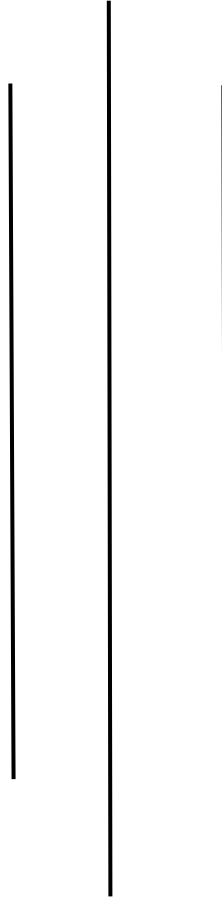


***Sanctification and Good Works in the Evangelical Presbyterian
Church of Sikkim***



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Sanctification and Good Works in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim

A Thesis for the requirement of the Course

Master of Intercultural Reformed Theology (MIRT)

By

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Submitted To

Dr. Jos Colijn

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For the Glory of God Alone

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------|--|
| EPCS | Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim |
| Institute | John Calvin. <i>The Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> . Translated by John T. McNeill. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. |
| WCF | Westminster Confession of Faith |
| Gal. | Galatians |
| Rom. | Romans |
| CNI | Church of North India |

Preface

Research Interest

In this research, I want to explore the concept of sanctification within the EPCS¹ through three lenses: empirical fieldwork among EPCS members, the Hindu understanding of sanctification, and the Reformed tradition, particularly as expressed in the teachings of John Calvin and the WCF. The study aims to examine how local Hindu ideas, especially the emphasis on good works as a means of purification, may have influenced the EPCS believers' understanding of sanctification

In terms of sanctification, the WCF teaches that our good works, though they are the fruit of sanctification, can never be sufficient to earn salvation. Therefore, they are not the foundation of our assurance, but rather come from God's Spirit as sanctifying work of God's grace in the believer's life.

“We cannot by our best works merit forgiveness of sin or eternal life at the hand of God. This is so because of the great disproportion between our best works and the glory to come. In addition, because of the infinite distance between us and God, our best works can neither profit God nor pay the debt of our former sins, for when we have done all we can, we have only done our duty and are unprofitable servants. Moreover, the goodness in our best works comes from God's Spirit, not from us, while the good works done by us are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot meet the searching standard of God's judgment (WCF 16:5).”²

David Dickson explains that no matter how excellent a person's actions may be, they can never earn God's grace or place Him under obligation, because according to divine justice, God cannot receive any benefit from His creatures (Psalm 16:2; Job 22:2–3). Since merit implies that a benefit has been given and accepted, and we cannot give God anything He needs, there can be no true merit in our works for God's grace. Our good works remain influenced by sin, both in quality and in completeness (Galatians 5:17; Isaiah 64:6-7; Deuteronomy 27:26).³ Dickson, citing Anthony Tuckney, emphasizes that good works are

¹ The EPCS is the largest Christian denomination in Sikkim. It is overseen by the Council of EPCS, which oversees more than 150 churches across the region.

² Rowland S. Ward, ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Lansvale: Tulip Publishing, 2021), 122.

³ David Dickson, *Truth's Victory Over Error: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 104.

necessary not as the cause of salvation, but work of the Holy Spirit. In the process of sanctification, these good works are the outward evidence of the believer's inward transformation. They do not achieve salvation but are the means through which salvation is lived out and demonstrated in a believer's daily walk.⁴ Hence, merit, which refers to earning God's grace, is impossible because God gains no benefit from our works. No matter how good our works may appear, they are corrupted by sin; therefore, we cannot earn salvation through them.

The EPCS, where I grew up, subscribes to the Westminster Standards, yet it does not actively teach or emphasize the Confession's doctrine of sanctification. Instead, within the EPCS, teaching elders, ruling elders, and congregation members place significant emphasis on good works as a means for achieving sanctification by human effort and as a condition for salvation. I am interested in exploring the roots of this emphasis on good works. One likely explanation is the influence of the surrounding Hindu context, from which many church members have converted. To gain deeper insight, I plan to study the concept of sanctification both in Hindu thought and in the Reformed theology, in order to compare them and to develop ways to more effectively communicate Reformed teaching on sanctification within the cultural and religious framework of Sikkim's Hindu background.

Problem Description

Sikkim is situated in the eastern Himalayas, below Mt. Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak. Bordered by Nepal in the west, China in the north, and Bhutan in the southeast. It became a part of the Indian Union in 1975.⁵ The first missionaries to preach the Gospel in the state of Sikkim were Scottish missionaries from the Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland. Their work in the 19th and 20th centuries established the Christian religion, more specifically, Presbyterianism.⁶ Historically, the EPCS was born from the mission work of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Church's *Blue Book*⁷ states that we follow John

⁴ Dickson, *Truth's Victory Over Error: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 282

⁵ D.R. Nepal, *Rural Sikkim: Towards Sustainable Development towards Holistic Growth* (Gangtok: Rural Management and Development Department, Government of Sikkim, 2016), 5.

⁶ Cindy L. Perry, *Nepali around the World* (Kathmandu: Ekta Book House, 1997), 94.

⁷ *The Blue Book of the EPCS* includes the core doctrines and confessions of the EPCS. The book affirms the teachings of John Calvin and holds to the Reformed confessions, particularly the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. It describes the EPCS's three-tier system of church government—local session, presbytery, and general council—and provides detailed procedures for the ordination of pastors, probationary pastors, and elders. It also includes policies on church membership, discipline, and the spiritual responsibilities of ordained officers.

Calvin's teachings and the WCF. However, in reality, believers do not know about the teachings of Calvin and the WCF, especially regarding the doctrine of sanctification. In the EPCS, sanctification is something that many believers struggle with, and many have questions about it. There is much confusion about the subject in our churches.

The predominant religion in Sikkim is Hinduism, and many members of the Presbyterian community have converted from this religion. As a religious minority, Presbyterian believers continue to share much of their social and cultural life with their Hindu neighbours. In Hindu practice, sanctification or spiritual purification is often pursued through good deeds and rituals such as visiting temples early in the morning for fasting and prayer, undertaking pilgrimages to the sacred places to attain spiritual liberation (moksha), and performing ritual acts like sprinkling holy water from the Ganges in their homes to purify their surroundings.

The understanding and practice of good deeds in Hinduism seems to significantly influence the perspective of local Christians, including those within the Presbyterian community. As a result, the believers often place their confidence in good works as the means of sanctification, rather than relying on the sanctifying grace of God. This emphasis can lead to confusion and spiritual insecurity, with believers frequently struggling to find assurance in their sanctified standing before God. In this context, it is valuable to explore the concept of sanctification from both Hindu and Reformed theological perspectives and to reflect on these teachings through an intercultural lens to help members of EPCS to appropriate the understanding of sanctification in the Reformed tradition and find assurance in God's grace. Therefore, I want to study the concept of sanctification in Hinduism and the classical Reformed tradition – Calvin and the WCF.

Relevance of the Topic for the Context of the Researcher

The mainline church in Sikkim, such as the EPCS, has only twenty-four pastors, the majority of whom have not received formal theological training. A small number have studied theology at the bachelor's level, and only a few hold a master's degree. To date, no theological writings have been produced in the local language or cultural context addressing this issue. During major Hindu festivals such as Dasara and Diwali, many Christians participate due to close family ties, as it is common for joint families to include both Hindu and Christian members. In this setting, I have observed that church leaders often preach sanctification as something achieved through good deeds, and believers have adopted this understanding. However, many of them experience spiritual dryness, lack the joy of Christian

living, and struggle with the assurance of salvation through their sanctified life. For these reasons, the doctrine of sanctification holds great significance within the EPCS context. By God's grace, having had the opportunity to study at Theological University Utrecht, I am motivated to write on this topic to serve both the leaders and believers in my home community.

Main Research Question

What can we learn from a comparison between the concepts of sanctification in Hinduism and classical Reformed theology (Calvin and WCF) for the teaching of the doctrine of sanctification in the EPCS?

Sub-questions

1. What is the socio-religious context of EPCS?
2. What perspectives do EPCS leaders hold regarding sanctification?
3. What perspectives do EPCS members hold regarding sanctification?
4. What is the classical Reformed perspective (Calvin and WCF) on the concept of sanctification?
5. What is the concept of sanctification in Hinduism?
6. To what extent and how does the Hindu concept of sanctification influence EPCS members?
7. What would be the theological guidelines for preaching the Reformed doctrine of sanctification in the EPCS?

Research Methodology

The subject of sanctification will be analysed from both theological and religious perspectives. The research will employ questionnaires for conducting interviews, which will provide an understanding of leaders' and the congregation's perspectives on the concept of sanctification. I will explore the Hindu concept of sanctification and the Reformed concept of sanctification with particular emphasis on the works of Calvin and the WCF. The study will incorporate various authors' writings on the Hindu concept of sanctification. For the WCF, I will examine exposition commentaries authored by different scholars, while my primary focus for Calvin will be on the Institutes of the Christian Religion, supplemented by secondary sources authored by various writers on Calvin's theology. I also want to get a clear idea about the understanding of the teaching of sanctification by pastors and elders, and

church members of the EPCS. Therefore, the questionnaire will be directed to both leaders and congregation members. For the congregation members, I will distribute a structured questionnaire among the members of the EPCS after the Sunday Divine service.⁸ For the leaders, I will conduct personal interviews with eight individuals, comprising four pastors and four senior elders. In the EPCS context, believers respect their leaders because they believe that they are anointed by God to take care of the body of Christ, and trust their teachings. In an intercultural dialogue, I will analyse the responses of the ordinary believers from the questionnaire alongside sermons from pastors and relevant literature, engaging in a discussion that includes the Hindu view, Calvin's view, and the WCF.

I will use the appropriation model (Believing-Belonging-Behaving-Experiencing) for comparing the materials from chapters two to five for the sixth chapter. The appropriation comes from the Latin "appropriare," meaning "to make one's own." This model refers to using words, ideas, objects, or practices outside their original context, giving them new meanings while retaining their original sense.⁹ Jos Colijn's research model, known as the BBBE model, comprises four key aspects of appropriation: Believing, Belonging, Behaving, and Experiencing. Believing involves knowing, affirming, and trusting, whereas belonging encompasses the social and spiritual relationships between parents and children, and with the Christian church. There are two aspects of belonging: the social (horizontal) and the spiritual (vertical). The social aspect refers to the natural relationships within families, communities, and society, as well as affiliation with a local Christian church, Christianity, or other religions. The vertical aspect represents the spiritual relationship between believing parents and their children with the Triune God. Behaving refers to rites, practices, traditions, and morality in personal and communal life. Experiencing refers to people's deeper perceptions of themselves, their relationship to God, and their interactions with Christian believers or non-Christians around them. It is about habits of the heart, spirituality, and religious feelings.¹⁰

Positionality of the Researcher

As a researcher, I am not entirely unfamiliar with the Hindu religious system, having been born and raised in an orthodox Hindu family. After being introduced to Christianity, I began

⁸ The Sunday service done in the EPCS called the Sunday Divine service.

⁹ Jos Colijn, *Testing the Waters, Infant Baptism as a Case Study for Doing Reformed Theology Interculturally*, Ph.D. Thesis (n.p. and n.d.), 2023, 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

reading the Bible and later studied the *Blue Book* of our church. As a recent convert, I was initially confused by the fact that many believers based their assurance of salvation on good deeds. This was particularly striking to me because, in Hinduism, sanctification, or spiritual purification, is also pursued through numerous rituals and good works aimed at achieving moksha. This similarity made it difficult for me to grasp the biblical concept of sanctification, especially since many believers also seemed to struggle with the assurance of salvation through a sanctified life. Among EPCS believers, a parallel to Hindu thought is evident in their understanding of sanctification. Hypothetically, this research may help me better understand both Hindu and Reformed teachings on sanctification. Such a study could reveal how Hindu practices and beliefs influence Christian life in the EPCS context. Ultimately, this research aims to guide believers in EPCS in deepening their understanding of sanctification and applying sound Christian doctrine in their lives. It seeks to empower them to live with confidence, joy, and assurance in their spiritual growth and sanctification as a gracious gift from God.

Content Indication per Chapter

This thesis will be structured into seven major chapters, along with an introduction. The Introduction will provide an overview of the research problem, including the main research question and its sub-questions. The first chapter will present the socio-religious context of the EPCS. The second chapter will explore the concept of sanctification among EPCS leaders. The third chapter will examine the idea of sanctification among EPCS believers. The fourth chapter will explore the Hindu Concept of Sanctification. The fifth chapter will focus on the Reformed understanding of sanctification, specifically examining Calvin and the WCF, as these are pertinent to our *Blue Book*. The sixth chapter will engage in intercultural conversation, incorporating theological perspectives from interviews with leaders (formal voice), the congregation (espoused voice), formal Indian theology (including insights from pastors' sermons and Indian publications), Hindu concepts, formal Western theology (Calvin), and normative theology (WCF). Finally, the seventh chapter will present the conclusions of the study along with the guidelines for preaching the Reformed doctrine of sanctification in the EPCS.

Chapter One

Socio-Religious Context of EPCS

1.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the socio-religious landscape of Sikkim, formally known as Sukhim, to understand the context in which the EPCS emerged and evolved. The investigation is guided by the main question: What is the socio-religious context of EPCS in Sikkim? This will be examined through sub-questions: What ethnic communities shape this context? How did Hinduism and Christianity develop in the region? And what are the attitudes of Hindus toward Christians? How does Hinduism influence Christianity? By examining the historical and religious dynamics of Sikkim, including the role of missionaries and inter-religious perceptions, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding.

1.2. Religious Demographics of Sikkim

In Sikkim, Hinduism is the predominant religion, encompassing 57.76% of the state's population, followed by Buddhism at 27.39% and Christianity at 9.91%.¹¹ This demographic pattern highlights the strong presence of Hinduism in the region. Notably, the majority of individuals who convert to Christianity in Sikkim come from Hindu backgrounds. In contrast, conversions from Buddhism to Christianity are relatively rare due to Buddhism's limited presence in Sikkim. As a result, examining the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, especially in terms of beliefs about sanctification, provides a deeper and more contextually meaningful area of study than focusing on Buddhism or other smaller religions.¹²

¹¹Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, C-01: Population by Religious Community, Sikkim - 2011, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/11391>. Accessed on 8 June, 2025.

¹²Centre for Policy Studies, "Christianity among the Scheduled Tribes of the Northeast: Assam and Sikkim," June 2023, <https://cpsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Blog-29-Northeast-ST-As-Tr-Sik.pdf>. Accessed on 8 June, 2025

1.3. Geographical Situation

Sikkim, which comes from the Yakthung language meaning “new house/place,”¹³ is situated in the Eastern Himalayas below Mt. Kanchenjunga. Bordering Nepal in the west, China in the north, and Bhutan in the southeast, it maintains continuity with India in the south, where it shares its border with the neighbouring state of West Bengal. It became a part of the Indian Union in 1975. It covers a total land area of 7,096 square kilometres. Though it is the second smallest state in India, it is one of the most geographically diverse states in the entire country.¹⁴

1.3.1. People

The population of Sikkim is 679,366 according to the 2021 census.¹⁵ Sikkim is a multi-ethnic state. The four predominant communities are Yakthung (Limbu/Tsong), Rong (Lepcha), Tibetan (Bhutia), and Nepalese (Nepali).¹⁶

1.3.1.1. Yakthung

Yakthung is an endonym term, and while they speak their language, “Yakthungpān,” they call themselves “Yakthung.”¹⁷ Yakthung is the only native/primitive tribe in Sikkim, along with the Rong tribe, that has its own script known as the “Yakthung Sirijanga”¹⁸ Script.” The Rong tribe calls them by the name “Chong/Chung.”¹⁹ However, when Tibetans immigrated to Sikkim, they pronounced “Chong/Chung” as “Tsong.”²⁰ Yakthungs are believed to be of Mongoloid descent. They are the original inhabitants of Sikkim, as their life and culture, and *Mundhum* revolve around the geography of Sikkim, and its mountains and rivers, which are considered their sacred deities. *Mundhum*, as Subba says, is for Yakthung “what the Bible is for the Christian, Quran for the Muslims, Tripitaka/Pecha for the

¹³ Buddhi L. Khamdhak, “The Sikkimese Limboo: A Historical Retrospection,” <https://buddhilkhamdhak.blogspot.com/p/the-sikkimese-limboo-historical.html/> accessed on July 7, 2025. Also see Robert William Lepcha, “The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim” (Unpublished M.Div. Thesis, Presbyterian Theological Seminary Dehradun, 2025), 1.

¹⁴ D.R. Nepal, *Rural Sikkim: Towards Sustainable Development towards Holistic Growth* (Gangtok: Rural Management and Development Department, Government of Sikkim, 2016), 5.

¹⁵ <https://www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/sikkim-population.html> (accessed on 26 May 2025)

¹⁶ Lepcha, “The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim,” 1. Also see Sunita Kharel and Jigme Wangchuk Bhutia eds., *Gazetteer of Sikkim* (Gangtok: Home Department, Govt of Sikkim, 2013), 115. Also see, Prasan Subba, “Disability and the Image of God: Understanding the Image of God in People with Disabilities” (Unpublished M.Div. thesis, Presbyterian Theological Seminary Dehradun, 2025), 43.

¹⁷ Lepcha, “The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim,” 3.

¹⁸ Some Yakthungs and non-Yakthung scholars spell “Sirijanga” as “Sirijunga.”

¹⁹ Lepcha, “The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim,” 3.

²⁰ Tamling Sarojini Subba, *The Cleaved Kingdom: Unveiling the Myths of Limbuwan & Sukhim* (Darjeeling: Bukrant, 2025), 44.

Buddhists, Agam Sutra for Jains, and Zend Avesta for Parsis.” She further writes, “Mundhum is poetical lyrical oral incantations passed down from generation to generation by the Shamans/priests of the autochthonous Limbu [Yakthung] Tribe of the Eastern Himalayas.”²¹ As Yakthung are animistic-shamanistic in their religion. However, when Buddhism was brought to their native land by Tibetans, the Yakthung were heavily influenced. Later, they were exposed to Hinduism when Hinduism arrived in Sikkim.

1.3.1.2. Rong

Rong is an endonym term, and while they speak their language, “Rongring,” they call themselves “Rong.”²² Rong, along with Yakthung, is the only native tribe that has their own script known as “Rongchyo.” The Yakthung tribe calls them by the name “Lepcha.”²³ The Rongs are the original inhabitants of Sikkim, along with the Yakthung tribe. R.K. Spring says, “The Limboo [Yakthung] were living in Sikkim before there was Sikkim for them to live in.”²⁴ Tamling Sarojini Subba adds, “And the Lepcha [Rong] and Limbu/Chong/Tsong [Yakthung] were living in Sikkim before there was a Sikkim for the Tibeto-Sikkimese and Namgyal Dynasty to claim and rule.”²⁵ Rongs are believed to be of Mongoloid descent. They are the original inhabitants of Sikkim, along with the Yakthung tribe, as their life and culture revolve around the Kanchenjunga Mountain and the rivers, which are considered their sacred deities. The Rong are animistic-shamanistic in their religion. However, they came to be heavily influenced by the Buddhism brought by the Tibetan rulers who came from Tibet.²⁶ Later, they came into contact with Hinduism when Hinduism came to Sikkim.

1.3.1.3. Tibetan

Tibetan, also known as Bhutia, is said to have originally immigrated from Tibet during the 16th Century. The name Bhutia, sometimes spelled and pronounced as Bhotia, is derived from their original habitat, ‘Bhot’ (Tibet). The Tibetans are followers of Buddhism. Community life of the them is organised around local Gompa or monasteries. The Gompa is normally situated at the hilltop overlooking the valley and studded with forests. Around the Gompa, outside the grounds, are clustered households which normally supply professional

²¹ Subba, *The Cleaved Kingdom: Unveiling the Myths of Limbuwan & Sukhim*, 29.

²² Lepcha, “The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim,” 3.

²³ Jewel Lepcha, “Advancement of Christianity in Lepcha Community of Sikkim and Kalimpong (West Bengal)” (Unpublished M.Div. Thesis, Presbyterian Theological Seminary Dehradun, 2024), 2.

²⁴ Cited in Kausila Subba, “A Comparative Study of Limboo and Bhutia Tribes in Sikkim, 1974-2014,” (Dissertation: Department of Political Science, Sikkim University, 2016), 5.

²⁵ Subba, *The Cleaved Kingdom: Unveiling the Myths of Limbuwan & Sukhim*, 189.

²⁶ Dick B. Dewan, *Education in Sikkim an Historical Retrospect: Pre- Merger and Post- Merger Period* (Kalimpong: Tender Buds Academy, 2012), 59-60.

priests to the Gompa, and further below are the households which engage mainly in cultivation. Every household ritual, marriage, birth, death ceremonies, and agricultural rites are conducted by the lamas from the Gompas.²⁷

1.3.1.4. Nepalese

The Nepalese are the latest of the major groups of people to settle in Sikkim. They are follower of the Hindu religion. The Nepalese settlement was the result of the rise of Nepalese power in Sikkim during the latter part of the 18th century, as well as of the British favour for them. The British needed more Nepalese labour to develop Sikkim's communication network for access to Tibet. So, their settlement in Sikkim was encouraged by the British. Today, Nepalese are the major group in Sikkim.²⁸

1.4. Development of Religious Pluralism in Sikkim

1.4.1. Hinduism

With the immigration of Tibetans (Bhutias), Sikkim was exposed to Buddhism. At the end of the 18th century, many Nepalese immigrated to Sikkim because the British favoured them. They were Hindus in their religious practice. With the settlement of the Hindus, several temples referred to as mandirs were built under the patronage of the Newars. The Newars were businessmen who built temples of Shiva in different places in Sikkim. The oldest of which is the Shivalaya, or the temple of Lord Shiva at Rongli in East Sikkim. The Marwari businessmen and other plainsmen also built a large number of temples in the bazaar areas, which became places of worship and were called Thakur Bari. The Hindus consist mainly of the Aryans, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Newars, Rai, and Marwari, but people belonging to other communities have also embraced Hinduism. There are a total of 217 temples in all six districts in Sikkim. Sikkim has the largest Hindu population compared to other religions in the state.²⁹ In every Hindu temple, there is a purohit³⁰ who performs rituals for the Hindu community. When people fall ill, they often consult the priest, who conducts sacred rituals,

²⁷ B.K. Roy, *Human ecology and Statutory status of ethnic entities in Sikkim* (Gangtok: Department of Information and Public, 2017), 57-59.

