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Violent text, violent context, and the Lukan Jesus in Luke 9:51–56

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This article explores the presence of violent texts and contexts in Scripture and how these dynamics can shape violent realities in society, focusing particularly on Luke's perspective. Luke's Gospel presents a distinct narrative tapestry, illustrated in the incident of Luke 9:51–56, where Jesus encounters a hostile and potentially violent situation. In this passage, the rhetorical response of the Lukan Jesus becomes central to the interpretation. His reaction contrasts sharply with the impulses of both the Samaritans and his own disciples, revealing how he transcends the violent text and the violent context before him. Through his response, Jesus transforms a moment charged with aggression into one marked by peace, offering a model for his emerging community as they face hostile or volatile circumstances.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article highlights Jesus's response as a crucial framework for rejecting violence against any human being, regardless of race, gender, or social standing. It concludes by urging the African Church to follow the example set by the Lukan Jesus in addressing the many conflicts confronting communities across the continent today.

Keywords: violent text; violent context; Samaritan; Lukan Jesus; Luke's Gospel; disciples.

Introduction

Violence is not only found in the physical exchange of power or abuse but also in written texts. Every text is pregnant with either violence or non-violence, depending on its context and situation. A text can be abusive and violent, depending on the contexts of the writer and the interpreter. A violent text possesses and pushes a reader towards a violent end and interpretation. Biblical scholars engage in locating key biblical texts within the domain or the framework of violence and abuse. Such scholars outrightly insinuate the Bible as an instrument of violence (Punt 1999:266). However, many interpreters of the Old Testament have accused it of sanitising violence in its context, depending on the interpretive lenses they use. This accusation does not end in the Old Testament; it extends into the New Testament. Even the New Testament text is believed to incite violence based on the interpreter and the method of interpretation (Punt 2007:200–201). The New Testament is far from being an instrument for violence. The entire New Testament discourages war and violence (Lk 22:50; Jn 18:10). Jeremy Punt, despite his critical view of the New Testament as one of the instruments that breeds violence in the modern world, acknowledges the fact that the New Testament does not promote violence and war but, instead, promotes peace. Punt (2016:37) further attests that peace has an overwhelming presence in the New Testament and that there is no space for violence and conflict. However, he warns that the violent elements found in the New Testament are based on interpretation when he says, 'The violent element is related to various socio-historical and theological factors, determined by the interest of communities, ideologies, and others' (Punt 2016:38).

Violent texts and their interpretation provide scholars with different menus of manoeuvring either in ordinate or inordinate procurement of such texts. While the violent text may depend on the text or its interpreter for its meanings, the context in which the text is produced has the potential to elicit violence. Nkabala (2017:91–97) has elucidated instances in which people interpret a given text to justify their acts of violence against humanity. Many people justify their claims based on their beliefs, using a text to perpetuate actions contrary to humanity. This occurs when an individual or group manipulates a text to incite violence (Nkabala 2017:92).

The violent text may contain words in the form of rhetoric, allusion, echo, and innuendo and acts naturally as a breeding ground for violence. In this case, the text serves as a fulcrum for violence and its interpretation. The context of a given text indicates the origin of the text, and such context

naturally mints violence with or without the input of an interpreter. The ability to turn violent text and violent context resides only with a subversive interpreter who subverts a text for the benefit of the people (Etukumana 2024a:2).

The word violence is not well stipulated in Luke, except in 16:16, where the Lukan Jesus applies it to the way and manner the people behave if they want to enter the Kingdom of God; where the Lukan Jesus believes that any violence against the Kingdom of God will never succeed (Aichele 1998:72–76). Luke writes on Jesus' dealings with the people in the Gospel of Luke, which inadvertently contradicts the popular interpretation of violent texts and context. His reaction in Luke 9:51–56 challenges his disciples, who align their interpretation contrary to Jesus'. Obstructing the movement of someone on a long-distance journey may bring a different response from the affected individual. However, rather than reacting to the measure they took against him, Jesus quickly contradicted their actions. Jesus' teaching in this text contradicts the opinion of his time. Jesus aimed for a world where humanity would live with one another without violence. This further demonstrates his subversive nature in dealing with social issues by introducing means capable of effecting change in his hearers' lives (Etukumana 2024a:5).

