Corporate Compassion: Analyzing John 15:9-17 through a Socio-Rhetorical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research delved into the intricate facets of workplace spirituality within the contemporary context, specifically addressing labor challenges in Indonesia. The study employed socio-rhetorical analysis, anchored in John's theology from chapter 15:9-17, to explore the theological and practical dimensions of spirituality in the workplace. Selected sources from prominent databases underpinned the socio-rhetorical analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The findings underscored that implementing spirituality in the workplace, particularly from a Christian perspective, could foster inclusivity, harmony, and organizational efficiency. Effective communication and respect for diverse beliefs emerged as pivotal factors in ensuring universal understanding and embrace of workplace spirituality. The research contributed nuanced insights into the intersection of theology and practice, offering implications for theory and application in contemporary workplaces. It concluded that workplace spirituality, rooted in John's theology, possessed transformative potential, infusing workplaces with transcendent purpose, nurturing harmonious relationships, and cultivating effective leadership. The implications of this study extended to the broader discourse on spirituality in organizational contexts, enriching the understanding of the role of faith and theology in shaping the modern workplace, especially in the unique socio-cultural landscape of Indonesia.

Keywords: Biblical Study; Christian Leadership; Socio-Rhetorical; John 15; Workplace Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

In the global era, the evolving needs of individuals are reshaping various aspects of life, including the workplace, family dynamics, social interactions, and global perspectives. As a result, work environments are undergoing a paradigm shift, emphasizing meaningful and progressive activities that empower employees with increased creativity and opportunities for self-improvement. To further this positive trajectory, effective workplace leadership must be grounded in advanced cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and even artificial intelligence.

While cognitive and emotional intelligence have become integral components of leadership discussions (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013, p. 205), incorporating artificial intelligence is a prevalent topic in contemporary societal dialogues (Peifer et al., 2022, p. 1026). Amidst these advancements, spirituality stands out as particularly complex and controversial. Defining spirituality and exploring its development have been ongoing challenges across philosophy, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences since the late 20th century. Remarkably, the organizational context has received limited scholarly attention concerning spirituality, a domain intertwined with elusive concepts such as the soul and spirit, which lack clear-cut definitions.

Moreover, the lack of a definitive stance on spirituality and its intrinsic connection with religion stems from the historical evolution in comprehending these concepts. Throughout ancient times, the understanding of the essence of spirituality and religion has undergone frequent transformations (Grant et al., 2004, p. 264). Dhiman observes the prevalent tendency to employ the term without providing a clear definition in contemplating spirituality, leading to its lack of self-evident meaning. Concurrently, the role of religion within the realm of spirituality emerges as one of the most contentious points among researchers. The dynamic and evolving nature of these concepts across history has contributed to the ongoing challenge of arriving at an unequivocal opinion or consensus (Dhiman et al., 2018).

Moreover, diverging from Dhiman et al. (2018) perspective, Rathee and Rajain posit an argument in favor of the existence of secular spirituality, asserting its foundational role in religion and any creative endeavor, thereby characterizing it as inherently irreligious (Rathee & Rajain, 2020). However, the scholarly discourse on this subject is far from homogeneous, presenting a spectrum of contrasting viewpoints. An alternative standpoint maintains a close interrelation between spirituality and religiosity, contending that spirituality constitutes an essential aspect of human identity (Ahmadi et al., 2014). Despite the contemporary significance of spirituality, a comprehensive exploration of its theological understanding remains notably underdeveloped. Noteworthy contributions to this discourse include Alvin Jeremiah's research, which draws practical examples from both the workplace and familial contexts. Jeremiah's

findings underscore the manifestation of believers' spirituality through acts of hospitality (Jeremiah, 2013).

This objective of this research endeavors to elucidate the complexity dimensions of a theological framework intricately intertwined with the multifaceted landscape of contemporary cultural and human labor activities. The theological exploration of corporate compassion entails grappling with profound inquiries concerning God, His involvement in labor, the purpose of human existence, the essence of divine providence in collaboration with humans, and the presence of arduous, perilous, and inequitable labor as a consequence of humanity's descent into sin. Christian spirituality, as delineated by Rathee and Rajain (2020), can be construed either within a biblical and theological framework or within the context of a specific confessional tradition.

