



DIVINE REPROOF OF OPPRESSIVE LABOUR POLICIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES 5:1-6 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN NATIONS

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Abstract

James 5:1-6 delivers a strong condemnation of the injustices and oppression associated with labor practices perpetrated by the wealthy. This situation closely mirrors the challenges faced by African nations in today's global context, where similar issues have hindered sustainable industrial development. This paper aims to address these concerns. The research employs a hermeneutical method of data analysis to study James 5:1-6, juxtaposing its themes with the contemporary reproof directed at the likely culprits in the epistle, as well as the implications for the sustainable industrial development of African nations. The study reveals that oppressive labor policies are not new; they manifest in various forms across history. Africa's share of this problem largely stems from leadership overindulgence that makes life difficult for citizens and stifles the productive potential of the continent. The paper recommends amplifying African theological voices that commend good governance and constructively condemn poor policies. Political leaders and their accomplices should be held responsible and accountable for the challenging economic conditions in Africa. Additionally, it advocates for fostering patriotism, capacity building, and a focus on productivity, rather than a consumption-driven mindset. These measures aim to promote the sustainable industrial development of African nations.

Keywords: Oppression, Labour Policies, Industrial Development, Africa, Reproof

Introduction

Labor policy can be understood as a set of laws and regulations governing work relations, including employee rights and employment rules. Generally, the existence of a set of rules or actions imposed by authorities, which unfairly restrict freedom, cause hardship, or subject people to harsh control or suffering, describes the construct—oppressive labor policies. It is a form of oppression because it is an institutional unfair usage of power and authority to discriminate and place restrictions on an individual or group, inhibiting their freedom and restraining their ability to wholly embed themselves into society. Fenwick, Howe, Marshall, and Landau¹ opine that

¹ C. Fenwick, J. Howe, S. Marshall, & I. Landau, "Labour and Labour-Related Laws in Micro and Small Enterprises: Innovative Regulatory Approaches", Series on Conducive Policy Environment for Small, (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org> on November 26, (2025), np



labor and labor-related laws can be an important means of improving job quality and of promoting decent work, but they are often perceived by the entrepreneurs as unsustainable regulatory burdens and costs. These entrepreneurs, in turn, make harsh policies, which adversely affect the employees. Succinctly, oppressive labour policies in this paper particularly point to employers' attitudes or rules, which make life difficult for employees or labourers.

Oppressive labour policies constitute the major factors generating labour crises and labour unionism in most African nations. This, in turn, generally hampers development on the continent. A comparative study conducted by Lex Africa² shows that North Africa remains the most advanced African region in industrial development, followed by Southern Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, and East Africa. The slow pace of industrial development in African nations is unarguably traced to labour policies, as shown in this study. Whether in the church, factory, civil service, or business premises, oppressive labour policies of any shade always have negative spillover effects on every sector of society. This submission agrees with Signé and Johnson,³ who argue that every industry generates substantial backward and forward linkages with other sectors.

In James 5:1-6, the writer vehemently reproofed the perpetrators of oppressive labour policies. This reproof is indicting, apologetic, and prophetic:

- a) It is indicting because it reprimands the Church for projecting a negative image of Christianity, thereby misleading new converts and giving room for outsiders to mock the church.
- b) It is apologetic because it exonerates the ideal Church from negative emblems such as oppression, marginalization, wickedness, covetousness, and reckless living.
- c) It is also prophetic because it addresses what should be the role of the Church in society. The church is to exemplify the love that characterizes the Christian faith and live in harmony with everyone in righteousness.

Thus, this paper examines the implications of James' reproof of oppressive labour policies in James 5:1-6 on the contemporary African nation's sustainable industrial development.

