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Servant-Leadership as a Model for Christian Community: A Subversive Rhetoric and Ideology in Luke 22:23–27

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Abstract: This article carefully examines the meaning of servant leadership as embedded in Luke 22:23–27. We believe that servant leadership as taught by the Lukan Jesus is an ideal leadership style suitable for anyone who aspires for any leadership position. To examine this topic, this article adopts subversive rhetoric to interpret the text in Luke 22:23–27 to understand the embedded ideology within the text. The application of subversive rhetoric and ideology in reading Luke 22:23–27 provides insights into the leadership problems faced in Christian community today. Using subversive rhetoric and ideology as a means of interpretation, this article emphasises that the Lukan text is an invitation to the Christian community to model their leadership style based on the premise of the Lukan Jesus since leadership is the centre of every good governance. The Lukan Jesus instructed his followers not to follow the empire’s leadership style of ruling over people without caring for their wellbeing. However, the article acknowledges that the disciples were instructed to subversively change the leadership style and implement the one that would be of benefit to the entire humanity—the servant leadership model. It concludes that the Luke text aims at introducing a servant leadership system that was against the Roman Empire for the new Lukan community and invites the present Christian community and world leaders to imbibe the ideology of servant leadership style as introduced by the Lukan Jesus and practised by Nelson Mandela.

Keywords: servant leadership; subversive rhetoric; ideology; Lukan Jesus; Luke’s Gospel; Christian community; Nelson Mandela



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1. Introduction

Reading and interpreting the New Testament as ancient texts still has socio-economic and political relevance to human needs. It contributes to educating the reader depending on the situation and the context of the reader. The words of Jesus in the Gospels, especially the Gospel of Luke, still resonate with impeccable relevance within the social and political context of our societies. As one reads the Lukan text, one tends to discover that it is enhanced with different nuances and meanings. One of the many focuses of Luke is on the words of Jesus as demonstrated in his teaching to his disciples. Jesus teaches and demonstrates to them what it means to be human to one another, not to call fire to burn one’s enemies (Luke 9:52–56), but to have mercy and help those in need (Luke 10:33–37). The climax of this behaviour authenticates his stance in Luke 22:23–27, where he teaches a functional leadership style. Jesus demonstrates the existence of an interface between the social function and the leadership. Leadership determines the function of any society.

The imagery in this text demonstrates that Jesus is a leader par excellence because of the way and manner he served the disciples in this text. The teaching in Luke 22:23–27 contradicts the popular opinion of the disciples who earlier in the Gospel demanded fire against their enemies. Here, Jesus shows leadership and demands the contrary. His words and his teachings resonate in his behaviour which he wants his disciples to emulate for the

betterment of humanity. Jesus' ideology contradicts imperial ideology built on coercion and propaganda (Punt 2012, pp. 3–5). However, the disciples are to navigate the Empire through the process of subversion (Punt 2012, p. 6; Etukumana 2018, pp. 73–76).

Luke 22:23–27 demonstrates what it takes to govern people. Leadership is always responsible for every action and inaction within their society. Reading and interpreting Luke 22:23–27 using subversive rhetoric and ideology in the context of modern humanity would provide insights into many problems facing humanity globally. Problems such as migration, poverty, and diseases can be resolved if we adopt the method of reading and interpretation that will unravel the values deposited within a given text. Reading Luke 22:23–27 using subversive rhetoric and ideology invites the reader to see leadership as a major problem that is facing the communities and the world at large and suggest solutions. Can good leadership be a solution to the manifold problems such as poverty, hunger, migration, and corruption in the world? Is the exodus of young people from one continent to another one of the factors that Jesus can address in Luke 22:23–27? How does the message of Jesus in Luke 22:23–27 resonate in the world amidst poor leadership?

Cubing the problem of leadership globally, the Bible has a prescription for humanity—servant leadership. It is a system of leadership that subverts the general norm and transcends all the facets of the entire humanity. It is the system that contradicts the general notion of leadership. The statement of the Lukan Jesus is contradictory and subversive to the established system of leadership known by the disciples of Jesus. The Roman Empire advocates and worships leadership and anyone who sits in the position of leadership (Horsley 2005, pp. 44–48).

Amidst all the problems of leadership facing humanity, what would Jesus do differently to save humanity from poverty, war, famine, migration, corruption, banditry, and the major problems facing us today?

