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## **Samaritan Compassion (Luke 10:25–37) and African Socioeconomic Problems**

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### **Abstract**

The worsening conditions of many African states have caught global attention for a very long time with no end in sight. It is concerning that oppressive leadership, which does not promote the common good of the populace, permeates the African landscape. This development has aggravated social disparity and discrimination and caused great havoc to the psyche and wellbeing of the African masses. However, the debacle results from a complex matrix; it is unacceptable to pin it solely on the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. With vast African resources, the term ‘poor Africans’ ought to be a misnomer. Thus, using a literary-critical approach, this paper presents the argument that imbibing the Samaritan’s compassion can significantly address Africa’s socioeconomic problems. Avoiding the pitfalls of the robbers, the priest, and the Levite, through a lifestyle of love and compassion in policies and programmes, will help mitigate African socioeconomic issues.

### **Introduction**

Much has been written about Africa’s richness in diverse natural and human resources, and its ironic resource curse. The wealth of natural resources of the continent makes it the perpetual bride of the global capitalist economy whose interest is not to solve its socioeconomic problems. While the socioeconomic problems remain and efforts are being made toward a laudable and effective solution, there is a need to underscore the role of the religious dimension. It is

noteworthy that sacred texts and their interpretations have influenced people's socioeconomic conditions globally in a way that shapes peoples' beliefs about God's involvement and control of their socioeconomic status. Although some nations in Europe and America have seized the benefits of the sacred texts to lay the foundations for socioeconomic development, there has yet to be much leverage of such in sub-Saharan Africa. As such, there is not enough emphasis on human responsibility, including that of governments, in transforming socioeconomic conditions. From a Christian standpoint, therefore, there is an urgent need to renew efforts at infusing biblical precepts and paradigms into lifestyles, which can improve the socioeconomic conditions of individuals and communities in a manner that is true to the intent of the scripture.

In light of the foregoing, this paper posits that the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37 ESV) provides a paradigm of compassion, which, when infused into personal and governmental policies and programmes, would help improve Africa's socioeconomic conditions. The parable's profound emphasis on and reinterpretation of love for God and one's neighbour is the foundation for the limitless application of compassion. It demands a shift from norms and prejudices that keep society apart and down in terrible conditions; instead, it promotes the need to transcend ethnic and class boundaries by showing compassion to people in distress. The Samaritan is a moral example emphasising the importance of showing compassion in social interaction. It is instructive that Jesus (and Luke) gives voice and exceptional attention to the Samaritan as a model of morality to emulate. It is crucial to note that Jesus, while proffering a solution to the problem inherent in the lawyer's question of who is my neighbour, throws a challenge to the lawyer, the larger audience and followers, and readers to show compassion to people in distress by his statement, 'Go, and do likewise' (Luke 10:37 ESV). Many scholars note that the parable is fraught with a journey motif and that it is crucial to interpret everything within the section of Luke 9:51–19:27, including the parable, in light of a journey. Blythe (2024:8) says

any interpretation of the Good Samaritan must consider the broader literary context, namely, Luke's travel narrative to Jerusalem that takes place from Luke 9:51 to 19:27.

Though the journey motif is no doubt crucial in interpreting the parable, the theme of compassion for others engendered by one's love for God is paramount in the parable. And such a theme is suitable for the current purpose of directing the parable to ameliorate some social problems in the current time. As a matter of fact, Jesus' telling of the story was focused on imbuing the virtue of compassion to solve social problems. The parable is significant for its initial context because it identifies some social problems and proffers some plausible solutions to them. It showed people's different attitudes (those of the robbers, the priest and the Levite, the innkeeper, and the good Samaritan) in the matrix of social problems affecting other people around them. Such a profound approach is equally significant for contemporary socioeconomic problems in Africa.

## **Issues with Jesus' Parables**

Parables are a hallmark of Jesus' teaching in the gospels; though he did not invent them, he made the most of them during his ministry in first-century Palestine. Remarkably, Jesus' parables have been of immense value to their audiences, from the first to the latest audience. The reputation and popularity of Jesus' parables are such that the English language possesses many expressions whose origins are from the parables (Stein 1994:33). Although all the evangelists recognised the significance of Jesus' parables and thus included them in their writings, Luke stands out as the most prominent, with no fewer than fifteen parables of Jesus not found in the other canonical gospels.