Drawbacks to Sustainable Industrial Development in Africa

African nations are widely acknowledged as blessed by God with natural and human resources that are capable of transforming the continent into the industrial hub of the global community. Unfortunately, most of the nations in Africa are generally regarded as third-world countries due to backwardness in development. Ahmed, Umaru, and Yusuf⁴ note that the main motive of Europeans' invasion, occupation, and domination of Africa was to exploit African resources and generate economic wealth for their mother country. Rich human and mineral resources in Africa

² Lex Africa, "The Progress of Industrial Development Across Africa", <https://lexafrica.com/2023/05/the-progress-of-industrial-development-across-africa/> (May 30, 2023), np

³ L. Signé & C. Johnson, *The Potential of Manufacturing and Industrialization in Africa*. (New York: The Brookings Institution, 2018), 45

⁴ I. Y. Ahmed, C. Umaru & R. Yusuf. "An Analysis of the Effects of Colonialism In Africa," *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research* 8(6), (June, 2022):47-54



attract other parts of the world. Some of the challenges facing developing countries are to provide;

- i. an equitable standard of living,
- ii. adequate food,
- iii. clean water,
- iv. safe shelter and energy,
- v. a healthy and secure environment,
- vi. an educated public,
- vii. a satisfying job for present and future generations

These challenges can only be confronted in the presence of sustainable industrial development. Pathetically, these challenges keep escalating daily, largely due to oppressive labour policies in most African nations.

Whereas it is impartial to admit that Europe contributed significantly to the underdevelopment of African countries predominantly through colonization and exploitation, yet the fact remains that most of these formally colonized African countries that have regained independence from their colonial masters are still bedeviled by retrogressive structures. This incongruity leaves every scrupulous mind in total bewilderment and further suggests the existence of inherent problems in most of the African countries. There are economic fluctuations, political instabilities, cultural imperialism and diffusion, religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, social unrest, and the like. These and more adversely affect sustainable industrial development on the continent. Recently, in Nigeria, most foreign investors relocated to other economically thriving nations for various reasons that range from insecurity to leadership failures.

Whereas countries like China, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, the United States of America, and Germany have become insignias for sustainable industrial development, most African nations still grapple with elementary issues. Ogujiuba, Ehigiamusoe, and Udefuna posit that the prominent challenges which hamper the achievement of sustainable development in Africa include: extreme poverty, rapid population growth rate, rapid urbanization, deforestation, environmental impact of extractive industries, rate of economic growth, rural development, climatic variability, and natural environmental hazard. If these challenges are well handled by African leaders, the continent would proudly churn out a formidable workforce for industrial development continuously.

Nevertheless, a major factor in the issues affecting African nations' industrial development is the bossiness of African leaders; most of these leaders are power intoxicated; they see their positions as life entitlements rather than transitory positions. In most of these countries, political office holders see politics as professions or careers and household inheritance; they ensure their family members are strategically positioned in places of authority and control of the nation's resources. In these countries, nepotism, tribalism, favoritism, and autocracy are the order of the day to the detriment of the citizens. These citizens are rather used as objects and means through which the leaders' selfish ambitions and interests are achieved. With no shame, no effective conscience,



and no sense of decency, they pride themselves over their ill-gotten wealth and trample upon the poor with impunity. These leaders live in unimaginable affluence and would rather lavish huge resources on frivolities than give the poor masses what legitimately belongs to them. Issues concerning these selfish leaders are never debated before being passed into law, but when it comes to matters that benefit the masses, they set up committees and initiate protracted debate sessions that often end up in unfavorable legislation. The poor masses are intentionally left to languish in pain at the instances of industrial actions before their matters are grudgingly and humiliatingly looked into with a touch of artificiality.

The indices for sustainable industrial development are: growth of endogenous or internal productive capacities, especially the capacity for innovation; improvement in the environmental performance of industry; and improvements in living. These indices manifest in the presence of natural resources, labor supply, capital availability, technological advancements, consumer demand, transportation infrastructure, and government cooperation. The development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is regarded as sustainable development. Thus, sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive and resilient future for people and the planet by harnessing the available material and human resources for this goal.