2. Luke 22:23–27 and Subversive Rhetoric

For one to understand the underlined layer of the text in Luke 22:23–27, it requires a critical reading and interpretation. The setting of the text within the remembrance meal scene depicts the importance of leadership in the new Lukan community. The actions and words of Jesus aim to make sure that the disciples get the leadership principles right. It is believed that the Lukan Jesus injected a different system of leadership other than what was known to the disciples (Klein 2006, p. 271). Subversion is what the Lukan Jesus wanted to negotiate with his disciples and for them to navigate it effectively using his words and actions (Etukumana 2020, pp. 39–40). Subversion is important when considering the term based on the context of the speaker and interpreter. It is on this assumption that subversive rhetoric becomes the necessary tool for interpreting Luke 22:23–27, which is different to the opinion of Kim (2008, p. 193), who believes that Luke does not apply any subversions in his writing. However, contrary to Kim (2008), Horsley (2005) and Esler (1987) situate the language of Luke within subversive rhetoric and believe that the language of Luke is subversive with the aim of Luke altering the popular notion of the people (Etukumana 2024, p. 5).

Blackstock (1964, p. 56) defines subversion as “the undermining or detachment of the loyalties of significant social groups and their transference—to the symbols and institutions of the aggressor.” Interestingly, Blackstock's definition emphasises “detachment of loyalty” from the “symbols and institutions of the aggressor” (Click 2004, p. 5). Blackstock further emphasises subversion politically and socially, but not in the written text which is the emphasis of this article. In other words, subversion does not only relate to politics and society, but it also involves rhetoric. There can be rhetorical subversion in written texts. The author believes that the audience will be able to decode the intent or what might be called the “hidden transcript” of the text (Scott 1990, p. 25). James C. Scott (1990, p. xiii) adds that the powerless audience uses rhetoric nuances as “vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct.” The essence of the hidden transcript in Scott is to enable

the audience to subvert the text, a dynamic that is common in Luke's Gospel (A. C. Miller 2014, pp. 2–3). Luke does not mention who the "aggressor" is in his text, but his audience could understand the aggressor as the Roman Empire—ruled by the Οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἔθνῶν "the kings of the Gentiles" (Luke 22:25).

Kane Madison Click (2004, pp. 5–7) alludes that every text can be read in multiple ways with different meanings. As a result, the principles of polysemy (when the meaning of the text depends on the reader's culture), polyvalence (when the reader reads the same text differently with different values), and ambivalence (when a reader cannot appropriate meaning to a text due to different societal values) enhance the reader's interpretation of a given text. Click (2004, p. 11) notices that all these methods emphasise that "Subversion is not immediately recognizable, especially by subscribers of the dominant ideologies, and therefore creates rather substantially divergent readings of the text."

For a text to be interpreted using subversive rhetoric, there must be an alternative and that is subsemy (Click 2004, p. 11). Click (2004, p. 12) sees subsemy in subversive rhetoric as "the mutually reinforcing combination of polysemy and subversion whereby a subsemic text is intentionally created to manipulate societal restraints." Subsemy as a subversive rhetoric has three characteristics that an interpreter can realise as one navigates the text: the seed of subversion, the strategic ambiguity, and the use of irony (Click 2004, p. 16). The seed of subversion in subsemy implies that the rhetoric in the text rejects the dominant authority. The use of οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἔθνῶν "the kings of the Gentiles" and εὐεργέται "benefactors" (Luke 22:25) in the text sarcastically shows that the Lukan Jesus rejects such leadership ideology.

The seed of subversion is found in every text with the author's intention. Sometimes, the author might use a hidden transcript to buttress his rhetorical nuance; however, the community that reads the text will identify the seed and use it as an agent of social change (J. H. Miller 2020, p. 4). The seed of subversion at the surface demonstrates the dominant power, but underneath there is total rejection of this dominant authority (Click 2004, pp. 16–18). This rhetorical nuance is visible in the reading of the statement of Jesus in Luke 22:23–27. Luke demonstrates this through the use of the rhetoric of syncrisis: the kings of the Gentiles, benefactor, and rule and contradicts this with the younger, servant, and service that were familiar to the audience at the time of writing.

