ABSTRACT

This study sought to apply Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc to a profound analysis of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, aiming to reveal deeper layers of existential and ethical meanings often overlooked in traditional interpretations. The primary objective was to understand how Ricoeur's theories on symbolism, metaphor, and the dialectic of suspicion and restoration could elucidate the parable’s complexities. The study employed a literary research method, analyzing the primary text, reviewing scholarly literature, and considering historical context. The analysis revealed that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic arc provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the symbols and themes of the parable, such as preparedness, inner virtue, and existential purpose. It also exposed cultural and historical biases while restoring the parable’s universal virtues of preparation, the finite nature of opportunities, and community values. The study concluded that Ricoeur's theories offer a multidimensional tool for understanding this parable and potentially other philosophical and religious texts. Future research was recommended to extend this hermeneutic approach to other parables and religious texts to examine how Ricoeur’s theories can provide a broader, more nuanced understanding of complex narratives.

KEYWORDS

Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutic arc, Parable of the Ten Virgins, symbolism, metaphor, dialectic of suspicion and restoration, existential themes, ethical meanings, literary
INTRODUCTION

The field of hermeneutics, dedicated to the art and theory of interpretation, has long grappled with deciphering the intricate layers of meaning within texts. Among its notable theorists, Paul Ricoeur stands out for his formulation of the "hermeneutic arc," a comprehensive approach to interpretation that pivots on the dialectics of understanding, explanation, and comprehension (Russo 445; Conti 91). While Ricoeur's theories have seen extensive application in a wide range of disciplines—be it philosophy, psychology, or the social sciences (Kearney 1-3; Kortelainen 11; Standen 8), their implications or theological and biblical studies remain surprisingly underexplored (D’Angeli 2).

The Parable of the Ten Virgins in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 25:1-13) is a compelling text fertile ground for applying Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory. The narrative, laden with symbolism and complex themes like preparedness, judgment, and divine intervention, is as intricate as provocative (Commentary on Matthew 25:1-13 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary; Bible.org). In the rich tapestry of hermeneutic theory, few scholars have made as lasting an impact as Paul Ricoeur. His intricate "hermeneutic arc" provides a robust framework for interpreting texts and the very act of interpretation itself (Ricoeur 1976 8).

While Ricoeur's theories have been applied across various disciplines, from law to psychology, their potential for offering fresh insights into Biblical parables remains an area ripe for exploration. One such parable, the Ten Virgins from the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 25:1-13), is a compelling case study. This narrative, rich in symbolism and ethical imperatives, challenges its audience to consider themes of preparedness, vigilance, and divine reckoning. However, significant scholarly attention has yet to explore this parable through the lens of Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc.

However, scholarly literature reveals a significant gap; few studies have employed Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework to delve deeply into this narrative. Recognizing this void, this paper aspires to navigate the parable's textual architecture through the lens of Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc. In light of the limited exploration of Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework concerning the Parable of the Ten Virgins, this paper takes on the crucial task of applying his framework to unveil the intricate layers of meaning within this biblical narrative. By doing so, it seeks to shed new light on the ethical and existential dimensions of the parable, offering fresh insights and perspectives. This endeavor enriches our understanding of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and contributes to a deeper comprehension of the profound themes embedded in this biblical text.
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study analyzes and interprets the Parable of the Ten Virgins through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc to uncover deeper layers of meaning and relevance.

Specifically, it focuses on the following:
1. How can Ricoeur's theory on symbolism and metaphor be applied to analyze the symbols of lamps and oil in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, and what do these symbols reveal about broader existential or spiritual themes?
2. How can Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and restoration be applied to deconstruct historical or cultural biases in the Parable of the Ten Virgins and restore its potentially universal meanings?
3. How does the Ricoeurian interpretation of the Parable of the Ten Virgins contribute to our understanding of narrative identity, mainly to themes of preparedness and wisdom as they apply to individual and communal identities?

