

THE WHOLENESS OF LIFE AS CHRISTIAN MISSION: READING THE EPISTLE OF JAMES IN CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: This article explores the concept of "wholeness of life" in the Epistle of James, arguing that it is a foundational principle for Christian mission, encompassing terms like "completeness," "perfection," "integration," and "maturity." It draws parallels between James's teachings and the holistic mission advocated by Qes Gudina Tumsa, a prominent Ethiopian church leader. Tumsa emphasized a holistic ministry that addresses socio-political, cultural, and economic issues, urging the church to engage proactively in its mission. The article examines the significance of wholeness in James, Tumsa's holistic theology, and the relevance of these concepts for contemporary Ethiopia, which faces numerous challenges such as poverty, conflict, and religious extremism. It concludes that understanding and applying the notion of wholeness in Christian mission is crucial for addressing the complex issues in Ethiopian society today.

INTRODUCTION

This article argues that the wholeness of life in James is not merely a central, "overarching theme,"¹ but a foundational principle directly linked to Christian mission—both individual and cosmic. This theme is expressed through terms like "completeness," "perfection," "integration," and "maturity."² By employing such terminology, James aims to nurture Christians toward their mission, fostering wholeness of life in theology, approach, and praxis.

Mission as wholeness of life is well attributed in the late *Qes*³ (Reverend) Gudina Tumsa's calling of the church towards "holistic mission." Tumsa (1929–1979), General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, urged the church toward proactive engagement in its calling, emphasizing holistic ministry in theology, approach, and praxis.⁴ "Wholeness of life," for Tumsa, involved ministering amid socio-political, cultural, and economic chaos. This article aims to demonstrate the affinity between this calling and James's emphasis on perfection, maturity, and completeness in the Christian community.⁵

My aim, following Richard Bauckham, is to read James not sequentially or linearly, but as a "compendium of James's wisdom"⁶ structured "to provide a resource for acquiring the wisdom that is expressed in obedience to God in everyday life."⁷ Mission as "wholeness of life" and "compendium of wisdom" is significant for contemporary Ethiopia, facing identity-based conflicts, poverty, displacement, persecution, economic disparity, prosperity gospel teachings, and more. This article first examines the meaning, purpose, and significance of wholeness in James vis-à-vis Christian mission. Then, it elaborates

¹ Richard Bauckham, *James: New Testament Reading* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 177.

² Bauckham, *James*, 177.

³ *Qes*, Amharic (the working language in Ethiopia), means Reverend. In this paper, I prefer to call Gudina Tumsa *Qes* rather than Reverend. Though the meaning is the same, the place *Qes* has in Ethiopian tradition is immense, and Gudina is known by the prefix *Qes* in Ethiopia.

⁴ The time *Qes* Gudina ministered was a time of persecution. The church was underground, and the government was atheist with hatred of religion and its discourse

⁵ Gudina Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, Ed. The Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Hamburg: WDL-Publishing, 2007), 165.

⁶ Bauckham, *James*, 177.

⁷ Bauckham, *James*, 108–09.

on *Qes Gudina Tumsa's* notion of holistic mission and its affinity with James's call to wholeness of life as Christian mission. Finally, it presents the importance of reading James in contemporary Ethiopia.

THE THEME OF WHOLENESS IN JAMES

The notion of wholeness is the central theme in the epistle of James, as most scholars argue. John H. Elliott asserts that wholeness in James is the central message of the epistle; it addresses the reader's relationship with their community and God.⁸ Richard Bauckham further affirms that the theme of wholeness is not only important in James. Instead, it is "the overarching theme" of the entire letter that subsumes other themes in the letter.⁹ Seongjae Yeo further substantiates this claim by saying that wholeness in the epistle of James shows the "perspective of the author."¹⁰ Agreeing with such a notion, wholeness as the central overarching theme of the epistle of James, this section elaborates on the meaning and usage of the term vis-à-vis Christian mission.