Luke, in his opinion, sees Jesus and his teaching as contradicting the norms that were popular in his time. He shows that Lukan Jesus turned a violent situation into a non-violent one (a peaceful situation). Luke points this out in one of his narrations about the Lukan Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. What would ordinarily have caused a fire on the people involved was given a different nuance.

Socio-historical hermeneutics becomes necessary in interpreting the residual nuances of a given text. It tries to locate violence within the text and genre of literature of the time (Gale & Scourfield 2018:1–2). This enables scholars to study texts in light of the available contexts and literature. In other words, there is a tendency for a given text to be examined based on already available literature within the context of that text. In this case, the Greco–Roman and Jewish contexts are the available contexts in this article. Using a socio-historical interpretation of Luke 9:51–56 enables the text to be read through the lens of the ancient world and within the contexts that gave rise to it. Exploring the violent text in Luke 9:51–56, this article focuses on the actions of the Lukan Jesus and their implications for the Christian community in Africa. The article examines how the Christian community in Africa can apply this model to navigate various violent situations across the continent. However, Luke's insertion of the narrative immediately after the teaching of Jesus on missions in 9:5 directly or indirectly indicts him for his intention. Does Luke want to see how effective Jesus is with his teachings?

Or, does he want to know how Jesus would react in a practical life situation? Does this text have anything to do with the violent situation that we are experiencing in Africa? Some of these questions will help the article to critically examine Luke's intention concerning this text and its application to the church in Africa.

The violent text and the violent context and the Gospel of Luke

Scholars of the New Testament have defined the ancient world as a violent world due to an unending search for honour (Etukumana 2016:39–61; Finney 2012:17–19). The text of the ancient world is heightened and labelled with a high level of violence. Violence, a common denominator in the ancient Greco–Roman world, had permeated all facets of life, including literature (Gale & Scourfield 2018:1–4). One easily detects elements of violence as one reads these ancient texts. The same could be observed in Luke's Gospel, as in other works of ancient Greco–Roman literature. Luke's Gospel is not exempt from such violence. De Villiers and Van Henten (eds. 2012:245–-273) carefully argue that Luke's Gospel contains elements of violence when examining its content through the lens of violence.

Luke's Gospel may contain many violent scenes, but in terms of how it presents Jesus' teaching, it is interesting to the reader. Luke has traces of violence in his writing, with instances in 6:1–5; 6:6–11; 13:10–17; 16:16; 19:45–47; 22:49–51. Again, Luke believes that much violence was projected onto or inflicted on the Lukan Jesus in many of these situations. However, Jesus' reaction contradicts his audience's expectations, as in Luke 6:27–31; 22:47–48; 22:49–51. The Lukan Jesus, based on his words and actions, expects a violent, free society. The portrait of Lukan Jesus in Luke's Gospel invites the idea that he verbally teaches his disciples about peace and nonviolence and demonstrates these using actions, as in the case of his passion events. The situation depicted in Luke 22:50–-51 defines Jesus's peace mission as non-violent, in contrast to the ancient Greco-Roman Empire, which believed that the sword was the instrument of peace.

For instance, the Aristotelian Ethics was based on the ancient concept of peace, which adhered to violence, war, and the infliction of pain as a matrix for peace. It was this matrix that Alexander the Great utilised to conquer the world of his time. In this text, Luke narrates that one of the disciples of Jesus violently severed one of the ears of the servant of the high priest. For the disciples of Jesus, the theory of insider-outsider identity was geared towards benefitting the insiders – the Lukan community. The reply of Jesus to the violent disciple is quite resonating: 'ἐᾶτε ἕως τούτου' (22:51), which the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and New Internation Version (NIV) simultaneously translate as 'No more of this!'.

This action of Jesus portrays him as a preacher of non-violence and as one who can change a violent context into non-violence. The violent death he suffered at the hands of those who were opposed to his teachings and beliefs demonstrates his non-violent mission to the world.

