

# The different manifestations of suffering and the Lukan Jesus

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Eben Scheffler wrote much on poverty and social injustice, and this article focusses on his understanding of the Gospel of Luke and the *Book of Acts* in order to comprehend the different dimensions of suffering and the healing ministry of the Lukan Jesus. Scheffler stressed that Jesus' life, from birth to cross, was immersed in suffering thus becoming part of the human condition of sorrow and misery, but Scheffler ultimately stressed the compassion of Jesus' ministry which continued in the early church and which must be reflected by his followers to all people.

**Keywords:** Jesus; Gospel of Luke; *Book of Acts*; suffering; poverty; illness; compassion; healing; love.

Eben Hans Scheffler was attached to the University of South Africa (UNISA) where he lectured on the Old Testament and Biblical Archaeology from 1978 until his retirement in 2018. He published extensively on Old Testament, Biblical Archaeology as well as New Testament. In 1988, he received a doctorate in New Testament with a thesis on suffering in the Gospel of Luke, which was published in the well-known series 'Ahandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments' in 1991. Scheffler's long academic career can be depicted in many ways, but in this article we focus on his profound awareness of human suffering in all its forms as depicted in the Gospel of Luke and the *Book of Acts*.

## A life lived in the Republic of South Africa

Scheffler's consciousness of suffering was shaped by the life context in which he was born, lived and worked. He was moulded by daily life as well as the sociopolitical context of South Africa during the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. It was a life formed by apartheid and political unrest, which contributed to the daily experience of meaninglessness, but which is also typical of the human condition. It was and still is a world of constant poverty, inequality and pain, which refuses to abate and crushes hopes of a brighter future. Within this world, Scheffler took suffering as a theme to understand himself, his world and that of first-century Christianity under Roman rule (1991b:281–298). And his main source and starting point is the Gospel of Luke and its relationship to the *Book of Acts* (Scheffler 1990:281–298, 2016a:161).

Living in the Republic of South Africa, Scheffler saw social injustices first-hand, which prompted him to talk about them, and his views also sensitised us to think and write about social injustices from the perspectives of the Old Testament and the New Testament (Scheffler 2016:139, n 15). This article exemplifies this approach by showing Luke's Jesus as the compassionate one who identified suffering and who healed and helped the weak and those who were fragile and broken in spirit (Scheffler 1988:30–40). In the end, Jesus himself was not saved from suffering but lived a life of humiliation and sorrow, which already began at his birth and continued to the cross. According to Scheffler, faith and ethics were indispensable of each other in the Gospel of Luke and the one implied the other and therefore the great compassion of the Lukan Jesus had to be experienced and reflected to the poor, the oppressed and the many other people who suffer (Scheffler 1989a:50–60).

## Luke's world

According to the author of the Gospel of Luke, faith in God did not exist in the intellectual acceptance of dogmas or historical 'facts' but implied loving-kindness towards those who suffer. After research of the existing documents, Luke 'decided to write an ordered account' (Lk 1:3) showing compassion at work.

**Note:** The collection entitled 'Eben Scheffler Festschrift', sub-edited by Jurie H. le Roux (University of Pretoria) and Christo Lombaard (University of South Africa).

Luke elaborated his story by means of a narrative about Jesus who alleviated many types of suffering of ordinary people and whose ministry can be depicted as 'holistic in nature and having a universal practicality' (Scheffler 2016:77). And Jesus' works of helping, healing and teaching had to inspire the faith community to act likewise (Scheffler 1992:56–73).

To understand this holistic understanding of suffering, the context wherein the gospel and *Book of Acts* took shape had to be understood. Although no definite historical information is provided, there are, however, some traces that can lead us to a possible context. Put differently, it is impossible to construct a precise life context, but an attempt must nevertheless be made to understand the world in which Luke's thoughts took shape:

Although such a (historical) construction may be ... containing much speculation (one must nevertheless attempt to create imaginatively a context) since a 'context-less' reading is not merely the worst reading but can in a certain sense be regarded as actually no reading at all. (Scheffler 2006:78)

The greater social world in which Luke, his community and his ideas were shaped can be placed between the first Jewish war and that of Bar Kochba (66–135 AD) (Scheffler 1991a:102–110). To understand Luke's gospel, we have to distinguish between three generations. The first (1:2) were the eyewitnesses, the second were the first writers of the gospels (1:1) and the third (between 80 and 90 AD) were those who had lost the fervour and the passion of the first generation, and Luke's gospel was an attempt to encourage this group and give them 'certainty'. It was a difficult time because of Roman rule, and the community experienced the brunt of that administration in the form of many ways of persecution. Within the community conflicts were rife and below we mention a few (Scheffler 1988:30–40).