Wholeness in James has a range of interrelated meanings (1:4, 1:17, 25; 2:8, 22; 3:2), such as "perfection," completeness," and "maturity."¹¹ Patrick J. Hartin elaborates on James 1:4, which says, "And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."¹² Here, Hartin argues that the meaning of "*teleios* is that of fullness ('the perfect work') or totality, which indicates maturity or completeness) ('so that you may be perfect')."¹³ Again, James 3:2 reads, "For all we stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body." Here, the notion of "perfect" is equivalent to complete or whole, meaning "total in all that one does—one's actions produce a "total (perfect) work" that is not blemished or lacking in any way." Hartin further argues that wholeness in these texts presents "the person who performs the perfect work is a total dedication to carrying out God's will. Faced with trials and testing, such a person is not deflected from total allegiance to God."¹⁴ The meaning of *teleios* in the rest of the scriptural passages is the same as describing completeness, perfection, maturity, and purpose.

In the same vein, Seongjae Yeo avers that the notion of wholeness in James uses the Greek word *teleios*, which refers to an end, goal, purpose, or aim. It means being complete, mature, fully developed, finished, or perfect.¹⁵ In such usage of the term, Yeo argues that *teleios* signifies consummate soundness, including "the idea of being whole."¹⁶ Moreover, the semantic range of the term wholeness, *teleios*, in the epistle of James is immense. As the Old Testament uses *teleios* in reference to temple sacrifice to mean perfect without blemish, Hartin conceptualizes the meaning, usage, and significance of *teleios*, incorporating three dimensions. According to him,

The conceptual meaning of *teleios* gives expression to three essential dimensions. First, it expresses the idea of wholeness or completeness, of a being remaining true to its original constitution. Second, it refers to giving oneself wholeheartedly and unconditionally to God in the context of God's people. When persons were grounded in this relationship, they would be whole, perfect. Third, such a wholehearted dedication to the Lord is expressed through obedience to God's will.... This threefold understanding of *teleios* explains James' meaning.¹⁷

⁸John H. Elliott, "The Epistle of James in Rhetorical and Social Scientific Perspective Holiness-Wholeness and Patterns of Replication," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 23 (1993): 71.

⁹Bauckham, *James*, 177.

¹⁰Seongjae Yeo, "Telios in the Epistle of James," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103 (2022): 1.

¹¹Bauckham, *James*, 165.

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible verses are from ESV.

¹³ Patrick J. Hartin, "Faith in Action: An Ethic of Perfection," *Center for Christian Ethics* (2012): 22.

¹⁴ Patrick J. Hartin, "Call to Be Perfect through Suffering (James 1, 2–4). The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount," *Biblica*, 77 No. 4 (1996): 484.

¹⁵Yeo, "Teleios in the Epistle of James," 10.

¹⁶Yeo, "Teleios in the Epistle of James," 1.

¹⁷Hartin, "Faith-in-Action," 22.

Thus, the notion of wholeness, *teleios*, according to Hartin, is not limited to individual perfection, completeness, and maturity, but it also incorporates communal wholeness reflected as "divine attributes."¹⁸ This understanding of *teleios* accords with James 1:17, which says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." Furthermore, the completeness for which James is calling is not only individual but also applies to the entire community and the people of God.¹⁹

The theme of wholeness is central to James' message, and the meaning, usage, and significance of wholeness encompasses an individual's consistency of purpose. In other words, a whole person is a "person who has achieved maturity, an undivided totality of personality and behavior."²⁰ Being whole and mature denotes devotion to God and a "state of integrity before God" that demands "purity of the heart," reflected in action. It comes from the "perfect wisdom of God." James is calling his readers to attain this maturity.²¹ Thus, wholeness demands consistency, integrity, and wholehearted devotion to God, and such dimensions of wholeness originate from God.

Elliott contends that holiness in James consistently correlates with wholeness or completeness. He posits that even the structure of James's letter centers on this theme, juxtaposing wholeness and holiness against their implied opposites: division and fragmentation. Thus, Elliott asserts a direct correlation between wholeness/completeness and holiness in James, while simultaneously highlighting their respective antitheses. Furthermore, he argues that the central message of James revolves around the theme of wholeness. Elliott substantiates this assertion by referencing the letter's opening, which introduces the theme: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Let steadfastness have its full effect, so that you may be complete and whole lacking in nothing" (Jas 1:2–12). Therefore, according to Elliott, the theme of wholeness and incompleteness constitutes the driving and principal argument of the letter, with each notion recurring throughout.²² In James, this correlation recurs at "personal, social, and cosmic level", informing a form of ethical principle for the Christian community.²³

