues but do not explicitly address the underlying meaning and significance of these pursuits. By integrating PPIs into youth programs and Sunday classes, Churches can provide a nurturing environment

Correlates,” *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 28 (March 18, 2017): 28–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2017.03.026>.

² Dhanya Raveendranathan, T. S. Jaisooriya, B. Sivasankaran Nair, Priya G. Menon, Anjana Rani, K. Thennarasu, and Pratima Murthy, “Gender-Specific Correlates of Alcohol Use Among College Students in Kerala, India,” *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 42, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 341–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620927891>.

³ World Health Organization. World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All. World Health Organization. (2022). <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240050860>

⁴ Benedetto Saraceno and José Miguel Caldas De Almeida, “An Outstanding Message of Hope: The WHO World Mental Health Report 2022,” *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 31 (January 1, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s2045796022000373>.

⁵ Joanne Deborah Worsley, Andy Pennington, and Rhiannon Corcoran, “Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing of University and College Students: A Systematic Review of Review-level Evidence of Interventions,” *PLoS ONE* 17, no. 7 (July 29, 2022): e0266725. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0266725>.

that encourages the development of efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism.⁶ Research suggests that spiritual beliefs and practices can act as a buffer against despair, promoting a hopeful outlook even in difficult circumstances.⁶

The benefits of such non-clinical positive interventions would be that these approaches are engaging⁷ and can be imparted by local lay counsellors, teachers, and others with less formal education⁸. Furthermore, these interventions can help counter the stigma⁹ that surrounds mental health issues; most of the exercises and activities focus on improving positive emotions, cognitions, and behaviour through the practice activities that are non-stigmatizing.

Faith and Positive Psychology

While PPIs focus on embracing and strengthening the positive aspects of behaviour scientifically, it is important to also address the concept of spirituality in the Indian context, as religion/spirituality influences thought, feelings and actions of the average Christian. Faith, often rooted in religious teachings, can provide a framework for resilience and emotional regulation in times of hardship. One crucial aspect of holistic development is the cultivation of a spiritual quotient, which has been shown to play a significant role in shaping psychological capacities.¹⁰

⁶ Michael Hryniuk, "Creating Space for God: Toward A Spirituality of Youth Ministry," *Religious Education* 100, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 139–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080590932445>.

⁷ Leslie R Rith-Najarian, Maya M. Boustani, and Bruce F. Chorpita, "A Systematic Review of Prevention Programs Targeting Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in University Students," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 257 (July 8, 2019): 568–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.06.035>.

⁸ Tom Hendriks, Marijke Schotanus-Dijkstra, Aabidien Hassankhan, Tobi Graafsma, Ernst Bohlmeijer, and Joop De Jong, "The Efficacy of Positive Psychology Interventions from Non-Western Countries: A Systematic Review and Metaanalysis," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 8, no. 1 (July 12, 2018): 71–98. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.711>.

⁹ Harriet Mills, Nadine Mulfinger, Sophie Raeder, Nicolas Rüscher, Henry Clements, and Katrina Scior, "Self-help Interventions to Reduce Self-stigma in People with Mental Health Problems: A Systematic Literature Review," *Psychiatry Research* 284 (November 22, 2019): 112702. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.112702>.

¹⁰ Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall. *SQ: Spiritual Intelligence, the Ultimate Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury. (2000).

Several studies highlight the positive link between religiosity/spirituality and well-being,¹¹ life satisfaction¹² and resilience.¹³ Faith further reinforces the belief in a higher purpose, strengthening individuals' ability to persevere. Additionally, coping mechanisms that employ religious or spiritual resources have been found to increase a sense of meaning and purpose,¹⁴ as well as to increase spiritual connectedness with others.¹⁵

Empirical research in positive psychology has brought forth promising resources for fostering constructive dialogue in the realm of spiritual formation especially for Christian living and experiences.¹⁶ For example, the search for eudaimonic happiness through a life of meaning and purpose is stressed in the Christian faith as evidenced through Ephesians 2:10 - "*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" – emphasise on doing good works, as a part of God's divine plan for one's lives. Also, many of the PP intervention-based exercises bear a strong resemblance to Christian faith and practices. For instance, cultivating gratitude, compassion, virtues, engaging in loving-kindness meditation, and forgiveness have been extolled in Christian living.

¹¹ Daniela Villani, Angela Sorgente, Paola Iannello, and Alessandro Antonietti, "The Role of Spirituality and Religiosity in Subjective Well-Being of Individuals with Different Religious Status," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (July 9, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01525>.

¹² Josje Ten Kate, Willem De Koster, and Jeroen Van Der Waal, "The Effect of Religiosity on Life Satisfaction in a Secularized Context: Assessing the Relevance of Believing and Belonging," *Review of Religious Research* 59, no. 2 (January 17, 2017): 135–55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-016-0282-1>.

¹³ William D.S Killgore, Emily C. Taylor, Sara A. Cloonan, and Natalie S. Dailey, "Psychological Resilience During the COVID-19 Lockdown," *Psychiatry Research* 291 (June 8, 2020): 113216. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113216>.

¹⁴ Dariusz Krok, "The Role of Meaning in Life Within the Relations of Religious Coping and Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 6 (December 19, 2014): 2292–2308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-014-9983-3>.

¹⁵ Neal Krause and Elena Bastida, "Core Religious Beliefs and Providing Support to Others in Late Life," *Mental Health Religion & Culture* 12, no. 1 (November 15, 2008): 75–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670802249753>.