²⁸ B.S Das, *The Sikkim Saga* (Delhi: Vikash Publishing House, 1983), 5.

²⁹ Sunita Kharel, Jigme Wangchuk Bhutia eds., *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, 194-195.

³⁰ In the Nepali language, the word "Purohit" typically refers to a priest, especially one who performs Hindu religious rituals such as pujas, weddings, funerals, and other rites.

offers prayers, and provides holy water and a small amount of rice, typically accompanied by a mantra.³¹

Recently, due to the dominance of Hinduism, Sikkim has become an important pilgrimage hub, particularly with the development of Siddhesvara Dham. This unique pilgrimage tourism venture, developed by the Sikkim government, is a ‘Pilgrim cum Cultural Heritage Centre’ that showcases replicas of India’s four sacred Char Dham temples in one place. Char Dham, literally meaning “the four abodes,” refers to four highly revered pilgrimage sites in India that Hindus consider sacred to visit during their lifetime. Siddhesvara Dham attracted 359,888 tourists (domestic and international) every year.³²

1.5. Christianity

1.5.1. Early Mission Work in Sikkim

John Calvin,³³ regarded as the founder of the Reformed faith, emphasized the absolute sovereignty of God over all creation and upheld Scripture as the supreme authority in matters of faith. He was a consistent thinker, deeply rooted in God’s Word.³⁴ His teachings greatly influenced John Knox of Scotland. Knox fled to Geneva to escape persecution, but upon returning to Scotland, he preached the Reformed faith and the Gospel with great conviction.³⁵

From this small country, Scotland, thousands of missionaries were sent out to preach the Gospel and their Reformed faith worldwide. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland dispatched missionaries through its mission wing, the Foreign Mission Committee, to work in North India, specifically Bihar. In 1865, they sent William Macfarlane to assist Rev. Alexander Clark at the Gaya Mission field in Bihar. But the mission did not bear any fruit. So, the Foreign Mission Committee requested Macfarlane to find a new place to work. After five years in Gaya in 1870, Macfarlane went to Darjeeling, where he bought a piece of land and started a school and a press. In 1873, he went to Kalimpong along with two teachers and

³¹ResearchGate, “Socio-cultural and religious use of plants by ethnic communities of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas,” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348714586_Socio-cultural_and_religious_use_of_plants_by_ethnic_communities_of_Darjeeling_and_Sikkim_Himalayas. Accessed May 23, 2025

³² Royal Rai, “Namchi-Siddhesvara Dham, A unique Pilgrimage Tourism venture of Sikkim”, <https://ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR21C2164.pdf> accessed on 23rd May 2025.

³³ The church constitution states that we follow John Calvin’s teachings; that is why I begin with Calvin.

³⁴ Godwin Justus, “Zeal for History” <https://sithri.blogspot.com/2017/03/reformation-zwingli-john-knox-and-calvin.html> accessed on 23rd May 2025.

³⁵ Kyle and Johnson (2009) John Knox. [edition unavailable]. Wipf and Stock. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/879093> (Accessed: 26 May 2025).

opened a school, which was the first school in Kalimpong. Macfarlane became interested in the neighbouring kingdom of Sikkim, which was ruled by Thutob Namgyal, but by 1878, the work became so extensive that he could not cover it alone. Therefore, he requested that more missionaries be sent to the field. At the request of William Macfarlane, the Church of Scotland sent more missionaries to the region. Rev. Archibald was put in charge of the Darjeeling field, while Rev. Sutherland was designated for the Sikkim mission field. In 1880, Rev. W.S. Sutherland made his trip to Tumlong to try and secure permission from the Raja of Sikkim for missionaries to settle in his territory to preach the Gospel.³⁶

The king was willing to permit a school if the school would be started by native workers, but the missionary was not allowed to settle permanently in Sikkim, nor were missionaries permitted to preach the Gospel. However, Rev. Sutherland was not discouraged but persisted as an optimist, hoping that the king would grant permission in the near future. However, in God's grace, in 1890, the foreign missionaries in residence were permitted by the government. Then Rev. Sutherland was deputed to take up the Independent Sikkim Division. In November 1890, with a tent and provisions in hand, he came to his newly assigned area, with the intent of starting a school in Phukamden (now known as Daramdin) in western Sikkim. He was accompanied by a Christian teacher, Gambu Lepcha, from the Rong tribe, and Buddhiman Limboo, from the Yakthung tribe.³⁷ Lepcha writes, "Men like Gombu Lepcha, the first catechist and founder of Thambong Church, and Buddhiman Limboo, who was sent to assist him, were among the early fruits of this mission."³⁸ They played a crucial role in spreading Christianity and strengthening the churches in Sikkim.³⁹ Rev. Sutherland frequently visited the village church to offer encouragement and support the people's spiritual growth. He motivated the villagers to educate their children by sending them to school. For those who remained at home, he established vocational training programs such as painting, knitting, weaving, and carpentry for both boys and girls.⁴⁰

1.5.2. Missionary Work From 1893 – 1923

From 1893 onwards, Rev. J. Macara arrived and stayed in the Sadam bungalow in Sikkim. However, he left the field in early 1898 because of illness. Four years after Macara's

³⁶Cindy L. Perry, *Nepali around the World*, (Kathmandu: Ekta Book House, 1997), 88-89

³⁷ Lepcha, "The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim," 23. Also see, Perry, *Nepali Around the World*, 89-91.

³⁸ Lepcha, "The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim," 24.

³⁹ Lepcha, "The Origins and Early Growth of the Christian Church in Sikkim," 24.

⁴⁰ Bijoy Chettri, "History of Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim" (Unpublished MDiv. thesis, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2005), 12

departure, Rev. W.G. Mackean and his family were able to settle at Sadam. He served there for four years, from 1902-1905, he was called back to Kalimpong to supervise the Scottish University Mission Institute. Again in 1910, Rev. Mackean rejoined the Sikkim mission field. During his time, he built up a new mission centre in Temi. This centre became the headquarters of overseas personnel who might be working in Sikkim.⁴¹

Later on, Rev. Mackean, along with his wife, started a weaving school and taught the local people to grow vegetables and to raise poultry, for which the Mackeans are gratefully remembered even today. Mackean spent around 14 years in Sikkim. After his departure, there was no resident foreign missionary for a time. Local pastors such as Laxman Singh, Mukhia, and K.S. Peter helped the congregation.⁴²

1.5.3. Missionary Work From 1923 Onwards

In 1923, Miss Mary Scott entered Sikkim. The Gangtok church was established during her time. She had written that the desire of the Christians in Gangtok for a proper church building also became my dream. This church was dedicated on October 30, 1936, the first officially recognized Christian church in Sikkim. It was built in the traditional Rong-Yakthung style. She reorganised the church government, strengthened the Sunday schools, formed women's fellowship, and taught believers how to be self-supporting. In 1924, evangelistic campaigns were held, and the Gospel was shared.⁴³

This period also saw the emergence of ordained, native leadership. The first pastor of Sikkim, Pahlo Targain of Vok, South Sikkim, was ordained as a Pastor in 1926. However, he resigned after two years. On February 22, 1928, Rev. C.T. Pazo was ordained.⁴⁴ He was the second local man to join pastoral ministry. In 1933, Rev. Pazo became the Moderator of the Sikkim Kirk session. He was later to serve as a nominated councillor to the Chogyal (Maharaja of Sikkim), was appointed an honorary magistrate, and was awarded the title "Pema Dorjee" by the Darbar. By January 1976, Rev. C.T. Pazo retired, and Rev. D.H. Mukhia led the congregation for some months. In May 1976, Rev. P.S. Tingbo took over from Rev. Mukhia. The congregation was divided into the North-East Presbytery and South-West Presbytery. Rev. Martin Rai took over from Rev. Tingbo in 1984. In the meantime, Rev.

⁴¹ Dick B. Dewan, *Education in Sikkim: A Historical Retrospect: Pre-Merger and Post-Merger Period*, (Kalimpong: Tender Buds Academy, 2012), 176.

⁴² Bijoy Chettri, "Brief History of Church in Sikkim", *EPCS Souvenir 2012*, 46.

⁴³ Chettri, "History of Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim," 23.

⁴⁴ Chettri, "Brief History of Church in Sikkim," 47.

Tingbo went to New Jersey to study. He came back in 1986 and took charge of the South Presbytery in January 1986.⁴⁵

The congregation of Sikkim was included under the Darjeeling Diocese of the Church of North India (CNI). The churches were in the minority and lacked trained leaders, with little understanding of Presbyterian, Anglican structures. Their primary intention was to find shelter under a larger umbrella, and the CNI, being a major denomination in India, provided that support. The first Nepali Bishop of this diocese was Bishop D.D. Pradhan. Later, Bishop John Ghose was elected as the Bishop of the diocese. It was during the period of Bishop Ghose that the Great split occurred, resulting in the formation of the EPCS on January 26, 1993.⁴⁶ After the restructuring of the Church, Elder H.C. Simick took over as the Chairman of the Council, followed after two years by Shri. Y.T. Lepcha. The responsibility of the general secretary fell on Shri. K.B. Gurung, who faithfully served till Oct 1997, when Mr. K. Peter took over from him.⁴⁷

In recent years, the EPCS has grown significantly, both spiritually and geographically, by God's grace. The Church has extended its mission beyond Sikkim's borders, reflecting its commitment to evangelism and service. Today, the Church comprises a total of 150 congregations organized into eight presbyteries. These are overseen by a central council that provides spiritual and administrative leadership. Currently, 24 pastors are entrusted with the pastoral care and guidance of these congregations, faithfully serving and nurturing the growing community of believers.⁴⁸

1.5.4. Social Service and Healing are means to Spread Christianity in Sikkim

In Sikkim, missionaries concentrated their efforts on addressing the urgent needs of the population by establishing schools and dispensaries. They trained local individuals as compounders and teachers and sent them to different regions of the state to serve the community. Educational and healthcare institutions were set up in key population centers such as Saryong (now known as Soreng), Chakung, Tendam (now known as Dentam), Temi, Pakyong, Thambong, and Sang. The compounders played a crucial role in providing medical care and in combating widespread diseases, particularly smallpox, over many years. In Gangtok, the capital city, Miss Mary Scott founded a girls' school now known as Paljor

⁴⁵ Sunita Kharel, and Jigme Wangchuk Bhutia, eds., *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, 217.

⁴⁶ Sunita Kharel, and Jigme Wangchuk Bhutia, eds., *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, 218

⁴⁷ Lepcha, "Our Church in Retrospect," EPCS, Souvenir, 26.

⁴⁸ Joe Lepcha, "Mandali Itihas," in *Padh Pradasak* (Siliguri: EPCS, 2025), 20.

Namgyal Girls' Senior Secondary School, which continues to contribute significantly to female education in the region.⁴⁹

The social services provided by the Scottish missionaries led many people to embrace Christianity, resulting in the establishment of Presbyterian churches in the aforementioned areas. For many, the decision to follow Christ was influenced by the access to education and healthcare provided by the mission.⁵⁰

Historically, Christian mission has always been deeply connected with social outreach. Christians were pioneers in founding hospitals, schools, and orphanages, and were active in literary and social reform movements. They selflessly contributed their resources to support the poor and marginalized.⁵¹ In Sikkim, individuals from economically weaker backgrounds often converted to Christianity in hopes of improving their quality of life. For many, the Christian faith was associated more with material well-being and social advancement than with spiritual redemption or the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus Christ was portrayed as more powerful than evil spirits and as the one who could lead people to heaven. In most villages, He was primarily introduced as a healer. These portrayals directly addressed the felt needs of the people at the time of their conversion.⁵² Therefore, in the context of Sikkim, many believers embraced Christianity mainly because of physical healing, seeing Jesus primarily as a healer rather than as the one who saves from sin.

1.5.5. Organization Transitions of the Presbyterian Church in Sikkim

In the course of time, the Presbyterian congregation of Sikkim underwent several organizational changes. In 1905, the Presbyterian Church of Sikkim became a part of the Presbyterian Church of India. Although financially, it was still sponsored by the Church of Scotland. In 1924, all the Presbyterian churches of North India and the Congregational Church of General Aikya joined together and formed the United Church of North India (UCNI). This was the first organic union of two different churches. In 1970, the Church of North India was established, uniting six different churches, including the UCNI. The negotiators of the Church union were advised to accommodate in its polity all Episcopal,

⁴⁹ Tar Tshering "Our Church in Retrospect," in *EPCS Souvenir 2000*, 16-18.

⁵⁰ K.A. Rai, "Our Foot Prints," in *EPCS Souvenir 2000*, 38-40.

⁵¹ Marina Ngursangzeli and Michael Biehl, eds., *Witnessing to Christ in North-East India*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, vol. 31 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 287.

⁵² Razouselie Lasetso, "Challenges and Prospects for Doing Ministry in North-East India," in *Doing Mission in Context: A South Asian Perspective*, ed. Hrangkhuma Fanai and A. Wati Longchar (Jorhat: ETC Publications, 2005), 29-34.

Presbyterian, and Congregational elements. With the passing of time, most of the members of the church in Sikkim resolved on January 26, 1993, to reorganise into the EPCS.⁵³

1.6. The Attitude of Some Hindus Towards Christians in a Socio-Religious Context

In the socio-religious landscape of EPCS, Christians have at times reported experiencing negative social attitudes from segments of the Hindu population, particularly in certain rural areas. Some Hindus regard their religious tradition as intrinsically pure and morally upright. In this context, conversion to Christianity may be viewed as a departure from cultural and religious purity, resulting in perceptions of social contamination or impurity. Such views can contribute to resistance against religious conversion and, in some cases, social distancing from converts. For instance, there have been reports that certain Brahmin individuals avoid accepting food prepared or offered by Christians.⁵⁴

Christianity in India is often associated by some with Western colonial history, as it was introduced through the efforts of missionaries and traders during the British period. This historical association has contributed to the perception among some Hindus that Christianity is a foreign or imperialist religion. As a result, conversion to Christianity may be viewed not only as a religious shift but also as an endorsement of Western cultural values, leading to fears of denationalization and loss of traditional identity.⁵⁵

Christian converts are at times perceived as having adopted a foreign faith, raising concerns about cultural and national loyalty. Some also argue that missionary efforts, often supported by international organizations, lead to Western cultural influence and socio-religious change. This has led to scepticism among certain Hindu individuals regarding the motivations for conversion, with accusations that conversions are driven by material incentives rather than genuine faith. Terms like “Rice Christians” are sometimes used derogatorily to describe those believed to have converted for economic benefits.⁵⁶ In the Sikkim context, this view strongly prevailed in rural areas.

⁵³ K.A. Rai, “Our Foot Prints” EPCS Souvenir 2000, 38-40.

⁵⁴ Atul Y. Aghamkar “TRADITIONAL HINDU VIEWS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD CHRISTIANITY”, http://www.globalmissiology.org/english/archive/aghmkar_hindu_attitudes_1_2008, 7. accessed on May 25, 7

⁵⁵ Mangalwadi, Vishal. *Missionary Conspiracy. Letters to a Postmodern Hindu*. 2nd ed. The MacLaurin Institute, 1996, 2-3.

⁵⁶ Atul Y. Aghamkar “Traditional Hindu Views and Attitudes Toward Christianity”, http://www.globalmissiology.org/english/archive/aghmkar_hindu_attitudes_1_2008, 7. accessed on May 25, 6-7.

Additionally, caste dynamics further complicate the issue. Marginalized castes such as the Kami and Damai, who convert to Christianity, often face exclusion from government reservation benefits due to constitutional restrictions that recognize Scheduled Caste status only within the Hindu framework. Reports suggest that in Sikkim, some Christian individuals from these communities have been denied such benefits, with claims that local opposition or complaints have led to their exclusion.⁵⁷ These factors contribute to a broader sense of social deprivation and marginalization among Christian converts from historically disadvantaged castes.

1.7. Influence of Hinduism⁵⁸ in EPCS Churches

Despite their adherence to the Reformed Christian faith, many members of the EPCS demonstrate practices influenced by the surrounding Hindu culture. A large majority of Christians in EPCS are converted from Hinduism. In India, the use of oil for medicinal purposes is common, particularly among believers who seek prayer over the oil, often by figures like D.G.S. Dhinakaran, for healing.⁵⁹ Similarly, in the EPCS context, congregants bring oil to church services and ask pastors and elders to pray over it. After the prayer, the oil is applied to the sick, often by making a cross on their forehead, with the belief that it transforms from ordinary oil to an anointed substance that carries healing power.

This practice is also extended to injuries and wounds. This ritual mirrors certain aspects of Hindu traditions, where consecrated elements are believed to have healing properties.⁶⁰

Increased prayer and fasting, especially early in the morning, are often believed to move God to action. The idea is that our dedication through prayer and fasting compels God to respond. When we lack such discipline, particularly in the early morning, God seems to remain silent, and all the sufferings, sickness, and problems are the result of a lack of discipline in prayer and fasting.⁶¹ This belief mirrors Hindu devotional practices, where early morning fasting and prayer are seen as expressions of deep devotion that prompt divine intervention in the EPCS context.

⁵⁷ *North East News*, “Sikkim SC Body Flays Government Policy on Revised Reservation,” June 26, 2018.

⁵⁸ The author himself is a pastor of the EPCS and a convert from Hinduism.

⁵⁹ <https://www.jesuscallsministries.org/category/enrich-your-soul/dr-paul-dhinakaran/> accessed on 5th June 2025.

⁶⁰ C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 58–60.

⁶¹ <https://youtube.com/channel/UCIIEJKdGjv6CpVYOYbpcVqA> Facebook channel Link, access on 7th June.

Believers place a strong emphasis on dreams and visions, often sharing them during fellowship gatherings. Others in the group then try to interpret the meaning of these dreams.⁶² This practice is heavily influenced by Hindu culture, where dreams are deeply believed to hold significant meaning.⁶³

Many believers, influenced by Hindu traditions, think that some days are not good for starting new things ('auspicious days'). Wednesday, in particular, is often seen as a "lazy" day when progress is slow. In Hinduism, each day is linked to a specific god, and people believe that certain activities are better done on certain days.⁶⁴ For example, Monday is dedicated to Lord Shiva, so it's seen as a good day for prayer and spiritual activities. Friday is for Goddess *Lakshmi*, and it's considered lucky for business or financial matters.⁶⁵ Hindus often follow these beliefs to make sure their actions bring good results. Similarly, some Christian believers also have their own ideas about which days are best for different activities, based on spiritual or cultural beliefs.⁶⁶

Many believers are strongly drawn to individuals who claim to have the gift of revealing personal details such as one's birthdate, marriage date, or future events. Within the EPCS community, such individuals are often regarded as spiritually gifted.⁶⁷ This belief closely parallels Hindu practices, where priests read palms or predict a person's life events, and people often offer donations in return for these insights.⁶⁸

Pilgrimage holds deep spiritual significance for many believers in the Indian context. It is common for Christians to visit Israel to reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of these pilgrims bring back water from the Jordan River, which they sprinkle around their homes, believing it brings blessings and a sense of anointing.⁶⁹ In the context of EPCS as well, Israel is viewed as a holy land, and visiting it often strengthens one's faith. Pilgrims often bring back water and sprinkle it in their homes. This practice mirrors Hindu

⁶²Sangati TV, *Lakmit Lepcha -Nepali Woman sharing Testimony of Heaven and Hell*, <https://youtu.be/NMAS-WE8iJ8?si=tEPK84QRztiI4YeV>. Accessed on 10 Jun. 2025.

⁶³ Robert E. Sears, "Spiritual Dreams and the Nepalese: Attribution Theory and the Dream-Related Cognition of Nepali Christians and Hindus," *Transformation* 35, no. 1 (2018): 1–18 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378817743246>.

⁶⁴ *Hinduism and the Days of the Week*, Encyclopaedia of Hinduism, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 79-80.

⁶⁵ Arvind Sharma, *The Hindu Tradition: A New Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154-155.

⁶⁶ N. K. Singh, "Astrology and Hindu Rituals," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2019): 102-104.

⁶⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16x92nuGLW> accessed on 5th June.

⁶⁸ "Author's field observation, Namchi, South Sikkim, July 2025."

⁶⁹ *The Times of India*, "West Bengal to Help Christians Make Holy Land Trip," November 3, 2012.

pilgrimages to the Ganges River, where devotees bring holy water home for spiritual blessings.⁷⁰

Caste-based discrimination is still present in some churches in India. For example, Dalit Christians in Kottapalayam, Trichy, report that they are excluded from church activities because only members of the higher caste are recognized as full parish members.⁷¹ Similarly, in Sikkim, although most communities have converted from Hinduism to Christianity, caste attitudes still affect social practices. Many young Christians prefer to marry within their own caste⁷² and avoid marrying people from the scheduled castes, who are still seen as lower in status. This shows that Hindu caste beliefs continue to influence Christian life and practices in EPCS.⁷³

1.8. Analysis

From the study of the Socio-religious factors, three key observations can be noted regarding the believers of the EPCS.

Firstly, missionaries from Scotland did extensive social work, exceeding the pressing needs of the time. As a result, Presbyterian churches were established. However, the missionaries were unable to focus on teaching the Reformed faith to newly converted believers, nor could they establish a theological training centre to equip leaders. Consequently, church believers lacked teaching on the Reformed perspective on sanctification.

Secondly, the Presbyterian Church in Sikkim underwent several organizational changes. As a result, believers lacked consistent and solid Reformed teaching on sanctification.

