

# THE RECONCILIATION OF LEPERS IN LUKE 5:12-15 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

An African Perspective

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## INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation is an important topic in contemporary political, social, economic and religious spheres since it has the ability to redefine human relationships therein. Without the possibility of reconciliation it would be impossible for humanity to live together in the modern world. The same was true of the ancient world in which the New Testament was written.

The focus of this chapter<sup>2</sup> is on the various ways in which the Gospel according to Luke describes the reconciliation of those who had become estranged from their communities with special reference to the case of lepers<sup>3</sup> in Luke 5:11-16. Based on Luke's account, this estrangement directly deprived the sufferer from having contact with the community of people and thereby denied him or her, in a violent manner, the right to liberty and human dignity. By using a socio-historical hermeneutics this chapter will investigate whether the metaphors used in Luke are similar to those used in African<sup>4</sup> society's engagement with lepers.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how reconciliation was effected in the social world of Luke a **socio-historical hermeneutics**, which is a combination of sociological exegesis and

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- 2 I would just like to express my deepest gratitude to my academic advisor, Professor Marius Nel, for all his input and wise counsel in the writing of this chapter.
- 3 The use of the word 'leper(s)' to refer to one living with leprosy or a leprosy patient is no longer acceptable within the academic or medical fields. The usage in this paper is, however, based on its meaning within its historical context (Manton, 2011:127).
- 4 The use of Africa in this chapter refers to the ancient African society, particularly Southern Nigeria. The available literature indicates that black Africans have many things in common irrespective of environment and location. While references may be made to the African society in general, the focus in this study is on the context of Southern Nigeria.

the historical critical method, will be used to investigate the Gospel of Luke. A good example of sociological exegesis is that of Gerd Theissen (1992:33) who states that the function of this method is to “investigate the relation between the written text and human behaviour” while the historical critical method focuses on the place of history in the interpretation of the biblical text (Aune, 1969:94). In the context of this study, the historical critical method helps an interpreter to deal with authorial intent, issues that prompted the creation of the text, and the situation of the text (Aune, 2010:105-108). The historical critical method thus embraces many facets that are crucial to the interpretation of a text. It also helps to prevent the present being read into the text (Barton, 2007:179).

The synthesis between sociological exegesis and the historical critical method provides a more balanced interpretation of a given text. This synthesis results in what might be called “socio-historical interpretation” (or hermeneutics) which intends to guard against reductionism from affecting the interpretation of a text (Van Staden, 1991:178). One of the results of using socio-historical hermeneutics is that its analysis enables the interpreter to draw tentative conclusions in regard to the origin, the setting, the author and the social context of the text as well as the social issues that emanates from the text (Theissen, 1992:34).

By using a socio-historical hermeneutics this chapter will attempt to analyse the different metaphors that refer to reconciliation in Luke 5:11-15 by considering both Greco-Roman and Jewish perspectives on reconciliation that is reflected in their respective literature (Porter, 1994:60-62). This chapter will also provide an African perspective on metaphors for reconciliation and the actions that bring about the process of reconciliation and the restoration of the dignity of people (Bediako, 1992:16).

## HEALING AS METAPHOR FOR RECONCILIATION IN LUKE

In the Gospel of Luke there are sixteen healing episodes and four exorcisms (Wahlen, 2004:144). Some of the healing episodes are unique to Luke’s Gospel. Luke thus specifically introduces his readers to the healing power of Jesus as a means through which the sick were able to find relief. The Lukan emphasis on Jesus as a healer is a direct allusion to the expected Isaianic *gō’ēl* (גֹּאֲלֵךְ).<sup>5</sup> Casting out demons and healing the sick were clear signs in Luke that the kingdom of God (ἡ βασιλεία του θεου) had come near to the people through Jesus. The coming of Jesus, according to Luke, was thus nothing less than the arrival of the salvation promised by God.

Healing in the New Testament incorporates different social and cultural phenomena<sup>6</sup> than what it is associated with in the modern world, since sickness was not seen as

5 The meaning of this word is well explained by Paul in Romans 11:26. Paul uses ὁ ῥυόμενος to explain the meaning of *gō’ēl* in Isaiah 59:20 (MT). The *gō’ēl* or ὁ ῥυόμενος (LXX) is the expected redeemer who will take away iniquity from Jacob and restores the fortune of Israel. The opinion of this chapter is that the Lukan Jesus fulfils this expectation through his action on the leper.

