

# Justice and reconciliation in Luke 19:1–10: A South African post-apartheid anti-imperial reading



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This article endeavours to offer an anti-imperial interpretation of the micro-narrative of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10, portraying it as a model for justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. This analysis stems from the perceived shortcomings of the outcomes of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) efforts in nation-building, particularly in the realm of socio-economic justice, which remained unaddressed. The article proposes that an examination of the Greek verbs *δίδωμι* and *ἀποδίδωμι* in Luke 19:8 within the broader context of the third Gospel – taking into account linguistic, structural and thematic considerations – reveals their inherent futuristic quality. This quality allows for their repetitive usage or usage with a future-oriented intent, seamlessly integrating them into the narrative and supporting an interpretation that depicts Zacchaeus as a repentant sinner committed to reforming his ways. Zacchaeus's repentant stance, particularly in relation to economic justice, is seen as an essential model for addressing justice for victims of colonialism and apartheid and fostering reconciliation between black people and white people in South Africa.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The anti-imperial method of reading makes it possible to foreground the imperial narrative and social world(s) of the Bible, analysing the theological critique of the values, structures, institutions and systems of these world(s) by New Testament writers, and applying the same critique to the political and socio-economic structures of colonialism, apartheid, and post-colonial South Africa today. Accordingly, this research intersects with imperial, colonial and post-colonial theories in the disciplines of sociology, history and political science.

**Keywords:** Luke; radical; good news; poor-rich; wealth renunciation; colonial apartheid; post-apartheid; economic justice.

## Introduction

The ministry of Jesus to the poor, which is central to the gospel of Luke, gives Luke a reputational notoriety of being labelled as 'the gospel of the poor'<sup>1</sup> (Degenhardt 1965; Pilgrim 1981; Schmithals 1975; cf. Scheffler 1990:21). Jesus' job description in Luke is encapsulated by the term 'good news to the poor' (Green 2014:173–174). This prophetic clarion cry for the destitute, downtrodden, and disadvantaged in Luke is merged with a stern warning against wealth's destructive influence (King 2019:i–ii). The complementary Lukan radical declarations opposing wealth and declaring glad tidings to the poor directly challenge the prevailing ethical principles of the Roman empire and present a substantial peril to modern worldwide economic structures, showing God opposing the wealthy and calling for a significant redistribution of wealth to the poor in favour of the poor and their cause for justice (King 2019:ii).

There exists ample evidence within the Gospel of Luke to suggest that Luke possesses a paradigmatic viewpoint on the subject of poverty and wealth, harbouring a degree of scepticism because of the potentially detrimental effects wealth may inflict upon individuals who actively pursue it, those who possess it, and even those who are perceived as obstacles impeding its acquisition. Pilgrim (1981:11), for example, argues that Luke implies that the wealthy cannot be saved while maintaining their wealth and that wealthy Christians must take a radical stand in relation to wealth. Metzger (2007:190–195), on the other hand, maintains that Luke's critique of money is clear-cut, and his radical message is unwavering.

This scepticism is not uniquely Lukan, since a commonly shared perspective in antiquity was that wealth is accumulated at the expense of the poor and marginalised (Myers 2016). Thus, the

1. Luke's usage of the term *πτωχος* [poor], by far, exceeds other New Testament writers (cf. Scheffler 2011).

deliberate choice made by Zacchaeus to correct his fraudulent economic behaviours by administering justice to those who have experienced economic dispossession and abuse in his encounter with Jesus in Luke 19:1–10 can be interpreted as a radical response to Luke's radical message on the subjects of wealth and poverty, bearing significant socio-economic consequences for Zacchaeus himself, the Graeco-Roman society, and the individuals residing within early Christian environments.

The global society of the 1st-century was categorised by a scarcity of resources, with approximately 90% of individuals residing at or below the threshold of subsistence and the absence of a middle class resulting from inequitable economic methodologies that sustained patterns of unfair, harsh, intergenerational and ceaseless poverty (cf. Häkkinen 2016:1). For the Roman-Palestinian narrative world of Luke which was characterised by an imperial, stratified and hierarchical structure, and had a prevailing hegemonic ideology that benefited the politically influential and privileged classes at the expense of the rest of society, the emphasis placed by Luke on the socio-economic well-being of the poor can be regarded as a groundbreaking and transformative concept. Luke provides a reinterpretation of Jesus' teachings intending to deliver a revolutionary message to the socially influential and prosperous group, whose accumulation of personal riches transpired at the cost of the destitute peasantry. The Lukan Jesus opposes the wealthy in Luke's gospel, arguing that they are cruel and hopelessly hooked to power and luxury, and he stands with the poor because they have been dehumanised (Myers 2016).