Thirdly, Hinduism has a strong influence in Sikkim, and its attitude towards Christians is unfavourable. As a result, believers were influenced by Hindu beliefs, which consequently affected their understanding of sanctification.

⁷⁰ “Author interview with Rev. P.K. Sherpa, Presbytery in charge, Soreng Presbytery (EPCS), July 2025.”

⁷¹ *The Times of India*, “Caste Discrimination: Dalit Christians Not Allowed to Take Part in Church Activities,” May 30, 2023.

⁷² In Hinduism, Brahmins are considered a higher caste, while the Scheduled Castes are regarded as a lower caste. Consequently, Brahmins do not marry people from the lower castes. Similarly, in churches, many young people are reluctant to marry those from lower castes.

⁷³ “Sikkim: Village Community Boycotts Couple for Inter-Caste Marriage,” *EastMojo*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.eastmojo.com/sikkim/2020/01/22/sikkim-village-community-boycotts-couple-for-inter-caste-marriage/>.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter provides a short understanding of the religious, ethnic, and historical context of the EPCS for understanding the context in which the research on sanctification is pursued. It highlights how the church emerged from the mission work of Scottish Presbyterians in a dominantly Hindu environment, yet lacked deep engagement with Reformed theological teachings. It becomes evident that the socio-religious landscape of Sikkim, dominated by Hindu ritualism, caste dynamics, and religious syncretism, has significantly shaped the beliefs and practices of many EPCS believers. Though Christianity grew through social services and healing ministries, theological depth – especially regarding sanctification – remains underdeveloped. In the EPCS, certain Hindu practices, such as pilgrimage, ritual purity, and caste identity, have influenced Christian beliefs and behavior. This influence can be seen in practices like using oil for healing, placing special value on dreams and visions, and maintaining caste-based attitudes. In addition, some Christians believe that certain days are unlucky and are influenced by fortune tellers. The chapter concludes that without strong theological foundations, believers are vulnerable to syncretism. Thus, the socio-religious context must be taken seriously when addressing the Reformed teaching of sanctification in the EPCS.

Chapter Two

Understanding Sanctification by EPCS Leaders and Hindu Pandits

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to examine how leaders of the EPCS and Hindu Pandits, along with Christian sermons and publications from Presbyterian leaders, understand the Christian doctrine of sanctification. To gather insights, I conducted in-depth interviews with eight leaders of the EPCS Church: four pastors and four senior elders currently serving in the church's branches located in Namchi, Ravangla, Anden, and Magalbaria.⁷⁴ In addition, I interviewed four Hindu Pandits serving at the Chardham Temple in Namchi, South Sikkim.⁷⁵ The questionnaires used for the interviews are included in the appendix.

The views shared by the Christian and Hindu leaders are interpreted by using the appropriation model, which explores four dimensions of religious understanding: believing, belonging, behaving, and experiencing (BBBE). In *Testing the Waters: Infant Baptism as a Case Study for Doing Reformed Theology Interculturally*, Jos Colijn draws on Helen Cameron's "Four Voices of Theology" framework, first introduced in *Talking about God in Practice*. This model identifies four distinct theological voices: the normative voice, which refers to Scripture and confessional standards; the formal voice, which includes the teachings of pastors and theologians, liturgical resources, and historical theological writings (such as Calvin's *Institutes*); the espoused voice, which reflects the articulated beliefs of a congregation or group of ordinary believers; and the operant voice, which is expressed through the actual practices of a congregation or group.⁷⁶

In this chapter, the focus is specifically on the formal voice of theology. That is, it aims to map the theological understanding of sanctification as consciously and theologically articulated by EPCS pastors and elders, as well as by the Hindu Pandits, through interviews, sermons, and publications. This formal voice reflects the informed and reflective expressions of theology and doctrine by religious leaders within their respective traditions.

⁷⁴ Eight EPCS leaders were interviewed, and their names are not disclosed due to the assurance of Confidentiality on 25th, 26th, 27th, and 28th May 2025.

⁷⁵ Four Pandits were interviewed, and their names are not disclosed due to the assurance of confidentiality on 5th June 2025.

⁷⁶ Colijn, "Testing the Waters: Infant Baptism as a Case Study for Doing Reformed Theology Interculturally," 23-26.

2.2. Appropriation of EPCS Leaders' Understanding of Sanctification

2.2.1. Believing Aspect of Sanctification – EPCS Leaders

This section explores the “believing” aspect as a crucial aspect of appropriating sanctification within the Christian tradition in the EPCS. To gain insights into this belief, I conducted interviews with elders and pastors of the EPCS. The elders included: Elder One from Ravangla (age 56, educated up to Class 8), Elder Two from Namchi (age 65, educated up to Class 4), Elder Three from Mangalbaray (age 70, Class 7 pass), and Elder Four from Ravangla (age 36, Class 12 pass). None of the elders had formal theological training. The pastors interviewed were: Pastor One from Sombaria (age 60, no theological education), Pastor Two from Namchi (age 70, no theological education), Pastor Three from Mangalbaray (age 46, Master of Divinity from Presbyterian Theological Seminary), and Pastor Four from Anden (age 45, Bachelor of Theology from Presbyterian Theological Seminary). Based on their responses, I have summarized their understanding and beliefs regarding the doctrine of sanctification.

2.2.1.1. Believing Aspect of Sanctification in EPCS

Based on interviews conducted with pastors and elders from various EPCS churches, both groups shared a common belief that sanctification involves being forgiven of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. They agreed that while sanctification is a gift of God’s grace, it also requires personal belief, trust, and repentance. Both pastors and elders affirmed that sanctification leads to a life conformed to the image of Christ, renews the individual, and transforms them away from a life of sin. They described it as being set apart from sin for holy living and granted life in the presence of God through holiness, received by trusting in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

However, there were also notable differences in emphasis between the two groups. Pastors often stressed that a life conformed to the image of Christ is made possible only through Jesus’ sacrifice and that sanctification requires a decisive break from worldly temptations along with the cultivation of a close, personal relationship with God. For them, sanctification not only saves a person from God’s wrath but also enables the believer to reflect God’s character in their daily life.

Elders, on the other hand, placed greater emphasis on human responsibility in the process of sanctification. One elder said, “God has already done His part by giving us

sanctification, but now it is our turn to do our part. We must believe in Him, turn away from sin, and work hard every day to live a good and faithful life.”⁷⁷ While agreeing that sanctification is by grace, they underlined that individuals are fully accountable for their choices. According to Pastor 2, “One who accepts God but continues to live a sinful life is personally responsible for his condemnation and separation from God.”⁷⁸

2.2.1.2. Believing Aspect of Sanctification in Hinduism

Hinduism does not have a concept of sanctification; however, it does have analogous ideas that resemble parts of sanctification, though rooted in a different worldview: Purification (śuddhi), Spiritual Discipline (sādhana), and Liberation (moksha).

All leaders of the EPCS believe that in Hinduism, sanctification refers to the path of moksha. They agreed that moksha is the ultimate goal of life in Hindu belief, where the soul is freed from suffering and united with the ultimate reality, Brahman.

Both pastors and elders noted that many Hindus believe moksha can be attained through good deeds and moral living. According to them, right actions, ethical behavior, and obedience to parents, who are often honored as divine figures, are seen as crucial to achieving sanctification.

However, contrasts emerged in their focus. Pastor Four highlighted that Hinduism often emphasizes religious rituals and sacrifices as a means to gain spiritual merit. He pointed out that “some believe blessings from priests or performing specific rites can bring one closer to moksha, and that those who lead disciplined or monastic lives, like priests and ascetics, are considered the most likely to attain it.”⁷⁹

In contrast, the elder four emphasized another path within Hinduism: the renunciation of worldly desires and attachments. He noted that “true liberation is believed to come only after death, when the soul departs the body and is finally freed from the cycle of rebirth.”⁸⁰

2.2.2. Belonging Aspect of Sanctification – EPCS Leaders

In this section, I have investigated the “belonging” aspect of the appropriation of the concept of sanctification. Based on the respondents’ answers, I have summarized their views.

⁷⁷ Elder Three from Mangalbaray, age 70.

⁷⁸ Pastor Two from Namchi (age 70, no theological education).

⁷⁹ Pastor Four from Anden (age 45, Bachelor of Theology from Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

⁸⁰ Elder Four from Ravangla (age 36, Class 12 pass).

2.2.2.1. Belonging Aspect of Sanctification in EPCS

All pastors and elders shared the common belief that they belong to God because, through faith in Jesus Christ, they have been adopted into His family and are justified before God solely based on Christ's finished work. They affirmed that all believers are part of the body of Christ, united beyond differences such as caste or background. Both groups emphasized that heaven is the believer's true home and that baptism serves as a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace, confirming that Christians belong to God and His people. Pastor Two even shared that "he often receives dreams confirming his belonging to God, reflecting a personal spiritual experience."⁸¹

While both pastors and elders agree on the spiritual identity of believers, there are differences in their practical applications of this belief. Pastor Three strongly emphasized that "there is no caste system in God's family, and that Christians should avoid worldly attachments, such as involvement in politics or non-Christian events, which could distract them from focusing on Christ."⁸² Pastor One further warned "against participating in non-biblical rituals or funeral ceremonies, emphasizing the importance of remaining spiritually distinct."⁸³

However, Pastor Two and Elder Three took a more relational and missional approach. They argued that "Christians are called to love and serve others, even in non-Christian settings. According to them, attending events like *puran* or *bartaman*⁸⁴ is acceptable if done to demonstrate Christ's love, provided that believers do not participate in the rituals themselves. They viewed such presence as an opportunity for witness and evangelism."⁸⁵

⁸¹ Pastor Two from Namchi (age 70, no theological education).

⁸² Pastor Three from Mangalbaray (age 46, Master of Divinity from Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

⁸³ Pastor One from Sombaria (age 60, no theological education).

⁸⁴ Bartaman, also known as Bratabandha, is a significant Hindu initiation ritual primarily practiced among the Bahun (Brahmin) and Chettri (Kshatriya) communities of Sikkim and Nepal. It marks the formal entrance of a boy into spiritual life and his readiness to study the scriptures. Performed typically between the ages of 8 to 16, the ceremony includes the shaving of the head (Mundan), sacred bathing, and the wearing of the sacred thread (Janai), symbolizing purity and commitment to dharma (religious duty). During the ritual, the boy is introduced to Gayatri Mantra and is expected to begin the Guru-disciple tradition. This rite of passage reflects the start of Brahmacharya (student) stage in the traditional four-fold ashram system of Hindu life.

⁸⁵ Pastor Two from Namchi (age 70, no theological education) & Elder Three from Mangalbaray (age 70 no theological education).

In contrast, Elder One and Elder Three held a stricter position. They stated that “they completely avoid events with non-Christian elements, including not eating food served at non-Christian funeral ceremonies.”⁸⁶

2.2.2.2. Belonging Aspect of Sanctification in Hinduism

In this section, I explore the Hindu understanding of “belonging” in relation to sanctification, as interpreted by pastors and elders of the EPCS. Their responses highlight that belonging in Hinduism is often marked by visible, external symbols and inherited cultural identity.

According to the respondents, Hindus express their spiritual belonging through signs such as the *janai* (sacred thread), the tuft of hair (*choti*), and the *begut* (thread tied around the wrist or waist), which are received during key religious rituals like *upanayan*.⁸⁷ They also mentioned the application of white powder on the forehead, which signifies religious purity and devotion. These outward symbols serve as daily reminders of one’s place within the religious and social order, often associated with caste and temple traditions.

The pastors and elders observed that Hindu belonging is deeply rooted in cultural rituals and external identity rather than personal spiritual transformation. Pastor Four noted “that although these symbols may reflect religious dedication, they do not necessarily indicate a changed heart.”⁸⁸ An Elder Three emphasized that “fear of losing family or community identity often keeps some Hindus from embracing the gospel.”⁸⁹

The EPCS leaders viewed Hindu belonging as external, caste-based, and inherited, whereas Christian belonging is grounded in faith in Christ, marked by inner transformation, and open to all regardless of background.

⁸⁶ Elder One from Ravangla (age 56, educated up to Class 8) & Elder Three from Mangalbaray (age 70, Class 7 pass)

⁸⁷ Upanayan is a traditional Hindu initiation rite, especially observed among the Bahun (Brahmin) and Chettri (Kshatriya) communities in Sikkim and Nepal. It signifies the formal beginning of a boy’s spiritual education and entrance into the Brahmacharya (student) stage of life. The ritual involves the investiture of the sacred thread (Janai) and the recitation of the Gayatri Mantra, symbolizing the child’s readiness to pursue Vedic learning and live a disciplined, dharma-oriented life. In Nepali Hindu society, this ceremony is often referred to as Bratabandha and holds cultural as well as religious importance.

⁸⁸ Pastor Four from Anden (age 45, Bachelor of Theology from Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

⁸⁹ Elder Three from Mangalbaray (age 70).

2.2.3. Behaving *Aspect of Sanctification in EPCS*

In this section, I will investigate the “behaving” aspect of the appropriation of the concept of sanctification. Based on the respondents’ answers, I have presented a summary of their views.

2.2.3.1. Behaving *Aspect of Sanctification in EPCS*

From interviews conducted, Pastor One emphasized that entering heaven requires obedience to God’s commandments, particularly the Ten Commandments. According to him, living a good and disciplined life is essential for attaining sanctification. He stressed that believers must obey God’s Word daily and “work out their sanctification with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).⁹⁰

In contrast, the Pastor Three emphasized that good deeds are the result, not the cause, of sanctification. He said, “We must receive sanctification by grace through faith, which naturally leads to a life of obedience and good works.”⁹¹ This pastor explained that good deeds are the fruit and evidence of a transformed life, but they do not play a role in earning sanctification. Instead, believers are made holy to do good works that glorify God.⁹²

One pastor and three elders expressed a strong belief that sanctification depends on obeying God and doing good works. Pastor One stated, “We need to please God through obedience, fasting, early morning prayers, and holy living is essential.”⁹³ And others echoed a similar voice. For them, good deeds not only confirm a person’s sanctification but are also necessary to grow spiritually and remain faithful. They believe that while God has done His part, it is the individual’s responsibility to accept sanctification and grow into it by doing good works.

Only Pastor Three shared a more grace-centered view, stating that sanctification transforms a person’s life, and good deeds flow naturally from that transformation. According to him, while good deeds cannot earn sanctification, they are important as a sign of being

⁹⁰ Pastor Two from Namchi (age 70, no theological education),

⁹¹ Pastor Three from Mangalbaray (age 46, Master of Divinity from Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

⁹² Pastor Three from Mangalbaray (age 46, Master of Divinity from Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

⁹³ Pastor One from Sombaria (age 60, no theological education).

truly made holy. These deeds glorify Christ, bring joy to God, and reflect a heart that belongs to Him.⁹⁴

2.2.3.2. Behaving *Aspect of Sanctification* in Hinduism

All four pastors believe that liberation from the cycle of rebirth is attained through ritual practices, good deeds, and devotion. Pastor One said, “Bathing in the Ganges River is considered essential for spiritual cleansing in Hindu belief.”⁹⁵ In comparison, three elders emphasized Hindu practices such as feeding the poor, helping widows and orphans, and following the example of rishis and sadhus, holy men known for their ascetic and spiritual lives.

All four pastors and elders agreed that reading the Bhagavad Gita, chanting names like Ram and Krishna, and performing rituals such as *bartaman* for children are believed to help one progress toward sanctification. They also mentioned pilgrimages to holy sites, giving alms, and conducting family pujas as important spiritual practices within Hinduism. The elder one said, “Dharma is sanctification that helps us to reach Moksha.”⁹⁶

In contrast, the rest of the leaders, both pastors and elders, admitted they did not have a clear understanding of moksha or Hindu beliefs about sanctification.

2.2.4. Experiencing *Aspect of Sanctification* in EPCS

In this aspect of appropriation, I inquired into the experience of sanctification.

Three pastors and two elders agreed that “living the Christian life means living with joy, confidence, and fearlessness, grounded in the hope of meeting God at His second coming. They emphasized that the assurance of sanctification brings peace and encourages believers to live joyfully on earth, despite challenges.”⁹⁷

However, Elder Three offered a contrasting perspective, sharing a more personal and vulnerable experience. He said, “I feel distressed when I sin or fail to perfectly obey God’s commandments, which causes me to fear losing my sanctification.”⁹⁸ This view highlights the

⁹⁴ Pastor Three from Mangalbaray (age 46, Master of Divinity from Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

⁹⁵ Pastor One from Sombaria (age 60, no theological education).

⁹⁶ Elder One from Ravangla (age 56, educated up to Class 8).

⁹⁷ Pastor three, one and four, Elder two and three

⁹⁸ Elder Three from Mangalbaray (age 70, Class 7 pass).

struggle for assurance and the emotional burden of striving for holiness, as well as the leader's failure to distinguish between salvation and sanctification.

In contrast, Elder Two emphasized that joy only comes through obedience to God's commandments. Yet he added that this joy is often temporary, suggesting that spiritual joy is conditional and fragile. He said, "My spiritual joy comes when I do good deeds."⁹⁹

2.3. Interview with the Hindu Priests

I conducted interviews with four pandits, but they refused to share their understanding of sanctification in Christianity; thus, I focused on the understanding of sanctification in Hinduism.

2.3.1. Believing Aspect of Sanctification in Hinduism

This section explores the aspect of "believing" in sanctification within Hinduism, based on interviews with Hindu priests.

All pandits believe that moksha is liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth and union with Brahman. Pandit 1 and Pandit 2 specifically mentioned that moksha also means being freed from the possibility of being born as a dog and entering *Vaikuntha Dham*.¹⁰⁰ As Pandit 1 said, "I don't want to be reborn as a dog, so I want to sanctify my life to attain Moksha."¹⁰¹ Pandit 3 and Pandit 4 stated that moksha can only be achieved by strictly following Sanatan *Dharma*,¹⁰² highlighting the essential role of religious discipline and dharmic living in attaining liberation.¹⁰³

2.3.2. Belonging Aspect of Sanctification in Hinduism

This section examines the aspect of "belonging" in the Hindu understanding of sanctification, based on interviews with Hindu priests.

All the pandits agreed that belonging is demonstrated through external religious practices such as performing the bartaman ceremony, wearing the *tuft* (shikha), and putting on the *Janai* (sacred thread), which signify one's belonging to Brahman. Pandit 1 emphasized that

⁹⁹ Elder Two from Namchi (age 65, educated up to Class 4).

¹⁰⁰ Pandit 1 Pandit 2. "Vaikuntha Dham in Hinduism is the eternal, blissful abode of Lord Vishnu, where liberated souls reside in divine peace and freedom from the cycle of birth and death."

¹⁰¹ Pandit 1.

¹⁰² According to Pandit 1 and 2, "Dharma means Hindu rituals like fasting, offering flowers to god etc."

¹⁰³ Pandit 3 and Pandit 4.

“only those who continually chant the Gayatri Mantra truly belong to God.”¹⁰⁴ Pandit 2 said, “I chant the Gayatri Mantra daily for my sanctification to attain my Moksha.”¹⁰⁵ In contrast, Pandit 4, a senior pandit, stated that “true belonging is revealed through inner spiritual experiences, such as seeing visions of Lord Ram.”¹⁰⁶

2.3.3. Behaving Aspect of Sanctification in Hinduism

This section explores the “behaving” aspect in the appropriation of moksha, as understood by Hindu pandits.

Pandit 4, a senior pandit, believes that offering a sacrifice during Dussehra brings blessings and is beneficial for Hindus. He stated, “We must offer the living animals to receive divine mercy and blessing.”¹⁰⁷ He emphasizes that the sacrifice of animals can aid in our sanctification, which eventually helps us to attain moksha. In contrast, one Pandit disagrees, arguing that killing an animal does not lead to moksha and may even hinder spiritual progress. Meanwhile, Pandit 2 and Pandit 3 emphasized a different path altogether, stating that to attain moksha, one must go on pilgrimages to holy places and take a ritual bath in the Ganges River.

2.3.4. Experiencing Aspect of Sanctification in Hinduism

This section addresses the “experiencing” aspect of moksha in Hindu belief, based on insights from the interviewed pandits.

All pandits share a sense of joy and pleasure after performing the yearly puja. Pandit 2 and Pandit 4 reported feeling elated and happy after returning from pilgrimages, particularly enjoying the ritual of sprinkling Ganges water at their homes. Pandit 2 stated, “I feel sanctified and feel the Lord Rama closer to me when I visit his temple.”¹⁰⁸ In contrast, Pandit 1 expresses sadness when a Brahmin abandons Sanatan Dharma for another faith.

2.4. Sermons and Publications by Presbyterian leaders

This section discusses the understanding of sanctification as presented in sermons and publications by Presbyterian Church leaders.

¹⁰⁴ Pandit 1.

¹⁰⁵ Pandit 2.

¹⁰⁶ Pandit 4.

¹⁰⁷ Pandit 4.

¹⁰⁸ Pandit 2.

2.4.1. Believing *Aspect of Sanctification*

2.4.1.1 Sanctification and Justification

Sermons and writings strongly stress the necessity of an active human response in the process of sanctification and justification. The message “faith without works is dead” is frequently used to teach that belief must be visible through one’s actions.¹⁰⁹ Those who do not display good works are not seen as true believers. Publications also urge believers to pursue sanctification with deep reverence and a sense of responsibility.¹¹⁰

2.4.1.2 Sanctification and the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is seen as working together with believers in the process of sanctification. Sermons emphasize that believers must stay faithful and filled with the Spirit, showing that God’s help in sanctification depends on how faithfully people respond.¹¹¹

2.4.1.3 Sanctification and Christlikeness

Christlikeness is presented as the result of personal sacrifice, obedience, and daily self-denial. Sermons link it to separation from “unbiblical traditions” like Christmas or cultural compromise.¹¹²

2.4.1.4 Sanctification and Eternal Life

Sanctification is viewed as conditional: “Christ sanctifies only those who remain obedient to God’s commandments. Turning away from obedience is seen as disqualifying a person from sanctification, and by extension, from receiving eternal life.”¹¹³ Obedience is therefore seen as essential for both sanctification and ultimate salvation.

