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An African Hermeneutics Re-Reading of Luke 18:1-8 and its Implications for Social Justice in Angola

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Abstract

Social inequality was a great concern in the context in which Jesus told the parable traditionally known as “the parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow.” Jesus’s society was clearly marked by socio-economic and cultural imbalances between different social groups under the Roman rule. This was a common characteristic for all societies in the ancient Mediterranean world. Social injustice is also one of the greatest contemporary issues in Angola where the vast majority of the population have been living in extreme poverty for decades. The history of reception regarding the interpretation of this parable shows that for centuries it has been interpreted as an allegory or a metaphor of prayer and divine response, and very little attention is given to the issue of injustice. This article aims to highlight the implication of re-reading this parable in the Angolan context through the African hermeneutics lens with a liberation perspective. It also seeks to unveil the liberationist-educational function of the parable, identifying a Lukan model for social justice in the Angolan context.

Introduction

The reception and interpretation history of Luke’s gospel shows that Luke 18:1-8, commonly referred to as the “Parable of the Widow and the Judge,” has traditionally been interpreted as an allegory of prayer and divine response (Dickerson 2017:16). From the Patristic era to the Reformation, this parable was mainly viewed within the relationship between God and the church, and God and our souls (Augustine 1989:620; Cyril of Alexandria 1983:478; Wailes

1987:262; Luther 1987:484). The widow was depicted as either the image of the desolate church awaiting the return of her spouse, or the human soul seeking vengeance against her oppressors – Satan or heretics, while the judge usually stood for the deity. However, reading the parable against allegorical hermeneutics, this article holds that injustice is the main motif of Jesus’ parable. Focusing on the widow’s ability to challenge injustice, the article shows how marginalized people can succeed in gaining justice through one of the most improbable means – persistence.

Therefore, in order to ignite the parable’s liberationist-educational power and making it a reflection and analytic instrument of the socio-historical reality of both Jesus’ and Luke’s listeners as well as for contemporary Angolan readers, the parable is re-read in this article through the African hermeneutics lens with a liberation perspective. Liberation hermeneutics is a circular process with three different moments, as proposed by Gerald West (2015:1980): *See*, which consists in contextual analysis; *Judge* which is the theological reflection moment; and *Act*, the praxis. So, firstly the article analyses the Angolan socio-historical context, that of corruption and impunity, extreme poverty, discrimination against women and children and other marginalized groups (see). Secondly, the paper focus on the interaction of Luke 18:1-8 and the Angolan context (judge); and finally, it highlights the implications of re-reading Luke 18:1-8 through the African hermeneutics lens and of course the pastoral actions to be adopted by the Angolan church (act).

African Liberation Hermeneutics

Liberation is a very dynamic concept, and it is manifest in times of desperate need. In this context it is understood as removal of all that keeps Africans in bondage, all that makes Africans less than what God intended them to be (Nwadiakor & Nweke 2013:83). African contemporary reality, characterized by bondage to several social-cultural, political, and economic evils fostered by injustices, poverty, marginalization, ignorance, and exploitation, makes liberation a very serious and urgent matter for the African people in this twenty-first century.

Croatto (1978:vi) defines liberation hermeneutics as a way or a process of “re-reading the Bible from the standpoint of our own situation.” It is an

interpretive process which consists in reading the biblical text through the eyes of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, with the aim of discovering and activating the *transforming energy* of biblical texts (Boff & Boff 1987:34). From the African perspective it is a “critical reflection on the experiences of the African people down through the ages and a total commitment to the process of development and the building of a new social order, all in the light of the gospel” (Nwadiolor & Nweke 2013:83). As an interpretive tool, African liberation hermeneutics takes the African context of struggle as the ground for interpretation of the Bible by the believing community. In other words, this is a hermeneutical approach that aims at presenting Jesus in terms of his intention to set Africans free from all forms of oppression. It is not just a reflection on the experience of the people but also a commitment to a practical process of building an equitable humane society having the Bible as a yardstick (Nwadiolor & Nweke 2013:83).

