

DID JESUS FORBID AMBITION FOR GREATNESS IN LUKE 22:24–30? AN INTERCULTURAL RECONSIDERATION

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Abstract

This is an Intercultural study of aspiration for greatness in Luke 22:24-30 first in the initial context of the first century Roman culture, and then in the contemporary Western Nigerian cultural context. The study looks at the common scholarly argument that the disciples were contending for superiority among themselves and that Jesus used this incident to correct their fight for power. After re-examining the text in the two cultural contexts, the study concludes that there is nothing condemnatory of aspiration for power in the text, but that the text challenges Jesus' disciples to use the power inherent in it for and in his service.

Keywords: Aspiration-ambition; greatness; power; servant; eschaton; and judgment.

Introduction

The issue of ambition or aspiration for greatness is contentious among Christians and the theological view of each Christian scholar is obviously reflected in his interpretation. Luke 22:24-30 has particularly been unfairly exploited by those who use the alleged condemnation of ambition for leadership by Jesus to subject their followers to perpetual followers and dependants. Expectedly therefore, many Christians remain at the level of followership. They rarely develop to become leaders since they are discouraged from aspiring to greatness. It is therefore common in Nigeria for leaders even in the church to pass down leadership baton in churches to relatives or close associates. This sometimes results in the church largely lacking in the right kind of leaders. This again sometimes leads to the dissatisfaction of many members with the kind of leaders their church presently has. This article examines a key text used to discourage ambition

for power in the church with the intention of helping the young ones to participate fully in church leadership in the church in Nigeria.

Structure and Context of the Luke 22:24-30

One way to structure Luke 22:24-30 is: A, B, A', B':³

A (22:24-25) The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors (22:25)

B (22:26-27) For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? (22:27)

A' (22:28-29) I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me (22:29)

B' (22:30) You may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom (22:30)
Values of the chiasmic structural form for the whole book of Luke ⁴ are the same for section 22:24-30. First chiasm shows that the Lucan document was carefully designed to reflect a literary style of its time to provide “check and balance” on the interpretation of the text. Again the structure reveals what was important in the text to Luke and Jesus; and finally, it points to the prioritisation and systematisation of the teaching of Jesus.

Another literary structuring of the text presented below is more technical. A first major section introduces the pericopé with the “ambition” (φιλονεικία) of the apostles concerning “the greater” (ὁ μείζων) among them and prepares for the speech of Jesus. The second has two subunits bound by the expression “but I ... am” (ἐγὼ δὲ ... εἶμι) (v.27) and “but you are” (ὕμεῖς δὲ ἔστε) (v. 28). There is a statement of fact followed by an exhortation or a promise in the two subunits. The contrast drawn by Jesus in his speech in verse 25b and verse 26 is highlighted with the injunction in verse 26a, “but you are not to be like that” (ὕμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως). One issue that the present interpretation examines is whether Jesus meant that his disciples, unlike “kings” and “those who exercise authority,” are not to have power, are not to abuse their power, or are to use their legitimate power in God’s service for others. The “kings” (βασιλεῖς) and the “exercising authority” (ἐξουσιάζοντες) are differentiated from the “younger” (νεώτερος) and the “serving” (διακονῶν) that are in a chiasmic relation to “the ruler” (ὁ ἡγούμενος) and “the greater” (ὁ μείζων). The rhetorical question of Jesus emphasizes his injunction. The second part of Jesus’ speech begins with a statement of fact: “But you are those who have stood by me in my trials”

³ Cf. Hajime Murai, “Literary Structure (Chiasm, Chiasmus) of Gospel of Luke,” 2014 <http://www.valdes.titech.ac.jp/~h_murai/bible/42_Luke_pericope_e.html#127> (19 June 2014).

⁴ Cf. Hobert K. Farrell, “The Structure and Theology of Luke’s Central Section,” *TrinJ* 7 (Fall, 1986), 51-52.

(Ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔστε οἱ διαμεμενηκότες μετ' ἑμοῦ ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου) (v. 28). It is followed with a promise. The word “greater”/“greatest” (μειζων) (vv. 24b, 26b and 27a) holds the first subunit of the second section together, and binds the first and the second sections. The contrast between the two statements of fact is clear: the first statement deals with “them” (“the kings ... and those exercising authority” = οἱ βασιλεῖς ... καὶ οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες) while the second deals with “you” (“you ... you are” = Ὑμεῖς ... ἔστε). “The reader is presented with two semantic fields of power and of suffering, which will help him to see both subjects as opposing poles.”⁵ If “the kings” and “those exercising authority” in the Roman Empire had legitimate power, and they were, from Paul’s view, God’s ministers (Cf. Rom 13), the argument of this paper is that Jesus’ contrast here is with the use of the legitimate power of the leader. After all Luke arguably, as an associate of Paul, understood his teaching.⁶

E. Earle Ellis captions Luke 22:24-30 as “the consummation of the Messiah’s mission (19:45-24:53).” He traces the progression of the story in Luke 22 thus: the plot to kill Jesus (vv. 1-6); the Last Supper (vv. 7-38); the prayer of Jesus (vv. 39-46); the betrayal (vv. 47-53); the denial (vv. 54-62); the crucifixion of Jesus (22:63-23:25); and the glorification of the Messiah (23:26-24:53).⁷ Eric D. Huntsman tags Luke 22:1-23:56, “the passion narrative.”⁸ Whatever classification one adopts, Luke 22:24-30 falls within the Passion period, and this informs the interpretation in this work. The ambition to be adjudged the greatest was the background to the dominical logon on leadership. This suggests to some that the disciples at no time lost interest in power.⁹ While some scholars doubt the genuineness of this story,¹⁰ the present commentator does not.¹¹ Interestingly, the text is part of the extensive mass of new material added by Luke from his special

⁵ Innocent Emezie Ezeani, “The Apologetic Revisited: Exonerating Luke from an Ancestral Exegetical and Theological Burden,” D.Th. Thesis, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, 142.