2.4.2. Belonging *Aspect of Sanctification*

2.4.2.1 Sanctification and Participation in Hindu Rituals

Indian publications often caution against syncretism. Preachers link compromise with spiritual danger. One sermon warned, “If we fail to do good works, we will die in our sins.

¹⁰⁹ “*Our Faith Pleases God*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Tikpur, November 10, 2024, preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

¹¹⁰ Patrus Gurung, *Esai Biswaska Kreembadh Bibliya bunyadi sikchaka 12 khurkila haru*, (Gangtok: Nirman Photo Ofset, 2012), 56.

¹¹¹ “*Human Response in Sanctification*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Chamchey, April 13, 2024. Preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

¹¹² “*Christmas and Sanctification*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Siktam, Feb, 23, 2025, preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

¹¹³ Anjana Rai, “Prabhu lay Khodai Prabhu Najik Aau,” *Bihan ko Tara* (July–September 2024): 11.

We should stay away from non-believers' festivals; otherwise, God will not purify us,"¹¹⁴ framing compromise as disobedience that endangers sanctification.

2.4.2.2 Sanctification and Belonging to God / Christ

Belonging means being connected to others and living responsibly. EPCS leader's sermon teaches that Christians should help each other and stay strong in their faith. The preacher encourages believers to stay faithful and prepared for Jesus' return. This means living with discipline and praying regularly to remain true to their identity in Christ.¹¹⁵

2.4.2.3 Sanctification and Belonging to the Church

Indian sermons emphasize the importance of corporate holiness, urging believers to walk together in their journey of sanctification. They are encouraged to speak the truth to one another and offer mutual support. The life of the church becomes the primary environment where this growth in holiness is nurtured through shared faith, accountability, and encouragement.¹¹⁶

2.4.3. Behaving *Aspect of Sanctification*

2.4.3.1 Sanctification and Human Responsibility

Sanctification is often taught as a shared process between God's grace and human responsibility. Sermons urge "Christian believers to actively turn away from sin"¹¹⁷ and "remain obedient through their actions."¹¹⁸ Indian publications support this by emphasizing that "sanctification requires personal effort, though it is led and empowered by the Holy Spirit."¹¹⁹

2.4.3.2 Sanctification and Good Works in Daily Life

Sermons teach that doing good works every day is key to living a life that pleases God.¹²⁰ One publication encourages Christian believers to "strive for excellence in Christian

¹¹⁴ Penual Lepcha, "Yongkala ko Aatmakatha," *Pratibimb Newsletter* 7, no. 1 (June 2020): 5–6.

¹¹⁵ "Rapture: Be Ready All the Time," sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Lunchok January 12, 2025, preacher's name withheld for confidentiality

¹¹⁶ "The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord", sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Changbagoan, September 24, 2024, preacher's name withheld for confidentiality

¹¹⁷ Kumar Thapa, "Jiwan ko Avilasa dekhi Bhaag," *Jiudo Pani*, no. 2, purak 82 (January–March 2021): 7–10.

¹¹⁸ "Our Faith Pleases God," sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Tikpur, November 10, 2024, preacher's name withheld for confidentiality.

¹¹⁹ Patrus Gurung, *Esai Biswaska Kreembadh Bibliya bunyadi sikchaka 12 khurkila haru*, (Gangtok: Nirman Photo Offset, 2012), 56.

¹²⁰ Kumar Thapa, "Jiwan ko Avilasa dekhi Bhaag," *Jiudo Pani*, no. 2, purak 82 (January–March 2021): 7–10.

institutions, highlighting the value of committed service. Daily discipline, prayer, and practical acts of holiness are seen as essential parts of the sanctification journey.”¹²¹

2.4.4. Experiencing *Aspect of Sanctification*

2.4.4.1 Sanctification and Trust / Assurance / Peace

Sermons describe sanctification as an emotional and active state. Christian believers are urged to “stay close to God,”¹²² and to “be ready every moment.”¹²³ The experience of peace and joy is seen as the result of discipline, effort, and obedience, not merely grace. Spiritual gifts like tongues are framed as both experiences and confirmations of sanctification.¹²⁴

2.4.4.2 Ritual and Emotional Markers of Sanctification

Indian publications describe sanctification as a lifelong process of becoming more like Christ.¹²⁵ At the same time, they warn that Satan constantly tries to attack Christian believers. As a result, Christian believers must fight for victory both emotionally and spiritually. Many experience feelings of unworthiness and believe that consistent effort is necessary to stay on the path of holiness.¹²⁶

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter reveals a mixed and sometimes confused understanding of sanctification among EPCS leaders. While pastors and elders affirm sanctification as a gift of grace through faith in Christ, many emphasize human effort, obedience, prayer, and good works as essential components. The interviews with Hindu pandits highlight that Hindu sanctification is primarily about moksha through dharma, rituals, and devotion, often marked by external symbols of belonging. The BBBE analysis shows that both groups deeply value behavior and experience, but the theological foundations (believing) differ. Pastors who received theological training offered a more grace-centered view. Leaders who have not received formal theological training tend to emphasize good works more than the grace of God. Moreover, they often teach that God’s help in sanctification depends primarily on how

¹²¹ B. D. Rai, “Christ ko Rajdutt, Dharmikaran, Pavitrakaran ani Sifhikaran,” *Rajagya* 36 (May–June 2018): 12.

¹²² “*Human Response in Sanctification*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Chamchey, April 13, 2024. Preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

¹²³ “*The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Changbagoan, September 24, 2024, preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

¹²⁴ Gedon Lamichanne, *Mukti Kasari Huncha?* (Dharan, Nepal: Mahapatriwaad Rastria Saptahik, 2018), 25–32.

¹²⁵ B. D. Rai, “Christ ko Rajdutt, Dharmikaran, Pavitrakaran ani Sifhikaran,” 14.

¹²⁶ Rai, “Christ ko Rajdutt, Dharmikaran, Pavitrakaran ani Sifhikaran,” 16.

faithfully people respond, which risks placing human effort at the center rather than God's sovereign grace. Those who receive dreams or visions sometimes place greater value on such spiritual experiences than on the authority of God's Word. This reflects a shift away from the biblical teaching that sanctification is wholly a work of God's Spirit, grounded in the finished work of Christ, and that the primary means of grace are the Word, sacraments, and prayer. While human obedience is necessary, it is the result, not the cause. Sermons and publications from EPCS leaders also reinforce a performance-based spirituality, reflecting a theology where assurance, identity, and transformation depend significantly on obedience and separation from non-Christian practices. This chapter concludes that EPCS leaders need a deeper grounding in Reformed theology to help believers distinguish biblical sanctification from culturally inherited Hindu ideals.

Chapter Three

Understanding of Sanctification among EPCS Believers

3.1. Introduction

The views shared by the EPCS believers are interpreted using the appropriation model, which explores four dimensions of religious understanding: believing, belonging, behaving, and experiencing (BBBE). Additionally, this chapter is guided by the Four Voices of Theology framework developed by Helen Cameron in *Talking about God in Practice*. This framework distinguishes between the normative voice (Scripture and confessions), the formal voice (pastors and teachers' teachings, liturgies, historical and Calvin's writings), the espoused voice (articulated beliefs of group/ congregation ordinary believers), and the operant voice (practice of a group/congregation, Ordinary believers).¹²⁷

In this chapter, the focus is specifically on espoused theology, as it aims to map the theological understanding of sanctification as consciously and theologically articulated by EPCS believers, including their understanding of the Hindu concept of Sanctification. This espoused voice reflects the informed and reflective expressions of doctrine by believers within their respective traditions.

3.2. Survey Done in Three Local Congregations of EPCS

A structured survey was conducted across three local congregations of the EPCS: Lungchok, Nangdang, and Namchi. Questionnaires were distributed to congregation members after Sunday Divine services in May 2025. Before distribution, the purpose and significance of the survey were clearly explained to ensure informed participation. This approach aimed to encourage genuine responses and enhance the reliability of the collected data.

| Serial No. | Name of the Church | Questionnaires |
|------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Lungchok EPCS | 20 |

¹²⁷ Jos Colijn, *Testing the Waters: Infant Baptism as a Case Study for Doing Reformed Theology Interculturally* (Utrecht: Theological University Kampen, 2023), 26.

| | | |
|---|---------------|----|
| 2 | Nangdang EPCS | 20 |
| 3 | Namchi EPCS | 20 |

3.3. Believing

3.3.1. Christian Believing

3.3.1.1. Understanding of Sinless Life and Transformation

All three congregations affirm that sanctification involves freedom from sin, means being saved from hell, and a transformed Christian life. For instance, in Lungchok, believers described sanctification as “being delivered from sin and living a transformed, holy life.”¹²⁸ In Namchi, believers agreed, saying sanctification meant “being born again and living a transformed life through faith in Christ.”¹²⁹ In Nangdang, some believers emphasized that “sanctification is centered on believing in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.”¹³⁰

3.3.1.2. Differing Views on Good Works in the Process of Sanctification

There are, however, differences in whether good works are considered a process for sanctification. In Namchi, several believers stated that sanctification includes “gaining eternal life through good deeds and faithful living,”¹³¹ highlighting a strong connection between moral action and divine approval. Meanwhile, believers in Lungchok noted that “good works help confirm one’s spiritual condition,”¹³² but did not necessarily see them as requirements for sanctification. In Nangdang, believers made a distinction, suggesting that “good deeds are expressions of gratitude, not as a means to earn sanctification.”¹³³ In the EPCS, due to a lack of trained leaders and organizational shifts, congregations hold differing opinions regarding sanctification.

¹²⁸ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025. EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹²⁹ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³⁰ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³¹ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³² EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³³ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

3.3.1.3. Work of the Holy Spirit in Sanctification

The role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification was emphasized primarily in Lungchok and Namchi. In Namchi, believers stated that “the Holy Spirit helps the believers to live a holy life,”¹³⁴ linking the Spirit directly to the sanctifying process. In Lungchok, believers asserted that sanctification was understood as including “freedom from sickness, demonic oppression,”¹³⁵ indicating a holistic view of sanctification influenced by spiritual warfare and healing.

3.3.1.3.1. Assurance of Salvation Believers

This also expressed varied understandings of assurance of salvation. In Lungchok, some believers expressed the belief that “a person can lose their salvation if they turn away from faith.”¹³⁶ In contrast, in Nangdang, believers affirmed that “assurance is a divine guarantee,”¹³⁷ while in Namchi, believers described assurance as “certainty and confidence that one is truly sanctified and will inherit eternal life.”¹³⁸ Believers have different understandings because of the lack of trained leaders.

3.3.2. Hindu Believing

3.3.2.1. Concept of Moksha and Liberation

Across all three congregations, EPCS believers described Hindu sanctification as rooted in moksha, the liberation from rebirth. A common view in Lungchok is that sanctification involves “being incarnated many times until one is finally able to reach moksha.”¹³⁹ Similarly, in Nangdang, believers described it as “liberation from the cycle of birth and death,”¹⁴⁰ and in Namchi, believers explained it as “liberation from the endless cycle of life and death.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³⁵ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³⁸ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹³⁹ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴⁰ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴¹ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

3.3.2.2.Necessity of Good Works (Karma)

The necessity of good works in Hinduism was consistently emphasized. In Nangdang, believers asserted that “sanctification is earned strictly through good deeds.”¹⁴² In Lungchok, believers described sanctification as requiring “doing good works, such as helping the poor or cleaning hospitals.”¹⁴³ While in Namchi, believers highlighted acts like “offering flowers to the gods and engaging in continuous prayer and fasting.”¹⁴⁴ In EPCS, believers express their faith by bringing the first fruits to the church and spending time in fasting and prayer.

3.3.2.3.Rituals and Ancestral Worship Rituals

Worship practices also played a central role in how Hindu sanctification was perceived. In Lungchok, believers noted that Hindus achieve sanctification through “worship of natural forces like the sun and moon, and by honouring their ancestors.”¹⁴⁵ In Namchi, believers described annual events like “organizing a puran, once a year,”¹⁴⁶ as integral to sanctification in Hinduism. In EPCS, believers express their faith by organizing a holy convention once a year, where leaders preach the Word of God, lead believers to repentance, and help them draw closer to God.

3.3.2.4.Rebirth and Karma

This understanding was also seen as foundational to Hindu understanding. In Namchi, believers explained that if someone fails to live righteously, they “may be reborn as an animal such as a dog or insect.”¹⁴⁷ In Lungchok, believers echoed this, noting that a person might be “reborn as an insect, a grasshopper, or an ant” depending on their karma.¹⁴⁸

3.4. Belonging

3.4.1. Christian Belonging

3.4.1.1.Sacramental and Liturgical Belonging

All three congregations affirm traditional Christian practices such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper as central to their identity. In Lungchok, believers said these are “seals of their

¹⁴² EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴³ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴⁴ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴⁵ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴⁶ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴⁷ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁴⁸ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

belonging to Christ.”¹⁴⁹ In Nangdang, believers viewed “participating in the Lord’s Supper” as “spiritually beneficial,”¹⁵⁰ even likening it to medicine. In Namchi, believers, while affirming their Christian identity, admitted they are sometimes required to participate in Hindu activities due to institutional settings. For example, believers who work in Sikkim government offices and students are required to attend the Saraswati Puja¹⁵¹ organized by the government.

3.4.1.2.Separation from Hindu Practices

The idea of separating from Hindu customs was strong across all congregations. In Lungchok, believers emphasized “refusing to bow before any human being,”¹⁵² seeing such acts as idolatrous. In Nangdang, believers reported “refusing to eat anything offered to idols,”¹⁵³ and in Namchi, believers spoke of “complete separation from Hindu practices, including avoiding the consumption of food.”¹⁵⁴

3.4.1.3.Evangelistic Engagement with Hindu Rituals

In EPCS, some believers, however, described their participation in Hindu rituals as a form of giving witness about Christ. In Nangdang, believers mentioned that they “participate in Hindu funerals to bear witness,”¹⁵⁵ while in Namchi, believers noted they are “present as witnesses in Hindu marriages and funerals,”¹⁵⁶ though without compromising their faith.

3.4.2. Hindu Belonging

3.4.2.1.External Symbols of Belonging

All three congregations identified tika and the sacred thread as external markers of Hindu identity. In Lungchok, believers noted that Hindus show belonging by “wearing a tika on their forehead and Janai (sacred thread).”¹⁵⁷ In Namchi, believers described these as “wearing the Janai and applying tika.”¹⁵⁸ In EPCS, believers see their identity as marked by external symbols as well as by inner transformation, baptism, and Christian practices such as wearing

¹⁴⁹ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵⁰ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵¹ Saraswati Puja is a Hindu festival dedicated to Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom, learning, and the arts, and is especially celebrated by students and educators.

¹⁵² EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵³ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵⁴ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵⁵ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵⁶ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵⁷ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁵⁸ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

a cross, attending church, and living a morally distinct life. Moreover, they carry a Bible and a hymn book in their bags or sometimes in their hands.

3.4.2.2.Caste-Based Exclusion

The believers from Nangdang and Namchi further reported caste-based exclusion. In Nangdang, believers were said to be “excluded from entering temples,”¹⁵⁹ especially those from lower castes. In Namchi, believers reported that “Brahmins refuse to allow Christians to live in their land.”¹⁶⁰

3.5. Behaving

3.5.1. Christian Behaving

3.5.1.1.Good Works as Fruit of Faith

All congregations affirmed that good works are important in the Christian life, though their theological weight varied. In Lungchok, believers emphasized that good deeds were seen as contributing to “one’s journey of sanctification.”¹⁶¹ In Nangdang, believers emphasized that “good deeds are expressions of gratitude and faithfulness.”¹⁶² While in Namchi, believers said, “sanctification involves both true faith and obedience.”¹⁶³

3.5.1.2.Witness through Behavior

Good behavior was also viewed as a witness to the world. In Nangdang, believers affirmed that “faithful believers will naturally engage in good works, which also serve as a form of evangelism.”¹⁶⁴ In Namchi, believers emphasized the need to “treat everyone equally.”¹⁶⁵ as an expression of Christ-like sanctification.

3.5.2. Hindu Behaving

3.5.2.1.Karma and Moral Discipline

In EPCS, believers widely perceived Hinduism as works-based and driven by personal effort. In Nangdang, believers emphasized “karma as its central doctrine, doing good results

¹⁵⁹ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶⁰ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶¹ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶² EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶³ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶⁴ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶⁵ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

in good outcomes.”¹⁶⁶ In Lungchok, believers described behavior such as “practicing yoga, bathing in the Ganges, to purify the soul.”¹⁶⁷ In Namchi, believers included ritual acts like “giving cows to priests (pandits) during funerals.”¹⁶⁸

3.5.2.2. Ritualistic Paths to Liberation

Rituals were seen as essential to sanctification. In Lungchok, believers mentioned “animal sacrifices during their festivals,”¹⁶⁹ while in Nangdang, believers highlighted “Satsanga can lead to sanctification.”¹⁷⁰ In Namchi, believers pointed to “cremation rituals of the deceased”¹⁷¹ as aiding the soul’s liberation. In EPCS, believers think that engaging in ritualistic activities such as carrying the pastor’s bag, cleaning the church, or offering essential items in memory of a deceased person can contribute to their final salvation.

3.6. Experiencing

In EPCS, believers experience sanctification and salvation in diverse ways. In Lungchok, some believers live “with a constant fear that they may lose their Salvation,”¹⁷² showing a fragile assurance based on moral performance. In contrast, in Namchi, believers expressed that “the Holy Spirit helps the believers to live a holy life.”¹⁷³ giving confidence in God’s preservation. In Nangdang, believers said that the assurance was linked to supernatural experiences, such as “seeing Jesus in a dream.”¹⁷⁴

3.7. Conclusion

The findings in this chapter reveal that EPCS believers across Lungchok, Nangdang, and Namchi understand sanctification as a journey involving spiritual transformation, moral conduct, and personal experience of the Holy Spirit. While the core Christian belief in sanctification through faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit is evident, elements of the Hindu worldview, such as karma, ritual purity, and fear of rebirth, continue to shape some perspectives and practices. In the Sikkim context, living a life that bears witness to Christ is a living testimony. This is the main strength in believers’ understanding of sanctification.

¹⁶⁶ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶⁷ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶⁸ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁶⁹ EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁷⁰ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁷¹ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁷² EPCS in Lungchok. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁷³ EPCS in Namchi. Interview by the author. May 2025.

¹⁷⁴ EPCS in Nangdang. Interview by the author. May 2025.

However, the weaknesses are that many place too much emphasis on good works and view sanctification as freedom from sickness and demonic oppression. Some treat the Lord's Supper as if it were a form of medicine, while others withdraw from society instead of engaging with it. In addition, some focus more on dreams and visions than on the authority of God's Word.

In EPCS, believers relate to Hindu understandings by practicing rituals like offering first fruits, fasting, and memorial acts for the deceased. They express faith through both external symbols and inner transformation, similar to Hindu piety. Some also believe that acts like carrying the pastor's bag or cleaning the church contribute to sanctification. This interplay of biblical and cultural beliefs underscores the importance of deeper theological discipleship to ground believers more firmly in the Reformed understanding of sanctification as a grace-filled, Spirit-led process of growing into the likeness of Christ.

Chapter Four

Hindu Concept of Sanctification – a Literature Review

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of sanctification¹⁷⁵ within Hinduism, a religion rich in philosophical, ritualistic, and devotional traditions. It seeks to answer the central question: What is the concept of sanctification in Hinduism? To address this, the chapter examines various dimensions of Hindu thought and practices, including scriptural perspectives from the Bhagavad Gita, philosophical insights from Vedantic traditions (Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita), and practices from Patanjali Yoga, Puranic pilgrimage, Vedic sacrifice, grace-based devotion, and prayer traditions.

4.2. Origin and Brief History of Hinduism

The origins of Hinduism are debated among scholars, with two main theories. The first suggests Hinduism is indigenous to India, developing in the south, while the Aryan invasion theory proposes that foreign Aryans introduced their religion and culture. Critics of the Aryan theory argue it lacks substantial evidence, and recent archaeological and linguistic discoveries support a native development of Hinduism.¹⁷⁶ Followers of the Vedic tradition preferred “Sanatana Dharma”¹⁷⁷ Sanatana means “eternal,” and Dharma means “that which holds up existence.”¹⁷⁸ a term rooted in their scriptures, but “Hindu” eventually became a secondary identifier. Derived from the Persian word for the Indus Valley people, Hindu gained formal usage during the 11th-century Muslim occupation as a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Later, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 defined a Hindu as anyone who didn't belong to another religion, echoing the British colonial era's approach, where individuals were classified as Hindus if they couldn't specify their creed or didn't identify with a recognized religion or sect.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Hinduism does not have a concept of sanctification; however, it does have analogous ideas that resemble parts of sanctification, though rooted in a different worldview: Purification (śuddhi), Spiritual Discipline (sādhana), and Liberation (moksha).

¹⁷⁶ Clifmond Shameerudeen, “Salvation in Hinduism,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2023): 44–63, <https://doi.org/10.32597/jams/vol19/iss1/6>, 45.

¹⁷⁷ O.M. Matthew Oruvattithara, *Introduction to World Religions: Christian Institute for the Study of Religious and Society*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 2012), 1.

¹⁷⁸ A Santanu K. Patro, ed., *A Guide to Religious Thought and Practices* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 44

¹⁷⁹ Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 32 -33.

The history of Hinduism is broadly divided into four periods. The first is the Vedic Era, where early Hindus worshipped nature and deities, emphasizing rituals and sacrifices. The second is the Puranic Era, marked by the prominence of Brahmanic priests who acted as intermediaries between the people and the gods, with the priests themselves sometimes considered superior to the gods. The third is the Upanishadic Era, characterized by deepening philosophical inquiry that influenced the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism as reactions to Brahmanic teachings. The fourth stage is the Devotional Era, where the process of sanctification was pursued through heartfelt devotion (*bhakti*), highlighting the transformative power of a personal relationship with a chosen deity.¹⁸⁰ Hence, Hinduism's origins are complex and multifaceted, lacking a single founder or definitive historical starting point. It can be seen as a rich synthesis of diverse cultural, philosophical, and spiritual traditions that have evolved.

