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## BOOK REVIEW

# Basilius Kasera "Towards a Contextualised Conceptualisation of Social Justice for Post-Apartheid Namibia".

(Langham Literature 2024, 336 Pages, £24.99)

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Basilius Kasera's carefully researched and readable book emerged from a recent OCRPL/Stellenbosch doctorate (2021) and many years of working in the humanitarian and academic sectors. Writing as a Namibian about post-Apartheid Namibia, at the same time he makes a welcome, important and original contribution to theological explorations into social justice in the context of Southern Africa and beyond. In fact, his main dialogue partner is the celebrated South African theologian Allan Boesak. He makes a clear case that Boesak is still required and relevant reading today, whilst at the same time offering an at times chastening and reparative reading of Boesak in the light of the post-Apartheid situation.

The introductory chapter 1, among other things, provides an overview of injustice in Namibia, citing the statistic that despite considerable natural resource wealth, in 2018 40% of the population lived in shacks in urban areas. Indeed, in 2022, according to the GINI index Namibia was one of the world's most unequal countries (17). In chapter 2, Kasera surveys different theories of justice, both sociological and theological, identifying a research gap in the Namibian context where the search for justice so often replicates Western concepts rather than forging a contextual theology and practice of justice (73).

Chapter 3 considers in depth Boesak's framing of social justice, briefly exploring his biography before outlining his essentially theological understandings of justice. Kasera argues that Boesak operates with a liberationist equation something like this: '*power is social justice*' (113, my italics). He contends that by power Boesak means Black African empowerment, overcoming the oppressive hold of white supremacy on the mind, a process which must include not only a new consciousness but also the political

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empowerment and crucially also the economic empowerment of black Africans through forms of material restitution for their past dispossession.

A key (and currently highly topical) question for Boesak and therefore for Kasera is the extent to which systematic economic redistribution needs to be part of any process of transforming postcolonial societies towards greater social justice. Kasera engages Boesak's critique of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), that as a process it sought to bring reconciliation in the absence of significant material restitution. In Boesak's pithy phrase, in the post-Apartheid context, despite the work of TRC, 'Zacchaeus remained in the tree'. The helpful diagrams on page 124 and page 128 outline respectively the TRC's model of reconciliation and Boesak's own contrasting and more demanding model.

In chapter 4 Kasera however critiques Boesak's nonetheless enduring contribution by contending that he doesn't sufficiently interrogate his own understandings of social justice. Drawing on Boesak's prophetic statement that there are 'Pharaohs on both sides of the river' in Southern Africa, that is both during and after formal Apartheid, Kasera argues that Christians need to come to terms also with the corruption and neocapitalism of post-Apartheid political elites, who have too often been exempt from theological critiques. He highlights the complexities for example of land restitution policies, expressing concern over indiscriminately 'punitive ideologies' (197) and highlighting the importance of addressing 'the root of the problem - the human heart' in church-led models of social transformation (198). Chapters 5 and 6 do the necessary reconstructive work on ways forward for Namibia, attempting to build on Boesak's insights. In conclusion, Kasera states 'continuing to use the historical analysis given by a theology that can no longer address the present context undermines our call to be God's disciples in the place and time in which God has placed us' (297).

This is a well organised, delicately balanced, theologically rich and timely study that draws not only on Boesak but also on other theologians of justice such as Nicholas Sagovsky, John de Gruchy and Isaiah Berlin as critical dialogue partners. On occasions, the reader has a sense of re-covering the same ground traversed in previous chapters but without doubt the reader will be fully aware of the cumulative direction of the argument, on what bases it is being built and its importance for the future.