

Actions as Means of Reconciliation in the Greco-Roman World: Its Hermeneutical Importance in Luke's Gospel

Godwin A. Etukumana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8967-6677>

- Department of Religious Management and Cultural Studies, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria
-

Abstract

Reconciliation is not a rhetorical nuance; rather, it implies several actions that must be carried out for it to be affected. Reconciliation as an ancient practice was something that ancient people could feel, touch and experience. Examining reconciliation as an ancient practice becomes necessary to shed light on this ancient and important practice. The practice of this process in the Greco-Roman world was carried out using several actions. These actions, and how such actions were used in defining the reconciliation process, were carefully examined. It was discovered that actions such as healing, rituals, eating of meals and exchange of gifts were some of the actions that ancient Greco-Romans used to achieve reconciliation. Examining some of these actions in the Greco-Roman world will help in the hermeneutical understating of the contemporary literature that existed during that period. The Gospel of Luke naturally fits into such ancient documents and its examination showed that the process of reconciliation was similar both in the Greco-Roman and the Gospel of Luke. Many actions of Jesus in Luke's Gospel are aimed at achieving the process of reconciliation.

Keywords: Reconciliation; Greco-Roman; Rituals; Healing; Luke's Gospel; Exchange; Meal

Introduction

Whenever one uses the term reconciliation, what tends to come to mind is the rhetorical nuances associated with it. Reconciliation is not considered a process but rhetoric or a ploy. Reconciliation in the modern concept is often carried out using nuances that perhaps fit such occasion. This is in contrast to the ancient world, where the term "reconciliation" seemed to be absent as merely a means of rhetoric. The argument in this article recognises that reconciliation in ancient Greco-Roman society was carried out using several actions that correlated with the cultural norms of the people of the ancient world. In trying to authenticate this notion, some of these actions that buttressed the principle of reconciliation of the time become necessary for us to know that reconciliation was not something that ancient people bragged about but what they lived and practised in their society. It was the action that defined the meaning of reconciliation in their world. Considering the actions of that time will help in shedding light and insights on the early assertion that Greco-Roman society practised reconciliation as a lifestyle and therefore did not consider it necessary to use the term often as is often the

case today. Plutarch once said that the wise, the ancient Greeks and Romans, preferred speaking through actions or signs instead of through words. This article argues that the concept of reconciliation that is found in the New Testament is similar to that of the Greco-Roman world. This article focuses on the actions as means of reconciliation in the Greco-Roman world and their importance to the hermeneutic understanding in Luke's Gospel. The question that comes to mind is how reconciliation can be understood from the perspective of the ancient world. Can this understanding help in shedding light on the Gospel of Luke? To achieve this, this article will use socio-historical hermeneutics to investigate how different actions were used for reconciliation in the ancient Greco-Roman world. The application of socio-historical interpretation (MacDonald, 1988:23; Webb, 1991:26–27) will draw insight hugely from the Greco-Roman world and partly from the Old Testament

Cilliers Breytenbach (2010:171–172) sees the creation of friendship as a result of reconciliation in a place where such friendship was estranged. This friendship can be affected through the use of many actions. These actions became sacrosanct in achieving reconciliation in the ancient world. These actions were tantamount to reconciliation and its metaphors in the ancient world.

This article intends to deal with those actions that help in providing insights into the concept of reconciliation in the Greco-Roman world. The reason for examining it is to show that actions, and not only words, were important when reconciliation was sought in antiquity. These actions, though they might not always be recognised as attempting reconciliation, actually depict the very process of reconciliation itself. Such actions had to be appropriated within their context to be effective and to be regarded as enacting reconciliation. Proper examination of these actions within their original context will shed light on understanding this concept in the Greco-Roman society. However, while actions were important in effecting reconciliation in the ancient world, many of the invocations that brought about the process of reconciliation were through words. A typical example of this is the invocation in Luke 22:19–20, where Jesus invoked “his body” and “his blood” to buttress his sacrificial action as a means of reconciliation.

A quick survey of the ancient world shows that it was ravaged by diseases, wars and social vices. Those vices were capable of separating and causing an estrangement between people. For instance, disease (νόσος) was a common phenomenon that affected all of humanity and it was, according to Socrates, an evil that causes discomfort to humanity (*Mem.* 4.31–32). The disease was capable of causing disunity and estrangement between people; the same notion was witnessed in other social vices such as war (Chanotis, 2005:1–6; Raaflaub (2007:9) and banishment (Suetonius, *Aug.* 24.1; Forsdyke 2005:11, 30–34; Jones 2008:85–86). To forestall the estrangements caused by disease and social vices, both divine and human actions were needed to bring about reconciliation (Breytenbach 2010:176). As Breytenbach (2010, 176) acknowledges, “reconciliation is an action of God” that is carried out through both the divine and human agent. Dionysius (*Ant. rom.* 8.50.3–4) writes that Valeria was able to admonish Marcus with the already-known customs of their society concerning reconciliation, believing that Marcus would listen and let go of his hostility when she (Valeria) said: “For the gods themselves, who in the first place instituted and delivered to us these customs, are disposed to forgive offences (αμαρτημασια) of men and are easily reconciled” (ευδιαλλακατοι). Mbabazi (2013:70–71) adds that examples of these customs and

actions are prayer and sacrifice, Stanley Porter (1994:13) sees the exchange as one of the actions that enabled hostility to be removed between warring parties in the ancient world. Godwin Etukumana (2020:34–37) sees a healing metaphor for reconciliation in the ancient world. Based on this idea, the understanding of reconciliation is conceptualised.