⁶ D.L. Boch, “Gospel of Luke,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, and I.H. Marshall; Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 495-496.

⁷ E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 20-21.

⁸ Eric D. Huntsman, “Luke the Compassionate and detailed Evangelist,” *The Message of the New Testament Gospels: the Unique Perspectives of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John* 2007 <<http://hccl.byu.edu/faculty/HuntsmanE/EducationWeek/NTGospelsEdWeek2007-3.pdf>> (15 February 2013).

⁹ Merrill C. Tenney, “Luke,” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. C.F. Pfeiffer, E.F. Harrison; Chicago: Moody, 1962), 1064.

¹⁰ Jonathan Knight, *Luke’s Gospel* (London: Routledge, 2005), 141; cf. Leon Morris, *Luke* (ed. R.V.G. Tasker; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1974), 307.

¹¹ It is possible however that Luke altered the context of the story to apply it to the need of its immediate audience. It is dependable enough however to conclude that the incidence took place during the Passion Week.

sources.¹² Jesus therefore took with all seriousness the need to address this issue. Since the present interpreter is of the view that the structure of Luke 22 presented above is intentional rather than accidental the chiasmic structure is brought to bear on the work below.

A Re-Examination of Luke 22:24-30

Introduction (vv. 24a-25a):

The introduction begins in verse 24a with a narration of the disciples' "ambition" (φιλονεικία) while verse 25a continues the introduction with a brief comment on Jesus' speech to follow. The question from the disciples is put in indirect form (v. 24): "which of them [is] the greater/greatest." The word translated by NIV as "arose" (ἔγένετο)¹³ (v. 24) also means, "there was" and "it came about that." It is aorist middle deponent 3rd person singular. Commenting on the strangeness of the Greek phrase translated, "There was moreover also" (ἔγένετο δὲ καὶ), Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall write:

Although the structure of this verse is very similar to 9:46, this is the only place in the NT or LXX, except for 2 Pet 2:1 (Ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ ψευδοπροφηταὶ ἐν τῷ λαῷ), where this combination occurs. The unusual construction apparently highlights the content of the dispute among the disciples.¹⁴

The word translated "dispute" in NIV is φιλονεικία.¹⁵ The use of φιλονεικία in the NT is only attested in the Gospel of Luke.¹⁶ Although it does mean quarrel or love for quarrel,¹⁷ the developmental history of the adjective φιλονεικος attests that the word could be positively used in the sense of "ambition." Φιλονεικία is a literary word used to refer primarily to "emulation"¹⁸ which could therefore in Luke 22:24 refer to "ambition to

¹² William Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels – A Revised Edition of the First Three Gospels* (Philadelphia: The Westminster, 1975), 107.

¹³ ISV translates the word, "sprang up;" NET Bible, "started;" and GWT, "broke out."

¹⁴ Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke* (ed. Martin M. Culy; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 674.

¹⁵ ISV translates the word as "argument;" KJV, "strive;" GWT, "quarrel;" and ASV "contention." All the translations make the Greek word negative. This work suggests an alternative interpretation.

¹⁶ Moulton–Geden, *Concordance*, 991. It is a hapax legomenon seen in Luke 22:24

¹⁷ Henry George Liddell, and Robert Scott, *Φιλονεικία, A Greek-English Lexicon* (8th ed.; New York: American Book, 1882), 1675. The two scholars hold that the word is sometimes but rarely used positively.

¹⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Φιλονεικία, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Transl. & Rev.; New York: American Book, 1886), 654. Thayer acknowledges however that the word is often negative in meaning. The positive meaning is adopted here.

surpass”¹⁹ others. The word is ambiguous because it can be used either positively in the sense of competition, emulation and eagerness, or negatively in the sense of rivalry and contentiousness. After examining the ways the LXX, Philo and Josephus²⁰ used the word, many scholars conclude that φιλονεικία in the Lucan context is negative. Taken positively however, the clause will be “There was ambition among them to be adjudged the greatest.” In that case, “ambition” (φιλονεικία) is the subject of “there was” (ἐγένετο). “Among them” (ἐν αὐτοῖς) is dative of association and is so translated in nearly all English versions. The article, “the” (τὸ), in this verse changes the interrogative clause, “which of them he thought to be [the] greater” (τίς αὐτῶν δοκεῖ εἶναι μείζων), into a nominative substantive that is appositive to “ambition” (φιλονεικία). “Who” (τίς) is the nominative subject of “he thinks” (δοκεῖ). William H. Van Doren adjudges “regards” (δοκεῖ) to be redundant.²¹ If the verb “regards” or “seems” (δοκέω) is used to signify how the disciples want to appear in the eyes of others as I.H. Marshall points out,²² the interpreter still needs to determine the person from whom the disciples want the honor. The “ambition” (φιλονεικία) of the disciples portrayed in the text is the foil for Jesus’ teaching on the relation between power and leadership especially in his new ethics. Jesus rounded up the discussion with the promise of reward for faithful service.²³ The position of Peter K. Nelson that the disciples wanted, in the question in verse 24, the honour of men other than Jesus, though strong, remains an opinion.²⁴ That view is disputed in this work. Since the question in the text was directed to Jesus, one may conclude that the disciples needed the recognition of Jesus.