The concept of "Christian spirituality" pertains to the comprehension of the Christian life and the specific devotional rituals created to nurture and uphold the connection with Christ. In essence, Christian spirituality can be defined as the manner in which individuals or communities within the Christian faith seek to enhance their encounter with God or engage in the deliberate cultivation of a continuous awareness of God's presence (McGrath, 2000), including work. For multiple Christians, however, understanding personal purpose and spirituality rarely penetrates the workplace space, the workday (Ahmadi et al., 2014). Christians employed by various secular organizations often associate spiritual life and practices only with activities carried out by local Christian organizations. It is rare to find a Christian who will speak of their work as a spiritual experience (Ahmadi et al., 2014). The disconnect between Christian spirituality and the workplace suggests a compartmentalization of faith, limiting its integration into professional life. Encouraging Christians to view their work as a spiritual experience could foster a more holistic approach to faith in daily activities.

This study aims to draw attention to the connection between Christian spirituality and the workplace through a structurally rhetorical analysis of John's theology in chapters 15:9-17. Workplace spirituality, which is built from the theological teachings of John 15, based on the doctrine of love, this teaching is fundamental in Christianity. Thesis of this research is Christian spirituality, as illuminated by the theological insights of John 15:9-17, has the potential to revolutionize contemporary workplaces by imbuing them with a transcendent purpose, harmonious relationships, and effective leadership, ultimately fostering organizational success.

The research endeavors to investigate the intricate dimensions of a theological framework entwined with contemporary cultural and workplace spirituality. The research question this research is: How does an understanding of the essence of workplace spirituality, the social and cultural context of John's theology in chapter 15:9-17, and the implementation of spirituality to enhance workplace relationships contribute to improved leadership effectiveness and a deeper comprehension of the purpose and necessity of

spirituality in organizational settings? The overarching goal is to explore how these elements collectively impact leadership effectiveness and contribute to a nuanced understanding of the significance of spirituality within the organizational context. The research posits that a holistic exploration of workplace spirituality, grounded in the theological insights of John's teachings, can potentially revolutionize contemporary workplaces by fostering transcendent purpose, harmonious relationships, and effective leadership, ultimately contributing to organizational success.

METHOD

The employed research methodology for this study is socio-rhetorical analysis, a multifaceted approach comprising various stages. The initial phase involves the direct acquisition of data, accomplished through targeted searches for articles, studies, and books in prominent data repositories, including Scopus, PubMed, Eric, ScienceDirect, and JSTOR. The search process involved keyword queries to identify relevant literature. Subsequently, the collected materials underwent a meticulous selection process, considering the research's pertinence to the topic and evaluating the authority of both the source and the author.

The examination of each text in the analysis prioritized understanding the rationale behind each verse, the circumstances leading to its expression, and the potential consequences associated with it. Within such texts, the author's intent takes a central role, emphasizing purposefulness. The socio-rhetorical analysis employed in this study is instrumental in ensuring an accurate comprehension of the text, thereby laying the groundwork for formulating one's perspective (Gorman, 2020, p. 112). Given that rhetoric places a primary focus on goal-setting, the analysis delves into a thorough examination of the context. Consequently, meticulous attention is directed towards unraveling information about the social and historical backdrop, the nature of the audience, and other contextual factors influencing the conception and direct delivery of the discourse.

Rhetoric, as a method, not only takes into consideration the social context but also assesses literary works through the lens of prevailing social values. Henson et al. (2020) advocate for an approach that scrutinizes the specific linguistic and structural attributes of a text in its current form, without delving into its age, social context, or historical evolution. In contrast, Smith (2016) accentuates the interconnection between oratory and the social milieu, asserting that rhetoric intertwines the text with its social environment, evaluating the text in light of its societal backdrop (Smith, 2016). This utilization of rhetorical analysis, according to Smith, allows biblical studies to transcend the limitations posed by form criticism, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the text.

After completing this study and becoming knowledgeable about the essence and idiosyncrasies of rhetorical analysis of the biblical text as one possible alternative for textual research, it can be claimed that this method has contributed to the interpretation

of the study. Traditional biblical academics have not universally accepted the validity and significance of this analysis approach, but it is firmly established as a specialized way of biblical interpretation (Gorman, 2020). The method revealed how the author demonstrated and supported his primary thesis in the study of John 15:9–17 and the context and authorial intent. Thus, the social, rhetorical method became the foundation of the study and allowed for the development of the author's framework based on the analysis of the reading.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research yields three key outcomes. First, the implementation of spirituality in the workplace, based on John's theology, offers principles of equality and purpose, fostering a more inclusive, harmonious, and supportive work environment. This integration of spiritual values enhances morale, teamwork, and overall job satisfaction among employees.

Second, embracing spirituality as a means to unlock human potential proves to enhance organizational efficiency and effectiveness. When employees connect their work with a higher purpose and mission, they become more engaged, motivated, and dedicated to achieving organizational goals. This connection can lead to increased productivity and improved business outcomes.