Unfortunately, the term “reconciliation” itself is not found in the Gospel of Luke, but certain words or groups of words found in Luke can easily be understood by those who are familiar with the concept of reconciliation. Words and phrases such as ἡγεμονεύοντος (2:2) ἀπηλλάχθαι from ἀπαλλάσσω (12:58), πρεσβείαν (14:32; 19:14), ἀλλήλων (23:12), ἔχθρα, φίλοι and φιλία (23:12) (Stein 1992:367; Porter 1994:123; Bash 1997:164; Myers & Enns 2009:126) point out that Luke’s Gospel has teachings on reconciliation.

These words or phrases are insulated within the Lukan text in the form of actions. A careful study of these actions and rituals provides a succinct definition of reconciliation as “a process or an action in which rituals like sacrifices and exchanges are involved for the purpose of eliminating the hostility between people and God, and between people” (Etukumana 2016:248). Some of these actions are better examined to know how the ancient world used these actions to affect the process of reconciliation in their world.

Healing

One of the problems that faced the ancient world, as acknowledged by Suetonius, Chaniotis (2005), Forsdyke (2005), and Raaflaub (2007), was that of disease. Diseases and sickness were sometimes regarded as punishment from the gods and as such, this could hinder human relationships with one another (Sigerist 1941:1–26).¹ It also led to the exclusion of the afflicted person. As a result of social stigmatisation and exclusion of the sick, healing was regarded as the only means of reintegration into society. Healing was thus sought by people who did not want to die or be separated from their people (Aelius Aristides, *Heracles*, 40:11). All diseases were healed, and many testified of deliverance from danger because of the powerful hand of Poseidon and Heracles. The power of Heracles was believed to have been manifested in almost all human situations to deliver them from death and danger (Aelius Aristides, *Heracles*, 40:12).² Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* alleges that when diseases invaded Rome, the senate decreed that Asclepius should be brought to help in healing the people within their empire and not to terminate the lives of the people of Rome (*Metamorphoses*, 15.622.745). It was the custom of the Greco-Roman people to separate the sick people from the healthy ones. The sick were sent to the shrine of Asclepius to be healed by the god. Healing itself may not have been regarded as reconciliation, but it was a means through which the sick persons experienced forgiveness and reconciliation within their communities.

In antiquity, special indignation was labelled against the sick people as incapacitated elements of society, since they were regarded as weak and indisposed for any societal

¹ The Stoics believed that incurable sickness is enough to cause one to commit suicide, and that without health, nothing is of good use. Many ancient philosophers and orators believed that nothing can be compared to good health (Sigerist, 1941:55–60).

² See also, P. Aelius Aristides. 1981. *The complete works*, Translated by Charles A. Behr. Leiden: Brill 240–241.

function.³ For one to be counted worthy, he or she had to be healthy and certified suitable to play a crucial function in society. The way the ancient Greco-Romans regarded sickness and disease is clear from the popularity of Asclepius among the gods within the empire. Asclepius was the god that possessed the secret of human existence through his power to effect healing.

Sickness was seen as punishment from the gods, and as such, anyone who suffered from sickness was seen as someone who had committed sin against a god or the gods and therefore deserved the consequences of his or her sin. Inscriptions from Asia Minor are characterised by how the suppliant presented his or her thanksgivings to Asclepius, who healed and restored his health. The following example of experiencing reconciliation through the healing of a sick person occurs in the work of Plutarch (Pompey 57.1–2) who says:

After this Pompey had a dangerous illness at Naples, but recovered from it, and on the advice of Praxagoras the Neapolitans offered sacrifices of thanksgiving for his preservation...No place could contain those who came to greet him from all quarters, but roads and villages and ports were filled with sacrificing and feasting throngs. Many also with garlands on their heads and lighted torches in their hands welcomed and escorted him on his way, pelting him with flowers, so that his progress and return to Rome was a most beautiful and splendid sight.

The separation from people was one of the methods that the ancient Greco-Romans used to affect the healing of sick persons. Since sickness or ill health was regarded as something that led to perpetual "disability or disablement" and caused many people to become useless, especially the poor ones; only Asclepius unrelentingly took care of the poor ones and slaves when sickness attacked them (Edelstein and Edelstein 1945:174–176). James Sands Elliott (1971:4–5) attests that the people who were separated from their homes were littering at the shrines of Asclepius until their health was restored before they went back to their homes.⁴

The author of the Gospel of Luke holds a similar notion regarding the sick people during his time (5:12–16; 17:11–19). Sickness was a means of separation; healing brought people closer and bridged the distance that separated the people. For instance,

³ Unlike the Jewish people, the Greeks and Roman were not in the habit of separating sick persons from their society. What they were struggling to do was to proffer a solution to the person's sickness. The argument here is that while they were trying to proffer a solution to illness, perhaps the sick person suffered some inhuman treatment that demeaned his or her dignity as a person. If not, the popular Hippocratic Oath would not have been formulated in the first instance. The way the Jewish community treated some specified sick people was different from that of the Greeks and Roman in the Greco-Roman world. The work of later Jewish writings during this period still held to the Mosaic Code on curative measures of some diseases and the way they treated the patient. Discrimination against sick people among the Greeks and Roman is not known to present scholarship, but it was prevalent among the Jewish community (Suidas, *Lexicon s.v Dominos*).