The community suffered because the tensions between Christians and Jews were intense and caused an identity crisis amongst many Christians. Around 85 AD, the Pharisees established themselves as a dominant group within the Jewish community, became very powerful and allowed no opposition. Christians were vehemently opposed, and this probably caused doubt amongst the Lukan community in the message of Jesus (Scheffler 1989a:50–60).

Probably, there was also conflict amongst the members of the Lukan community because they rejected groups like shepherds and toll-collectors. Especially, the delay of the second coming of Christ caused great despair and doubt. Because of this delay, their future looked bleak, and the community started to doubt the reality of Jesus' presence and, therefore, the Emmaus story was told, and in the *Book of Acts*, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the growth of Christianity was described (Scheffler 1989c:251–267).

In short, it can be said that different forms of suffering (like persecution, poverty, ostracism, despondency, uncertainty, violence, degeneracy and political oppression) plagued the

community of Luke, and the gospel and the *Book of Acts* were attempts to comfort the 'little flock' (τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον) with the belief that the Lukan Jesus is filled with love and compassion and will alleviate their suffering (Scheffler 2006:82).

## A unique understanding of suffering

To elaborate Scheffler's views, we first focus on suffering in the Gospel of Luke (Scheffler 1989a:50–60). A fundamental aspect of Scheffler's interpretation is his unique understanding of Luke's account of suffering.

In the course of time, the Gospel of Luke has often one-sidedly been called the gospel of the poor, the gospel of women or the gospel interested in marginalised people like the gentiles, social outcasts, Samaritans, etc. Scheffler has 'corrected' this view by means of 'a uniquely holistic approach' (Dijkhuizen 2016:vi).

He rejected the view that poverty is the only focal point of Luke and came to the conclusion that the Gospel's focus is broader and he therefore identified various dimensions of human suffering that can be distinguished in the Gospel of Luke (Scheffler 2016b:132). According to Scheffler, human suffering must not be restricted to one human condition like 'poverty', but it must be understood in a much wider horizon of understanding. And this he excellently illustrated in his work on Luke and his study of *Book of Acts*. Or, as a well-known Luke scholar said: 'Scheffler is right to insist as well on both the extension and intensity of suffering. Jesus participates in human suffering during his life and agony' (Bovon 2006:552). Various kinds of suffering can according to Scheffler be distinguished in the Gospel of Luke and *Book of Acts* (Scheffler 1991b:120–130).

## Jesus' compassion is universal, immediate and real

To illustrate the comprehensive understanding of suffering as well as the relief of suffering, Scheffler referred to Jesus's visit to Nazareth (Lk 4:16–30) (Scheffler 1993:25–48). It was not his first visit but perhaps the most important (Scheffler 1989a:50–60). It is an episode after he had been tested by the devil and he returned to Galilee where he taught in the synagogues and was everywhere well received, but he then visited Nazareth. Luke says that it was the town where he was brought up and on the day of Sabbath he visited the synagogue as usual. A few interesting events took place: Jesus stood up, a sign that he would like to read from the Scripture, they gave him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he unrolled it, read a few verses out loud, after the reading he gave the scroll back to the assistant, sat down and began explaining Isaiah. All eyes were on him (Scheffler 1993:45–48).

The words that Jesus read out loud were from Isaiah 61, which depicted the nature of the work of the prophet: he had to 'proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the

oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord' (Lk 4:18–19). Jesus used Isaiah to depict the nature of his own work: not only the poor but also the captives, the blind, the oppressed, et cetera, would experience relief from their suffering. Real people struggling with real problems will experience real alleviation from their suffering. It is important to note that suffering was real and the relief of suffering was also real. Furthermore, this relief will not happen in future but here and now in the present (Scheffler 1993:38–40).

Jesus then said something, which caused a stir amongst the listeners: this relief from suffering would not be limited to Israel but all people would share in it. To illustrate the universal nature of his ministry, Jesus referred to two examples from the *Book of Kings*. One deals with Elijah and the other with a widow of Zarephath:

There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for 3 years and 6 months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. (Lk 4:26)

It is not stated in the *Book of Kings* (1 Ki 17:8ff) that Elijah paid no visit to Israelite widows, but according to Jesus this was an indication that the relief from suffering would also be experienced by non-Israelites. The same is true of Naaman: 'And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured – only Naaman the Syrian' (Lk 4:27). In both cases, the sufferers were 'gentiles', illustrating the universal aspect of Jesus' work (Scheffler 1993:43).