6 Paul John Isaak (2006:1214), in reference to healing using an African lens, emphasises that, “For such an individual being healed means being restored to one’s extended family, friend and community.” He

the result of environmental, physical or pathological problems.<sup>7</sup> Sickness, in both ancient Israel and Greco-Roman society, was regarded as a bad omen that came upon the sufferer as a result of punishment from the gods. Some of these sicknesses called for ostracising the sick person from his or her community. In Judaism lepers were, for example, expelled from their communities. They were regarded as being dead, with funeral services even being held on their behalf.

Lepers were, furthermore, not ostracised because their sickness was understood as being contagious, but because it was seen as bringing pollution into a community (Weissenrieder, 2003:136-139). The community therefore determined the contaminating nature of the sickness and how to deal with it (Pilch, 2000a:67-68). The healing of lepers was furthermore the only way through which the ostracised could be reconciled with their community.<sup>8</sup> This is in line with healings in the Gospel of Luke which often refer to the integration of healed persons back into their community. It is, therefore, important to note that the work of reconciliation carried out by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke would not have been completed if the sick were not healed and the captives set free from their bondage of suffering and sin. In the words of Pilch (2000b:14), "Jesus reduces and moves the experiential oppressiveness associated with such afflictions. In all instances of healing, meaning is restored to life and the sufferer is returned to purposeful living."<sup>9</sup> In other words, since the

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further adds that, "Health, therefore, implies safe integration into the life of the society."

- 7 Annette Weissenrieder (2003) in her book, *Images of illness in the Gospel of Luke: insights of ancient medical texts*, emphasises the importance of understanding the ancient socio-historical understanding of illness and how it was constructed based on specific social and cultural parameters. Weissenrieder (2003:3) elucidates that: "Illnesses only ever exist for us in the form of a socially imposed image that reflect both the knowledge and the judgments and expectations of particular eras and cultures. Objective manifestations such as medical and social evidence are nearly always the cornerstones on which images of illness are built. However, the meaning that people attribute to these manifestations is a constructivist issue rather than a natural one."
- 8 The case of the outbreak of Ebola in recent time may be likened to that of a person that suffered leprosy in the ancient world. In the case of Ebola, sufferers are separated from their families and the community of people, but if they recover they will be reintegrated into their families. This differs from HIV/AIDS, which often has negative socio-cultural values attached to it, and therefore people see anyone suffering from it as being immoral. In the *Priesterschrift*, leprosy is seen as pollution that created socio-cultural oppressiveness in the life of whoever suffered from such a disease. The two cases of leprosy in the Old Testament are treated as cases of pollution and sin (Num. 12:10, 15; 2 Chron. 26:17, 20), which Israel was to be mindful of. The same socio-cultural understanding in ancient Israel of some sicknesses as pollution is evident in Num. 5:1-4. The emphasis here is to remind the people what happened to Miriam, the prophetess and elder sister of Moses, when she sinned against God and Moses. Hence the people were called to remember *rkz* (μνήσθητι) the punishment associated with crossing such a boundary. This established the matrix through which the subsequent socio-cultural dynamic was interpreted.
- 9 It is noteworthy that sickness was perceived to be a sign of sin in the Old Testament and in order to be healed the person had first to be forgiven and reconciled to God. This forgiveness and reconciliation did not end with the person concerned and God, but also impacted society in order to enable the person to be accepted back into the community. For this to be carried out, the deity provided humanity with two options, which are prayers and sacrifice, as the means through which reconciliation could be effected (Mbabzi, 2013:69-71).

restoration of the sick to their community is concomitant with the removal of the estrangement that caused their separation, it implies enacted reconciliation.

## THE *λέπρα* TEXTS AND RECONCILIATION IN LUKE

The leper text in 5:12-16 occurs in all the three Synoptic Gospels. However, despite the text being found in all three Synoptic Gospels, Luke has a unique addition (Plummer, 1922:151)<sup>10</sup> in that he adds another pericope on lepers in 17:11-19. Due to the different settings in which the two stories (5:12-16 and 17:11-19) occur in Luke, the two accounts and their implication for the Lukan community will be examined separately. Luke's inclusion in his narrative of the issue of leprosy<sup>11</sup> also raises questions concerning the nature of leprosy and how those who suffered from the disease were treated in the ancient world.