4.3. Concept of Sin in Hinduism

There is no concept of sin in Hinduism. It says that one has to reap what one sows, good or bad. If a person makes mistakes, he or she will have to face the consequences. If a person does well, he will enjoy the fruits.¹⁸¹ The guiding principle for determining what is right and true across various movements in Hinduism is *dharma*, which means duty. Dharma encompasses the proper way of life, including all aspects and activities. Its counterpart is *adharma*. *Adharma* exists within the broader framework of human bondage to *avidya* or ignorance. This ignorance leads individuals to become attached to *maya* or illusion, making them subject to the consequences of karma. As a result, they undergo cycles of rebirth, known as reincarnation. In this ongoing cycle, the *Atman* (soul) transitions from one life to another, with an individual's current existence being just one of an infinite series of previous and future lives. Rebirths are influenced by Karma, a metaphysical life that dictates present and future circumstances based on past actions and tendencies. This continuous process of birth, death, and rebirth is referred to as *samsara*, which literally means "wandering." Since ignorance is the root issue, achieving insight or realization is essential for liberation. Only by eliminating this ignorance can the soul's true nature as pure spirit be restored.¹⁸² While

¹⁸⁰Shameerudeen, "Salvation in Hinduism," 46.

¹⁸¹ Ramesh Chand, *Major Religions in India* (Dehradun: Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2025), 18.

¹⁸²Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Spirit and Salvation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, Volume 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 221–23.

Hinduism doesn't recognize the concept of sin in the classical sense, adharmā, bad karma, and ignorance can be seen as analogous to sin.

4.4. Sanctification Through Liberation as Taught in the Bhagavad Gita

The concept of sanctification in Hinduism is extensively described in the Bhagavad Gita, a revered scripture featuring a dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, a Hindu deity. According to Krishna, sanctification involves the purification and spiritual elevation of the soul, ultimately leading to its freedom from the bondage of the physical body and union with the divine. This concept promotes the dichotomy between the individual soul and the body, rather than promoting psychosomatic unity. In Hinduism, salvation is rooted in the separation of the soul from the material world (*prakṛiti*). The idea of soul liberation is a recurring theme in Hindu scriptures, with moksha and mukti being the two primary terms used to describe salvation. Moksha, meaning “liberated” or “set free,” is the most commonly used term.¹⁸³ The liberation unfolds in three stages: knowledge of the world's impermanence (*vicāra*), recognizing its ultimate non-existence (*atyantābhāva*); contemplation of the ātman (*jñāna*), realizing it as the sole ultimate reality and transcending ego (*ahaṁkāra*); and ultimate detachment (*uttamavairāgya*), cultivating dispassionate detachment free from causal influences (*nimittakāraṇa*), ultimately leading to liberation.¹⁸⁴ The ultimate goal is to free the soul from its bodily confines. The journey to salvation which is sanctification in the Hindu context. It begins in this life and may span multiple reincarnations until and unless they achieve enough good karma in their sanctification, which outweighs their bad karma, and finally leads to Moksha (salvation). Additionally, the Bhagavad Gita outlines three paths to attain salvation: karma-yoga, jnana-yoga, and bhakti-yoga, which are part of sanctification.

4.4.1. Sanctification as Collecting Good Karma as Taught in Karma Yoga

Hindus can achieve sanctification leading to moksha by faithfully performing the “obligatory duties,” which are the sacred duties ordained by god, such as prayers, rituals, and essential acts of worship, which serve as means of spiritual purification and transformation, which are part of karma yoga. Acts of adoration to the Supreme god, these responsibilities (nitya karma) must be performed with selfless intentions. Hindus must execute their “work as a sacrifice” and let go of their attachment to the outside world. Because they are classified as

¹⁸³Shameerudeen, “Salvation in Hinduism”, 52.

¹⁸⁴Ionut Moise, *Salvation in Indian Philosophy Perfection and Simplicity for Vaisesika* (London: Routledge, 2021), 38,

“bondage,” ordinary tasks like housework and employment are not included in the sacrifice described in the Bhagavad Gita. According to the Bhagavad Gita, Hindus can attain the ‘highest good’ by performing right actions. This highest good is realized when actions are performed with a sense of interconnectedness with god, while remaining detached from the benefits of those actions. Therefore, Hindus understand that their actions, whether sacrificial (yajna) or dutiful (nitya), must be carried out in alignment with their Supreme god (Ishvara) and with no desire for personal reward. When performed with such selfless devotion, these actions become a means of sanctification. Through this path of karma yoga, individuals are spiritually purified, grow in detachment from worldly ties, and are cleansed from the burden of past sins, thus progressing toward a sanctified state.¹⁸⁵ Karma Yoga encourages individuals to perform their duties with dedication. Lord Buddha, the ninth incarnation of Hinduism, is treated as a living embodiment of the karma yoga ideal.¹⁸⁶

4.4.2. Sanctification Through Transcendent Knowledge in Jnana Yoga

In the context of Jnana yoga, god’s actions are influenced by an individual’s caste and family background. In this framework, god requires a mediator to impart spiritual knowledge.

Jnana-yoga, or the path of “transcendent knowledge,” is viewed in the Bhagavad Gita as a means of achieving sanctification – spiritual purification and union with the divine, through which they achieve their Moksha. However, access to this path often appears limited to individuals from certain castes or familial lineages, suggesting sanctification through jnana-yoga may be culturally and socially exclusive. This path emphasizes the reception of divine knowledge through a guru-disciple relationship, reinforced by spiritual initiation rites. Essential qualities for sanctification via jnana-yoga include unwavering faith, deep devotion, and disciplined self-control. Remarkably, the Bhagavad Gita teaches that even those burdened by severe sinfulness can undergo inner transformation and attain spiritual purity, as their sin is symbolically destroyed like ashes when illuminated by this sacred knowledge.¹⁸⁷ Thus, sanctification in Jnana Yoga is not achieved through rituals alone but primarily through transcendent knowledge received from a guru. While spiritual initiation rites play a role, true sanctification comes through inner transformation marked by faith, devotion, and self-discipline rather than external ritual acts.

¹⁸⁵Shameerudeen, “Salvation in Hinduism”, 54.

¹⁸⁶Santanu K. Patro, *A Guide to Religious Thought and Practices* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 51.

¹⁸⁷Shameerudeen, “Salvation in Hinduism”, 54-55.

4.4.3. Sanctification Through Devotion in Bhakti Yoga

Bhakti-yoga, considered the supreme path to sanctification in Hinduism, emphasizes cultivating deep love and personal devotion toward a deity. The word “bhakti,” rooted in the Sanskrit term meaning “separation,” symbolizes the soul’s intense longing to be reunited with the ultimate reality. As described in the Bhagavad Gita, sanctification through bhakti-yoga is realized through various practices – concentrating the mind on god, mastering the senses, engaging in sincere worship, maintaining constant devotion through disciplined spiritual practice and selfless service, surrendering completely to the divine will, and dedicating the outcomes of one’s actions to god. Significantly, this path of sanctification is inclusive, extending to all people, including women and children, unlike the more restrictive path of jnana-yoga.¹⁸⁸

4.5. Sanctification Through Self-Realization as taught in Upanishadic and Vedantic Tradition.

The Upanishads are ancient texts within the philosophical tradition of Hinduism. They explore the nature of ultimate reality, the self, and the path to spiritual realization. The Sanskrit phrase “Tat tvam asi” conveys the idea that the ultimate reality, which is known as Brahman, underlying all existence, is identical to one’s own self, i.e., soul, which is the life force (ultimate reality) present within both the world and humanity. This phrase holds profound significance about reality and can facilitate self-realization.¹⁸⁹ The tradition of Vedanta, which literally means “the end of the Vedas,” builds upon the teachings of the Upanishads and has been interpreted and systematized by various scholars over the centuries.¹⁹⁰ Among the most influential exponents of Vedanta are three South Indian Brahmin philosophers, Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva, each of whom offered distinct theological perspectives on the nature of Brahman and its relationship to the individual soul. While Hindu thought broadly affirms the existence of a supreme, sustaining divine reality, the nature of that reality and the means of attaining unity with it are interpreted differently across these schools of thought.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸Shameerudeen, “Salvation in Hinduism”, 56.

¹⁸⁹Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*, Second edition, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25.

¹⁹⁰Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Round Table: Evangelicalism in conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 40.

¹⁹¹Knott, *Hinduism*, 26.

4.5.1. Sanctification Through Non-duality in Shankara.

Shankara's core teaching, Advaita or "non-duality," presents sanctification as the realization that the individual self (Atman) is not separate from the Brahman. In his view, true spiritual purification and union with the divine come from recognizing that all distinctions are illusory, everything is part of a singular, unified reality. Brahman alone is real and exists beyond all human categories and understanding. The world of everyday experience is maya, or illusion, a lesser reality that obscures the truth. Sanctification, in this context, involves the removal of ignorance, discerning the eternal from the transient, and awakening to the knowledge that one's true self is identical with Brahman. Thus, the process of sanctification culminates in the realization that the individual self and Brahman are one and the same.¹⁹² Shankara's teachings emphasize the pursuit of sanctification through self-realization and a deep understanding of the ultimate reality. This sanctification involves the inner transformation and spiritual purification that come from recognizing one's true nature as identical with Brahman, leading to union with the divine. This is merely a philosophical sanctification.

4.5.2. Sanctification Through Knowledge and Transformative Relationship in Ramanuja Sanctification

Ramanuja, in his magnum opus *Sri Bhashya*, articulates his theory of *Visistadvaita* or "qualified non-dualism," offering a distinctive view of sanctification.¹⁹³ While affirming the non-dual nature of ultimate reality, he strongly rejects Shankara's Advaita notion that individuality and the material world are mere illusions (*maya*). For Ramanuja, the distinctions between the self, others, and God are not illusory but constitute a real and meaningful part of the divine order.¹⁹⁴ Souls, according to him, are eternal and infinitely small substances that retain their individuality even in union with the divine.¹⁹⁵ Sanctification, therefore, is not about the dissolution of the self but about establishing a right relationship with a personal and loving God (*Ishvara*), rather than with fellow beings. Unlike the impersonal Brahman of Shankara, Ramanuja's Brahman is the Supreme Person, vividly portrayed in the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and *Puranas*, who indwells and sustains all things. Sanctification involves both the knowledge of this personal God and a transformative relationship marked

¹⁹²Knott, *Hinduism*, 28.

¹⁹³O.M. Matthew Oruvattithara, *Introduction to World Religions: Christian Institute for the Study of Religious and Society*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 2012), 58.

¹⁹⁴Knott, *Hinduism*, 29,

¹⁹⁵Santanu K. Patro, *A Guide to Religious Thought and Practices* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 53.

by loving surrender. It is achieved through divine grace and the soul's humble submission, wherein God acts as the inner guide, drawing the individual toward holiness and spiritual fulfillment.¹⁹⁶ Thus, for Ramanuja, sanctification is not attained through intellectual knowledge alone, but through a relational, grace-enabled process in which God purifies and transforms the soul.

4.5.3. Sanctification Through Devotion and Grace in Madhava

Madhava, the champion of Dualism (*Dvaita Vedanta*), developed a theology of sanctification grounded in a clear distinction between the individual self (*Atman*) and the ultimate reality (*Brahman*). Scholars opine that he was influenced by Ramanujacharya and the Krishna devotional tradition, which emphasized a personal relationship with God.¹⁹⁷

Madhava taught that sanctification involves recognizing the uniqueness of all beings and their absolute dependence on God. Unlike the non-dualistic views of others, Madhva asserted that the self, the world, and God are eternally distinct, yet all exist under the sovereignty of the ultimate reality. Sanctification, in this view, requires divine grace, wholehearted dependence on God, and active devotion expressed through worship and service,¹⁹⁸ such as veneration of the divine through sacred images (*murtis*). According to him, Brahman is present mystically in sacred images.¹⁹⁹ His establishment of the Krishna icon at Udupi symbolizes the central role of personal devotion in the process of sanctification, drawing the soul nearer to God while affirming its distinct identity.²⁰⁰

In the context of sanctification, Madhva's teachings stress that spiritual purification and transformation require a clear recognition of the soul's separateness from God, along with wholehearted devotion and reliance on divine grace. Sanctification, according to Madhva, is attained through a life of dedicated worship and humble dependence on the Lord, who alone grants the grace necessary for the soul's spiritual elevation.

We can see a contradiction to each other regarding the nature of Brahman and in the understanding of sanctification. Shankara emphasized non-duality, where the individual self (*Atman*) and ultimate reality (*Brahman*) are one. In contrast, Ramanuja's philosophy posited a distinction between Brahman and *Atman*, though they are explicitly related. Madhva's view

¹⁹⁶Knott, *Hinduism*, 29-30.

¹⁹⁷ O.M. Matthew Oruvattithara, 59

¹⁹⁸Knott, *Hinduism*, 30

¹⁹⁹ Santanu K. Patro, *A Guide to Religious Thought and Practices* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 53.

²⁰⁰Knott, *Hinduism*, 30.

was more extreme, asserting a complete separation between the two, yet he believed the self to be in God's image and inhabited by a divine inner witness.²⁰¹

4.6. Sanctification Through Ethical Discipline and Mediation in Patanjali Yoga.

Patanjali Yoga remains a revered and influential philosophical framework in India, with its emphasis on spiritual growth and salvific liberation continuing to inspire practitioners to this day. This yoga, Hariharananda argued, was samkhyayoga based on Kapila's philosophy.²⁰² Patanjali Yoga addresses the spiritual condition of humanity and offers a path of sanctification by helping individuals discern between the fleeting, material self and the eternal, pure spirit (Purusha). People often mistake their thoughts, emotions, and physical experiences for their true identity, leading them to associate themselves with the aging and perishable body. However, through the disciplined mindset cultivated in Patanjali Yoga, one can come to recognize their true essence as the eternal spirit, free from material attachments. This yoga system provides a structured process of sanctification, guiding individuals through ethical living and deep meditation to purify the body, mind, and soul, ultimately leading to spiritual awakening and transformation.²⁰³ Hence, the essence of Patanjali yoga lies in its emphasis on self-realization, detachment, and cultivating a profound understanding of one's true nature, ultimately leading to true liberation.

Patanjali Yoga offers a path to sanctification through various stages. These stages can be categorized into three main areas: moral preparation, physical preparation, and spiritual preparation.

Moral preparation involves two key components. Firstly, Yama encompasses external self-control through practices such as nonviolence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), honesty (asteya), chastity (brahmacharya), and non-possessiveness (aparigraha). Secondly, Niyama involves internal self-discipline through purity (sauca), contentment (santosa), asceticism (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), recitation of the holy syllable *Om*, and divine worship (Isvarapranidhana).²⁰⁴

Physical preparation includes three stages. Asana involves physical postures, particularly sitting positions like the Lotus and Lion positions, with up to eighty-four positions taught in

²⁰¹Knott, *Hinduism*, 31.

²⁰²Knut A. Jacobsen, *Yoga in Modern Hinduism*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 57.

²⁰³Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 287,

²⁰⁴Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 288.

Hathayoga. Pranayama involves breath restraint, regulating inhalation, exhalation, and breathing frequency. Pratyahara involves the withdrawal of the senses, separating the sense organs from external objects.²⁰⁵

Spiritual preparation comprises three higher stages. Dharana involves concentration on an object to calm the mind. Dhyana is contemplative meditation, where one lets go of thoughts. Finally, Samadhi is the highest stage of contemplation, where the distinction between spirit and matter dissolves, liberating the soul. Yoga aims to liberate individuals by revealing the fundamental unity beneath apparent duality, recognizing the interplay between spirit (Purusha) and matter (Prakriti). By discerning the distinction between the individual soul and material existence, one can identify with the immortal essence, transcending mortal limitations. In modern Hinduism, yoga is often practiced to unite with Brahman, the ultimate reality.²⁰⁶

Hence, Patanjali Yoga offers a structured path of sanctification, helping individuals realize their true spiritual identity (Purusha) beyond thoughts, emotions, and the physical body. It promotes self-realization, detachment, and liberation through ethical living and deep meditation.

4.7. Sanctification Through Pilgrimage in the Puranic period.

In Hinduism, the idea of sanctification through pilgrimage (tirtha-yatra) became prominent during the Puranic period. The Puranas highlight the spiritual value of journeying to sacred places as a vital practice for achieving inner purification, deepening one's spiritual growth, and progressing toward sanctification. These pilgrimages are seen as transformative acts that cleanse the soul and draw the individual closer to the divine.

In Hinduism, pilgrimage is regarded as a vital act of devotion that fosters sanctification, especially during the Puranic era. It served as a means of spiritual refinement and inner cleansing, guiding the soul toward holiness and union with the divine. Pilgrims travelled to sacred locations connected to deities and mythological events, as described in the Sthala Puranas. Notable examples include Braj, celebrated for its association with Krishna's childhood, and Cidambaram, revered as the site of Shiva's cosmic dance. These pilgrimages were seen as powerful practices for advancing one's sanctification.²⁰⁷ Shiva is best shown as

²⁰⁵Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 288.

²⁰⁶Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 288.

²⁰⁷Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *Everyday Hinduism*, (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 109.

Nataraja, the dancing Lord. His dance represents the victory over evil forces. Because of this, being devoted to Shiva can help people overcome their demons. For this reason, the dance of Shiva is an important part of sanctifying.²⁰⁸ Rameshvaram, connected to Rama's journey. These sites, often located on riverbanks, are called 'tirtha', meaning a crossing point. Hindus undertake pilgrimage for purifying to get moksha.²⁰⁹ Therefore, as per the Sthala Puranas, Hindus undertake pilgrimages as a means to sanctify themselves.

Varanasi (Kashi), located along the sacred Ganga River, stands as one of Hinduism's most venerated sites for sanctification. It is believed that dying in Kashi leads to spiritual purification and ultimate union with the divine, prompting many to spend their final days there. The Ganga at Varanasi – along with places like Gaya and Rishikesh – holds great importance for the immersion of ancestral ashes, a ritual viewed as essential for the sanctification of the departed soul. Hindus believe that such rites help the deceased attain spiritual release. Additionally, giving *Dakshina* (offerings) to the priests who conduct these rituals is seen as a sacred act that furthers the soul's sanctification. The physical and emotional trials of pilgrimage itself are also believed to help detach the soul from worldly ties, guiding it toward spiritual purification and closeness to the divine.²¹⁰ Pilgrimage is a good deed for Hindus, purifying themselves and their loved ones through sacred rituals like ash immersion in the Ganga.

4.8. Sanctification Through Sacrifice in the Vedic tradition.

In the ancient Vedic tradition, sacrifice was regarded as a sacred act that served various spiritual purposes, particularly the pursuit of sanctification and the attainment of the heavenly realm. Through the ritual of sacrifice, individuals sought to unite with the ultimate reality, as the offering symbolized the surrender and transformation of the self. A key theme in this tradition is the self-sacrifice of *Prajapati*, the lord of creation, whose act of offering himself becomes a profound model of sanctification. In this myth, Prajapati brings forth creation by dismembering and reassembling himself, symbolizing that true spiritual purification and self-realization are achieved through self-giving and inner transformation.²¹¹ Sacrifice was seen as a sacred means through which individuals could pursue sanctification, guiding them toward divine joy and spiritual fulfillment. It served not only as a pathway to the heavenly realm but

²⁰⁸Kelvin M. McCune, *Effective Hindu Evangelism: contrasting the Concept of Salvation between Hinduism and Christianity*, (Columbus: Brentwood Christian Press, 2012), 56.

²⁰⁹Flueckiger, *Everyday Hinduism*, (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 109.

²¹⁰Flueckiger, *Everyday Hinduism*, 110-113.

²¹¹Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 266.

also as a means of rising above worldly limitations to attain one's highest spiritual potential. Symbolically, sacrifices were portrayed as bridges that connected the earthly and the divine, forming a link between the human and the transcendent. In this spiritual journey, *Agni*, the fire deity, was revered as the divine mediator who carried offerings to the gods. He is honored as the bridge, the thread, and the path that leads humanity toward sanctification and communion with the divine. As the ancient hymn declares: "Agni has stretched out the heavenly thread; thou Agni art the thread for us, the bridge; Thou art the road which leadeth to the gods: let us with thee rise to the highest heaven" (Taittiriya Brahmana II, 4.2.6), illustrating his central role in leading souls toward spiritual elevation.²¹² The Vedic tradition emphasizes the sanctification through sacrifice as a means to purify for attaining moksha.

4.9. Sanctification through Grace in the Vaishnavite Tyaga tradition

Hinduism also upholds the concept of divine grace as essential to sanctification. The Ramanandis, a group of ascetics within the Vaishnavite Tyaga tradition, believe that true sanctification is ultimately granted through the mercy of Vishnu or Rama. While they engage in rigorous ascetic disciplines, they acknowledge that spiritual purification and transformation do not come from human effort alone but depend on the compassionate grace of the divine. This belief is symbolically expressed in their continued wearing of the "Sacred Thread," which signifies their reliance on divine grace and underscores the virtues of humility and surrender. Their understanding of sanctification closely reflects the Bhakti tradition, which prioritizes devotion, complete surrender, and the transformative power of God's grace in drawing the soul into sanctification.²¹³ Thus, in Hinduism, particularly among the Ramanandis of the Bhakti tradition, grace is understood as the essential, compassionate gift of the divine, granted by Vishnu or Rama, that enables true sanctification beyond human effort, fostering humility, surrender, and spiritual transformation.

