

# Ethnicity and conflict resolution in Luke 10:29–37 from an African perspective

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This article seeks to examine the debilitating issue of ethnicity and conflict which is so prevalent in Africa with particular focus on Cameroon. Many situations of ethnicity and conflict have disrupted the unity of many communities in Africa. As Jesus equally lived in an agonistic society of stratification and class differences wherein the question of neighbourliness was a matter of endless discussion, Luke 10:29–37 is approached from an African perspective to verify what ethnicity and conflict meant to Jesus' listeners in their 1st-century Mediterranean context and what it meant to Africans in their own context. The article contends that the continued resurgence of disputes over religious differences, a sense of belonging and cultural prejudice, inter alia are some of the consequential factors that breed ethnic conflicts in Cameroon. This article argues that to overcome these impediments, capacity prevention and conflict resolution should be strengthened through dialogue, mediation and arbitration with particular attention on the African values of love and compassion. Jesus' method of conflict resolution was to show love and compassion, even to the enemy; thus He commissioned all to do the same, 'Go and do likewise' (Lk 10:37). The article concludes that if dialogue is considered and implemented, sustainable ethnic conflict resolution will be enhanced in Africa and the Cameroonian society.

**Contribution:** This article highlights the relationship between ethnicity and conflict in Africa. Reading Luke 10:29–37 through the lenses of the African values of love and compassion, the article proposes that ethnic conflict can be overcome through dialogue, mediation and arbitration. The article thus contributes to the possible resolution of ethnic conflict in Africa and especially in Cameroonian society.

**Keywords:** ethnicity; conflict resolution; good Samaritan; Luke 10:29–37; African perspective.

## Introduction

There are many types of conflicts in Africa, but ethnic conflict seems the most widespread. In many cases, Aapengnuo (2010:2) opined that it is the politicisation of ethnicity and not ethnicity per se that fuels the attitudes of perceived injustice, a lack of recognition and exclusion that are the sources of conflict. The misdiagnosis of African conflicts as ethnic ignores the political nature of the issues of contention. Yet, little is known or reported on such rural conflicts. Bujra (2002:13) had made reference to the fact that conflicts among ethnic groups in Africa are conflicts over fertile and cultivatable land, mineral deposits, boundary landmarks and water points. All ethnic rivals are usually very costly when viewed in terms of human suffering and the destruction of property.<sup>1</sup> When an ethnic conflict occurs between two villages as it often happens, military intervention is used by the government to quell the warring parties but quite often, there is little or no solution for the root cause of the uprising. This is because most African countries have got little or no mechanisms for managing and resolving conflicts other than the use of military force, which has become so redundant and absurd. The use of military force has never been a prudent method to resolve conflicts because, in the process, women are raped, property looted and more pain is inflicted on the civilian population.

The framework of the article stems from the fact that numerous situations of ethnic conflict that are beckoning for conflict resolution have been the motivating factor for the many situations of ethnic rivalry in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa's ethnic conflict can be correlated with

1. Some historical examples of interethnic conflicts in Cameroon include: The 2007 Bali Nyonga and Bawock ethnic groups (Che 2008:16); the Mbasa and Oku ethnic conflict of 2007 (Nke 2007:2); the Confrontations between the Balikumbat and Bambilang communities in the North West region of Cameroon of 10th March 2011; the Musgoum and Shuwa Arab ethnic groups conflict in the town of Logone Birni, Far North of Cameroon on 10–13 August 2021 resulted in hundreds of casualties and at least 30 reported fatalities. Properties and houses in both communities were destroyed and burned down (Echo Daily Flash, 18th August 2021).

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the age-long ethnic conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans of the 1st-century Mediterranean world. The Jews had a feeling of superiority over the Samaritans probably because of their religious identity as a chosen race. Thus, Jesus sought for a solution to this conflict in response to the question of the legal expert 'Who is my neighbour?' (Lk 10:29). The quest of this article is to demonstrate that Jesus' dealing with ethnic conflict through acceptance, friendliness and compassion could be of help in restoring today's many ethnic conflicts in Africa. It is fundamental here to understand ethnicity and conflict in its Mediterranean context.

