

## EXPOSING BIBLICAL INFERENCES AND MULTI-FACETED IDENTITY REVEALED IN NORMAN MCKINNEL'S *THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS*

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### ABSTRACT:

Norman McKinnel, a Scottish stage and film actor, wrote the one-act play titled *The Bishop's Candlesticks*. This play is based on the story narrated by Victor Hugo in his novel *Les Miserables*. The plot of the play is a highly appreciated humanistic story portraying love and the kind of protagonist. The bishop is considered the protagonist who leads a saintly life by adhering to religious principles. McKinnel has positioned the bishop as a significant character expressing the biblical values that he wanted to promulgate across the globe. In addition, this one-act play hints at the concept of identity and identity crisis. Reading these aspects has motivated the researcher to write the present research paper. To explore biblical implications identified in the play, I have referred to the Bible and analyzed the text from the biblical perspective. There have been innumerable research on the concept of identity and identity crisis, but the idea of identity has not been explored in the selected text; therefore, this research paper attempted to deal with it.

**Keywords:** biblical, implications, identity, bishop

Norman McKinnel, who lived between 10 February 1870 and 29 March 1932, is a Scottish playwright. He has also acted in many stage plays in the United Kingdom. As a dramatist, he is famous for the one-act play, *The Bishop's Candlesticks*, which is an adaptation of a portion of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. The first play of McKinnel was performed in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, in 1894. Playing many Shakespearean roles made him popular and famous in the U.S., Australia, and South Africa theatres. McKinnel is known for producing several easily stageable one-act plays, and *The Bishop's Candlesticks*, which was produced in 1901, is the most successful among all.

*The Bishop's Candlesticks* teaches that love and kindness have more power than violence; thus, it can transform a man. It portrays a convict with a multifaceted identity who was arrested for stealing food for his dying wife. He was imprisoned for ten years and tortured and treated less than an animal. This imprisonment snatches away his original identity absolutely and grants him an unpleasant identity, thereby making him more arrogant and brutish. He escapes from the 'hell,' that is the jail, and barged into the bishop's house for food the kind bishop who represents all the noble Christian virtues offered food and bed to the convict.

The gentle treatment of the bishop convinced the convict thus gets softened little by little; however, he could not control himself from stealing the silver candlesticks of the bishop, which was gifted to him by his beloved mother on her deathbed. Shop-lifting the silver candlesticks, the convict, escape from the house. On the way, he falls into the hands of the sergeant and three gendarmes and is brought back to the bishop. He was kind enough to save the convict from the hands of the sergeant and three gendarmes by confessing him as his good friend. As soon as the sergeant and three gendarmes left, the bishop gifts the candlesticks to him. The convict is

startled, and thereby he gets transformed into a good man in society. Now he believes in the existence of God and confesses that the spirit of God dwells in his heart.

It is qualitative research adopting a content analysis approach to the selected text, and the text is critically examined. The present research paper probes into the Bible elements reflected in *The Bishop's Candlesticks* and explored the multiple identities presented through the play's characters. The current research interprets Biblical inferences as the ideas of the Bible projected in the selected text. Bible emphasizes humanity and receiving salvation by accepting God in the spiritual realm. Likewise, even McKinnel also exhibits humanity and acknowledging God as one's redeemer. Looking at the text closely with the Bible, the Bible paves a way to investigate the elements of the Bible in the play.

In addition to the inferences of Bible the, this research paper explores identity and its multiple faces. Identity and identity crisis are commonly dealt subjects in the faculty of literature. However, the present paper also emphasizes identity as a need to bring it to light. The concept of identity is a broadly discussed topic in the field of literature and social sciences. There are diverse types of identities dealt with in these streams of education; some are national identity, cultural identity, biological identity, occupational identity, and so on. It is treated as the individuality of a person in the social arena. A person can have multiple identities, and sometimes identity changes from place to place. Sometimes identities do not change according to the atmosphere. For instance, the biological identity of a person is a permanent one. There are cases where even the biological identity differs after a certain age. For example, a transgender person takes two biological identities in life.

Oyserman, et al. has attempted to define identities as the "traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is." (69). Identities are formed based on varied factors such as social background, biological, occupational, and many others. McKinnel has dealt with identities and identity crisis in his play. Every character of his can be seen through the concept of identity, and identity crisis can be seen in the convict's life. A convict is a person without a name but is addressed by the bishop in many ways. Before the imprisonment, the convict was leading a life like every common man on this earth, but poverty pushes him to steal a piece of bread, and as a result, he spends ten long years in hell. Here, hell signifies the jail that he was in, and this is how he refers to it in his dialogue.