Relationship between Labour Policies and Sustainable Industrial Development

Labour policies play a crucial role in shaping industrial development, especially in the manufacturing and construction sectors. They influence the business environment, worker productivity, and overall economic growth. They can either support or hinder growth, depending on how they are structured. According to the ILO⁵, Effective labor policies and labor sustain the decision initiation of different growth policies. Some key ways labour policies impact industrial development include:

- a) regulating working conditions and working rights
- b) influencing labour costs and productivity
- c) affecting investment and business decisions
- d) shaping workforce skills and training.

Friendly labour policies ensure fair treatment, safety, and welfare of workers, boosting productivity and reducing conflicts. Furthermore, they regulate wages, benefits, and collective bargaining, which impact production costs, influencing investment decisions. They also capture workforce development, training programs, education, and skill development initiatives to enhance human capital, driving innovation and competitiveness. They enhance industrial relations through harmonious employer-employee relationships, reducing disputes and promoting stability. Friendly labour policies boost the morale of the labourers and, in turn, bring out the best in them; when workers' welfare is adequately attended to, they are motivated to

⁵ ILO, *Work for a Brighter Future: Global Commission on the Future of Work*. (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2019), 44.



promote the quality products of their organization. Indeed, a friendly labour policy results in labour productivity.

The unfortunate outcome of oppressive labour policies in African nations is labour crises, which manifest in industrial actions and mass exodus of youths, professionals, technocrats, and entrepreneurs from the continent in search of greener pastures. Labour crisis is a breakdown of cordial relationship between labour and management over the rights and interests in matters relating to organizational procedures. It is the result of an unpleasant, unfair, and unfriendly relationship and interaction between and among the parties involved in industrial relations. For instance, in Nigeria, Oyewale discloses that “since the return of the democratic system of governance in the country in 1999, labour crises have become endemic. It is apparent that Nigeria is under a serious labour crisis with overwhelming evidence of a series of conflicts in the education sector from primary education through secondary to tertiary education.”⁶ When there is a delay in payment of salaries without a justifiable reason for such delay, a labour crisis may erupt for such salaries to be paid.

Unfriendly policies of the African leaders have adversely affected the cream of society, who would have contributed positively to the economic development of the nations. In Nigeria, most of the best brains in the medical and educational sectors have relocated abroad in search of friendly working conditions and remuneration. This view is corroborated by Elegbede, Gbajumosherriff, and Oni, who opine that “international migration of the Nigerian workforce has been a major factor affecting the economic growth.”⁷ A situation where intellectuals are relegated to the background and ignoramuses are preferred would definitely give rise to a regressive structure and brain drain. Kalu and Ede⁸ agree that the lack of adequate infrastructure and a competitive wage are the reasons that account for the massive brain drain in Nigeria. This is the pathetic situation of most African nations, where mediocrity is celebrated over meritocracy as long as the benefiting recipients have a political or filial connection with the powers that be. When the rights of a citizen are denied, the victims are not motivated to contribute meaningfully to the industrial development of such a country. Akume and Abdullahi⁹ are right in their view that if the issues bordering on labor-management relations are not properly resolved, they tend to burst their banks with resultant dire consequences on productivity/service delivery and can even bring the entire economy of the nation to a standstill.

Hermeneutical Analysis of James 5:1-6

The Text

⁶ B. Y. Oyewale. “Assessment of Factors Responsible for Incessant Labour Crisis in Nigeria: Implications for Universities Stakeholders.” *Nigerian Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 8(1), (2022): 9-13

⁷ S. T. Elegbede, M. Gbajumosherriff, & O. O. Oni. “A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis of Government Wage Policy and Labour Migration in Nigeria”, *Nigerian Journal of Management Sciences* 25(2), (October, 2024):1-8

⁸ D. Z. Kalu, & V. Ede. “Brain Drain and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: Socio-Philosophical Appraisal”, *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 4 (1), (2022): 5779-6990

⁹ A.T. Akume & Y.M. Abdullahi. “Challenges and Prospects of Effective Industrial Conflict Resolution in Nigeria.” *CASS Journal of Social Science*, 36(2), (2013): 46-58.