Verse 25a continues the introduction to the pericopé. The nominative subject of “he said” (εἶπεν) is the preposition, “he” (ὁ), added for emphasis in the verse. In its translation, NIV changes the “he” to “Jesus” for clarification. The pronoun translatable as “to them” (αὐτοῖς) (v. 25) is

¹⁹ Cf. “Emulation,” *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000 <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/emulation>> (26 May 2014).

²⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 7, 182. In the Antiquities, a typical reception of the story of David and Absalom is given. An old woman clad in a mourner’s garb visits David with the information that her two sons were involved in a quarrel. As no one appeared, who could have stopped the quarrel, the stronger one killed the other. The use of the word in the works of Philo and Josephus, notwithstanding the few positive undertones, has nothing positive about it.

²¹ William H. Van Doren, *The Gospel of Luke*, Two Volumes in One (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 945.

²² I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 811.

²³ John Nolland, “Form Criticism of the New Testament,” *DTIS*, 1062.

²⁴ Peter K. Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship: A Study of Luke 22:24-30* (SBLDS 138; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 144-145.

personal dative masculine plural and is the indirect object of “he said” (εἶπεν).

Exhortation (vv. 25b-27b):

Verses 25b to 30 consist of Jesus’ direct speech. It begins with a statement of fact: “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors” (v. 25b-c). This is followed with the core exhortation: “But you are not thus. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves” (v. 26a-c). Doren insinuates that some Christian groups use the phrase in Luke 22:26a, “But you are not thus,” to forbid their members from taking public office.²⁵ Hypophora then follows: “for who is greater, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at the table?” (v. 27a-b). Hypophora is “the figure in which one asks questions of adversaries, or of oneself, and answers with what ought or ought not to be said, making oneself look good, and the adversary look bad.”²⁶

The nominative subject of “rule over”/“exercise authority over” (κυριεύουσιν) here is “the kings” (οἱ βασιλεῖς), while the Greek clause translated “of the nations” (DBT) or “of the Gentiles” (NIV) (τῶν ἔθνῶν) is noun genitive neuter plural. The Greek clause, “of the nations,” is, in Greek, genitive of subordination to “the kings.” The Greek word translated, “lord over” (NASB) or “dominate” (HCSB) (κυριεύουσιν) is, in Greek, indicative present active 3rd person plural. The next pronoun, “them” (αὐτῶν), is a genitive complement of “they rule over.” H. Cremer holds that κυριεύουσιν is used here with the meaning “to have or exercise power or force.”²⁷ “Having authority” (ἐξουσιάζοντες) is participle present active nominative masculine plural. The clause, “those who exercise authority over” (οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες), is the nominative subject of “are called” (καλοῦνται). The pronoun “of them” (αὐτῶν) after “those who rule over” (οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες) is, this time, a complement of “ruling over” (ἐξουσιάζοντες). “Benefactors” (εὐεργέται) is a complement in a subject-complement double nominative construction. It is from εὐεργέτης which also means “a well-doer” or “a philanthropist” (cf. Luke 22:25).²⁸ The NLT renders εὐεργέται as “friends,” while DRB makes it “beneficent.” The translation of NLT is clearly inadequate. Many years ago, Joseph Henry Thayer observed, “[εὐεργέτης]

²⁵ Doren, *The Gospel of Luke*, 946.

²⁶ Keith A. Reich, *Figuring Jesus: The Power of Rhetorical Figures of Speech in the Gospel of Luke* (Paul Anderson and Yvonne Sherwood, eds.; Boston: Brill, 2011), 127.

²⁷ H. Cremer, Κυριεύω, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (4th ed.; transl. W. Urwich; Edinburgh: T&T, 1895), 758.

²⁸ Harold L. Moulton, *The Analytical Lexicon* (Rev. ed; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 173.

... was also a title of honor [in the east], conferred on such as had done their country service, and upon princes; equivalent to *Soter* ["Savior"], *Pater Patriae* ["Father of the Country]."²⁹ James H. Moulton and George Milligan agree with that position.³⁰

So, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich are right that "Benefactor" (εὐεργέτης) was used in ancient writings "as a title of princes and other outstanding men."³¹ In fact, each of Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II was regarded as εὐεργέτης ("benefactor"),³² and a title of honour demanded by some other people. Very few scholars agree with William Barclay that Jesus meant in Luke 22:25 that "It is not the king but the servant who obtains that title [benefactor] in ... [Jesus'] kingdom."³³ A scholarly debate is brewing up here: Were the ancient eastern kings imposters and did Jesus use the term, Benefactor, with negative or positive connotation? Answer to this is attempted below.

The verb, "they call themselves"/"they are called" (καλοῦνται), is significant to the ongoing discussion. The Greek word is the indicative present middle or passive 3rd person plural of "call." If καλοῦνται is taken as middle (reflective) indicative the word means "they call themselves." This is the translation adopted by the NIV. But if the verb is taken as passive indicative, then it means "they are called." The ASV adopts this last translation. J. Norval Geldenhuys argues for taking εὐεργέται καλοῦνται as middle thus,

*εὐεργέται καλοῦνται should here be taken as in the "middle voice:" "get themselves called benefactors," ... "claim the title" In the Hellenistic world it was a prevalent custom for Gentile rulers to adopt the title Euergetes. ... "He (Jesus) mentioned the title not without contempt, and forbade his disciples to allow themselves to be so called ..."*³⁴

David J. Lull takes the same line on this:

Although only a few commentators ... take ... [the verb] to be reflexive, this reading provides the strongest support for the view that being called "benefactors" contradicts the kind of

²⁹ Thayer, εὐεργέτης, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 258.