Elliott substantiates the interconnectedness of holiness and wholeness by contrasting wholeness and division across three interrelated levels:

1. The personal, the social, and the cosmological, examining the issue of division and its antithesis, wholeness;
2. The portrayal of community and individual integrity/wholeness as an essential feature of holiness; and
3. The moral and social implications of this holiness.²⁴

For Elliott, the three categories of holiness and division, existing at various interconnected levels, are integral to both individual and community holiness, carrying significant moral and social implications. Succinctly, the core of Elliott's argument concerning the Epistle of James can be stated as follows:

Ethnic, economic, and social differences had led to social division; and divisions, to personal doubt, dissimulation, despair, and defection. Factionousness and fission within the community were accompanied by a split in the attitudes and actions of individuals themselves. The community and its members were undergoing an erosion of integrity and cohesion at both the personal and the social levels of life.²⁵

Elliott's tripartite framework suggests that the pursuit of wholeness and purity, as antitheses to incompleteness and pollution, are integral to human flourishing across individual, communal, and existential levels. These opposing forces shape human experience and inform the ethical considerations

¹⁸ Yeo, "Teleios in the Epistle of James," 2.

¹⁹ Martha L. Moore-Kish, *James: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: John Knox, 2019), 29.

²⁰ Moore-Keish, *James*, 29.

²¹ Elsa Támez quoted in Moore-Keish, *James*, 28–29.

²² Elliott, "The Epistle of James," 71.

²³ Elliott, "The Epistle of James," 71.

²⁴ Elliott, "The Epistle of James," 75.

²⁵ Elliott, "The Epistle of James," 75.

presented in the epistle. James elucidates three interconnected dimensions of human existence—"personal, social, and cosmological spheres"—where the dichotomy of incompleteness and wholeness, pollution and purity, manifests.²⁶

Richard Bauckham further asserts a strong association between wholehearted devotion to God and counter-culturalism within society for the responsible Christian community. He argues that James, in his epistle, constructs a "counter-cultural community" practicing the already manifested assets of the kingdom of God. This community, characterized by "wholeness and integrity," encompasses five aspects: integration, exclusion, completion, consistency, and divine perfection.²⁷

Bauckham describes "wholeness and integrity" in five aspects. First, integration, or inclusion, involves not only communal and personal relationships but also complete personal devotion. The whole person in James, according to Bauckham, consists of "the heart (thoughts, feeling, will), the tongue and mouth (words) and the hands or the whole body (deeds)."²⁸ Wholeness as integration in James solicits communal allegiance to God and others, reflected in individuals' acquisition of characters like being "peaceable, gentle, considerate, caring and forgiving (2:13; 3:13, 17; 4:11–13; 5:16)."²⁹ Bauckham further argues that "wholeness in a community is characterized by loving one's neighbor as oneself without distinction (2:8–9; 3:17)." Finally, wholeness as integration entails the eschatological goal of renewal not only for the individual and Christian community but also for the entire creation (1:18).³⁰

Bauckham's second aspect of wholeness in James is exclusion, entailing "excluding what is incompatible" with the whole. This is explained in James as a dualism between the world's value system and God's, juxtaposing the two as either/or and requiring remaining unstained by the world.³¹ This is illustrated by the contrast between earthly and divine wisdom (1:17). As Bauckham avers, "the dualism entailed by wholeness as exclusion thus requires a counter-cultural community, one whose values and therefore also lifestyle are at odds with the dominant society."³² Such a lifestyle is achieved through purity and holiness, "removing and keeping oneself untainted." "Wholeness as exclusion also means resisting the evil inclination (1:14) and removing all wickedness from the heart (1:21),"³³ encompassing truth/untruth, blessing/curse (3:9–11), and total inclination toward good, thereby excluding all evils (2:13; 5:1–6, 9, 12). Thus, wholeness as integration, for Bauckham, also includes the exclusion of elements that negate wholeness.