4.10. Sanctification through prayer in Hinduism.

In Hinduism, sanctification can be sought through prayer, understood as a living and dynamic communion with the divine. Prayer manifests in multiple forms, expressions of praise, petitions, gratitude, and humble supplication. It also includes the chanting of sacred *mantras*, which may not directly address a specific deity but still serve as powerful tools for

²¹²Wilhelm Dilger, *Salvation in Hinduism and Christianity: A Comparison and a Contrast*, (Mangalore: Basel Mission Book, 1908). 459.

²¹³Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 276.

spiritual purification. In the Vedic period, hymns of praise and supplication, such as *stotra*, *stuti*, *stava*, and at times *kavya*, were integral to invoking divine guidance, inner transformation, and sanctifying grace, helping individuals progress toward spiritual refinement and closeness with the sacred.²¹⁴ The *Gayatri* mantra, a revered Sanskrit prayer hymn from the Rigveda, is believed to lead to sanctification to attain moksha. It's associated with the goddess Gayatri. The holy syllable *Om*, symbolizing Brahman, the ultimate reality, is often chanted in conjunction with mantras like Gayatri. According to Hindu tradition, Om holds immense power, connecting practitioners with the Brahman.²¹⁵

In the context of sanctification, the recitation of god's name in prayer is believed to secure spiritual purification and a blessed passage into the afterlife. Great importance is placed on the correct liturgical use, precise pronunciation, and the appropriate number of repetitions. The sanctifying power of divine names is often transmitted through a guru, whose guidance helps the seeker understand and consecrate these names. Many Hindus hold the belief that invoking god's name at the time of death, an act famously demonstrated by Mahatma Gandhi, ensures a serene and sacred transition from this life. This conviction is expressed during Hindu funeral rites, where the chant *Ram nam satya hai*, which is literally translated as "the name of Rama is truth," affirms the soul's sanctification and the victory of divine truth over mortal existence.²¹⁶

4.11. Conclusion

This chapter carefully examined Hindu perspectives on sanctification, focusing on moksha, the liberation from the cycle of rebirth and union with Brahman, as the ultimate spiritual goal. The path to moksha varies across Hindu traditions, encompassing dharma (duty), bhakti (devotion), jnana (knowledge), and karma (good works). Sanctification is seen as a cumulative, merit-based process requiring personal effort, religious rites, and detachment from worldly life. This chapter concludes that while Hindu sanctification is rich in religious symbolism and moral aspiration. Moreover, the concept of grace is found in some Hindu sects, such as the Ramanandis of the Bhakti tradition. However, it ultimately depends on human action.

²¹⁴Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 248.

²¹⁵Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 249.

²¹⁶Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 250.

Chapter Five

Understanding of Sanctification in Calvin and the WCF

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine how John Calvin and the WCF understand sanctification by exploring two main questions: What does Calvin teach about sanctification? And what does the WCF say about it? These guiding questions will be addressed throughout the chapter to present a clear understanding of sanctification from a Reformed theological perspective.

5.2. Socio-religious Context of Calvin

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, Picardy, a region in northern France known for its rural landscape and strong Catholic tradition. At the age of fourteen, John Calvin moved to Paris for his education. He studied under the guidance of renowned educator Mathurin Cordier, focusing on liberal arts for four years to prepare for a career in the priesthood.²¹⁷ When Calvin was about nineteen and had just finished the work of the Faculty of Arts at Paris, his father had decided that his profession should not be theology but Law, because his father had a quarrel with the Catholic authorities in Noyon. Then his father sent him to Orleans to study law. Later, he studied under the famous Italian Jurist Alciati at the University of Bourges. After finishing his law course, Calvin went back to Paris for further study.²¹⁸

In 1533, Nicolas Cop was accused by the parliament because he talked about the gospels and God's free grace. Calvin was his close friend, so for this reason, he also had to flee the city. He left the city and went north toward Noyon.²¹⁹ In April 1534, he returned to his birthplace of Noyon and gave up his "benefice."²²⁰ On October 18, 1534, during King Francis' persecution of the Protestants, Calvin fled France and settled in Basel. At Basel, Calvin wrote the first edition of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, which was published in 1536.²²¹

²¹⁷Richard C. Gamble, "The Relationship of Calvin's Theology to the Reformed Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-6.

²¹⁸ Georgia Harkness, *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 3-6.

²¹⁹ Thea B. Van Halsema, *This Was John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 29-31.

²²⁰ Halsema, *This Was John Calvin*, 34.

²²¹ Halsema, *This Was John Calvin*, 37-44.

Later, Calvin decided to go to Strassburg. On the way to Strassburg, he decided to stay one night in Geneva. There, Farel insisted him to stay and minister in that city. For the rest of his days, except for an interval when he was kicked out of the city, he served there, turning Geneva into a godly city. He drew up a church order, a set of rules for the governing of the Church. He imposed a strict lifestyle based on biblical law in the city. He established the Geneva Academy. Through him light of the Gospel radiated from the little city of Geneva into every corner of Europe.²²²

5.3. Calvin's View on Sanctification

5.3.1. Sanctification as the Exclusive Work of God in the Elect

Calvin says that God performs His saving work exclusively in the elect. He writes,

“Yet only in the elect does that confidence flourish which Paul extols, that they loudly proclaim Abba, Father [Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 8:15]. Therefore, as God regenerates only the elect with incorruptible seed forever [I Peter 1:23] so that the seed of life sown in their hearts may never perish, thus he firmly seals the gift of his adoption in them that it may be steady and sure.”²²³

While the quotation mainly focuses on faith and regeneration, in Calvin's theological view, these concepts are closely connected with sanctification. Regeneration is the new birth through which the believer gains spiritual life, and this life naturally leads to the ongoing process of sanctification. By stating that God regenerates the elect with “incorruptible seed” and seals them in adoption, Calvin affirms that the same divine power that grants new life also preserves and transforms believers until the end. Therefore, although the passage directly discusses regeneration, it implicitly supports Calvin's belief that sanctification, like regeneration, is a unique and permanent work of God in the elect, stemming from the same grace of Christ and founded on God's eternal decree.

5.3.2. Sanctification as the Gift of God, Not Human Effort

According to Cornelis P. Venema, Calvin uses the terms repentance, regeneration, and sanctification interchangeably to emphasize that the transformation of human life through

²²² B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 29-31.

²²³ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John T. McNeill (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3.2.11. Hereafter abbreviated as *Institutes*. The reference will be given to the Book, Chapter, and Section, as is the standard practice when referring to *The Institutes*.

faith is not a human achievement but a divine gift. This inward renewal is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, not by human will or strength. Sanctification, in Calvin's view, is the result of the Spirit's creative power working in believers. Christ grants the Holy Spirit to regenerate and renew the heart and mind, producing new life. Since the giving of repentance is a work of Christ, it cannot be within human control or effort. This transformation, from being enslaved to sin to walking in righteousness, is so profound that humans are no more capable of producing it by themselves than of creating themselves.²²⁴ Thus, sanctification is entirely a gift of God's grace, not the fruit of human good works, but the evidence of the Spirit's renewing work in those united to Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30).²²⁵

5.3.3. Understanding of the Double Grace

According to Richard B. Gaffin Jr., Calvin teaches that through union with Christ, believers receive a "double grace," justification and sanctification. This means that by faith, we are united to Christ and receive two main blessings. First, we are reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness so that we no longer face Him as Judge but as our gracious Father. Second, we are sanctified and renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we may live in holiness and grow in love for God and others. Venema affirms that Calvin saw justification and sanctification as the two key gifts that come through our union with Christ.²²⁶ J. Todd Billings explains, by quoting Calvin, that sanctification and regeneration are part of what Calvin calls the "double grace" given to believers. This second part of grace is the new life that the Holy Spirit creates in us, which shows itself through love for God and others.²²⁷ Likewise, Venema says that, according to Calvin, God's grace brings two main blessings through our union with Christ: justification and, secondly, sanctification.²²⁸

Furthermore, Calvin teaches that justification and sanctification, while different in nature, are inseparably joined in the life of every believer. They cannot be separated, just as Christ himself cannot be divided into parts. When God accepts someone by His grace, He also gives them the Holy Spirit, who renews them into His image. These two blessings come

²²⁴ *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 96.

²²⁵ *Institutes* 3.16.1.

²²⁶ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Justification and Union with Christ," in *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, eds. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), 252-253.

²²⁷ Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 500.

²²⁸ Joel R. Beeke, ed., *Calvin for Today* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 95.

as one united gift through our union with Christ, and they always go hand in hand in the experience of true salvation.²²⁹

Manetsch explains that, according to Calvin, justification and sanctification are two distinct but inseparable blessings that come through union with Christ. Justification is Christ's pardon and imputed righteousness; sanctification is Christ's imparted righteousness, made available through the Holy Spirit.²³⁰

Therefore, for Calvin, justification and sanctification are distinct in nature but inseparably united in the believer's experience of salvation. Justification is the gracious act of God whereby He declares sinners righteous solely through faith in Jesus Christ. Sanctification, on the other hand, is the inward work of the Holy Spirit, effecting a real and progressive transformation in the believer's life. Though distinct, the two are never isolated, for the faith that justifies also initiates the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

5.3.4. Sanctification as Salvation Applied: Mortification and Vivification

Calvin insists that sanctification is the continuous work of the Holy Spirit, consisting of both mortifications, the putting to death of sinful desires, and vivification, the renewal of the believer into a life of righteousness and obedience to God. He emphasizes that sanctification begins with mortification, the ongoing dying of the sinful nature. Through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, the believer is enabled to put to death sinful attitudes, desires, and behaviors, thereby turning away from the dominion of the flesh. Calvin states,

And indeed, this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death.²³¹

Venema explicates that, as per Calvin, sanctification involves a continual process called mortification, which is the first step of repentance. Mortification means putting to death our old, sinful nature so that God can live in us and guide us by His Spirit. This is not something that happens instantly; rather, it is a lifelong struggle. Although the power of sin is

²²⁹ *Institutes* 3.11.16

²³⁰ Scott M. Manetsch, "John Calvin's Doctrine of Christian Life," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 2 (December 31, 2018): 259–73, 265.

²³¹ *Institutes* 3.3.9.

weakened in those who are born again, sin still remains and tries to influence them. Calvin says that even in a believer, sinful desires still arise and tempt them to do wrong. Therefore, sanctification requires a daily fight against the sinful self, including selfish desires and love for the world, in order to grow in love for God. While sin no longer rules over believers, it still affects them. For Calvin, mortification, putting sin to death, is a key part of sanctification, and it must be carried out through the power of Christ's Spirit.²³²

In addition to mortification, Calvin speaks of vivification, the Spirit-empowered process by which the believer is renewed and made alive to God. It is not simply the removal of sin, but the active and growing pursuit of holiness, love, obedience, and a godly life in conformity to Christ. "The Spirit of God is not idle in us, but he so breathes new life into us that we are no longer actuated by our own spirit, but are governed by his guidance and influence."²³³ Moreover, Calvin says, "It means, rather, the desire to live in a holy and devoted manner, a desire arising from rebirth; as if it were said that man dies to himself that he may begin to live to God."²³⁴

Therefore, according to Calvin, this vivifying work of the Spirit enables believers to live in the likeness of Christ, bearing the fruits of righteousness as evidence of their union with Him. Vivification empowers the believer to not only resist sin but to delight in God and walk according to His will, and the Holy Spirit brings the desire to live for God.

5.3.5. Sanctification as Ongoing Growth in the Image of God

Calvin emphasizes that sanctification is a process of continual growth, through which the image of God, defaced by sin, is progressively restored in the believer. It is a gradual transformation into the likeness of Christ, brought by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. As Calvin states,

"But we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God. Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression."²³⁵

²³² Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The 'Two-Fold Grace of God' and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 118–19.

²³³ *Institutes* 3.3.1.

²³⁴ *Institutes* 3.3.3

²³⁵ *Institutes* 3.3.9

Accordingly, Calvin presents sanctification as a progressive journey in which believers are gradually conformed to the image of Christ throughout their lives.

5.3.6. Sanctification is not based on Human Work

Calvin teaches that we cannot ground our sanctification in our own deeds. He saw God as the author and ultimate cause of all things, not only justification but also sanctification.²³⁶ He writes, in John 17:17, “He asks, first, therefore, that the father would sanctify the disciples, or, in other words, that he would consecrate them entirely to himself, and defend them as his sacred inheritance...it is God alone who sanctifies.”²³⁷ This shows that, for him, the process of sanctification cannot depend on anything within us.

Moreover, Calvin was deeply aware of human sinfulness, as reflected in Romans 3:9-18. He taught that everyone stands guilty before God (Romans 3:19), and that when our works are compared to God’s perfect law, they only highlight our condemnation (Romans 3:20).²³⁸ Therefore, if we try to measure our growth in holiness by our works, it will only lead to discouragement and uncertainty. From Calvin’s perspective, due to the deep corruption of human nature, sanctification cannot be built on our efforts, nor can our assurance of growth in grace come from looking at our works.

5.3.7. The Centrality of Christ and the Spirit in Sanctification

Anthony A. Hoekema, citing Calvin, teaches that sanctification is only possible through our union with Christ. He said that Calvin has put it well, “As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”²³⁹ It is through being joined to Christ that we are sanctified. Calvin also affirms that “our common nature with Christ is the pledge of our fellowship with the Son of God, and clothed with our flesh, he vanquished death and sin together that the victory and triumph might be ours.”²⁴⁰ Here, Calvin shows that through our union with Christ, who conquered sin, we are empowered to

²³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries*, vol. 22, on 1 Peter 1:3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979)

²³⁷ Calvin, J. and King, J. (2012) John Calvin’s Commentaries On The Gospel Of John Vol. 2. [edition unavailable]. Jazzybee Verlag. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1070650> (Accessed: 14 August 2025).

²³⁸ Keith S. Lindley, “Luther and Calvin on the Assurance of Your Salvation,” *Dallas Theological Seminary*, <https://voice.dts.edu/article/lutherandcalvinonsalvation/> (accessed June 17, 2025).

²³⁹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994, 195. *Institute*, 3.1.1.

²⁴⁰ *Institutes*, 2.12.3.

share in His victory. This directly relates to sanctification as the ongoing work of becoming holy by sharing in Christ's triumph over sin.

Thabiti Anyabwile adds that Calvin sees the Holy Spirit as the essential connection between us and Christ.²⁴¹ Herman J. Selderhuis agrees, explaining that Calvin teaches that everything Christ has done for our salvation becomes real and active in us through the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁴² According to Calvin, the Holy Spirit is not only the one who unites us to Christ, but also the "Spirit of sanctification" who brings about real spiritual transformation in the lives of believers.²⁴³

Selderhuis said that this sanctification is not merely an external moral improvement but a deep, inward renewal of our entire being. As Romans 5:5 says, the Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts, initiating true change.²⁴⁴ Calvin describes the Holy Spirit as the "root and seed of heavenly life," meaning He both begins and nurtures the process of making us holy and set apart for God.²⁴⁵ Through the Spirit's work, believers are given new spiritual life (Titus 3:5), their minds are opened to understand and accept the blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:13), and they are assured of their salvation.²⁴⁶ This sanctifying work is grounded in God's eternal choice and is realized through the Spirit's indwelling power (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; Romans 1:4).²⁴⁷

Ultimately, Calvin emphasizes that while all the blessings needed for sanctification are found in Christ, we can only receive and experience them through the ongoing, active work of the Holy Spirit.

5.3.8. Active Participation of Believers in Sanctification

As the first aspect of sanctification, in Calvin's understanding, is definitive that it is God alone who sanctifies. However, for Calvin, sanctification also has a second aspect, which is its experiential or progressive nature. Further, in the commentary on John 17:17, Calvin writes,

²⁴¹ Burk Parsons, ed., *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2001), 122.

²⁴² Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 304

²⁴³ *Institutes*, 3.1.2.

²⁴⁴ Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook*, 304

²⁴⁵ *Institutes*, 3.1.2.

²⁴⁶ Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook*, 305

²⁴⁷ *Institutes*, 3.1.2

We ought to infer from Christ's words that sanctification is not instantly completed in us in the first day, but that we make progress in it through the whole course of our life, till at length, God, having taken away from us the garment of the flesh, fills us with his righteousness.²⁴⁸

These two aspects of Sanctification are inseparable. Believers can grow in sanctification only because they have already been sanctified in Christ.

Joel Beeke explains that, for Calvin, sanctification, especially the aspect of vivification, calls believers to an active life of good works. When the Holy Spirit governs a believer, their life is ethically transformed and brought into alignment with God's will, resulting in a sincere pursuit of righteousness. This transformation produces spiritual fruit as believers are internally compelled to love God and their neighbours, practice justice and mercy, and turn away from evil while doing good. Beeke references Walter Stueremann, who observes that Calvin emphasizes the ethical dimension of repentance to defend justification by faith against claims of moral passivity. For Calvin, genuine faith and repentance always involve inner renewal that expresses itself in outward good works.²⁴⁹ Cornelis P. Venema further notes that Calvin views sanctification as awakening a renewed longing for holiness and obedient service to God.²⁵⁰ Thus, sanctification has a definitive aspect, granted entirely by Christ. Yet, as people still living in the flesh, believers continue to face the lingering effects of sin inherited from Adam, making ongoing purification necessary. This purification represents the progressive or experiential side of sanctification. This progressive sanctification purifies the believer and restores him to the image of God.

5.4. Socio-religious Context of WCF

The WCF was formulated in the political and theological context of the mid-seventeenth century in the British Isles. The foundation of the Westminster Assembly goes back to the Puritan movement and especially to the conflict between the Puritans and the Stuart Kings, James I and Charles I. Charles provoked the Scots by imposing the prayer book in Scotland because he wanted to bring the Church of Scotland into conformity with the Episcopal

²⁴⁸ Calvin, J. and King, J. (2012) John Calvin's Commentaries On The Gospel Of John Vol. 2. [edition unavailable]. Jazzybee Verlag. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1070650> (Accessed: 15 August 2025).

²⁴⁹ David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, eds., *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001) 297-298

²⁵⁰ Joel R. Beeke, ed., *Calvin for Today* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 108

Church of England. It brought two Bishops' wars, first in 1638 and second in 1640. The king was forced to call the Parliament, which was in conflict with the king. This parliament presented the king with the Grand Remonstrance, which outlined many of the theological and ecclesiastical grievances and called for a synod. In June 1643, the Parliament, disregarding the refusal of the King, agreed upon an ordinance calling the Assembly into existence.²⁵¹

The WCF was composed by theologians and ministers gathered at Westminster Abbey in London beginning in 1643.²⁵² It was written by an assembly of Puritan clergymen of the Church of England that met in 1643 by order of the Long Parliament.²⁵³ The Assembly consisted of 121 members who represented the Churches of England who were of Puritan conviction ('the divines'). Presbyterians were the majority, and the minority belonged to other parties. However, along with these, there were added thirty members of Parliament and six advisors from Scotland.²⁵⁴

The Assembly consisted of three important groups. There were Episcopalians, who were loyal to the King and also accepted the prevailing Church order. Second, there were Independents, who wanted freedom of religion and worship for everybody. Thirdly, there were Presbyterian Puritans, who wanted the King and Parliament should cooperate in reforming the Church. They were the majority, and they wanted a national church with a Reformed creed.²⁵⁵

The Confession was first officially put into service by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647, and has remained in force there ever since. Various independent assemblies adopted it with minor changes.²⁵⁶ Even though it was written by different people they express the truths of the Reformed faith with great clarity.

5.5. WCF View on Sanctification

The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q 35 says that "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are

²⁵¹ John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1967), 23-24.

²⁵² Joel R. Beeke, and Sinclair B. Ferguson, eds., *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1999), 12.

²⁵³ Edwards A. Dower, *A Commentary on the Confession of 1667: An Introduction to the Book of Confession* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.), 214.

²⁵⁴ *Handbook of Reformed Confessions: Class Room Edition* (Dehradun, Uttarakhand: Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2005), 11-12.

²⁵⁵ *Handbook of Reformed Confession*, 11-12.

²⁵⁶ Beeke and Ferguson, eds., *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, 12.

enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”²⁵⁷ And the Larger Catechism Q. no 74 says that “sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, and are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.”²⁵⁸

The Westminster Catechisms teach that sanctification is the ongoing work of God’s grace in the lives of believers. Through the power of the Holy Spirit applying Christ’s death and resurrection, believers are renewed in every part of their being to reflect the image of God. As a result, they grow continually in repentance and holiness, dying more and more to sin and living in righteousness and newness of life. Thus, good works are not the cause of sanctification but the fruit of a sanctified life.

5.5.1. Sanctification is the Work of the Triune God

The WCF states, “They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified really and personally through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them.....” (WCF XIII: I).²⁵⁹

The Confession teaches that sanctification is the work of the Triune God. The Father effectually calls and regenerates believers, giving them a new heart and spirit. The Son sanctifies them through His death and resurrection, securing their holiness. The Holy Spirit applies this sanctification by dwelling within them and working through the Word, transforming them personally and continually into the likeness of Christ.

Reformed scholars support this Trinitarian understanding of sanctification. A.A. Hodge affirms that sanctification is the work of the Triune God; it is ascribed to God absolutely (1 Thessalonians 5:23), to the Son (Ephesians 5:25-26), and pre-eminently to the

²⁵⁷ *Handbook of Reformed Confession*, 195.

²⁵⁸ *Handbook of Reformed Confession*, 161.

²⁵⁹ Johann Peter Kirsch ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)* (Germany: Jazzbee verlag, 2012).

Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13), whose distinct role in the economy of redemption is to apply the grace obtained through Christ's mediation.²⁶⁰

Similarly, Hoekema maintains that sanctification is attributed to all three persons of the Trinity. He notes that Jesus prays to the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth" (John 17:17), and that the author of Hebrews describes God's disciplinary actions as a means by which believers "share in his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10), an expression of sanctification as the Father's gracious work. Sanctification is also clearly attributed to the Son in Ephesians 5:25-27, where Paul explains that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word." Here, Christ is seen as the active agent in sanctification, using the Word as His means. Moreover, sanctification is repeatedly ascribed to the Holy Spirit. As Peter writes, believers are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:2). Paul echoes this in Romans 15:16 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13, stating that Gentiles are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and that salvation comes "through the sanctifying work of the Spirit."²⁶¹

The goal of sanctification is the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ. This is accomplished by the Triune God: The Father initiates sanctification by calling and regenerating believers; the Son secures their holiness through His death and resurrection; and the Holy Spirit applies this work by indwelling and renewing them through the Word.