## The Mediterranean perspective for understanding ethnicity and conflict in Luke 10:29–37

### Ethnicity in the Jewish context

One of the main issues that portray the historico-religious context of Palestine at the time of Jesus is the issue of ethnicity. Hamel (2008:2) posited that Samaritans and Jews were both joined and separated by geography, religion and history. The alienation has its roots in the fact that large numbers of the Samaritans (the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) were deported after the Assyrian conquest of 721 BCE. Moreover, according to 2 Kings 17:24–41, they were replaced by foreigners. Smith (1999:112) remarked further that when the Jews from the south returned from the Babylonian exile in 537 BCE, they regarded the Samaritans who had presumably intermingled with foreigners, as corrupt and apostate. Later, at some point under the Persian kings, they were authorised to rebuild their own temple on Mt Gerizim. Samaritans in the north and Judeans to the south shared the Torah and a monotheistic faith, yet continuously fought each other in a bitter, seemingly unsolvable conflict. At the time of Jesus, Harris (2003:200) recalled that the Samaritans were still despised by the 'true' Jews of Judah. Samaritans were uncharitably regarded as foreign corrupters of the faith. For Harris, this hostility was still current in the New Testament times, when Jesus probably shocked his Jewish audience by making a Samaritan the moral hero in Luke 10:29–37 and because Luke's Gospel is written from the background of a world filled with competing ethnic identities and ethnic hatred, which shows its ugly head at various points in Luke-Acts (Lk 4:24–30, 9:51–56, 10:8, 10:25–37, Ac 6:1–6, 11:1–18, 15:1–4, 16:19–24, 19:23–41, 22:17–23).<sup>2</sup> Jesus' wise approach to humanity and ethnicity in Luke 10:29–37 flows from the fact that all people are created in the image of God and thus are equal before God.

### Ethnicity in Luke 10:29–37

The story in Luke 10:29–37 confronts and subverts the particular ethnic prejudice of the Jews, and the Samaritans. Jesus' hearers must have been stunned with silence as the message of the story challenged them almost scandalously.

2. Ethnic identities and ethnic hatred in Luke-Acts developed steadily from Jesus' rejection in Nazareth in Luke 4 right to Paul's defense in Jerusalem in Acts 22:38 (Kuecher 2008:40).

His message demanded a fundamental change of values, which transform and transcend all racial and cultural boundaries. What is generally referred to as the parable of the Good Samaritan would have awakened partisan memories of injustice, which would go on with the cycle of inter-ethnic hatred, violence and revenge unless it was somehow redeemed (Ferdinando 2009:15).

Summarily, one of the religious pillars that stand out as a symbol of ethnicity was the temple. While the Jews worshiped in the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans worshiped at Mt Gerizim<sup>3</sup> and Jews viewed Samaritans with scorn as corrupters of their faith.<sup>4</sup> When Jesus stepped into the scene, he fought this generational hatred and conflict between the Jews and Samaritans with love and compassion. On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus intentionally wanted to pass through Samaria that was the direct road from Galilee to Jerusalem, but Jesus' deliberate intention was refused<sup>5</sup> (ed. Adeyemo 2006:1224). Jesus did not fight back even when the Samaritans rejected him (Lk 9:51–56). As Messiah Jesus heals all, both Jews and non-Jews alike. His saving activities were viewed in a context of opposing scribes, who defamed Jesus as someone who annulled the Torah. Opposition to Jesus came in the form of the Israelite elite, but only insofar as their collaboration with Rome was concerned<sup>6</sup> (Van Aarde 2005:10). Some of Jesus' disciples went and preached in non-Jewish communities particularly among the Gentiles without first insisting that their male members submit to circumcision (Elmer 2006:2). This was a way of dismantling ethnic barriers. Jesus' dexterity to further restrain ethnic barriers and hatred also took the form of boundary expansion.

### Boundary expansion

One of the intentions of Luke's Jesus is to tell his hearers who they are and how they are. In so doing, Jesus redefines their identity and suppressed mechanisms for the maintenance of social boundaries (Kuecher 2008:25). Therefore, Jesus arrives at the conclusion that his hearers should no longer understand themselves primarily in terms of their relationship with their ethnic identity or kinfolk but in terms of love for one another without distinction. Social identity theory (SIT)<sup>7</sup> may be used here to help readers

3. Mount Gerizim was thought of as the meeting place of heaven and earth by early Israelites. For the Samaritans, it is the highest of all mountains, the place to worship God (Jn 4:20). The 1st-century Jewish historian says that Hadrian constructed the Samaritan temple at Gerizim in A.D. 130 CE (Achtmeier 1985:341).