- 1 *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.*
- 2 *Your riches have rotted, and your garments are moth-eaten.*
- 3 *Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.*
- 4 *Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.*
- 5 *You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.*
- 6 *You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you (RSV).*

Brief Background to the Text

The Epistle of James is generally dated to the late first century CE, although some scholars argue for an earlier date if attributed to James, the brother of Jesus.¹⁰ The audience was largely composed of diaspora Jewish Christians facing social, economic, and religious pressures.¹¹ The socio-economic setting of the text reflects the agrarian economy of first-century Palestine and the Greco-Roman world, where wealthy landowners controlled large estates and often exploited day laborers.¹²

James 5:1–6 forms part of a prophetic denunciation (a “woe oracle”) reminiscent of Old Testament prophetic literature such as Amos 4:1 and Isaiah 5:8.¹³ James adopts the rhetoric of an OT prophet to condemn unjust, exploitative wealth and to console the oppressed believers in the community.

Hermeneutical Issues Raised in James 5:1–6

1. *Lifestyle of the Oppressors*

James paints a vivid, almost apocalyptic, portrait of wealthy oppressors whose lifestyles are marked by greed, self-indulgence, injustice, and violence. The statement that they have “*laid up treasure in the last days*” (v. 3) indicates moral blindness and eschatological ignorance.¹⁴ Despite living at a time when divine judgment is imminent, they continue to hoard wealth excessively.

James’ description implies the unrestrained accumulation of wealth—storing up money, precious metals, and expensive garments in hidden rooms, storehouses, or treasuries.¹⁵ Such hoarding contradicts the Jewish-Christian ethic of generosity (cf. Matt 6:19–21). The hoarded “treasures”

¹⁰ P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 182.

¹¹ D. C. Allison, *James: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. International Critical Commentary, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 45.

¹² S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*. Harper’s New Testament Commentaries, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 210-211.

¹³ R. P. Martin, *James. Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 48*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 176.

¹⁴ D. J. Moo, *The Letter of James*. Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 220.

¹⁵ P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 182.



have begun to rot, decay, and corrode.¹⁶ This symbolizes both the temporary nature of material possessions and the moral corruption of their owners.

Their lives are characterized by “*luxury and self-indulgence*” (v. 5). These phrases capture a lifestyle of excessive comfort—lavish homes, costly garments, rich food, and endless feasting. They engage in reckless parties, extravagant spending, and wasteful consumption, often with their social accomplices. Such indulgence mirrors the prophetic image of cattle being “fattened for the day of slaughter” (cf. Jeremiah 50:27). James thus uses animal imagery to emphasize impending judgment.¹⁷ More severely, James accuses them of “condemning and murdering the righteous person” (v. 6). Scholars interpret this either literally—referring to judicial corruption that results in the death of the innocent, or figuratively, referring to economic exploitation that destroys lives.¹⁸ Their oppression includes:

- a. Fraudulent withholding of wages (v. 4), a direct violation of Torah commands (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14–15).
- b. Heartlessness toward the cries of the poor, which have gone unheard by humans but have reached “the Lord of Hosts,” the divine warrior who defends the oppressed.
- c. Intimidation, manipulation, and violent injustice destroy the righteous who cannot resist or defend themselves.

The text presents a morally depraved upper class who are spiritually numb, materially intoxicated, and socially oppressive, insensitive to the suffering caused by their greed.