## Relevance to the South African socio-economic and political landscape

Luke's perspective on wealth differs from that of the Boer-Briton socio-economic social agreement, which was established through the *Act of Union of 1910*, when both factions reached a consensus to jointly hold political authority and amass riches in a primitive manner, while excluding the indigenous African majority from the mainstream economy and denying them the privilege to vote as trade slaves (cf. Mbeki 1978:4). Primitive accumulation refers to the nascent period of capitalism, wherein Europeans expropriated land and resources of African peoples (Araghi & Karides 2012:1–2). In Marxist theory, primitive accumulation refers to the process of removing, often by force, the owners from their means of production. This radical message conveyed by Luke holds significance in addressing the enduring repercussions of colonialism and apartheid, as well as the socio-economic challenges afflicting the democratic South African setting. Luke's message denounces 'the rapacious and predatory value system' of the recently established African ruling class and the politically affiliated individuals who loot, misappropriate and negligently mishandle state assets for

their advancement as well as that of their relatives and associates (cf. Mbeki 2017), whilst equally differing fundamentally with the economic exploitation that typified the primitive accumulation of capital which had become entrenched in the apartheid Boer economy (cf. Mbeki 1978:4). The message conveyed by Luke, when applied to the South African apartheid-era system, provides a clear and severe criticism of the discriminatory socio-economic system of apartheid, as well as its replication, which is exemplified by the political insiders and governing elites of the post-apartheid era who seem to be imitating the oppressive behaviours of their previous colonial rulers.

During the 20th century, empire emerged as a prevalent form of racial governance in Southern Africa, specifically in South Africa, where it played a central role in the colonial endeavour, bestowing colonialism and apartheid with their distinct connotations (Mkhize 2015:22). The intellectual contemplation of South Africa's history during the early 20th century amalgamates racial discrimination and imperialistic notions within adaptable and expansive national and imperial confines (Mkhize 2015:17).

The Lukan message resonates with the plight of the landless majority-black poor in post-democratic South Africa (cf. Modise & Mtshiselwa 2013:2; Stats SA 2012:71). It challenges the colonial and apartheid spatial and economically skewed policies that favoured minority white population, while calling for the redressing of these policies by upscaling the material conditions of the majority black populace.

Similar to other settler colonies of the past, the annals of South Africa are characterised by the acquisition of a specific geographical area and the estrangement of its indigenous populace (Delpont & Lephakga 2016:1). Inevitably, the fundamental impetus and ultimate objective of imperialism perpetually reside in profit, thereby resulting in the economic subjugation of native populations and the utilisation of their inherent resources (Perdue 2005:282).

When the nation transitioned from apartheid to democracy, the National Party safeguarded the rights of private property, privileges afforded to the white population, and the broader communal concerns of white individuals at large, as well as the Afrikaner community specifically, compelling the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiators to embrace a gradual socio-economic transformation plan as opposed to a radical socio-economic transformation approach, resulting in the liberation movement opting to halt the implementation of the radical socio-economic transformation programme in favour of a political transition that would lead to the attainment of state power (cf. Southall, in Adam & Moodley 1993:34). Consequently, the import of the 1994 elections resided not primarily in their conclusions but rather in their reluctance to confront fundamental matters regarding governmental authority and societal equity, which necessitated deferral to facilitate the progression of democracy (Szeftel 1994:458).

The topic of the negotiated settlement is a matter of great debate among a multitude of social commentators. Habib (2013:1–33) deems South Africa's situation as a 'suspended revolution'<sup>2</sup>, while Hamilton (2014:19) calls it a 'revolution still pending'. Lephakga (2015:8) puts forward the proposition that the African National Congress (ANC) was outsmarted during the negotiation process because, while the ANC acquired political influence, the National Party (NP) and/or corporate sector in South Africa obtained economic power. The gradualist perspective towards socio-economic transformation, which was adopted, was defended by employing an analogous line of reasoning, that posits that the national democratic revolution in South Africa shares commonalities with prior revolutions, as it unfolds as a series of consequential occurrences, including the pivotal moment of 27 April 1994 (Jordan 1997:2).