5.5.2. The Progressive and Definitive Nature of Sanctification

".....the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (WCF XIII:1).²⁶²

The Confession teaches that, when a person is sanctified, the power of sin over their life is broken. Their sinful desires grow weaker and are gradually put to death, while they

²⁶⁰A.A. Hodge, *A commentary: The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 195.

²⁶¹Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 119-120.

²⁶²Johann Peter Kirsch ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)* (Germany: Jazzbee verlag, 2012).

become stronger in the graces of salvation. As a result, they grow in true holiness, which is essential because without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Robert Letham explains that sanctification involves two key aspects, both deeply rooted in the work of the Triune God. First, there is a decisive change that occurs instantly when a believer is united with Christ in His death and resurrection. By this union achieved through the work of the Son and applied by the Holy Spirit, the dominion of sin is broken, as seen in Romans 6:6 and 6:14. Believers are no longer slaves to sin but live under grace, set free by the redemptive work of Christ and the Spirit's power. Second, sanctification continues throughout the believer's life. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, progressively weakens sinful desires and strengthens the believer in grace. This lifelong transformation is necessary, for without holiness no one will see the Lord. It is grounded in the Father's eternal decree, carried out through Christ's redemptive work, and applied by the Spirit. Sanctification renews the whole person into the image of God, producing ongoing repentance and new life, as believers continually die to sin and live in the Spirit's power.²⁶³

G.I. Williamson explains that when someone becomes a true believer, the power (or dominion) of sin is broken, even though sin is not completely gone. He compares it to World War II: when the Allied forces invaded Europe, they destroyed Hitler's dream of ruling the world, but it still took time to remove all traces of his influence. In the same way, sin no longer rules the believer's heart; God is now in control. The main power lines of sin have been cut off, but sin still tries to fight back, using tricks and attacks like a defeated enemy. He also quotes theologian John Murray, who said there's a big difference between sin that remains and sin that rules. A real Christian cannot be comfortable with sin or treat God's grace as an excuse to keep sinning. True believers fight against sin with the help of the Holy Spirit, as Romans 8:13 says, "If you, through the Spirit, put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Interestingly, the more a person grows in holiness, the more aware and troubled they become by the sin that still lingers in their life, just like Paul expressed in Romans 7:24.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its theology in historical context* (New Jersey: PR Publishing, 2009), 278-279.

²⁶⁴ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Class* (New Jersey: PR Publishing, 2004), 151.

5.5.3. The Role of Good Works in Sanctification

In terms of sanctification, the WCF teaches that our good works, though they are the fruit of sanctification, can never be sufficient to earn salvation. Therefore, they are not the foundation of our assurance, but rather come from God's Spirit as sanctifying work of God's grace in the believer's life. WCF 16:5 states,

“We cannot by our best works merit forgiveness of sin or eternal life at the hand of God. This is so because of the great disproportion between our best works and the glory to come. In addition, because of the infinite distance between us and God, our best works can neither profit God nor pay the debt of our former sins, for when we have done all we can, we have only done our duty and are unprofitable servants. Moreover, the goodness in our best works comes from God's Spirit, not from us, while the good works done by us are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot meet the searching standard of God's judgment.”²⁶⁵

David Dickson explains that no matter how excellent a person's actions may be, they can never earn God's favor or place Him under obligation, because according to divine justice, God cannot receive any benefit from His creatures (Psalm 16:2; Job 22:23). Since merit implies that a benefit has been given and accepted, and we can give God nothing, there can be no true merit in our works. Our good deeds are always marked by imperfection, both in quality and in completeness (Galatians 5:17; Isaiah 64:6-7; Deuteronomy 27:26).²⁶⁶

Dickson, citing Anthony Tuckney, emphasizes that good works are necessary not as the cause of salvation, but as its natural result. In the process of sanctification, these good works are the outward evidence of the believer's inward transformation. They do not achieve salvation but are the means through which salvation is lived out and demonstrated in a believer's daily walk.²⁶⁷

5.5.4. The Means of Sanctification

While sanctification is entirely a work of God's grace, the WCF emphasizes that the preaching of the Word is the primary means by which believers are edified and grow in holiness. “They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new

²⁶⁵ Rowland S. Ward ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Lansvale: Tulip Publishing, 2021), 122.

²⁶⁶ David Dickson, *Truth's victory over Error: A commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 104.

²⁶⁷ Dickson, *Truth's victory over Error: A commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 282.

spirit created in them, are further sanctified really and personally through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection by his Word ..." (WCF XIII.1).²⁶⁸

Joel R. Beeke highlights that the WCF reaffirms the primacy of Scripture, meaning that the Bible holds the highest authority in shaping a believer's life. He supports this by quoting Robert Harris, who says that believers should not rely on their own feelings or personal opinions, but instead trust and depend on what the Word of God says. The idea is that spiritual maturity and godly living come through a deep commitment to Scripture, not through emotions or human reasoning. Therefore, the Bible is seen as the primary tool by which God sanctifies believers, helping them grow in holiness and obedience.²⁶⁹

Berkhof states that the primary means the Holy Spirit uses in sanctification is the Word of God. Through Scripture, all the necessary conditions for living a holy life are provided. God's Word stirs believers to spiritual activity by setting forth divine motivations and promises, and it guides their walk through its commands, exhortations, and examples. This is supported by passages such as 1 Peter 1:22; 2:2, and 2 Peter 1:4.²⁷⁰

5.5.5. The Ongoing Struggle and Progress of Sanctification

"This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may rich prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (WCF XIII; ii & iii)."²⁷¹

The WCF clearly says that sanctification affects every part of a believer's life, yet it remains incomplete in this life because some sinful tendencies still persist. As a result, there is a constant and unavoidable struggle between the desires of the flesh and the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer. However, by the ongoing strength provided by Christ's

²⁶⁸ Johann Peter Kirsch ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)* (Germany: Jazzbee verlag, 2012).

²⁶⁹ Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for full assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and his successors*, (Grand Rapids: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 152.

²⁷⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 535.

²⁷¹ *Handbook of Reformed Confession* (Dehradun: Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2005), 131

sanctifying Spirit, the renewed nature ultimately prevails, enabling believers to grow in grace and pursue holiness with reverent fear of God.

5.5.6. The believer's Active Role in Sanctification

Mohan Chacko, in his exposition of WCF XIII:1, explains that sanctification involves an active role on the part of the regenerated believer. Unlike the natural (unregenerated) person who is incapable of doing any spiritual good, the regenerated individual who possesses new life in Christ is capable of doing good works as a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This active principle of new life enables the believer to participate in sanctification. Scripture supports this, as in Romans 12:2, where believers are urged to be “transformed by the renewal of your mind,” and in Hebrews 12:14, which commands: “Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Sanctification, then, includes the believer's active obedience. He emphasizes that the believer's effort in sanctification is always a response to God's prior work. This is clearly illustrated in Philippians 2:12-13, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Two truths stand out in this passage. First, believers are responsible for “working out” their salvation, meaning they are to cultivate or develop their spiritual life through obedience. Obedience is the central theme of Philippians 2:1-18. Second, this work is not done independently or by human strength alone; it is God who works within the believer, both to will and to act. This shows that sanctification is never a solo effort; it is a cooperative process in which the believer's good works arise from God's enabling grace and sovereign purpose. Sanctification, therefore, is inseparable from both divine initiative and human obedience.²⁷²

5.6. Conclusion

John Calvin and the WCF share a common Reformed understanding of sanctification as the gracious work of God, inseparably joined to union with Christ and effected by the Holy Spirit. Both affirm its definitive aspect, whereby believers are set apart to God, and its progressive aspect, whereby they grow in holiness through the mortification of sin and vivification of righteousness. They agree that sanctification flows from grace alone, produces good works as its fruit, and requires the believer's Spirit-enabled participation. Yet, subtle differences of emphasis appear: Calvin, shaped by his doctrine of the double grace, integrates

²⁷² Mohan Chacko, *Christ and Salvation*, (Dehradun: Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2022), 254-255

sanctification more directly with justification as twin gifts of union with Christ, presenting it in rich pastoral and experiential terms, while the WCF situates it as a distinct step in the order of salvation. The WCF explicitly details the means of sanctification, especially the Word, whereas Calvin, though affirming these, places greater weight on the believer's lived communion with Christ as the fountain of holiness. Ultimately, both Calvin and the WCF affirm that the goal of sanctification is the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ.

Chapter Six

Intercultural Conversation

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an intercultural theological dialogue on sanctification within the EPCS, analysed through the Believing-Belonging-Behaving, and Experiencing (BBBE) model. It compares five distinct theological perspectives: Formal Indian theology (EPCS leaders, sermons, and literature), Espoused theology (lay believers), Normative theology (WCF), Formal Western theology (John Calvin), and Hindu concepts of sanctification.

This structure reveals intercultural tensions, syntheses, and theological implications within the EPCS's lived theology of sanctification. The dialogue highlights where the Reformed teaching intersects or conflicts with Hindu-influenced practices, such as the blending of grace and works reflecting karma/dharma logic, ritual separation rooted in Hindu purity codes, and assurance tied to performance.

6.2 BELIEVING

6.2.1 Espoused Indian Theology (Church Members)

EPCS congregants fuse grace and works in sanctification, reflecting Hindu karma logic. As one believer asserted, "Sanctification comes through faith and good deeds,"²⁷³ indicating that faith alone is insufficient without action. Another warned, "We can lose our salvation if we do not live righteously,"²⁷⁴ which shows that sustaining justification requires ongoing moral effort. This mirrors sermons teaching that "faith without works is dead,"²⁷⁵ framing obedience as non-negotiable. Publications like Gurung's *Esai Biswaska* stresses "personal effort, though led by the Holy Spirit,"²⁷⁶ revealing a transactional view where holiness must be maintained through good deeds, a perspective aligning more with karmic accountability than grace. In my observation, failing to live righteously results in losing salvation, a view that can appear similar to the Hindu idea of karma, where one's eternal

²⁷³ EPCS in Namchi, Interview by the author, May 2025

²⁷⁴ EPCS in Nangdang, Interview by the author, May 2025.

²⁷⁵ "Our Faith Pleases God," sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Tikpur, November 10, 2024, preacher's name withheld for confidentiality.

²⁷⁶ Patrus Gurung, *Esai Biswaska Kreembadh Bibliya bunyadi sikchaka 12 khurkila haru*, (Gangtok: Nirman Photo Offset, 2012), 56.

destiny depends on personal deeds. However, from a Reformed perspective, Scripture teaches that righteous living is not the cause of salvation but the fruit of it. Hebrews 12:14 reminds us that “and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord”, yet this holiness is the inevitable result of God’s saving work, not a human-maintained condition for keeping salvation. If someone consistently “walks in darkness” (1 John 1:6) or claims to know God but does not keep His commandments (1 John 2:4) and loves his brother (1 John 2:11), the issue is not that they have lost salvation, but that they never truly received God’s saving grace in the first place. Holiness, therefore, is the necessary and inevitable fruit produced by God’s Spirit in those who are genuinely saved, ensuring their perseverance to the end.

6.2.2 Hindu Concepts

Hinduism lacks forensic justification; moksha (liberation) depends on karma (action) and dharma (duty). Pandit 2 clarified, “Dharma is sanctification that helps us to reach Moksha.”²⁷⁷ Sanctification is thus a gradual path of spiritual effort, distinct from Reformed grace-based transformation. As Pandit 1 noted, “I sanctify my life daily to escape rebirth,”²⁷⁸ emphasizing self-driven purification rather than divine initiative.

6.2.3 Formal & Normative Western Theology (Calvin & WCF)

For Calvin, faith is the means by which the believer receives the “double grace” of justification and sanctification. It is not human effort, but faith in Christ that initiates the believer’s transformation, as the Holy Spirit regenerates and renews them through this union. Similarly, the WCF teaches that sanctification is the work of God’s free grace applied through faith, whereby believers are renewed after God’s image and enabled to die to sin and live in righteousness.

6.2.4 Formal Indian Theology (Pastoral Response)

EPCS leaders often conflate justification and sanctification. An elder stated, “God has already done His part; now it is our turn to live a good and faithful life,”²⁷⁹ portraying salvation as dependent on human performance. Sermons amplify this, urging “Active human response is necessary for salvation. If we do not obey His commands, we will not receive

²⁷⁷ Interview with Pandit 2.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Pandit 1.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Elder One, Ravangla, May 2025.

salvation.”²⁸⁰ Framing salvation as contingent on obedience. This mirrors Hindu karma, where spiritual progress is earned through deeds.

6.2.5. Conclusion: Believing

The EPCS belief system reveals a synthesis of the Reformed doctrine and Hindu karmic thought, particularly in how sanctification is understood. Among congregants and leaders alike, sanctification is often viewed as something “earned through human effort” rather than received solely by grace. Pastors reinforce this view by emphasizing “obedience through actions,”²⁸¹ highlighting a practical theology shaped more by karmic obligation than by the Reformed grace. This creates a noticeable tension between the EPCS’s formal theological identity and its lived theology. Moreover, both leaders and lay believers demonstrate a limited understanding of sanctification from the Reformed perspective, often conflating it with justification and interpreting salvation as conditional upon moral performance.

6.3 BELONGING

6.3.1 Espoused Indian Theology (Church Members)

Belonging centers on ritual separation from Hinduism. A believer explained, “I don’t eat food from non-Christian funerals because it keeps me spiritually unclean. This is my belonging to God,”²⁸² reflecting ongoing concern with ritual defilement, echoing Hindu purity codes. Others navigate tension between faith and social harmony, attending rituals but “not joining” them.²⁸³ This duality exposes a struggle between Christian identity and cultural embeddedness.

6.3.2 Hindu Concepts

In Hinduism, belonging is affirmed through ritual participation. As Pandit 4 noted, “Only those who chant the Gayatri Mantra truly belong to God.”²⁸⁴ Acts like sprinkling Ganges water “bring joy and spiritual closeness,”²⁸⁵ framing ritual as identity-forming and

²⁸⁰ “*Human Response in Sanctification*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Chamchey, April 13, 2024. Preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

²⁸¹ “*Our Faith Pleases God*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Tikpur, November 10, 2024, preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

²⁸² Interview with Elder Two, Namchi, May 2025.

²⁸³ EPCS in Lungchok, Interview by the author, May 2025.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Pandit 4.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Pandit 4.

sanctifying. Hindu identity is performative and ritual-dependent. Also, in Hinduism, belonging to Brahman signifies the soul's deep unity with the ultimate reality, where sanctification is realized by recognizing that one's true self (Atman) is not separate from Brahman, as taught in the non-dualistic tradition of Advaita Vedanta.

6.3.3 Formal & Normative Western Theology

For Calvin and the WCF, belonging means being united to Christ and adopted into God's family by grace through faith. Calvin teaches that through this union, believers receive the double grace of justification and sanctification, showing that belonging to God is inseparable from being transformed by Him. The WCF likewise affirms that those effectually called are indwelt by the Spirit, renewed after the image of God, and incorporated into the community of saints, where they grow in holiness and fellowship as members of God's household.

6.3.4 Formal Indian Theology (Pastoral Response)

Pastors equate belonging with visible holiness, warning that compromise "endangers sanctification."²⁸⁶ One pastor tied belonging to charismatic signs, "Without speaking in tongues, there is no real confirmation of sanctification."²⁸⁷ Sermons emphasize "corporate holiness" through "mutual support and accountability,"²⁸⁸ framing the church as a sanctified enclave distinct from the world.

6.3.4. Conclusion: Belonging

The EPCS concept of belonging reveals a complex interplay between Reformed theology and Hindu purity culture. While many believers express their belonging to God through ritual separation from non-Christian practices, this mirrors Hindu notions of ritual defilement, where external purity signifies spiritual status. Although such separation affirms Christian distinctiveness, it risks reducing holiness to outward conformity, rather than fostering the inward transformation emphasized in the Reformed theology. In contrast, Calvin and the WCF root belonging in a spiritual union with Christ and incorporation into the covenant community, where sanctification flows from grace rather than ritual avoidance. This

²⁸⁶ Penuel Lepcha, "Yongkala ko Aatmakatha," *Pratibimb Newsletter* 7, no. 1 (June 2020): 5–6.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Pastor One from Sombaria, May 2025.

²⁸⁸ "The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord", sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Changbagoan, September 24, 2024, preacher's name withheld for confidentiality.

tension exposes a gap between the EPCS's formal Reformed identity and its lived theology, which is shaped by cultural patterns of purity, performance, and visible signs of sanctity.

6.4 BEHAVING

6.4.1 Espoused Indian Theology (Church Members)

Behavioral discipline, such as fasting, early morning prayer, and avoiding alcohol, is seen as essential for sanctification among believers. One believer claimed, "Good works can remove 90% of our sins,"²⁸⁹ reflecting karmic logic where deeds offset spiritual debt. Another insisted, "If we don't do good deeds, like early morning prayer, avoiding alcohol, and avoiding smoking, then we cannot be sanctified,"²⁹⁰ showing sanctification as conditional on performance. This transactional view contrasts sharply with the Reformed understanding of works as fruits of grace.

6.4.2 Hindu Concepts

In Hinduism, behaving is closely tied to the fulfillment of dharma (duty), which forms the foundation of sanctification. A pandit explained, "Bathing in the Ganges and performing charity removes sin and brings holiness,"²⁹¹ highlighting the role of ritual and ethical actions in the pursuit of spiritual purity. Performing one's duties selflessly, known as Karma Yoga, is considered essential for accumulating good karma, positioning spiritual progress as the result of disciplined ethical exertion. Behaving, therefore, includes actions such as prayer, sacrifice, moral conduct, pilgrimage, and yogic discipline, practices that are believed to purify the soul and lead ultimately to moksha (liberation).

6.4.3 Formal & Normative Western Theology

Calvin emphasizes that sanctification includes mortification (putting sin to death) and vivification (living in righteousness), which is not merely external moral improvement but a deep inward renewal of the believer into the image of Christ. The WCF echoes this by stating that sanctification is the work of God's grace that enables believers more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness, producing good works as evidence, not the cause of true sanctification. Though the power of sin is broken, believers still wrestle with it, requiring daily ethical commitment fueled by the Spirit's strength to reflect their union with Christ.

²⁸⁹ EPCS in Nangdang, Interview by the author, May 2025.

²⁹⁰ EPCS in Lungchok, Interview by the author, May 2025.

²⁹¹ Interview with Pandit 3

6.4.4 Formal Indian Theology (Pastoral Response)

Pastors frame behavior as a non-negotiable requirement for holiness. One elder stressed, “True sanctification requires daily obedience to God’s Word,”²⁹² emphasizing practices such as fasting to attain a higher level of spiritual purity. Sermons often warn that moral failings lead to “spiritual ruin,” equating sanctification with behavioral perfection. Likewise, church publications call for “daily discipline and practical acts of holiness,”²⁹³ reinforcing the belief that consistent moral behavior is essential for a sanctified life.

6.4.5 Conclusion: Behaving

The EPCS understanding of behaving reveals a strong influence of Hindu dharmic ethics, where sanctification is seen as conditional upon disciplined moral performance. Practices such as fasting, early prayer, and abstaining from alcohol are treated not as fruits of grace but as prerequisites for holiness, mirroring the karmic notion that good deeds offset sin. Sermons and publications consistently promote a behavior-focused spirituality, often equating sanctification with moral perfection and external discipline. This view departs from the Reformed vision upheld by Calvin and the WCF, where good works flow from the believer’s union with Christ and are empowered by the Holy Spirit not performed to earn sanctity. Consequently, EPCS theology reflects a tension between its formal Reformed identity and its culturally shaped emphasis on self-effort.

6.5 EXPERIENCING

6.5.1 Espoused Indian Theology (Church Members)

Assurance hinges on emotional/ritual markers. One believer said, “I feel joy only when I do good deeds,”²⁹⁴ tying spiritual peace to personal performance. Others feared, “If we are not holy, Satan will take us away,”²⁹⁵ revealing anxiety about losing salvation through behavioral failure. Supernatural signs (dreams, gibberish) are seen as divine validation of sanctification.

²⁹² Interview with Elder One, Ravangla, May 2025.

²⁹³ Rev. Dr. B. D. Rai, “Christ ko Rajdutt, Dharmikaran, Pavitrakaran ani Sifhikaran,” *Rajagya* 36 (May–June 2018): 12

²⁹⁴ EPCS in Namchi, Interview by the author, May 2025.

²⁹⁵ EPCS in Lungchok, Interview by the author, May 2025.

6.5.2 Hindu Concepts

Hinduism links experience to ritual/mystical practices. Pandit 2 shared, “I feel sanctified and feel Lord Rama closer when I visit his temple.”²⁹⁶ Chanting, pilgrimage, and visions foster a tangible sense of divine presence, offering experiential assurance through ritual participation.

6.5.3 Formal & Normative Western Theology

For Calvin and the WCF, the experience of sanctification involves a deep inward renewal that transforms the believer’s heart, affections, and desires through the Holy Spirit. Calvin emphasizes that sanctification is not just external moral improvement but a spiritual rebirth that creates new habits of loving God and neighbor, driven by the Spirit’s indwelling presence. The WCF similarly teaches that sanctification reshapes the whole person mind, will, and emotions, causing a heartfelt hatred of sin, a delight in holiness, and a reverent fear of God. This transformation affects not only behavior but also the inner life, producing spiritual joy, assurance, and a sincere devotion to God as the believer grows in grace and communion with Christ.