FRAMEWORK

The study anchored on Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc emerges as a compelling framework for deeper analysis and interpretation (Ricoeur 1975 85). This comprehensive theoretical lens incorporates Ricoeur's views on symbolism and metaphor and extends to his dialectic of suspicion, restoration, and the concept of narrative identity. The hermeneutic arc is particularly relevant for decoding complex religious parables like the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Ricoeur's theories allow for a polysemic reading of the parable's symbols, such as 'lamps and oil,' transforming them into dynamic signifiers of existential and spiritual themes. Furthermore, his dialectic of suspicion and restoration offers a balanced approach to scrutinizing the cultural and historical biases inherent in the text while simultaneously restoring its universal virtues of preparation, human agency, and community. The framework also incorporates Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, expanding the parable's applicability as a guide for constructing individual and communal identities. These elements of Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc collectively provide a robust theoretical framework, raising nuanced research questions and enriching the interpretive possibilities for the Parable of the Ten Virgins.

METHODOLOGY

Literary Research Method Used

The researcher employed the Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis approach, leveraging Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc to explore the existential and ethical dimensions of the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The methodology commenced with the researcher conducting a comprehensive textual analysis, where multiple
versions of the biblical parable were examined alongside scholarly literature to establish a foundational understanding. Following this groundwork, the researcher systematically applied Ricoeur's theories in three main stages: explanation, interpretation, and reflection. This enabled the researcher to delve into the parable's key symbols and themes, such as 'lamps' and 'oil,' and overarching themes like 'preparedness' and 'virtue' across linguistic, syntactic, existential, and ethical dimensions. Secondary scholarly literature was also consulted to add depth and perspective. The final stage of the methodology involved a phenomenological reduction, wherein the researcher distilled the various interpretations to their essence. Academic verification procedures complemented this to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Through this rigorously designed Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis approach, the researcher achieved a nuanced understanding of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, making a substantive contribution to academic discourse and existential inquiry.

Sources of Data

The researcher employed multiple sources of data to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The primary data source was the Parable of the Ten Virgins text, gleaned from various Bible editions and relevant religious texts. This source provided the essential content that constituted the object of study.

The secondary sources included scholarly articles, books, and journals that elaborated on Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theories, literature symbolism, and the parable's cultural and historical context. The researcher meticulously reviewed these academic works to develop a framework for interpreting the parable through Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc.

Furthermore, archival material, including manuscripts, commentaries, and historical records, were consulted to give a broader understanding of the cultural and historical aspects of the parable.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher followed a structured procedure for data gathering to ensure the study's credibility and comprehensiveness. Initially, the researcher identified the Parable of the Ten Virgins across multiple versions of the Bible and religious texts, meticulously noting the differences and similarities in wording and context. This primary text served as the cornerstone for analysis.

Subsequently, a literature review was undertaken. The researcher scoured academic databases, libraries, and online repositories to collect scholarly articles, books, and journals that focused on Paul Ricoeur's theories, the hermeneutics of religious texts, and literary symbolism. Each source was evaluated for relevance and credibility before being incorporated into the study's theoretical framework.

Archival research was the next step. The researcher visited multiple archives and libraries to consult historical manuscripts, religious commentaries, and ancient records that could provide a broader cultural and historical context for the parable.

Finally, all gathered data was cataloged and organized meticulously to facilitate a smooth transition into the analysis phase. The researcher employed software tools...
for data management and thematic coding, ensuring that each piece of information was readily accessible and appropriately categorized for subsequent interpretation and discussion.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