So, its primary function is to lead the readers to take actions that must change reality. As Herzog (1994:46-47) observes, “Theo-praxis has to be the starting point and ultimate court of appeal.” This means that the Christian message has to be placed in and evaluated on the basis of its practical application to the ethical, social, political and economic agenda left by Christ himself (Nwadiolor and Nweke 2013:86). The fundamental idea is that action is at the heart of liberation hermeneutics. And action here, according to West (2015:1981), refers to actual action in a particular struggle. Different kind of actions can be proposed by liberation hermeneutics which includes, but not least, actions such as education, health and sanitation programs, professional training centres, orphanages, rehabilitation centres which can accommodate even women who have been abused, advocacy programs, peace and conflict resolution centres, and many other programs that could empower the people and generate funds and employment for the masses. It is important to understand, as reminded by Ukpong (2006:275), that modern Liberation Theology, like African liberation hermeneutics, appeals to peaceful reformation and not violence. Therefore, in the context of this article, the Angolan church is expected first of all to empower its people through educating the masses as a liberative action; then to reform the theological training curriculum; and finally advocating for constitutional reforms for political and economic changes.

The Socio-Historical Context of Angola

The current socio-political and economic context of the country seems to reflect its historical background as an independent Republic, founded in 1975, at the end of the Portuguese colonial regime present in the country for almost five centuries. The proclamation of the independent country was immediately followed by a period of civil conflict from 1975 to 2002 and a post-conflict period from 2002 to date. A one-party state political regime prevailed in the country up to 1991 with the inauguration of the multiparty system leading to the first democratic elections in September, 1992. A centralized economic system inspired by a socialist Soviet and Cuban model that included a high degree of state participation in the economy drove the country's economy up to late 80s and early 90s with the emergence of the "open" market economy (Faria 2013:n.p).

Angola has a population of between 30 to 33 million people in a territory of 1.246.700 km², and one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of mineral resources. It is the second largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa (U.S. ENERGY INFO. ADMIN. [EIA] 2021:n.p). However, the country is characterized by one of the highest levels of social inequality in the world. The vast majority of the population cannot even afford their basic needs, while a tiny elite share among themselves the "goods of the land". Poverty, illiteracy, high levels of unemployment and corruption are among the biggest social evils putting the country among the poorest in the world. As stated by Porter (2017:n.p) and Santos (2015:101), most of the population cannot access basic infrastructure and health services; infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world; periodic epidemics of infectious and contagious diseases such as malaria and cholera; limited access to public services such as birth certificates for children, and identification cards for adults, are all part of the chaotic reality. Unlawful deprivation of life; judicial inefficiency; forced evictions without compensation; limits on freedoms such as speech and press; official corruption and impunity; lack of effective accountability and prosecution in cases of rape and other violence against women and children; discrimination against indigenous communities, are among the most significant and prevalent human rights issues (USDS 2020:1).

Societal discrimination against women and children, and other marginalized groups, is widespread. In a similar fashion with the Lukan context, women have their legal rights to inherit property negatively impacted by the customary law which in many places prevails over civil law. As a common thing in most missionary founded congregations, women, especially single mothers and those women who have not had their marriages solemnized in and by the church, in many places are still not allowed to sit at the Lord's Table, to baptize their children, or to take up leadership roles. In some communities, women and children are victims of abuse due to accusations of the practice of witchcraft. Despite all the constitutional provisions, with only some exceptions, women are still operating outside the centre of power, generally holding low-level positions and earning lower salaries in the workplace (USDS 2020:21, 22). The economy of the country has been almost completely dependent on the extractive industry (oil and mining). The already fragile economic system has been badly impacted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the prices of the main driver of the economy – oil, being brought to the lowest level. As a result, it also reduced the country's capacity for importing goods in an economy which relies largely on imported goods, and consequently lowered people's level of consumption.

Politics of intimidation, exclusion, and marginalization is the order of the day. According to Faria (2013:n.p), the relationship between the state and society is characterized by the existence of an authoritarian postcolonial elite of rent seekers maintaining a state system of client to patron relationships by virtue of parallel and unofficial channels. Despite the constitutional provisions for an independent and impartial judiciary, the judiciary is still the weakest link of the government, being kept hostage by the executive, and its decision-making process interfered with by political influence. In summary, most scholars agree that, simply put, the socio-political context of Angola reveals the authoritarianism of the political regime and the disenfranchisement of the ordinary population.