4. The origins of the Samaritans are generally understood to be associated with the account of the Assyrian conquest of Palestine in 2 Kings 17:24–41, which recounts how the Assyrians colonised the conquered Samaria and settled people from Mesopotamia, who intermarried with Israelites that the Assyrians had left in the region, thereby bringing forth a generation of mixed blood. Josephus labeled the Samaritans as Jewish apostates (Gardner 1995:578).

5. By this, he was extending a hand of friendship to a people who were enemies. By refusing him, not only was hospitality refused but the extended hand of reconciliation and friendship was repudiated.

6. Jesus as 'king' stood in opposition to the emperor. The contrast between them is the manner in which Jesus saved as opposed to how the emperor acted as 'saviour'. Jesus' approach was that of a shepherd caring for his sheep, whereas the emperor exploited the people from whom he demanded loyalty and had no mercy (Van Aarde 2005:10).

7. Social-identity theory is a branch of social psychology that studies the relationship between people's self-concept and membership to groups (Nyiauwung 2013:48). According to SIT, people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organisational membership, religious affiliation, gender and age cohort (Ashforth & Mael 1989:20).

to understand how Luke portrayed Jesus expanding the boundaries of people. According to Dahrendorf, SIT essentially deals with issues of common identity, which justifies the solidarity of the in-group and fosters cohesion (Nyiawung 2013:49). In Luke 4:27, Elisha granted Naaman, (a non-Israelite) the benefit of healing to which Israelites expected exclusive entitlement. In this way, Kuecher (2008:94) argued that ethnic identities are important yet irrelevant in the work of God, which crosses group boundaries with impunity.

According to SIT, Jesus was supposed to side with the Jews as a member of the in-group but he expanded the boundary by taking the line of mercy (Lk 7:1–10, 47–48; 9:51–56). Jesus equally lived in a society of exclusivism but left it and instituted a society of inclusion and freedom. Nyiawung pursues this idea further by noting that Jesus' understanding of God as compassionate brought about the destruction of ethnic, cultural, class, language and status barriers and the destruction of such barriers brought about a new structure, which is the kingdom of God (Nyiawung 2013:51). Jesus freely mingled with those who were considered as outsiders and frequently challenged the interest of his opponents. Nyiawung (2010:9) posited that Jesus challenged the social order by x-raying societal abnormalities such as injustice, oppression, exploitation and ethnicity and stood for a just society of love, equality and peace, which are all virtues of the kingdom.

In Luke 10:36, the SIT of crossed categorisation<sup>8</sup> may be used to help readers to understand how Jesus curbs conflict between Jews and Samaritans. The lawyer as a member of the in-group is persuaded to recognise the mercy and compassion of the Samaritan who is an out-group. The lawyer affirms to Jesus that the one who was a neighbour to the victim of the robbers was the one who had mercy on him (Lk 10:37). Thus, Jesus creates a new worldview that softens the initial attitude of his listeners (Jews) and minimises their differences with Samaritans. In this understanding of crossed categorisation, Jesus has persuaded a Jew (as a representative of the Jewish community) to change their ideology about the Samaritans but the two ethnic groups, however, remained independent (Nyiawung 2013:50). According to SIT, a Samaritan is supposed to stay away from the Jews who are enemies, but Jesus presents the Samaritan man as leaving the boundary line and taking the line of mercy, thus creating an inclusive society that annuls ethnic differences.

### Compassion

Compassion is an attitude of caring about someone's needs to the point of doing something about it (O'Donovan 1996:62). Jesus cares when people are sick, disabled or discouraged. He hears the prayers of the suffering and the outcast of society. Jesus alleviated the situation of those in

8. Crossed categorisation refers to the crossing of one dichotomous categorisation (in-group or out-group) by a second one. This means that some people who belong to an individual's membership group according to one categorisation simultaneously belong to a second categorisation. Crossed categorisation constitutes an important strategy for reducing intergroup conflict (Hewstone, Islam & Judd 1993:779).