### Leprosy in the ancient world

The actual meaning of the term *λέπρα* is not clear. Some scholars believe that the disease comprised a number of different ailments associated with the skin. They argue that the biblical nomenclature for what is today called leprosy does not denote what was known as leprosy in biblical times. Scholars such as Pilch (2000b:39-56), Weissenrieder (2003:35) and Edmond (2006:37-42) follow the argument that was first put forward by Bateman, who argues that leprosy was mistranslated by those who translated the works of Arabian writers into Latin. Bateman notes that the Greek meaning of leprosy is similar to that of the Hebrew word, but that the muddled translation came about with the misappropriation of the nomenclature after the translators had already used words for other tubercular diseases for leprosy.<sup>12</sup> The first misappropriation of this name probably came from Aretaeus, who used *ελέφας* and *ελεφαντίασις*, which were tubercular diseases, for *λέπρα* (Bateman, 1813:294). Bateman, in trying to end the misappropriation of the use of "leprosy" for the Greek (*Lepra Graecorum*), divides the category *lepra* into *Lepra vulgaris*, *Lepra alphoides*, and *Lepra nigricans*. Based on his description, leprosy was a scaly skin disease (Bateman, 1813:25-36; Edmond, 2006:37-44).

Bateman's description of leprosy does not however offer any solution to the understanding of the term as used in the ancient texts, like the Old Testament's Uzziah, and its conceptualisation in the Lukan text. All the varieties of leprosy listed by him, for example, are believed to be non-contagious and do not fit the description of the Old Testament texts such as Numbers 12:10-15 and 2 Chronicles 26:17-20. The Old Testament describes leprosy as a whitish disease that covers the whole body. The cases of Miriam and King Uzziah are typical examples. The Lukan

10 Scholars such as Taylor and Fitzmyer see Mark as Luke's source for his leper texts, while some argue that Luke had an independent source. Fitzmyer (1985:571) acknowledges that the context of the story is part of the Synoptic Triple Tradition, but argues that the sources available to each of them might have been different from each other. The addition of the polis by Luke aims at describing wondering nature of those that suffered from leprosy in the ancient world.

11 Luke alludes to lepers in several places in his Gospel (4:27; 5:12-16; 7:22; and 17:11-19).

12 Tubercular diseases are caused by bacteria (e.g. tuberculosis).

language is in line with that of the Old Testament description of leprosy. In 5:12, Luke uses the Greek term πλήρης “full” or “covered with” to describe the nature and the extent of the disease, which none of Bateman’s descriptions fit. Viewing the disease of leprosy through the modern lenses of its *non-contagious effect* in essence reduces the meaning and the implication of the text in the socio-historical context of Luke’s time, since what the modern world calls non-contagious disease does not apply to the ancient world’s understanding of λέπρα, especially when sacred and non-sacred spaces were involved. Consequently, the modern description of leprosy as Hansen’s disease, psoriasis, pityriasis or ichthyosis (Bateman, 1813:25), may not actually convey what in the Lukan text is meant by leprosy. The reason for this is that the expression in Luke differs from the understanding of the disease based on the notions of modern medicine.<sup>13</sup> It must thus be understood in terms of its socio-cultural and religious implications for the sufferers and their community within the socio-historical context in which it occurred. For example, Luke emphasises the need of purity for leprosy sufferers, which necessitated rituals and sacrifices in order to enact reconciliation as an integral part of their healing. The ancient world regarded leprosy as a serious disease that had the power to contaminate the presence of the holy. It was not just a contagious disease, which easily spread to other persons, but was regarded as defilement and pollution that invoked the idea of diminishing the presence of the sacred or divine.

Little is known of how Greco-Roman society treated those who suffered from leprosy. However, the works of the Cappadocian Fathers—Aretaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus (Or. 43.63-64)—provide information regarding the social stigmatisation of lepers in Greco-Roman society in the period 200 to 400 CE. The Cappadocian fathers heavily depended on the previous works of Aretaeus, who was a medical practitioner in Rome. Their works thus shed some light on the way in which lepers were treated in the earlier Roman period. As a result, Susan R. Holman (1999:285) concludes that:

As with the ancient Israelite leper, those who contracted leprosy in the Greek and Roman worlds of late antiquity also faced the threat of social exile, destitution, and lingering self-destruction. Yet, at least in these texts, contagion is not defined in terms of ritual purity and pollution, but in terms of social terror of catching this dreaded sickness. Leprosy was, above all, a social disease. Its manifestations were most notable for their power to exile the afflicted from that religious identity which for Greek-speaking Christians and Greek and Roman religions was inseparable from civic life...