The South African society in the post-apartheid era is enduring a lasting impact resulting from this transitional delay/suspension in social transformation, which has become a permanent feature in society, thereby rendering it the most disparate nation globally, as evidenced by the fact that most white South Africans reside in a relatively prosperous developed economy, while the majority black South Africans find themselves in a destitute non-developed economy (cf. Koma 2013:154; Mbeki 1998; StatsSA 2019). This has made the task of fostering collective citizenship<sup>3</sup> among previously conflicting factions a major vulnerability as in numerous African countries after gaining autonomy and freedom (Mamdani 1996:23–25;183–217). National efforts to forge a shared sense of identity in South Africa have been impeded by racial inequality and the long-lasting effects of apartheid, which left most black people impoverished and white people in better economic standing as a consequence of the failure to improve reconciliation which undermines inclusive development, making it difficult to promote national cohesion (Gumede 2020:133–134; 2021:184). Since there is not a strong sense of kinship among its people, South Africa lacks the sense of nationhood that comes with being a nation (Anderson 2006:4–7).

South Africa as a country is still very divided and faces many socio-economic challenges, even after many efforts to promote reconciliation were made during the first 10 years of democratic government, which creates obstacles for the ruling ANC in its efforts to bring about reconciliation and slows down the pace at which socio-economic changes are implemented (Gumede 2020:132). The persistent socio-economic inequalities are ascribed to the gradualist approach towards socio-economic change that did not explicitly confront the consequences of settler colonialism, even when confronted with the remarkably well-handled and adeptly negotiated termination of apartheid and the substantial

2. Habib chronicles South Africa's democratic evolution, the factors and actors that influenced the trajectory of that democratic evolution, and why a new social democratic imagination is needed to realise the moral vision of South Africa's Constitution (cf. Habib 2013).

3. Mamdani analyses resistance movements as representing urban and rural divide, and the problem of ethnicity in the process of democratisation of multi-ethnic contexts (cf. Mamdani 1996).

endeavours of the government to redistribute social policy (Therborn 2019:34).

This is because colonial and apartheid policies, such as the 1913 *Land Act*, which denied black South Africans the right to own land, are primarily to blame for the country's post-apartheid poverty (Maylam 1995:22; Modise & Mtshiselwa 2013:1). To address housing and land inequality in South Africa, it is crucial to understand its geographic history, since deprivation of access to land, is among others, the useful lens for understanding unequal power relations in South African history (cf. Strauss 2017:181–243; Strauss & Liebenberg 2014:428; Terreblanche 2002:6).

The excessive concentration of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the absolution of those responsible for the atrocities of apartheid, disregarding the pursuit of justice for individuals whose close relatives were murdered or gravely disfigured, inadvertently eroded the principles of social and economic justice in the post-apartheid period, as asserted by the majority of South Africans (LenkaBula 2005:109–114). The South African case, aimed to advance from the transition phase to the transformation stage with little to no transformation, resulting in the current shortcomings in the socio-economic and socio-psychological spheres, in contrast to other international peace-building cases like Israel and Northern Ireland, where a comprehensive approach involving transition, transformation and reconciliation was pursued (cf. Knox & Quirk 2000:29–142). Retributive justice was publicly and justifiably attacked in their name of reconciliation, and systems of socio-economic justice that would have required apartheid benefactors to give up their money were repudiated for fear of violation of market principles (Bowsher 2019:50). The TRC ultimately offered a mistaken racial reform that was centred on reconciliation, which proved to be counter-revolutionary to the socio-economic goal that served as the foundation for the (liberation) struggle (Meister 2011:69). Because of South Africa's inability to address the historical injustice of colonialism and apartheid, which undermines the majority's right to justice and freedom, the country has yet to achieve reconciliation and justice (Gumede 2020:149), and the pressure of unfulfilled expectations continues to mount on South Africa, despite the country's outward displays of a resilient political democracy following apartheid (Hofmeyr & Potgieter 2018:2).

Like the Graeco-Roman *Pax Romana*, colonialism and apartheid utilised military, religious, racial, and cultural propaganda to deprive black South Africans of their inherent entitlement to citizenship within their native land and, consequently, to optimise the utilisation of their native resources for self-governance. Carter (2006:4) and Weaver (2005:109) describe the Roman Empire as a politically domineering empire bent at the expropriation of the economic resources of the occupied peoples, while employing military force as the backdrop of its dominance. The societal structure of the Roman Empire was distinguished by social hierarchies,

stratification, unequal distribution of resources, utilisation of military power, economic subjugation, theological propaganda and political control (Carter 2006:8–10, Carter, in Diehl 2011:11–12). Apartheid ideology had similar traits in that military and police force (cf. Brewer 1994:1–8;10) were used to socially stratify black and white South Africans, while cultural (Changuion & Steenkamp 2012:192) and theological propaganda (cf. Manavhela 2009:64–67;89–107) were used as the basis for the notion of ‘separate development’. In the main, black people were associated with barbarism, paganism and backwardness, and white people with superiority, with religion utilised to uphold white privilege over African people and to validate the delusion of white supremacy. Brute force through policing and militarism was used to marginalise black people keeping them economically disenfranchised. Each succeeding era of the colonial and apartheid regimes, which comprised of the white minority, fortified the prevailing foundations that perpetuated the subjugation of black individuals within society through the dissemination of racially patronising perspectives, conduct and methodologies. Consequently, most white South Africans continue to derive their principles, perspectives, delineations and understandings from the ideological frameworks of their earlier white ancestors.