Forty-Six Years of Corruption and Impunity

Angola is among the most corrupt countries in the world. Studies revealed that corruption is endemic in Angola. Corruption in Angola occurs at all levels, ranging from petty corruption (which occurs at a smaller scale in small places like registration offices, police stations, state licensing boards, etc.) to grand

corruption (which occurs at the highest levels of government in a way that requires significant subversion of the political, legal and economic systems). Petty corruption is widespread in Angola, happening mainly in form of bribery, best known locally as “*gasosa*” – (soft drink). As suggested by Badlam and others (2021:1) “corruption schemes have been wide-ranging, including widespread petty corruption as part of the ‘*gasosa* culture.’” *Gasosa* became the guarantee for accessing basic public services including health, education, justice, and other administrative services. Levying additional charges for bureaucratic services became the norm for public servants (Santos 2018:3). Corruption in high offices – grand corruption, is also factual and rampant, involving high ranking government officials, including the presidency, posing a major threat to the sovereignty of the country (Morais 2012:26).

It is believed that impunity is one of the main reasons for the prevalence of such levels of corruption in the country. As suggested by Santos (2018:1), corruption in Angola became highly rewarding since people involved in acts of corruption are not lawfully punished. On the same note, Sakala (2021:n.p) states that it flourished within the superstructure of the one-party system, which unlawfully enriched a minority of Angolans and, for decades created strong tentacles abroad and internal complicity on the basis of personal interests. Therefore, it seems to have become a generalized belief that misappropriation of public funds is very normal. “At a certain stage in the history of the country, the abnormal became normal and the immoral was a pandemic, but a minority with the political power told the populations that everything was normal and moral” (Neto 2021:n.p). Very few, among the so called “big fishes” have been brought to book for malpractices of corruption, since it is done in a selective and discriminatory manner – selective impunity.

Corruption and poverty

According to the Angolan *Instituto Nacional de Estatística* – INE (National Institute of Statistics) 2020 Report, around 54.0% of the Angolan population live in multidimensional poverty, meaning that they are deprived from the basic social services which include, among others, health, education, quality of life and employment (INE 2021:45). In terms of monetary poverty, around 40.6% (about 41 out of every 100 Angolans) have a level of consumption below the poverty line, less than USD \$1.00 per day (INE 2021:15). An extremely huge gap exists between a tiny rich elite and a vast majority poor, who are “often

ignored or despised both by false discourses and by the unfair practices of the State policies and the elite of predators” (Santos 2015:103). These people live without a minimum of dignity, calling for immediate reforms to the country’s social context. Poverty in Angola is not merely an academic subject but the ugly existential reality. According to Transparency International (2020:n.p) apart from eroding trust, weakening democracy and hampering economic development, corruption exacerbates inequality, poverty and social division. In Angola, associated with these issues are inequities in the judicial system, nepotism, cronyism, and patronage networks (Badlam and others 2021:1). According to Justino Pinto de Andrade (2021:n.p), the socio-economic ideologies implemented by the political regime, in power for almost five decades, “led to the almost absolute impoverishment of Angolans.”

The Church: A Voice of the Voiceless and the Culture of Silence

A culture of silence has been installed within the Angolan context throughout different phases of the history of the country. Fear of direct reprisal or retaliation has kept people from expressing their sentiments and fully exercising their rights – not only during the colonial period, but even after independence. A criticism of the social situation leads someone to be identified as opposing the regime, resulting in retaliation (Martins & Cardina 2019:59). Very recent cases with religious leaders, especially from the Roman Catholic Church, can attest to that. Scrutiny by the political regime, at all levels of public pronouncement (including sermons and homilies), led most of the people to maintain a culture of silence for fear of being reprimanded.

For decades the church has actively spoken on behalf of the most vulnerable on the social margins. According to Jensen and Pestana (2020:42), churches in Angola (traditional Catholic and Protestant) have maintained their critical voice and work towards creating an engaged citizenship. On the other hand, however, in his criticism Jensen (2018:21) observes that the Angolan church has demonstrated the capacity for peace and addressing the social issues of the post-war period through an ecumenical movement. But the church has been facing some challenges in this new dispensation, not being able to effectively advocate its positions vis-à-vis the government. Acts of corruption including misappropriation of church funds and property (land, houses, cars, etc.), power struggle and tribalism, have become common within the church (Cristóvão, 2017:n.p). As seen above, discrimination against women, especially

single mothers who in many places are still not allowed to sit at the Lord's Table, to baptize their children, or to take on leadership roles, is also part of the present reality of the church.