The situation of those suffering from leprosy was thus dire from ancient Egypt and Israel to the Greco-Roman period, since they were subjected to social stigmatisation and ostracism. The harsh treatment of the lepers in antiquity is reflected in the derogatory statement found in an ancient Egyptian papyrus document dated from 2500 BC and a Greek text from about 327 BC as well as a Roman one from about 62 BC. The dignity of the lepers as human beings were in essence stripped off them

13 Shellberg (2012:49-51) observes that the “modern judgments about the severity of an illness tend to influence interpretations toward enhancing the miraculous aspect of healings.”

in ancient Greco-Roman society. This unwholesome treatment of lepers causes Holman (1999:286) to state that “Graeco-Roman culture was satisfied to exile this threatening group to the fringes of social existence,” where they would live and beg for shelter. Holman thus comes to the conclusion that the treatment of those who suffered leprosy during late antiquity was similar to those received in ancient Israel. In other words, their dignity as humans was stripped off them, and that they were separated from the rest of society. This is also evident in the writings of Josephus. In his writing *Against Apion*, Josephus’s argument against Manetho reflected on the way in which the lepers were treated in the ancient world, beginning from ancient Egypt to the Roman Empire. Josephus’s argument is based on the writing of Manetho who explained that the reason why the Egyptians drove the Israelites from their land was because they were leprous. He further added that the leprous Israel, after being saved from Egypt, went into the desert and sought the face of the gods through fasting and supplication, as is told by Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 1.308):

Hereupon the scabby and leprous people were drowned, and the rest were gotten together, and sent into desert places, in order to be exposed to destruction. In this case they assembled themselves together, and took counsel what they should do; and determined, that as the night was coming on, they should kindle fires and lamps, and keep watch; that they also should fast the next night, and propitiate the gods, in order to obtain deliverance from them (νηστεύσαντας ἰλάσκεσθαι τοὺς θεοὺς περὶ τοῦ σῶσαι αὐτούς).

The argument of Josephus against the accusation of Manetho that the Jews were lepers, and that this caused them to be driven away from Egypt, thus sheds some light on how deeply lepers were despised in the ancient world. However, in Greco-Roman society, Asclepius was always available to effect healings in the lives of those that were afflicted with diseases including leprosy (Etukumana, 2016:74-76). The Lukan perspective provides an additional framework through which one could view the way lepers were treated during his time. The *Lepra Pericopae* in Luke 5:12-16 and 17:11-19 suggest that the people who suffered from leprosy in his time were given the same treatment as prescribed in the Mosaic code, in that they were excluded from their communities.

### Purity and reconciliation in Luke

In the biblical narrative, and in the ancient Near East, it can be argued that whenever the issue of reconciliation occurs it is always viewed from the perspective of purity. One of the reasons for seeking reconciliation in the Old Testament and in Greco-Roman society was to deal with the defilement brought about by humans’ pollution of the sacred. The command of YHWH to the house of Israel in Leviticus 20:24-26 to be holy unto him provided the rationale for the rituals and sacrifices that were intended to deal with the estrangement that had come about as a result of the defilement of both sacred and communal spaces (Dunn, 2002:450).

The precise nature of the relationship between the purity code and the Gospel has, however, been “an ongoing debate” according to Dunn (2002:450-451). It was initially mainly between E.P. Sanders and Jacob Neusner before Bruce Chilton and Craig

A. Evans and others entered the debate (Dunn, 2002:499-453). All of these scholars believe that the purity code is very important for understanding the Gospel of Luke and Acts. James Dunn, for example, argues that the purity code is enshrined in both Lukan texts, but especially in the Acts of Apostles. According to Dunn (2002:451-453), Peter's behaviour towards others in Acts depicts the role of the purity code in his time. Neusner (1993:222-224) in turn believes that what determines the action of Jesus in Luke is tied to the purity code that was inherent in the Jewish religion from the time of Moses. Citing cases in Luke, such as the cleanings of leper(s) (5:12-16; 17:11-19) and the prohibition against touching unclean things (7:32-50), he states that such actions presuppose the continued functioning of the purity code in Luke. Suffice to say the ongoing debate on the precise function of the purity code in the time of Luke is beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient for this study to note that the purity code plays a crucial role in Luke and therefore delineates how its author understood the reconciliation process, since defilement in the Old Testament, according to him, called for reconciliation in the house of Israel.