Another key element in subversive rhetoric is the strategy of ambiguity where an author encrypts the text with multiple interpretations for the audience to decide. The author strategically allows the audience to decode the meaning enshrined in the text. Abdallah and Langley (2014, p. 29) acknowledge the double-edge function of strategic ambiguity as both positive and negative depending on the audience that reads the text. It means that the same text can be used by both the oppressor and the oppressed. Would Luke write a text that will stand against his community? Luke's belief is far from writing a text that would be inimical to his community and this emphatically indicates the reason the Lukan text should be read with a single audience, a single meaning, and a single purpose. This is confirmed by the use of the phrase ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως "but this must not be among you" (Luke 22:26). In this case, the use of "ambiguity by the oppressed for the oppressed or by the dominant to placate the oppressed is not relevant", but what is important is for the audience to know the existence of the ambiguity and how to apply it as they navigate the subversion in the text (Click 2004, p. 20). In the case of Luke 22:23–27, the author was aware of his specific audience (Walton 2002, p. 7) and he decided to navigate his message to his audience using this method of rhetoric.

The use of irony becomes vital in negotiating the subversive rhetoric of a given text (Strong 2021, p. 14). Irony is used in many ways. One of the ways of using irony in rhetoric is to heighten a specific inclusive topic that would bring consensus among the readers. The second use of irony in the subversive rhetoric is the exclusive method of attacking the opponent by application of sarcasm to underrate the author's opposition (Click 2004, p. 20). The use of "benefactor" and "ruler" in the text of Luke inevitably indicates that the author aims at providing the ambience of the text within the purview of his audience—the Lukan

community will understand the embedded irony in the text. In other words, Luke informs his audience that ‘you must not act as an imperium benefactor but as a servant-leader and you must not be a ruler but a servant.’ In this context, Luke uses irony both as a subversive device as well as narrative nuance to communicate to his audience.

It is improper to conclude that the Lukan community/audience was interested in reading the text using polysemy or subsemy. However, Luke uses certain rhetorical devices to speak to his audience. The audience, he believes, would understand his rhetoric negotiation. The Lukan application of *paraenetic syncrisis* rhetoric in the statement allotted to the Lukan Jesus in the text subversively provides his audiences with a monosemic understanding of the rhetoric. The Lukan audience may comprise diverse people (Esler 1987, pp. 30–33) with a singular focus—the kingdom of God. Reading a text subversively has many implications for the reader of the text. It invites the audience to see the same issue in the opposite direction. It also calls for a change in attitude in the lives of the audience (Blackstock 1964, p. 56). Reading Luke 22:23–27 subversively enables his community to change their behaviour from negative to positive by acting differently from others around them.

Having explained the method of subversive rhetoric that is residual in Luke 22:23–27, this article will further query the embedded ideology in the text. What prompted Luke to place this text within the Lukan remembrance meal commonly called the Lord’s Supper?

Terry Eagleton (2008, p. 13) defines ideology as “the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in. . . those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power”. Ideology itself is not perfect, as Paul Ricoeur (1986, p. 12) points out, but “is to make possible an autonomous politics by providing the needed authoritative concepts that make it meaningful.” The concept needed here that will be of benefit to the Lukan community is that of servant leadership.

In leadership, ideology plays an indisputable role by legitimating authority in politics. The nature of ideology determines the functionality of leadership and politics. This article deals with the nexus of leadership in Christianity, based on Jesus’ view on leadership in Luke’s Gospel. As a result, Ricoeur’s observation is worth citing at length:

Ideology enters here because no system of leadership, even the most brutal, rules only by force, by domination. Every system of leadership summons not only our physical submission but also our consent and cooperation. Every system of leadership wants its rule to rest not merely on domination, then; it also wants its power to be granted because its authority is legitimate. It is ideology’s role to legitimate this authority. More exactly, while ideology serves . . . , as the code of interpretation that secures integration, it does so by justifying the present system of authority.

The ideology within the text of Luke 22:23–27 will be examined using subversive rhetorical hermeneutics. Ideology is not just relating to the people but is about discourse on people. The text in Luke 22:23–27 is about people and the discourse is centred on people, “it represents the points where power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them” (Eagleton 1991, p. 223). The author of Luke’s Gospel demonstrates that the words and actions of the Lukan Jesus are capable of changing his audience positively.

The concern of this article is to emphasise that Luke 22:23–27 sculpts ideology that the Lukan Jesus wanted his disciples to imbibe as they prepared to lead his new community. Using subversive rhetoric in this article enables the language of Luke to be understood by the audience as they listen and read the text. Those disciples of Jesus were able to decipher the subversive nuance and ideology behind the rhetoric as they listened to the Lukan Jesus. Jesus wanted a change in character in the disciples from what they learnt from the empire (Etukumana 2024, pp. 5–6). The only way he could do that was through the use of subversive rhetoric.