¹⁶ "CFP: The Psychological Science of Emotions for Spiritual Formation and Soul Care – Theology. News," February 9, 2023. <https://theology.news/2023/02/09/cfp-the-psychological-science-of-emotions-for-spiritual-formation-and-soul-care/>.

Drawing Parallels Between PsyCap Dimensions and Spirituality

PsyCap, which emerged from Positive Organizational Behaviour, is defined as the study and application of positive human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed to enhance performance. PsyCap is a higher-order construct that includes four key components: Hope, Optimism, Resilience, and Self-Efficacy. These four components are considered state-like and can be developed through specific interventions.¹⁷ The emergence of PsyCap, a higher order construct, consisting of the four positive psychological resources of Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism has shown promise in boosting overall wellbeing.¹⁸ PsyCap has been described as a state of overall positivity, transcending traditional human and social capital¹⁹ achieved by investing in and developing one's personal identity to gain a competitive edge. PsyCap represents an individual's psychological resources that can be developed and leveraged to gain a competitive edge which is unlike human capital (knowledge, skills, and abilities) and social capital (relationships and networks).

Hope: From the psychological perspective, Snyder²⁰ conceptualized hope as a motivational state driven by two elements: agency, or the determination to achieve goals, and pathways, the strategies devised to reach those goals. In a typical intervention, individuals are guided through goal setting exercises and finding pathways and alternative pathways towards achieving goals. Here, the interplay between spirituality and hope is profound as spirituality often provides a framework for individuals to cultivate hope, which in turn, can lead to improved coping mechanisms during difficult situations and challenges.

¹⁷ Fred Luthans and Carolyn M. Youssef-Morgan, "Psychological Capital: An Evidence-Based Positive Approach," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour* 4, no. 1 (January 26, 2017): 339–66. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113324>.

¹⁸ Fred Luthans, Carolyn M. Youssef-Morgan, & Avolio, Bruce J. *Psychological Capital and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Fred Luthans, James B. Avey, Bruce J. Avolio, Steven M. Norman, and Gwendolyn M. Combs, "Psychological Capital Development: Toward a Micro-intervention," *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 27, no. 3 (March 27, 2006): 387–93. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.373>.

²⁰ Charles R. Snyder, *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures, and Applications*, (London: Academic Press, 2000).

For Christians, the ability to imagine and think beyond the present moment is deeply rooted in a higher power or God. For instance, Christianity teaches acceptance of death as a natural part of the life cycle, fuelled by the belief in a life after death and attainment of heaven. This belief fosters a sense of hope especially for those facing the end of life or anticipating death. The word hope is found recurrently in the Bible, with the book of Psalms replete with verses on hope. In the Old Testament, numerous verses indicate trust in God to overcome disappointment while in the New Testament, St. Paul elevated the concept of hope throughout his writings. An example is Romans 3: verses 3-5 *“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*

Research indicates that the inter-relationship between hope and spirituality is a protective factor against psychological distress²¹ and when combined with forgiveness, facilitates healing and relational repair.²² During global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, spirituality helped individuals find stability and generate hope, even in chaotic environments.²³ The construct of hope has been empirically associated with coping, well-being, as well as in moderating depression and negative life events, functioning as a protective factor in suicide, self-deprecatory thinking and promoting healthy behaviour engagement.²⁴

The psychological resource of Hope reflects agentic behaviour by which individuals set and achieve goals by formulating pathways and alternative pathways for goal attainment. As the popular quote

²¹ Hazal Ozdemir Koyu, Gökce Algül, Naime Altay, and Ebru Kilicarslan, “The Effect of Psychological Resilience and Spiritual Well-being on the Experience of Hope in Parents of Children with Cancer,” *Journal of Paediatric Nursing* 76 (February 2, 2024): e34–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2024.01.016>.

²² Frank .D Fincham, “Forgiveness in Marriage,” In *Routledge eBooks* (2019): 142–52. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341-14>.

²³ Terry R. Bard, “Spirituality, Chaos, and Hope,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counselling Advancing Theory and Professional Practice Through Scholarly and Reflective Publications* 76, no. 2 (May 31, 2022): 79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15423050221103574>.

²⁴ Stephanie Griggs, “Hope and Mental Health in Young Adult College Students: An Integrative Review,” *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 55, no. 2 (February 1, 2017): 28–35. <https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20170210-04>.

in Malayalam goes “*Thaan paathi, Daivam paathi*” (Half is human effort, half is divine grace), where one needs to do their best while the Lord does the rest. To summarize, integrating psychological hope with agentic and pathway thinking with spiritual hope can provide a holistic approach to fostering well-being during difficult and challenging times in young adults.

Efficacy: Rooted in Bandura’s²⁵ Social Learning Theory, the psychological resource of Efficacy reflects people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute actions needed to achieve desired outcomes.²⁶ The relationship between the psychological dimension of self-efficacy and spirituality is multifaceted with research indicating that spirituality can enhance self-efficacious behaviour in several domains like health management,²⁷ financial management and wellbeing,²⁸ workplace well-being,²⁹ family relationships,³⁰ spiritual care competency and clinical self-efficacy.³¹ Additionally, studies show a positive correlation between religiosity and self-efficacy, where

²⁵ Albert Bandura, “Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioural change,” *Psychological Review* 84, no. 2 (1977).

²⁶ Albert Bandura, “Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory,” *Prentice Hall*, 1986.

²⁷ Tracie L Augusta, Annapoorna Mary, Sohye Lee, Fawaz Mzayek, and Christy Woodbury-Moore, “Spirituality, Self-Efficacy, and Medication Use in African American Women with Hypertension: Beyond the Prescriptions,” *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice*, July 18, 2024, RTNP-0139.R1. <https://doi.org/10.1891/rtnp-2023-0139>.