Third, to effectively communicate workplace spirituality and respect diverse beliefs, organizations are encouraged to invest in diversity and inclusion programs. These initiatives may involve cultural and religious sensitivity training, open forums for spiritual discussions, and the development of policies accommodating various spiritual practices and beliefs. Overall, the research emphasizes the transformative potential of spirituality in the workplace, urging organizations to view work as a divine calling and ministry, ultimately contributing to a more compassionate, just, and purpose-driven work culture.

Analysis of the Text and its Sociological Context

In John 15:1–17, Jesus instructs his disciples to maintain a continuous and close connection with him, similar to how branches rely on the vine for their sustenance and life (15:1–7). This union will result in the production of love, which Jesus emphasizes as a fundamental commandment (15:8–17). While this entire section (15:1–17) serves as a cohesive unit, it stands in sharp contrast to the world's hostility toward the disciples (15:18–25). However, we have divided the section into two parts, 15:1–7 and 15:8–17, even though the distinction between them is not abrupt but rather gradual (15:8) (Keener, 2003, p. 989). John 15:1–17 highlights the importance of maintaining a close connection with Jesus and producing love as a central commandment, aligning with key aspects of Christian spirituality. He asks that them live up to this friendship by doing what he commands them (Moloney, 2013, p. 118). However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the division into two parts may oversimplify the text, potentially missing the nuances of the

discourse. Moreover, while the contrast with the world's hostility underscores the countercultural nature of Christian spirituality, it also raises questions about the practical challenges of living out such spirituality in a diverse and sometimes adversarial world.

It is more reasonable to speak of Christian spirituality, following the idea of *Sola Scriptura*, based on all of Scripture, not selectively, and such an approach certainly requires extensive work. However, to begin a discussion of Christian spirituality in the workplace based on the Gospel, it is rational to turn to the understanding of Christian spirituality offered in John's teaching, specifically chapter 15:9-17. In this chapter of the Gospel, John discusses the love of God, and the lives of Christ's elect, ironizing their pseudo-spirituality (Sharma & Singh, 2020). He uses the concepts of wisdom, love, spirituality, and perfection, which various philosophers of the day used to explain spirituality but gives them an entirely different meaning.

It is significant to note that one of the main theses of the letter passage of John 15 to the citizens is that the Church, with its spiritual power, can be an example of the harmonious interaction of people in pursuit of a common goal. In doing so, individuals are created to love and rejoice despite the difficulties ahead. Moreover, God's Spirit is the architect and energy for the intelligent, creative interaction of Christians. From the content of this paragraph, several essential elements of spirituality can be discerned (Adnan et al., 2020). These include, first and foremost: a sincere conviction in the saving and transforming power of Christ's death and resurrection and a demonstration of love for those around. According to John, spirituality consists in God's allowing one, through self-revelation, to become a partaker of that which is spiritual (Xu et al., 2016). Spirituality arises in one's pursuit of God, in one's search for life with God.

Historical Context

Christian spirituality is God-centered, based on the work of the Holy Spirit in man. Christian spirituality is firmly God-centered because it is deeply rooted in the theological understanding of God's central role as the creator and sustainer of all things. Spirituality often denotes a way of life characterized by personal growth and a profound connection with the divine, leading to a transformative experience that transcends the self (Willett, 2010). It involves aligning one's existence with the divine in a manner that resonates with the essence of the divine encountered in everyday life (Van der Merwe, 2019, p. 4). The active involvement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers further emphasizes the divine connection in Christian spirituality. Ultimately, the goal of becoming more Christ-like and aligning with God's purposes underscores the centrality of God in the Christian spiritual journey.

However, human spirituality, according to John, has an anthropocentric connotation. It causes man to strive for autonomy, self-importance, and self-satisfaction. As a result, people begin to argue among themselves, envy one another, violate moral laws,

and strive for status and power. John observes that when called Christians, not all believers have completely submitted to the Spirit of God (Xu et al., 2016). Without His influence, they have acted unworthy of the title. He carefully chooses words and techniques to show the real picture. In 15:9-17, he states that one of the basic principles of the New Testament is that fruitlessness and futility bring disaster (Carson, 2020). Following John's theology, a Christian is as spiritual and whole as he is united to Christ: he loves him and those around him. Spiritual rebirth comes to a person when they respond by faith to divine revelation, accept Christ by faith, come into spiritual contact with the person of God by faith, and open their soul and heart to divine truth. The notion of spiritual wholeness and love, as described, reflects the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. Trinitarian theology emphasizes that the Holy Spirit empowers believers to love God and others, mirroring the love within the Trinity itself, where the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father (Merwe, 2019, pp. 5–7). This love is to be expressed in the Christian's relationships with both Christ and those around them.

