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### POOR AND RICH IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND EXEGETICAL STUDY

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This investigation attempts to break further from parochialism in dealing with the Epistle of James, moving away from the purely literary and theological orientation, and paying more attention to the social milieu out of which the document arose and how the ethos of the community impinged upon the thought of the writer.

Socially oriented studies in NT scholarship are not new. Since the 1930s, however, this emphasis has been largely neglected until its recent revival. Chap. 1 shows that the greatest problem with social orientation in NT studies is finding a satisfactory method. The majority of scholars who are presently following such an investigation utilize sociological theories, but there are pitfalls when a modern theory governs the study of the text and its socio-historical implications. This research, therefore, argues that a socio-historical description of a document and its community must be initially undertaken before any attempt is made to analyze it sociologically.

Chap. 2 briefly surveys the social stratification of the Graeco-Roman world of the first century, taking note of the earlier Hellenistic influence. Chap. 3 looks into the categories "poor and rich" in pertinent Jewish literature as well as in the NT. The material in these chapters provides the possible *Weltanschauung* of James.

Chap. 4 deals with literary and socio-historical contexts. As to the former, this study exegetes the four pericopae which treat the poor and wealthy (Jas 1:9-11; 2:1-9; 4:13-17; 5:1-6). As to the latter, it describes the social *realia* within the pericopae, and attempts a comprehensive reconstruction of the social history of the milieu out of which the document arose.

This investigation demonstrates that James was not working simply with the *anawim*-piety of Judaism, but was actually addressing the socio-economic reality of his time. Thus the categories "poor and rich" were for the author fundamentally economic realities, though set in a spiritual context.

The Epistle shows that in primitive Christianity there was a critical attitude of society, a concern with social justice, and a sensitivity to the needs of the oppressed. This research, therefore, presents the biblical scholar in general and the Third World theologian in particular with a model which demonstrates God's concern for oppression and poverty.