³⁰ James H. Moulton, and George Milligan, εὐεργέτης, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914-1929), 261.

³¹ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, εὐεργέτης, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (4th ed; London: The University of Chicago, 1957), 320.

³² William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1979), 971.

³³ Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels*, 267.

³⁴ J. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London, 1950), 564.

*service to which Christians are called. An anomaly of the consensus is that it assumes, with few exceptions, that the passive is the correct reading. If, however, καλούνται is passive, the case weakens for interpreting v. 25 negatively.*³⁵

Paul W. Walaskay is correct that those who regard καλοῦνται in the middle sense see in this passage sarcasm toward the Empire. He himself rejects that position. Walaskay holds:

*It is difficult to believe ... that Luke does other than reflect the practice of the urban populace who often proclaimed a benefactor as εὐεργέτης. Those who rule in the secular realm are not oppressors of the people, but are in a position to dispense divine benefits to the people. Even though the disciples are to implement a different order of rank, there is no mockery in Luke's use of the title "Benefactor." It is both popularly acclaimed and divinely ordained.*³⁶

Lull also makes a "case ... for interpreting the saying about those who are called 'Benefactors' as a *positive* example in terms of which 'greatness' is defined. In fact, the main characters in Luke-Acts embody the ideal expressed in Luke 22:25. Moreover, one can see that 'greatness' is defined here in terms familiar in the larger Greco-Roman world, terms associated with monarchs and other benefactors."³⁷

The first part of the direct speech of Jesus which begins in verse 25b, forms a contrast with the injunction, "but not so with you" (ὁμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως) in verse 26a, where "the kings" (οἱ βασιλεῖς) and "those exercising authority" (οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες) are differentiated from "the younger one" (ὁ νεώτερος) and "the one serving" (ὁ διακονῶν) that are in a chiasmic relation with "the greater" (ὁ μείζων) and "the one leading" (ὁ ἡγούμενος).³⁸ The hypophora of Jesus emphasizes his injunction. The second part of the direct speech begins with a statement of fact: "You are those who have stood by me in my trials" (Ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐστε οἱ διαμεμενηκότες μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου). The word translated "greatest" (μείζων) in verses 24b, 26b and 27a is a comparative adjective and is used figuratively in this passage. The adjective not only holds the first submission of the second section together, it binds the first and the second sections. The *opposition* between the two statements of fact is clear: the first statement of fact deals with "them" ("The kings" ... and

³⁵ David J. Lull, "The Servant-Benefactor as a Model of Greatness (Luke 22:24-30)," *NT* 28 (1986), 4:293.

³⁶ Paul W. Walaskay, "And so We Came to Rome:" *The Political Perspective of St. Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 37.

³⁷ Lull, "The Servant-Benefactor as a Model of Greatness (Luke 22:24-30)," 293-294.

³⁸ Nolland, "Form Criticism of the New Testament," 1065.

those who rule”) while the second deals with “you” (“you ... are”). The predicates of the subjects of the different statements of fact are semantically different: those in power lord it over others, while the apostles are steadfast in the temptations of Jesus. The reader is presented with two semantic fields of power and of suffering, which will help him to see both subjects as opposing poles.³⁹

The core exhortation in this unit is in verse 26. The word translated “you” (ὁμεῖς) is plural. It is the nominative subject which refers to the disciples while οὕτως is simply an adverb of manner. “But”/“instead” (ἀλλά) introduces a clause that runs contra to conventional expectations. “The greater”/“greatest” (ὁ μείζων) is the subject of “let him be” (γινέσθω). Μείζων is actually not “... equivalent to the superlative, which would have indicated several gradations from lowest to highest. The comparative implies only two, a superior and all the rest as equals” (Cf. Luke 9:46; Mark 9:34).⁴⁰ The verb translated “let him be” (γινέσθω) is imperative present middle or passive deponent 3rd person singular. “The younger” (ὁ νεώτερος) is here, in Greek, the nominative subject of an implied “is” (ἐστίν). The word “younger” (νεώτερος) which is comparative in form is used in Luke 22:26 but is always given superlative sense (“youngest”) in translation as if the text were comparing more than two groups.⁴¹ In fact, Doren argues that μείζων, “... may mean *elder*, as contrasted with the younger, as James the less.”⁴² Doren posits further that the struggle for headship was between Peter and John but that remains a speculation. The idea of the phrase is that the person who is, on one hand “greater,” when compared with a whole group on the other hand, is likened to the “younger” (comparative) of the group of two. Innocent Emezie Ezeani, like several other scholars, holds that in ANE, the youngest expectedly performed the lowliest task in a given community.⁴³ The point therefore is, whoever is greater is to perform the role of the younger to the rest “As” (ὡς) is adverb of comparison. The Greek clause “the [one] leading/ruling” (ὁ ἡγούμενος) could in Greek be present middle or

³⁹ J. Green argues that there exists a thematic relationship between the betrayal question and the question of pre-eminence as the betrayal question ends with *to tis*. If the prophecy of Jesus about a betrayer in his company was a cause for alarm so too is the betrayal of the understanding of the kingdom of Jesus as exhibited by the other disciples another cause. J. B. Green, *Luke*, 766. Further, this sequence mirrors Luke 9:43b-45, 46-48. Fitzmyer explains the sequence thus: The revelation that one of the apostles was the betrayer of Jesus means that there could be differences among the chosen twelve. If it is so, who then seems to be the greatest and the best? Cf. J. Fitzmyer, *Luke* 11, 1414f

⁴⁰ Alfred Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1920), 501.

