Stellenbosch Theological Journal 2026, Vol 12, No 1, 1–20
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2026.v12n1.a22
Online ISSN 2413-9467 | Print ISSN 2413-9459
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Farewell to innocence: Allan Boesak's anthropology and the truth-revealing dimension of divine justice

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Abstract

Boesak's anthropology has often been recognised, but its implications for understanding divine justice remain underexplored. The article follows the logic of Boesak's anthropology, particularly his account of pseudo-innocence and the colonised consciousness, to argue that divine justice includes a truth-revealing dimension, since liberation from dehumanising falsehood requires the disclosure of truth. This constructive claim is tested against critiques from within and beyond Boesak's own tradition, including concerns regarding sin, eschatology, and the historical neglect of gendered oppression within Black Theology of Liberation.

Keywords

Allan Boesak, theological anthropology, pseudo-innocence, truth, colonised consciousness, Black Theology, divine justice

Introduction

Allan Boesak (1946 –), a South African theologian, political activist, and "accidental politician[1]", provides a theology which can be explored anthropologically. As Boesak explores what authentic humanity entails (freedom, neighbourliness, self-love, shared power), he also highlights how detrimental pseudo-innocence and a colonised mind are to our humanity.

1 As he refers to himself in the title of his book *Running with horses: Reflections of an accidental politician* (2009).

Through distorting the truth and embracing falsehoods, they dehumanise individuals and communities. Following the logic of Boesak's anthropology, this article argues that his understanding of authentic humanity, and how pseudo-innocence undermines it, can deepen our understanding of divine justice. This constructive argument expands an area of Boesak's work that has so far been undeveloped, namely its relation to God's divine justice. Boesak's anthropology leads to an understanding of divine justice as including a truth-revealing dimension because authentic humanity, liberation, and reconciliation all depend upon truth. Methodologically, this article does not claim that Boesak himself articulates divine justice as truth-revealing. Rather, it proceeds by way of immanent critique through taking Boesak's own commitments (such as pseudo-innocence as epistemic distortion and truth as the necessary condition of liberation) as premises and questioning what they entail for an understanding of divine justice that Boesak's corpus points towards but does not fully develop. The validity of this argument therefore rests on whether this inference remains faithful to Boesak's own logic, a question taken up critically in what follows. This article will begin by exploring Boesak's anthropological vision. It will then address pseudo-innocence and the colonised consciousness and its detrimental effects for authentic humanity. This will lead to the argument that liberation requires truth and then to the constructive argument that divine justice has a truth-revealing dimension. The conclusion will briefly note how truth can be revealed.

1. Boesak's anthropological vision

The first argument this article makes is that Boesak's anthropology is fundamentally concerned with the recovery of authentic humanity in contexts of dehumanisation. Previous authors have noted a theological-anthropological dimension to Boesak's writings. Amie van Wyk (2003) makes specific reference to Boesak's anthropology, situating it in the context of Boesak's apartheid struggle and his broader theological commitments. Van Wyk shows how Boesak and Liberation Theology are concerned about the whole human being. Boesak's anthropology centres on how human beings have been created in the image of God, possess dignity and personhood, and how oppressive structures like apartheid dehumanise people and communities. Liberation, then, is not merely liberation from

something (such as apartheid) but towards authentic humanity. Van Wyk importantly notes, however, that Boesak's anthropology can be in danger of being too political, optimistic and revolutionary, while not placing enough importance on the effects of sin and eschatology. Sin and eschatology will be addressed when discussing divine justice directly to show how Boesak's work can seriously contribute to both theological concepts.

Martin Laubscher (2025) also identifies an anthropological dimension to Boesak's work first in his observation that Boesak often emphasises the vulnerable and deliberately names them. Referring to Boesak's (2009) "Running with horses", Laubscher notes the many names of real people, in specific places, experiencing various forms of suffering that Boesak references. Boesak is not merely interested in theological doctrine, but specifically in the stories of these vulnerable people. Through this, Boesak illuminates a God who wholly identifies and is in solidarity with those who suffer. While Laubscher highlights God's solidarity with vulnerable persons, the implications of that solidarity for understanding divine action are still an open question. Second, Laubscher (2025:19) details how Boesak's (2021) "Selfless Revolutionaries" rings throughout with the gift of "a more human face". Laubscher (2025, n. 76) notes Boesak's language of "the creation of a meaningful humanity"; a "de-dichotomised human consciousness"; and "a truly human and humanised consciousness", and many more. Laubscher reveals that Boesak's anthropology is concerned not merely with abstract personhood but with the conditions that either foster or undermine authentic human consciousness. Laubscher also raises some important critiques of Boesak, and Black Liberation Theology, which will feature when discussing divine justice directly.