Jonathan Klawans (2000:137) in this regard argues that impurity defiles every boundary and space, and as such it must be atoned for. The same picture emerges in the Lukan text (e.g. 7:36-50; 15:1ff) (Evans, 1997:371). It was mentioned earlier that sickness and diseases were seen in antiquity as being caused by sin, and in turn caused pollution or impurity, which resulted in the sick being estranged from God and their communities (e.g. those suffering from leprosy). The idea of reconciliation is thus implicit whenever impurity as a boundary is removed. The way Jesus dealt with impurity in the Lukan text identifies him as the Messiah who had compassion and mercy on sinners and the sick amidst their impurity so as to bring about their reconciliation with God. The remission of their sin by Jesus was thus an important way through which reconciliation with God and their communities was enacted (22:19-20; cf. 5:20; 7:48).

### Socio-cultural boundaries in Luke 5:12-16

Based on the *Priesterschrift's* prescription, a leper in Israel was not allowed to have contact with other people, since impurity was seen as being highly contagious, it therefore caused those who came into contact with it to be polluted. Separation from the people around them was understood to be important.<sup>14</sup> People suffering from leprosy were thus regarded socially, religiously, economically and culturally as unfit to be a part of a healthy human society. They lived on the fringe of society and as such were regarded as being marginal in the ancient world.<sup>15</sup>

14 The treatment of a leprosy person was similar to that of the scapegoat in that both a leper and the *azazel* were sent away from the inhabitants of Israel. In the purifying sacrifice for a leper the birds used for the sacrifice were also sent away like the *azazel* (Finlan, 2005:34-35).

15 Luke 5:12-16 contains "a constellation of stereotypical characters: entities on the outer edges of social and religious systems" (Spencer, 2007:152), who were readily responding to Jesus' benefaction.

## Λέπρα and ostracism in Luke 5:12-13

Luke's use of the word λέπρα (5:12-13) to refer to the nature of the sickness that was suffered by the man poses a number of problems in terms of its pathological nomenclature. Luke's writing implies an understanding of leprosy based on the procedures of the diagnostic apparatus provided and sanctioned by the *Priesterschrift* (Fitzmyer, 1985:573), instead of that of modern medicine. The Lukan use of the term thus invokes the notion that the disease is associated with impurity and that it was contagious in the sense that it could pollute the whole community (Weissenrieder, 2003:136-137). Since contact with lepers could make people unclean, to have leprosy was to face ostracism in accordance with the Mosaic prescription and the priestly legislation (Bock, 1994:472). Importantly, verse 12 reveals the leper to be an Israelite,<sup>16</sup> and not a foreigner, a son of Abraham who despite this still faced ostracism (Spencer, 2008:128).<sup>17</sup> The infinitive of the verb καθαρίζω, used by Luke means "to cleanse," in the LXX is used for the cleansing or purification ritual of unclean people (Nolland, 1989:227). **Wherever the word is used in the LXX and other Hellenistic writings, it invokes the idea of pollution and defilement.** It also implies a sense of estrangement in the relationship between humans and the divine that needs to be removed through cleansing. The cleansing also necessitated the physical declaration by a priest that the affected person was free of the pollution (Taylor, 1980:187). This is the reason why Jesus decided to send the healed man to a priest for a physical examination (Luke 5:14).

In the Levitical code the use of καθαριζομένου (Leviticus 14) and καθάρισα (Leviticus 16) all focus on sin as the cause of the impurity and estrangement. It is used in Psalm 51:2 (LXX 50:4), where David cried out to God to καθάρισόν him from his sin (καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας μου καθάρισόν με). Josephus (*Ant.* 5.42) presupposes that the term καθάιρω had a similar usage in classical Greek,<sup>18</sup> especially in ritual purification which was necessary for a relationship to be restored with God and humanity. The notion is also evident in another of Josephus's works (*Ag. Ap.* 2.205), where he uses καθάιρω (first person active indicative of καθάιρειν) as a prescription ritual for those who were defiled by contact with dead bodies.

- 16 The setting of the event poses many interpretive questions, since Luke does not mention the name of the city where it took place. Hans Conzelmann (1960:43) asserts that Luke does not mention the exact location the event took place in since it was his intention to narrate the mission tour of Jesus to his community in Judea, or as Fitzmyer (1985:573) puts it, "the country of the Jews." Marshall (1978b:208), Bock (1994:472) and Green (1997:236) place the event within the jurisdiction of the "other cities" in the ministry of Jesus, as earlier mentioned. This unspecified *polis* in the Lukan text may figuratively describe the hopelessness of those found with such a disease in ancient Jewish society, since leprosy people were living without a city, and therefore without human rules and regulations, being seen as dead people. Taylor (1980:186) alleges that for Luke to remove the name of the city where the event took place means that he was critical of Mark's historical record.
- 17 In the Greek context of the *polis*, citizens were expected to have equal rights as well as an existence without discriminatory practices, since they believed that the *polis* was a gift from the gods (Garrison, 1997:59). Unfortunately this notion was far from those that suffered disease such as leprosy. The ostracised individual suffered violent treatment from his or her people.
- 18 Deissmann's (1927:216-217) conjecture is that the use of καθάρισα by the λέπρα is derived from the Hellenistic Greek use of καθαρίζω, which is in agreement with the LXX.