Zacchaeus’s dedication to divest as a means to regain acceptance in society demonstrates the necessity of prioritising the victim’s well-being in any negotiation process. This substantiates Lephakga’s assertion<sup>4</sup> that the white elites involved in CODESA successfully outmanoeuvred the ANC, resulting in a politically viable yet socio-economically impractical agreement.

Notwithstanding the TRC’s Christian connotations, a view<sup>5</sup> exists that real reconciliation between white and black South Africans did not materialise because most white South Africans did not undergo a moral conversion; rather, black South Africans were forced to pardon white people for the sake of the ‘Rainbow Nation’. Unlike Zacchaeus, the economic beneficiaries of apartheid were not summoned to provide evidence at the TRC, and thus held accountable for their misdeeds, which becomes a missing link in applying Luke 19:1–10 micro-narrative that assumes Zacchaeus as an essential archetype for authentic reconciliation; this marks the failure of the reconciliation project in South Africa since the beneficiaries of colonial and apartheid regimes did not effect restitution towards their victims. Genuine reconciliation is based on equity, necessitating the rectification of previous socio-economic injustices (cf. Boesak 2008:636). Consequently, there remains still a need for real reconciliation between white and black South Africans, one characterised by sincere repentance and a dedication to justice. White South Africans bear a greater responsibility to upend the stigma associated with colonialism and apartheid and repair the damage done by that oppressive system by proving, not only rhetorically

4. See page 5.

5. According to Terry-Oakley Smith, ‘white South Africa got away with it in 1994, did not apologize, did not have the grace to understand the (race-relations) issues in South Africa, and did not pay any reparations for Apartheid’ (cf. Motuku 2018:99).

but also via their socio-economic actions, that they are genuine South Africans willing to see the country through to the end of apartheid.

## Methodology

An anti-imperial lens in reading ancient texts includes, but is not limited to, historical and literary methods, and is contemporaneous with postcolonial criticism<sup>6</sup> though specifically belonging to empire studies (Carter 2015:71). One leading South African post-colonial theory scholar, Jeremy Punt, underscores the political and ideological primacy of postcolonial biblical criticism as a combination of varied interpretive approaches espousing suspicious and restorative hermeneutics in viewing textual politics (Punt 2003:58). The interaction of colonial history and its aftermath(s), the repressive and repudiatory nature of that history, the concurrent exposing, restoring and transforming of that history, is the purview of post-colonialism (Punt 2003:58).

Unlike post-colonialism, however, anti-imperial methodology is focussed on the literary bounds of the Bible, making it consistent with hegemonic historical criticism, while privileging the Graeco-Roman world of the biblical text, foregrounding it in interpretation(s) highlighting power differential in the world of the Bible and its readers. Therefore, the anti-imperial methodology represents a forward-thinking cooperation that consistently maintains a text-bound interpretation of the Bible while actively engaging with the institutional framework of the Graeco-Roman society (cf. Motuku 2018). The often spiritual, personal, sacred and vertical Western interpretive methods in New Testament studies are balanced by an anti-imperial methodological focus on structural, public, secular and horizontal institutions, systems and structures that characterise the Graeco-Roman world. This method is useful in analysing socio-economic and political power differentials in the New Testament world generally, and the Lukan text specifically, which is the focus of this article.

Post-colonial critique of empire studies, and consequently anti-imperiality as a defanged truncated version of post-colonialism (Boer 2009:119; Sugirtharajah 2006:133; 2012:80–81) is because of the failure of Western scholars who limit the scope of anti-imperial studies to imperial Roman critique, with neither reference nor relevance to modern neo-colonial ‘empires’ who are self-appointed prefects of geo-politics wielding power in global political and economic structures and institutions. This article addresses this lacuna by extending the use and application of the anti-imperial method to the colonial, apartheid, and the post-apartheid South African situation. The foregrounding of the 1st-century Roman Palestinian world, its political, and socio-economic structures, institutions and systems, demonstrates that

6. As noted by Carter (2015:71) postcolonial work ‘focuses on the emergence, representation, and consequences of imperial power including interconnected issues of power, gender, class, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.... It engages biblical texts across a spectrum embracing their origin in contexts of empire through to their current reception and interpretation, often in contexts of various contemporary expressions of empire’. Detailed post-colonial criticism, is offered by *inter alia* Segovia and Sugirtharajah (2009), and Sugirtharajah (2012).