The violent death of Jesus by the hands of the Romans was plotted by the Jewish leaders who were in opposition to his

teachings and beliefs. Therefore, his death was a persecution that the Jewish people meted out on him (Cunningham 1997:139–144). The prayer of Jesus on the cross in Luke 23:34 is another succinct demonstration of his peaceful, nonviolent nature. It is only in this text that this prayer is mentioned; all other evangelists (Matthew and Mark) do not refer to this (Cunningham 1997:152–153). This prayer is one of the Lukan peculiarities (Etukumana 2016:230). In this text, Jesus prays for the forgiveness of his executioners, which serves as a reiteration and reaffirmation of his teaching in Luke 6:27–28. Grün (2003), examining Jesus' actions on the cross, notes that even Jesus' prayer has made the cross a symbol of forgiveness and redemption. All the teachings of Jesus and their expression in his actions in Luke's Gospel aim to teach his disciples how to negotiate between peace and violence whenever they are confronted with either (Agbiji & Etukumana 2018:75–76).

Thus, through various actions and words of the Lukan Jesus in Luke's Gospel, many violent texts and contexts are mitigated by Jesus' non-violent actions and words. His mien conjures a sense and ability to subvert violent text and its context to a non-violent interpretation and application in Luke.

The Lukan Jesus and the violent text in Luke 9:51–56

The literary structure of this text falls within the journey narrative (9.51–19:28) in which the Lukan Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem (Łaszkiewicz 2019:125–130). The report on this coordinated violence against Jesus by the Samaritan community is peculiar to Luke (Agbiji & Etukumana 2018:21). The reason for this narrative is important to the Lukan socio-historical narrative.

Josephus (Ant. 20:118; War. 2:232) provides insights into what transpired between the Jewish people and the Samaritans that led to the killing of many Jewish pilgrims in one of the Samaritans' communities. Josephus and Luke's narratives are punctuated with bias between the two ethnic nationalities. Luke, in this text, further pinpoints identity politics in his narrative, whereby a boundary is factored based on ethnicity; the Jewish people are carefully differentiated from the Samaritans. This is highlighted using κώμην Σαμαριτῶν 'village of Samaritans' (9:52), differentiating it from other villages or locations around the vicinity. Wolter (2017:47) is right that the use of the κώμην Σαμαριτῶν is not tied to location but to the ethnic population that occupies the place. It shows that the Samaritans were the majority of the neighbourhood's inhabitants. Luke's interest is projected in a manner that offers insights into his narrative within the pericope on discipleship (Wolter 2017:45–46). Identity and ethnicity become the hallmarks of his narrative, detailing Jesus' reaction in such situations and contexts.

TABLE 1: Luke 9:51-56 in Original Greek and the English translation.

Original Greek	English translation
Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ἀναλήμψεως αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς τὸ πρόσωπον ἐστήρισεν τοῦ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ.	When the days approached for him to be ascended to heaven, it happened that he set his face to proceed to Jerusalem.
[52]καὶ ἀπέστειλεν ἀγγέλους πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ. καὶ πορευθέντες εἰσῆλθον εἰς κώμην Σαμαριτῶν ὡς ἑτοιμάσαι αὐτῷ·	[52]And he sent his messengers ahead of him, and they entered the Samaritan village to make preparations for him.
[53]καὶ οὐκ ἐδέξαντο αὐτόν, ὅτι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἦν πορευόμενον εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ.	[53]But they did not receive him, because he set his face toward Jerusalem.
[54] ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης εἶπαν· κύριε, θέλεις εἴπωμεν πῦρ καταβῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἀναλῶσαι αὐτούς;	[54]And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire from heaven to consume them?'
[55]στραφεὶς δὲ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς.	[55]But he turned and rebuked them.
[56]καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς ἑτέραν κώμην	[56]They went in another direction.[1]

Source: Author's translation from Luke 9:51-56 in the original Greek Text : Aland, B., Aland, K., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C.M. & Metzger, B.M. (eds), 2012). Novum Testamentum Graece. 28th rev.edn. Deutsche, Stuttgart

1.Luke 9:51–56 has one of the critical variants in Luke's Gospel. For instance, the omission of ὡς καὶ Ἠλίας ἐποίησεν ['even as Elijah did'] in 9:54 is witnessed by ℵ A B C, while D K Θ Ψ witnesses its omission. This long passage καὶ εἶπεν, Οὐκ οἴδατε οἵου πνεύματός ἐστε ὑμεῖς· ['and he said, do you know the kind of spirit you are made up of'] and v. 56 are absent or omitted in p. 45, 75, ℵ A B C, L, W, Δ, X, Ψ (Nolland 1993:532–533; Samkutty 2006:105).