The Hebrew word for καθαρίζω is *kipper*, which means “to cleanse.” It played an important part in describing the special sacrifices that deal with the issue of impurity in the Old Testament (Lev 14:10-32). In the Old Testament the mediating figure between an impure person and the divine was ὁ ἱερεὺς. His role was to carry out the physical purification of the defiled people of God, thereby removing the barrier between God and his estranged people. The removal of this barrier through purification, rituals and sacrifice invokes the idea that God had forgiven his people and restored them back to fellowship with him and with one another. The usage of καθαρίζω in the Lukan text thus implies that there was impurity and sinfulness in the life of the λεπρός which is congruent with the view in Judaism that sickness was a result of moral contamination. His separation from the community of people also resulted in him being separated from the divine presence. Therefore, he was not qualified to be counted as a person in Israel’s confederation. He needed to be cleansed of his impurity for his right as son of Israel to be restored to him. The Old Testament thus points to καθαρίζω as being one of the ritual actions that embodied reconciliation, and as an event that was particularly important within the ambit of communal worship.

The λεπρός calling the Lukan Jesus κυριε goes beyond just identifying him as a mere “lord.” He understands him as the Lord who is capable of restoring his estranged relationship with his God and his community. From this point in the passage, Jesus functions as a mediator between the leprous and God and thus he goes beyond the stipulation of Leviticus 14. *The touching of the leper by Jesus* is a cultic (Hughes, 1998:170), cultural (Bovon, 2002:175) and emotional act (Bock, 1994:474) by which Jesus transferred his purity to the unclean to make him pure again (Hughes, 1998:170-171).<sup>19</sup> The lordship of Jesus in this text denotes him as a mediator between two groups that had been estranged by disease. The ancient Greek and Roman societies witnessed similar demonstration of healing power through the work of Asclepius (Etukumana, 2016:74-75).<sup>20</sup> Here the Lukan Jesus is the Lord of reconciliation, with the authority to remove boundaries and bring good news to the afflicted (Green, 1997:237-238). This δύναμις and ἐξουσία that the Lukan leper found in the Lukan Jesus are the power and authority through which an outcast could be reconciled to society. The nature and manner in which Jesus engaged the leprous in the text shows that Jesus treated him with dignity as a human contrary to the procedure prescribed by the Mosaic code.

19 Marshall (1978b:209) states that the stretching out of the hand of Jesus is reminiscent of the hand of God and his accomplishment in history, as well as the action of Moses in delivering Israel from captivity.

20 My intention of using Asclepius alongside Jesus is not to equate the two personalities but to ostentatiously indicate both as demonstrating healing power that effected reconciliation in the ancient world. Scholars such as H. Remus (1983), R.J. Rüttimann (1986), J.L. Wolmarans (1996), and L. Nogueira (2017) believe that there are similarities between Asclepius of the ancient Greco-Roman world and Jesus of the Gospel. F.S. Tappenden and C. Daniel-Hughes (2017:1-15) while acknowledging the existence of these similarities in Asclepius and Jesus, they further add that Jesus of the Gospels is far superior to that Asclepius.

The invocation of the name of Jesus was thus a medium through which this estranged leper found cleansing and reconciliation (Nolland, 1989:227). The longing of the man was to be “restored to his family and community” (Bratcher, 1982:79), thereby bringing to an end his unbearable ostracism.

### Legal and cultic prescripts for reconciliation in Luke 5:14-16

Wright (2001:57) states that the intention of Jesus for the healed leper was for “him to re-join his family, his village and his community as a full and acceptable member.” It is noteworthy that in order to accomplish this Jesus followed the Mosaic code by commanding the leper to act according to the law (Fitzmyer, 1985:575; 1989:180) so as to be “officially reintroduced into social discourse” (Green, 1997:238).