²⁸ Mei The Goi, Mohd Rizal Palil, Nor Hazila Mohd Zain, and Nor Hasikin Mamat, “Self-Efficacy, Religiosity, Financial Behavior, and Financial Well-Being,” *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences* 133 (May 6, 2024): Mei Teh-431. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2024.05.35>.

²⁹ Priya Dubey Sharma and K.N. Tripathi, “Relationship of Workplace Spirituality with Self-Efficacy and Psychological Well-being Among Working Professionals,” *Mind and Society* 13, no. 01 (March 31, 2024): 72–81. <https://doi.org/10.56011/mind-mri-131-20249>.

³⁰ Tantut Susanto, Mochamad Riko Saputra, Eka Afdi Septiyono, Rismawan Adi Yunanto, and Fitrio Deviantony, “Spirituality and Family Support Related Family Self-Efficacy During Physical Distancing of COVID-19: A Cross-sectional Study Among Family in Indonesia,” *Pielęgniarstwo XXI Wieku / Nursing in the 21st Century* 22, no. 4 (November 27, 2023): 229–34. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pielxxiw-2023-0033>.

³¹ Zahra Sahebi and Maasoumeh Barkhordari-Sharifabad, “Spiritual Care Competency and Its Relationship With Clinical Self-efficacy in Nursing Students,” *BMC Medical Education* 23, no. 1 (December 8, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-023-04937-3>.

spiritual rituals like prayer can improve self-efficacy in managing health conditions, such as coronary artery disease.³²

Among the four strategies proposed by Bandura³³ to improve self-efficacy—Mastering Tasks, Social Modelling, Social Persuasion, and Psychological & Physiological Responses—Christian leaders can have a particularly significant impact through Social Modelling and Social Persuasion. By serving as role models and offering encouragement, they can effectively enhance self-efficacy in young adults. Bandura³³ theorized that when people are encouraged to have trust in their abilities required to succeed, then self-efficacy levels can increase. Reducing stress responses and altering a negative mindset can help in building self-efficacy. It is here that the Christian leaders can serve as role models and provide mentorship which may help enhance self-efficacy of young adults by fostering a sense of community and belonging, alleviating anxiety, and promoting confidence in individuals' abilities³⁴ through supportive religious practices and teachings. Also in youth meetings, Christian leaders can play a crucial role, by utilizing faith-based principles to provide mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social support through scripture, and promoting physiological well-being through spiritual teachings.³⁵

Resilience: Luthans³⁶ described resilience as the capacity to “bounce back” from adversity, uncertainty, or even positive change, and Hardy, Concato & Gill³⁷ further characterized it as the ability to remain well, recover, or thrive in challenging circumstances. The resilient character

³² Firda Romadhonika Putri Rivani Wantiyah and Mulia Hakam, “The Correlation Between Religiosity and Self-Efficacy in Patients with Coronary Artery Disease,” *Belitung Nursing Journal* 6, no. 5 (October 14, 2020): 172–76. <https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.1134>.

³³ Albert Bandura, *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co., 1997.

³⁴ Otniel Aurelius Nole and Florensia Dana Carla Balleo, “A Christian Leadership Review on Youth Self-Leadership and Self-Efficacy Relations,” *KINAA Jurnal Kepemimpinan Kristen Dan Pemberdayaan Jemaat* 5, no. 1 (June 22, 2024): 31–50. <https://doi.org/10.34307/kinaa.v5i1.165>.

³⁵ Twianie Roberts, “A Theological Extension of Self-Efficacy: Academic Implications,” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 12, no. 04 (January 1, 2022): 616–23. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2022.124042>.

³⁶ Fred Luthans, “The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behaviour,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23, no. 6 (July 15, 2002): 695–706. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.165>.

³⁷ Susan E Hardy John Concato, and Thomas M. Gill, “Resilience of Community-Dwelling Older Persons,” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 52, no. 2 (January 22, 2004): 257–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2004.52065.x>.

has the ability to make realistic plans and perform the actions required to achieve the same; having a robust view of the self and having confidence in one's abilities; developing and displaying healthy communication and problem-solving skill and the ability to manage feelings and impulses healthily.

Several verses in the Biblical books of Joshua, Mark, Luke, Matthew, Ephesians, Isaiah, Philippians, John, Galatians, Corinthians, Philippians, Romans, James - refer to building resilience in the face of adversities. The Bible abounds in resilient figures from Joseph, who was sold into slavery, Daniel, who escaped unhurt from a lion's den, Noah, who overcame devastating floods, David, who was hunted by King Saul, St. Paul the missionary, who boasted of his persecutions, Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale and Job, who lost his family, fortune and health but continued to persevere, praising God. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is considered by Christians to be the ultimate inspiration of resilience with Hebrews 12:1-3 stating - *"let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*

Empirical research has linked spirituality with greater resilience³⁸ and healthy coping mechanisms in difficult situations,³⁹ battling terminal illnesses,⁴⁰ improving quality of life of terminally ill patients,⁴¹ higher

³⁸ Ronika Tindaon, Kartika Nur Fathiyah, and Yohanes Engelbertus Paji, "Religiosity and Resilience in Students of the Faculty of Catholic Religious Education," *Journal of Educational Health and Community Psychology* 13, no. 2 (June 8, 2024): 480. <https://doi.org/10.12928/jehcp.v13i2.27930>.