2. *Forms of Oppression*

One form of oppression highlighted by James in his epistle is - ‘keeping back by fraud the wages of the laborers who mowed the oppressors’ fields.’ This situation does not suggest unavailability of funds to pay the labourers, but a deliberate act of withholding the labourers’ wages so as to make life difficult for the labourers. Ezeagba¹⁹ hints that in Nigeria, many organizations always delay or refuse to pay their workers’ salaries and other emoluments even when the organization concerned has sufficient funds to pay. The oppressors in the epistle of James had no justifiable reason to hold back the labourers’ wages, but they fraudulently rested on flimsy excuses to deny or withhold the labourers’ wages. It is worthy of note that the labourers did their jobs (mowed their fields – large farm lands) as required; they left their homes with the hope of bringing back something for the upkeep of their families, but, disappointingly, the oppressor didn’t consider the job they did as deserving their legitimate reward. The oppressors didn’t have regard for the labourers’ welfare. Imagine a situation where the labourers are made to understand there is no money available for their payment, while these oppressors are using the same money for

¹⁶ Allison, *James: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 684.

¹⁷ Martin, *James, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 48*, 181.

¹⁸ S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, 216.

¹⁹ E. C. Ezeagba. “Effects of Strike Cost on Economic Development in Nigeria.” *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)*, 3(3), (2014): 26 -34.



turnover. The oppressors have diverse ways they marginalize the labourers - they intentionally subject the poor labourers to be at their mercy, so the labourer would have no option but to take whatever the oppressor offers to them as if that is what they deserve. The oppressors make the labourers believe they are being helped whenever they are given what they laboured for and is their entitlement. The oppressors may just wake up one day and decide to sack all the workers, without any notice or severance payment for the affected workers. When the labourers refuse to buy into the ideas of the employers, a labour crisis erupts.

3. *State of the oppressed*

James presents a deeply moving and tragic portrait of the oppressed—a *people in tears, powerless before their exploiters*. Their only language is the language of *weeping*; they stand before ruthless employers with tear-stained faces, pleading for what is rightfully theirs, yet their cries make no impression on the hardened hearts of the wealthy. They return home in tears, soaking their pillows at night because of hunger, financial strain, and the crushing weight of family responsibilities. This imagery echoes the plight of the Israelites in Egypt, whose groans rose to God as a testimony of their suffering (Exod. 2:23–25). As Moo notes, James intentionally uses evocative prophetic language that “captures both the desperation of the victims and the moral bankruptcy of their oppressors.”²⁰ The poor were really helpless in the hands of their oppressors, which made James call them out. This situation is not far from what people face today in the hands of some bad leaders.

In James’ depiction, crying becomes a symbol of pain, discomfort, anguish, and dissatisfaction, a vocabulary spoken only by those whose humanity has been violated. Only a *heartless employer* can disregard the tears of laborers who poured out their time, strength, and dignity in service. David observes that the rich in this passage embody a systemic cruelty in which “the weak are denied justice because they lack the status, resources, or influence to defend themselves.”²¹ In our world today, justice is perverted because most of the time, the poor cannot afford to pay judges. In this case, their rights are trampled upon.

Furthermore, James emphasizes that the oppressed are utterly unable to resist their oppressors. They lack social standing, have no financial means to pursue litigation, and possess no physical power to challenge the elite. The wealthy form ungodly alliances, protecting one another’s interests and ensuring that no legislation or judicial process favors the marginalized. This creates a closed circle of power where the vulnerable are silenced, exploited, and deprived of redress. Yet, despite this imbalance, James assures that the cries of the laborers have reached “the Lord of hosts”—the divine defender who hears what the powerful ignore.

4. *The futility of wealth*

²⁰ D. J. Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter of James*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 224.

²¹ P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 185.



Regrettably, the oppressors lacked the wisdom to perceive the inevitable miseries that their actions would bring upon them. Their attitudes and behaviors make this truth unmistakably clear. They speak recklessly and live without contemplating the meaning of life or their final destination beyond it. They accumulate riches that eventually rot, and their expensive garments are destined to be eaten by termites or moths. They store up gold and silver that ultimately corrode, failing to recognize—as Allison observes—that such imagery serves as “a symbolic testimony against self-deceptive wealth that blinds its possessors to divine judgment.”²² These individuals gladly gather wealth and hoard it for years, even when it decays in their storehouses, rather than releasing it for the benefit of the poor. They even take pleasure in discarding spoiled resources and watching the poor scramble for them like scavengers.