One of the features of this text is that Luke does not use technical terms to convey the nature of the message the Lukan Jesus sends through his disciples. Luke's use of ἀγγέλους [messengers] (in plural form) instead of πρεσβεία [ambassador] in the text indicates that there was no initial rift between the Lukan Jesus and the Samaritans before now (Bash 1997:164; Etukumana 2016:167–168). From the Lukan perspective, the absence of πρεσβεία further conveys the peaceful nature of Jesus' action, an idea of the absence of hostility between the two factions, the Lukan Jesus and the Samaritan community. Whatever enmity existed between them must have resulted from ethnic differences and stereotypes. Luke does not indicate that Jesus had a personal problem with the Samaritans that led him to send messengers ahead to the Samaritan community (Klein 2006:363).

There is no doubt that the Lukan Jesus was caught up in the existing hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jesus' dealings with the Samaritans in Luke's Gospel show a friendly relationship (10:33; 17:16). Hostility between Jews and Samaritans is well documented both in ancient and modern scholarship. However, both the Jews and the Samaritans worshipped in different places. The Jews at Jerusalem and the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim (1 Macc 1:10–44; Jn 4:4; Josephus, *Ant*. 12:257–264). A socio-historical study of the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans reveals that it was built on hatred (Agbiji & Etukumana 2018:12). The Lukan Jesus and his disciples were aware of the hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans (10:33; 17:16–18). This hostility is playing out in the Lukan Jesus' journey narrative in Luke's Gospel. There is no way Luke mentions any misgiving between Jesus and his disciples with the Samaritans.

Also, the Lukan Jesus was possibly aware of the killings of the Jewish pilgrims by the Samaritans, as reported by Flavius Josephus, which prompted him to send messengers to allow him access to Jerusalem through their community to avoid any violent situation. Jesus' actions imply that humanity must learn to respect one another. In this context, Luke therefore paints a picture that invites the Lukan community

to see Jesus as their model when confronted with violent texts, situations, and contexts. By sending messengers to the Samaritans, Jesus wants to create a good relationship between the Samaritans and his community in Luke. By doing so, Luke alludes to a similar text in the Old Testament; herein, Luke intentionally reconfigures the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 32 (LXX).

Luke indicates a similarity between the Lukan Jesus and Jacob, who sent messengers to meet with his brother, Esau, ἀπέστειλεν δὲ Ιακωβ ἀγγέλους ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πρὸς Ησαυ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτου … [Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau …] (Gn 32:4 LXX). However, the Lukan Jesus and Jacob are not in the same situation and context. Jacob sent messengers with gifts to pacify his brother, Esau. But in Luke, Jesus does not intend to pacify the Samaritans, but rather to gain access to their territory, thereby enabling him to travel peacefully to Jerusalem to fulfil his role as the saviour of the world (Aryeh 2024:5–6). The idea is that both Jesus and Jacob sent messengers, but their intentions were both similar and different. It could be that Luke intends to highlight the similarity in the relationship between Jacob and Esau. The Jews represented by Jesus and the Samaritans are brothers. The second similarity in the two stories is that Jesus and Jacob are migrating from one place to another. Jesus moved from Galilee to Jerusalem, while Jacob moved from his father-in-law's to the land of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac.

Both had to pass through their brother's land. In the case of Jesus, κώμην Σαμαριτῶν [village of the Samaritans,] while Jacob, εἰς γῆν Σηιρ εἰς χώραν Εδωμ [in the land of Seir in the territory of Edom] (34:4 LXX). A handful of welcome was accorded to Jacob by his brother Esau, but the Lukan Jesus was denied the opportunity to pass through the land of the Samaritans.