³⁹ Charlotte D Shelton, Sascha Hein, and Kelly A. Phipps, "Resilience and Spirituality: A Mixed Methods Exploration of Executive Stress," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 28, no. 2 (November 23, 2019): 399–416. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-08-2019-1848>.

⁴⁰ Monaris Daralina, Hilman Syarif, and Syarifah Rauzatul Jannah, "The Relationship Between Spirituality and Resilience Among Patients Suffered from Breast Cancer Who Are Undergoing Chemotherapy at Aceh Provincial General Hospital," *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies* Vol. 4–4, 2024. <https://www.multiresearchjournal.com/admin/uploads/archives/archive-1723101453.pdf>.

⁴¹ Migda Hunter-Hernández, Rosario Costas-Muñíz, and Francesca Gany, "Missed Opportunity: Spirituality as a Bridge to Resilience in Latinos with Cancer," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 6 (February 24, 2015): 2367–75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0020-y>.

empathy,⁴² and improving relational coping mechanisms.⁴³ Engaging in prayer and worship has been linked with effective coping⁴⁴ as negative experiences often activate spiritual pursuits.⁴⁵

While spirituality is often linked to resilience, some argue that resilience can also stem from secular sources, such as community support and personal experiences, suggesting a multifaceted approach to understanding resilience. In the context of the Chilean miners' rescue, spirituality and hope fostered a strong work-group mentality, enabling individuals to endure extreme adversity.⁴⁶

Therefore, building resilience involves an assessment of risk factors and asset factors.⁴⁷ Assets include personal assets that can be measured and can predict positive outcomes as well as adapt to difficult situations. These assets or resources can be built through mentoring programs⁴⁸ by church leaders in youth meetings. Risk factors are also measurable and

⁴² Anna Tms Moura, Andreia M. Coriolano, Renata Kobayasi, Silvio Pessanha, Hellen Lmc Cruz, Suely M. Melo, Inah Md Pecly, Patricia Tempski, and Milton A. Martins, "Is There an Association Among Spirituality, Resilience and Empathy in Medical Students?" *BMC Medical Education* 24, no. 1 (June 28, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-05687-6>.

⁴³ Riko Hengki Nababan, Jenny Marlindawani Purba, and Wardiyah Daulay, "The Relationship of Self-Regulation and Resilience in Parents of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at Special School-C Karya Tulus Tuntungan II," *Contagion Scientific Periodical Journal of Public Health and Coastal Health* 6, no. 2 (August 17, 2024): 892. <https://doi.org/10.30829/contagion.v6i2.20602>.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Graber, Florence Pichon, Elizabeth Carabine, and Overseas Development Institute, "Psychological Resilience: State of Knowledge and Future Research Agendas - Report," Overseas Development Institute, September 2015. <https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/9872.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Kari A O'Grady, James Douglas Orton, Kenneth White, and Nicole Snyder, "A Way Forward for Spirituality, Resilience, and International Social Science," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 44, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 166–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711604400207>.

⁴⁶ Matías Sanfuentes, Francisco Valenzuela, and Alejandro Castillo, "What Lies Beneath Resilience: Analyzing the Affective-relational Basis of Shared Leadership in the Chilean Miners' Catastrophe," *Leadership* 17, no. 3 (December 31, 2020): 255–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715020986061>.

⁴⁷ Ann S Masten, "Resilience in Children Threatened by Extreme Adversity: Frameworks for Research, Practice, and Translational Synergy," *Development and Psychopathology* 23, no. 2 (April 18, 2011): 493–506. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579411000198>.

⁴⁸ Ann. S Masten and Reed, M.-G. "Resilience in development," *Handbook of positive psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press. (2002), 117–131.

denote those characteristics that help in predicting negative outcomes and poor coping in the face of threats or adverse circumstances. Therefore, any attempt to build resilience in youth should focus on developing assets and reducing risk factors. Church leaders therefore, can offer support by building positive connections to one's beliefs and practices that can mitigate the effects of trauma and offer solace in distress. This kind of supportive relationships that offer positive spiritual coping has been linked empirically to improved functioning and post-traumatic growth.⁴⁹

Optimism: Optimism involves positive expectations about future events.⁵⁰ Seligman⁵¹ defined it as an attributional style where positive events are seen as personal, permanent, and pervasive, while negative events are viewed as external, temporary, and situation-specific. Therefore, PsyCap interventions focusing on the dimension of optimism aim to alter a pessimistic attributional style of events to a more optimistic explanatory style. This involves a three-step process that calls for viewing the past with leniency, appreciating the present circumstance, and looking for opportunities for the future.⁵² By engaging in this process, the individual identifies negative feelings and attributions about past experiences and replaces them with positive attributions thereby leading to experiencing more positive feelings.

Empirical studies on optimism have found it to contribute significantly to mental health and to act as a buffer against stress and pathological behaviours.⁵³ Optimism has also been found to mediate the negative

⁴⁹ Justyna Kucharska, "Religiosity and the Psychological Outcomes of Trauma: A Systematic Review of Quantitative Studies," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 76, no. 1 (September 26, 2019): 40–58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22867>.

⁵⁰ J. Patrick Sharpe, Nicholas R. Martin, and Kelly A. Roth, "Optimism and the Big Five Factors of Personality: Beyond Neuroticism and Extraversion," *Personality and Individual Differences* 51, no. 8 (August 31, 2011): 946–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.07.033>.

⁵¹ Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

⁵² Sandra L Schneider, "In Search of Realistic Optimism: Meaning, Knowledge, and Warm Fuzziness," *American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (January 1, 2001): 250–63. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.250>.