The historical fact and the theological significance of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead must be related to an understanding of Christian spirituality, not only as some theological reasoning. It is important to compare it to the real physical and practical life of the Christian as anything but spiritual life (Adnan et al., 2020). One must remember that spirituality does not appear by itself but as a result of co-laboring with God. The Spirit of God, in turn, transforms man, of course, without violence against man, revealing his inherent potential to "love God" (Carson, 2020). These two commandments project the possibility of achieving harmony between the spiritual and the material in man and society, in the present and the future.

John's teaching on Christian spirituality in 15:9-17 can be summarized in three main parts: 1) Spirituality means the distribution of life, the distribution of prayer and silence in such a way that no day passes that we forget Him. God, by His grace, saves people and sets spiritual benchmarks; 2) We are chosen to love, and we were sent into the world to love one another. Sometimes we act as if we were sent to compete, argue, and quarrel with one another. However, a Christian must show with all his life that Christianity is about loving one another; 3) The significance of Christ's followers is that they do the Lord's work according to God's criteria and strategies. As bearers of the image of God, they have the creativity and intelligence to make creative decisions and actions.

Verse 15:9-17 allows one to speak of Christian spirituality in the workplace not directly but indirectly, and in at least three ways (Christological, pneumatologically, and human/social). First, followers of Christ connect the workplace's meanings, purposes, hopes, and achievements with Christ (Haldorai et al., 2020). The efforts of Christians are directed toward finding a spiritual connection with Christ, toward practical imitation of Christ. It is spiritual wisdom, which has a concrete practical objectification concerning the workplace, the line of work, and various situations (Dhiman et al., 2018). Secondly,

the Christian does not rely on his reason or human wisdom but on the Spirit of God who lives within him to grasp the essence of concrete actions and decisions in daily work life.

Second, due to the Spirit of God, the believer is led away from what is useful, permissible, and necessary for himself and those around him. However, this perspective on the connection between theology and spirituality becomes problematic when we acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is constantly bringing about fresh experiences and transformations in individuals and the world. It is undesirable to limit Christian spirituality solely to what is already established in theology, as numerous fields of study have significantly advanced our comprehension of Christian spirituality without necessarily adhering to theological standards as their starting point (Perrin, 2007, p. 33). This raises a valid point about the dynamic nature of Christian spirituality and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. It suggests that a rigid adherence to established theological norms may hinder the exploration of new dimensions of Christian spirituality that emerge through various academic disciplines and experiences.

Third, spiritual experience with Christ and spiritual teaching from the Spirit of God transforms a person, making him capable of loving others through diligence, wisdom, service, gratitude, excellence, charity, justice, mutual respect, responsibility, efficiency, and trust. Through the knowledge of God, one better understands oneself, one's purpose, talents, and capabilities (Najoan, 2020). As the image of God, man God's creative potential to think, evaluate, reflects the decide, and act. Therefore, term "Christian spirituality" refers to the way in which the Christian life is understood and the explicitly devotional practices which have been developed to foster and sustain that relationship with Christ. Christian spirituality may be thus understood as the way in which Christian individuals or groups aim to deepen their experience of God, or to "practice the presence of God."

The term "Christian spirituality" pertains to the comprehension of the Christian life and the intentional devotional customs established to nurture and uphold one's connection with Christ. It can be viewed as the manner in which Christians, whether individually or collectively, seek to enhance their encounter with God or actively engage in "maintaining a sense of God's presence." (McGrath, 2000, p. 3). Christianity is a way of life, where faith finds practical expression. This includes participation in Christian communities for prayer and worship, reflecting the diversity of expressions within Christianity due to geographic, cultural, and theological variations. Part of this way of life is what is termed "spirituality," a domain where personal faith experiences are explored and nurtured, fostering a deeper connection with God. In essence, Christianity is not just a set of doctrines; it's a holistic framework encompassing beliefs, values, and a lived experience that seeks to emulate the example of Jesus Christ.