Eugene Fortein's (2018, 2020, 2025) body of work on Boesak is also important for understanding his anthropology, as Fortein consistently reminds us that Boesak's theology is formed historically before it is formed conceptually. Fortein is consistently historical-biographical, tracing the formation of Boesak's theology of prophetic resistance against its historical context and life narrative. Boesak's anthropology is formed within his own lived experience within apartheid South Africa, along with his theological commitments. This article takes a different, constructive approach to these authors: rather than situating Boesak historically or trying to prove Boesak has an anthropology (previous authors have clearly already done

this), it follows the logic of his anthropology to ask what it entails for an underdeveloped area of his thought, namely divine justice. The purpose is to acknowledge Boesak's anthropology and to question its implications, particularly when distorted forms of consciousness threaten authentic humanity.

Boesak's anthropology essentially deals with authentic humanity, or full personhood, and he highlights certain concepts that are integral to this. For example, in his seminal work "Farewell to Innocence", Boesak (1977) includes the topics of personhood, self-love, neighbourliness, power, and the courage to be. All of these are vital to Boesak's anthropology and to what it means to be human. For Boesak (1977:1) there needed to be recognition by black people that their "humanity is constituted by their blackness". Hlulani Mdingi (2022:585–586) observes how Boesak connects blackness with the creation of a new humanity, making it an ontological, eschatological, and existential reality. In relation to self-love and self-hatred, Boesak (1977:30) writes:

> … for blacks, in order to become reconciled with themselves, but also for whites, to become reconciled with themselves and to accept blackness as authentic humanity. This is sharing in God's creation, participating in a new Exodus, creating a new black being, thereby demythologising white superiority and humanising white living from its own idolatrous absurdity and black living from its own blasphemous non-beingness.

An indispensable aspect of being human is therefore the ability to be a neighbour to others (Boesak 1977:5). To treat another human being unjustly is to destroy the bonds of our shared humanity, since every person is our neighbour (Boesak 2018:11)". Drawing on John Calvin, Boesak argues that it is enough for a person to simply be human to be considered a neighbour. To be a neighbour is therefore essential to becoming truly human because neighbourliness involves recognising and affirming the dignity of the other. Yet neighbourliness also requires self-love.

Boesak's anthropological vision is thus one where all human beings can exist as authentic human beings. This means that they can flourish and exist in the fullness of their being. This requires all the above notions that Boesak highlights, but also, importantly, freedom. As the title of Boesak's

(2018) address to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) says "full humanity requires freedom". Therefore, Boesak's theological anthropology can be viewed as an embodied and contextual anthropology. It cannot be separated from his socio-political environment, his context of growing up in apartheid South Africa, or the many stories of real people that he has witnessed suffering alongside him under oppressive and racist regimes. Through this all, Boesak reveals a concern for what it means to be human amid oppression and suffering, and how human beings can and should respond to live a free existence. Two threats to this authentic humanity, to which the article now turns, are the notions of pseudo-innocence and the colonised consciousness.

2. Pseudo-innocence and the colonised consciousness

Pseudo-innocence and the colonised consciousness are not being highlighted because Boesak necessarily sees them as the greatest threat to authentic human existence, but because they are persistent themes within his writing that have not yet been fully developed in terms of their implications for divine justice. An exploration of pseudo-innocence and the colonised mind reveals how authentic humanity can be distorted. Pseudo-innocence functions as an epistemic tool that prevents human beings from becoming fully human. The question then is: what can sufficiently address pseudo-innocence or the colonised consciousness? These questions will be explored in the next section.

Boesak first introduced the notion of pseudo-innocence in "Farewell to Innocence". For Boesak (1977:3–6) pseudo-innocence is one of the greatest obstacles to authentic humanity as it distorts how individuals understand themselves, others, and the social realities within which they live. Fundamental to Boesak's understanding of Liberation Theology is the epistemic category of "innocence" (Cloete 2016:22). Boesak (1977:3) understands innocence as a function of Western theology's intentional and systematic ignorance of lived experiences on which Liberation Theology is based, these being: "realities of rich and poor, of white and black, of oppressors and oppressed, of oppression and liberation from oppression". Innocence, as a kind of "racial thinking", offers the condition both for the possibility of white power and privilege in colonial-apartheid South Africa,

and also the violent invasion of the land, mind, and life of the pre-colonial indigenous African people (Cloete 2016:22). Through colonisation and enslavement, the conquest of the African mind contributed to the genocidal violation of the African person's right to life, as well as to a deficit of self-confidence and deep scepticism regarding the validity, moral significance, and epistemological relevance of pre-colonial African indigenous systems of thought (Cloete 2016:23).