However, as significant as Jesus' parables are, their study over the centuries is not without controversy. One point of debate deals with interpreting Jesus' parables in the gospels. Scholars have considered Jesus' parables as allegories, metaphors, symbols, stories with a specific moral, stories reflecting a particular understanding of existence, and autonomous stories with aesthetic values (Hedrick 2005:10). Another issue is categorising Jesus' parables, as opinions differ among scholars on which specific parables fit into the riddle, example, and challenge types. The good Samaritan, for example, is considered an example parable by most scholars, but others, including Jahosky (2020:78), posit that it is also suitable as a challenge parable.

Likewise, questions arise about the alignment of the literary and the original contexts of the parables. For instance, because the good Samaritan parable is a complete unit and is capable of standing by itself and being meaningful without its literary setting, some interpreters doubt the literary context the author assigns it (Lewis 1985:94). Derrett (2005:210) claims that there is an unbridged gap between Jesus and his predominantly non-Jewish followers, despite the latter's faith and ingenuity, because they fail to recognise the nexus of the parables in existing Jewish biblical history. For instance, the good Samaritan parable draws upon existing stories of the young prophet from Jerusalem and the old prophet of Samaria (1 Kings 13:11–22) and the conscience-stricken 'Samaritans' in 2 Chronicles (28:8–15).

In the same way, Vrudny (2016:118) observes that

contemporary commentary on the parable is earnest in its attempt to challenge anti-Jewish readings that have dominated interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan for centuries.

Zitzer (2006:n.p.) accuses Christian scholars of advancing staged readings of the gospels by introducing the theme of shock where none exists. He contends that Christian interpreters distort the context of the good Samaritan parable to support their anti-Judaist stance by introducing a sense of shock, which neither Jesus nor the narrator intended. Thus, negative comments about gentiles were not peculiar to the Jews, and such comments do not mean a general hatred towards gentiles or Samaritans, as there were instances in the Talmud and Mishna where Jews showed respect towards them. While Zitzer's attempt to show that Jews recognised pious behaviour from gentiles is commendable, his claim that Christian scholars introduced the element of shock to Jesus' story is untenable. Particularly in the case of the good Samaritan, Jesus' audience would probably not have expected the Samaritan appearing on the scene to have done better than the priest and Levite before him. But, contrary to their expectation, the Samaritan acted extraordinarily with compassion, a gesture which evoked the element of shock in the audience. The same shock element is discernible in the lawyer's final response, an indirect mention of the Samaritan ('The one who showed mercy toward him', Luke 10:37).

## **Analysis of the Parable (Luke 10:25–37)**

### ***The Contexts of the Parable***

The Lucan setting for the parable of the good Samaritan occurs as a transition from a secluded discourse by Jesus to his disciples after their mission to Israel's towns (10:1–24) to a question postured by a lawyer. The ensuing dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer centres around a love for God and a love for one's neighbour. Often, commentators suggest that the good Samaritan parable deals with love for one's neighbour (10:29–37), while the theme of love for God is addressed by the subsequent Martha and Mary narrative (Forbes 2000:55). But the parable's immediate literary context is the lawyer's question to Jesus about who is my neighbour after he had got an answer to the question of eternal life (Luke 10:25).

Nevertheless, the matter of context involves some debate as many scholars acknowledge that biblical narratives, especially parables, have multiple contexts which must be considered when analysing such texts. This standpoint is premised on the awareness that biblical writers seemed to have demonstrated some liberty in fixing some, if not all, narratives in their own literary contexts, other than the settings in which the stories were initially told. According to Stein (1994:55), four settings or contexts have been identified, namely: (1) the first setting in life, which is the situation in which Jesus told the story, (2) the situation of the early church during the oral transmission period of the story, (3) the situation of evangelists in which they communicated the story to their various Christian communities, (4) the post-biblical setting, which spans from the second century AD to the present. This scholarly postulation has given rise to the scholarly notion that biblical writers place stories in their literary contexts, different from the original settings in which Jesus told them. The fact that the canonical evangelists present different contexts for the same narratives/parables further supports this viewpoint.