⁴¹ Ezeani, “The Apologetic Revisited,” 153.

⁴² Doren, *The Gospel of Luke*, 947.

⁴³ Ezeani, “The Apologetic Revisited,” 155.

passive participle deponent masculine nominative singular. Its use here is substantival. “The one serving” (ὁ διακονῶν) is nominative subject also of an implied “is” (ἔστιν). It is present active participle masculine nominative singular of διακονέω (substantival). “And (let) the one who leads (be) like the one who serves” translates, καὶ ὁ ἡγούμενος ὡς ὁ διακονῶν.

Kimberly Penner studies the Greek word translated “serve” (διακονέω). He observes that the isolated use of διακονία “does not say much in the Greek language about the status or specific task of the person involved in it, the context is extremely significant.”⁴⁴ Luke-Acts uses the Greek word group “servant-service-serve” most and the usage cannot be limited to “table-waiting.” For in Luke-Acts, the sociologically lowly activity of servant “becomes the expression in practice of the ideal of discipleship according to Jesus.”⁴⁵ Louise Schottroff adds that in the NT, “serving others” has “the full sense of active Christian love for neighbour and ... is a mark of true discipleship of Jesus.”⁴⁶ Διακονία has been interpreted by some as financial provision (Cf. Luke 8:3); some others as table-waiting; while others construe it as discipleship.⁴⁷ Although Penner cites John N. Collins on *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources*,⁴⁸ he shows little understanding of his work, and has obviously not read Karl Paul Donfried’s additional comments on it.⁴⁹ Pointing out that there are few examples of the application of the word-group to domestic service, and that those which do occur most frequently refer to a ceremonial waiter, Collins cites Luke 22:27 as reference to a ceremonial waiter.⁵⁰ Donfried succinctly puts the point thus:

For Collins ... Jesus here [is] as a “waiter,” not as one who serves but as “the one attending.” Verse 26 ... has the parallel meaning of “the one attending,” for “from Homeric times, it was the Greek ideal that youths should honour their betters in age by waiting on them.” The advice of Jesus is that

⁴⁴ Kimberly Penner, “The Work of Wealthy Women: Female Discipleship in Luke 8:1-3” (MTS Thesis, University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario 2011), 93.

⁴⁵ Penner, “The Work of Wealthy Women,” 94.

⁴⁶ Louise Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 209.

⁴⁷ Penner, “The Work of Wealthy Women,” 96-99.

⁴⁸ John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴⁹ Karl Paul Donfried, “Ministry: Rethinking the Term *Diakomia*,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 56 (January 1992), 1: 1-15.

⁵⁰ Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources*, 76, 151, 166.

*the disciples should be like young men who wait on older dignitaries, a role which Jesus Himself adopts in verse 27.*⁵¹

Since “he who serves” takes, in Greek, the dative of persons ministered to,⁵² the expected receivers of the service in the Lucan text are “among you [the disciples].” Because the Greek phrase translated “among you,” which is a reference to the disciples, is the only dative (Luke 22:26), then the clause is the object of comparison for the greater, the younger, the leading, and the serving.

Jesus uses hypophora in 22:27a-b to highlight his role reversing message. It begins with “For who is greater?” (NIV) (τίς γὰρ μείζων;). The interrogative pronoun, “who” (τίς) is nominative masculine singular. It is the subject of an implied equative verb. “For” (γὰρ) is a conjunction in this verse, it is explanatory. “Greater” (μείζων) is adjective nominative masculine singular comparative of “great” (μέγας). “The one reclining” is, in Greek, predicate adjective of an implied equative verb with “greater,” and is substantival. “The one serving/waiting at the table” (ὁ διακονῶν) is present active participle masculine nominative singular. It is substantival. It appears in this verse as nominative subject of an implied equative verb with “greater.”

Almost without exception commentators see in Jesus’ words in 22:24-27 “sarcasm, irony, criticism, and invective hurled against the rulers of the Roman Empire.” They deduce that the words reflect Jesus’ critical attitude toward the State. “Fewer scholars take these verses to be neutral in assessing the Empire.”⁵³ Walaskay disagrees with this consensus. By contrasting Luke 22:24-27 with Mark 10:42-5, one observes that Luke has changed the word used for “rule” by Mark in 10:42 from “exercise authority over” (κατεξουσιάζουσιν) to “rule over” (κυριεύουσιν) (Luke 22:25). Similarly Luke replaces the words in Mark translated “those being accounted to rule over” (οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν) with “the kings” (οἱ βασιλεῖς) (Luke 22:25). Luke refuses to use the phrase, “the great ones” (οἱ μεγάλοι) found in Mark 10:42. After comparing the vocabularies of Mark 10:42-45 and Luke 22:24-27, one also observes difference in the ways Mark and Luke use certain vocabularies, which leads to the conclusion that Luke shows dislike for the compound form of words which may have negative implication of subduing, humiliating and tyrannising someone.⁵⁴ Luke has thus removed

⁵¹Donfried, “Ministry: Rethinking the Term *Diakomia*,” 9.

⁵² Thayer, *Διακονέω*, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 187.

⁵³ Walaskay, “*And so We Came to Rome*,” 36.