Perhaps the most severe consequence of pseudo-innocence is the failure to face, and thus live meaningfully within, the present political reality (Cloete 2016:26). Pseudo-innocence attempts to escape the truth by either holding onto a fabricated heroic past that never existed, or to an idealised future that never will exist. This distortion of present reality means it is almost impossible to connect meaningfully with the "other" as a fellow human being. For Boesak (1977:3), pseudo-innocence involves a "closing" of our eyes in the face of horrendous issues, causing us to embrace powerlessness, weakness, and helplessness while treating these as virtues. Pseudo-innocence becomes self-destructive and uses "the ideal" to blind people to the present-day atrocities, while simultaneously covering up and rationalising guilt and sin (Boesak 1977:4). It becomes demonic because it conceals evil while simultaneously justifying it. One is thus unable to repent, and genuine reconciliation becomes impossible. Boesak (1977:4) describes the heart of the matter as follows:

> In order to maintain the status quo, whites must believe, and keep on believing, that they are innocent. They are innocent because they "just happen to have the superior position in the world", or in some mysterious way, they have been placed in a position of leadership (guardianship) over blacks by nature, by virtue of their "superior" culture, or by God. They thus may believe themselves to have a "divine calling" vis-à-vis blacks, or to uphold "western Christian civilisation".

The only way the status quo could be maintained during apartheid was through the preservation of this pseudo-innocence (Boesak 1977:4). If this pseudo-innocence is maintained, then it becomes impossible to engage with the "other" as a fully human person worthy of dignity and respect (Cloete 2016:27). Thus, pseudo-innocence and dialogue are mutually exclusive

concepts that maintain a divided South African landscape consisting of the opposed groups of "us and them".

A focal point of pseudo-innocence is the mind of both the oppressor and the oppressed. The mind of the racialised citizen is the greatest weapon of the state, as pseudo-innocence destroys the desire for change (Cloete 2016:26–27). The logic of racism is self-validating and obscures the possibility that another world is possible. For Mdingi (2016:97) the mind is the "greatest tool" of human existence because ideas assume material form in social and political reality. Boesak (1977:6) likewise emphasises the vulnerability of the black mind to white racial thinking. In seeking recognition within a society structured by white supremacy, the black person may internalise white norms and become trapped in what Cloete (2016:28) describes as the "failed dialectics of recognition". Black Consciousness therefore seeks to eradicate this slave mentality by affirming black personhood and dignity. As Boesak (1977:5–6), drawing on Biko, observes, "The greatest ally of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed". Liberation therefore requires overcoming an implanted slave mentality and affirming one's personhood in the face of systems of oppression.

Pseudo-innocence is therefore not purely a "closing" of one's eyes to maintain moral innocence; it is a hermeneutical distortion that results in a disingenuous reading of Scripture, a distorted understanding of God, and a perversion of the concept "neighbour". It obscures the humanity of both self and other, whereas authentic innocence recognises the full humanity of the other and the ethical obligations that follow from such recognition. Pseudo-innocence therefore represents more than a moral failure. It is a form of dehumanisation that obscures both the dignity of the self and the humanity of the other.

Alongside pseudo-innocence, one can also discuss the concept of the colonised mind or consciousness. In Boesak's most recent writings, in relation to the notion of empire, he talks of the need to decolonise the mind. In "Selfless revolutionaries", Boesak (2021:44) writes that the decolonised mind rejects "Meek acceptance of those rules, oppressive, exploitative, and dehumanising as they are … as it rejects definitions of 'respectability' and 'decency' as set by the hegemonic narratives of the dominant culture". In the struggle for "authentic Africanity", the decolonised mind is vital and

must engage both pulpit and lectern (p.88-89). The goal is for people to become the authors of their own liberation. And in discussing empire, and a definition of empire, Boesak (2020a:43–44) speaks of "the colonisation of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life".