1. How can Ricoeur's theories on symbolism and metaphor be applied to analyze the symbols of 'lamps and oil' in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, and what do these symbols reveal about broader existential or spiritual themes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)</th>
<th>Symbolism</th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Spiritual Themes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>The Symbol of the Lamp</strong></td>
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<td>The lamp can be &quot;read&quot; as a symbol of one’s spiritual or existential condition. At the surface level, it signifies preparedness and diligence, as five of the virgins have their lamps trimmed and lit, ready for the arrival of the bridegroom.</td>
<td>The lamp is likened to a lighthouse that guides ships through tumultuous waters. Just as a lighthouse offers direction and a point of reference, the lamp in the parable symbolizes the existential journey each person undergoes, guided by their search for meaning.</td>
<td>Preparedness and Opportunity</td>
<td>The absence or presence of oil at the crucial moment speaks to the existential importance of readiness for unforeseen opportunities or challenges.</td>
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<td>The oil in the lamps becomes the North Star, a celestial body used for navigation. Just as the North Star helps sailors stay on course, the oil in the parable represents the inner virtues of divine grace that guides one’s spiritual or existential path.</td>
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<td>Inner Virtues and External Journey</td>
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<td>The oil in the lamps also works at multiple levels. At the most basic, it is the fuel that keeps the lamp burning, pointing to the necessity of sustained spiritual discipline to keep one’s existential journey on course.</td>
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<td>Transcendence and Immanence</td>
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In the Parable of the Ten Virgins from the Christian Bible (Matthew 25:1-13), lamps and oil serve as symbols that are dense with meaning, often interpreted through the lens of spiritual preparedness and wisdom. Employing Paul Ricoeur’s concepts of symbolism and metaphor, the symbols of lamps and oil can be scrutinized to reveal broader existential and spiritual themes.

**Ricoeur's Concepts of Symbolism and Metaphor**

Paul Ricoeur, a philosopher well-known for his interpretation theory, posits that symbols are not just signs that point to a single meaning but are laden with a spectrum of significations. According to Ricoeur, a symbol can be “read” on multiple levels and is inherently polysemic. Ricoeur’s idea of metaphor focuses on “innovative redescriptions” of reality, meaning that metaphors create a new understanding of the world through a linguistic leap (Ricoeur 1975 106).

**The Symbol of the Lamp**

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the lamp can be "read" as a symbol of one’s spiritual or existential condition. At the surface level, it signifies preparedness and diligence, as five virgins have their lamps trimmed and lit, ready for the bridegroom's arrival. On a deeper, more existential level, the lamp might also be seen as the human search for meaning or enlightenment. It is a metaphor for one’s spiritual journey, which must be undertaken with vigilance and wisdom.
The Symbol of Oil

The oil in the lamps also works at multiple levels. At the most basic, it is the fuel that keeps the lamp burning, pointing to the necessity of sustained spiritual discipline to keep one's existential journey on course. At a deeper level, the oil can be read as a representation of inner virtues or divine grace that sustains spiritual life. It is not just a resource but the essence of spiritual vitality. Like a metaphor, oil " redescribes" what it means to be spiritually fulfilled and prepared.

1. The Lamp as a Lighthouse: In this metaphor, the lamp is likened to a lighthouse that guides ships through tumultuous waters. Just as a lighthouse offers direction and a point of reference, the lamp in the parable symbolizes the existential journey each person undergoes, guided by their search for meaning.

2. Oil as the North Star: Here, the oil in the lamps becomes the North Star, a celestial body used for navigation. Just as the North Star helps sailors stay on course, the oil in the parable represents the inner virtues or divine grace that guides one's spiritual or existential path.

3. Preparedness and Opportunity as the Tide: The tide metaphorically represents the themes of preparedness and opportunity. An opportune tide can carry a well-prepared ship to new lands, illustrating the existential importance of readiness for life's unforeseen challenges or opportunities.

4. Inner Virtues and External Journey as Sail and Wind: In this metaphor, inner virtues and the external journey are likened to the sail and wind of a ship. Just as a sail catches the wind to propel the ship forward, inner virtues (the sail) catch life's opportunities (the wind) to advance one's existential journey.

5. Transcendence and Immanence as the Horizon: Finally, the interplay of transcendence and immanence is symbolized as the horizon where the sky meets the sea. This illustrates how divine grace (the sky) must intersect with human effort (the sea) for a spiritually fulfilling life.