Tragically, they live without moments of self-examination or sober reflection concerning the true purpose of life and the eschatological implications of human existence on earth. King Solomon eventually reached the point of recognizing that affluence and influence, without wisdom and righteousness, amount to nothing but “vanity of vanities” (Eccl. 1:2–11).

5. *Divine involvement*

The anthropomorphic nature of God becomes evident in this passage—God is portrayed as having eyes to see and ears to hear. He sees the sufferings of His people just as He did when Israel groaned under the oppressive rule of Pharaoh in Egypt (Exod. 3:7–10), and He hears the cries that rise continually before Him. James emphasizes that “the cries of the oppressed have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts,” indicating both the *extent* to which these cries have ascended and the *duration* of their appeal. As Davids notes, this imagery underscores a “persistent, heaven-rattling lament that demands divine intervention.”²³ The intensity of the oppressed people’s cries disturbs heaven itself and captures God’s active attention.

This signals impending judgment on the oppressors, for God does not remain silent in the face of suffering and marginalization. He is passionately committed to defending the vulnerable—the widow, the orphan, the destitute, and all who are socially or economically deprived (Ps. 10:17–18). In line with this divine concern, James announces God’s judgment on the wealthy oppressors: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.”

Divine Reproof of Oppressive Labour Policies and Implications on African Nations

- a. God is interested in the growth and development of every society. This is in line with his creation mandate in Genesis 1:28 – “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” When humanity makes it difficult for development to take place in any society,

²² Allison, *James: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 689.

²³ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 187.



it attracts divine displeasure, as in the case of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, where the people agreed to build a great city with a tower that would reach the sky in order to avoid a second flood. God saw this move as a dangerous decision and a violation of his expansion purpose for the creation of the earth, and as such, brought about confusion in the language they spoke. According to Coogan, “the confusion of tongues resulting from the construction of the Tower of Babel accounts for the fragmentation of human languages: God brought into existence multiple languages, rendering humanity unable to understand each other.”²⁴ African churches should be progressive and promote whatever brings development in the society where they are.

- b. Maltreatment of the poor—whether through withholding their legitimate wages or suffocating them under cruel practices and harsh policies is a direct violation of divine law. Isaiah denounced the mistreatment of the poor in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Isa. 10:1–3), and the prophet Amos condemned the wealthy elites who oppressed the poor in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Amos 4:1). As Wright observes, the prophetic tradition consistently affirms that “God stands against every institutional structure that crushes the vulnerable.”²⁵ God issues stern warnings against systemic injustice and oppression, and He demonstrated His commitment to justice by liberating Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exod. 3:7–8). He remains passionately concerned when people are enslaved, marginalized, or mistreated; He is the defender and liberator of the oppressed. The rich man who ignored the suffering of poor Lazarus received no commendation from God at death (Luke 16:19–31). Every act of cruelty against the less privileged carries serious eschatological consequences.
- c. The Church as an agent of God in the world has a responsibility to demonstrate its theology of God’s love and love for fellow humans, and of the unity of the human race. There is no distinction between the rich and the poor as society has made it look. James’ epistle was addressed to the church, suggestive of some ungodly practices taking root in the church. The ideal church is expected to epitomize the love of God and the unity of believers, not just in spirit but in truth. When the church demonstrates God’s love within, the people without would be attracted to the church. The church should teach the world how to relate with one another as the apostle Paul suggested in Colossians 1:4 - “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.” The church must not treat its workers like outcasts; they must be properly attended to and be given what they deserve. Ungodly policies must not be used as yardsticks for the employer-employee relationship of working principles in church-owned establishments. The church is not supposed to support economic systems that are profit-motivated to the detriment of the welfare of human beings.

