

The Old Man and the Sea: A Manual of Biblical Teaching and Preaching

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ABSTRACT

*This paper examines how biblical teachings and preaching are reflected in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Literature and religion resonate deeply with human emotions and senses across all ages and cultures. Religious stories employ literary devices like allegory, metaphor, and symbolism. Santiago's promises and actions—going on pilgrimage, praying the Rosary, and fasting—illustrate Christian values, symbolism, allusion, and references in the novella. This study explores biblical accounts of Christ's crucifixion, numerology, the scriptural concept of neighbour, the canonical relation between master and disciple, and the fundamental Christian virtues of faith, hope, love, empathy, and resilience portrayed in *The Old Man and the Sea*.*

1. Introduction:

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, a novella published in 1952, follows Santiago, an old fisherman in a small Cuban village, and his apprentice, Manolin. After 84 days without a catch, Santiago's struggle culminates in a fierce battle with a giant Marlin on the eighty-fifth day. The sea, a metaphor for human life, conceals depths of meaning reminiscent of biblical parables, particularly the teachings of Jesus in the Galilean region. In Matthew 4:18-20, Jesus says, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." Similarly, Hemingway employs a minimalist style to imbue profound meaning into simple narratives.

Although Manolin is forced to leave Santiago for a more prosperous boat, he has been moulded by Santiago's teachings over seven years, reflecting Jesus' mentorship of his disciples. While facing fate alone despite his failures, Santiago embodies perseverance and dignity. His determination culminates in catching the Marlin, but he ultimately loses it to sharks.

In the novel, Santiago stands as a powerful embodiment of Christ through his pain, suffering, and ultimate sacrifice. His injury to the right hand, coupled with the vivid imagery of nails piercing it, parallels the crucifixion of Jesus. Carrying the mast like a cross, Santiago reflects Christ-like qualities, including profound humility, unwavering kindness, and an indomitable spirit in the face of sorrow. This narrative echoes the New Testament, where Jesus is crucified alongside two men; similarly, Manolin—unlike others—defends and supports Santiago, highlighting their bond.

Santiago's successful catch on the seventh attempt and the killing of seven sharks signal divine perfection and completion. His role as a teacher extends beyond fishing, instilling essential values of humility and pride in Manolin. In the heat of battle, Santiago's cries of pain resonate with Christ's final words, further cementing the connection. His ascent from the sea, arms outstretched, powerfully evokes the crucifixion, clearly illustrating the profound Christian themes intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative.

Scholars and critics around the globe have analysed *The Old Man and the Sea* through various lenses. Critics like Fatmir Ramadani highlight the moral victory achieved through persistence. Sandamali K. P. S. examines the novella's symbolism, while others, such as Amporn Sa-Ngiamwibool, explore Christian, universal, and Buddhist themes within the text. Sanjo Ojedoja discusses the theme of courage. This paper offers a unique perspective by analysing the novella as a manual of biblical teaching and preaching.

2. Christian Symbolism, Allusion, and References

Theorists Alfred North Whitehead, Susanne Langer, Northrop Frye, and Ferdinand de Saussure explored the significance of symbolism in text interpretation. Whitehead posits that symbolism reflects human imagination, while Langer emphasizes its central role in philosophy and understanding. Frye defines symbols as units of literary structure for critical analysis. Saussure's study of semiotics examines the relationship between objects (signified) and their linguistic representations (signifier), encompassing various forms beyond language.

Like other American writers, Hemingway utilized realism, naturalism, romanticism, and symbolism to depict human lives and critique societal issues. As a prominent writer from the Romantic era, he infused his works with Christian symbols and references. Born and raised in a Protestant household, Hemingway converted to Catholicism during World War I and maintained his faith throughout his life. His novella *The Old Man and the Sea* reflects Christian spirituality through elements like pilgrimage, prayer, fasting, and biblical symbolism, illustrating his deep connection to Christianity.