However, the Lukan Jesus took another route to Jerusalem and by implication, migrated to establish a new Israel of God through his sacrifice on the cross in Jerusalem, just as Jacob moved from Laban's home to fulfil the establishment of the new nation God promised Abraham. Luke's reconfiguration of this text has significant implications for the Lukan community in Luke's Gospel (Etukumana 2024b:3).

Luke portrays Jesus in this complicated situation as someone who shows humanity how to respond when confronted with a real-life situation. The reactions to the Samaritans by turning to another community for access to Jerusalem teach that when one is faced with violence, there is always a way to avoid it (v. 56). In the second instance, by rebuking his disciples, he further demonstrates that violent situations must not always be given a corresponding violent answer (v. 55). These actions of Jesus are (Agbiji & Etukumana 2018):

> [*S*]ubversive of the expected theological-sociocultural norms of his people, including his disciples. Jesus acted as an exemplary leader whose duty was to bring healing to the broken relationship, thereby creating room for forgiveness and reconciliation. (p. 12)

Samaritans and the disciples of Jesus in Luke 9:51–56

The reaction of the Samaritans in this text provokes the disciples of Jesus, who wanted punishment to be meted out to the Samaritans for their actions against Jesus on his way to Jerusalem (Wolter 2017:45–46). Jesus sent the unnamed disciples to prepare the way for him as he entered Jerusalem (Klein 2006:263). The unnamed disciples met something contrary to their expectations. The Samaritans denied their master access through their community. Samaritans' action against Jesus by rejecting his request is tantamount to, according to Evans (1987:80), rejecting the prophetic ministry of Jesus, which means rejecting Jerusalem as the city of God and Judaism as a true religion; they are Samaritans who deserve not to live but to be dead. Based on these grounds, the judgment on the Samaritans became inevitable (Evans 1987:80).

Again, Luke's refusal to name the disciples Jesus sent to prepare the way for him could be read as a way of communicating to his audience that hospitality and security are social responsibilities of all citizens. By keeping this from his community, Luke believes that everyone should take responsibility for caring for and securing one another. Luke carefully keeps from his audience the response of the unnamed disciples that Jesus sent to request access on his behalf. If they had responded to the Samaritans immediately after they were denied a pass, violence would have erupted without the presence of Jesus. The result would be carnage on the side of the disciples. The disciples knew this and kept quiet until Jesus was informed (v. 53).

The Samaritans' refusal to allow the Lukan Jesus access to their territory ignites anger among the disciples, and Luke must ensure he mentions those involved in this contestation. Luke specifically mentions James and John's involvement in the matter (v. 54a).

It could be that Luke does this to inform the community that not all the disciples were involved in the fracas over rewarding the Samaritans for refusing to allow Jesus access to Jerusalem through their land. James and John, his brother, believed that the only punishment that could be apportioned to the Samaritans who refused Jesus's entry to their land was by commanding fire from heaven to burn them (v. 54b).

Unfortunately, Luke does not inform his audience whether the Samaritans were to serve as objects of sacrifice or objects of punishment. However, Feník (2022:233–252)'s assertion that there are instances where fire is used as a means of destruction (ἀναλῶσαι; ἀπώλεσεν) in Luke's Gospel (9:54; 17:29) becomes very crucial in authenticating the reason for the use of fire in this text. Allison (2002:464) cites the author of the Testament of Abraham, who describes a similar situation in which fire is commanded to descend and consume the evil-doers. Fire is often used as a metaphor for

the wrath of God upon those who acted contrary to his will, whether in this life or hereafter, as in Genesis 19:24–25; Ezekiel 15:6–7; Jeremiah 22:7 (Feník 2022:246–247).

It means that James and John wanted the Samaritans to be punished for refusing to let Jesus pass through their territory. Luke's writing is interspersed with many images from biblical and extra-biblical sources where fire was descending from heaven to either burn offerings or to destroy the enemies of God (Lv 10:1–2; 2 Ki 1:9–12; Ezk 15:4–6; 19:12; Jl 1:19; 2:3; 2 Macc 4:10; Wolter 2017:47–48).