3. From Subversive Meal to Subversive Leadership in Luke 22:23–27

Among the three writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, only Luke records and situates his story within the context of the remembrance meal that Jesus shared with his disciples before his death. Luke is believed to have used the context of the meal where Jesus served his disciples (Reich 2011, p. 127) as he introspected the need for humble service to those who will identify with him (Nolland 1993, p. 1062). This meal scene enables the Lukan Jesus to inform his disciples of the leadership model that would be friendly to the Lukan community. That is why v.23 becomes necessary by creating a link between the meal and the discourse on leadership (Nolland 1993, p. 1060). In this text, v.23 acts as a fulcrum through which Jesus' discussion on leadership rotates (Wolter 2017, p. 467). It is obvious that the dispute in v.23 links to the disciples' belief that their master will soon leave them. According to Hans Klein (2006, p. 670), Luke introduces this section so that the disciples will learn to serve one another as Jesus served them during the meal. The argument in this verse points to the intrigue betrayal of Jesus "through the communion fellowship of the church" (Nolland 1993, p. 1060).

It is in this context of the meal and betrayal of Jesus that Luke positions Jesus' teaching on leadership. It shows the need for leadership replacement and leadership transfer. The death of Jesus foretold in v.22 creates a vacuum that must be filled by one of the disciples. Helene A. Shugart (1999, pp. 436–38) describes the painting of Leonardo da Vinci's *On the Last Supper* as rhetorically subversive, depicting many meanings to the scene. The extensive work of R. Alan Streett (2013, p. 291) situates the Lukan meal as the meal that demonstrates the dawn of a new era. The Lukan meal which is the symbol of the Christian meal itself speaks as "subversive and counter to the purpose of the empire" (Streett 2013, p. 25). The meal was to act as a means through which the disciples would keep his memory alive in all generations. All the disciples knew the significance of this event and they quickly canvassed for a replacement. A meal of this nature symbolises patron–client relations and provides an environment for the benefactor to praise their patron (Etukumana 2012, pp. 71–76). Jesus' actions with the disciples contradict the imperial system as he reclined with them and served them. Streett (2013, p. 235) states clearly that

Jesus reclines with ones who have failed him repeatedly and will continue to fail him, and then takes it one step further by serving the tables. For Luke's audience the lesson is clear—they should imitate Jesus and his meal practices and abandon the practices of the status-conscious Gentiles.

The action of Jesus with his disciples depicts that he wanted to use the remembrance meal to communicate to his disciples the need to change their orientation and learn how to serve one another. The leadership style of the Lukan community must be in contrast to the empire. This aspect of leadership is what this article refers to as subversive, which according to Fei Wang (2018, p. 7) "involves power transformation for the purpose of changing the course of action to a desired end." The Lukan Jesus uses a similar meal that was popular in his day to speak to his disciples that leadership is servanthood. This teaching opposes the notion and the belief of the empire. The purpose was to change the social behaviour of the disciples from being dictatorial to "equity and justice" (Wang 2018, p. 5). Using the meal and the rhetoric in 22:23–27, Luke reiterates that servant leadership is the basic leadership norm accepted in the new community.

4. Rhetorical Analysis of Luke 22:23–27

It was earlier noted that for Luke to situate this text within the Lukan remembrance meal scene has a huge implication for biblical scholarship and exegesis. Luke carefully structures his argument through the way he arranges his work (Wolter 2017, p. 467). We discussed the function of v.23 in the preceding heading. The opening of v.24 follows the Lukan peculiarity of using *εγένετο δε* "it happened" along rhetorical *chreia* to invite the audience to the insatiable human behaviour common in all society (Nolland 1993, p. 1064; Wolter 2017, p. 467). The *φιλονεικία* "contention or argument" as to who is

μείζων “greatest” among the disciples resonates with the aspiration of their immediate environment—Greco–Roman society (Keener 1993, p. 250). The progression of the context from the one *who will betray Jesus* to the one *who will take his position of leadership* becomes very intriguing in the text. The Lukan Jesus in the text knows that “the greatest burdens of leadership is the propensity for people to compete with one another rather than co-operating as a team, and Jesus’ disciples were no different in this respect” (Sproul 1999, p. 392). Thus, this demonstrates that the rhetorical strategy is indeed hidden, requiring the attentive audience to understand the actual betrayal, as Jesus sees it. It is the climax of the subversion that he has been teaching, such that his followers aspire to be the greatest.