Bauckham's third aspect of wholeness as integration is "completion," involving both addition and removal for purity. James 1:22–25 emphasizes hearing and doing; 4:17 affirms knowing and doing; and 2:14–26 acclaims believing and doing, especially verse 22, which speaks of "faith completed by work." This relates to the completion of wholeness as the eschatological goal (1:3–4).³⁴ James also emphasizes "consistency," where integration and wholeness require coherence in what is included, devotion of life, and exclusion of inconsistencies. Bauckham asserts that "wholeness is about the consistent devotion of the whole person, the whole life, the whole community, and ultimately the whole cosmos to God."³⁵

The final aspect of wholeness as integration is "divine perfection." Bauckham argues that "human wholeness is imitation of God's completeness," evident in various dimensions of life. "Wholeness occurs when the whole human life is focused and integrated in God. It receives from God the complete law and complete wisdom adequate to encompass the whole of life. It responds to God in wholehearted faith (1:5–8), in wholehearted love (1:12; 2:5) and in fulfilling the complete law (1:22–25; 2:8–11)."³⁶

²⁶Elliott, "The Epistle of James," 75.

²⁷Bauckham, *James*, 173.

²⁸Bauckham, *James*, 178.

²⁹Bauckham, *James*, 178.

³⁰Bauckham, *James*, 179, emphasis mine.

³¹Bauckham, *James*, 179–80.

³²Bauckham, *James*, 180.

³³Bauckham, *James*, 180.

³⁴Bauckham, *James*, 181.

³⁵Bauckham, *James*, 181.

³⁶Bauckham, *James*, 182.

According to Bauckham's definition, wholeness is a goal towards which one can move only in relation to the center which is already whole and from which one can gain wholeness. ... it means rejecting values and behaviors which are inconsistent with goals. It means refusing all the idolatries which dominate and diminish human life in favor of the one love which can truly liberate and include all that is good.³⁷

Human life is to be lived in favor of the one love that truly liberates and includes all that is good. As John Painter and David A. deSilva argue, God is the "source of generosity and every perfect gift." Thus, *teleios* in James describes a wholeness of life replete with the multifaceted aspects of integration, exclusion, completion, consistency, and divine perfection.

THE WHOLENESS OF LIFE AS CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE THEOLOGY OF GUDINA TUMSA

Gudina Tumsa,³⁸ the late General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), is known for introducing the notion of holistic ministry/theology in the church.³⁹ Gudina's notion of holistic ministry is derived out of his strong emphasis concerning "the role of Christians in a given society."⁴⁰ For Gudina, "a Christian is placed by God to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people that are in need and in difficulty so that they can turn to God to get their needs met and their problems solved."⁴¹ Qes Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology is brought forth in the most unlikely era in Ethiopia, the socialist military government which overthrew the previous Imperial regime via force.

Gudina was born in 1929 in a small village called Bodji in Western Wollega, educated as Nurse Assistant⁴² and served for four years in different hospitals and places. Though he was a medical person, he was also well known for his preaching the gospel as part of his medical service. In this regard, Yonas Derresa said that the latter teaching of "serving the whole human person" emerged out of such practical experiences and engagement.⁴³ He has served in rural area of Ethiopia of Nekemte, Bakko, Arjo, Kembata and Hadiya as a health professional and church preacher. Later, as a leader, he has organized many congregations in the area to synods, for which he was highly appreciated by the EECMY officials and the general secretary.⁴⁴ Later on he went abroad for further theological education in USA. After his return, he has served as the General Secretary of the EECMY from 1966-1979.

Gudina Tumsa was known for his strong spirituality, preaching and boldness in almost every situation he encountered. Emmanuel Abraham described him as "our Billy Graham" and "a man of strong character, physically, mentally, and spiritually."⁴⁵ According to Tibebe Eshete, the renowned Ethiopian evangelical historian, "Gudina was the most prominent leader, who was capable of reading the times, interpreting trends, and providing theological articulations to the church."⁴⁶ To add more, Abeneazer G.

³⁷Bauckham, *James*, 183.

³⁸ Since, in Ethiopian we use first name to address a person unlike Western names, which is Family name. Thus, I am going to use the first name for all Ethiopian names based on our usage ... in naming names.

³⁹ The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *Witness and Discipleship: Leaders of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a time of Revolution*, The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa (Hamburg: WDL, 2008), i–iii.

⁴⁰ The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *Witness and Discipleship*, 1.

⁴¹ The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *Witness and Discipleship*, 1–2.

⁴² Nurse assistant used to be called dressers during that time, 1952.