Jesus's love for people who suffer thus reaches far beyond the borders of Israel. Jesus' compassion for the sick, the poor, the afflicted, et cetera, is comprehensive and all people would experience it (Scheffler 2017:95–111). However, to the audience in the synagogue this was unacceptable. They believed that God's salvation was restricted to Israel and was enraged by Jesus' universalism and therefore they wanted to kill him (cf. Scheffler 1999:179–197).

## Various dimensions of suffering

As we have said, Scheffler has been commended for his holistic understanding of suffering (Scheffler 2011b:192–207). It cannot be restricted to only one aspect of life but comprises many forms of human distress and below we briefly discuss some aspects of Scheffler's different dimensions of suffering. It is important to note the nature of the suffering as well as the way Jesus helped, healed and changed people's lives and their suffering (Scheffler 1995b:54–69). Jesus changed the popular views and narratives about the poor, the shepherds and others by becoming involved in their lives and their misery. Underlying Jesus's actions was his compassion and love for those who suffer (Scheffler 2001b:205–220).

### Economic suffering

This is not the only form of suffering, but in Luke's Gospel it is an important one (Scheffler 2012:480–496).

Luke uses the word *πτωχός*; it refers to the destitute and the begging poor and it must be interpreted literally (Scheffler 1994a:16–30). This can, for instance, be seen in Luke's rendition of the first beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount. According to Matthew, Jesus said, 'How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs' (Mt 5:3). Luke, however, subtly changed it to 'poor': 'How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours' (Lk 6:20). This poverty, which Luke speaks of, must never be spiritualised but understood literally. Luke's view of the poor also had consequences for his views on the renunciation of possessions. According to him, the followers of Jesus had to abandon all possessions and give it to the poor. An austere life style is advocated (Scheffler 1993:67). 'We can therefore conclude with a high degree of probability that Luke consistently used the term *πτωχός* in its *literal sense*' (Scheffler 1993:62). Although the poor must be pitied, they are in the eyes of Jesus blessed and happy because of what is promised to them (Scheffler 2011a:115–135).

Poverty also led to illness as can be seen in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Of Lazarus it was said:

And at his (the rich man's) gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. (Lk 16:20–21)

Lazarus, who probably had a skin disease caused by his immense poverty, had to beg for a living and craved for what fell from the rich man's table. In the end, Lazarus died and 'was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham'. The rich man also died, was buried and arrived in Hades 'where he was being tormented' (Lk 16:22–23). This led to a conversation between Abraham and the rich man and the latter begging that Lazarus be sent to his bothers to warn them 'that they do not come to this place of torment too' (Lk 16:28), but the request was declined because 'they have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them' (Lk 16:29). According to Scheffler, the brothers of Lazarus had for example to live according Deuteronomy 15:4–11 (Scheffler 1993:65–66, 2008a:194–221).

### Social suffering

Then there was social suffering referring to the ostracism of people who belonged to certain groups in contemporary Jewish society. They were social outcasts just because they belonged to a specific group like tax collectors, shepherds, soldiers, et cetera, but Luke had a more positive attitude. The narrative about Zacchaeus illustrates the negative attitude towards *tax collectors*, but he was nevertheless accepted by Jesus and was not expected to quit his job as tax collector but to make restitution and give money to the poor (Lk 19:1–10) (Scheffler 1993:69).

The same can be said about the *shepherds*: they were viewed as thieves and swindlers and could not testify in court because they were viewed as untrustworthy. In Luke's rendition of Jesus's birth, it was the shepherds who first

heard the 'news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people' (Lk 2:10). And in the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:4-6), the shepherd is depicted as the one who cares and rejoices when it is found (Scheffler 1993:71).

*Soldiers* were also despised but Luke once again turned things around. In the story of the Roman centurion's dying slave, Jesus was astonished to see his faith and said, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found faith as great as this' (Lk 7:9). *Women* were often looked upon with contempt, but Luke had a different view and his gospel was often referred to as the 'Gospel of women'. Women like Elizabeth and Mary, Martha and Anna are functioning prominently in the gospel, thereby undermining the negative view about women in society (Scheffler 2008b:185-206). Another social group, which was ostracised and not taken seriously, was *children*. Parental love and affection were probably not emphasised much in the first-century society, but Luke stressed that this broken relationships will be restored (Scheffler 1993:74-75).