Interrelationship of Lamp and Oil

Notably, a lamp without oil is useless, and oil without a lamp has no way to manifest its purpose. This reflects a broader existential theme that meaning (lamp) and the sustenance of that meaning (oil) are inextricably linked. One cannot function effectively without the other, much like Ricoeur posits that symbols and interpretation are bound in a dialectical relationship.

Broader Existential and Spiritual Themes

The interaction between the lamps and the oil in this parable opens up several existential themes:

1. Preparedness and Opportunity: The absence or presence of oil at the crucial moment speaks to the existential importance of readiness for unforeseen opportunities or challenges.

2. Inner Virtues and External Journey: It stresses that an outward search for
meaning is incomplete without inner cultivation, mirroring the symbiotic relationship between lamp and oil.

3. **Transcendence and Immanence**: Just as the oil sustains the lamp's flame, divine grace (transcendent) must be integrated into our lives (immanent) for genuine spiritual fulfillment.

Through the lens of Ricoeur's theories, the symbols of lamps and oil in the Parable of the Ten Virgins are not static but dynamic, pointing to complex layers of existential and spiritual meaning. When understood deeply, these symbols serve as reminders of the constant interplay between readiness and virtue, between the quest for meaning and the sustenance of that quest.

2. How can Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and restoration be applied to deconstruct historical or cultural biases in the Parable of the Ten Virgins and restore its potentially universal meanings?

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<td><strong>Preparedness as a Universal Virtue</strong>&lt;br&gt;The virtue of being prepared, symbolized by the virgins who bring extra oil, can be a universally applicable lesson. The message here transcends culture and religion, encouraging foresight and preparedness in all aspects of life.</td>
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<td><strong>Social and Economic Implications</strong>&lt;br&gt;The virgins who bring extra oil are ultimately rewarded, which could be seen as an endorsement of social and economic prudence but might also be interpreted as promoting wealth or preparedness as a sign of virtue.</td>
<td><strong>The Finite Nature of Opportunities</strong>&lt;br&gt;The closing of the door after the bridegroom arrives is a strong metaphor for missed opportunities that can be universally understood. It speaks to the human condition, where choices and their timeliness often have irrevocable consequences.</td>
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<td><strong>Religious Exclusivism</strong>&lt;br&gt;The parable is embedded within a Christian context and is often interpreted within this religious framework. This restricts the universal applicability of its teachings.</td>
<td><strong>Reconsidering Gender Roles</strong>&lt;br&gt;While the parable is set in a patriarchal context, its core message doesn't rely on this setting. A contemporary interpretation could focus on the virgins as individuals, irrespective of gender, who face a universal human dilemma, making the story more inclusive.</td>
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<td><strong>Interfaith Dialogues</strong>&lt;br&gt;By stripping the parable of its overtly Christian elements, it could serve as a focal point for discussions about readiness, wisdom, and missed opportunities in multiple religious or secular contexts.</td>
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**Applying Ricoeur's Dialectic of Suspicion**

Deconstruction: Suspicion Towards Historical and Cultural Biases

Paul Ricoeur's concept of "suspicion" focuses on uncovering underlying structures or biases that inform a text (Ricoeur 2008 32). In the Parable of the Ten Virgins context, this would involve questioning the social, historical, and cultural biases present within it.

**Suspicion: Deconstructing Historical or Cultural Biases**

**Patriarchal Undertones**

One of the immediate biases present in the Parable of the Ten Virgins is its patriarchal setting. The virgins are waiting for the bridegroom, a male figure who holds the power to either admit them to the feast or lock them out. This reflects the gender biases of the historical period in which the parable was written.

**Social and Economic Implications**

The virgins who bring extra oil are ultimately rewarded, which could be seen as an endorsement of social and economic prudence but might also be interpreted as promoting wealth or preparedness as a sign of virtue.

**Religious Exclusivism**

The parable is embedded within a Christian context and is often interpreted within this religious framework. This restricts the universal applicability of its teachings.