The leadership method of their immediate environment warranted the disciples to gamble for a position of power similar to the empire and contrasts that of Jesus. They were influenced by the leadership style exerted by the emperors (Keener 1993, p. 250). Prominence and fame are what kings and lords look for as they rule their people. Luke carefully scripts the text by repeatedly using the term μείζων “greater” in this verse, which Jesus re-echoes in vv. 26 and 27 (Nolland 1993, p. 1064). It is strongly believed that this word, μείζων, captured the attention of Jesus since it contradicts Jesus’ belief and lifestyle regarding leadership principles (Luke 5:12–13; 9:13–17; 9:51–56; 17:11–15; 19:4–10). The interruption of the disciples in their argument as to who will be the greatest saturates the teachings of the Lukan Jesus in this text and flavours it with ancient rhetorical nuances. To subvert their belief about leadership and its position, Luke introduces the Lukan Jesus teaching in vv. 25–26 with the ancient subversion rhetorical device of *paranetic synchrisis* (Wolter 2017, p. 468).¹ The timely interruption of the disciples by Jesus makes the text one of the most vital rhetorical texts in the Lukan narrative. The reason for the interruption has not been provided by many scholars of the New Testament (Kurz 1985, p. 251). Luke’s arrangement of the text is such that the disciples were amazed at what Jesus said to them. They understood the underlying ideology of the statement which is contrary to their popular opinion. This is carefully scripted by Luke using δὲ “but” which signals a departure from the earlier disciples’ ideology and belief. The Lukan Jesus’ statement in v.25 reads: Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν κυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν, καὶ οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες αὐτῶν ἐδεργέται καλοῦνται. “But he said to them, the kings of the nations (Gentiles) rule over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors.” The practice of benefaction was common in the Lukan immediate environment. Many of these benefactors used their patronage to exploit their clients (Marshall 2009, p. 45; Etukumana 2012, p. 70). Therefore, the statement of Jesus in v.25 is the statement of fact describing the attitudes of these leaders towards their followers.

5. The Kings of the Gentiles as Benefactors

The interruption and interjection of the Lukan Jesus provide a lesson that the disciples needed throughout their lifetime. A lesson that will dissipate their initial ideology about leadership. The phrase Οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν “The kings of the nations (Gentiles)” to the Lukan Jesus is a bad example of leadership when viewed from the synchrisis rhetorical device. It is a bad example in the sense that nature and the manner they exercised authority over their people distinctively made them tyrants. τῶν ἐθνῶν “of the nations or Gentiles” as used in Luke is in contrast to the Jews (Horsley 2010, pp. 11–13). Luke’s use of this phrase implies “the Gentile nations” (Luke 2:32; 21:24–25). Seyoon Kim (2008, pp. 89–90) regards Caesar as a typical example of a Gentile leader who exercised power over his people in a dictatorial way. These kings were interested in ruling the subjects and receiving worship from them.

Jerome H. Neyrey (2005, pp. 7–9) mentions six different synonyms that the ancient Greco–Roman used to describe ἐδεργέται (plural form of ἐδεργέτης) as king, father, saviour, benefactor, creator, and sovereign. All these titles were used to explain the meaning of ἐδεργέτης “benefactor” in Greco–Roman society. Jonathan Marshall (2009, p. 312) notes “Luke’s use of ἐδεργέτης to describe those in authority over the Gentile kings corresponds with the language of benefaction.” These kings attracted to themselves the same power

that people were giving to God. According to Luke, Jesus implies that the Gentile nations worship their kings as gods, and these kings rule over their subjects as though they were slaves. While the kings were worshipped, they determined the future of their subjects. Life and death were in the hands of these kings. Many dictatorial and undemocratic leaders all over the world seem to rule their nations and their people like these ancient benefactors. Even when these leaders are brutal and siphoning the resources of their countries from their people, their people will still worship them. The aim of the Lukan Jesus in teaching his disciples was for them to act differently from these Gentile kings.