need because he had compassion for them. In Luke 10:29–37, the Samaritan's actions show the transcendence of the human heart when it opens itself to human suffering and allows itself to be moved by the inhumanity of others. The same Jesus who says 'be merciful, just as your Father is merciful' (Lk 6:36) presents this particular Samaritan as merciful and compassionate according to the heart of God (Baca 2011:51). Baca pushes the point further by saying that this Samaritan through his actions gains praise from Jesus for reaching out to a stranger, an alien and a victim of violence. This Samaritan sees something, feels something and does something (Crowder 2021:11). This is powerful, because what drove the Samaritan's actions was compassion. The Samaritan had no guarantee of receiving back his expenditure, yet he helped the man, because he understood that the man was his neighbour (North 2012:208). The Samaritan becomes a model figure: a model of goodness, compassion and in solidarity with the suffering, the beaten and the forgotten. Jesus is picturing here how the Father sees us in our brokenness, is filled with compassion for us and works on our behalf.

## An African perspective for understanding ethnicity and conflict resolution (Lk 10:29–37)

In Africa, ethnicity is the 'consciousness of belonging to, identifying with and being loyal to a social group distinguished by shared cultural traditions, a common language, in group sentiments and self-identity' (Odum & Chibuzor 2017:46). It sometimes transcends a mere consciousness to a willingness to act on the behalf of the group, to limit one's vision, scope and perception of human existence to that as held by the group. Several fundamental elements play important roles in the social-historical<sup>9</sup> organisation of most African communities whether in rural or urban towns that can engender ethnicity and conflict in Africa. Some of these elements include *inter alia*: Religious differences, a sense of belonging, cultural prejudice. These perspectives are further elucidated next.

### Religious differences

In virtually every heterogeneous society, religious difference serves as a source of potential conflict. There are some aspects of religion that make it susceptible to being a latent<sup>10</sup> source of conflict. All religions have their accepted dogma or articles of belief that their followers must accept without question. This can lead to inflexibility and intolerance in the face of other beliefs (Brahm 2005:2).

9. Historically, the boundaries of all African states were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial masters at the Berlin Conference of 1885 (Ikyaase & Ollisah 2014:188). Some of the conflicts in Africa can be traced to the boundaries bequeathed by the colonialists. The belief that the boundary area contains natural resources can magnify disputes. For example, the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, especially over the Bakassi peninsula is based on the belief that there are oil fields in the disputed area (Englebert & Carter 2002:6).

10. Also referred to as unstable peace, it exists whenever individuals, groups, organisations or nations have differences that bother one or the other, but those differences are not great enough to cause one side to act to alter the situation. Latent conflict is often rooted in longstanding economic inequality or in groups' unequal access to political power.

Because individuals are often ignorant of other faiths, there is some potential tension, but it does not necessarily mean conflict will result. Religion is not necessarily conflictual. One might expect that what is contested is ideology or morality (i.e. belief). Mayer (2013:3) opined that this is not necessarily the case. Religious conflict usually engages a combination of contested domains, including power, personality, space or place and group identity.<sup>11</sup> Such religious adherents engage in mutually opposing action and use coercive behaviour to destroy, injure, thwart or otherwise control their opponents (Ushe 2015:118). In Luke 10:25–37 and from a religious point of view, the Samaritans were originally of the same provenance and of the same religion with the Jews, Samaritans in the course of time became estranged from the Jews. As at the time of Christ, both groups had ideologically interpreted their religion in a manner exclusive of the other. While the Samaritans represented themselves as real Jews with the authentic worship of Yahweh, the Jews insisted on the status of Samaritans as foreigners (Naseri 2014:76). Furthermore, Naseri observed that it was a situation of conflict, which as history reveals had degenerated to the point of each seeking to eliminate leaders in the opposing camps.