However, this paper accepts the literary context as the context in which Jesus also told the story. Luke chapter 10 begins with the narrative of Jesus sending out 72 disciples with specific instructions in pairs to the cities and places he would later visit with the good news of the kingdom, the return of the disciples with joyous reports, and Jesus' further strengthening of the disciples (verses 1–24). Then the narrator reports that, after Jesus had appraised his disciples'

reports, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. The narrator's introduction of the lawyer with the conjunction *kai* suggests that a crowd was present during the disciples' reports. Thus, the lawyer's testing of Jesus with the questions 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' and 'And who is my neighbour?' form the immediate context of the parable of the good Samaritan.

It is pertinent to note that the narrator closely links the lawyer to the parable by his consistent portrayal of the characters, νομικός τις, Ανθρωπός τις, ἱερεὺς τις, and Σαμαρίτη δέ τις (UBS GNT 4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Also, the lawyer contrasts the wounded man: while the lawyer 'stood up' (ἀνέστη) to test (ἐκπειράζων) Jesus and justify (δικαιῶσαι) himself, the wounded man fell (περιέπεσεν) among robbers and lay half-dead on the road. The lawyer is like the priest and the Levite, able to stand and justify or preserve their opinion and position, unlike the Samaritan whose standing is insignificant yet who rendered the needed help with the love and devotion envisaged by the law quoted by the lawyer. The narrator's description of the lawyer-Jesus engagement is interesting in that a certain νομός (lawyer) asks Jesus, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' and Jesus replies to him with two questions: 'What is written in the law?' (νόμῳ) and 'How do you read it?' (πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις) (Luke 10:26). The questioning and counter-questioning indicate the lawyer and Jesus' familiarity with the halakhic method of their days. Jesus affirms that the lawyer's quotation from the law (Deuteronomy 6:5:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind

and Leviticus 19:18: 'love your neighbour as yourself') is correct. It is clear from the discussion between the lawyer and Jesus that eternal life is inextricably linked to the kingdom of God. As such, love for God and fellow humans must anchor the character of that kingdom. Here is a very significant point: breaking socioeconomic barriers in Africa requires compassion and the demonstration of love.

Regarding the lawyer's second question, the narrator mentions that it arises from self-justification. The lawyer, feeling righteous in his own right, asks Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29). The question is not misplaced considering that stipulated obligations require clarity of line and boundaries to

avoid crossing the lines and boundaries. Thus, a lawyer wanting to have clarification and the boundaries outlined so he could comply has not done any wrong. But Jesus refuses to give the boundary of whom a neighbour is or the category of neighbour to love. As explained, what Jesus does instead is

to define the category of neighbour, not in terms of the person-over-there but in terms of the lawyer himself. You are to be the neighbour to anyone, including people of a different religion or ethnic group. (Meier 1991:204)

Another point relating to the reasonability of the lawyer's question has to do with some ambiguity in interpreting the Old Testament command 'Love your neighbour', as evidenced in the rabbinic discussion of the early first century. The difficulty regards whether the term *rea*, neighbour, *reah* ('companion', 'fellow', 'kinsman', or 'friend'), in Leviticus 19:17–18 is broad enough to include non-Israelites. Many interpreters hold the viewpoint that the text focuses on fellow Israelites, suggesting that the Hebrew word translated as 'neighbour' does not usually apply to just any person because the focus was not on loving everyone (humanity) but on loyalty to one's own companions. Yet, other notable scholars, connecting verses 33–34 to the previous verses, 17–18, are persuaded that the term covers non-Israelites (Benovitz 2006:128–132).

The issue of interpreting the Leviticus command to love one's neighbour comes into focus again in Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:43, where he is reported to have said, 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbours and hate your enemy"'. Tverberg (2012:60) argues that Christians' accusation that Pharisees were those teaching what Jesus quoted is erroneous because it occurs nowhere in rabbinic writings. But the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed that it was the Essenes who gave the command to 'Love your neighbour' the spin of 'and hate your enemies' (Tverberg 2012:60). It is clear from the debate surrounding the interpretation of the command to love one's neighbour that there was some unresolved difficulty associated with it even up to the time of Jesus. It should be noted, however, that such difficulty was compounded by the lawyer's premeditated self-justification of his own viewpoint. The peril of self-righteousness, which prompted the lawyer's follow-up question of 'Who is my neighbour?' always prevents one from recognising and accepting one's

weaknesses, failures, and aspects that need improvement. The lawyer must have thought that Jesus would align with his tribal, parochial, and discriminative concept of neighbour. Disappointedly, Jesus' answer through the parable rejects the lawyer's perspective as flawed, retrogressive, and unhealthy.