⁴³ Yonas Derresa, "The Rev. Gudina Tumsa – Early Life and Ministry," in the *Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa: Lectures and Discussions MISSIOLOGICAL Seminar 2001 2nd ed.* ed. the Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Hamburg: WDL, 2007), 7. See also Samuel Deressa, "St. Gudina Tumsa," *Lutheran Forum* (Spring 2012), 36–39.

⁴⁴ The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa: Lectures and Discussions*, Missiological Seminar 2001 2nd edition (Hamburg: WDL, 2007), 4–9.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Abraham quoted in The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa*, 10, 11.

⁴⁶ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 229–30.

Urga refers to Gudina as "the African Bonhoeffer,"⁴⁷ not merely for his magnanimous contribution for the church of Ethiopia at the cost of his life, but also for the life he lived with integrity as a living witness to the Gospel.⁴⁸ It is for such commitment that Gudina has been imprisoned thrice, and finally murdered by the socialist government on July 28, 1979 after his preaching service at Urael Mekane Yesus Church (one of the congregations of EECMY in Addis Ababa).⁴⁹ Gudina is known for his unwavering faith and commitment in his ministry and leadership until his death.

The contribution and legacy of Gudina Tumsa is boldly written in EECMY⁵⁰ history. Gudina is not only acclaimed for his prolific preaching and church leadership. But more importantly, his holistic theology has been the foundation of the church policy and practice since then.

Wholistic theology is an effort in rediscovering total human life. Apolitical life is not worthy of existence. Uninvolvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation ... In our continent what is prevalent is the basis to define economic policy, agricultural development, foreign relations—politics decides who should die and who should live. African theology should develop a political theology relevant to the African context.⁵¹

Thus, Gudina's holistic theology is a spiritual commitment and witness of faith which calls for the witness of the church to be contextually relevant to the society they are living in. In being relevant, the witness of the church which Gudina aspires and directs will be sensitive to the socio-political and cultural context. Moreover, it is also a call towards the public-ness of theology. Context specificity is a key contribution of Gudina's holistic theology.

Furthermore, Øyvind M. Eide explains that Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology is founded on his theological understanding of creation and incarnation.⁵² Thus, as Eide notes, Gudina Tumsa's wholistic theology bases can be explained in praxis-theoria-praxis framework. According to Gudina Tumsa, as mentioned in his Memorandum of 1975, asserts that,

theology must grow out of the daily experiences from our dealing with ordinary affairs of life as we experience them in our situations, in our cultural settings, in our economic life, in our political experience and in our social practice An indigenous theology in the Ethiopia context may be defined as a translation of the biblical sources ... to the pattern of our people that they may feel at home with the gospel of love.⁵³⁵⁴

Eide's summary of Gudina Tumsa' theology as "Praxis–theory–praxis model," which takes the daily practice and experience of the people in to consideration, is a way of doing mission. This resonates with Gudina's claims about the impossibility of mission to be divorced from personal and societal aspect. In his words,

an integral human development, where spiritual and material needs are seen together, is the question in our society... The division between witness and service or between proclamation and development... is ... harmful to the church and will ultimately result in

⁴⁷Abeneazer G. Urga, "The Bonhoeffer of Africa: Rev. Gudina Tumsa's Life, Theological Emphases and Contribution to the Ethiopian Church" Paper presented at the southeast regional Evangelical Missiological Society meeting at Columbia International University, March 18, 2017.

⁴⁸Gerd Decke, "Gudina Tumsa and Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Emerging Theological Praxis*, Journal of Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012), 2:30.

⁴⁹The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa*, 11.

⁵⁰The EECMY, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the one of the biggest and ancient evangelical church in the country with about 10 million members.

⁵¹Gudina Tumsa quoted in The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa*, 63.

⁵²Gudina Tumsa quoted in Øyvind M. Eide, "Integral Human Development: Rev. Gudina Tumsa's Theology, with Special Reference to His critique of Dominant Trends in Missiology and the Question of Human Rights," in *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa*, Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Hamburg: WDL, 2008), 63.

⁵³Gudina Tumsa quoted in Eide, "Integral Human Development," 45.