Λεπρόι in Israel were required to be certified or given a “clean bill of health” (Wright, 2001:57) before they were allowed access to people and their community. It was mandatory that no λεπρός was allowed to have any contact with other people before ritual purification took place. Fulfilling the requirements of the law as stated in Leviticus 14:2-57, would enable all the necessary processes to be completed for the certification of the leper as being healed (Ravens, 1995:86). The Lukan Jesus’ use of προέταξεν implies unconditional obedience to the law, which was necessary for reconciliation to be enacted within Israel’s legal jurisdiction. This is an allusion to Isaiah 42:3-4 (LXX),<sup>21</sup> and was not understood as merely a suggestion that one could decide to obey or not. It was a κέλευσμα that must be kept in Israel and any disobedience to it was punishable by death (Lev 14:2-57). The Lukan Jesus thus wanted the man to act based on the law in order for him to be accepted back into Israel’s confederation.

Luke’s retention of the Markan phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς (Mark 1:44) may be explained based on his understanding of the Old Testament concept of ritual purification and sacrifice, which was geared towards reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> The Priestly Code prescribed a two-in-one ceremony for a healed leper. The first aspect of the ceremony was a ritual purification that prepared the leper to make the actual sacrifice which was to take place in the temple, and which would enable him to be welcomed back to the community of God and his people. The two-in-one ceremony was performed as a witness (εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς) to both the priest and the household of Israel that the person who had at one time been estranged from the confederacy of Israel and economy of God had now been reconciled, and the evidence for this was the ritual-sacrifice carried out by the priest. This is where ritual and sacrifice were acted out as means through which an estranged person (leper) could be reconciled

21 There is a possibility that Luke was influenced by the prophecy of Isaiah in 42:3 and that Luke here depicts Jesus as the one who fulfilled the law without breaking a “reed” κάλαμιον as was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. By implication the Lukan Jesus thus fulfils all the legal requirements of the law. Luke’s presentation of Jesus’ instruction to the λεπρός is thus a succinct description of the Mosaic legal legislation for purification and reconciliation of a healed leper with Israel’s community.

22 He thus sees that the only way reconciliation could be accomplished in Israel was through a ritual cleansing contra Fitzmyer (1989:575) who believes that Luke did not understand the meaning of the phrase.

to God and his people in Israel. The authority to do this rested on the priests, who were the custodians of the Mosaic legislation (Marshall, 1978b:209-210).

This procedure that the healed person had to undertake underlines the importance of ritual action in the process of reconciliation in antiquity. In other words, Luke upholds the premise that action was a valuable tool in the reconciliation process in ancient Israel. The rituals and sacrifices that were specified in the Law of Moses are actions that were expected to act as means of reconciling the estranged Israel with YHWH, as is stated by Mbabazi (2013:70), who acknowledges that God has provided to humanity prayers and sacrifices as means of achieving forgiveness and reconciliation. Rituals and sacrifices are tangible means that differentiated reconciliation from any other similar process. That Luke is aware of this is evident in his emphasis on the importance of ritual and sacrifices as actions of reconciliation in his narrative (5:14; 17:14; 22:19-20; 23:30-40). The Lukan Jesus does not downplay the assessment of the leper by the priests, who were trained both in cultic and socio-cultural ways to undertake this task, as it was the prerogative of the priest to carry out such an examination and certification (Nolland, 1989:228). Such action was also in agreement with the law as a *code of conduct* in Leviticus 13 and 14 (Esler, 1987:114-115).

## AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The treatment meted on those that suffered from leprosy in the past, based on the available documents, shows that **the ancient African society was not different from its counterparts in the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds as observed by El Hassan, Khalil and El-Hassan (2002:21)**. The stories of social stigmatisation of lepers and their degrading statuses are well documented in many parts of Africa, e.g. Tanzania (Van den Broek, O'Donoghue, Ishengoma, Masao & Mbega, 1998:57-74), Sudan (El Hassan, Khalil & El-Hassan, 2002:21-28), Ethiopia (Teckle-Haimanot, Forsgren & Gebrre-Mariam, 1992:157-168) and Nigeria (Manton, 2011:126).

### Social exclusion

The treatment of those with leprosy in African countries was characterised by social stigmatisation and exclusion. How this stigmatisation started is not readily apparent from ancient African literature (Manton, 2011:127). Derogatory language used in describing those that were affected by some illnesses however supports the inference that the people were highly stigmatised and excluded from day to day activities of society. Chinua Achebe (1958:59) has, for example, pointed to the derogatory words that his people, in Igbo land, used in describing a leper. Derogatory in the sense that a leper, according to Achebe (1958:59), was called "white-man" and "the polite name for leprosy was 'the white skin'" or what J. Manton (2011:126) termed in the context of Southern Nigeria as "colonial skin." This stigmatisation led to the lepers in many countries in Africa, especially the Igbo communities in South Eastern Nigeria being excluded from their communities (Manton, 2011:126). Even the name "colony" used in reference to where the lepers lived is itself derogatory and highlights the separation between the affected and unaffected persons (Edmond, 2006:180). Their

exclusion from their communities was nothing other than violence that demeaned their human dignity.