Discussion of the Meaning of Spirituality and its Role in the Organization

Spirituality is inextricably linked to the workplace, and this connection can be explained as follows. In the smallest scope, this is about the relationship between employers and housekeepers in the home of a believer. Mercy towards domestic workers is a very important spiritual practice that we must undertake because it is what we are called to do. Based on Matthew 25:31-46, if we look at people who are lower in status than us as we look at the Lord Jesus Himself, who is our Savior and King, that means we must treat them as people whose status is higher than us (Jeremiah, 2013). The essence of true spirituality by recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, regardless of their societal status. Fostering relationship between all peoples reminds us to emulate the compassionate love and empathy exemplified by Jesus, fostering a more just and compassionate society.

Spirituality in the workplace can be seen as a measurable aspect of an organization's culture, harmoniously providing a sense of connection to the world through the work process (Faith & In, 2022). From this perspective, employers and employees of various organizations can be evaluated according to several criteria. Charity, productivity, humanity, integrity, fairness, reciprocity, receptivity, respect, responsibility, and trust can be distinguished among them (Neal, 2013). Speaking substantively about Christian spirituality, society faces some rather difficult questions first, whether Christian spirituality is an intrinsic aspect of work. Secondly, what makes labor and the workplace spiritual.

The conducted research and analysis of the Biblical text allow one to argue for a assumption about strong connection between labor and spirituality. In some modern theories of organizational management, there is an opinion that spirituality is a competitive element of organizations (Faith & In, 2022). In practice, however, abuse and manipulation are possible and do occur. Christian spirituality seems to be perceived and valued only for its own sake and not as a means to effectiveness and success. Spirituality is not a consumer good that individuals possess and it is not a means to organizational success (Najoan, 2020). Thinking that some material and physical indicators can measure spiritual life is unnatural. It requires a holistic approach, and its significance lies in the broader impact of spirituality in the workplace (Neal, 2013). It affects not only the quality of work performance but also discipline, professionalism, responsibility, trust, and fairness. Moreover, spirituality in the world of work seen from Calvin's perspective is very fundamental and spiritual. In his research, Hendra Winarjo emphasized work as a calling and ministry of God (Winarjo, 2023, pp. 108–114). In Christian spirituality, divine calling and ministry are closely related to true Christian spirituality. Everything starts from God and ends with God, but in the middle every believer is given the opportunity by God to participate.

Therefore, the most important thing is to understand the genuine value of spirituality. The Christian does not rely on his intellect or human wisdom but on the Spirit

of God, who dwells in him, to discern the substance of particular actions and decisions in the workplace (Winston, 2018). Through the Spirit of God, the believer is led away by what is useful, permissible, and necessary for oneself and those around. The spiritual experience of fellowship with Christ and spiritual teaching from the Spirit of God transforms a person, making him capable of loving others, showing diligence, wisdom, service, gratitude, and perfection. Through the knowledge of God, one better understands oneself, one's purpose, talents, and abilities (Winston, 2018).

Individuals must realize that organizations serve, not just provide a service. It is a search for themselves to achieve their life purpose and harness that passion. A corporate culture with a soulful atmosphere in the workplace is moving toward a new type. It empowers, values, and cultivates inclusiveness and open, honest communication and supports true teamwork and collaboration instead of competition, control, and fear. The result is less turnover, less absenteeism, higher productivity, increased profits, and increased employee loyalty. People are so much more than that which they do to get paid.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that individuals are spiritual beings with human experience. Workplace spirituality unlocks human potential, allowing people to be all they are capable of. Spirituality and the workplace are inseparable as it determines the degree to which a person realizes their full prospect and understands their mission and purpose. Thus, leaders must understand that spirituality is inextricably linked to establishing a corporate culture based on the principles of equality. At the same time, if spirituality has no place in the workplace, then the very essence of who individuals are is absent.

The historical context and the theological significance of John 15:9-17 suggest several conclusions. First, these relate to the need to relate Christian spirituality not only to theological reasoning but also to the actual physical and practical life of the Christian. Moreover, a study of the social context leads to the realization that faith, with its spiritual power, can exemplify the harmonious interaction of people toward a common goal. Surely this principle can be actively applied to labor, providing its basis and uniting people in pursuing conscious goals guided by a true purpose. Overall, spirituality can solve problems of organizational efficiency, subjective satisfaction of businessmen and employees with their work, and other pressing business problems.

It must be recognized that using Christian terminology to communicate spirituality in the workplace without clear definitions and explanations can cause misunderstandings. To avoid this, one must look for appropriate ways to communicate Christian spirituality to those employees or leaders in organizations unfamiliar with Christianity. That said, interest in spirituality in organizations is one of the significant trends in modern organizational management. At the same time, there is an active debate in the literary dimension about the similarities or differences between spirituality in the

workplace and faith at work. Thus, clarifying and exploring these concepts could be a promising and interesting topic in the context of further research.

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