The story of prophet Elijah in the Old Testament is a typical example in which fire was invoked to destroy those who acted contrary to the rule of prophet Elijah. Allison (2002:359–460) sees a correlation between Elijah's text and Luke. The similarities and differences between Elijah in the Old Testament and Luke 9:51–56 aim to teach Luke's community that the Lukan Jesus has many attributes that surpass those of Elijah and other Old Testament prophets (Brodie 1989: 108–109). Elijah's event in the book of Kings takes place in Samaria, and Luke's in one of the Samaritans' villages. By implication, James and John wanted to repeat Elijah's event in Luke. It was the intervention of the wise captain that averted further killing of the people by Elijah (2 Ki 1:13–15). Jesus in Luke is more than a mere captain of Samaria who pleaded with Elijah to spare his life and that of his men. The Lukan Jesus is Τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεου [the Christ of God] (Lk 9:20). While some of the disciples were erratic towards the purported enemies, Jesus was always compassionate to the people and prevented them from calling fire from heaven. His action informs Luke's community that 'violent vengeance' in whatever form is not acceptable in the new community (v. 55). Mercy is the order of the new community, and that becomes one of the hallmarks of the Lukan Jesus' teachings in the text (Allison 2002:476).

Lukan Jesus: A non-violent Messiah in Luke 9:51–56

Again, Luke, in his text, has successfully revealed his intention for it to his community by portraying Jesus as the non-violent messiah who subversively changed muddy situations to clear ones. He changes bad situations to good ones and violent situations into non-violent ones. The Lukan Jesus applies subversive actions and rhetoric to turn the situation around for the good of humanity (Etukumana 2024a:3–5). Subversive actions and rhetoric that Jesus employed in the text to change a violent context into a non-violent one are convincing in Luke 9:51–56.

By sending messengers – Luke 9:52

Scholars of Luke place strong emphasis on the messengers in this text (Brodie 1989:100), but they show no interest in why Jesus decided to send these messengers. By sending messengers to the village of the Samaritans (v. 52), Jesus showcases the need for human dignity and respect. He knows his boundaries and makes sure he maintains them as he deals with different groups of people. If Jesus had not asked the Samaritans for permission, it would have led to a catastrophic, chaotic situation. Luke's Gospel records a similar situation in which a disciple committed violent action that was not authorised by Jesus (Lk 22:49–50). His disciples would have called down fire to consume the Samaritans if Jesus had not initially sent the messengers to gauge the temperature of the environment.

Rebuking his disciples – Luke 9:55

Luke's literary insight is very significant in his writing. Words and actions are so important to Luke and his community (Etukumana 2024a:4–5). In this violent situation, Luke uses στραφεὶς [turns around] (Loubser 2002:213) as an exclusive gesture applied to Jesus in all his writing (Lk 7:9, 44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61; 23:28). The use of this word in Luke sometimes brings special emotions out of Jesus (22:61; 23:28). Its application in the context of Luke means that the Lukan Jesus has special message (warning) to deliver to his community (v. 55). Its usage is so significant in Luke whenever it is used. Most often, it reverses actions in the lives of those that Jesus had encountered (Lk 7:9, 44; 9:55).

Luke's ability to apply reversal rhetoric in his writing makes him one of the writers of the ancient world. Instances in which Luke employs reversal rhetoric are numerous (Lk 1:50–53; 7:36–50; 10:30–35; 15:11–32; 16:19–31; 18:10–14, etc.). Luke's application of reversal rhetoric in his writing enables Luke to directly impact his message to his community (York 1989:2–50). Jesus' rebuke to his disciples in verse 55 aims to reverse the existing conflict between Jews and Samaritans. The application of rebuttal in this verse serves both as a reversal and as a subversive rhetorical device intended to correct ill-conceived ideology from the new Jesus community in Luke. Verse 55 of this text serves as a fulcrum that regulates the activities of Luke's communal ethos. Jesus must prevent the situation from plunging into violence (Klein 2006:363; Söding 2023:261).

By rebuking his disciples, Klein and Söding see a similarity in the earlier command in Luke 9:21, where the Lukan Jesus instructs his disciples not to disclose his identity at the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem.