⁴ Sleeping in the sanctuary of Asclepius was said to fasten the healing process in the sick one. Many inscriptions from Asia Minor attest that the people were healed upon sleeping in the shrines (Asclepeia). Sleeping in the shrines brought healing that was a means of reconciling suppliants with their families. Many barren women whose marriages were at the threshold of being collapsed were restored after giving birth to children. For instance, "Andromache of Epeirus, for the sake of offspring. She slept in the Temple and saw a dream. It seemed to her that a handsome boy uncovered her, after that the god touched her with his hand, whereupon a son was born to Adromache from Arybbas" (Edelstein and Edelstein 1945:235).

the leper texts in Luke (5:11–21; 17:11–19) serve to inform the modern reader that people who suffered certain diseases were removed from the social and cultic life of the ancient people during Luke's time. The context of Luke 17:11–19 is Luke's *Sondergut*, and it relates to healing that brings about reconciliation, since leprosy was removed from the human community. Leprosy is the only disease for which the Priestly material prescribes two rituals for the sufferer to be restored or reconciled into the community of people. This is seen in the way that the people who were sick roamed the street and were not allowed to interact with healthy people.

One of the earlier mandates given to the disciples by Jesus, according to Luke, aimed at healing the sick as a physical sign that indicates the presence of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ among the people (Luke 10:9). Bringing hope to those ravaged by sickness and diseases signals the redemptive effect of the ministry of the early Jesus' disciples to the community in which they found themselves. It was pointed out earlier that healing was very crucial in restoring relationships and building social strata and bonds within society (Etukumana, 2020:34–36). The liberation of the people from the shackles of sickness and diseases entails a dynamic shift from bondage to freedom brought to the people by the coming messiah (Bazzana 2009:236–239). Thus, such freedom creates a sense of forgiveness and wholeness in those who previously suffered from the sickness. This sense of wholeness and forgiveness of sin as a result of healing will naturally invite a sense of reconciliation with God and the people around him. Healing as an action is a means of reconciliation.

Ritual

Rituals played a significant role in the reconciliation process between gods and humans and between humans themselves. It played a unique role in the daily events of any community. Their duties to the gods, the state and one another were tied to the process of ritualisation. In any religious society, it is often difficult to perform a credible action or duty without being involved in ritual (τελετουργία). Ritual, Tom Driver (1991:99–187) claims, offers its ultimate moments in places such as in a shrine, state house, wedding, funeral feast or any kind of ceremony. Lisa Schirch (2005:17) adds that ritual uses symbolic actions to communicate a forming or transforming message in a unique social space. Any action that is used to affect a social, cultural, religious, or political communication of a set of beliefs or principles can be said to be a ritual. The religious, social, and political life of the Greco-Roman society was nurtured by rituals.

Whether in transgressing a sacred precinct or in the socio-political affairs of the polis, ritual actions had to be performed. The reason for performing a ritual was to make sure that the action that necessitated it was driven by the inmost part of human understanding to fortify its meaning. It can be termed as a "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical being or power" (Turner 1967:19). People were conditioned to believe that actions performed in reverence to the supernatural had a bearing on their duty as humans. Thus ritual conveys a religious freight within a given social and political structure of a system. For instance, the Athenians seemed to respect the place of ritual in the political sphere when they decided to seal the amnesty given to oligarchs by taking an oath. Xenophon (in Huang 2008:96) says that "oaths were sworn that there should be an amnesty for all that had happened in the past, and to this day both parties live together as fellow citizens." After

driving away from the tyrant king Tarquinius, the Roman people had to take a special oath that never again would they allow a tyrant to rule over them (Dionysius, *Ant. Rom.* 5.1.1–3). These are clear examples that indicate the place of rituals in the political domain of the ancient world.

The idea of religious transgression and pollution was a religious motivation towards establishing ritual actions, which aimed at communicating symbolically between a god and the suppliant. To accomplish reconciliation, a ritual had to be carried out. The nature of the sin committed determined the type of ritual action that had to be performed. It could take the form of propitiation, ransom, expiation, and sometimes death, as in the case of Ajax in the play of Sophocles.

Inscriptions in the Greco-Roman world have shown that many people who were involved in the process of reconciliation did so through some sort of ritual. While inscription itself might not be a means of reconciliation as proposed by Rostad (2006:15), Konstan, on the other hand, emphasises that stele might not have much to do with the process of reconciliation; rather, he argues that reconciliation was achieved not by raising the inscription but “by admitting the transgression and performing rituals of propitiation” (Konstan 2010:89). The function of these inscriptions was feasible after the dedicant had been forgiven and reconciled to the god and not only to the god but also to humans. Such rituals could take the form of prayer, fasting, confession, sleeping (as in *Asclepeia*), washing or libation. When an action aims at resolving a problem between two people, factions or parties, such a ritual can be termed a reconciliation ritual,⁵ since it is meant to glue and mend the broken relationship.