### Sense of belonging

Africa's many ethnic groups have caused a lot of mutual suspicions, power struggle, tension and fear among themselves. This is because people want to be identified by their tribes. As a result of the tension that exists among the various ethnic groups, it is obvious that many African communities have been plagued by civil or tribal wars as a struggle to maintain the social identity and social pride. This situation has taken the lives of many African people. Many of those who have survived such wars are living as refugees in other neighbouring environments. As a result, one of the paradoxes of the neoliberal drive, otherwise referred to as globalisation, has been the resurgence of the identity question. The anglophone problem in Cameroon arose because of the threats to the cultural identity of a people who at several moments since the 1961 reunification with Francophone Cameroon have threatened to secede from the Republic of Cameroon because of marginalisation and in the interest of their cultural identity (Nfi 2014:1). Anglophones are sentimentally attached to their cultural identity and geographical space. An Anglophone in Cameroon, Nfi (2014:122) said, is not just someone who speaks English; not just someone whose parents lived in the former British Southern Cameroons, not just someone who has acquired Anglo-saxon education or culture but precisely someone whose ancestry is Southern Cameroonian. The anglophone problem is therefore seen as a struggle by the ethnic Anglophones to rescue their cultural identity threatened by the assimilationist policies of the majority francophones.

11. Understanding religious conflict in this way takes away the debate as to whether a conflict is or is not religiously motivated.

The tension between the Jews and the Samaritans is reminiscence of the Jewish cultural and religious identity when the Jews insisted that the Samaritans were not Jews. They regarded Samaritanism as a heresy derived from the corrupt worship of Yahweh mixed up with the worship of the foreign gods brought into Samaria by the foreign settlers during the Assyrian deportations (Naseri 2014:82).

### Cultural prejudice

Hiebert gives a vivid definition of culture when he says that culture is the more or less an integrated system of ideas, feelings and values and their associated patterns of behaviour and products shared by a group of people who organise and regulate what they think, feel and do (Aben 2008:144). As more and more African people are born into different ethnic groups, they are equally born into different cultures. People from different cultures may have difficulties getting along with each other peacefully because of prejudice, suspicion and fear. One cultural group often thinks of themselves as better than other groups.

Prejudiced attitudes are typically widely shared and directed against certain groups and not others. Cohrs and Duckitts (2012:4) have employed SIT to see the intergroup bias and discrimination triggered by mere categorisation as a rudimentary form of prejudice. When a group is characterised by convergent boundaries, the coincidence of many possible distinctions, such as ethnicity, language, religion, social class, urban or rural residence, political affiliation and social categorisation is highly salient and pervasive. This tendency is often called 'ethnocentrism' (O'Donovan 1996:268–269). Cultural prejudice has made some ethnic groups to strive to conquer a neighbouring ethnic group and integrate them under their control.

A historical fuel of prejudice that precipitated the stereotype between the Jews and Samaritans was the construction of a temple of Yahweh on Mount Gerizim as an outright rejection of the temple in Jerusalem by the Samaritans, which renewed and sealed the schism.<sup>12</sup>

### Reading Luke 10:29–37 from an African perspective

From an African perspective, the question of the lawyer to Jesus (who is my neighbour?) would have been 'who is my *countryman*?'.<sup>13</sup> When African people live at home, the *countryman* is someone with whom they live in the same village or town. When an African is out of his own region of origin like the case in Cameroon, a *countryman* becomes someone who comes from the same region with him. The question of who falls within the boundaries of a neighbour is crucial to Africans as well, given the current

12. On the part of the Jews other important elements characteristic of the estrangement were the Samaritans' intermarriages with foreigners, the earlier syncretism that was brought into their worship and their rejection of the post-Pentateuchal scriptures (Naseri 2014:81).

13. *Countryman* is a popular expression that has been adapted from Pidgin English and refers to one who is a member of one's own tribe or culture.

crisis where still too often, African men and women fail to find appropriate responses to their needs. How can Africans respond to the question of neighbourliness as an ethic of love (Ukpong 1984:49)? Mbiti's (1990:106) basic African philosophy is that whatever happens to an individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. This may be a cardinal point in the understanding of a neighbour from an African perspective. The problem of ethnicity can be resolved from an African perspective by using current models that African theologians use in order to understand and explain the relevance of neighbourliness in the African context. These current African models include inter alia, African solidarity, human dignity, customs and tradition, respect and integrity and moral values.

### African solidarity

An African sense of solidarity is the concern for one another, which is based on the principle that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual (Mbiti 1990:106; Ntem & Van Eck 2021:11). The strongest form of African solidarity is seen in tribal or ethnic solidarity. In Africa, people do not live for themselves; they live for the community. Meaningful life in Africa is discovered only when it is shared within the community to which they belong. Said differently, individuals do not exist or live in isolation, they exist as corporate bodies. If someone were to die, other members of the community will suspend whatever work that they had and come to mourn together with the bereaved. This concern of African solidarity is vividly illustrated in a popular African proverb which says: 'Go the way that many people go; if you go alone you will have reason to lament' (Davidson 1969:31). This type of living expressed in Africa is reminiscent of the dyadic relationship of the 1st-century Mediterranean context.