⁵³ Fabio Alexis Rincón Uribe, Cristian Ariel Neira Espejo, and Janari Da Silva Pedroso, "The Role of Optimism in Adolescent Mental Health: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 23, no. 2 (July 1, 2021): 815–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-021-00425-x>.

effects of childhood life experiences on depressive symptoms⁵⁴ and appears to shield against negative perceptions of illnesses which in turn was associated with better health-related quality of life and mood.⁵⁵ Optimists also distance themselves from unfavourable outcomes, protecting themselves from guilt and self-blame.⁵⁶ According to Blasco-Belled et al.,⁵⁷ optimists display higher emotional intelligence, satisfaction with life, and higher levels of happiness than pessimists.

Studies have demonstrated how spirituality can foster optimism in multiple ways and help cope with adverse situations.⁵⁸ The scriptures in the Bible teach optimism, offering believers a sense of purpose and inner strength. For instance, Matthew 9:29 - “*According to your faith be it unto you*” exhorts optimism by strengthening faith and Romans 8:28 - “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*” – encourages an optimistic outlook in Christians. The biblical portrayal of optimism is based on how success and failure is defined for Christians. The Christian hope is not rooted in personal accomplishments, but rather in faith. True hope therefore, lies not in mental strength, but in God. So, the Christian believes that they are not judged according to efforts but from obedience and faith in God as denoted in John 15: 4 - “*Without Me, you can do nothing,*” which ultimately boosts an optimistic outlook

⁵⁴ Kevin M Fitzpatrick, “How Positive Is Their Future? Assessing the Role of Optimism and Social Support in Understanding Mental Health Symptomatology Among Homeless Adults,” *Stress and Health* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2676>.

⁵⁵ Catherine S Hurt, David J. Burn, John Hindle, Mike Samuel, Ken Wilson, and Richard G. Brown, “Thinking Positively About Chronic Illness: An Exploration of Optimism, Illness Perceptions and Well-being in Patients with Parkinson’s Disease,” *British Journal of Health Psychology* 19, no. 2 (March 19, 2013): 363–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12043>.

⁵⁶ M. Aarthi Priya, “Optimist Vs Pessimist: Indulging and Contextualizing Martin Seligman’s Learned Optimism in ‘Once Again’ and ‘Trisanku’ by C.S. Lakshmi,” *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 15, no. 5 (December 25, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n5.07>.

⁵⁷ Ana Blasco-Belled, Radosław Rogoza, Cristina Torrelles-Nadal, and Carles Alsinet, “Differentiating Optimists from Pessimists in the Prediction of Emotional Intelligence, Happiness, and Life Satisfaction: A Latent Profile Analysis,” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 23, no. 5 (February 23, 2022): 2371–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-022-00507-4>.

⁵⁸ Yesiana Dwi Wahyu Werdani, “Spiritual Well-Being and Optimism as Contributing Factors That Influence the Subjective Well-Being of Cancer Patients,” *Indonesian Journal of Cancer* 16, no. 1 (April 1, 2022): 16. <https://doi.org/10.33371/ijoc.v16i1.819>.

even in the midst of adverse events. Also, spiritual practices like prayer and meditation have been linked with optimism in difficult times.⁵⁹ The messages in the Bible repeatedly offer God's unconditional love and eternal rewards for the faithful, thereby promoting positive coping and increased religiosity.⁶⁰ Also, it has been documented that religious individuals harboured more optimism from religious-based therapy than standard psychotherapy.⁶¹ The church can therefore foster more positive attributions and positive expectations for the future by engaging in open discussions, encouraging youth to consider their past with spiritual leniency, accept and appreciate their current circumstances, and maintain rational faith in the future. Countering pessimistic and irrational thoughts can be taught by church leaders or mentors citing examples from the Bible as well as through visualization exercises.

Conclusion

In today's times where the phenomenon of youth leaving churches has become a multifaceted issue influenced by generational shifts, cultural disaffection, and the evolving nature of spirituality,⁶² the church leaders can play a significant role by creating safer, more inclusive environments that resonate with young people's spiritual and psychological needs. Therefore, churches instead of prioritizing institutional needs over community engagement can create a shift by fostering psychological resources along with the spiritual needs of the Christian youth. Some argue that the decline in church attendance among youth may not signify a complete rejection of spirituality but rather a transformation

⁵⁹ Irina Andreeva, Youllee Kim, and Sungeun Chung, "Inspiration by Role Models," *Journal of Media Psychology Theories Methods and Applications*, February 16, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000413>.

⁶⁰ Peter Warren, Kathryn Van Eck, Greg Townley, and Bret Kloos, "Relationships Among Religious Coping, Optimism, and Outcomes for Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 7, no. 2 (November 17, 2014): 91–99. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038346>.

⁶¹ Harold G Koenig, Lee S Berk, Noha S Daher, Michelle J Pearce, Denise L Bellinger, Clive J Robins, Bruce Nelson, Sally F Shaw, Harvey Jay Cohen, and Michael B King, "Religious Involvement Is Associated with Greater Purpose, Optimism, Generosity and Gratitude in Persons with Major Depression and Chronic Medical Illness," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 77, no. 2 (May 15, 2014): 135–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2014.05.002>.