When it was expected for the church to have the plight and the liberation of the oppressed on the topmost in their agenda, many of its leaders choose to side with the oppressor and become part of the elites against the poor and outcast. This is reinforced by Blanes and Zawiejska (2019:39), stating that the church in Angola has been discredited in many circles, being identified as aligning with the State, providing moral and social legitimation to the government's unjust policies. The "Gospel is the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16). However, some are preaching it to exploit the poor instead of setting them free both spiritually and physically. The Angolan church is therefore called to move its theological discourse beyond exploitation so that she can become the voice of the voiceless poor and oppressed. The church must not hesitate becoming the voice of the poor and oppressed since the Angolan government and civil society see the church as a credible voice that can make an impact on peace building, reconciliation, human rights, citizenship and improving moral and ethical values (Ajayi 2015:n.p). She must not only question the roots of poverty and injustices but also promote actions to empower the poor and marginalized to speak for themselves against injustice and poverty, and any other kind of social evil hindering them to live life in its fullness.

Luke 18:1-8 and the Quest of Social Justice

As stated by Weaver (2002:219), even though this parable occupies a mere eight verses of Luke's gospel, it opens out onto a vast and challenging world of theological reflection. Its interpretation has been a subject of intense disputes concerning its authenticity and structure (the unity of the entire text). There is no specificity about the precise setting of the parable in the ministry of Jesus. Scholars are divided in this matter, some regarding the entire pericope as being a unit from Jesus, others from Luke's own material (L), while others see a disjunction in it, where one can listen to Jesus *ipsissima vox* (vv.2-5) and Luke's interpretation or narrative frame at same time (vv.1; 6-8) (Curkpatrick, 2002:117; Herzog, 1994:215). However, the analysis of the literary background

of the parable has led some scholars to look at Ben Sirach 35:15-25 as the prototype of Luke 18:1-8.

On the other side, scholars also disagree regarding the main point of the parable, since it seems difficult to reduce the tensions between what is believed to be Jesus *ipsissima vox* (vv.2-5) and Luke's frame (vv.1, 6-8). Traditionally and following Luke's interpretive frame (vv.1, 6-8), through a *minori ad maius* (lesser to greater argument) analogy to God, the parable has been interpreted as an allegory of prayer and divine response. However, Curkpatrick (2002:109) points out that the frame (Luke 18:1, 6-8) has altered the focus of the parable from the widow to the judge in a *minori ad maius* analogy to God, making the judge as the centre of the meaning of the parable. He suggests that it is possible that the parable may have never been about prayer but could have been concerned with justice, which, according to him, fits well into the theme of Luke (Curkpatrick 2002:108). Apart from divorcing the parable from its original *sitz-im-leben*, traditional interpretations also raise a theological concern, that God can be pestered to action, and reinforce stereotypes.

Luke opens the pericope in a way that is very characteristic to him with the imperfect tense Ἐλεγεν δὲ παραβολὴν... (he told a parable...) (cf. 5:36; 13:6; 14:7), even though in most cases he uses the aorist tense εἶπεν, such as in 6:39; 8:4; 12:16; 15:3; 18:9; 19:11; 21:29. The phrase πρὸς τό with δεῖν (the present active infinitive of the impersonal δεῖ "in order to" or "so that") introduces the motif of the parable (for Luke). This generally calls for a verb that identifies what needs to be done, which is, in this case, προσεύχεσθαι – to pray. Though the adverb πάντοτε implies the continuous sense of προσεύχομαι, the exhortation πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι (*to pray always*) with μὴ ἐγκακεῖν, do not suggest intermittent or continuous prayer, rather, to pray "consistently and persistently", again and again without "losing heart" or "giving up", getting tired or discouraged (Edwards 2015:497, Johnson 1991:268-269).