These words κυριεύουσιν, “rule or lord” ἐξουσιάζοντες, “authority or dominion” and καλοῦνται “call or name” are carefully worded by Luke to show the exchange and reciprocity that existed between the benefactors and their people. The use of καλοῦνται “call or name” by Luke could be seen as a metaphor for “worship” or “praise.” Luke’s use of a passive form of καλέω implies that the people *called* these kings benefactors (Marshall 2009, p. 307). In contrast to Marshall, the succeeding v.26 rhetorical explains its meaning in Lukan usage in this context. These people called their kings benefactors as a means of sycophancy. The ability of these kings to keep their people poor might be a reason for the people to call them benefactors to attract sympathy to the people. This is not far from what is happening in many African countries, where sycophancy and hero worship become the means of attracting attention from their rulers (Mutonono 2018, pp. 110–12).

It therefore means that while the benefactors or the kings ruled and exercised dominion and authority over their subjects, the subjects owed them the duty to praise and worship them as gods. Without this reciprocity, the benefactors or the kings will not provide the needed benefits to their subjects. This prompted the Lukan Jesus to use it as an example of poor and negative leadership to his disciples (Klein 2006, p. 670). This is similar to the notion of Philo who describes Flaccus as one of the examples of bad leaders. Philo (*Fla* 126, 131) attests that Greco–Roman people called their rulers or kings δεσπότην καὶ εὐεργέτην καὶ σωτήρα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα “master and benefactor and saviour and the like” and the same kings would later maltreat his people and overturn judgment against his people (Neyrey 2005, p. 474; Wolter 2017, p. 469).

6. Servant leadership in the Lukan Community: A Reversal to Benefactors of the Empire

V.26 highlights the importance of the Lukan Jesus’ statement through the use of paraenetic syncrisis rhetoric, ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως “But not so with you” (RSV). The use of this phrase contradicts the earlier phrase in v.25 concerning the attitude of the Gentile leaders toward their people. The Lukan Jesus’ statement is a clear irony to the practice of the Greco–Roman world. Michael Wolter (2017, p. 469) sees the use of δὲ as adversative in the text, especially when used alongside οὐχ οὕτως, ἀλλ.’ The Lukan Jesus employs the phrase paraenetically to inject systemic change within the disciples. The syncritic use of ὁ μείζων, ὁ ἡγούμενος, and ὁ διακονῶν in the text is subversive, antithesis, and opposite to what happened in the preceding verse. Here, the Lukan Jesus advises his disciples to act to the contrary. The greatest in the context of the Lukan community must be the youngest, and the greatest should be the one who serves the people. Through the use of subversive irony in the text, the Lukan Jesus expects his disciples to behave contrary to the way and manner found in the Greco–Roman society and its leadership. The Lukan Jesus’ leadership ideology emphasises that elders should serve the younger ones. According to Luke, Jesus implies that the Gentile nations worship their kings as gods, and these kings rule over their subjects as though they were slaves. While the Greco–Roman kings ruled over their subjects, in the new Lukan Jesus’ community, leaders are to serve the people. To properly understand Jesus’ rhetorical role in this text, we arrange the text (Luke 22:25–26) using paraenetical syncrisis as **A** and **B**, as shown below:

- *And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors (RSV).*
- *But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become the youngest, and the leader as one who serves (RSV).*

From the analysis, **A** and **B** serve as a syncretism where two leadership styles are compared. The **A** leadership style is what is popular with the Gentile kings and lords. It is an acceptable leadership style in the Lukan environment and surroundings. **B** injects paraenesis rhetoric with the use of “But not so with you”. Jesus introducing this phrase succeeds in his use of subversive rhetoric to the Lukan community. The reason is to advise the disciples to the contrary leadership lifestyle found in **A**. Instead, the statement in **B** shows an obvious contrast to the statement in **A**. The disciples’ attitude is to be a servant who serves the people instead of imitating kings and Lords. This contradicts the meaning of status in antiquity where age and position determined one’s rank and social status in society (Keener 1993, p. 250). Jesus aims at distancing the disciples from the system similar to that of *the other nations*. Philip Esler (1987, p. 208) notes that the Lukan Jesus “is not espousing the abolition of this political and social pattern. . . , he is merely denying it any place in the Christian community”. As a matter of emphasis, the Christian community is not expected to follow the system of leadership in **A**.