⁶² Timothy Mullen and Trudi Cooper, "Young Adult Ministry," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 36, no. 3 (March 26, 2024): 293–316. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.27063>.

in how they engage with faith, seeking more personalized and less institutionalized forms of spiritual expression. With mounting evidence on the link between spirituality, mental health and PsyCap, churches can transform to becoming more welcoming, fostering inclusivity, and developing programs that address the emotional and relational aspects of spirituality.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

REPORT - THE NATIONAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF INDIA

N.M.S. Sunday, 2nd November, 1924

(Vol. XLIV, November 1924, Pg. 435)

Once again it is the privilege of the disciples of our Lord in this land to unite in an act of prayer on behalf of the National Missionary Society of India. The Society aims at placing on the hearts of Indian Christians the sacred charge that the Lord has given to Indian Christians of making known the good news of deliverance and of transformed life to the peoples of India and of adjacent lands. It has also undertaken missionary responsibility in eight different parts of India and is proposing in the near future to send out workers into Tibet.

It is gratifying to find that Christians of many ecclesiastical connections are already realising their oneness in Christ not in any formal union and not merely in the unity which comes from our common relationship in thankful and adoring faith to the one Lord, but also in a common endeavour to lead citizens of India into the citizenship of the heavenly Kingdom.

This is India's hour of awakening. The purest among the aspirations of India are truly the work of the Spirit of Christ that is at work in the land, and it is remarkable that the best forces in the land are increasingly turning in wonder and in reverence to the personality of our Lord. It is He who is quickening her to noble aspirations, and it is He alone that can satisfy her deepest hunger. While socially and politically the outlook is confused, spiritually the situation is full of hope.

The call of the Lord to His disciples at this juncture in India's history is one that we dare not turn away from. Ours is a responsibility of making Christ known that He may win the love and consecration of

the many millions of the land, and thus through them recreate India, our motherland, into a new land after the mind of God. In this task, we are not alone. God's own power is available, and by the prayers of the faithful, the infinite powers of God are being set free in the service of love. The prayers of believers, though they may be simple, unlettered men and women, prevail with God; for there is one that prays along with us: "For the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity for we know not how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Assured of the power of Him who never faileth and who is ever longing to put Himself into the lives of those who would enter the Kingdom, let us unite on Sunday, the 2nd of November, in a devout act of prayer for our beloved land, for all the efforts of Christ-like men and women to establish the sovereignty of Christ in the lives of individuals and of the nation, and especially for the National Missionary Society of India and its work.

R. Sirajuddin, President.

J. D. Asirvadam, Gen. Secretary.

...

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NCCI NEWS

BUILDING AND GROWING CHURCHES FOR ALL: NCCI IDEA AND ECI CHENNAI DIOCESE HOSTS DISABILITY SENSITIZATION SESSION FOR 300 PASTORS

“Imagine a church where everyone feels they truly belong—where physical, emotional, and social barriers are removed, creating a community that embraces all.” With this vision, over 300 pastors from the Evangelical Churches of India (ECI) Chennai Diocese gathered for their monthly prayer fellowship, on 2nd November 2024 at ECI Zion Church Chennai. This included a thought-provoking disability sensitisation session. This initiative reflects ECI’s commitment to building an empathetic and accessible church environment, where disability inclusion is treated as essential to living out the Gospel’s message of love and acceptance. The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), through its Indian Disability Ecumenical Accompaniment (IDEA), collaborated to lead the session, sharing tools and insights to help pastors make their congregations more welcoming for people with disabilities.

The session covered key aspects of disability inclusion, including understanding disabilities, addressing barriers to accessibility, shifting attitudes within the church, and the importance of building a church that truly embodies openness and support. A key feature was the introduction of the Engage Disability audit tool—a resource designed to guide churches in self-assessment, helping them identify areas to improve accessibility and advocate for the inherent value of each individual.

The gathering was further strengthened by the presence of ECI leaders such as The Most Rev. Dr. David Onisimu, Bishop President of ECI; The Rt. Rev. Dr. Kathirolu Manickam, Bishop of ECI Chennai Diocese and Chairperson of the ECI Lydia Women’s Fellowship; and Bishop Commissaries Rev. Dr. Duraiswamy, Rev. Sasi, and Rev. Susuai Paul. Their participation highlighted the diocese’s dedication to building a welcoming environment for all.

During the session, Bishop Kathirolu Manickam encouraged pastors to join Indian Sign Language (ISL) courses and observe Disability Advocacy Sunday, underscoring ECI’s mission to raise awareness and support for people with disabilities within its churches. Rev. Ribin John, Executive Secretary of NCCI-IDEA, led the session, inspiring pastors to take these learnings into their ministries. And be committed to making their churches accessible and responsive, marking a meaningful

step in the diocese’s journey to becoming communities of genuine care, understanding, and support for all.

Rev. Ribin John
Executive Secretary, Ecumenical Fora



WCC NEWS

WCC ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE-DRIVEN CLIMATE ACTION AT COP29

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), emphasized the ethical urgency of addressing the climate crisis, stating that it is a moral obligation rooted in Christian values of justice and compassion. At COP29, the WCC urges developed nations to lead in reducing fossil fuel emissions and increasing climate finance to support vulnerable communities facing climate impacts. They also highlight the need to address the non-economic effects of climate change, such as cultural loss and trauma, especially for Indigenous peoples. Athena Peralta, director of the WCC Commission on Climate Justice, stressed the importance of recognizing intangible losses and protecting Indigenous knowledge in climate finance frameworks. The WCC delegation, in collaboration with faith-based and civil society groups, seeks to amplify a collective call for climate action that is equitable, accountable, and compassionate, ensuring that COP29 advances commitments to protect both people and the planet.