⁵⁴ The use of the word here suggests an aspect of tyranny. Cf. W. Bauer-Aland, *Worterbuch*, 857. Notwithstanding the absence of this word in the LXX and in the works of Philo and Josephus, there is the tendency to see this word as implying the possibility of compulsion and oppression, which is immanent in all earthly power.

the sting that Mark, attaches to the words.⁵⁵ Walaskay's position that Luke 22 is neutral about classifying the Gentile kings' authority and that the challenge inherent in the parable is that Jesus' disciples should not follow the pattern of the degraded type is both interesting and convincing to this exegete. It is embarrassing that Luke, in its record on ambition for greatness (22:24-27), omits the saying found in Mark, "For the Son of man also came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). Such has led some scholars to conclude that Luke is not interested in Christological questions.⁵⁶

The feet-washing comment of Jesus is illustrative of transformed greatness: "But I am among you as one who serves" (v. 27b). The phrase is a reference to the whole ministry of Jesus and may not be limited to the feet-washing of his disciples or the serving of/waiting on his disciples at the Paschal Meal.⁵⁷ "The one reclining and being served is (according to the Greco-Roman honor-shame system) greater than the servant [waiter]. ... The point is that he, Jesus, is the one serving."⁵⁸ Sharon H. Ringe's comment, "By serving or distributing the food to the other guests, Jesus has taken on the work generally carried out by a servant or by a woman of the household,"⁵⁹ is legitimate. It is however debatable if the illustration better compares Jesus' "service" with that of a servant/waiter, or a younger person. John C. Hutchison's position is that Jesus' "call of his disciples to this model was one of the most difficult commands for them to understand and obey in their cultural situation. This radical call ... violated foundational cultural values related to honor/shame and patronage that were embedded in Jewish and Greco-Roman society."⁶⁰ The present re-interpretation disagrees with Hutchison and other scholars of his persuasion because he missed the point of contrast: Jesus did not compare the perverse kingship of Roman Empire

⁵⁵ Evans made a distinction between the two uses among the evangelists Luke and Mark. It could be that the Markan usage works from the perspective of a greater level of tyranny, while the Lucan usage, though being descriptive, is suggestive of a mentality not worthy of the Christian community. The observation of Marshall, that these verbs in Luke belongs to the action to be avoided by the Christian hierarchy in the epistles e.g. 2 Cor 1:24, 1 Pet 5:3, is very important. To convictions resembling that of Evans, which suggest that these compound verbs underscores the negative portrayal of the political elites, Clark counters that. Cf. K. W. Clark, *Meaning*, 207-212.

⁵⁶ William Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels*, 277.

⁵⁷ Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 501-502.

⁵⁸ Reich, *Figuring Jesus*, 128; cf. David A. deSilva, *Honour, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), 23-25.

⁵⁹ Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 263.

⁶⁰ John C. Hutchison, "Servanthood: Jesus' Countercultural call to Christian Leaders," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (Jan-March, 2009), 54.

with leadership in his Kingdom. He contrasted the ideal leadership of Gentile nations.

The Promise (vv. 28-30):

Plummer is right that the content of verses 28-30 is peculiar to Luke.⁶¹ It belongs to “L” materials. Verse 28 begins with a statement, “You are those who have stood by me in my trials” (NIV). In the verse, “you” (ὁμεῖς) is the subject nominative of “you are” (ἐστε). While “those” (οἱ) is the definite article nominative masculine plural, “who have stood” (διαμεμενηκότες) is verb participle perfect active nominative masculine plural. The phrase, “those who have stood,” is substantival, and functions in the verse as predicate nominative.⁶² Ernest de Witt Burton states,

*An Adjective Participle used substantively with article may of course occur as a predicate with a copula. This, however, is not properly a Predicative Participle. The presence of the article makes its use as a noun easily evident. The participle without the article may be as really substantive ... but it is not easily distinguished as such.*⁶³

Burton cites Luke 22:28 as example of such uses. Citing Plummer with approval, Geldenhuys comments thus, “The idea of *persistent loyalty* is enforced by the compound verb,”⁶⁴ by the perfect tense (διαμεμενηκότες), and by the preposition (μετά).⁶⁵ When μετά is followed by genitive as here, it is better rendered, “with.” The clause translated “by me” (μετ’ ἐμοῦ) in NIV, is made, “with me,” in ESV. The word, “of me” (ἐμοῦ), is genitive of association describing the relation of Jesus with his disciples while, “in the trials” (ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς), pinpoints the temporal or context of the association. The last word, “of me” (μου), in verse 28 is personal pronoun genitive singular. It is used in this verse as subjective genitive.⁶⁶ The pronoun refers to Jesus and the “trials” he faced or the trials which his followers faced for identifying with him. Commenting on verse 28 Geldenhuys approvingly cites A. Schlatter thus, “The things that could move them to forsake Jesus ... denote the end of Jesus that every pious Jew employed when he accepted from God’s hand suffering imposed upon him. His suffering is a test, a confirmation of the reality and perfection of the faith

⁶¹ Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 502.

⁶² Culy, Parsons, and Stigall, *Luke*, 675.

⁶³ Ernest de Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Mood and Tenses in the New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 169.

⁶⁴ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 564.

⁶⁵ Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 502.