7. Jesus’ Leadership: An Example to the Lukan Community

The use of subversive rhetoric in vv.25–26 built up to v.27 where the Lukan Jesus uses himself as teaching aid to his disciples to understand the meaning of the *μεἰζων* “greatest”. The arrangement of v.27 serves as a summary of vv.25–26 and the conclusion of v.27 is similar to that of v.26. The Lukan Jesus achieves the climax of his rhetorical subversive strategy by comparing two different people with different statuses. By comparing *ὁ ἀνακείμενος* “the one reclining at the table” and *ὁ διακονῶν* “the one serving”, Jesus aims at teaching the disciples the importance of role reversal in one’s leadership service to humanity. Jesus does not only teach the disciples using verbal rhetoric but he uses himself to demonstrate that his service to the community is a role reversal. As alleged by Wolter (2017, p. 471):

From the side of the narrated addressees and readers, it is presupposed as christological knowledge that Jesus’s status as Kyrios, Son of God, and Messiah is known to them. Against the background of this knowledge, Jesus himself, namely through the adoption of the role of the *διακονῶν* within the circle of the disciples, becomes the ethical prefiguration of the top-down-inversion of status and role required by him.

Hans Klein (2006) adds that this role shows that Jesus *in der er sich als Vorbild hinstellt* “sets himself up as a role model” for the disciples to follow. The statement of Jesus in this text forms the climax of the teaching of Jesus to the Lukan community on leadership. The action of Jesus demonstrates the reversal of the already established benefaction leadership system. It is the one that reclines at the table that is the master while the slaves serve them. Again, as Klein points out, Jesus’ model contradicts this role. The greater must be the one that serves as a slave. In the new Lukan community, the tendency is that those who are masters will serve the slaves. Luke’s portrait of Jesus brings about what Mary Ann Beavis (1994, p. 363) calls “the reversal of sociocultural expectations” that “underlines the message of deliverance for marginalized people” (Luke demonstrates a similar reversal in 9:46–48). The meal scene resonates with the idea that the one reclining at the table serves as a servant during the meal. The application of antithesis in the text evokes a paradigm shift, implicating a role reversal where the younger is the one greatest and the one governing is the one serving at the table (Yan 2019, p. 236). “But, I am among you as the one who serves” is a clear example of leadership expected of the new community. By this statement, the Lukan Jesus does not only reverse the leadership role of the empire but he establishes a leadership style that has become an ideology to his new community—a servant leadership system where the leader serves their subject. Service is the intrinsic requirement of leadership in the Christian community.

8. Servant leadership in Luke 22:23–27 as an Ideology to the Christian Community Today

Humanity is in dire need of a servant leader in all spheres of human leadership (Horsman 2018, pp. 15–16), and the literature on this topic has reached its crescendo. The rhetorical nuance in the Lukan texts echoes this need. Luke's narrative on servant leadership is ironic to the leadership system of the ancient world. Throughout his narrative, Luke carefully negotiates that the Lukan Jesus used action and words to subvert the leadership system of the empire. Jesus' servant leadership is in opposition to the benefactor system. It is a call to the new community to act differently from the worldly system of rulership. By implication, it means that a leader is called to be a servant or a slave to the people (Yung 2021, p. 5). Service to humanity becomes the ideological principle infused in the disciples by the Lukan Jesus.

Lack of adequate service to humanity always results in many problems that are facing humanity today and such problems are migration (*Japa syndrome* in Africa), corruption, wars, and poverty. These are global problems. The entire world is faced with these problems due to poor leadership. The rhetorical nuance in Luke 22:23–27 aims at reversing such abnormality in human existence. In the Lukan leadership ideology, service comes first before any position. The position comes as a result of one's selfless service to his or her community. This is evident in Luke's use of *διακονέω* repeatedly in the text. The repetitive rhetoric of *ὁ διακονῶν* in v.27 is subversive. It entails service as the ultimate ideology to the Lukan community and the Christian community. It is the leadership ideology that the Lukan Jesus believes will reverse and subvert the leadership system that impoverishes human existence.

The plot, the setting of the meals, and the language of the text in Luke 22:23–27 alert the disciples to the need to behave differently from the already known norm of their immediate environment. The Lukan Jesus uses the meal scene to present and subvert the benefactor system of the Roman Empire and establishes a new system with a different ideology for his new community, an ideology that is based on servant leadership which "represents a shift from followers serving leaders to leaders serving followers" (Dhiman and Roberts 2023, p. xvi).

The Christian community is expected to be the service provider to humanity, following the examples of Jesus. Service to humanity and the community is an implicit and intrinsic value of servant leadership. The Christian communities in Africa where immigration (*Japa syndrome*) affects the entire continent and the best brains leave the continent as a result of poor leadership need servant leaders. The Christian community is expected to use their leadership style and subvert the system that is unfavourable to human existence. Africa is not the only continent that is affected by bad leadership. What would the Lukan Jesus do differently in the wars between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas in Palestine, banditry and terrorism, and the poverty and immigration problems affecting humanity today?