⁵⁴Tumsa quoted in Paul E. Hoffman, "Gudina Tumsa's Legacy," 45. And The Memorandum (1975), published in Eide 2000: 277.

a distorted Christianity... the development of the inner person is a prerequisite for a healthy and lasting development of society.⁵⁵

Gudina further elaborates his holistic theology as a mechanism of bringing integral development that interlaces witness, service, mission and development as a separate whole rather than different activities. He gives huge emphasis for “integral human development” which incorporates the two dimensions together, “the spiritual and material,” “witness and service” that is subsumed in his notion of “serving the whole man.”⁵⁶ For him, the “development of the inner person is a prerequisite for a healthy and lasting development of a society.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, Gudina was also critical of the understanding and practice of mission of that time. More specifically, he blamed the notion of the contemporaneous mission for its narrow definition of mission. This understanding limited the gospel as “good news for the whole man, and salvation was given a narrow individual interpretation which was foreign to our understanding of the God-man relationship.”⁵⁸ Accordingly, mission is beyond individual salvation in that it is serving the whole man, society, and creation as a whole. Thus, Gudina has a comprehensive understanding of the mission of God.

Gudina further argues about salvation which is related with healing and restoration. For him, to heal means not only being healed from disease and so on, but it “has to do with the restoration of man to full liberty and wholeness.”⁵⁹ This goes with James’s notion of salvation as wholeness and integrity. Iteffa Gobena comments that such a holistic understanding of mission led a way to do the theology of the church that considers the Ethiopian context and situation in to the heart of its service and ministry.⁶⁰ Iteffa attests that Gudina is also known for “leading the church in times of trouble” by demonstrating a life of “commitment and suffering.” Gudina lived with a motto which states that “A Christian lives in a given society where he/she carries out the mandate given to him/her by the Lord of the church. We have not been given a choice as to where we should be born. We believe that God has placed us where we are to do his will.”⁶¹ Iteffa remarks that “for a person like Gudina, commitment is conviction of faith.”⁶²

Furthermore, according to his former seminary friend Darrel Jodock’s attestation, Gudina’s theology is “self-engaging and self-involving from beginning to end.”⁶³ Therefore, Gudina’s notion of holistic mission is about serving the whole person, which is always possible in engaging wholeness of life as Christian mission. In this regard, Christian mission for Gudina surpasses evangelism and even social action. But it endeavours toward transformation of the individual and the society as a whole. For Gudina, the question is, “what is a responsible ministry of the Christian church in today’s world and in a given cultural, social, and political situation?”⁶⁴ Such a holistic transformative engagement of mission is explicit in his theology as he states in this manner:

We are not interested in creating medieval monasteries, in setting up ghettos (modern monasteries), but in being involved in the complex social life of our people as we find it daily, with full knowledge of our Christian responsibility.⁶⁵

Thus, for Gudina, mission is understood as the effort to attain the wholeness of life by addressing the individual, community/society and also the cosmic in an integrated manner.⁶⁶

⁵⁵Gudina Tumsa quoted in Paul E. Hoffman, “Gudina Tumsa’s Legacy: His Spirituality and Leadership,” in *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa: Lectures and discussions*, Missiological Seminar second edition, (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2008), 36.

⁵⁶Tumsa quoted in Eide, “Integral Human Development,” 47.

⁵⁷Tumsa quoted in Eide 2000: 265. Gudina quoted in “Integral Human Development,” 46.

⁵⁸Tumsa quoted in Eide, “Integral Human Development,” 55.

⁵⁹Iteffa Gobena, “Leading a Church in Times of Trouble: the EECMY in the Ethiopian Marxist Revolution (1974–1979),” in the Gudina Tumsa Foundation, *Church and Society: Lecture Responses Second Missiological Seminar 2003 on the Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa* (Hamburg: WDL, 2010), 211.

⁶⁰Gobena, “Leading a Church in Times of Trouble,” 212.

⁶¹Gobena, “Leading a Church in Times of Trouble,” 222.

⁶²Gobena, “Leading a Church in Times of Trouble,” 222–23.

⁶³Darrel Jodock, “Gudina Tumsa’s Contribution to Theology,” *Global South Theological Journal* 1.1 (2022):5.

⁶⁴Eide quoted in Tumsa in The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 47.

⁶⁵Gudina, *Witness and Discipleship*, 70.

⁶⁶Jodock, “Gudina Tumsa’s Contribution to Theology,” 5.