From an African perspective, solidarity in Luke 10:29–37 would have been expressed first by the Priest because he belongs to a particular group of those who are custodians of the law (Frimpong 2011:91). He has a status to defend and so he acts in solidarity with that group or their community. He is guided by his purity customs and traditions and fears that he can be excluded from his duties, should he act not in solidarity with his community. The Levite who followed the Priest is of the same community like the Priest. He wants to remain in conformity with their community rules and he jealously fears that he might be excluded from their community if he becomes unclean by coming into contact with a corpse (Nm 19:11–13).

In Luke 10:33b, the Samaritan saw the victim of the robbers and took pity on him. The problem of the victim became the problem of the Samaritan. Pity is a strong form of solidarity and it is the concern for a fellow human being in need that calls for solidarity (Ntem & Van Eck 2021:11). The Samaritan did not need to know the identity of the victim of the robbers. His heart of compassion went for him and he identified

himself with him as a fellow brother in need of his love. In verse 34, the Samaritan went to the wounded victim, poured oil and wine on his wounds, bandaged them, and put him on his donkey. He then brought him to an inn and took care of him. Like African solidarity, the Samaritan man knows no boundaries of persons when it concerns life. By going to the victim, the Samaritan makes the wounded man to be like a member of his family or tribe or his *countryman*.

### African sense of human dignity

Human dignity in Africa is the value of a person in the eyes of another person. People are often referred to, depending on their blood lineage as: 'this is my blood' thus, blood and life are synonymous. Blood is considered as sacred, the carrier of life. Africans value human blood in such a way that it is a taboo for a man to spill the blood of another man by killing him. The African man's idea of security and its value depends on personal identification with and within the community (Ezenweke & Nwadiolor 2013:61). From that perspective of human dignity, the Samaritan in Luke 10:34 bandages the wounds of the victim after pouring oil and wine on them. If the Samaritan were an African, he would be one who would not see blood and neglect. He values it because as blood flows, it is life ebbing away. It is the very blood that flows in his own veins, he holds it in dignity. By bandaging the wounds of the victim, pouring oil and wine, he wants to preserve life and ensure its continuity. He feels humane even for an unknown victim, which is purely an African traditional value.

The use of oil and wine from an African perspective is legitimate because oil is used to mix any medicine for application on a wound because oil soothes the wound and wine is used as a traditional detergent or a cleansing substance for healing (Biwul 2021:3). Oil and wine are commonly used for traditional sacrifices. A conscious African traveller on a journey would carry them along for any eventuality. The Samaritan had his oil and wine in place and he used them as first aid before taking the victim to an inn. From an African perspective, an inn would have been a herbalist. By helping the victim, the Samaritan restores back the man's human dignity, which was taken away by the robbers.

By this act of the Samaritan, the parable may be seen to redefine how the African sense of human dignity should be perceived. It should be guided, not by kinship but by compassion and love for a neighbour. The dignity of the man who has received help is not simply to regain his health and go and continue to be the same as he was but to make others feel a sense of belonging (Ntem & Van Eck 2021:11).

### African sense of respect and integrity

Considering the fact that honour and shame are pivotal values in the 1st-century Mediterranean society, it can be observed in comparative terms that respect and integrity are to Africa as honour and shame is to the 1st-century Mediterranean society. Respect and integrity are status

qualifiers because they form the very basis of African moral identity. Africans place a lot of importance on the concept of hierarchy, which is based partly on age and partly on status (Mbiti 1999:200). The oldest members in a community have a higher status than the young and they deserve respect and obedience from the young ones. Adults, on the other hand, have a duty to protect, care and provide for the young. Emeakaroha (2002) had drawn inspiration from William Canton who said that:

Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect<sup>14</sup> for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, an African will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him right to courtesy and politeness. (p. 8)

From an African perspective of Luke 10:29–37, Priests and Levites would have been title holders or men of status. Men of such status would have wished to preserve their dignity by not defiling themselves. This article assumes that Jesus would neither have been against the African value of respect for the elderly nor would he have despised the recognition of social status and titles. The teachings and his attitudes of Jesus may cause one to consider the African notion of respect and title holding as a model that redefines status as that which is in accordance with God's purpose for the world, which is embedded in his kingdom principles of mutual love, compassion and respect of human dignity (Nyaiwung 2010:303).