Turning in a different direction – Luke 9:56

Luke writes καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς ἑτέραν κώμην, highlighting the last action of the Lukan Jesus, which presents him as a Messiah who teaches his disciples how to deal with violent situations. Jesus does not just avoid the people; he addresses the primary cause of violence and hatred by rebuking his immediate constituency, his disciples, and directing them toward ethical lifestyles acceptable in his community. He teaches them a lifestyle that will enable them to deal with violence without resorting to revenge. His action instructs his disciples to take no revenge and set a boundary that will empower them to achieve their goal without offending those who do not welcome them (Söding 2023:262).

For Jesus to turn another way serves as an instruction to his disciples to do the same whenever they are confronted with violent confrontation. Jesus's exit from the scene by taking a different direction is very crucial in Luke's presentation to his community. At this point, Luke concludes the narrative by building on Jesus' action in verse 56, demonstrating to the disciples what they must do when faced with such a situation. Violence must not be associated with the human community. By so doing, Luke invites his audience to subvert the ugly situation and mitigate it to a non-violent one. Here, Luke again applies his subversive rhetoric to demonstrate to his community Jesus' ability to deal with violence and conflict. The actions of Jesus in Luke 9:51–56 demonstrate that Luke's community does not either accept or welcome the act of vengeance from members of the Lukan Jesus community, as carefully observed by Allison (2002):

> Here is at this point no harmony between old and new. Jesus' unelaborated rebuke seemingly implies that violent vengeance is always wrong at all times and places. Luke 9:52–56 does not, admittedly, say this in so many words. But the pericope, as we have seen, belongs to a tradition that rejects human vengeance on the grounds of God's nature. The Creator's love of the entire creation entails showing mercy to all humans. (p. 476)

The Lukan Jesus and the violent context in Africa: A reflection on African *ecclesia*

A myriad of literature has documented a high rate of violence and conflict in modern Africa, from north to south and from east to west. It prompted Chabal, Engel and Gentili (eds. 2005) to raise critical and salient questions: Is conflict inevitable in Africa? Perhaps that could also trigger the interest of Zeleza (2008:3), who catalogues violent conflict in Africa, concluding that the continent is indeed ravaged by a range of conflicts that impede its democratic progress, development, and good governance. Violent conflicts are multifaceted and manifest in various areas of human endeavours in Africa (Evans 2009:4–5). However, the reasons and causes of violent conflicts in Africa raise questions, as scholars suggest that they do not have a single story (Akokpari 2008:89).

Violent conflict has become a very important script that many Africans, as actors in the theatre of wars, terrorism, and gender-based violence, domestic violence, violence against strangers, and political and economic violence, have all been found in almost all the continents (Gebrewold 2009:1–35). Zeleza (2008:1) further claimed that violent conflicts not only deter the progress and the development of Africa but also kill more Africans than any other means of death on the continent. These conflicts and violence in Africa have been blamed on external forces as the major contributors. It is believed that 'African states are not mere victims of the international system; instead, they have become an essential part of it' (Gebrewold 2009:36). Recently, another hydra of violence has emerged from Africa in the form of xenophobic attacks, where strangers are either lynched or violently manipulated by the purported owner of the land.

The church, as a beneficiary of the reading and teaching of Luke's Gospel, has a duty to embody the Lukan Jesus's model in confronting violence in Africa. Therefore, the duty to mitigate violence in Africa is one of the church's responsibilities. The church in Africa must learn to read the text of Luke the way the Lukan Jesus read it. The church needs to imitate the Lukan Jesus in addressing violent texts and contexts in Africa. This article proposes ways in which the Church in Africa can deal with conflict situations.

Application of subversive actions and rhetoric

Etukumana (2024a:2–5) believes that subversive rhetoric or action is found when one or a group of people read a text differently from the already established way for the benefit of humanity. He notes that Jesus was able to read the text of the empire differently from the way the empire itself read and understood it. Jesus did this so that humanity would be free from the shackles that enslaved them. The same method was adopted by Nelson Mandela in reading the script of apartheid. Nelson Mandela read the text of apartheid subversively to enable him to bring freedom to the people of South Africa. This reading gave birth to the present democratic South Africa.