It is apparent that Jesus' second question and what follows indicate that there were divergent interpretations of that law, and Jesus rejects the restricted perspective, which the lawyer most likely holds. Interpreters note the ongoing rabbinic discussions about the meaning of *neighbour* in the early first century. That probably explains the rationale for the lawyer's follow-up question.

### ***The Jericho Road as the Geographical Setting of the Parable***

The story's setting is the dangerous Jerusalem to Jericho road, the road well-known for its banditry and highway robbery in first-century Palestine. Jesus must have been familiar with the road through his journeys to Jerusalem from Galilee. Commentators over the centuries have consistently described the ancient Jerusalem-Jericho road as the 'Bloody Way' or the 'Bloody Pass' because robbers had wreaked great havoc on so many travellers along that highway (Miller 2011:57–61). Given the rugged and isolated terrain, travellers (especially individuals who journeyed alone) on this road were vulnerable to bandits who could exploit the plentiful hiding spots and escape routes into the desert, where pursuit would be futile. Jesus' listeners would have immediately recognised the peril implied in his statement about a man journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho (Corpora no date). The story's setting on a public highway with people from different social strata allows for exploring its message in contemporary African socioeconomic contexts.

### ***Characters in the Parable***

The parable has five characters: the robbers, the victim, the priest/Levite, the good Samaritan, and the innkeeper. Interpreters usually consider the robbers and the innkeeper minor characters, though they play significant roles in the social matrix of that story. As such, scholars do not pay much attention to them when interpreting the parable. It suffices here to stress that the robbers created a particular problem associated with other social issues of that environment at the time. At the same time, the innkeeper acted as a



professional providing treatment at a fee. The paper focuses on the three main characters: the victim, the priest/Levite, and the Samaritan, the story's hero.

### ***A Certain Man: Going Down from Jerusalem to Jericho Falls Victim***

The narrator says Jesus begins the parable by stating that a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among robbers, and was stripped. They beat him and went away, leaving him half dead (Luke 10:30). The Jerusalem-Jericho highway was notoriously dangerous, infested with robbers who lurked around to prey on travellers who did not travel in caravans in those days. The status of the man who fell among robbers is unknown, and perhaps he was from the low stratum of society because there is no description of his person or occupation. Though in a terrible situation, he was lucky not to have died from the havoc inflicted on him by the robbers. This man represents the vulnerable people who barely live in Africa today because they are half dead by all indices of a good life.

### ***A Certain Priest and a Levite: Highly Positioned but Falling below Expectations***

The first character that appears on the scene after the damage to the victim is a significant figure in Jewish society, a priest who happens to belong to that echelon of the society. His appearance as the first was strategic, to hopefully solve the existing problem of a robbed, beaten, and unconscious victim. The reader/audience must have heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing that a priest was coming down that same road where the victim lay helpless. Though the half-dead man was in a terrible situation, struggling between life and death, his attackers, the robbers, left him a ray of hope by not dragging him into the field or ditch nearby but leaving him on the way where he would be conspicuous to the people passing by that road. So, when the priest appears, the hope of resuscitating the victim arises in the readers/audience. That the priest saw the man implies some quick assessment and decision whether to intervene. However, the priest's response suddenly dashed the initial hope because he chose not to give the man the required attention; instead, he left the side of the road where the victim lay, moved to the other side, and passed by.

The third character, a Levite, ranks below the priest and follows his example by passing by the wounded man on the Jerusalem-Jericho road. Scholars

suggest that the priest and Levite likely avoided helping the man for self-preservation, to prevent their defilement and temporary loss of office and its accompanying benefits. Arbuckle (2013:79) says the priest

refused to help for two reasons: he feared being attacked by bandits if he delayed, but more importantly, he was not prepared to be defiled by touching the victim.

Many interpreters think that it was most likely the priest and Levite shunned the wounded man to preserve their ritual purity. This is because the Old Testament law stipulates touching a dead body or blood makes a person unclean, a condition that would require a ritual restoration of cleanliness (Forbes 2000:63). Derrett (2005:216) argues that rabbinical interpretation techniques are necessary to get the parable's message. Countering the cowardice explanation he ascribes to Ethelbert Stauffer, he contends that the priest's action (or the alternative action he did not choose) could be justified since the ethics of the time gave no conclusive direction.