Luke's message was not just personal, private and spiritual, but also had radical and socio-economic implications for the political, and socio-economic structures, institutions and systems of the Roman-Palestinian and Graeco-Roman worlds. This radical Lukan message can help in bringing about economic justice in post-apartheid South Africa and reconciliation between black and white South Africans.

## Context of the Zacchaeus micro-narrative in Luke 19:1–10

The literary stage within which the Zacchaeus micro-narrative is acted out is the terminal stage of Luke's travel narrative (Luke 9:51–19:27). Various perspectives and themes have been suggested for the micronarrative. Pilgrim (1981:129–130) views the micronarrative as a '*tour d'horizon*' of Jesus' twin seeking and saving ministry of the lost *en route* to Jerusalem, while Moratalla (2001:120) understands it as the epitome of the penitential motif in the travel narrative. Thematic inquiry encompasses subjects such as wealth and consumption (Metzger 2007), disposition towards possessions (Moratalla 2001), and discipleship (Pilgrim 1981). The article views Zacchaeus in the micronarrative, as an example of a penitential convert who pledged his discipleship allegiance by reorganising his attitude towards wealth and possessions, particularly ill-gotten wealth.

Equally debatable and speculative is the literary form of Luke 19:1–10. Bultmann (1963:55–57) views it as an apophthegmatic biography that is idealistic and metaphorical, while some like Dibelius<sup>7</sup> (1970:50–51) view it as legendary personification albeit with essential history. The salvific claim of the story is refuted by White (1979:21), who sees no elements worthy of a salvation story in the micronarrative, rather ascribing a vindication verdict on Zacchaeus. Tannehill (1981:1-3, 113) suggests that a fitting reading optic for Luke 19:1-10 is that of a pronouncement story of a quest type.

Interpreters are polarised between the opposed vindication and resolve theories, with the former viewing Zacchaeus's words in Luke 19:8 as 'customary presents' verbs signifying customary behaviour of a devout Jewish practising 'son of Abraham', while the latter views *δίδωμι* and *ἀποδίδωμι* as 'futuristic presents', which pertain to Zacchaeus's words in the narrative as indicating a change in mindset and subsequent conduct.

The introduction of Zacchaeus as a wealthy chief tax collector (Lk 19:2) warrants closer scrutiny. Rome's colonial occupation and economic exploitation is signalled by the taxation system, with the elite stratum of Roman society adeptly capitalising on the mechanism of taxation, a complex interplay of governance and commerce that found its embodiment in Jericho through the activities of certain individuals who assumed the responsibility of tax collection, notably

7.This view is also shared by Marshall (1978:695).

Zacchaeus, the esteemed figurehead of their collective. The phenomenon, wherein a colonising external entity represses an indigenous populace, subjecting them to governance either in military or economic terms is commonly referred to as imperialism (Perdue 2005:282). Given the considerable regard Zacchaeus's Roman society held for landed wealth, it is plausible that a portion of his wealth derived from possessing substantial land assets, which may have included certain parcels of ancestral land belonging to his fellow Jewish countrymen, particularly plots likely confiscated subsequent to the failure to meet the demands of exorbitant agricultural loans and taxes.

Since tax collectors served as illustrations of biblical allusions to economic inequity as firmly recorded, Zacchaeus, in his capacity as the chief tax collector, epitomised the ruling bourgeois class; in other words, he functioned as a regional collaborator with the oppressive Roman regime (Capper 2004; Hoppe 2004; Horsley 2009; cf. Johnson 2013:163). The murderous violent and physical beatings and intimidation of civilians by tax-collectors in the execution of their work is a well-recorded fact (MacMullen 1974:11). Philo states that the Romans deliberately selected individuals who were the epitome of cruelty and lack of compassion to serve as tax collectors, thereby granting them an unwarranted level of power and control over available resources (Philo II, 93; cf. Elliott 2008:93; MacMullen 1974:9–12). The tax collectors of ancient Rome were renowned for their methodical cruelty and lack of compassion, in addition to their strategies of aggression and subjugation, a reality that was widely recognised by the ruling elite, who derived satisfaction from employing immunizing or immunity measures specifically devised to exploit the financial resources of the subjected populace and even coerced the peasants into contemplating suicide (Elliott 2008:93).