The plot of the parable is introduced in v.2 with a negative description of the judge as τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος καὶ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρέπόμενος (neither feared God nor had regard/respect for people). To fear God and keeping his commandments was a mandate in Hebrew Scripture. In a context where a judge was meant to be a stock character and was expected to stand up for

justice and execution of the law according to God's moral standards, the negated participles in verse 2, τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος καὶ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρέπόμενος paint a very negative picture of the judge in terms of character (Matsoso 1992:92). This shows his moral decadence, since the word ἐντρέπόμενος (present participle passive of τρεπω – put to shame) belongs to the vocabulary of shame, meaning, in the active voice, “to make ashamed.” The action of the story, however, starts in v.3 Ἐκδίκησόν με ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιδίκου μου (grant me justice against my opponent), and comes to its conclusion in v.5 with the decision of the unjust judge to grant the widow her request “I will grant her justice”.

Luke describes the widow in v.3 as persistent, who was repeatedly coming to the judge demanding for justice ἤρχετο...λέγουσα. The imperfect iterative ἤρχετο (from ἔρχομαι – to come) indicates an action performed repeatedly by the same person. In this verse, Luke makes use of the technical language of the court: ἐκδίκησόν με ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιδίκου μου (do me justice against my opponent). The verb ἐκδικέω (to avenge in the LXX) in judicial process means to fight for someone’s cause or to help someone to get justice by securing the rights of the wronged person or by punishing the offender (Marshall, 1978: 672). According to Freed (1987:45) the 2nd person aorist imperative ἐκδίκησόν με (avenge me, do me justice) demands that the judge deliver her from her adversary (ἀντιδίκου) for the sake of justice to which she is entitled. The noun ἀντιδίκου refers to a legal opponent or adversary in a lawsuit (Hicks, 1991:216). So, Marshall (1978: 672) observes that “what the widow wants is not the punishment of her opponent but the payment of whatever is due to her” (restoration).

The widow’s demand was for a while denied by the judge. The imperfect ἤθελεν (of θελεν – wish, want, desire) is negated with οὐκ, rendering the sentence as “for a while he did not want” or “he refused for a while”. However, if the imperfect ἤθελεν is interpreted in the light of ἤρχετο in v.3, an imperfect iterative, it means that the refusal of the judge was a repeated action, he refused over and over again. According to Hicks (1991:216), ἐπὶ χρόνον (for a time) refers generally to an undefined length of time. However with the preposition ἐπί plus the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα (after these things; afterwards) which follows, it gives a temporal sense as “for a ‘while’ the judge refused”, implying that an end is in view (O’Connor, 2019:56). In his interior monologue

the judge decides finally to attend to the widow's plea. The reasons for his move are introduced by the combination *διὰ γε* (because). Because "she keeps bothering me" by continually coming (*τὸ παρέχειν μοι κόπον*) the judge will render her justice, as indicated by the future indicative *ἐκδικήσω αὐτήν*.

Luke shows that the judge is not just moved by the fact she keeps coming (what bothers him), but by what might happen if she continues coming: *ἴνα μὴ εἰς τέλος ἐρχομένη ὑπωπιάζη με*. The main verb in this clause *ὑπωπιάζω* (*ὑπό* + *ὤψ* – face just under the eye) means, literally "to hit under the eye," "give a black eye to," in a metaphor drawn from boxing (Marshall, 1978:673). It has to do with a physical assault on one's face. Many translations adopt the metaphorical meaning "to wear out". According to Derrett (1970:190), "'blacken my face' for *ὑπωπιάζω* is synonymous of 'loss of prestige' thus incurring shame and dishonor," based on a later use of the word and a common Oriental expression "to slander or destroy one's good name." Johnson (1991: 270), on the same note, shows that the term can also mean "to damage the reputation." Derrett and Johnson's proposals fit in the context of this parable, in the sense that the judge was much worried about his own reputation. Since he has no regard for humans (vv.2, 4), he may depend on some sort of reputation to continue being a judge (Johnson, 1991:270).

The narrator then redirects his hearers' attention to the lesson to be learnt from the judge. As it was said above, many scholars argue that v.1 and vv.6-8 are Luke's addition on the main parable (vv.2-5). According to Hicks (1991:210), *εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος* (then the Lord said) may be considered as Luke's editorial notation in order to set the parable off from its application (vv.7-8). Forbes (2000:204) points out that Luke's use of the post-resurrection title *ὁ κύριος* adds authority to the pronouncement. The expression *ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας* the judge of injustice or the unrighteous judge) represents a Semitic idiom in Luke's text, with a similar characterization applying to the "dishonest manager" in Luke 16:8 (Hultgren 2000:256).