Konstan (2010:13–14) believes that supplication as a ritual played a crucial role in the act of forgiveness and reconciliation in the classical world. Citing F.S. Naiden (2006:29–169), Konstan puts forward his argument by acknowledging that the classical world had a four-step supplication ritual that effected reconciliation. The steps are as follows: in the first place, the suppliant approached the supplicand,⁶ and secondly, verbal touching would be exercised by the suppliant as in (*Od.* 6.141–8),⁷ and thirdly, the suppliant would now put forward his or her petition with an argument that would convince the supplicand, and the last stage was for the supplicand to either accept or reject it.

Plato (*Men.*244a–b) adds that apart from sacrifice and prayer in the course of reconciliation, memory rituals play an unmatched role in reconciliation by freighting people's minds back to the past for future reconciliation to be tenable. The civil ritual was also applicable in effecting forgiveness and reconciliation. The civil ritual in this context refers to the pact the Athenians signed in 403 BCE that led to the forgiveness of the oligarchs who betrayed the Athenians by their attitude to the people. Thus Robin Osborne (2010:405) is correct when he observes that the Athenians' life comprised "a

⁵ David Konstan (2010:164), in alignment with Mill (200381) and Aristotle, believes that apology is a ritual because it involves the humiliation of one person before another. It shows an act of humiliation, and therefore such ritual should be termed a *humiliation ritual*.

⁶ A supplicand is a person to whom the suppliant is directing his or her supplication; it could be a god, altar or a sacred precinct. For more on supplicand see Konstan (2010:13–14)

⁷ Verbal touching in this context means using memory as if the actual action is being carried out by the suppliant. It delineates the theory that words can be more powerful than action. Touching the supplicand at this point of supplication may mean an acute insult to his or her personality and perhaps lead to the cancellation of the process of reconciliation (Konstan, 2010:13).

never-ending sequence of rituals". Many scholars are in accord with him that the Greco-Roman concept of ritual emphasises that the lives of the people were regulated by ritual actions in which they participated as a matter of routine. Their political lifestyles and decisions were all shaped by a ritual calendar (Osborne 2010:406–408).

For Plato to acknowledge that the Athenians' reconciliation was made possible by a ritual memory is very insightful. And that the Athenians employed it for their unity has substantiated the value which the ancient Greco-Roman attached to ritual. How ritual actions were performed in the religious, social and political spheres informs present scholarship that ritual was used as one of the means of reconciliation and most often as an element that repaired their estranged relationship.

Gerald A. Klingbeil (2016:425) posits that ritual in the New Testament has "communicative ability" in its action when such action is closely observed by an onlooker. Klingbeil further acknowledges that the location of such rituals plays a vital role in the ritualisation process. A ritual may have not a specified location also a time attached to such ritual. For instance, Luke often informs his audience of the place and time in which Jesus and his disciples engaged in prayer and other ritual actions (6:12; 9:28; 22:45). Ritual is very important in maintaining private and communal religiosity. Luke's ritualisation is intensified in the texts where rituals such as circumcision, prayer, fasting, preaching, touching and eating a meal are common (5:33-35; 8:1; 9:6; 22:19–20).

The blood ritual has an impeccable place in the Old Testament based on various sacrifices carried out on behalf of the people (Exod 12:13). The blood of the Passover lamb that Moses used in striking the lintel of the Jewish people in Egypt has a different and more spiritualised meaning in Luke. Luke sees the blood ritual as being fulfilled in the death of Jesus as the blood of the new covenant for the redemption of Jesus' community (22:20). Luke sees the blood of the new covenant as the blood of reconciliation. It has been acknowledged earlier that ritual played a crucial role in Israel's religiosity and "That Luke is aware of this is evident in his emphasis on the importance of ritual and sacrifices as actions of reconciliation in his narrative (5:14; 17:14; 22:19-20; 23:30-40)" (Etukumana, 2020:43). As Klingbeil (2016:428) clearly shows that ritual "[points] to important underlying concepts and presuppositions", and in the case of Luke, it is within the framework of enactment of reconciliation with estranged fellows.

Eating of Meal

Many scholars believe that meals (δεῖπνον) play a dynamic role, not only in religious settings but also in social and political environments.⁸ Generally, meals consisted of both the δεῖπνον and συμπόσιον, in other words the eating and drinking sections or party (Finney 2012:168). Meals came to be a standard way of life in the Greco-Roman world from 200 BCE, with the formulation of customs that were observed by the people (Smith

⁸ Paul in his letter to Corinthians (1 Cor.10:19-22) mentions two tables – the table of the Lord (τραπέζης κυρίου) and the table of the devil (τραπέζης δαιμονίων). The contrast is an indication that meals in the Greco-Roman were eaten in the sacred precincts. It could have a connection with the Homeric sacrificial banquet (*Iliad*. 7.321; *Odyssey*, 3. 439-463, 14.418-436, 20.280, 293). Smith (1992, 653) that the Greco-Roman sacred meal carried instruction especially when it was eaten within the holy precincts to the people "do not carry away" (*ou phora*). In the same vein, Plato (*Law*, 2. 653d) adds that the participants were "made whole again" because they dined and wined with the gods

1992:652–653). It was one of the rituals used in society with diverse connotations attached to it. Sharing a meal thus signifies different things depending on the context and place in which the meal took place. Sharing a meal is a means of congregating people who have decided to eat together and share their opinions on the polity of the day. W. A. Meeks (1983:31) expresses that meals offer "the chance for people who had no chance to participate in the politics of the city itself to feel important in their miniature republics". The purpose of initiating a meal added to the meaning and value that would be attached to the meal even before and after the meal; this helped in defining those who qualified to participate at the table. Eating together is an ancient sign of friendship and the same time a means of cementing relationships. Its importance can never be overemphasised as it:

... played a significant role in Greco-Roman society. Meals in the ancient world created social boundaries and bonding. The boundaries defined by the social code of the meal depicted an endorsement and ritualization of the boundaries that existed in society. The process of dining together helped in cementing the social network that existed before they gathered. (Etukumana 2016:80)

The meal's table was not a place for factionalism to arise, but rather a place of love and where unity was accorded its rightful position. The Greco-Roman meal was coded with undertones of etiquette and ritual symbols that aimed at fellowship between different people (Smith 1992:653). The etiquette at the table depended upon the nature of the meal and the purpose thereof (Plato, *Law*, 2.671c; Xenophon, *Sym.* 2.1).

Several moves for good relationships and association in the ancient Greco-Roman world called for the people to see meals as a conveyor as well as custodian of such relationships. Meal scenes were regarded as unique places where breaches between people were repaired in the ancient world. Hal Taussig (2009:33–35) alleges that the emergence of the culture of association in the ancient world cannot be separated from the Greco-Roman meal. Their gathering together was to share a meal on some occasion to create a bond. A meal was a social institution that helped the process of reconciliation within ancient society. In the case of a community meal, the social exchange and experience gathered by the people in the community at all levels, whether at home, theatre or gymnasium, were institutionalised during their communal meal (Klinghardt 2012:10).

Rostad seems to believe that meals were part of the negotiation for propitiation when one sinned against a god in the ancient Greco-Roman world. If this can be proved to be correct, it implies that eating a meal together is part of an action or a reconciliation rite that had to be done for reconciliation to take effect. This assertion is confirmed in one of the reconciliation inscriptions found in Asia Minor, which Rostad (2006:286) labels as BWK₆ in appendix B of his dissertation and it is read as follows:

Polion (dedicates this stele) to Zeus Oreites and Mên Axiottenos, who rules Perkos (or: Perkon) as a king. When (the circumstances) were hidden from me, and I overstepped the border without permission, the gods punished him (= me). In the year 323, on the 30th of the month Dystros. He removed (the transgression) with a triad consisting of a mole, a sparrow and a tuna. He also gave the means of

atonement that by habit is due to the gods when the stele was raised: a modius of wheat and one prokhos of wine. As a meal to the priests, he gave 1½ (?) kypros of wheat, 1½ (?) prokhos of wine, peas and salt. And I have propitiated the gods for the sake of my grand-children and the descendants of my descendants.

The exclusion from a communal meal meant that an individual had offended a god and had thus transgressed a divine boundary. Such an individual or a group of people had to create a marginal community other than the existing community, which was not allowed to take part in the decisions of affairs of the polis or state. One's acceptance at the communal meal was thus an indicator that the person had been reconciled with the community and that his sins had been forgiven by the gods and their human agent (Burkert 1985:301–304).

The significance and importance of meals in the Greco-Roman world are cast succinctly by Plutarch (*Antony* 32.3–5) as a means by which conflicting enemies could reconcile themselves. C. B. R. Pelling (1988:205) describes this scene of a meal as “another powerful scene at sea”, a typical meal of reconciliation. The meeting at Cape Misenum in this scene meal was evocative of their reconciliation since the trio – Antony, Caesar and Sextus Pompey reached their agreement (Pelling 1988:204). The negotiation and agreement preceded the δεῖπνον according to Plutarch in this context; this, however, means that the δεῖπνον was used as a means of sealing the agreement among the three of them. This meal scene posits the usage of a meal in fostering unity since it was difficult for enemies to share the same meal.

The Gospel of Luke displays many instances where meal scenes are mentioned. Meals play a key role in Luke's gospel (e.g. 5:29; 7:36–49; 11:37; 24:30). Students of Luke, such as Jeremias (1966), Marshall (1978b), Fitzmyer (1985), Soards (1987), Green (1997), Heil (1999), Megbelayin (2001) and Etukumana (2017), have identified so many meal scenes in Luke. Of all the meal scenes in Luke's Gospel, the one in Luke 22:19–20 is identified as having a direct bearing on ancient ritual and its meaning.

This meal scene is characterised by many events that signalled semblance to the Greco-Roman reconciliation meal scene. One of the characteristics is that the meal was shared among two unequal people, Jesus and his disciples. It was between their master and the disciples. Secondly, it was aimed at establishing a relationship that was believed to have been severed by human frailty and sin. The invocation at the scene of the meal is well captured by Klingbeil as an innovation of the ancient ritual of sharing a meal (Klingbeil 2016:431–433). Sharing of meal and invocation of “my body and my blood” are reminiscent of the Old Testament method of atonement (Lev 17:11) that directly impacts the action of reconciliation in Luke 22:19–20.