It must be stressed that the priest and the Levite's choice not to help a wounded fellow must have exacerbated the victim's condition in the mind of the audience. Such a failure is very huge because it comes from those who have powers and influence to easily make positive impacts in society. While it is not only the elite or the establishment that fail to mitigate poor socioeconomic conditions in Africa, theirs is of great impact because of the post they occupy. No doubt, the leaders are responsible for enhancing people's welfare and bringing development to society, but, instead of this, they abandon their responsibility and even worsen people's condition. Indeed, the priest and the Levite missed the opportunity to demonstrate the impact of God's anointing upon them on the half-dead man.

The priest and the Levite's preoccupation with their self-preservation exposes their lack of love and compassion for someone in serious need. The priest and Levite missed an opportunity to demonstrate the impact of their anointing from God on the injured man. It is worth noting that they could have also fallen victim to robbers on the same road, but they were fortunate not to. The narrator's mention of their shared path implies the potential risk they faced, highlighting their luck in avoiding danger on that occasion. The narrator's

expression that the priest and the Levite were going down the same road implicitly alludes to the possibility of their exposure to such risk. They could have fallen among robbers since they also travelled that road but were lucky not to be victims on this occasion. Or could it be that their privileged position also provided them with some extra layer of security as we see today in our contemporary society?

### ***A Certain Samaritan: Rises to the Occasion and Becomes the Hero***

It is interesting that a less 'significant' person, according to his ethno-religious identity, appeared when top members of society had already established a pattern of neglect for the victim (representing people experiencing difficulties in society). Then a certain Samaritan, less qualified to help, appeared on the scene. A Samaritan, though considered to be ethnically and religiously inferior by the Jews, would soon shock everyone, including those like the lawyer testing Jesus and claiming self-righteousness on account of his limiting perception and discrimination. Though the Samaritans claimed to worship the same God as the Judaeans, they believed Mount Gerizim in their land, not Jerusalem, was the chosen place for worship and sacrifice. During Jesus' time, the Samaritans were considered impure and despised by the Judaeans. They were also not supposed to be neighbours as the Jews excluded them from those they (Jews) would exercise the command 'love your neighbour' to. They treated Samaritans as their enemies (Lee 2015:142).

Biblical and extra-biblical sources affirm the mutual hostility between Jews and Samaritans and the problem subsisting in the time of Jesus. Extra-biblical literature is replete with Jews' disdain for the Samaritans as unclean and ungodly. Already, Luke places an event of Samaritan hostility against Jesus and his company of disciples in 9:51–56 to show this mutual distrust. Also, John's point of view, 'For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans' in the narrative about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (4:4–26), alludes to the same problem. Jews and gentiles demonstrated their mutual hostility through vengeful actions, which saw Samaritans desecrating the Jerusalem temple one night during Passover, slaying many Galileans on their way to Jerusalem for a festival, and the Jews retaliating by attacking Samaritan villages (Chandler 2012:34).

The Samaritan's appearance in the story would not at first raise any hope of a better thing than what the priest and the Levite had done. So, it is safe to imagine that the immediate audience and the readers of the story (the Lucan communities) would expect a far worse scenario than what the earlier characters had done; the worst would be to assist the unconscious man to his complete death. In contrast, however, the Samaritan's actions introduced a twist to the story. The plot twist of the story lies in the actions of the Samaritan, as he shocks the audience (by his compassion and elaborate sacrifice and care for the wounded and dispossessed victim), including the lawyer testing Jesus and claiming self-righteousness on account of his limiting perception and discrimination. The hated Samaritan is thus the stock figure used in a radical reversal of expectation (Court 1997:54). The reversal of expectation lies in that the highly placed religious figures, expected to act as neighbours to the wounded man, fail in this regard.

Although the priest and Levite, and the Samaritan, are all portrayed as being on a journey, the description of the Samaritan suggests that his journey was somewhat different. The point is more striking if he was a businessman on a journey to sell the items (the oil and wine) he was carrying. But despite the constraints his journey demanded, he came to the man, and unlike the priest and the Levite (who saw him and felt no compassion), he felt compassion when he saw him and cared for him. The Samaritan's compassion was genuine as it led him to immediately render the first aid he knew best to the victim. Having stabilised the wounded man, he did not leave him in that dangerous zone but moved him to safety and robust treatment and care, which would ultimately restore his health and dignity.