The application of the parable is applied by means of a rhetorical question, with an emphatic negative future (*οὐ μὴ*) employed to accentuate the situation. Combined with *ποιήσῃ* (an aorist active subjunctive of *ποιέω* – to do, to execute), the clause becomes a very strong imperative, rendering "will he (God) not certainly do justice..." or "will not God *absolutely* bring about

justice?” (Edwards 2015:499; Forbes 2000:204). According to Marshall (1978:673) οὐ μὴ construction is normally used to ask a strong question, expecting an emphatic affirmative “yes”. The temporal genitives ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός (day and night) presuppose a description of incessant or uninterrupted prayer. Reiling and Swellengrebel (1993:598) observe, however, that the order of “day and night” reflects a Gentile idiom, while “night and day” reflects a Hebrew idiom (as in Luke 2:37). Luke suggests that the elect ones (τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν) are expected to wait patiently καὶ μακροθυμεῖ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς. The term μακροθυμέω, etymologically from μακρό + θυμος (long-tempered), can mean: to wait patiently, to be slow to get angry, or even long-suffering.

As observed, the emphatic negative οὐ μὴ construction normally expects an emphatic affirmative answer. So, the question of v.7 is answered affirmatively in v.8 with the Lord’s authoritative affirmation that God will do justice to or will vindicate his elect (ποιήσει τὴν ἐκδίκησιν αὐτῶν) and that it will be done quickly or speedily (ἐν τάχει) (O’Connor, 2019:69).

The question in v.8b πλὴν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐλθὼν ἄρα εὕρησει τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; (will indeed the son of Man find faith on earth when he returns?) marks an abrupt shift in Jesus’ teaching from faithfulness of God (v. 8a) to human faithfulness. Jesus seems concerned if the disciples can remain faithful amidst of tribulations and delaying in the response of their prayers. “The concern indicates awareness of the tendency of faith to falter as time passes – what will the Son of Man find when he comes?” (Parsons, 2015:265). The expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (the Son of Man) has an eschatological character and seems to mark a link between this parable and 17: 22-37. “The Son of man is the eschatological vindicator of the elect” (Marshall, 1978:676). The particle ἄρα (indeed) is an interrogative particle implying anxiety or impatience, acting here as an interrogative intensifier, which different from οὐ μὴ, expects a negative answer. As the application of the parable, “it is meant as an exhortation to take seriously the lesson of the parable that God will certainly act to vindicate them. Thus an interval before the Parousia is presupposed, but the sense of imminent expectation is not abandoned” (Marshall, 1978:677).

The Judge of injustice and the Abuse of Power

According to Stephen Wright (2002:84) fearing God and respecting people is a phrase that is formulaic and proverbial, and abuse against both elements condemns the judge as dishonourable and shameless: “not fearing God is unequivocally negative in biblical terms.” He not only represents a contradiction to the primary expectation, but also, his resolute lack of fear of God would make it almost impossible to expect justice in his judgment. In the Hebrew tradition he is a quintessential expression of resistance to Yahweh’s justice (Curkpatrick 2002:220).

In his examination of the Roman judicial system, Harries (1999:171) observes that it was a tight circle of ambitious judges (elites) eager to amass greater wealth and enhancing personal reputation. Non-elites like the widow were left outside that circle, which would provide prestigious contacts or wealthy connections: “lowly *judices* needed powerful friends.” As observed by Herzog (1994:227) and Cotter (2015:332) the judge in this parable seems not to be an exception; he represents the rule, well versed in iniquitous dealings using his position to line his pockets.

Injustice to the Widow and The Widow’s Agency

The widow of the parable is victimized in many different levels: i) she is part of an androcentric socio-cultural world which discriminates her on the basis of a gender (female) and her marital status (widow); ii) she was expected to be protected by a judicial system which is now described as systematically corrupt and discriminates her on the basis of her economic status (poor); iii) she is victimized by an opponent (not identified in the parable) who takes advantage of her powerlessness to strip her of are means of survival (O’Connor, 2019:95); iv) finally, and for her misfortune, it gets worse as she brings her case to a judge who admits by his own to have neither respect for God nor for people, and which for a long time refused to attend to her appeals. So, she is a victim of an ongoing structural injustice.