The Portrait of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the house of Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* (page 7) serves both explicit and implicit references to Christ's love for humanity. This portrait, one of two religious images on the wall of his shack, symbolizes his devotion to Christ. Jesus teaches, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37), while God describes "his work of redemption, saying he will give people a new heart and remove their stony hearts" (Ezekiel 11:19-20). Santiago's love and respect for others reflect Jesus' unconditional love for humankind. Many critics and academics interpret Santiago as a symbolic representation of Christ. For 84 days without catching a fish, Santiago experiences a form of crucifixion and resurrection. The inclusion of this portrait acts as Christian symbolism, allusion, and reference in the novella.

The Virgin of Cobre

The Virgin of Cobre, popularly known as the Virgin Mary, is the patron saint of Cuba. She symbolizes Cuban identity and reconciliation. The relic of the Virgin of Cobre connects to Christianity and the Mother Mary in the Bible. The statue is said to perform miracles, making the shrine the most important religious site on the island. Santiago not only keeps a relic of the Virgin of Cobre but also promises to make a pilgrimage, praying ten Hail Marys and ten Our Fathers if he catches a large fish. The Virgin Mary represents motherly love and care. Like Santiago, Christians love the Virgin Mary for many reasons. Mother Mary, a model of faith and charity for the Church, is believed to have exemplified its mission by supporting Jesus' ministry, following his teachings, and adhering to the will of God. Being the mother of Jesus, she is considered the spiritual mother of all, symbolizing God's love and care for humanity. Hemingway highlights the inclusion of the Virgin of Cobre to illustrate the significance of Christian symbols and religious rites in his work.

By exploring biblical symbolism, allusion, and references—like the portraits of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin of Cobre—throughout his narrative, Hemingway engages readers to intertwine prolific theoretical relations between Scripture and his novella. Hemingway employs this illustrious approach to *The Old Man and the Sea*, an essential guide for understanding and compellingly conveying biblical teachings.

3. Biblical Practices and Values

Hemingway was born and raised in a Protestant household, and he later converted to Catholicism, which influenced much of his work. Drawing from his broad religious background, Hemingway integrates Christian ideologies and principles throughout the novella. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Christian practices and values such as pilgrimage, the Rosary, and fasting symbolize Santiago's spiritual journey.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage, an act of devotion and a journey toward spiritual enrichment is a fundamental Christian practice and ritual. Many critics highlight that Hemingway illustrates the significance and purpose of pilgrimage in the lives of Christians through Santiago's promise in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Santiago states, "I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre if I catch him. That is a promise." His intention to undertake a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre expresses his deep desire to overcome the challenges he faces at sea, his repentance, and his willingness to seek divine assistance in the novella. This promise, symbolizing his search for meaning and personal growth amid misfortune, highlights Santiago's reliance on faith, repentance, and the search for divine grace.

Praying the Rosary

In the novella, Santiago implores aloud, "I am not religious...However, I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish." His heartfelt statement enables readers to understand the depth of his character. It demonstrates that he is aware of the critical aspects of praying the Rosary, especially during moments of adversity and struggle. It also reminds the readers that hope and faith can shine even in the toughest times. Santiago also understands that the recitation of the Rosary can lead to good works flourishing, receiving signal graces and special protection, serving as powerful armour in hardship, and providing resilience against misfortune. Through these repetitive prayers, Hemingway tries to symbolize Santiago's resilience and spiritual focus, mainly his perseverance in battling the Marlin. Conceivably, he incorporates this value and practice in the text to emphasize the importance of faith in overcoming challenges with dignity.

Fasting

Hemingway highlights fasting for three primary reasons: narrative focus, internal dialogue, and the impact on Santiago's body. A group of scholars emphasizes that a significant portion of the story is dedicated to describing Santiago's efforts to catch a fish, underscoring the length of his "fast" and the challenges he encounters. Santiago's prolonged fasting and his hardship parallel the biblical fasting practices of Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days, emphasizing themes of resilience and preparation for greater challenges.