### Political suffering

This refers to the suffering of an entire nation at the hand of other nations, or an individual's suffering on account of his nationality. Luke criticised Jewish exclusivism but was nevertheless acutely aware of their suffering under Roman rule (Scheffler 2005b:309-322). In the annunciation of Jesus' birth, Mary is told to call her child 'Jesus' meaning 'Yahweh saves', and this has indeed political overtones when the following is added: 'The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end' (Lk 1:32-33). In Luke 2:32, it is further stated that he will be 'a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people of Israel' and 'people of Israel' 'undeniably retains its political significance' and according to Luke, the 'people of Israel' are 'therefore the object of God's salvation in a political sense (the throne of David) will be given to Jesus and he will reign over the house of Jacob' (Scheffler 1993:76).

### Physical suffering

This kind of suffering refers to literary physical pain as depicted in the parable of the Good Samaritan where outlaws attacked a man and 'they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead' (Lk 10:30) or when the right ear of the high priest's slave was cut off and Jesus healed him (Lk 22:50-51) (Scheffler 1989b:110-120, 2001a:318-343). To emphasise the reality and brutality of the ear episode, according to the Luke account, we must compare him to Mark and Matthew. Mark merely tells how the ear was cut off but Jesus did not attend to the sufferer (Mk 14:47-48) and in Matthew Jesus also did nothing to the bleeding servant and only reprimanded the sword bearer (Mt 26:52). Luke is different and focussed on the suffering servant and the healing of his ear. Luke's Jesus cared for those in pain while he was himself suffering. This is typical of Luke's depiction of Jesus' healing ministry: Luke provided more information about those who suffered and often the suffering is more

brutally and vividly depicted in Luke than in Mark. And compared to Mark, the Lucan Jesus treated the sufferers with more compassion and the healing occurred instantaneously (Scheffler 1993:85, 88, 90).

### Psychological suffering

Scheffler understood old age as a form of psychological suffering (Scheffler 1995a:299-312). More than the other gospels, Luke made much of old people as can be seen in his narration of Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:5-80) and Simeon and Anna. Of Zechariah and Elizabeth, it is told that 'they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years' (Lk 1:7), and this barrenness was seen as punishment of God and caused enormous psychological stress because of embarrassment and humiliation. The promise that Elizabeth would bear a child was a form of alleviation of psychological suffering (Scheffler 1993:91-92, 1994b:148-159).

### The suffering of the Lucan Jesus

The Lucan account of Jesus' suffering is not limited to his arrest, trial and crucifixion but encompassed his whole life. Put differently: throughout his life Jesus has suffered. Scheffler wanted to relate Jesus' suffering to that of ordinary people: 'Luke seems to depict Jesus' suffering as no different to ordinary human suffering which continues throughout the human lifespan' (Scheffler 1993:145).

It already started with his birth and early childhood. He was born in very humble conditions. He was born in a manger and among animals 'because there was no room for them in the living-space' (Lk 2:7).

Shepherds who were a despised group in the time of Jesus visited the newly born emphasising that Jesus was born 'a humble human being ... in poverty-stricken conditions' (Scheffler 1993:105).

Furthermore, his genealogy does not reflect a royal lineage as depicted by Matthew: Jesus was the son of David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, et cetera (Mt 1:7-10). According to Luke 3:23-38, Jesus stemmed from a lineage of ordinary people without royal or noble connections, emphasising that Jesus was a humble human being from an all too human descent (Scheffler 1993:107).

This humiliation continued into his early years, which can be clearly seen in the 'presentation episode' (Lk 2:22-24). Thirty-three days after his circumcision, 'they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord'. According to Leviticus 12:6, the mother 'shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering', but in the case of Jesus they only brought 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons' (Lk 2:24). This humble contribution can be interpreted as 'the sacrifice of the poor', and it highlights the poverty in which Jesus was brought up (Scheffler 1993:105).

To mention another example: at the age of 12 years, he visited the temple with his parents where he was sitting amongst the teachers asking questions impressing all who heard him.

His parents did not understand his behaviour and rebuked him (Lk 2:48) and he 'went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority' (Lk 2:51). Although he is the Son of God, 'he followed the humble way of obedience to earthly parents' (Scheffler 1993:106).