It is very significant that he halted his journey because of a total stranger he did not afflict. He stayed overnight at the health facility in which he had put the wounded man to recover. Genuine love, compassion, and care for the well-being of others, especially those in poor socioeconomic conditions, are easy to discern. Leaders in Africa should note this and know that the socioeconomically less privileged or marginalised would always appreciate genuine efforts to alleviate their suffering. To sustain his efforts toward the full recovery of the wounded man, the Samaritan man, in addition to his initial care and generosity, provided money to the professional healthcare givers with a promise that he would return to pay whatever additional expenses accrued for

treating the patient. Jesus' listeners would have been astounded – and perhaps incensed – that Jesus told a story in which the hero turned out to be a Samaritan. This reaction would have contributed to the story's effectiveness. It is hard to forget. The despised and 'inferior' Samaritan becomes the true neighbour through compassionate actions.

The twist also extends to the conversation between Jesus and the lawyer. The scene begins with the lawyer standing to test Jesus and justify himself. In contrast, it ends with Jesus instructing the lawyer to go and do likewise what the Samaritan has done. Shocked and humbled by the Samaritan's actions, the lawyer could not deny the Samaritan's heroic acts but indirectly acknowledged him as 'the one who showed him mercy' without mentioning the Samaritan. As Arbuckle aptly remarks,

the dramatic paradox of the story, that would have shocked contemporary listeners, is that a Samaritan, one considered a religious heretic, a culturally and occupationally inferior person, spontaneously aided the dying man. (2013:80)

Jesus uses his ambiguous ethnicity to expand the definition of 'neighbour' beyond ethnic boundaries and emphasise the practical application of the law ('do this, and you will live', 10:28), which the Samaritan embodies by fulfilling the law through his actions, aligning with Jesus' teachings in Matthew 7:24–27 and Luke 6:46–49 (Chandler 2012:37).

Considering the Jews' disdain for the Samaritans, Jesus' choice of a Samaritan as the story's hero enhanced the surprise of the listeners and possibly angered a good number of them, because an unworthy and inferior individual replaces the priest and Levite who are among the symbols of their religious pride. Indeed, it would be impossible to forget this story (Deppe 2011:162). The Samaritan's compassion in the parable is remarkable, considering his potential constraints as a travelling businessman of wine and oil. Given his context, he was not in an ideal position to give the kindness he rendered. Yet against all odds, and unlike the priest and the Levite, he showed mercy and cared for the wounded man. The Samaritan provided immediate aid, moved the man to safety, and restored his health and dignity. His actions set a new paradigm for loving one's neighbour. The Samaritan's sacrifice and disregard for personal

concerns, such as defilement and potential danger, demonstrate his kindness and vulnerability. Despite their differences, he didn't expect anything from the injured man in return (Derrett 2005:217–219). His genuine love, compassion, and care for this victim in these poor socioeconomic conditions are evident. African leaders and followers would positively impact and transform their society if they understood that the less privileged or marginalised appreciate genuine efforts to alleviate their suffering.

## **Implications for Pressing Socioeconomic Problems in Africa**

The good Samaritan parable has significant implications for addressing African socioeconomic challenges, particularly for Christians. It encourages a problem-solving attitude and presents a clear lesson about treating others compassionately, regardless of their background or social and economic status (SES). Thus, this paper affirms that the parable provides strong motivation to dismantle socioeconomic problems rather than to stand by and watch people drown in them. It implies that Africa would break many socioeconomic obstacles and achieve rapid progress when love and compassion were entrenched in its policies and programmes. It is also crucial for all, leaders and led, of all walks of life, to take the lead in imbibing the ethics of love and compassion in their general conduct, dealing with others, and championing the cause to inculcate the same in others.

Although many socioeconomic barriers are bedevilling the continent, the following critical area should begin to witness the application of compassion ethics. The paper posits that the fundamental problems lie in the selected sections, just like Jesus chose the Jericho highway to situate the problem.

