

Article of the Month – November 2012

Missiological Observations in the NT (14) – James

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James' missiology shows us sad realities in the Majority Church. The observations below are not unilateral accusations from the Minority- to the Majority Church.¹ Both make mistakes, have to repent² and repair the damage.

There are many orphans and widows in the Global South³ and with its numerous Christians the question is justified, why *western* missionaries have to execute ministries, that the Majority Church should do itself.

How pure and faultless is Southern Christianity in this regard? Compassion ministries are the local church's responsibility and not meant as occupation for cross-cultural missionaries, except in unreached areas where such ministries may serve to open up the population to receive the Gospel.

Paraphrasing one passage,⁴ we might say to some non-western leaders: 'Brothers ... don't show favoritism. Suppose a [white] man meets you, a western missionary with much finance at his disposal, and another comes in without that. If you show special attention to the rich missionary and say 'Hey, let's partner', but say to the less advantaged missionary 'yes, yes' – but then ignore him – have you not discriminated and become judges with evil motives? Has not God chosen those who are poor in your eyes to be rich in faith, knowledge, experience and advice? But you insulted His less affluent workers. Is it not the rich missionaries who make you dependent on their funds and dictate you their agendas? Is their version of 'partnership' not in fact an employer-employee relationship? Do they not enslave you with their wealth and degrade you and the name of Who created you? If you show favoritism, you sin.'

Further on we read about faith without deeds.⁵ Is not that a Southern form of Christianity that one of its leaders labeled as 'a mile wide but only an inch deep'?⁶ James calls it 'dead'. Undisciplined converts will not change the world. The world needs no more talkers, but walkers. Take Africa. On no continent Christianity has spread as widely, yet Christianity's impact on society is often small. No place in the world knows so much AIDS, poverty, wars, power abuse and corruption. Therefore, the overseas cross-cultural missionary enterprise in Africa should concentrate on discipleship- and leadership-training, and mobilize the Church to reach the unreached on its continent. The western missionary task force should teach *them* to develop and care for *their own* communities and equipping the saints for ministry, rather

¹ With 'Majority-Church' I mean the Church in the Global South, with 'Minority Church' the Western Church

² James 4:8-10,17

³ 1:27

⁴ 2:1-9

⁵ 2:14,17

⁶ The term was coined by the late Nigerian theologian Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo

than performing local ministries *themselves*. Such work should be based on self-reliance principles, abandoning dependency on foreign funds and personnel.

James gives an example of social care (food and clothing) as proof of true religion.⁷ It is a great western ministry: shipping in food and clothes for the poor. Such ministry is an easy fundraiser and it helps to ease the donors' consciences. But does it help? It relieves, but fails to develop communities. It changes situations, but not structures. In some cases indigenous markets were spoiled because local farmers could not compete with free overseas wheat. What should be done then? It is wiser to give somebody a rod and teach him to fish, than just give him a fish. There should be disaster-relief, but this should not replace community development. Giving things is easier than teaching people to care for themselves – which also redeems their dignity and self-esteem. Is not this what James meant?

Later, he describes earthly, unspiritual and devilish 'wisdom'.⁸ This reminds us of the envy that exists among poorer church leaders because of a western-type prosperity gospel, daily broadcast on TV into their regions. Unfortunately many Southerners fell for the glitter of impressive cathedrals with expensive sound systems – and they want it too.

Parallel to this run envy on the status of others and the ambitious attempts to jack up one's reputation by using impressive titles, such as Apostle and Prophet (which sound more prestigious than 'pastor'), Doctor, Reverend, Bishop, etc. Such unholy self-exaltation can only raise contempt among people that are *not* driven by a chief-mentality that seeks to build empires at the cost of God's Kingdom. Such boasting and bragging⁹ has become a widespread satanic disease, causing lots of disorders (think about unreliability,¹⁰ waste of time and money and absence of financial accountability, to mention a few) and other evil practices.¹¹ What on earth have we, western missionaries, done to grow such fruit? Repentance is badly needed on both ends!

James' complaint against undesirable church-behavior goes on.¹² There is quarrelling and fighting in the Majority Church. Much is caused by the above issues, but there are also divisions along tribal, denominational, cultural, social and racial lines. Apart from coveting killing occurs. How? Even if that were not the case literally, we can think of killing relationships, one another's reputations or credibility¹³ and the unity in Christ's Body. The fighting does not even yield results: 'You do not have because you do not ask *God*'.¹⁴ Often unashamed fundraising by Southern Christians in the West replaced asking *God*! By forgetting to ask the Highest Authority with regard to financial needs,¹⁵ non-western leaders fall into the trap of wrong motives and succumb to serving Mammon instead of God.¹⁶ James' concluding word 'adulterous' is in place:¹⁷ there is a lot of 'washing, purifying, mourning, grieving, wailing and humbling' to be done¹⁸ before the Majority Church can expect to be lifted out of her numerous predicaments.

⁷ 2:15,16

⁸ 3:14-16

⁹ 4:16

¹⁰ 5:12b

¹¹ 3:16

¹² 4:1-3

¹³ 4:11

¹⁴ 4:2 (italics mine)

¹⁵ Haggai 2:9; Ps. 50:10

¹⁶ Matt. 6:24

¹⁷ James 4:4

¹⁸ 4:8-10

His next warning applies to affluent Christians who abused their wealth for selfish ends.¹⁹ Paraphrasing it into missionary vocabulary: ‘Your wealth missed the eternal benefits it could have reaped. You forfeited the possibility to be clothed with fine linen.’²⁰ Your gold and silver have missed its true purpose, and that loss will testify against and consume you, who piled up wealth instead of investing it into Last Days initiatives. The wages you failed to pay the workers of the Kingdom, who went out to evangelize the nations on your behalf are crying out against you. The cries of these harvest-laborers have reached the ears of the Almighty. You lived in luxury and self-indulgence [and] fattened yourselves while Judgment Day approaches.’ James repeats his advice to ‘weep and wail because of the coming misery’²¹ – in other words: he calls the rich to repentance.

James’ last missions-related remark applies to the brothers who expect a spiritual harvest, encouraging them to be patient until the Lord comes,²² i.e. when the Great Commission has been completed.²³ He warns that the last stretch of that race will contain much suffering, like that of the prophets who spoke in the Lord’s name; and that perseverance will have a reward, much richer than expected, as was the case with Job.

¹⁹ 5:2-5

²⁰ Rev. 19:8b

²¹ James 5:1

²² 5:7-11

²³ Matt. 24:14