Nearly all people rejected Jesus. When he returned to Nazareth later in life, he was rejected because of his lowly status as the son of Joseph and his view of God's salvation including non-Israelites as well.

Luke described this rejection 'much fiercer' than Mark (6:1–6a). Jesus was rejected by the very same people amongst whom he grew up, which intensified his humiliation and suffering. Jewish leaders persecuted him in many ways. They questioned for instance his right to forgive a paralytic his sins and accused him of blasphemy (Scheffler 1993:109–110). When he dined with Levi the tax collector, the Pharisees criticised his behaviour: 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' (Lk 5:30). And when the disciples picked corn on the Sabbath, rubbing them in their hands and eating it, the Pharisees raised a critical question: 'Why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day?' (Lk 6:2). On another Sabbath day, Jesus healed the man with the withered hand and the anger of the Pharisees now changed into hate: 'The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would cure somebody on the Sabbath, hoping to find something to charge him with' (Lk 6:7) (Scheffler 1993:112). This rejection took the form of insults, unjustified animosity towards him and ostracism (Scheffler 1993:124).

Jesus' suffering and humiliation increased when his disciples did not understand his announcements about his own suffering. Jesus was aware of his own impending passion but apparently his disciples failed to fathom that his exaltation is preceded by enormous suffering: 'But they could make nothing of this; what he said was quite obscure to them, they did not understand what he was telling them' (Lk 18:34) (Scheffler 1993:118–121). This is for instance clear from the disciples' arguments about greatness. They have added to his suffering because of their inability to understand 'the true meaning of his suffering for the benefit of his followers' (Scheffler 1993:132).

According to Luke's farewell discourse (22:21–38), the suffering of Jesus was further increased by the defection of his disciples upon whom he relied in his hour of misery. Especially two disciples were singled out: Judas and Peter. It was extremely painful because Judas was one of the inner circle. Perhaps, the pain was so immense that Jesus was not even able to mention Judas by name during the Passover meal. He only said: '... here with me on the table is the hand of the man who is betraying me' (Lk 22:20–21).

Jesus' reluctance to call Judas by name triggered a discussion amongst his disciples about greatness and which one of them was the greatest. Once again showing their lack of understanding of the true nature of Jesus's suffering for others. After this conversation, another piece of sad news followed: Peter would deny Jesus. Initially, he disagreed but in the end he succumbed to pressure, denied Jesus thrice and thereby intensifying Jesus' suffering (Scheffler 1993:129–131).

Jesus' crucifixion implied his extreme humiliation and suffering. Things could not get worse. He was crucified with two criminals, which intensified his humiliation; the soldiers mocked him and contributed to his suffering by offering him vinegar; they stripped him of his clothes (a form of utter humiliation) and casting 'lots to share out his clothing' (Lk 23:34), et cetera. Sometimes, Jesus' last words, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Lk 23:46), are interpreted as more serene, tranquil and peaceful, but this interpretation is not probable. His crucifixion formed part of a life of suffering and humiliation, which started at his birth and was concluded on the cross (Scheffler 1993:141).

In short: Jesus suffered as a human being, experiencing the same feelings and emotions as the people whom he healed and helped. His birth was humble and his early childhood was probably spent in poverty; his parents offered 'the sacrifice of the poor' when they brought him to the temple; as a young adult, Jesus himself was probably also poor and probably did not own a house; he suffered because people did not always understand him and insulted him in many ways; he was tormented by the misunderstanding and the betrayal of his disciples; he was humiliated by the cross and the anger of the people (Scheffler 2007b:145–165).

## Suffering in the early church

Scheffler forged an important link between Luke and the *Book of Acts* by means of the same comprehensive view of suffering. He criticised Western scholarship on *Book of Acts* because 'relatively little attention is given to the comprehensive care for the needy in society' (Scheffler 2016:161). According to Scheffler, the same dimensions of suffering, which can be found in the Gospel of Luke, can also be discovered in the *Book of Acts*, and this view sheds important light on the early days of Christianity (Scheffler 1988:30–40). In *Book of Acts*, mention is also made of economic distress as well as physical and psychological torture. Social, political and religious issues are addressed, and Scheffler also added another dimension, which he called 'juridical' (persecution), which can be found in Luke 6:22 and 21:12–19 (Scheffler 2016b:132–133).