NICAIA 2025 BOSSEY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The conference, hosted by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, explored the lasting ecumenical significance of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Rev. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba, WCC programme director, highlighted the commencement of the WCC’s Special Ecumenical Year 2025, marking 17 centuries since Nicaea. The conference aimed to examine the council’s impact on Christian doctrine, unity, and ecumenical formation. Rev. Dr Benjamin Simon emphasized the Nicene Creed’s focus on unity, beginning with “one God” and “one Lord Jesus Christ.” Dr Andrej Jeftić stressed Nicaea’s influence on shared faith and church order, including the common celebration of Easter in 2025. WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay urged a focus on visible Christian unity, addressing theological and ecclesiological challenges for unity today.

CCA NEWS

REGIONAL INTERFAITH CONFERENCE ON FAITH-BASED ENGAGEMENTS TO REVERSE THE HIV EPIDEMIC IN ASIA

The regional interfaith conference on ‘Reversing the HIV Epidemic in Asia: Faith-Based Engagements’ in Phnom Penh concluded with a collective commitment from faith-based organisations to combat stigma and discrimination related to HIV. Participants, including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim leaders, emphasised the role of faith communities in fostering inclusive care, advocacy, and prevention strategies. Garcia Violeta Ross Quiroga from the WCC introduced manuals to guide faith communities on issues like HIV and mental health, migration, and youth engagement. The conference’s communiqué called for equitable access to care and renewed interfaith teachings to address contemporary challenges. Dr. Ronald Lalthanmawia of the CCA highlighted the importance of ongoing collaboration, stressing that the fight against HIV is a continuous effort requiring unity and collective action. The event saw over 80 participants, including faith leaders, health professionals, and activists from across Asia.

REGIONAL WOMEN’S CONSULTATION TO ADDRESS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND FORCED MIGRATION OF WOMEN

The Asia regional consultation on ‘Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Strengthening Gender Justice Advocacy’, held in Bangkok from 19 to 21 November 2024, concluded with a call for collaborative, inclusive, and transformative action to address gender-based violence (GBV) and forced migration. A communiqué emphasized empowering women through awareness, advocacy, and collaboration, while also highlighting the importance of involving men to challenge patriarchal structures. The role of churches was underscored, urging faith communities to raise awareness, support survivors, and promote gender justice through theological education and policy development. Participants committed to using their platforms to advocate for stronger policies protecting women’s rights and called for a collective commitment from all sectors, particularly faith-based groups, to combat GBV and support displaced women. The consultation concluded with a shared pledge for lasting change and gender equity.



BIBLE STUDY

‘MORE THAN A SLAVE...’ BEYOND MASTER/SLAVE IDENTITIES TOWARDS THE FAMILY OF GOD

(PHILEMON 1-25)

- Mathew Skariah*

“Whose history do we speak of?” – the young Indian historian Manu S. Pillai posed this important question during a recent lecture on the idea of history. In doing so, he sought to challenge the dominant narratives of Indian history, which often marginalize the multi-layered stories that coexist within all historical accounts. While the dominant narratives amplify the voices of the elite, they frequently silence those of the underprivileged. This issue is equally relevant to the history of biblical interpretation, which has largely aligned with monolithic and dominant perspectives, often disregarding marginalized voices.

With regard to the interpretation of Paul’s letter to Philemon, many a time, the dominant narrative of Philemon has gained the upper hand, with Onesimus the slave silenced or side-lined. Philemon is portrayed as the hero, under whose patronage the church exists, but who is wronged by his own slave Onesimus, who has deserted his master and has caused damages. Even when the text is silent about any specific instance, commentators have attributed multiple possibilities of misdemeanour – theft or some other criminal act – on the part of Onesimus, without exploring any possibility of harsh treatment or abuse of his slave by Philemon. Onesimus has since become a Christian, and Paul, through the letter, makes the fervent appeal to Philemon to accept the fugitive back into his household. The dominant narrative invests Philemon with absolute power to adjudicate, to whom Paul appeals on behalf of Onesimus, who is stereotyped as an offender. But is this the complete story?

Paul’s epistles provide hints on the presence of slaves and masters in the early church, which reflected the social realities of the time. Yet, Paul has been accused of not opposing the institution of slavery

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directly, but only advocating a fair treatment of slaves by their masters (Col 3:22 – 4:1; Eph 6:59). Even the admonition to the slaves (1 Cor 7:21) is found to be ambivalent, as Paul encourages both the status of remaining a slave, and the possibility to be free. On the contrary, the epistle to Philemon demonstrates how Paul's rhetoric destabilises the master/slave identities that existed in the early church. A close reading of the epistle reveals that it engages in a series of disruptions whereby the edifice of master/slave identities is dismantled, and a new identity based on love and justice is constructed.

Recasting the Author and the Audience

The personal nature of the vocabulary, tone and contents of the letter creates an impression that the epistle is a private letter of request by Paul to Philemon. Nevertheless, it is not merely a friendly correspondence but an epistle to Philemon in his capacity as host and pastoral leader of the local congregation that gathers in his home. Timothy is attested as the co-author of the letter, signifying shared authorship and convictions (v. 1). It is addressed not just to Philemon but to other leaders of the house-church, Apphia and Archippus and to the whole church in his house (v. 2). The letter is thus on the level of a pastoral letter from the apostle and his co-worker to the church that gathers at the house of Philemon. It can be assumed that the letter would be read openly at a meeting of the house church, so that Philemon would feel himself answerable not only to the distant Paul but also to the Christians who come regularly to his house. Beyond a personal appeal to Philemon, the epistle is a summons to both the individual Philemon and to the body of Christ gathering at his home, and has to be received as a matter deeply relevant to their faith and practice.