Conventionally, women in general and widows in particular, were seen as captives within vulnerable and compromising situations (Dickerson 2017:18). According to Herzog (1994:228) the widow of our parable is self-motivated, takes the initiative, and is unrelenting with persistence, the only weapon she possesses. She must have no one to speak for her. She knows her rights; she

knows that God's law is on her side. Therefore, like the woman with a haemorrhage (Luke 8:43-48) she proactively assumes unusual responsibility for her own well-being, trusts in her own capacity, and with steadfast faith keeps coming continually until the judge's attention is drawn to her rights and is moved to action (Green 1997:640). In her obstinate and resolute determination to achieve her purpose, she breaks all the protocols, the culture of silence, and other cultural boundaries that make her captive, and she speaks for herself. In view of O'Connor (2019:86), the way Luke draws out the inner dynamic of the parable reveals how skilful the widow becomes in navigating her difficult course through this crisis. It is her persistence that draws the judge's attention to her rights.

This widow of Jesus' parable belongs to all ages and all cultures. She represents the masses – the outcasts of our society. Luke assigns to her an agency role which is a model to demonstrate the way to justice in an unjust world. Her accomplishment makes her not only the central motivator, but also, as Schottroff (2006:92) describes her, an instructor who demonstrates what is essential to get justice in an unjust world. She overcomes patriarchal constraint and impels the judge to administer justice. Her persistence accomplishes; she shames the judge into action (Ringe 1998:244). Persistence pays off. As Marshal (1978:672) observes, it is those who endure who will rejoice at the end.

The current context of Angola is in many ways an authentic picture of Luke's world. After almost five decades of independence all the former oppressive structures are still operating effectively in the country. As Blanes (2019:220) attests, the country has embarked in a process of degeneration, "going back to the inequalities, injustice and exploitation proper of colonial times, in becoming the very thing they fought against in the liberation wars." Therefore, in line with Matsoso's (1982:105) argument, Luke 18:1-8 becomes a source of renewed hope for the suffering people in Angola. The widow's victory teaches the Angolan people that justice delayed is not justice denied. Jesus guarantees that justice shall be served to those who cry to God day and night (v.7), as long as they persistently pursue their endeavour without losing heart (v.1). The widow's (marginalized people in Angola) unrelenting and persistent pursuit for justice from an unjust judge (structures of power boss in the State and church)

becomes, as Gowler (2021:n.p) would say, a paradigm for how we should unrelentingly pursue justice for those denied justice in our society.

Practical Implications of Re-reading Luke 18:1-8 in the Angolan Context

How would an Angolan audience have heard the parable of the Widow and the Judge? What would be the effects of this liberative reading for social justice in Angola? According to Meleshko (2013:65) issues of justice and the right attitude to the poor and oppressed, to poverty and human rights provoke believers to read the Bible with the purpose of finding answers to the hard questions of life. Therefore, a liberative reading of Luke 18:1-8, through the African hermeneutics lens in the Angolan context, consists in reading this parable in a way that the Angolan readers are empowered and influenced by the power of the Gospel to be actively involved in a life-transforming mission, which brings forth hope and justice to the Angolan communities, especially the poor and marginalized. Through this reading the reader not only see how the Lukan Jesus addressed the issue of injustice, but also how this parable is applicable to their local social and religious context.

It is important to remember that historical studies have demonstrated that Luke's Gospel was a great encouragement to Africans under European imperial rule. According to Mbefo (2010:12) their aspirations were to see that its message becomes a reality in their lived experience. Luke's gospel has also been of great relevance in the emancipatory fight against the patriarchal systems prevalent in the continent. Matsoso (1992:96) points out that this parable has, in a way, laid roots for the struggle of women worldwide, and especially in the so-called Third World, where women are fighting for their liberation and attempting to build a wholistically new humanity.