These dimensions of suffering in *Book of Acts* shed important light on the early beginnings of Christianity.

Socially ostracised people like the Roman soldiers, women, prostitutes and children were for instance accepted and cared for thus illustrating God's great compassion for the marginalised in society (Scheffler 2016b:151,154).

The impact of this support and care can also be seen in the reference to Greek widows who were cared for daily by deacons who were elected through prayer and were filled with the Spirit (Ac 6:1–6). Caring for the sick, the assaulted and those in physical danger are also mentioned in *Book of Acts*. Examples of the latter are the assault on church members and the execution of James by Herod (12:1–2), the imprisonment and miraculous release of Peter (12:4–19), the violent arrest of Paul in Jerusalem (21:31–34), et cetera (Scheffler 1991c:281–298)

In *Book of Acts*, the apostles took over Jesus' healing ministry, but it has not reached the same heights as that of Jesus because they had to preach the new life in Christ. In the gospel, the healings and the caring of Jesus for the poor were the result of Jesus' kind-heartedness and compassion and this is also continued in *Book of Acts*.

There is, however, a difference: in *Book of Acts*, Paul's and Peter's healings were 'signs and wonders' emphasising the message of Jesus and his crucifixion. And this preaching of Jesus did not merely focus on the risen Christ but also included his earthly life and ministry (Scheffler 2016b:140). In the gospel, the story of the earthly Jesus is being told and in *Book of Acts* the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome is being narrated (Scheffler 1994a:16–30).

According to *Book of Acts*, the caring for the poor and the weak took many shapes in the early church (Scheffler1991b:70–84). One radical form of caring was the sharing of possessions. In the gospel, the followers of Jesus are instructed to share or to sell their possessions, and this happened in a radical form according to *Book of Acts*: 'And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed' (2:45). All believers were united and 'no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common'. No one was in want because:

[A]ll those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any who might be in need. (4:32, 35)

According to Luke, this radical sharing of possessions was the consequence of Jesus' instruction to support and care for the needy (Scheffler 2016b:135).

Caring in *Book of Acts* was not restricted to the followers of Jesus but something, which they themselves experienced. When Paul and his company were stranded on the island of Malta, the inhabitants treated them 'with unusual kindness' (Ac 28:2). Publius, the Roman leader on the island, showed them hospitality for 3 days (v. 7). When Paul and the group left they were provided with supplies for the journey. Important to Luke was the focus on the needy that suffered regardless whether they were followers of Jesus. There was also another form of caring consisting of forfeiting the

'right' to be cared for. This was true of Paul who said, 'I have never asked anyone for money or clothes; you know for yourselves that these hands of mine earned enough to meet my needs and those of my companions' (Ac 20:33–34) (Scheffler 2016b:138–140).

In 10 statements, Scheffler indicated that we must be cautious to read the separation between Jews and Christians in the *Book of Acts* because Luke was aware of the 'colonial' situation in the Roman Empire and was 'positively inclined to both Jews and gentiles and that neither is to be excluded at the cost of the other' (Scheffler 2016b:148). Tensions between Jews and the Samaritans were well-known in the first century, but according to *Book of Acts* the Samaritans rejoiced in the gospel and were depicted as fully belonging to the church. What motivated Luke was the need of people, whether Jew or Samaritan or gentile (Scheffler 2016b:149).

In *Book of Acts*, the psychologically afflicted were also being cared for. Those who wept at the death of Dorcas or Tabitha were consoled because Peter had raised her from the dead (Ac 9:36–42). People who were obsessed by demons were cared for and their exorcisms facilitated the spread of the gospel: 'In this powerful way the word of the Lord spread more and more widely and successfully' (Ac 19:20) (Scheffler 2016b:146).

In short, the compassion of the Lukan Jesus, which became a visible reality and a physical experience in the healing of the poor, the sick, the afflicted, et cetera, was according to the *Book of Acts* and continued in the early church. Not necessarily in the same manner but the kind-heartedness to those who suffered remained and was also experienced outside the small circle of the disciples or the followers of Jesus. This overwhelming love of Jesus had to be continued by his followers into the world, which he has left: '... he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight' (Ac 1:9) (Scheffler 2004:653–675).