If this parable were told in an African setting, Jesus would have challenged the African use of status with the behaviour of the Samaritan. The Samaritan would have earned an acquired title in the face of the community from an African perspective because of his outstanding benevolent service to the wounded man. His good deeds would earn him a title that elevates his status and dignity above the ordinary members of the community. The Samaritan was formerly a member of the despised, the unclean and outcast. His new-found status would have elevated him from a despised position to one of dignity. To emphasise his status, Jesus described his action in words that Jewish scripture used only for God. The Samaritan is said to have compassion (Lk 10:33).

### African moral values

Morals deal with human conduct, which has two dimensions: Personal conduct that has to do with the life of the individual and social conduct that has to do with the life of society at large (Mbiti 1991:174). The African society puts great emphasis on social conduct. Husien and Kebede (2017:60) and Ntem and Van Eck (2021:13) affirmed that moral principles are primarily concerned with the maintenance of good relationship with others as opposed to the maintenance of justice and individual rights in the West. In Africa what is right is what connects people together;

<sup>14</sup>African elders are respected for these reasons. They are believed to be the teachers and directors of the young. The words of one's elders are like protection; thus the elders are also believed to say the truth, and their words and instructions are heeded to for the promotion of good behaviour among the young. Emeakaroha (2002:8) says further that the elders are taken to be the repository of communal wisdom, and therefore they are conceded leadership in the affairs of the people and of the reasons for this is the nearness of the elders to the ancestors.

what separates people is wrong (Ntem 2020:191; Ntem & Van Eck 2021:13). Moral values are concepts that safeguard African community life and maintain its social identity intact. Mbiti (1991:177), on the other hand, pointed out some of the things that are held to be morally wrong in Africa such as robbery, rape, telling lies, stealing, being cruel, backbiting, being lazy or greedy, being selfish and breaking promises, etc. These moral vices are not acceptable in the face of the community.

From an African perspective, the action of the robbers (Lk 10:30b) who beat up their victim and stripped him of his dresses would have been a serious moral flaw in the face of the community. However, robbers do their activities in hiding and because Africans have a shame culture (Ferrari 1998:334) as opposed to the guilt culture in the West, robbers will have no moral value as long as they are not identified. The action of the Samaritan in Luke 10:34 proved that he was moved with compassion that overcame religious and racial animosity and he treated the Jew with a sense of love (ed. Adeyemo 2006:1225). He would have been a moral hero in the face of an African community. He accorded moral love to a person whom he did not know. It is morally wrong for an African to pay back evil for evil, instead reconciliation is to be sought. In using models that animate the African worldview to read Luke 10:29–37, this article has come to the conclusion that what is generally called the Parable of the Good Samaritan can easily be understood by Africans when read from an African perspective.

### Conclusion

Ethnic identities are an undeniable sign of cultural pluralism; it is a primary force in shaping identity and expressing solidarity. When ethnicity is politicised and ethnic groups try to maximise power and resources at the expense of others, sociologists maintain that there are sociocultural models that are drawn from the context of African society that can be used to handle ethnicity and conflict. These are *inter alia*, the African sense of solidarity, human dignity, respect and integrity and African moral values, which are inborn in African men and women. In Luke 10:29–37, the biblical characters that animate what has generally been referred to as the parable of the Good Samaritan have been shown to make correlations with these contemporary African sociocultural models. This study has revealed that Jesus changes the mentality of the long-time ethnic conflict between the Jews and Samaritans by setting aside all boundaries, prejudices and biases that separated them. When Jesus stepped into the scene, He redefines ethnic identity and suppressed mechanisms for the maintenance of social boundaries. As a way of conflict resolution, Jesus arrives at the conclusion that his hearers should no longer understand themselves in terms of their relationship with their ethnic group but in terms of their love for one another. This study points to the fact that the sociocultural background of others should not become a leeway for treating others in an inhuman manner because salvation is universal in scope.

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The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## Author's contributions

G.S.N. is the sole author of this article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards of research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability

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