Exchange of Gifts

Greco-Roman literature, from Homer to Plutarch, attests to the exchange of gifts as a means of assuaging anger and creating an atmosphere for reconciliation with one another. For one to reconcile with the gods in the ancient world there was a need of creating an enabling environment through the use of a gift. Appeasement was important if reconciliation was to be enforced between two parties and between the gods and humans. The oldest example of such a move is found in the work of Homer (*Iliad*. 9.121–156) in which Agamemnon wanted to offer gifts to Achilles. The offer was so great that

it extends to forty lines in the *Iliad*. The quantity of the offer prompted Hector to say that “no mortal could scorn any longer these gifts that you offer to Achilles, the king” (*Iliad*, 164-165). The offer aimed to lure Achilles to reconcile with him and fight in “the battle against the Trojans to avenge the death of his friend Patroclus” (Konstan 2010:60).⁹ Unfortunately, Achilles rejected the gifts of his friend Agamemnon; even when Agamemnon sent ambassadors Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix and added his daughter. Achilles thus refused reconciliation. The reason for this refusal was that Achilles said that Agamemnon had taken away his honour and reviled him before the Achaeans “as though I were some alien that had no rights” (*Iliad* 9.646–648). Achilles’ anger came because he believed that Agamemnon treated him as an ἀτίμητον μετανάστην (*Iliad* 9.648) which means having no regard for his person or “a dishonoured outsider or outcast” (Rabel 1997:132) or “vagabond without honour” (Konstan 2010:61).

The reason for Achilles' refusal to accept the Agamemnon's offer is beyond the reach of this study, but worthy of note is that Homer has shed light on the possible way, ancient Greco-Romans performed forgiveness and reconciliation through the exchange of gifts.

Plutarch, for example, sees the exchange of gifts as one of how Greco-Romans promoted co-corporation among themselves. Pompey was given a wife by Sulla just to make peace with him (Plutarch, *Pompey* 9.1–3). The same assessment is made of the marriage between Mark Antony and Augustus Caesar’s sister, Octavia. Many scholars of ancient history think that such a marriage was politically motivated to coerce political stability and sublime political aspirations¹⁰ of two factions. The gift of a sister to someone's enemy or friend in marriage was highly valued as a means of fostering their inclination towards reconciliation in Greco-Roman society. Such arranged marriage was a means to peaceful co-existence in society. The same might have applied to the marriage between Mark Antony and Octavia, a sister to Augustus, as N.S. Gill¹¹ states that,

Part of the reconciliation between Antony and Octavian (following the mutiny) was the marriage between Antony and Octavian's sister Octavia. They married in 40 B.C. and Octavia bore their first child the following year. She acted as a peacemaker between Octavian and Antony, trying to persuade each to accommodate the other. When Antony went east to fight the Parthians, Octavia moved to Rome where she looked after Antony's brood (and continued to do so even after divorce).

Joyce E. Salisbury (2001:253–254) emphasises that “marriage ties were central to forging political alliances” and reconciliation in the ancient world. This marriage became a political ladder that aided Augustus to get to the topmost position in the empire (Foss 1996:42; Alston 2014:85–87). Apart from the political domain of the ancient world where the exchange of gifts was used as a bridge to interpersonal forgiveness and

⁹ The work of David Konstan is gratefully acknowledged for its great insights into the exchange of gifts in Homeric literature and its application to the concept of forgiveness and reconciliation in the ancient world. For further details see (Joe P. Christensen 2007:416–428; Bruce Heiden 2008:128–158; Martin Mueller 2009:48–50 and David F. Elmer 2013:67–79).

¹⁰ Luke (23:6–12) makes reference to the reconciliation between Herod and Pilate using Jesus as the basis for their reconciliation and friendship.

¹¹ N. S. Gill’s opinion is that the marriage between Mark Antony and Octavia was motivated by the Roman political class. See (<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/markantony/f/AntonyWives.htm>)

reconciliation, it is also believed that other spheres of the then society had applied the same process in fostering their forgiveness and reconciliation that led to unity and a peaceful co-existence within society.

Regarding the use of marriage as a means of reconciliation in the ancient Greco-Roman world, Plutarch (*Antony* 30.3) writes that after the death of Fulvia the first wife of Antony: "Therefore there was even more for reconciliation with Caesar." The only way this reconciliation could be carried out was for Caesar to offer Octavia to Antony in marriage. This marriage was believed to be a hinge that the unity of Rome would hang on as Plutarch (*Antony* 31.2-3) later writes:

Everyone tried to bring about this marriage. For they hoped that Octavia, who, besides her great beauty had intelligence of dignity, when united to Antony and beloved by him, as such a woman naturally must be, would restore harmony and be their complete salvation.¹² Accordingly, when both men agreed, they went up to Rome and celebrated Octavia's marriage, although the law did not permit a woman to marry before her husband had been dead ten months. In this case, however, the Senate passed a decree remitting the restriction in time.¹³

Holt Parker (1998:159–160) captures the idea of Plutarch that women were used as a means of reconciliation in ancient Greco-Roman society when he says:

The exchange of women is part of the founding legend of Rome. Livy's tale of the rape of the Sabine women illustrates the positive side of this mediation. Torn from their natal families by rape, they become, by their love and loyalty to their new husbands, the medium of exchange and reconciliation between men and families.

Luke's language in his writing invites the ancient Greco-Roman way of exchange of gifts for a specified purpose. Recapitulation of the remembrance meal scene in 22:19–20 indicates that there was an invocation that captures that ancient Greco-Roman language of exchange. As pointed out earlier, "Greco-Roman literature from Homer to Plutarch attests to the exchange of gifts as a means of assuaging anger and creating an atmosphere for reconciliation with one another" (Etukumana, 2016:49–51). Whereas such a gift was rejected, it indicated that assuaging anger was not successful according to ancient literature (Homer *Iliad*. 9.646–648).