⁶⁶ Dana, Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 78.

offered to God and of the obedience accorded to Him.”⁶⁷ Plummer’s comments on the clause, “in my trials” (ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου), are convincing: “[These were] the trials to which he [Jesus] had been subjected during his ministry, and especially the latter portion of it. These, even to him, were temptations to abandon his work.”⁶⁸

Jesus’ promise for “the great” found in verses 29-30 is two-fold: “A kingdom,” and “a dinning and ruling with Jesus” (Luke 22:29). “And I” (κἀγώ) is the shortened form of καὶ ἐγώ. It is the nominative subject of “confer” (διατίθεμαι). “Confer” is verb indicative present middle 1st person singular. Διατίθημι is used only in the middle form in the NT. Διατίθεμαι means, “to assign a thing to someone as his possession.” Hence in verse 29 where διατίθεμαι is used with the dative of the indirect object, “on you” (ὑμῖν), διατίθεμαι ὑμῖν, means “I confer on you,”⁶⁹ Geldenhuys argues that the word βασιλείαν without the article should here be translated, “authority,” and not “a kingdom,” and that it is better taken as the object of only “appointed” (διέθετό).⁷⁰ Plummer has earlier made this same point thus, “‘βασιλεία is here ‘dominion’ rather than ‘a kingdom.’”⁷¹ According to William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, διατίθεμαι is used with the dative of the persons favored.⁷² The word, διέθετό, means “appointed” or “granted,” although it can take the meaning, “conferred” as it does here. The argument that “confer” (διατίθεμαι) in verse 29 be taken as eschatological is critiqued and rejected later in this work.

On the question if, the dinning and ruling of the disciples in Luke 22:29-30, is in the church age, in the eschaton, or in both eras, after an impressive work, Peter K. Nelson suggests, “On the basis of verbal, grammatical, contextual, logical, and other factors ... in spite of the orientation of much recent scholarship, the eschaton, not earlier periods, is in view.”⁷³ A careful reading of Luke 22:29-30 reveals that the text distinguishes between Jesus’ conferment of authority/kingdom on the disciples and the time when that conferral is completely fulfilled, its privileges and responsibilities being fully realised. The timing of the initial act can be determined by paying attention to the use of the present tense

⁶⁷ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 564.

⁶⁸ Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 502.

⁶⁹ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 142.

⁷⁰ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 565.

⁷¹ Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 502.

⁷² Διατίθημι, *BAG*, 189.

⁷³ Peter K. Nelson, “Luke 22:29-30 and the Time Frame for Dinning and Ruling,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993) 2: 351.

“appoint” (διατίθεμαι) in verse 29. The word is best understood as aoristic present because comparative “as” (καθὼς) likens it to aorist “appointed” (διέθετό), and because the act in question is momentary and not continuing or repeated.

Luke 22:30 reads, “so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” “So that” (ἵνα), is a conjunction and it serves in this verse as a purpose clause. The verb “you might eat” (ἔσθητε) is subjunctive present active 2nd person plural. The subjunctive is used here with “so that” (ἵνα). “You might drink” (πίνητε) is verb subjunctive present active 2nd person plural. The subjunctive is also used with the conjunction, “so that” (ἵνα). “At the table” (ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης) is locative. “Of me” (μου) is possessive genitive while “in the kingdom” (ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ) is also locative. The preposition “of me” (μου) after “kingdom” (βασιλείᾳ) is used as subjective genitive (cf. Luke 4:43). “You will sit” (καθήσεσθε) is future middle indicative 2nd person plural.

Although the preceding καὶ could indicate that this clause is part of the ἵνα clause, with the future (x A B2 L N Q W Θ Ψ f13 pc) being substituted for the more typical subjunctive (cf. 14:10 on ἐπεῖ), the context suggests that it is coordinate with the clause in verse 29 Some scribes (B T Δ pc), however, made a connection to the ἵνα clause explicit by using the aorist middle subjunctive καθήσθε (thus, “so that you might eat and drink . . . and sit on thrones . . .”).⁷⁴*

“On thrones” (ἐπὶ θρόνων) is locative while “the twelve tribes” (τὰς δώδεκα φυλὰς) accusative is the direct object of “judging” (κρίνοντες). “Judging” (κρίνοντες) is verb participle present active nominative masculine (manner). “Of Israel” (τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ) is exegetical genitive.

In a running commentary on Luke 22:24-30, David Gooding writes, [The Disciples] were been schooled in to renounce the Gentile concept of government as domination over others, and to follow the ideal which he had set before them, that of the Servant-King (22:24-27). Their schooling done and their loyalty to the King tested by the sharing of his suffering, they were to be rewarded in the age to come with the delight of close personal fellowship with him in his glory and with active participation with him in the government (22:28-30).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Culy, Parsons, and Stigall, *Luke*, 676-677.

⁷⁵ David Gooding, *According to Luke: an Exposition of the Third Gospel* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 333.

Nelson correctly summarises the arguments that Jesus’ promises of dinning and ruling to his disciples are future thus:

Subjunctive [you might eat] ἔσθητε and [you might drink] πίνετε clearly anticipate a future meal at Jesus’ table in his kingdom. Further, it would be senseless for Jesus to confer upon the apostles the right to do at present what they were already doing, namely dining with him. Moreover, [are to sit] καθήσεσθε necessarily anticipates a future realisation, and the timing for the present participle [judging] κρίνοντες is contemporaneous with [are to sit] καθήσεσθε. So the present conferral must await a future fulfillment.⁷⁶

So, the answer to the question raised at the beginning of this work is that Jesus never condemned ambition for greatness in Luke 22:24-30. Neither did he condemn the legitimacy and usefulness of power even among the nations. He however corrected the way his disciples should use power as leaders. To interpret otherwise is to camp Luke against 1 Timothy 3:1, “whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task” (NRS), and some scholars are ready to do this with some justifications at the first opportunity.