Looking at the biological identity of the convict, the readers of the play can figure out that he is a ragged male. McKinnel portrays him as a character having no fault in his biological identity. But his sociological identity differs and puts him into the shackles of an identity crisis. His life before going to jail must have been a far better and respected one, and that had given him dignity and recognition in society. When he was imprisoned, the people in the jail have snatched his identity and have rendered him an unfair identity that is a set of five numbers: 15729. He confesses that he is not a man, just a number: "That was when I was a man, now I'm not a man; now I'm a number: 15729" (McKinnel 10). This numeric snatched away his original identity and imposed this number as his identity in the jail. Though he disliked this identity and did not want to carry it with him, he had no other choice other than forcibly taking it. This affects him and results in a pathetic impact of becoming an arrogant and hostile person to society.

The convict escapes from the jail with the same arrogance and hunts for food, eventually barging into the philanthropic bishop's house. When he escapes from prison, he inherits a new identity called convict. Society saw him as a convict and not as a common man. This identity is socially unacceptable because people in society knew that the person with such an identity is unfit to live with them. The moment he was in jail, he loses the socially accepted identity and

then inherits socially unaccepted identities. The title, 'convict' and the number '15729' are seen as socially unaccepted identities by the people of his society as they have understood the threat of these identities.

The bishop plays a vital role in replacing these socially unaccepted identities with a new socially accepted identity that is 'bishop's friend.' The convict was not approachable. Instead, he was aggressive and violent, but the bishop tried pacifying him and implanted nice nature through his kind and loving words. The philanthropic bishop has been very much kind enough to address him as 'my friend,' 'dear,' and 'my son. The convict gets gradually transformed into a softer man by the gentle treatment of the bishop. He was kind enough to attract him with his kind words. The convict realizes the sort of transformation that he is undergoing and registers it in his dialogue: "Here, cheer up, my hearty, you're getting soft. God! Wouldn't my chain mates laugh to see 15729 hesitating about collaring the plunder because he felt good? Good! Ha! Ha! Oh my God! Good! Ha! Ha! 15729 are getting soft. That's a good one."McKinnel (12-13).Compassionately addressing him has convinced the convict to forget his past identities and clothe him with a new socially accepted identity.

When the bishop calls him using kind words, the convict gradually gets transformed psychologically, impacting his identity. Initially, he was hesitant about the change of identity, but later, slowly, there is a transformation that even the audience can notice clearly. The policemen bring the convict back to the bishop suspecting him because he could not prove his identity. He failed to verify his identity in front of the policemen because his possessing identities were socially unaccepted; therefore, he was scared to disclose his real identity, but the bishop, like a savior, comes forward to protect him from the shackles of the chain. When the convict could not disclose his true identity, it is vivid that he has undergone a severe identity crisis.

The convict experiences identity crisis at two junctures; one is in jail, and the other is immediately after escaping from the prison. However, there is a remarkable transformation noticed in his identity towards the end of the play. The friend of the bishop is the identity that he inherits from the bishop. Initially, the convict was hesitant, but later, he understands its true meaning and accepted it wholeheartedly. From the convict's case, it can be argued that identity can change and get transformed over time.

Furthermore, it can be forgotten by the person, and that identity can be lost entirely. This is evidently seen in the convict's case. As soon as he accepts the new identity that was rendered by the bishop, he forgets his number being his identity and the title, 'convict' being his identity. He happily bids farewell to the bishop and leaves home as the bishop's friend at the end of the play. From this, it is transparent that at the bishop's house, the convict gets his identity exchanged through the articulated words of the bishop.

Words are powerful weapons that can construct and destroy. In the convict case, it is clear that the words of the jailors have ruined his life with socially unaccepted identity, and later the words of the bishop have constructed his life with a new socially accepted identity. So here, words play a significant position in constructing and destructing identities. Looking at the life of the bishop and his sister, Persome, one can argue that their identities do not undergo any change in the course of the play. The bishop has inherited an identity that will never change even after his death. In fact, after his death, the title 'Bishop' will remain as his identity. It is because that the title 'Bishop' is a socially accepted and dignified rank that has become his identity. In the bishop's case, it can be argued that the person's occupation takes a predominant and permanent role in his life.