To appease the anger of God, the statement of the Lukan Jesus at the Lord's Supper to his disciples, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον "this is my body given to you" is pertinent in the context of reconciliation. The use of the phrase τὸ σῶμά μου

¹² The use of σωτηρίαν ... καὶ σύγκρασις 'salvation and harmony' signalled already existing conflict that was hoped to be settled in Rome through the solemnisation of this marriage.

¹³ The Pontificate law of Roman permits a dead to be mourned for ten months during this period of mourning, widow(s) was not permitted to get married to another man until the expiration of the tenmonth mourning period stipulated by the Numa law. But it seems as if this law was not applicable to men who lost their wives (Plutarch *Num.* 12.1–2). Plutarch (*Antony* 31.1-2) has alerted us that the husband of Octavia, Caius Marcellus, died not long before the wife of Mark Antony, Fluvia. According to the Numan law, Octavia should have stayed in her mourning house and mourned her dead husband for at least ten months before considering another marriage. But the situation was reversed by the abrogation of the law by the senate. This was to enable the marriage between Mark Antony and Octavia to be consummated within the shortest space of time.

τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον in Luke is both social-cultural as well as cultic, as viewed from the perspective of the ancient world (Klingbeil 2016:432). By this statement, Jesus decided to offer his life as a gift in exchange for the life of his community to establish a new covenant (Wolter 2017:464). The underlying meaning of sacrifice in the Old Testament (LXX) is within the context of Lev 27:10 using ἄλλαγμα “exchange”, indicating that one life has been exchanged for another. The context buttresses the true meaning of what sacrifice is entailed (Bilich, Bonfiglio and Carlson 2000:105). The Lukan Jesus follows the ancient tradition of effecting reconciliation and decides to offer himself in *exchange* for the life of his friends for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Conclusion

Greco-Roman New Testament reading is one of the most potent readings of the ancient texts that help shed light on the understanding of the New Testament. The ancient cultural norms permeate the text of the New Testament to such an extent that if not properly understood, understanding of the New Testament is degraded. Understanding these ancient cultures and practices signals can help to provide an accurate interpretation of the New Testament. The authors of the New Testament, especially the Gospel writers did not exist in a vacuum. They were implicitly and intrinsically present in their world. The nuances of the ancient world have spilt over into the New Testament, and understanding these nuances enhances understanding of the New Testament. The contextual understanding of the New Testament viewing from its environment locus is very important. Many of these gospel writers were aligned alongside their counterparts in their world to present their stories (Moessner 2006:129–150).

A careful reading and understanding of the ancient Greco-Roman texts help in shedding light on the contextual ancient text. The situation was not far from that of Luke's gospel in understanding the process of reconciliation. We have noticed that the Greco-Roman world did carry out the process of reconciliation, but such a process was not easily expressed verbally; rather, it was demonstrated through actions more than by words (Etukumana, 2020:33–35). Healing from the perspective of Luke was not just a process of restoring an individual to a normal health situation but it was a means through which such an individual was reconciled to his or her community.