There is extensive evidence available regarding the prosperous indigenous economy of Jericho, which is founded on its abundant natural resources, causing the city to develop into a pivotal centre for commerce, while also serving as a primary gateway for all transportation activity crossing the Jordan River from the eastern region; (Notably, the river ford located five miles to the east represents one of merely three locations where the river can be traversed between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea). Taha and Qleibo (2010:42) describe Jericho as the seat of agriculture and transportation while serving as a retreat for the aristocracy during the Roman Palestinian period. Being the capital of King Herod, who turned the city of Jericho into a garden city next to Wadi Qelt with a hippodrome, opulent palaces and a complex system of channels and aqueducts that was left to the Roman emperor upon Herod's death, Jericho was significant for the Jordan Valley as a whole because of its strategic location with fortresses on the hills surrounding the plain (Taha & Qleibo 2010:20). Jericho possesses historical importance because of its role as the focal point for Rome's military quelling of the Jewish revolt and the consequential retreat of the XI legion from Rome (Fiensy 1991:27).

Luke's three stories about tax collectors (Lk 5:27–32; Lk 18:9–14; Lk 19:1–10), all of which revolve around a wayward sinner, are remarkable because of Luke's consistent utilisation of the narratives of communal meals to further his central message of conversion (cf. Seo 2015:90). After recognising Jesus as his Lord, Zacchaeus endeavours to rectify the economic injustices he had perpetrated, such as the amassing of illicit funds through coercion, as depicted in Luke 19:8 (cf. Seo 2015:91). Luke's explicit statement in Luke 19:2 regarding Zacchaeus' affluence alludes to the notion that his wealth originated from his role as the principal tax collector, allowing him to capitalise on the economic subjugation of the Palestinian populace by the Roman occupiers. Zacchaeus availed himself of personal advantages derived from his role as the chief tax collector because of the elevated status and affluence enjoyed by prominent tax collectors relative to their counterparts (Corbin-Reuschling 2009:72; Harrison 2005:99–111).

Because of his prominent standing and privileged access to financial assets within the expansive Roman patronage framework, Zacchaeus, in his capacity as a tax official of elevated status, possessed a distinct advantage over his subordinates who held lower positions within the hierarchical and stratified society of the Roman system (Seo 2015:86–87). As the primary individual responsible for the collection of taxes, Zacchaeus would have occupied the position of utmost avarice and, consequently, would have been regarded with utmost disdain because of the perception among tax collectors of themselves as emissaries of Rome, exploiting their fellow citizens for personal gain (cf. Myers 2016).

Whereas Zacchaeus has been modelled as a quintessential disciple who assumes the right attitude to wealth (Pilgrim 1981:133) in contradistinction to the 'Rich Young Ruler' who is possessed by wealth (in Luke 18:18–30), in much of wealth and poverty issues interpretive paradigms, this article, in contradistinction argues that, far from being an exemplary model of discipleship, Zacchaeus is a repentant fraudster who makes restitution for his fraudulent ways. This is the costly reconciliation Zacchaeus needs (Boesak 2008:640), to reconcile himself with his estranged community. Care and concern for the poor, and justice through fourfold restitution are cardinal pillars of Zacchaeus's covenantal restoration (Tannehill 1996:277; Wright 2004:277).

Some commentators have accused Jesus of double standard, in that he demands total renunciation of wealth from the 'Rich Young Ruler', and yet accepts half-divestiture from Zacchaeus. This is incorrect and ignores the fact that Zacchaeus not only gives half his wealth to the poor but also makes a fourfold restitution of fraud. In essence, Zacchaeus virtually gives away everything by going beyond the prescribed minimum recompense in the Torah. The suggestion by Phillips (2001:169–170) that Jesus seems to have changed the renunciation demand in favour of voluntary almsgiving is therefore untenable.

Seccombe (1982:132) moves from the attitude of Jesus to that of the two narrative actors to underscore attitudinal differences in the two stories as the main determinant of Jesus' varied response to each. A requirement for absolute abandonment is asserted as the 'Rich Young Ruler' is engulfed in his belongings; conversely, the deliberate choice of divestment and fourfold compensation by Zacchaeus is commended, positioning him in a circumstance that bears material resemblance to his initial state<sup>8</sup> (Seccombe 1982:132). While noting the different commands by Jesus, Ringe (1995:232) however acknowledges the extraordinary nature of Zacchaeus' self-propelled divestiture.