As mentioned earlier, one's occupation can remain as his identity, which could be a permanent one, and sometimes it could be a temporary one. In bishop's life, the occupational identity has become his true and noble identity. This identity has been an advantage to Persome in many ways. Persome is identified as the sister of the bishop. Since the bishop's true name is not revealed, his occupation stands as his identity, but in Persome's case, the biological connection between her and the bishop renders her an identity. She is often referred to as the bishop's sister, socially accepted and a prestigious identity. Here, the occupation of the bishop offers the bishop and his sister acquiring a new identity, which is a dignified and socially accepted one.

The bishop was truly kind because he was adhering to the principles of Jesus Christ. The bishop exhibits Christian values through his action. He was not the only kind to convict but also to Marie, who was his maid. He shows him as an image of humanity and philanthrope. He sells his belongings to do charity. His charitable act is explicit when he sells the silver salt-cellers to pay the home rent of Mere Gringoire. His philanthropic nature and humanistic thoughts are adapted from the teaching of Jesus Christ, who taught his disciples to share a set of clothing for the needy one if they have two with them. This idea is dealt with in Luke 3: 11: "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." (ESV 919). This verse points out that Jesus Christ emphasizes humanistic quality, and the bishop has firmly adhered to such Christian values.

In addition, Jesus insisted on loving our enemies as He did. This is mentioned in Matthew 5: 44: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (ESV 867). Jesus Christ emphasized humanistic qualities and the bishop has adopted them firmly in his life. He loved the poor people and helped the needy people. In Mere Gringoire's case, one can find that the bishop was exceedingly kind to help her in paying her house rent. Likewise, in Marie's case, the bishop goes to the extent of giving his overcoat to her to protect herself from the freezing weather.

One can argue that the bishop had adopted the verse Matthew 5: 44 very strictly in his life. This can be substantiated by quoting the scene wherein the convict barges into the bishop's house to take some food for his hungry stomach. He barges in with knife point to the neck of the bishop. The bishop was genuinely kind and did not abuse him; instead, he addressed him as his friend. In this case, it is explicit that even at the crucial time; the bishop was a lovely person showing kindness even to the one who was threatening him. It can be vehemently argued that the bishop could behave too adorable because he has Christ in him and was practicing the Christian values even at the most challenging phase of the life.

The depth of the bishop's kindness is explicit towards the end of the play, wherein the escaped convict was brought to the bishop along with the candlesticks by the Gendarmes. The bishop was too casual and kind seeing the escaped convict. Even now, he did not lose his patience; instead, he addresses him as 'my friend.' This reveals the love that the bishop has for the convict even after stealing his priceless silver candlesticks, which were presented to him by his mother when she was on her deathbed. Analyzing the bishop's character, one can understand that the bishop was too humble and polite to the people around him. It was all because he was practicing the principles of Jesus Christ.

McKinnel has portrayed the bishop as a philanthropic character projecting the Christian values in a gentle tone. The dramatist disseminates the Christian values through this play, and there are validating dialogues that can be pointed out through the text. Many of his dialogues convey the same message that has been discussed in the Holy Bible. There are a few dialogues that can be enumerated and juxtaposed with that of the Bible. The dialogues mentioned below points out a similar scene that is portrayed.

BISHOP: And now I think you may let your prisoner go.

SERGEANT: But he won't show me his papers; he won't tell me who he is.

BISHOP: I have told you he is my friend. (McKinnel 14)

One such similar idea is dealt with in Romans 6:22: "But now that you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." Looking at this verse from the perspective of *The Bishop's Candlesticks*, it can be understood that the bishop plays the role of God and the convict takes the position of the people. As God redeems his people, the bishop sets the convict free from the shackles of the chain. God wanted to save the world from the clutches of sin; therefore, He sends His only begotten son to this world as the savior. Jesus Christ was sent to this world to suffer and die for the well-being of the people. He has sacrificed his life for the redemption of the people. In *The Bishop's Candlesticks*, it is transparent that the bishop sacrifices his wish and desire to help others and the needy people at their crisis time. As a redeemer of the convict, he sets the convict free and addresses the convict as his 'friend' and 'my son' as Jesus addresses the people who act according to the will of the Lord as 'my brother and sister and mother,' which is mentioned in Mark 3: 34-35.

Apart from such implicit inferences, there are a few explicit references to the verses of the Bible. As soon as the convict barges into the bishop's house, he threatens the bishop at the knife points and demands food. He threatens the bishop telling him that if he plays a false game of him, he will drive his knife through the bishop's heart because he does not anything more to lose in life. No sooner he uttered this, the bishop was very moved and replied, telling, "You have your soul to lose" (McKinnel 7). This dialogue connects with what is stated in Matthew 16: 26: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (ESV 880). This verse emphasizes the importance of the soul and the eternity that it enters to lead an immortal life. The Bible speaks much about the eternity and the immortal life that the soul is eligible for.