Paul employs skilful and persuasive rhetoric regarding the return of Onesimus to Philemon's household and church. The relative social locations of Onesimus as a slave, and Philemon a slave master, invests the narrative with added textures in the context of slavery in the Greco-Roman world and the tensions in master/slave relations within early Christian communities. It can be seen that Paul's rhetoric opens up the possibility for an alternate paradigm of relationships that is different from the dominant and enslaving one prevalent in that era.

Re-membering Through Restructuring Master/Slave Identities

Paul utilises an abundance of 'family language' in the epistle; brother (1, 7, 16, 20), sister (2), and child (10). The frequency of the use of the

terms is so pronounced that the communal-familial emphasis cannot be viewed as coincidental. Family language destabilises the hierarchical social order and values of the culture based on status and privilege and proposes a new culture of family relationships. The major focus of the appeal is the change of status on part of Onesimus, who has been brought to the faith of Christ through Paul during his imprisonment. One who existed at the bottom of the social hierarchy as a slave, is now given a new identity as the child and the member of the body of Christ.

The paramount act of demolishing the social structures of slavery and that of privilege and status happens with the unequivocal appeal of Paul to receive the slave Onesimus “no longer as a slave but more than a slave – a beloved brother...both in the flesh and in the Lord” (v. 16). Considering a slave to be a brother of the master is a radical restructuring of relationships. Paul is not sending Onesimus back to Philemon so that he can re-enter the same master/slave relationship that he had escaped. Paul appeals not for the reinstatement of the slave to his duties, but the unconditional and warm welcoming of the new member into the household of God. Paul expects the house-church over which Philemon presided to exemplify the agape love to which he refers in the opening salutation. The phrases ‘in the flesh’ and ‘in the Lord’ are significant, as it encompasses the entire life settings of Onesimus and Philemon, both of the household and the house-church.

Most importantly, Paul identifies Onesimus with himself and appeals to Philemon to “receive him as you would receive me” (v. 17). Receiving Onesimus as a brother and an honoured guest signified critical divesting of Philemon’s power as a master and sharing it with his former slave. It is inevitable that Philemon cede his absolute rights as a master if he were to accept the former slave on par with Paul. The appeal restructures the master/slave identities within the new paradigm of relationships mandated by the church. In preparing the way for a slave to be considered a brother and an honoured guest, Paul destabilises the authoritarian and patriarchal cultural values of the Greco-Roman society.

Reconceptualising Usefulness as Goodness

Paul presents the new identity of Onesimus as having transitioned from being useless in the past to being useful in the present (v. 11). It is a wordplay on the name Onesimus, which means “useful,” through

the contrast of “useless” and “useful.” It raises significant questions about the conceptualization of usefulness in the contexts of slavery. Slaves were stereotyped as useless, lazy, and even criminal, even as the slave’s body was put to maximum utility for the master. Paul’s description of Onesimus’ as being useless in the past may reflect the prevailing mind-set. The utility of the slave was valued only as long as it benefitted the master, without any consideration of the life of the slave, which demands a reconceptualization of the idea of usefulness. In opposition to the societal conceptualization of usefulness, it has to be seen within the perspective of the ‘goodness for the sake of Christ’ (v. 6), which characterizes the fellowship within the church. It urges the reconceptualization of the concept of usefulness through recognizing the agency of Onesimus.

Reversing Debt-repayment Paradigm

Paul promises repayment of any losses caused by Onesimus, presumably through his desertion, or some other action (v. 19). The Roman economy was a slave economy, built on slave labour. The profit of the master depended on the best utilisation of the slave’s service, and any interruption would be counted as debt on part of the slave. The burden of debt kept the slave as the perpetual property of the master. “Once a slave, always a slave” was the dictum in Roman slavery. Even the purchase of freedom would not release the slave from being a client of the master. But Paul overturns this enslaving debt-repayment paradigm by asserting Philemon’s perpetual debt to him as the one who shared God’s salvation. The master is now at a greater debt than the slave, as he is under the new authority of God.

Reconstituting Hospitality of the Household of God

Paul’s appeal concludes with command to prepare a guest room for Paul’s intended visit to the household of Philemon (v. 22). Paul’s commendation of Philemon’s past as ‘refreshing the hearts of saints’ (v. 7), well attests the generous hospitality being provided to the members of the church. Hospitality in cultures of antiquity always depended on the patronage of wealthy patrons and demonstrated their power and status. Paul’s bold request for hospitality signifies, rather than the close personal ties with Philemon, the clear attempt of Paul

to dismantle the patronage-hospitality system and forge a new kind of ecclesial hospitality. Paul speaks as if the power and prestige of the host is relocated and reconstituted. The demand for hospitality for Paul has to be seen in correlation to the demand for acceptance of Onesimus, the one who is to be received like Paul. It marks the new hospitality that characterises the household of God.

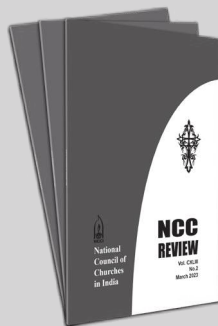
Conclusion

In the contemporary Indian society, master/slave identities manifest itself in multifarious forms as caste discrimination, inter-racial and communal violence. The dominant forces promote the stereotyping of the marginalised, depriving them of their rights and privileges. The epistle to Philemon summons the church to strive to counter the contexts that perpetuate domination, exclusion and animosity between peoples and communities. In its journey towards becoming the family of God, the church needs to transform the contexts and perceptions that continue to enslave. Would the church endeavour to become the space of genuine hospitality, a space for reconciliation between communities in the quest for a new community as the family of God?

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