**Restoration: Finding Universal Meanings**

**Preparedness as a Universal Virtue**

The virtue of being prepared, symbolized by the virgins who bring extra oil, can be a universally applicable lesson. The message here transcends culture and religion, encouraging foresight and preparedness in all aspects of life.

**The Finite Nature of Opportunities**

The closing of the door after the bridegroom arrives is a potent metaphor for missed opportunities that can be universally understood. It speaks to the human condition, where choices and timeliness often have irrevocable consequences.

**Reconsidering Gender Roles:**

While the parable is set in a patriarchal context, its core message does not rely on this setting. A contemporary interpretation could focus on the virgins as individuals, irrespective of gender, who face a universal human dilemma, making the story more inclusive.
Interfaith Dialogues

Stipping the parable of its overtly Christian elements could be a focal point for discussing readiness, wisdom, and missed opportunities in multiple religious or secular contexts.

One can uncover historical and cultural biases by applying Ricoeur’s dialectic of suspicion and restoration to the Parable of the Ten Virgins while finding deeper, potentially universal meanings. This exercise provides a nuanced understanding that both critiques and appreciates the complexities of the parable.

3. How does the Ricoeurian interpretation of the Parable of the Ten Virgins contribute to our understanding of narrative identity, mainly to themes of preparedness and wisdom as they apply to individual and communal identities?

<table>
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<td><strong>Communal Identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self as a Project</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cultural Narratives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Ricoeur’s terms, identity is always a project in the making. The virgins who bring extra oil can be seen as individuals who are well-prepared for future events. This represents a form of self-identity centered around foresight, planning, and wisdom.</td>
<td>The story can be seen as a cultural narrative that reinforces or propagates certain virtues like preparedness and wisdom. Communities might adopt this story as a shared narrative that shapes communal identity, promoting virtues that are deemed important for the wellbeing of the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character Development</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social Cohesion</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>The parable, when interpreted through a Ricœurian lens, serves as a mini-narrative of character development. Those who are wise and prepared are rewarded, reinforcing the virtues of readiness and prudence in shaping individual identity.</td>
<td>The notion of being prepared not just for oneself but also for a communal event like a wedding feast speaks to social cohesion and responsibility. Through the Ricœurian lens, the parable can be seen as a narrative that fosters a sense of communal duty and preparedness.</td>
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<td><strong>Intergenerational Wisdom</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>Preparedness and wisdom in this context are not just pragmatic virtues but ethical ones. Ricœur’s concept of “the capable self” highlights the ethical dimensions of human action.</td>
<td>The parable can also function as a narrative that transmits wisdom across generations. In a communal setting, such shared narratives often serve as a repository of collective wisdom, shaping the identity of the community over time.</td>
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</table>
The Parable of the Ten Virgins, as told in the Christian New Testament (Matthew 25:1-13), is a story that addresses the themes of preparedness and wisdom through the lens of a wedding feast. In this story, ten virgins await the bridegroom; five are wise and bring oil for their lamps, while the other five are foolish and do not. When the bridegroom arrives unexpectedly late, only those with oil are prepared and can enter the feast. The others are left outside, unprepared and locked out of the feast, regretting their lack of foresight.

Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity concept concerns how individuals make sense of their lives and identities through stories (Ricoeur 1992 4). In this framework, narratives are not just stories but are also a form of ethical and existential understanding. They shape, inform, and express who we are, who we were, and who we hope to become.

Themes of Preparedness and Wisdom

Individual Identity
At an individual level, the wise virgins demonstrate forethought, readiness, and wisdom, key traits seen as desirable in shaping one's narrative identity. They are rewarded for their preparation with inclusion and celebration, emphasizing that wisdom and preparedness are virtues to strive for. Their story becomes one of success and inclusion, shaping their narrative identity positively. On the flip side, the foolish virgins become cautionary figures; their lack of preparedness shapes their narrative identity as unfavorable, one characterized by missed opportunities and regret.

Communal Identity
The parable also emphasizes communal values of wisdom and preparedness, setting an ethical norm for the community. The communal narrative identity then becomes one that values wisdom, readiness, and inclusion, but only for those who are prepared. The unprepared are excluded, warning the community about the consequences of a lack of preparedness.