Through the lens of biblical practices and values—pilgrimage, the Rosary, and fasting—Hemingway encourages readers to bridge some philosophical connections between the Scripture and his novella. This thoughtful perception transforms the reading experience, showcasing the novella not only as a remarkable piece of literature but also as a rich source of biblical knowledge and wisdom.

4. Biblical Parallels in Santiago's Journey

Hemingway aptly incorporates biblical parallels in Santiago's Journey. His symbolic use of Christ's crucifixion, numerology, the concept of neighbour, and the relationship between master and disciple enrich the reader's understanding of his character and link his journey to biblical narratives.

Biblical Accounts of Christ's Crucifixion and Numerology

Three, Seven, and Forty reinforce the Christian symbolism in the novella. Santiago's trials lasted three days, echoing Jesus's suffering on the Cross. The number three symbolizes the Trinity, reflecting on the three patriarchs, apostles, and Jesus's ministry. Santiago, Manolin, and the Marlin represent this divine union. The number seven signifies divine perfection and completion. Santiago nets the fish on the seventh attempt and kills seven sharks. Santiago's struggle with the Marlin and the significance of seven further links Santiago's journey to biblical narratives in terms of numerological elements.

The Concept of Neighbourhood

The concept of neighbour in the Bible is represented by the Hebrew word *rēa'*, meaning "friend" or "companion," and the Greek word *plēsion*, meaning "the (one) near." In Leviticus 19:18, God

commands, "Love your neighbour as yourself," and Jesus reiterates this in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, emphasizing its significance. In Hemingway's novella, Manolin, Martin, Rogelio, Perico, and Pedrico embody this biblical spirit of community. Manolin remains devoted to Santiago despite the pressure to leave, helping him with his gear and bringing him food. Martin sends provisions through Manolin, Rogelio assists with fishing nets, Perico supplies newspapers, and Pedrico cares for Santiago's boat throughout the narrative. The togetherness, compassion, and care of the villagers illustrate the deep connection to the biblical teaching of loving one's neighbour.

Scriptural Accounts of Master and Disciple

Manolin carries the Holy Cross of true discipleship for seven years. He is unwaveringly loyal to Santiago, who embodies the ideal disciple by adhering to his teachings and mirroring his behaviour. Santiago, in turn, expertly trains and guides Manolin, who relies on him for seven formative years. Manolin actively cares for Santiago by preparing his gear, bringing him food, and enlisting the villagers' help to improve Santiago's living condition. Hemingway, through their union, relationship, and interaction, reflects the biblical dynamic between Jesus and His disciples. Their bond exemplifies the mutual growth inherent in master-disciple relationships.

Hemingway employs biblical parallels—explicitly Christ's crucifixion, numerology, the concept of neighbourhood, and the master-disciple relationship—to inspire readers to discover substantial connections between the Bible and his narrative. This approach enables us to appreciate *The Old Man and the Sea* as a literary work as well as a valuable resource for biblical lessons and learnings.

5. Christian Virtues in the Novella

Hemingway's representation of biblical parallels, Christian symbolism, allusion, references, practices, and values is deeply connected to his religious background. He incorporates the virtues of faith, hope, love, empathy, and resilience to showcase Santiago's noble life and living.

Faith

Hemingway highlights the virtue of faith in his novella, presenting it as a divine gift that fosters a belief in God and community. Manolin's unwavering faith in Santiago shines through their relationship; for seven years, he stands by Santiago, even during a 40-day fishing dry spell. His trust is evident when he declares Santiago as one of the greatest fishermen despite his parents urging him to leave. Despite societal doubts, Manolin believes in Santiago's greatness, and his firm devotion to Santiago mirrors the disciples' faith in Jesus. By choosing to honour Santiago's legacy, Manolin embodies the Christian teaching of "living by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), reinforcing the novella's central theme of faith.