The fact that Zacchaeus initiates the giving is viewed by Kim (1998:199) as a voluntary act that absolves from any obligation or prescription by Luke, but instead gives credence to the idea of almsgiving and limitless generosity. The assertion that Zacchaeus giving is voluntary is however questionable, in that Jesus had initiated the visit to Zacchaeus house, and it is the presence of one who has come to 'seek and save' that convicts Zacchaeus of his sinful fraudulent ways. The presence of the Saviour makes it difficult for a known fraudster to be complacent in his fraudulent ways. Moreover, the radicality of Zacchaeus's act is in that he goes beyond the bare minimum prescribed in the law for amendment of his corrupt ways. Kim's assertion, on a subject that has already been concealed beneath a substantial quantity of contested exegetical refuse, is replete with questionable exegesis and problematic secondary ramifications (Danker 1998:760).

The inclination to domesticate the radicality of Zacchaeus' act is further highlighted by the attempt by Hays (2010:177–179) to create two sets of wealth ethics for so-called 'itinerant disciples' and 'local disciples'. Hays (2010:177–179) classifies the 'Rich Young Ruler' as an itinerant disciple who must give up all his possessions in quest of Jesus' mission, while Zacchaeus is viewed as a 'local disciple' who has the luxury of partial giving while enjoying the rest of his wealth. It is not clear how a man who gives half his possession and makes fourfold restitution can be left, if any, with much to enjoy. The act of relinquishing 50% of one's possessions is an extreme action that defies complete or effortless explanation through the designation of 'almsgiving' (Schottroff & Stegemann 1986:109).

As noted by Sick (2016:231), it is the beneficiaries of modern empires like the Roman empire and collaborators who accord Zacchaeus the noble status outside his credentials and character. Most privileged Western interpreters who are economically mobile accord Zacchaeus this interpretive status because doing so make them comfortable in enjoying the spoils of life in hegemonic centres built at the back of marginal others. Parading Zacchaeus as a model of generosity, charity and/or almsgiving absolves them from the Lukan radical wealth ethic of renunciation, making them enjoy wealth and opulence, in the face of a world riddled with hunger, poverty and cruel economic oppression.

<sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus never attains to his initial state as claimed by Seccombe since giving half of his wealth to the poor and making fourfold restitution virtually leaves him with little or nothing.

In the declaration of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8, the positioning of the phrase 'τοῖς πτωχοῖς δίδωμι' accentuates the notion that voluntary relinquishment in Luke consistently pertains to the welfare of the poor rather than solely concerning the perils associated with affluence (Metzger 2007:217). This underscores that Zacchaeus' act of giving is primarily motivated by his concern for the destitute, ensuring that wealth is allocated more equitably, thereby fulfilling Jesus' objective of establishing economic fairness (King 2019:120). Zacchaeus frees himself from the clutches of the hegemonic Roman cultural values that espouse tyranny and oppression as weapons to primitively accumulate wealth by exploiting the weak and vulnerable in society. The relinquishment of riches and the provision of assistance to the less fortunate are intricately connected and intertwined (King 2019:120). Zacchaeus' eagerness to eliminate any financial impurities associated with the Roman system is exemplified through his aspiration to compensate the poor (Crowder 2007:179).

By bestowing 50% of his riches as reparation for his deceitfulness and allocating the remaining 50% to the disadvantaged, Zacchaeus demonstrated his readiness to embrace the divine figure into his abode and his soul, allowing him to partake in the sanctified condition that had been pledged to the destitute in return for their tribulation (King 2019:204). The affluent individuals are unable to regard Zacchaeus as a prominent illustration of a committed adherent without surrendering his possessions to the degree of essentially forsaking all his belongings (King 2019:204). This radical reconciliatory act by Zacchaeus exemplifies the values of transformation, restoration and justice (Boesak 2008:641).

Luke's revolutionary economic proclamation concerning justice for the poor and marginalised is encountered with an extraordinary reaction in the utterances of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10, which proclaims the intervention of divine justice as a verdict on structures of economic inequality, as substantiated by the examination of language in the text (cf. Myers 2016).

## Brief grammatical discussion of δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι in Luke 19:8

Scholars<sup>9</sup> engaged in the study of the Greek text of Luke find themselves in disagreement when it comes to the appropriate interpretation of δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι in Luke 19:8. The dispute revolves around whether these terms should be understood as customary presents or futuristic presents. Two main schools of thought have emerged from this debate: the vindication theory, which perceives the mentioned words as a form of defence, and the 'futuristic presents' view, which supports the resolve theory. The latter theory posits that the words in question signify a conversion followed by a commitment to act in a specific manner in the future. Conversely, the 'futuristic presents' perspective upholds the resolve theory. The determination of the proper meaning of

9. For the varying arguments in the treatment of δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι in Luke 19:8, cf. White 1979; Fitzmyer 1985; Hamm 1988; Mitchell 1990; Veras 1996; Moratalla 2001, among others.

these words in each context is heavily influenced by the contextual interpretation.