## Love those who suffer

The world, which Luke depicted in the gospel and *Book of Acts*, reflects the traces of an early Christian community who had to grapple with the sufferings and hardships of first-century life. They suffered persecution, poverty, ostracism, despondency, uncertainty, violence, degeneracy and political enmity (Scheffler 2006:82). Probably, there were also tensions in the community caused by people who were striving for power while others discriminated against the Jews and Samaritans or tax-collectors, shepherds, etc. In short, the Lukan community suffered, and Luke attempted to comfort the 'little flock' with the loving-kindness of the Lukan Jesus who relieved the pain and enormous suffering of ordinary people. This great love became a reality in the gospel and *Book of Acts* where we are confronted with the gravest forms of suffering as well as the existential experience of Jesus' love. We read about people who were possessed by demons but who were healed, others who were on the verge of dying

but who were cured and of those who were grieving but who were comforted and encouraged. In the gospel, the sufferers experienced Jesus personally, but in *Book of Acts* this healing process was taken over by Peter and Paul, and it formed part of their preaching about Jesus; in all cases, the love of Jesus became a reality and the Lukan community had to reflect this love to all people (Scheffler 2004:653–775).

Luke's answer to the community's daily struggle to survive was thus an exhortation to show Jesus's kindness to all the people of the first century (Scheffler 1992:56–73). According to Luke, the members of his community had to live a life of love, which even implied mercy and compassion to the enemy. Compassion is an essential attribute of God and therefore the members had to show the same attitude (Scheffler 2013:1–8). The words, 'Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate' (Lk 6:36), form the foundation and the source for the congregation's compassion and love for the enemy. Without 'compassion, nobody would be able to love the enemy. The attitude and feeling of compassion seems to override the default feelings of hatred and prejudice towards the enemy' (Scheffler 2006:85–86).

The call to love the enemy is clearly illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritans were the archenemies of the Jews, but they should also be loved. Concrete instructions regarding the love for the enemy are given in Luke 6:27–36: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly ...' (Lk 6:27–28). Each negative attitude or action by the enemy 'should be responded to in a positive way' (Scheffler 2006:86).

From the above, it is clear that a mere feeling of compassion is not enough because it must lead to concrete actions. Jesus felt pity for the widow of Nain and raised her son: 'When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, "Don't cry" ....' (Lk 7:13). The Good Samaritan felt pity for the robbed man and then attended to his wounds (Lk 10:33). When the lost son returned home, his father saw him from afar, felt pity and received him with joy: 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him' (Lk 15:20). Lukan ethics thus implied concrete *Book of Acts* of compassion by caring for the poor and the hungry, the acceptance of people in ostracised professions, positive action towards children, et cetera (Scheffler 2014:1–8).

The other side of love is humbleness. In the narrative of the undeserving servants (Lk 19:7–10), faith is defined as 'humble selflessness, expressed in willingness to the lesser role of servant' (Scheffler 2006:86). To Scheffler, this kind of humility must be a very decisive characteristic of Jesus' followers and he referred to the Swiss psychologist, Karl Jung, who said that the opposite of love is not hatred but power, the burning desire to be the first, the best and to rule over other people (Scheffler 2004:653–775, 2006:86).

Scheffler used this perspective as a way of understanding the Lukan Jesus and his suggestion to abstain from power (Scheffler 2017:95–111). Instead of craving for power, humility and unselfish service that is based on compassion is rather emphasised. Perhaps, power struggles marred the unity in the Lukan community and therefore reference to the power struggles among the disciples (Lk 22:24–30) was meant to curb any power struggles. Jesus acted out of love and compassion and served his people unto death, and this had to serve as an example to his disciples to abstain from power (Scheffler 2007a:14–20).

## Conclusion

Eben Scheffler has contributed greatly to an awareness of suffering by taking as starting point the Gospel of Luke and the *Book of Acts*. He has been commended for his comprehensive view of suffering and his depiction of the Lukan Jesus' compassion for all who suffered and were plagued by all kinds of physical and spiritual illnesses. Scheffler appropriated Luke's message and had developed a sharp eye for social injustices and the circumstances of the poor, the underdog and the weak. However, his wish would be that the kind-heartedness of the Lukan Jesus be translated into the social improvement of those underprivileged masses in South Africa; however, it seems impossible owing to immense constraints. Nevertheless, we conclude with a prayer by a well-known Afrikaans poet who once said:

Seën, Here ... dat ons as een groot nasie in dié gramadoelas  
met elke stukkie sinkplaat en met elke wiel,  
en wit en bruin en swart foelie agter skoon glas  
ewig U sonlig vang en na mekaar toe spieël. (Opperman 1983:292)

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I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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