## **Corruption and Bad Leadership**

It is no exaggeration to say that many years of corruption and bad leadership have retarded economic growth and social development in many African nations. It is a disturbing reality that massive corruption cases are still being discovered in many African states. The parable shows that the Samaritan has a compassionate mind, which led him to make personal sacrifices of his belongings and business commodities, oil and wine, to save the life of a wounded stranger. He did not follow the path of the robbers nor that of the

ignoring priest and Levite. The point to emphasise is that if a man could use his resources to lift a stranger from a socially terrible condition, how much would he do if he were in charge of the commonwealth of the people for their welfare and development? Corruption exhibited in the forms of misappropriation of funds, lack of transparency, nepotism, and impunity undermine socioeconomic progress in many African states, also undermining the social fabric of these nations. Impunity has exacerbated corruption in Africa because many states' justice systems and governance structures do not uphold the rule of law. All these point to the absence of love and compassion. Africans must rally together to emplace solid leadership with integrity that will wean the continent from the forces and caprices of neocolonialism, which continues to aid corrupt leaders and exploit African resources. Also, there is a need for cultural reorientation and renewal to eliminate certain cultural practices promoting corruption in Africa.

## **Inadequate Infrastructure and Unemployment**

Observers have rightly stressed that inadequate transportation, energy, irrigation, water/sanitation, and ICT (information and communications technology) infrastructure hinder economic growth and development in many African countries. In Nigeria for instance, energy is the most significant infrastructure challenge impeding industrialisation, which

has resulted in a shrinking industrial base. Once widespread industries such as textiles and shoe making have, for the most part, disappeared. (Radwan and Pellegrini 2010:2)

The Nigerian people currently face a dire economic situation as even several multinational industries have been exiting the country one after another. Martin Luther King Jr's remarks that emulating the good Samaritan entails the transformation of the whole Jericho road to keep the road safe and prevent men and women from falling victims as they journey on life's highway is apt (Gregory 2008:31). Today, in Africa, this would mean the provision of infrastructures that make living comfortable for all and enhance productivity to address poverty and wealth disparities. Massive infrastructure development is crucial in energy, transportation, irrigation, and information technology, creating job opportunities. As it is known, there is a nexus between inadequate

infrastructure and unemployment rates, particularly among African youth. Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to five per cent in the third quarter of 2023 (Aina and Olufemi 2024). Compassionate leaders are needed to prioritise creating employment opportunities for the youth.

## **Out-of-School Children**

The large number of out-of-school children in Africa has become an albatross for its development.

Sub-Sahara Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion from the six developing world regions. Over one-fifth of primary-age children are out of school, and almost 60 per cent of youth between the ages of 15 and 17 are not in school. (Klapper and Panchamia 2023)

Unfortunately, 'Nigeria accounts for 12.4 per cent of out-of-school children in Sub-Sahara Africa' (Okoro 2023). In Nigeria, for instance, many children of school age do not attend school because of parental neglect and the government's lack of political will to provide free and compulsory primary and secondary school education. Some of these children beg for food in restaurants and along major streets of the country, especially in the northern part. Others hawk while some others serve as domestic workers against their wishes. The pertinent question is: why are such children left in such terrible socioeconomic conditions? Nigeria's ability to create a demand-driven education system that focuses on lifelong learning will determine its capacity to embrace the benefits of the knowledge economy. To transition into a knowledge economy, Nigeria must improve the quality and applicability of education, particularly vocational training, and increase access to tertiary education to equip the youth to seize economic opportunities and actively contribute to the economy (Radwan and Pellegrini 2010:2).

## **Lack of Access to Quality Healthcare**

Africa faces challenges to accessing quality healthcare due to inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and ineffective healthcare systems. Many



of the population still lack access to quality healthcare, leading to inequalities, poor health outcomes, and reduced productivity.

About 672 million Africans, representing 48 per cent of the population, still lack access to the quality health care they need, WHO Regional Director for Africa, Matshidiso Moeti, has said. (Adebowale-Tambe 2023)

The good Samaritan parable has influenced Western healthcare principles and policies, emphasising quality care as a fundamental human right based on trust and relationships between providers and patients.

Just as the wounded Jew in the parable had a right to receive care from the Samaritan, everyone today has the right to healthcare. It is not a commodity to be bought only by those who can afford it. (Arbuckle 2013:76)

African leaders should adopt this ethos of compassion and welfare, reducing disparities in healthcare access. Investing in quality health infrastructure will reduce medical tourism and benefit the economy and well-being of African citizens. African leaders should aim to transform their nations into welfare states, providing social security for all citizens regardless of their status, religion, or tribe.