The action and language of the church in Africa should aim to read any conflictual or violent text or situation subversively, the way the Lukan community understood and read Jesus. The action in the text was a xenophobic attack on Jesus (Lk 9:51), but Jesus responded subversively and averted the attack against him and his disciples. When his disciples wanted to retaliate against the Samaritans, Jesus turned them aside, rebuked them (v. 55), and took a different, more peaceful route to Jerusalem.

Reading Luke shows that the church is mandated to employ subversive rhetoric and actions in dealing with many conflicts and violent situations affecting Africa. Reading the violent text subversively in the violent context will help the church avert the violent text, turn it into a gentle text, and change the violent context to a peaceful one, as Jesus did in Luke 9:51–56.

Imitation of the Lukan Jesus

Apart from using subversive rhetoric and action to mitigate violence in Africa, the church must apply the principle of imitating Jesus. The Church in Africa should intensify this process by asking itself, 'What would Jesus do in this kind of situation if Jesus were to be here?' By asking this question as the church reads the violent text, it can see Jesus as he wants to be seen by his disciples. An invitation to imitate the Lukan Jesus means that the church becomes a disciple of Jesus, through the process of discipleship (Barth 2003:2–5). *Imitatio Christi* invokes the idea that enables the church to crucially become a disciple of Jesus and engage in discipleship (Etukumana & Ezele 2023:35). Yoder (2003:18–21) sees 'discipleship' in this context as a political and subversive means of asphyxiating evil through the power of Christ.

In trying to conquer violent situations in Africa, the church has to be the messenger that detects the tempo of the African community to Jesus (v. 51). The church as a disciple must be careful to watch and listen to Jesus to know when Jesus 'turns around' to rebuke the erratic behaviour of the church against humanity (v. 55). By imitating Christ, the church must be willing 'to go with Jesus to another village' (v. 56) in dealing with violent text and context in Africa. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* admonition resonates for contemporary readers of Luke's Gospel as they are confronted with violent conflicts that are ravaging the world, and their responsibility to the violent world is that:

> We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness have each through the whole world changed our warlike weapons – our swords into plowshares and our spears into implements of tillage, we cultivate piety, righteousness, philanthropy, faith, and hope. (pp. 110–113)

Conclusion

The investigation has indicated that violence was prevalent in the Greco–Roman world and in the Old Testament. The Gospel of Luke, as one of the ancient writings, is not exempt from this violence, as it is believed to contain violent elements. Examination of violent text and context as it applied to Luke 9:51–56 was the hallmark of this investigation. It was discovered that Luke intentionally used words his audience was familiar with in the text. The rhetorical devices used in the text provide a means through which the community reads the actions of Jesus. The Lukan Jesus' actions and rhetoric were geared towards the liberation of humanity from the violent situation. It was observed that all the actions of Jesus in the text, such as sending the messengers (v. 51), turning and rebuking the disciples (v. 55), and taking another route to Jerusalem (v. 56), were deliberate to inform the Lukan community that Jesus applied all these to deal with violent text and context in Luke. However, in dealing with the violent context confronting the Lukan Jesus, Luke strongly acknowledges the application of subversive action and rhetoric of Jesus in manoeuvring this violent situation. By doing so, Jesus successfully changed the violent situation into a non-violent context for the peaceful coexistence of humanity.

It was noted that growth in Africa as a continent is often punctuated by violence across many facets of human endeavour. If this violent situation must be eliminated, there are duties to be carried out in Africa. The onus of doing this rests with the church if the violent conflict ravaging the continent must be abetted. The church has to be the vehicle for conveying Jesus' message and actions to the African community through subversive actions and rhetoric, and through imitation of Christ. As a disciple of Jesus, the church must change its violent script to non-violent through its actions and messages. It was also proposed that the church must learn to imitate Jesus by engaging in a subversive manner to change the violent situation in Africa into a peaceful environment. The church's mandate is superior: to overcome the evil of violence in Africa through reading and imitating Jesus.

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