Even the bishop insists on eternity and the immortal life that the soul rests on. When the bishop detected that the convict has void knowledge about soul and eternity, he was unhappy and thought of imparting the right knowledge about in a kind manner. He takes a friendly approach to deliver the knowledge about the priceless soul. The convict hates religion and church. Initially, he had no mind to listen to anything related to God and religion, but later, there is a sort of transformation noticed in his attitude. When the convict says that he hates the church, the bishop, in return, replies that "That is a pity, my son, as the church does not hate you." (McKinnel 63). This is similar to what is mentioned in the Bible. In 2 Peter 3:9, it is stated that "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (ESV 1090). God loves the sinners but hates sins. He does not neglect sinners because he came to this world to render redemption to the sinners. This biblical truth is brought out in the play through the bishop.

The convict who hated God and religion gets transformed and looks for the blessings of God. The transformation makes him softer and imparts humanistic qualities. He confesses towards the end of the play that "something had come into me" (McKinnel 16). This shows that he has received salvation as soon as he gave room for a transition. It also explains that he has accepted Christ as his savior, and he noticed the difference in his

spiritual realm. Recognizing the change, he confesses that something has come into him. In Christianity, accepting Christ happens through confession as per the verses 9 and 10 of Romans chapter 10: "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (ESV 1012). So it is clear that accepting Christ as one's savior happens through confession that 'Jesus is Lord.'

The convict who has no good idea about Christianity and Jesus did not confess 'Jesus is Lord'; instead, he stooped down to receive God's blessing from the bishop. He had a strong belief that the blessing of the bishop can bring open new doors and bring prosperity in his life. In addition, he gives room for transforming him from a convict to a friend of the bishop. He approved himself to be the friend of the bishop. Here, the state of the bishop and Jesus can be juxtaposed. Jesus accepts whoever confesses his name as Lord, and the bishop became the friend of the convict when the convict approved it. From this, it is vivid that the bishop was ready to accept the convict as his friend; likewise, Christ is earnest to accept the people of the world as his brother and sister. He is very much eager to bring the world into his relationship.

At the end of the play, the bishop advises the convict, telling them that "this poor body is the Temple of the Living God" (McKinnel 16). He wants to caution his friend to keep himself holy because the body is the living temple of the living God. The bishop knew well that God demands holiness from man as He is holy and dwells in holiness. He cannot settle in the sinful room, which he considers as filth. His is God who looks from a clean who as He is holy of all holiness. Having known this truth, the bishop extends his dialogue to advise his friend to remain holy in all his actions. Here, righteousness refers to abstaining from sinful activities. Committing sin stains the salvation robe put on by God; thus, the bishop also insists on holiness. The Bible treats salvation as a kind of robe that prevents it from being nude. Therefore, it emphasizes preserving it without soiling it.

The verses that dealt with the human body as the living temple of God are seen in I Corinthians 3:16 and II Corinthians 6: 16. These verses shed light on the perception of God about the human body. God considers the human body as his temple wherein He dwells in the form of a Spirit. The verses mentioned highlights the underlying connection between what God has accentuated and what the bishop has pronounced:

**I Corinthians 3:16:**

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? (ESV 1020)

**II Corinthians 6:16:**

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (ESV1034)

From the verses mentioned above, it is evident that God lives in the body of human beings and makes it his room of living. He wants to dwell in the human body because He has sacrificed his only begotten son for the redemption of the entire universe. The sacrifice of what God has done to save the world is remarkable and lofty. Hence, God expects human beings to accept God as their savior to prove that human beings have understood what God has done to them. God is unhappy about the people who do not recognize and approve of the enormous sacrifice that God

has made for their well-being. Therefore, the bishop who had an intimate relationship with God could understand this and re-emphasizes this truth.

In *The Bishop's Candlesticks*, the bishop insists on the values depicted in the Holy Bible. During every appearance on the stage, the bishop underscores the Christian values through his dialogues. His attitude impresses the people in no time; he was diligently practicing the biblical values. More than teaching the biblical values, he was practicing them in his life. He posed to be the best showpiece of Christian values in the play. Though bishop is considered an occupation and identity, practicing Christian values re-affirmed him as a valid bishop. He made his identity and proved it through the play through his philanthropic gestures and humanistic approach to life.

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