Hope

Hope, another theological virtue, signifies the desire for divine union and eternal happiness in Christianity. Santiago and Manolin exemplify hope in their fishing endeavours, continually optimistic despite setbacks. Santiago believes, "Every day is a new day," and with Manolin's support, he remains resolute despite failures. For Santiago, clinging to hope is almost a moral obligation, as he battles a giant marlin and fights off sharks to bring his catch ashore. Manolin's support rejuvenates Santiago's spirit, reflecting hope's transformative power. This relationship shows how hope, intertwined with faith, sustains both Santiago and Manolin throughout their struggles in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Love

Love is central to the relationship between Santiago and Manolin in Hemingway's novella, reflecting the biblical teaching that "the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Manolin exemplifies love and faith by supporting Santiago through difficult times, accompanying him on fishing trips, and caring for him when he is injured. His devotion shines through as he searches for Santiago after he goes missing. Similarly, Santiago's love for Manolin is deep; he mentors him in fishing from a young

age and relies on their companionship, especially during his isolation.

Santiago admires Manolin's strength and is grateful for his support, mirroring the care shown by Jesus' disciples after his crucifixion. Manolin's actions, particularly when he finds a weary Santiago, echo the compassion found in biblical teachings. Manolin's care for Santiago, mirrored by Santiago's mentorship, also demonstrates mutual devotion. Their bond reflects the commandment to "love one another" (John 13:34).

Empathy

Santiago's respect for the Marlin and Manolin's concern for Santiago illustrate empathy as a spiritual virtue. Empathy also plays a crucial role in their relationship. Manolin expresses concern for Santiago's well-being, sharing in his pain and joys. Santiago exhibits empathy toward nature, feeling remorse for the creatures he hunts and referring to fish as "our true brothers." Both characters embody the biblical call to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2), highlighting Hemingway's emphasis on love and empathy in their lives.

Resilience

In the novella, Santiago embodies a living example of resilience. He asserts that "man is not made for defeat," showcasing resilience regardless of suffering from pain and exhaustion. His relationship with nature reflects deep respect, seeing the Marlin as a worthy adversary. Despite adversity, Santiago's unbreakable spirit shines through. Santiago's bond with Manolin symbolizes mutual support and growth. Although Manolin is pressured to fish on a more prosperous boat, he insists he will bring luck back to Santiago, highlighting their commitment to each other despite barriers.

Santiago's lifelong passion for fishing drives him to the Gulf Stream, where he faces challenges, including 84 days without a catch. Inspired by Joe DiMaggio's perseverance, he advocates for Manolin's empowerment while navigating his grief after losing the boy's support. As a leader, Santiago exemplifies service and humility, showing that leadership extends beyond personal success to nurturing others. Santiago's respect for the Marlin and Manolin's concern for Santiago illustrate empathy as a spiritual virtue. Santiago's story inspires confidence and determination, exemplifying the transformative power of resilience. Hemingway uses these moments to emphasize understanding and compassion, echoing biblical teachings.

By highlighting key Christian virtues—faith, hope, love, empathy, and resilience—Hemingway invites readers to draw meaningful connections between the Bible and his narrative. This perspective allows us to appreciate *The Old Man and the Sea* not just as a literary work but as an insightful guide for biblical teaching and preaching.

6. Conclusions

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* serves as a rich tapestry of biblical symbolism, teaching, and preaching. Through allegory, metaphor, and Christian virtues, the novella connects readers to timeless biblical themes and allusion. Santiago's journey, enriched by elements of pilgrimage, prayer, and fasting, resembles the struggles and redemption found in Christian teachings. By exploring Christ-like suffering, community, and resilience, Hemingway offers a manual of faith, hope, and love that continues to inspire readers today. Additionally, themes related to Christ's crucifixion and the relationship between master and disciple further illuminate these teachings. Ultimately, the Christian virtues of faith, hope, love, empathy, and resilience reveal the deep connections between the Bible and the novella. Therefore, *The Old Man and the Sea* can be seen as a guide for biblical teaching and preaching.

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