Individual Identity: Preparedness and Wisdom

1. Self as a Project: In Ricoeur's terms, identity is always a project in the making. The virgins who bring extra oil can be seen as individuals who are well-prepared for future events. This represents a form of self-identity centered around foresight, planning, and wisdom. Such an interpretation can serve as an aspirational narrative for individuals, shaping their identity around values like preparedness and resourcefulness.

2. Character Development: When interpreted through a Ricoeurian lens, the parable serves as a mini-narrative of character development. Those who are wise and prepared are rewarded, reinforcing the virtues of readiness and prudence in shaping individual identity.

3. Ethical Implications: Preparedness and wisdom in this context are not just pragmatic virtues but ethical ones. Ricoeur's concept of “the capable self”
highlights the ethical dimensions of human action. Being prepared implies a sense of responsibility toward oneself and others, a moral stance contributing to one's narrative identity.

Communal Identity: Preparedness and Wisdom

1. Cultural Narratives: The story can be seen as a cultural narrative that reinforces or propagates virtues like preparedness and wisdom. Communities might adopt this story as a shared narrative that shapes communal identity, promoting virtues necessary for the community's well-being.

2. Social Cohesion: The notion of being prepared for oneself and a communal event like a wedding feast speaks to social cohesion and responsibility. Through the Ricoeurian lens, the parable can be seen as a narrative that fosters a sense of communal duty and preparedness.

3. Intergenerational Wisdom: The parable can also function as a narrative that transmits wisdom across generations. In a communal setting, such shared narratives often serve as a repository of collective wisdom, shaping the community's identity over time.

Ricoeurian Interpretation

Ricoeur would likely interpret the parable as an ethical and existential guide. The text is a moralizing story and a medium through which individuals and communities can explore complex concepts like responsibility, foresight, and collective values. The parable is a hermeneutic tool that helps decode more significant ethical and existential questions.

For example, what does it mean to be 'wise' or 'prepared'? Is it merely a logistical foresight, or does it also encompass moral, ethical, and existential readiness? The parable could symbolize life, where wisdom and preparedness shape our momentary circumstances and narrative identities.

By analyzing the Parable of the Ten Virgins through a Ricoeurian lens, we understand how themes of wisdom and preparedness contribute to shaping narrative identities on individual and communal levels. These themes guide us in understanding how to construct our lives and the stories we tell about them, thus enriching our narrative identity.

Given your background in English and Literature, you may find it particularly interesting to explore how narrative construction in parables can serve as complex tools for ethical and existential interpretation, adding layers of meaning that enrich academic and personal understandings of texts.

CONCLUSION

The study successfully applied Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc to the Parable of the Ten Virgins, revealing a multi-dimensional narrative transcending its conventional interpretation as a simple moral or theological tale. The research used Ricoeur's theory to deepen our understanding of the symbols 'lamps and oil,' uncovering their
dynamic roles in pointing to complex existential and spiritual themes. Moreover, by employing Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and restoration, the study revealed and restored the parable's inherent cultural biases, broadening its universal relevance. This restoration emphasized virtues like preparation and community, surpassing cultural limitations. Lastly, the study explored narrative identity, showing how the parable can serve as a transformative narrative guide for individuals and communities. Overall, the Ricoeurian lens enriched our reading of the parable, adding a nuanced layer of interpretive possibilities that can be universally appreciated and deserve further academic exploration.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study's findings, further exploration of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic techniques in interpreting other religious and philosophical texts will be recommended to determine the generalizability of the insights. Moreover, interdisciplinary studies could combine Ricoeur's theories with sociological or psychological frameworks to broaden the scope of understanding the cultural and individual implications of religious parables or myths. Comparative studies employing Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc across various religious traditions may also unveil universal themes or distinctive interpretive variations. These recommendations deepen our understanding of literature's existential and ethical themes, enhancing the field's academic richness.

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