READING JAMES IN CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIA

Characterizing the contemporary Ethiopian situation is challenging at times. But it is yet more confusing due to the overwhelming socio-political and religious chaos of unresolved historical hangovers. In the past five years, various things happened in the country. On the one hand, the country is a victim of extreme poverty, hunger, drought, sickness, communicable disease, high maternal and child death, worsened living condition and inflation. Also, the nation is continually suffering from never ceasing conflicts, war, ethnocentrism, ethnic based killings, atrocities, hatred of the “other,” partiality, moral and ethical decay, corruption, religious extremism, displacement, gender-based violence, and many more. On the other hand, we witness the politico-religious rhetoric of “prosperity,” “time for Ethiopia,” “the rise of Ethiopia,” “God’s time of work in relation to the rise of an evangelical leader,” the rhetoric of unity (*Medemer*⁶⁷ both in politics and church), fancy tourism projects, the numerical increase in economy, and the list goes on. Girma Bekele best characterized such a phenomenon in such a way, “at the moment the socio-political and religious life in Ethiopia is characterized by fine lines and by various polarities.”⁶⁸

In the same vein, characterizing the contemporary Ethiopian church is also similarly confusing and challenging. The church is wrestling with multi-dimensional crisis of identity, doctrinal heterodoxy, ethico-moral, social, cultural, economic problems ethnic-based conflicts, divisions, atrocities, hatred and other problems. Yet, the church is proclaiming and echoing “prosperity,” “the rise of Ethiopia,” and proposing unity despite major doctrinal differences. Moreover, the church has lost its critical distance and identity as “an alternative community.”⁶⁹ and engaged in an undesirable relationship with the government which deprived her of mission. As a result, the church became part of the problem more than part of the solution. Considering the numerical figure of the evangelical population which constitutes about 25% of the total, Girma Bekele was correct when he said “if we cure our problems [problem among the evangelical churches] almost one fourth of the country’s problem will get an answer or a cure.”⁷⁰ In order to get the cure, the church needs to turn to her identity and mandate, the wholeness of life—serving the whole person.

Thus, mission as wholeness of life in James has huge significance for the contemporary readers in Ethiopia who are struggling in a turbulent situation of identity crisis. Richard Bauckham rightly affirms that the notion of “wholeness provides a broad framework for relating James’ teaching to the cultural context in which contemporary western Christians live.”⁷¹ In this, though many lessons can be drawn from James to the contemporary Ethiopian situations, I selected three main frameworks in light of wholeness and integrity in the epistle of James which are explained at the individual, social and cosmic level.

The first framework is solidarity with the poor. This involves conceptualizing the relationship between poverty and wealth. As we read According to Bauckham, solidarity with the poor in James (2:5, 8–9) is not a mere individual’s spiritual attitude alone. Rather, it is tangled with the praxis in the society. Solidarity with the poor is expressed in the social and economic relationship of the community. “For the community whose life is characterized not by competitive ambition, status-seeking and greed, but by peaceable-ness and selfless considerations of others (3:13–17), attitude to the poor expressed in concrete economic and social relationship are the litmus test.”⁷² In addition, the relationship between wealth and poverty in James (2:2–3, 15–16; 5:1–6)⁷³ is another lesson that can be taken in the Ethiopian context.

⁶⁷Medemer is the political rhetoric of Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who has written a book with this title which means synergy or the state of being added together.

⁶⁸Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People: Reading David Bosch through the Lens of Mission History and Contemporary Challenge in Ethiopia* (Waco: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 381.

⁶⁹The church as an “alternative community” is borrowed from Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*.

⁷⁰Girma Bekele, a sermon at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, semester opening program, February 12, 2024.

⁷¹Bauckham, *James*, 183 (emphasis added).

⁷²Bauckham, *James*, 195.

⁷³Bauckham, *James*, 197.

Hence, the prosperity gospel is flourishing, while solidarity with the poor is almost vanishing. Thus, James directs us to a sense of practice of avoiding not wealth; rather, he is calling us towards a way of life that challenges “selfish hoarding of money 5:2–3, senseless luxury 5:5, defrauding the workers 5:4, and persecuting the righteous 5:4.”⁷⁴ As Gudina affirms, Christians are called to live and serve the whole person, where mission is understood as attainment of wholeness.