This gospel provides a transformative force for the Angolan people, especially the poor and marginalized. The holistic theology emphasized in it is appropriately suited to approach the contemporary Angolan crisis. Like first century Palestine, contemporary the Angolan social-economic context is one marked by great inequalities between a small minority of rich elite and a majority poor, who consequently operate on the margins of the society. Luke's gospel, therefore, challenges Angolan leaders, both political and religious

leaders, to urgently deal with the structures of poverty and oppression and their causes. Luke unveils a new world of possibilities for the marginalized in Angola.

Despite providing a picture of the Palestinian context under the Roman rule, the parables of Jesus raise awareness and expose the ugly face of the exploitation and settings of social oppression of the peasantry by the elite, calling into question the established status quo (Herzog 1994:29; Oakman 2008:172, 173). They “fulfill a liberationist-educational function for the first listener by becoming a reflection of and analytic instrument for societal reality” (Herzog 1994:29).

Therefore re-reading Luke 18: 1-8 through the African hermeneutics lens in the Angolan context, above all, allows this parable to speak to the hearts of the Angolan people and offers them an opportunity to construct a biblical model to curb injustices in their own context. Angolans need the power to speak for themselves against the social evils which keep on enslaving them in their own land. Like the widow in the parable, Angolan people are expected to not grow weary, not to give up, but to stand firm, to be persistent in their pursuit for justice and freedom from all forms of evil and oppression. The church on the other hand, through this parable can also recover Luke's holistic view of salvation and so, expand its limited theological praxis to better reflect the mission of Jesus. Then it will be equipped to exercise the holistic gospel that is transformative for the whole Angolan community, in particular the oppressed and marginalized.

By rejecting the metaphorical and allegorical interpretations of the parable and reading this parable through the African hermeneutics lens raises awareness and exposes the ugly face of human exploitation and all the oppressive structures hindering the majority of Angolans to live life in its fullness. Consequently, this will provoke the Angolan readers to read the Bible with the purpose of finding the right answers for their current situation and to question the established status quo. Not speculative answers, but practical ones to be practiced by every believer in the basic communities in their daily lives (Meleshko 2013:65). The parable of the Widow and the Judge poses a huge challenge to the Angolan political and religious leaders and their current practices. It is an authentic call to political and economic as well as religious

repentance. Reconciliation with God and others is an imperative in the current context of the country. Contextualizing the words of Buffel (2010:7), theological reflection and pastoral actions in the country's context cannot afford to proceed unchallenged with their usual apathy towards the socio-economic and political conditions and the plight of the poor and marginalized. The church is therefore called to not only reflect but do theology. Finally, re-reading of Luke 18: 1-8 from the standpoint of the Angolan situation will unveil and activate the transforming energy of the parable and consequently compel them on the way of liberation.

So, in view of all this, the Angolan church must capitalize on empowering the poor and marginalized to demand for social justice through educating the masses. Advocacy for constitutional reforms for political and economic changes is another pastoral action to be practiced by the Angolan church. Alongside with its advocacy role, the church should also empower the people to emulate the widow's agency, whose voice breaks the culture of silence, and bring about the justice she fought for, and speak up for themselves. The church is called to continue using the Bible as a source of power for its liberative mission. The church in Angola is to rethink its God's given mandate and realign its discourse on social justice with its praxis. The Angolan church must also capitalize on investing more in theological education and to uptake and integrate into the theological curriculum subjects on African hermeneutics.

Conclusion

The presence of social injustices is very evident both in the context where the parable was initially told and heard as well as in the Angolan context. This article has shown that the encounter between the widow and the judge in Luke 18:1-8 presents an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that an understanding of the socio-historical environment behind this text can highlight possible ways to deal with the quest of social justice in the current context of Africa and Angola in particular. Through this parable Jesus shows how one of the most unlikely approaches to gaining justice can succeed (Herzog 1994:229). The parable leaves it clear how in seeking justice, while confronted with institutional corruption even at the judiciary level, a vulnerable widow is yet able to effectively take up her cause (O'Connor 2019:98). For this reason this article has concluded that this parable is a

liberative text, serving a liberationist-educational purpose. Therefore, a re-reading of this text through the African hermeneutics lens has not only revealed features of the parable often ignored by the traditional hermeneutists, but also contributes towards empowering Angolan readers to overcome the problem of social injustices being perpetuated in their own time and place. It offers a biblical model to curb injustices – persistence.

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