The Lukan Jesus would have reiterated the same phrase *ὁ μὲν δὲ οὐχ οὕτως* "but this must not be among you" (Luke 22:26). It was emphasised that this phrase means a lot to Jesus' actions and character. It defined the ethos of the new community. It is what Jesus wants his followers to imbibe. It is the total opposite of the empire and the beliefs of their kings. It is a stern warning to act differently from the "normal" way of doing things. It means adopting an approach that will not be inimical to the people. It is a means that will subversively change abnormal situations to normal situations for the benefit of the common humanity. For instance, in South Africa, Nelson Mandela was able to subvert the apartheid republic to a democratic republic (Salazar 2002, pp. 53–57) by adopting a method that was contrary to the apartheid republic and by so doing subversively changed the old apartheid republic to a new democratic republic (Cawood 2014, pp. 47–48). Mandela believed that in building a new nation, the actions and the rhetoric of the old nation must be different from those of the new nation. When he was returning from prison he said that his actions of new South Africa must be different from the actions of the old South Africa. These actions of his caused something new in him when he wrote "These actions made me think that

the South Africa I was returning to was far different from the one I had left" (Mandela 1994, p. 674, italic mine). Through the use of subversive rhetoric, Mandela as a servant leader was able to avert what would have plunged his country into an unending conflict by offering something different, "forgiveness" as "a better way forward" that changed the historical landscape of South Africa in its entirety and humanity (Yung 2021, p. 3). Doing things differently for the benefit of humanity is the rhetoric that Luke invites the Christian community to partake in as an acceptable method of leadership that the Lukan Jesus offers to humanity as a way of life.

9. Conclusions

This article examined the content of Luke 22:23–27 using subversion rhetoric to extract the embedded ideology in the text. Such text has a hidden transcript that can only be decoded by the reading community. It was emphasised that the Lukan community did not read the text of Luke with different meanings. Rather, they read it with the single meaning that was understood by the community, thus dismissing the theories of polysemy and polyvalence understanding of the Lukan subversive rhetoric. It was realised that the Lukan Jesus used subversive rhetoric to teach his disciples to view leadership positions differently from the way the Empire saw it. Luke used subversive rhetoric to enshrine in his community the ideology that would change the narrative of leadership from what they already knew.

Using subversive rhetoric within the context of the Lukan remembrance meal enabled the Lukan Jesus to inject into the Lukan community a true meaning of leadership that is different from the one practiced by the kings around them. The Lukan Jesus contradicted this system of leadership and established servant leadership using himself as a model. The Lukan Jesus aimed at teaching his disciples to emulate his example as a servant leader who served among them.

The servant leadership is the system of leadership that the Lukan Jesus offered to his disciples as an ideology of leadership to the Lukan community. This ideology implies that the Lukan community must live for the benefit of humanity. The Lukan Jesus implored his community that leaders should be servants. He showed himself as an example when he offered to serve them as a servant. Jesus served his disciples with humility and gentleness "But, I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:26), leaving them an example to follow. It was also observed that the Christian community should imitate the Lukan Jesus' servant leadership. Nelson Mandela was used as an example of those who employed subversion rhetoric to read the script of the apartheid system differently to the benefit of South Africa and the common humanity. Mandela's actions and words transformed Mandela into a servant leader as he served his people, ". . . I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. . . I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands" (Mandela 1994, p. 676).

The present situations facing humanity today ranging from wars, immigration, insecurity, poor leadership, diseases, and poverty live with us. The question that comes to mind is what would Jesus do differently to mitigate the problems for the benefit of humanity if Jesus were to be in our situation today? This and many other questions beg answers from the Christian community as they read the Lukan Jesus' actions and words. Therefore, imitation of Jesus becomes both invocative and prophetic, through which the Christian community can navigate their way as they interact and serve one another.

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Note

¹ Paraenetic syncrisis is a combination of two rhetorical nuances that form a single whole when applied in a given text. Paraenetic (paraenesis or paranesis) is an exhortation to the contrary, while syncrisis is a rhetorical device in which two opposite things or figures or words are compared. Paraenetic syncrisis (advice to the contrary) as a rhetorical device, therefore, is an exhortation, especially about morals to the contrary or opposite beliefs or morals (Kennedy 2003, pp. 52–55). Its application in the Lukan narrative is captivating and intriguing.

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