²⁴ M. D. Coogan. *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: the Hebrew Bible in its Context*. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009), 48.

²⁵ C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 124.



Recommendations

- a) There is a need for African theological voices that will commend good governance and condemn constructively bad policies on the continent. This would help to reduce the aspersions cast on the church for conniving with the powers that be to oppress the poor.
- b) African nations should pass votes of no confidence on political leaders who oppress their workers. Affected political leaders and their accomplices should be held responsible and accountable for African economic instability.
- c) Employees in the African nations should possess a patriotic and altruistic spirit to encourage sustainable industrial development. Workers should be ready and willing to make sacrifices when and where necessary. Workers should not place outrageous demands on their employers. There has to be a healthy balance between the demands and expectations of both employers and employees. According to the World Bank, “excessive labor restrictions may impede job creation, particularly in the formal sector, while excessive flexibility may lead to economic inequality and job insecurity.”²⁶
- d) Sustainable industrial development requires human capital development for technical know-how or capacity building. Employers must be willing and ready to intentionally support their employees to acquire new skills that would increase productivity and economic expansion.
- e) African leaders must inculcate a productive rather than a consumption mentality. Unregulated reliance on foreign products stultifies local initiatives and thus must be discouraged. Unguarded appetite for pleasure and frivolities must be eschewed. These encourage covetousness, which in turn leads to tampering with the rights of the poor to satisfy the leaders’ wantonness.
- f) The church in Africa should deliberately and systematically cushion the effects of oppressive labour policies through the provision of rehabilitation centers for those who have been battered by the ill-treatment of the oppressors. The church is the hope of a common man in society who obviously does not have the wherewithal for litigation. Potentials must not be stultified by the church; the poor must be provided with an adequate environment and resources to be harnessed for optimal benefit.
- g) African nations should ensure, through their responsible agencies, that contract agreements of employment are properly documented. The practice in most African nations is that contracts and employment can be oral or written, implied or express. Contracts of employment do not necessarily have to be in writing, but it is highly recommended to have a written contract to avoid disputes and clarify

²⁶ World Bank. *Doing Business 2020: Comparing Business Regulation in 190 Economies*. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2020), 78



terms. According to Khoso, Baseer, Haq, Hassan, and Afzal, “Labor laws are crucial instruments that governments use to manage the dynamics of the labor market, influence employment rates, and promote economic growth.”²⁷

- h) There is a need for urgent labour policy reforms for both public and private sectors in African nations to avoid inequalities, abuses, and marginalization. Highlighting the urgent need for strategic labour policy reforms, a study by the World Economic Forum notes that by 2025, 85 million jobs may be displaced by technology, while 97 million new roles could emerge.²⁸

Conclusion

The paper used James 5:1-6 as a paradigm for the analysis of oppressive labour policies impinging on sustainable industrial development in African nations. The paper paid little attention to other militating factors to industrial development but concentrated on the oppressive attitudes of the leaders towards the teeming workforce of African nations, especially known for dwindling or stagnant industrial development. The paper strongly posits that the bossy attitudes and unguarded appetites for frivolities noticeable among most African leaders are responsible for oppressive labour policies on the continent. The relationship between labour policies and sustainable economic development is such that when the former is at stake, crises erupt and the latter suffers grossly. The paper recognizes theological connotations of the symbiotic relationship between friendly labour policies and sustainable industrial development in African nations. The church, theologians, and government have significant roles to play in order to create room for sustainable industrial development in Africa.

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²⁷ F. H. Khoso, A. Baseer, M. I. Haq, & S. H. I. Afzal. “Analysis of Labor Policies and Their Impact on Employment and Economic Growth.” *Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works*, 3(2), (2025): 374-381

²⁸ World Economic Forum. *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2020), 54



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