6.5.4 Formal Indian Theology (Pastoral Response)

Pastors emphasize tangible spiritual experiences as signs of sanctification. Some use anointing oil or water from the Jordan River to bless homes, saying that people feel spiritually uplifted afterward.²⁹⁷ Others consider speaking in tongues as proof of true holiness. Sermons often warn believers to “stay ready at all times, or you will be thrown into the lake of fire,”²⁹⁸ suggesting that inner peace depends on constant alertness and that moral failure can lead to losing one’s assurance of salvation.

6.5.5 Conclusion: Experiencing

The EPCS understanding of spiritual experience reveals a syncretic fusion of Hindu ritualism and Pentecostal emotionalism, where assurance of sanctification is often contingent on visible signs, emotional highs, or strict moral behavior. This contrasts sharply with Calvin and the WCF’s emphasis on grace-based assurance, where the believer’s peace rests not on performance or mystical experience, but on the inward work of the Holy Spirit through union

²⁹⁶ Interview with Pandit 2.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Pastor Four, Anden, May 2025.

²⁹⁸ *The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord*, sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Changbagoan, September 24, 2024, preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

with Christ. While EPCS believers seek experiential validation through dreams, rituals, or charismatic expressions, the Reformed theology roots assurance in God's unchanging promise and the Spirit's quiet but powerful renewal of the heart. This divergence highlights the challenge of integrating biblical sanctification with deeply ingrained cultural expectations and emotional expressions.

6.6 Pastoral Evaluation and Theological Synthesis

6.6.1. Do Pastors Answer Congregational Questions?

While pastors attempt to address believers' fears about salvation, they often unintentionally deepen confusion by echoing karmic logic. As one pastor stated, "We must continue to work out our sanctification with faith and obedience."²⁹⁹ (Pastor Three). Although they emphasize the need for "daily effort,"³⁰⁰ they neglect Calvin's doctrine of *double grace*, which includes both justification and sanctification as gifts of grace. As a result, the framework fails to resolve believers' performance anxiety with the assurance offered by Reformed theology. The overall message implies that sanctification depends primarily on sustained human effort, rather than resting in God's grace

6.6.2 Do Their Answers Align with Normative Theology?

No, several critical divergences emerge when EPCS pastoral responses are compared with the WCF and Calvin's theology.

6.6.2.1 Sanctification as human effort

Pastors often equate sanctification with moral striving. Pastor Two claimed, "*God purifies only those who pray continually*,"³⁰¹ suggesting that divine grace is conditional upon sustained religious effort. This view starkly contrasts the WCF's teaching that sanctification is the work of God's free grace (WCF 13.1), not human merit.

6.6.2.2. Assurance through rituals and signs

Some pastors emphasize visible or emotional markers speaking in tongues, using Jordan River water, or experiencing dreams as necessary signs of sanctification.³⁰² Such

²⁹⁹ Interview with Pastor Three, Mangalbaray, May 2025

³⁰⁰ Patrus Gurung, *Esai Biswaska Kreembadh Bibliya bunyadi sikchaka 12 khurkila haru*, (Gangtok: Nirman Photo Offset, 2012), 56.

³⁰¹ Interview with Pastor, Two from Namchi, May 2025.

³⁰² Interview with Pastor One from Sombaria, May 2025.

emphasis distorts the Reformed doctrine of assurance, which is grounded in the inward witness of the Holy Spirit and not on fluctuating emotional experiences.

6.6.2.3 Belonging via ritual separation

The rejection of tika, food from Hindu funerals, or participation in cultural festivals is framed by pastors as evidence of holiness.³⁰³ This practice reflects Hindu purity codes, not the Reformed covenantal belonging, which rests on union with Christ and participation in the body of believers.

6.6.2.4 Conditional salvation

Sermons stating that “*if we do not obey His commands, we will not receive salvation*”³⁰⁴ reveals a misunderstanding of the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone and the doctrine of assurance based on God’s sovereign grace.

6.6.3 Recommendations for Improvement

To bridge the growing theological gap between Reformed orthodoxy and culturally influenced beliefs, the following recommendations are proposed:

6.6.3.1 Clarify the distinction between justification and sanctification

Pastors should explicitly teach that justification is a one-time act of God’s grace, received through faith in Christ alone. In contrast, sanctification is a lifelong process of spiritual transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit. This distinction, central to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF 11.1; 13.1), must be emphasized in sermons and discipleship materials to counter the common misconception that believers must earn or preserve their salvation through personal effort. Though the WCF presents sanctification as a distinct step in the order of salvation, John Calvin, shaped by his doctrine of the double grace, integrates justification and sanctification more directly as inseparable twin benefits of union with Christ. Calvin thus frames sanctification in rich pastoral and experiential terms, whereas the WCF adopts a more systematic distinction between the two.

6.6.3.2. Anchor assurance in God’s unchanging grace

³⁰³ Interview with Elder Two, Namchi, May 2025.

³⁰⁴ “*Human Response in Sanctification*,” sermon, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Chamchey, April 13, 2024. Preacher’s name withheld for confidentiality.

Rather than relying on emotional experiences or ritual purity for assurance, believers must be taught to rest in the unchanging promises of God and the Spirit's inward testimony. Preaching should emphasize Romans 8:16: "*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*" This would replace performance-driven anxiety with deep spiritual confidence rooted in grace.

6.6.3.3. Contextualize without syncretism

While EPCS pastors commendably promote community accountability and spiritual discipline, they must take care to differentiate these from karma-based frameworks. Discipline must be framed as the fruit of grace, not the price for sanctity. Hindu-influenced views of transactional holiness must be critically addressed through biblical intercultural theology.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that while the EPCS earnestly seeks sanctification, its lived theology is shaped by a deep intercultural tension between the Reformed grace and Hindu karmic patterns. Through the BBBE framework, we see that beliefs, behaviors, and experiences often reflect performance-based spirituality, ritual purity, and emotional assurance rather than the biblical doctrines of grace and union with Christ. Pastoral teaching, though well-intentioned, frequently reinforces this fusion. To remain faithful to its Reformed identity, the EPCS must clarify the distinction between justification and sanctification, root assurance in God's grace, and pursue contextual theology without compromising the gospel.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion and Application

7.1. Introduction

This study has revealed that sanctification is a contested and misunderstood doctrine among the EPCS. While the EPCS subscribes to the WCF and professes adherence to the Reformed theology, in practice, many pastors, elders, and believers exhibit a theology of sanctification that is deeply influenced by surrounding Hindu cultural and religious ideas. These include belief in karma, emphasis on good works for spiritual merit, fasting, and early-morning devotions as a means to manipulate divine response, and ritual purity linked to caste and socio-cultural identity.

Using the BBBE model of appropriation, the research shows that many EPCS leaders and members have appropriated Hindu categories of sanctification. These influences distort the biblical doctrine that sanctification is a sovereign act of God's grace through union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Further, sanctification is an ongoing process in human life to be moulded in the image of Christ. The Reformed theology, as taught by Calvin and the WCF, emphasizes sanctification as the inevitable fruit of justification, not its cause, and it is grounded in God's election, the work of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

At the organizational level, the EPCS is structured in a three-tier system: General Council, Presbytery, and Local Church. With eight presbyteries further divided into zones such as "A" Zone, "B" Zone, etc., the system offers a strong infrastructure for theological renewal. However, a lack of formal theological education among most pastors and elders has contributed to a weakened doctrinal foundation, making room for syncretism and experiential subjectivism.

Therefore, it is crucial that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification is recovered, articulated, and preached clearly across all levels of the church, council, presbytery, and local congregation, to ensure that the believers of EPCS live joyful, grace-driven lives, grounded in biblical assurance and holiness.

7.2. Theological Guidelines for Preaching Sanctification in EPCS

To address theological confusion and cultural influences among the EPCS, the following guidelines are proposed for preaching sanctification faithfully.

7.2.1. Image of Christ

Sanctification in the EPCS must be preached with a clear emphasis on the image of Christ. Pastors should teach that sanctification flows from the believer's union with Christ, not from human effort or self-improvement. As Calvin emphasized, believers are sanctified through their mystical union with Christ by the Holy Spirit, and continual process to become in the image of Christ. Therefore, preaching on sanctification must begin with Christ's finished work and the believer's new identity in Him. This Christ's image foundation guards against legalism and empowers believers to pursue holiness through grace rather than striving in their own strength.

7.2.2. Grace-Driven Obedience

A key theological guideline for preaching sanctification in the EPCS is to emphasize grace-driven obedience. Pastors must explicitly teach that obedience is the fruit of sanctification, not its condition. Sanctification, as stated in the WCF (13.1), is "the work of God."³⁰⁵ and cannot be earned through human efforts such as fasting, dreams, rituals, or the avoidance of ancestral taboos. Therefore, preaching must correct folk beliefs and cultural misunderstandings, and instead present sanctification as a transformative work of the Holy Spirit, grounded in union with Christ and received by faith. This approach not only affirms the sufficiency of Scripture but also nurtures joyful, Spirit-empowered obedience among believers.

7.2.3. Assurance of Salvation

Preaching on sanctification in the EPCS must also include a strong emphasis on the assurance of salvation. Many believers struggle with fear and uncertainty, often tying their assurance to emotional experiences or personal performance. Pastors must teach that true assurance rests in God's covenant faithfulness, not in human feelings or perfection. While the work of sanctification in the believer may be imperfect, it is never absent in the truly

³⁰⁵ Chacko Mohan, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Dehradun: PTS, 2018), 108.

regenerate. Preaching should remind us that everyone who belongs to Christ can live with confidence and hope, because God always finishes what He starts.

7.2.4. Holiness as Separation, not Isolation

Sanctification must also be preached as holiness through separation, not isolation. Believers are called to be distinct in character and conduct (1 Peter 1:16), but not to withdraw from society. While rejecting participation in Hindu rituals is necessary for theological clarity and faithfulness to Christ, it must be done with humility, love, and a desire for gospel witness, not out of fear or pride. Pastors should teach that true holiness involves engaging the world as salt and light, maintaining spiritual separation while building relational bridges for the sake of Christ's mission.

7.2.5. Covenantal Framework

Sanctification should be preached within a covenantal framework, helping believers understand their growth in holiness as part of God's ongoing covenant relationship. Pastors must teach that baptism and the Lord's Supper are not superstitious rituals but means of grace, visible signs and seals of God's promises to His people. These sacraments should be approached with understanding and reverence, as they nourish faith and strengthen the believer's union with Christ. Emphasizing covenant theology will deepen the church's appreciation of sanctification as a communal, grace-driven journey rooted in God's unchanging faithfulness.

7.3. Pastoral response for the EPCS

To implement these theological insights effectively, the following practical recommendations are proposed at various levels of church leadership.

7.3.1. Council Level (General Leadership)

At the Council level, the EPCS should establish a Doctrinal Committee tasked with developing a simple catechism or teaching guide on Reformed sanctification in Nepali and English, including Sikkimese languages like Yakthungpān and Rongring. To strengthen doctrinal understanding among leaders, the Council should also organize Annual Theological Conferences focusing on core Reformed themes such as sanctification, justification, union with Christ, and the sacraments. Furthermore, it is recommended that the EPCS initiate a Bible College or Training Institute in Sikkim, grounded in the Reformed theology, to equip

future pastors and elders with a strong foundation in the Westminster Standards and sound biblical exegesis.

7.3.2. Presbytery and Zonal Level

At the Presbytery and Zonal level, each presbytery should appoint a Zonal Theological Coordinator to oversee the training of leaders within their respective “A,” “B,” and other zones. Regular Zonal Bible Studies should be conducted quarterly, guided by a unified syllabus focused on key doctrines such as grace, justification, sanctification, and assurance. To promote theological consistency and strengthen weaker areas, Cross-Presbytery Exchange Programs should be implemented, allowing trained pastors to rotate and serve in zones with fewer resources or less theological training.

7.3.3. Local Church Level

At the local church level, Reformed Catechism Classes should be introduced for youth, new believers, and baptism candidates to build a strong theological foundation. Pastors should be encouraged to preach systematically through entire books of the Bible, such as Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, rather than focusing only on practical topics, thereby grounding sanctification in Scripture. Additionally, folk theology must be addressed by confronting unbiblical beliefs related to dreams, visions, and cultural taboos in sermons, affirming the sufficiency of Scripture and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

7.3.4. Language and Resources

To strengthen theological education, essential Reformed resources such as selected portions of Calvin’s Institutes, the WCF, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and *Saved by Grace* by Anthony Hoekema should be translated into local languages like Nepali and Sikkimese languages like Yakthungpān and Rongring. Additionally, simple and accessible Sunday school booklets on sanctification should be developed to help children and parents understand and apply biblical truths in their daily lives. These resources will support consistent theological teaching across all age groups within the EPCS.

7.4. Biblical Foundation for teaching Sanctification

Peter emphasizes human responsibilities to make calling and election sure. “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall” 2Peter 1:10 ESV. Michael Green says that the aorist

imperative, “be diligent,” stresses the importance of Peter’s request that believers should be determined to live for God.³⁰⁶ Dick Lucas and Christopher Green say that the word “Make” is in the middle voice, which emphasizes our duty in making calling and election sure. The word sure has a legal taste, indicating ratified.³⁰⁷ Christ has called the Christians into his kingdom (2Peter 1:3), promising them immortality (2Peter 1:4), but an appropriate moral response is required if his final salvation is to be guaranteed.³⁰⁸ Paul also encourages us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), because it is God who works in us to cause us to do good works and also to cause us to will to do them, and it is all of sovereign pleasure. In a predominantly Hindu context, believers are called to be witnesses through their good works. Calvin and the WCF affirm that believers must actively participate in sanctification, showing their faith by living a holy life. However, these good works, though necessary, are imperfect and cannot earn salvation; they are the fruit of grace, not the cause of it.

7.5. Final Words

This thesis has shown that preaching the Reformed doctrine of sanctification in the EPCS is both necessary and urgent. The church must return to the rich theological heritage it professes in the Westminster Standards and Calvinistic tradition. When believers understand that sanctification is God’s gracious work in them, not a reward for ritual performance, they will live with greater peace, joy, and holiness.

A renewed theological foundation will not only purify the church from syncretism but also equip it for witness in a Hindu-majority context. The gospel of grace must be preached boldly, and sanctification must be seen not as a burden but as a blessing flowing from Christ alone, through faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, rather than rejecting Hindu culture wholesale, EPCS believers are called to engage it critically and discerningly, recognizing where cultural values resonate with biblical principles and where the gospel must transform them. Teaching sanctification as a grace-driven transformation rather than a merit-based achievement can help believers find assurance in Christ, rather than in performance, and live confidently as witnesses in their pluralistic society.

³⁰⁶ Michael Green, *Tyndale: The second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 73.

³⁰⁷ Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 63.

³⁰⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2Peter: Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol.50 (Waco: Word Book Publisher, 1983), 188.

Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

Name _____

Church/Place _____

Education Qualification _____

Occupation _____

Designation _____

Gender: Male ()/ Female ()

*The above information request is optional; the questionnaires will be treated with confidence, and no identities will be disclosed in the research.

A. Survey Questions for EPCS Leaders (Elders and Pastors)

1. How did you become a Christian?
2. What is the meaning of sanctification, according to you? (believing)
3. What is the role of good deeds in the process of salvation? (behaving)
4. Can you explain the concept of sanctification in Hinduism? (Believing)
5. What steps must one take to attain sanctification in Hinduism? (behaving)
6. What do your church members believe about sanctification? (believing)
7. What is, for Christians, the role of good deeds in achieving sanctification? (behaving)
8. Can you indicate the differences and similarities between Hinduism and Christianity concerning sanctification? (believing; belonging; behaving; experiencing)
9. How can the doctrine of sanctification be preached in the Presbyterian churches in Sikkim? (believing; belonging; behaving; experiencing)

EPCS का अगुवाहरू (एल्डरहरू र पादरीहरू) का लागि सर्वेक्षण प्रश्नहरू

1. तपाईं कसरी ख्रीष्टियन बन्नुभयो?
2. तपाईंको विचारमा पवित्रीकरण (Sanctification) को अर्थ के हो? (विश्वास — **Believing**)
3. उद्धारको प्रक्रियामा राम्रो कामहरूको के भूमिका हुन्छ? (व्यवहार — **Behaving**)

4. तपाईं हिन्दू धर्ममा पवित्रीकरणको अवधारणा बुझाउनुहुन्छ? (विश्वास — **Believing**)
5. हिन्दू धर्ममा पवित्रीकरण प्राप्त गर्नका लागि के के कदम चाल्नु पर्छ? (व्यवहार — **Behaving**)
6. तपाईंका चर्च सदस्यहरूले पवित्रीकरणबारे के विश्वास गर्छन्? (विश्वास — **Believing**)
7. ख्रीष्टियनहरूको लागि पवित्रीकरण प्राप्त गर्नमा राम्रो कामहरूको भूमिका के हो? (व्यवहार — **Behaving**)
8. पवित्रीकरणको सन्दर्भमा हिन्दू धर्म र ख्रीष्टियन धर्म बीच के के फरक र समानता छन्? (विश्वास, सम्बन्ध, व्यवहार, अनुभव — **Believing; Belonging; Behaving; Experiencing**)
9. पवित्रीकरणको सिद्धान्तलाई सिक्किमको प्रेसबिटेरियन चर्चहरूमा कसरी प्रचार गरिन सक्छ? (विश्वास, सम्बन्ध, व्यवहार, अनुभव — **Believing; Belonging; Behaving; Experiencing**)

B. Survey Questions for EPCS Congregations

1. How did you become a Christian?
2. What is the meaning of sanctification, according to you? (believing)
3. What is the role of good deeds in the process of sanctification? (behaving)
4. How do you look at Hinduism and its rituals? (belonging)
5. Do you sometimes participate in Hindu rituals, and if so, can you explain why? (believing, belonging, behaving, experiencing)
6. What do you know about the concept of sanctification in Hinduism? (believing)
7. What steps must one take to attain sanctification in Hinduism? (behaving)
8. What is, for Christians, the role of good deeds in achieving sanctification? (behaving)
9. Can you indicate the differences and similarities between Hinduism and Christianity with regard to sanctification? (believing; belonging; behaving; experiencing)
10. Can you recall any sermon preached by your church leader on sanctification, and if so, what do you remember from it? (believing)

ई.पी.सी.एस. मण्डलीका लागि सर्वेक्षण प्रश्नहरू

1. तपाईं कसरी ख्रीष्टियन हुनु भयो?
2. तपाईंको विचारमा पवित्रीकरण (sanctification) को अर्थ के हो? (विश्वास — *believing*)
3. पवित्रीकरणको प्रक्रियामा असल कामहरूको भूमिका के हो? (व्यवहार — *behaving*)
4. तपाईं हिन्दू धर्म र त्यसका चाडपर्व/कर्मकाण्डहरूलाई कसरी हेर्नुहुन्छ? (सम्बन्ध — *belonging*)
5. के तपाईं कहिलेकाहीँ हिन्दू कर्मकाण्डहरूमा सहभागी हुनुहुन्छ? यदि हो भने, किन? (विश्वास, सम्बन्ध, व्यवहार, अनुभव — *believing, belonging, behaving, experiencing*)
6. तपाईंलाई हिन्दू धर्ममा पवित्रीकरणको बारेमा के जानकारी छ? (विश्वास — *believing*)
7. हिन्दू धर्ममा पवित्रीकरण प्राप्त गर्नका लागि मानिसहरूले के-के कदम चाल्नुपर्छ? (व्यवहार — *behaving*)
8. ख्रीष्टियनहरूको दृष्टिमा पवित्रीकरण प्राप्त गर्न असल कामहरूको भूमिका के हो? (व्यवहार — *behaving*)
9. पवित्रीकरणको सन्दर्भमा हिन्दू धर्म र ख्रीष्टियन धर्मबीच के समानता र फरक छन्? (विश्वास, सम्बन्ध, व्यवहार, अनुभव — *believing, belonging, behaving, experiencing*)
10. के तपाईं आफ्नो मण्डलीका अगुवाले पवित्रीकरणबारे कुनै प्रवचन गर्नुभएको सम्झनुहुन्छ? यदि हो भने, तपाईं त्यसबाट के सम्झनुहुन्छ? (विश्वास — *believing*)

C. Survey Questions for Hindu Pandit

1. What is the meaning of sanctification, according to you? (*believing*)
2. What is the role of good deeds in the process of sanctification? (*behaving*)
3. Can you explain the concept of sanctification in Christianity? (*Believing*)

4. What steps must one take to attain sanctification in Hinduism? (behaving)
5. What is, for Christians, the role of good deeds in achieving sanctification? (behaving)
6. Can you indicate the differences and similarities between Hinduism and Christianity with regard to sanctification? (believing; belonging; behaving; experiencing)
7. What does it mean to have assurance of sanctification? (experiencing)

हिन्दू पण्डितका लागि सर्वेक्षण प्रश्नहरू

1. तपाईंको विचारमा पवित्रीकरण (sanctification) भन्नाले के जनाउँछ? (विश्वास — *believing*)
2. पवित्रीकरणको प्रक्रियामा असल कर्महरूको भूमिका के हुन्छ? (व्यवहार — *behaving*)
3. तपाईं ख्रीष्टियन धर्ममा पवित्रीकरणको अवधारणा कसरी बुझ्नुहुन्छ? (विश्वास — *believing*)
4. हिन्दू धर्ममा पवित्रीकरण प्राप्त गर्नका लागि कुन-कुन कदमहरू चाल्नुपर्छ? (व्यवहार — *behaving*)
5. ख्रीष्टियनहरूको दृष्टिमा पवित्रीकरण प्राप्त गर्न असल कर्महरूको भूमिका के हुन्छ? (व्यवहार — *behaving*)
6. पवित्रीकरणको सन्दर्भमा हिन्दू धर्म र ख्रीष्टियन धर्मबीच के समानता र फरक छन्? (विश्वास, सम्बन्ध, व्यवहार, अनुभव — *believing; belonging; behaving; experiencing*)
7. पवित्रीकरणको सुनिश्चितता (assurance) हुनुको अर्थ के हो? (अनुभव — *experiencing*)

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