## Ancestral curse

The general belief of the people in the South Eastern Nigeria in regard to leprosy sufferers was that such people were cursed. The disease, according to the traditional people, as observed by the work of T.F. Davey in 1938, was understood as a terrible disease caused by the gods. One of the effects of this disease was that the sufferer would not be allowed to join the glorious reign of the ancestors after death (Manton, 2011:129-130). The socio-historical interpretation of leprosy in many African communities in Nigeria also indicates that those that suffered from the disease would not reincarnate. Nor would they be welcomed into the spirit world of the ancestors. The initial separation started with the separation of the leprosy from the physical world to colonies and this separation continued unless healing is effected before his or her departure from the world of the living to the world of the dead. The insight from Rod Edmond (2011:180), who believes that “Leper and penal colonies were places of forcible exile in which any productive activity was always compulsory,” applies in to the African perspective on leprosy. The exile of lepers continues even in the world of the dead and that is why Davey concludes that the African people believe that anyone that dies without being healed from leprosy would never resurrect since “the leper is denied that right of resurrection into the spirit world which other mortals share ...’ (Manton, 2011:130).

## Healing

The only plausible way of living a normal life with dignity or humanness in some of these communities was through healing. Just as in the biblical understanding of healing in reference to leprosy where a healed person was allowed to go back to their community, the same notion occurred in African society. Healing as a means of reconciliation for the leprosy affected person allowed integration and re-socialisation of the individual who was affected by the disease (Barton & Taylor, 2016:265). The social, religious, and cultural stigmatisation that ravaged the life of the sufferer was removed upon his or her healing. The removal of this stigmatisation overcame the estrangement that was caused by the disease and therefore brought reconciliation of the healed person with his or her family and community. Reintegration and reconciliation became possible in many communities for those who were affected by the sickness.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has emphasised that there was ostracism, violence, and the denial of human dignity for those that suffered from leprosy in the ancient world. An argument can be made that healing as an action serves as the enactment of reconciliation in Luke’s Gospel. Several actions that Luke believes that Jesus carried out were intended to transform human relationships so as to enable humanity to live with one another in peace. The effectiveness of some of these actions was expressed in the process

of healing the sick person. Reintegration and socialisation thereby became effective tools in the process of the reconciliation of humanity with one another and to God. The healed person in Luke's Gospel was able to reintegrate into his society because of the healing that the Lukan Jesus made possible. The desire of the sick man was to be cleansed by Jesus and his desire was met and this brought about reconciliation with his community and God. Without healing his reconciliation would not have been possible.

Different methods for effecting reconciliation were practiced in Greco-Roman and Jewish societies. In Greco-Roman societies healing was carried out by Asclepius, the god of health. His duty was to heal all manners of diseases and illnesses and thereby bring re-integration, re-socialisation and re-union to those that were affected by sickness including leprosy. The same notion is evident in the ancient Jewish society where YHWH was the great healer of his people. While YHWH healed, the priest mediated in the process of this healing through atonement, sacrifice and cleansing. All these activities and processes were aimed at making sure that the afflicted people were reconciliation to God and the community of people.

On the African continent, where sickness is rampant, some of those that suffered from skin diseases were ostracised and stigmatised. The only solution to their plight was to regain their freedom through healing. The terms used in describing those that were afflicted by sickness were not based on how contagious the disease was medically, but instead on how contaminating the disease was socially, culturally and religiously. It, therefore, resulted in the sufferer of such disease being stigmatised based on social, cultural and religious ideologies while the healing of the disease conversely implied re-integration, re-union, and re-socialisation of the person to his or her community. Therefore the processes that aid in the removal of barriers that stood between the sufferer and his or her community are all enacted metaphors that imply reconciliation, which in turn restore their human dignity.

The Lukan Jesus exemplified this and was able to touch the leprous man providing his followers with an example to touch and heal those that have been devastated by sickness and human ideologies. The church in Africa can learn from the example of Jesus by touching the lives of those that are suffering from diseases and maltreatment that alienate them from others so as to heal and to restore their dignity as humans.

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