It was noticed that rituals played an important role in the ancient Greco-Roman whenever the issue of reconciliation was mentioned. A certain ritual was carried out to realign humanity with the divine to help humanity. Blood became a ritual symbol that invoked special meaning based on event, location and situation (Klingbeil 2016:425). It was found that Luke applies this ritual symbol in his text as a means through which reconciliation can be carried out for the sake of humanity (Luke 22:19–20). In Luke, blood represents an exchange of Jesus' life for the entire humanity for their forgiveness of sin and reconciliation. Thus, healing, ritual actions, exchange of gifts and sharing of meals as a means of reconciliation in the ancient Greco-Roman world have hermeneutical implications in understanding the same process in the Gospel of Luke.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alston, Richard. 2014. *Aspects of Roman history 31BC–AD117*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bash, A. 1997. *Ambassadors for Christ: An exploration of ambassadorial language in the New Testament*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Bazzana, G.B. 2009. Early Christian missionaries as physicians healing and its cultural value in the Greco-Roman context. *Novum Testamentum* 51:232–251.
- Bilich, M.A., Bonfiglio, S. and Carlson, S.D. 2000. *Shared grace: therapists and clergy working together*. Binghamton: Haworth Pastoral.
- Breytenbach, C. 2010. *Grace, reconciliation and concord: The death of Christ in Graeco-Roman metaphors*. Leiden: Brill.
- Burkert, W. 1985. *Greek religion*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Chanotis, A. 2005. *War in the Hellenistic world: a social and cultural history*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Christensen, J.P. 2007. The failure of speech: rhetoric and politics in the “Iliad”. Unpublished PhD dissertation. New York: New York University.
- Driver, T.F. 1991. The magic of ritual: our need for liberating rites that transform our lives and our communities. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Edelstein, E.J. and Edelstein, L. 1945. *Asclepius: Collection and interpretation of the Testimonies*, vol. 1 and 2. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Elliott, J.S. 1971. *Outlines of Greek and Roman medicine*. Boston: Milford House.
- Elmer, D.F. 2013. *The poetics of consent: Collective decision making and the Iliad*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Etukumana, G.A. 2020. The reconciliation of Lepers in Luke 5:12-15 and its implications for human dignity: An African perspective. In Nel, Marius J., Forster, Dion A. and Thesnaar, Christo H. (eds), *Reconciliation, forgiveness and violence in Africa*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media.
- Etukumana, G. A. 2017. Interpretation of the meal in Luke 22: 19-20 and implications to African Christianity, *African Journal of Biblical Research* 3/4: 193–206.
- Etukumana, G.A. 2016. Reconciliation in the Gospel of Luke: A socio-historical study. PhD dissertation. Stellenbosch University [Online]. Available: <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/100023> [2021, March 20].
- Finney, M.T. 2012. Honour and conflict in the ancient world: 1 Corinthians in its Greco-Roman social setting. London: T and T Clark.
- Fitzmyer, J.A. 1985. *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*. New York: Doubleday.
- Forsdyke, S. 2005. *Exile, ostracism, and democracy: The politics of expulsion in ancient Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Foss, J. 1996. *Antony and Cleopatra*. Piscataway: Research and Education Association.
- Gill, N.S. [S.a.]. Mark Anthony marriage. Online: <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/markantony/f/AntonyWives.htm> [2021, January 24].
- Green, J.B. 1997. *The new international commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Heiden, Bruce. 2008. *Homer's cosmic fabrication: Choice and design in the Iliad*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Heil, J.P. 1999. *The meal scenes in Luke-Acts: An audience-oriented approach*. Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature.
- Huang, Juin-Lung. 2008. Law, reconciliation and philosophy: Athenian democracy at the end of the fifth century B.C. PhD dissertation. Fife, Scotland: St. Andrews University. Online: <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/437> [2020, August 30].
- Jones, P. 2008. *Vote for Caesar: How the ancient Greeks and Romans solved the problems of today*. London: Orion Books.
- Klingbeil, G.A. 2016. When action collides with meaning: ritual, biblical theology and New Testament Lord's Supper. *Neotestamentica* 50(2):423–439.
- Klinghardt, M. 2012. A typology of the communal meal. In Taussig, D. S. (ed.), *Meals in the early Christian world*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 9–22.
- Konstan, D. 2010. *Before forgiveness: The origins of a moral idea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacDonald, M.Y. 1988. *The Pauline churches: A socio-historical study of institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meeks, W.A. 1983. *The first urban Christians: The social world of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Megbelayin, I.O.J. 2001. A socio-rhetorical analysis of the Lucan narrative of the Last Supper. PhD dissertation. St. Paul University, Ottawa. Online: <http://web.ebscohost.com.ez.sun.ac.za> [2020, November 22].
- Moessner, D. P. 2006. 'Listening posts' along the way: 'synchronisms' as metaleptic prompts to the 'continuity of the narrative' in Polybius' histories and in Luke's gospel-acts. A tribute to David E. Aune. In Fotopoulos, John (ed.), *The New Testament and early Christian literature in Greco-Roman context studies in honor of David E. Aune*. Leiden: Brill, 129–150.
- Mueller, M. 2009. *The Iliad*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Myers, C. & Enns, E. 2009. *Ambassadors of reconciliation: New Testament reflections on restorative justice*, vol. 1. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Naiden, F.S. 2006. *Ancient supplication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Osborne, R. (2010). *Athens and Athenian democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Parker, H. 1998. Loyal slaves and loyal wives: The crisis of the outsider-within and Roman exemplum literature. S.R. Joshel, S.R. and Murnaghan, S. (eds), *Women and slaves in Greco-Roman culture: Differential equations*. London: Routledge, 157–178.
- Pelling, C.B.R. (ed.). 1988. *Plutarch. Life of Antony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marshall, I.H. 1978b. *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text: New international Greek Testament commentary*. Exeter: Paternoster.
- Porter, S.E. 1994. *Κατάλασσω in ancient Greek literature, with reference to the Pauline writings*. De Cordoba: Ediciones El Amendro. Plato, 1997. *Complete works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Raaflaub, K.A. 2007. Introduction: Searching for peace in the ancient world. In Raaflaub, Kurt A. (ed), *War and Peace in the Ancient World*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1–33.

- Rostad, A. 2006. *Human transgression: divine retribution a study of religious transgressions and punishments in Greek cultic regulations and Lydian-Phrygian reconciliation inscriptions*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Bergen: University of Bergen.
- Saunders, T. J., trans. 2004. *Plato. The laws*. Ringwood: Penguin Book.
- Salisbury, J.E. 2001. Octavia, in *Encyclopedia of women in the ancient world*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 253–254.
- Schirch, L. 2005. *Ritual and symbol in peacebuilding*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press.
- Sigerist, H. E. 1941. *Medicine and human welfare*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Smith, D.E. 1992. Meal Custom (Greco-Roman), in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4. New York: Doubleday, 651–655.
- Soards, M.L. 1987. *The passion according to Luke: The special material of Luke 22*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Stein, R.A. 1992. *Luke: An exegetical and theological exposition of Holy Scripture. Luke, Vol. 24*. Nashville: B&B.
- Taussig, H. 2009. *In the beginning was the meal social experimentation and early Christian identity*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
- Turner, V.W. 1967. *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Webb, R.L. 1991. *John the baptiser and prophet: A socio-historical study*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press.
- Wolter, M. 2017. *The Gospel According to Luke Volume II (Luke 9:51–24)*. Baylor: Baylor University Press.