## **Poverty**

Poverty in Africa is a significant socioeconomic issue which stems from factors like income inequality, limited services, and inadequate social safety nets. In 2024, around 429 million of Africa's 1.4 billion people lived under the extreme poverty of 2.15 USD per day, representing approximately one-third of the continent's population (Galal 2024). Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had significant proportions of the world's impoverished population (Galal 2024). Tanzania, Mozambique, and Madagascar were also countries with high poverty levels (Galal 2024). The poverty rate in Nigeria has worsened, with a significant portion of the population slipping into multidimensional poverty bolstered by the country's highest inflation rate of 33 per cent in history. It is worrisome that the present government in Nigeria

has pandered to international lenders, leading to the removal of subsidies on energy and education while also increasing and widening tax nets. The subsidy removal has increased hardship, poverty, hunger, crime, disease, and death. These measures are without compassion. African governments and leaders must take responsibility for the economic prosperity of their people and nations. While Jesus acknowledged the existence of poverty in society, he emphasised the importance of helping those in need (evident in Matthew 26:6–13, Mark 14:1–9, and John 12:1–8) (Gates 2006:11–12). That emphasis of helping the poor is what contemporary African Christians should constantly demonstrate to alleviate the pervasive suffering across the continent.

## **Violent Ethnic Clashes**

The parable captures the social problem of violence in all its ramifications. It is disturbing that many African states have achieved little or no integration among their several ethnic nationalities since their independence from the colonial powers. The 2022 Annual Review of Nigeria’s Violent Conflict Profile mentions that

Over 60,000 lives were lost to Nigeria’s security challenges in the last decade. Violent conflicts such as insurgency, banditry, farmer-herder disputes, gang wars and separatist agitations have continued to afflict the country. (Nextier 2023:12)

The parable counters tribalism and ethnic hostility, but violent clashes and civil wars persist in Africa due to factors like colonialism, unfair political dominance, historical hostility, and manipulation by African elites. African elites use political campaigns and speeches that exploit the existing ethnic and religious fault lines, thereby widening divisions, escalating tensions, and causing violence. In contrast, they disregard these divisions within their ranks. The death of Herbert Wigwe, former CEO of Access Bank Plc, reveals that ethnicity and religion are inconsequential among elites (Channels Television 2024). Yet they manipulate the masses using these factors. Therefore, the masses must embrace love and show ‘unexpected’ compassion like the Samaritan’s to achieve their desired transformation and prosperity.

## **Conclusion**

This paper analysed the good Samaritan parable to argue that compassion is a potent tool that can help transform African socioeconomic problems. As exemplified in the paper's analysis, compassion can lead to actions that turn terrible situations around for good. As such, it is no exaggeration to say compassion, properly channelled, will foster genuine efforts to address different socioeconomic issues, which include inequities, poverty, ethnicity, social marginalisation, and exclusion in Africa. Every African must imbibe the virtue of compassion with a sense of community that transcends ethnic barriers to facilitate socioeconomic transformation. This attitude of compassion should also be integrated into governance in Africa with tangible programmes and projects in all sectors that will positively impact the people. This is why African governments should prioritise the welfare and empathic empowerment of their citizens. Religious leaders, particularly Christians, also need to champion the education of compassion at every forum at which they speak. The socioeconomic issues confronting Africa are surmountable. Situated in compassion, relevant solutions utilising local resources can transform the socioeconomic landscape of Africa. Countries in Africa have stayed long enough in the valley of severe socioeconomic issues, and now is the time to dismantle the difficulties.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of this paper, the following recommended actions are needed:

1. Education (formal and informal) at every level in Africa should include compassion in its curriculum to ensure that the welfare of all people and the common good are achieved.
2. African governments should prioritise judicious use of national resources and common wealth for the welfare and prosperity of their citizens. They should design and implement welfare programmes that alleviate the suffering of the masses. They should place people's well-being over the globalist agenda that keeps impoverishing the masses in Africa.

3. The church in Africa should intensify efforts to provide solutions to socioeconomic problems through its social ministry. The church should also constantly persuade governments to make fair and compassionate policies and programmes that will improve the socioeconomic state of Africa.
4. Christians should be exemplary in demonstrating compassion, to bring solutions to the myriads of socioeconomic issues in Africa.

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