“From Zero to Hero:” Aspiration in Western Nigerian Context and in Luke 22

The people that dominate the Western region of Nigeria are the Yorùbá. Elements of their church services are singing of choruses, singing of hymns, sermons/sermonets, collection of offerings, and prayer. The weakest element in their contemporary worship services is singing of hymns: African Initiated Churches like the Christ Apostolic Church, the Redeem Christian Church of God, the Living Faith, have reduced the singing of hymns to the barest minimum, and many of their members know little or nothing of the old, classical, hymns with their great theological assets. But Christians of Western Nigeria have not totally forsaking the traditional Christian hymns. The following three popular choruses in among the Christians in Western Nigeria convey their yearnings and aspirations for promotion.

Selected Yoruba Choruses with their Translations

Yoruba	English
1. Gbé mi s’ókè Gbé mi dide Fà mí l’ówó s’okó Kí un ga ju ayé lo Ògo ayé mi, jé k’ó je jáde	1. Lift me up Raise me up Lift me up to a high place Beyond others The glory of my life, let it manifest

⁷⁶ Nelson, “Luke 22:29-30 and the Time Frame for Dinning and Ruling,” 352.

Fà mí l'ówó s'okè Má mà jé kó pé.	Lift me up to a high place Let it not be delayed further
2. Olúwa jò ó gbé mí í s'okè Wá gbé mi lo sí ibi gíga Isàlè sú mi, ó mà sú mí o Òkè ni mo fé ló Wá gbé mi í s'okè	2. Lord, please lift me up Come and lift me to a higher ground I am tired of the valley, I am tired I want to move up Come and lift me up
3. Baba gbé mi sókè, Jésù gbé mi sókè Isàlè kò dára, Baba òkè ni mo fé T'orí ení bá wà l'óké, Ojú rẹ á t'ólè Isàlè kò dára, Baba òkè ni mo fé	3. Father lift me up, Jesus exalt me Valley is not good, Father lift me up Because only he who is up, sees everything Valley is not good, Father lift me up.

The choruses above show that while servitude may be encountered it is not cherished. Again the choruses show that the Christians in Western Nigeria, like the disciples in Luke, believe that they should look unto Jesus for their promotion. The interchange between *Baba* (“Father”) and *Jesu* (“Jesus”) in the first line of the third chorus is symbolic of the common confusion in the Persons of the Trinity in popular theology. Whether the upliftment is from the Father or the Son, to the Western Nigerian Christians, God is the “right” source of promotion, and whatever differs from this is “ungodly.” While the petitioner in the first chorus simply requests to be lifted higher than his colleagues, the second petitioner expresses his frustration at being down-trodden it is however only the third petitioner who expresses his reason for the request – to supervise. Christians who pray to God for upliftment in Western Nigeria are not to be condemned: their requests are directed to God who decides either to answer or not. On the other hand, there is a general agreement among Bible interpreters that fighting for power is condemnable.

In a research carried out in Osun Diocese of Anglican Communion recently, William Sunday Ojelade discovered that there is leadership power struggle in the Anglican Communion in Osogbo.⁷⁷ David Oluseye Oyeniyi discovered a same problem in the Christ Apostolic Church in Ile-Ife, Ilesa, and Osogbo.⁷⁸ This, as found by James Opeyemi Arowolo, is similarly the case with the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Ilesa, and Ondo.⁷⁹ In a discussion with some Doctor of Ministry students in Nigeria,

⁷⁷ William Sunday Ojelade, he carried out the study between January and November 2013. The information is from the data he gathered in the course of writing his MA Thesis. The information is used with the researcher’s permission.

⁷⁸ David Oyeniyi Oluseye, he carried out the study between June 2013 and March 2014. The information is from the data he gathered in the course of writing his MA Thesis. The information is used with the researcher’s permission.

⁷⁹ James Opeyemi Arowolo, he carried out the study between May and October 2011. The information is from the data he gathered in the course of writing his PhD Thesis work. The information is used with the researcher’s permission.

the students told the researcher that, sermons on and prayers for upliftment is common in Nigeria as a whole. They pointed out further that while some people use demonic means to achieve this, Christians use God glorifying means.⁸⁰

The Yoruba distinguish inordinate ambitions for power which employs whatever available means to getting it from legitimate aspiration for power which employs God glorifying means. In discussions, even among the non-religious, and sermons, inordinate ambition for power and position is condemned. Psychologically, the human wants to be recognised and rewarded. Investigations of Ojelade, Oyeniya, and Arowolo suggest that power struggle in the affected denominations may be a reaction to the failure of those in authority for preventing those under them from developing their leadership potentials.

There was a time when “absolute power” resided in kings in Nigeria, then figures of Yoruba monarchs like the *Aláàfin* would have adequately convey the power of the Roman Emperor but things have changed. Traditional rulers are now mainly symbolic. Only figures like State Governors or President of the country can adequately convey the power intended in Luke 22:25. Clearly, inordinate ambition for power is dangerous as the four studies by Ojelade, Oyeniya, Arowolo, and Folarin show but that is not the issue in Luke 22. The Lucan pericopé shows the following things: the disciples entertained the thought of greatness; the request for greatness was directed to Jesus; Jesus did not condemn the disciples’ interest in greatness; Jesus affirmed that greatness inherently confers power; but Jesus directed that leadership power should be used to serve; and a future reward is attached to faithful service. Reading the Lucan text in the context of the church in Western Nigeria yields the conclusion that aspiring to use leadership power to serve God and his people is not violating but conforming to the challenge of Luke 22.

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⁸⁰ George O. Folarin conducted the discussion with the D.Min. students in Pauline Epistles’ class in ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, in June 2014. Their observation does not imply the endorsement of the theological position.

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