The second framework that can be drawn from James for the contemporary Ethiopian situation is the notion of wholeness as integrity *vis-à-vis* division or fraction. In the epistle of James, Elliott perfectly elaborates the notion of “wholeness and holiness,” taking its “implied opposite, division and fragmentation.”⁷⁵ Thus, wholeness of life tackles division and fragmentation in many aspects of the life of the individual, community, and society. In the same vein, Elliott also argues that

Ethnic, economic, and social differences had led to social division; and divisions, to personal doubt, dissimulation, despair, and defection. Factionalism and fission within the community were accompanied by a split in the attitudes and actions of individuals themselves. The community and its members were undergoing an erosion of integrity and cohesion at both the personal and the social levels of life.⁷⁶

Thus, James’s message of wholeness of life as integrity is very relevant for the Ethiopian church which is in the midst of many divisions, including ethnic based fractions and fragmentations. Thereby, “wholeness and integrity”⁷⁷ leads people to integration. Similarly, exclusion of un-holiness, division, and fraction fosters “completion, consistency and divine perfection.”⁷⁸ This synchronizes with what Gudina has fiercely argued in his attestation that Christians should practice their faith in all sphere of life.

In the third framework, James teaches about resisting the value-system which he calls “the world” (1:17; 4:4); and he calls to the value of God which is always “embodied in public praxis.”⁷⁹ Bauckham strongly argues that James is constructing a “counter-cultural community” that practices the assets of the kingdom of God in its “already” manifestation.⁸⁰ This counter-cultural Christian community is characterized by James 1:18 as the “first fruit of the new creation and the vanguard of the coming rule of God (2:5).”⁸¹ In the same vein, Gudina asserts that the mission of the church (*missio ecclesia*) and the mission of God (*missio Dei*) is about the wholeness of life which is practiced not only at personal level but also at social and cosmic level. For Gudina, as the worker of the kingdom of God, “the church could not afford to be ignorant of some of the basic issues the revolution [the Dergue] has raised, such as equality, freedom, dismantling of oppressive structures.”⁸² Tibebe Eshete testifies that Gudina’s theology was filled with “heightened social concern.”⁸³ He further elaborates that

Gudina helped many Christian leaders create awareness of the new philosophy that the state has endorsed in its doctrine. He called on the church leaders to take the path of critical engagement: Christian leaders should keep their critical distance in order to be able to criticise those in power.⁸⁴

In such a way, the contemporary church, as an alternative counter-cultural community, can resist mingling and advocating for the this worldly value system. Thus, James in his epistle aims at nurturing Christians towards their mission, the wholeness of life in their theology, approach, and praxis.

CONCLUSION

⁷⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *James: The Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1985), 54–55.

⁷⁵ Elliott, “The Epistle of James,” 75.

⁷⁶ Elliott, “The Epistle of James,” 75.

⁷⁷ Bauckham, *James*, 178–82.

⁷⁸ Bauckham, *James*, 173.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *James*, 198.

⁸⁰ Bauckham, *James*, 173.

⁸¹ Bauckham, *James*, 173.

⁸² Tibebe, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 225.

⁸³ Tibebe, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 226.

⁸⁴ Tibebe, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 227.

The notion of the wholeness of life in the epistle of James, which is explained as *teleios*, has a dense meaning of completeness, perfection, integrity, maturity. Thus, wholeness is a key word to mission in the epistle. By using such concepts, James aims at nurturing Christians towards their mission. This wholeness of life should be demonstrated in their theology, approach, and praxis not only in their personal lives, but it should also be exhibited also within communal and societal life as well. The wholeness of life as Christian mission is also well attributed in *Qes Gudina Tumsa’s* calling of the church towards “Wholistic mission.”

Gudina urged the church to be more proactive to her calling, which is “wholistic ministry.” The holistic nature of mission is reflected not only in her theology but also in the approach and praxis towards the goal of perfection, maturity, and completeness. The “wholeness of life” for Gudina Tumsa is the core essence of Christian mission. Therefore, understanding James’s notion of wholeness of life in Christian mission has immense significance for the contemporary Ethiopian readers who are challenged by many problems. The urgency of Gudina is directed towards drawing the church to her calling and ministry, ministering the wholeness of life in the midst of the socio-political, cultural, and economical chaos through integrating the wholeness of life at the individual, communal, societal, and cosmic level.

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