According to the structural, thematic and narrative coherence of the gospel of Luke, it is appropriate to interpret Luke 19:8 as the culmination of a penitent transgressor, as indicated by significant terms including *hyparchonton*, *esykophantesa*, *soteria* and *apololos*, which suggest that Zacchaeus is not a virtuous individual within the text (Veras 1996:107). The unwavering conviction that the verbs δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι in Luke 19:8 are most effectively translated as future presents, implying a resolution that is characterised by a transformation in mindset and conduct, is informed by examination of the Lukan corpus, grammatical analysis, and intra-inter contexts.

Examining Luke 19:8 within the framework of the third Gospel, taking into account its linguistic, structural and thematic implications, rather than in isolation, elucidates the fact that δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι possess a futuristic quality, rendering them suitable for iterative or futuristic applications of the Greek present that gradually recede into the background, thus favouring an interpretation that perceives Zacchaeus as a penitent sinner who makes a solemn commitment to amend his ways. Following the conversion hypothesis, which elucidates the word pair as futuristic verbs implying a determination to convey a repentant demeanour by Zacchaeus directing forthcoming conduct, the customary depiction of the story as a conversion and/or salvation narrative in contrast to an apologia and/or defence narrative is consequently favoured. This is also buttressed by the rhetorical skill of 'physiognomic consciousness' that links his small stature to his inept morality, spirituality and intellectuality (Parsons 2001:50–57; 2006:97–108; 2007:70–71).

The analysis of Luke's teachings on wealth, poverty, the rich, the poor and money provides support for this interpretation, which centres on Luke's radical economic message encompassed in fundamental texts that serve as models and directives, including the beatitudes, the first Nazareth Manifesto sermon, Lukan songs from the margin and the infant narratives.

Luke's narrative places great emphasis on the principle of solidarity with the marginalised and simultaneously offers a critique of the Roman Empire, thereby presenting an alternative worldview to the dominant narrative of Rome's Empire. Luke's particular concern with political and socio-economic issues and their impact on his narrative offers valuable insights for theological analysis of the post-apartheid context. Furthermore, his moral perspective advocating for a fair and inclusive society renders his gospel message admirable.

The disproportionate preference given to the elites in the Roman economy, as evident in both the Lukan narrative and the socio-economic backdrop of Luke's audience, makes Luke's radical proclamation of 'good news to the

poor' and the act of 'wealth renunciation' comprehensible and applicable to the post-apartheid South African situation.

## Conclusion

This article employed an anti-imperial method of reading, focussing on the themes of economic justice and reconciliation. Read through this lens, the article concludes that Zacchaeus is a repentant fraudster who is committing himself to economic justice as the foundation of reconciliation with his estranged community. Thus, *δίδωμι* and *ἀποδίδωμι* are found to be futuristic present verbs. Zacchaeus' story in Luke 19:1–10 prioritises justice as the cornerstone of genuine reconciliation. This is a valuable contribution to post-apartheid efforts on reconciliation between black and white South Africans towards nation-building.

The radical nature of Luke's dual proclamation of 'good news to the poor' and 'wealth renunciation' in support of the less fortunate is emphasised when examined in the framework of the agrarian economy of 1st-century Roman Palestine, encompassing its establishments, mechanisms and arrangements, which impact not only communal and secular institutions, but also spiritual, personal and individual aspects.

In Luke 19:1–10 micro-narrative, Zacchaeus exhibits a comparable audacity that embodies Luke's radical message and holds significant spiritual and socio-economic implications for both him and the Graeco-Roman society. True transformation, founded on a profound shift in one's innermost being, is exemplified by Zacchaeus and is indispensable in dismantling the economic structures of apartheid (cf. Myers 2016).

To attain genuine equity and conciliation among individuals of the black and white races, as well as to effectuate substantial changes in the political and economic remnants of colonialism and apartheid, this radical approach is regarded as an imperative paradigm, playing a pivotal role in fostering a sense of national identity, enhancing inter-racial interactions, and fostering economic justice within the post-apartheid South African society.

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## Authors' contributions

K.P.M. was involved in the conceptualisation, writing of the original draft, and E.V.E. reviewed and edited the draft and prepared the final manuscript. E.V.E was also responsible for supervision.

## Ethical considerations

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