Although distinct concepts, pseudo-innocence and colonised consciousness share a common concern with distorted perception and false forms of consciousness. Pseudo-innocence seems to describe a moral and spiritual condition. It describes a refusal to acknowledge the truth about oneself, one's participation in oppression, or the reality of injustice. It is a form of self-deception and denial. It concerns how people understand themselves and their relationship to truth and responsibility. The colonised mind seems to be mainly a psychological, social, and political condition. It involves the internalisation of oppressive narratives, values, categories, and assumptions. A person begins to see themselves, others, and the world through the framework of the oppressor. Both concepts overlap in that they involve distorted perception, false consciousness and an inability to see reality truthfully. In this way, they both compromise humanity and challenge an authentic human existence. This leads to the second argument, that pseudo-innocence and the colonised consciousness represent significant, persistent ways that authentic humanity is distorted, by compromising and concealing truth. Thus, a person embraces and lives within a false and distorted reality. Therefore, for there to be liberation towards a fully human existence, there first needs to be an exposing of falsehood and an embracing of truth. Neighbourliness, self-love, dignity, ubuntu, freedom, and all the other concepts Boesak raises to motivate humanity towards authentic existence first require the truth to be revealed. Both pseudo-innocence and colonised consciousness represent forms of distorted consciousness through which reality is misperceived, evil concealed, and authentic humanity undermined. Authentic human existence therefore requires more than political liberation. It requires liberation from falsehood itself. Thus, the next section furthers this argument that liberation requires truth.

3. Liberation requires truth

The third argument of this article is that liberation, reconciliation, and authentic humanity all require truth. Throughout Boesak's writings, liberation is repeatedly linked to the exposure of falsehood and the disclosure of realities that systems of oppression seek to conceal. For example, in "Pharaohs on both sides of the blood-red waters", Boesak (2017:1) presents this powerful quote in the opening pages:

> The cry ringing across the world is resistance against empire because it reveals truth. Mendacity is the lifeblood of empires. Empires cannot live without it. It lies about itself, about the realities of oppression, domination and subjugation. It lies about the people: not just about what the people need, but about what the people deserve and are entitled to. It proclaims that whatever is good for empire is good for the world. The cry for justice, freedom and dignity exposes the truth about the empire, but simultaneously it reveals the truth about the people: their outrage at injustice and their longings for justice; their outrage at oppression and their love for freedom; their outrage at exploitation and their desire for dignity; their outrage at the destruction of their lives and their strength in the indestructibility of their hope".

It is clear here how fundamental distorted truth is to empire, "mendacity is the "lifeblood of empires", and how vital truth-revealing is to defeat it. Fighting for liberation and against oppression is vitally a fight to reveal the truth. The truth about empire and the truth about humanity. Without revealing the truth, how can one speak of liberation? In "Children of the waters", Boesak (2019:30) shows just how impossible reconciliation is when truth is denied, and pseudo-innocence is embraced. Boesak explains that racism "has become sacralised in white minds", barring a few notable exceptions. Because of this, it is impossible for white South Africans, such as F.W. De Klerk, to acknowledge the evil of apartheid, seek genuine repentance and show remorse; to ask for forgiveness and engage in reconciliation. Since the truth of racism cannot be accepted, the rest cannot follow. Boesak (2020a:56) furthers this point when referring to how Mr De Klerk could not understand the anger at his public remarks in a BBC interview when he claimed apartheid was not a crime against humanity.

Boesak describes De Klerk's position as one of white arrogance, denial, and wearing the cloak of victimhood, as this is "the best bulwark against genuine change and transformation". Again, Boesak here emphasises how without truth there cannot be change.

One last example, Boesak (2019:92–95) refers to the start of the hearings at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Nomonde Calata had just begun speaking when she suddenly broke down and let out an anguished scream of pain. Boesak says, "what she cried for was the justice informed and sustained by the love of the wounded God" and "Nomonde decided she would hide her outrage no longer and reveal South Africa's truth for all the world to see". At the beginning of a process seeking justice, Mrs Calata first wanted to reveal the truth of her pain, and the devastation of apartheid for all to see. Her cry to expose the truth was not just about information but also about acknowledgement. Unfortunately, as Boesak notes, over twenty years later, her cry is still largely unheard by the powerful and rich, the self-sufficient and the pampered, the privileged and forgetful. To the extent that her cry has not been heard, her truth has not been embraced, and justice is in some form still denied. If pseudo-innocence and colonised consciousness distort reality, then authentic humanity becomes impossible as human beings no longer perceive themselves, their neighbours, or their world truthfully. For Boesak, liberation is impossible where falsehood remains unchallenged because distorted understandings of the self, the neighbour, and society prevent authentic humanity from emerging. Truth is therefore not merely a component of liberation, reconciliation, and justice, but a necessary condition for each of them.

It is no wonder then that Boesak (2020a:96) speaks of cheap reconciliation. Cheap reconciliation is one without repentance, contrition, remorse, restoration, or justice. Unless the truth is revealed, reconciliation cannot be fully achieved. Without the full exposure and embracing of the truth, not only is reconciliation cheap, but so are liberation and the rest. Indeed, genuine reconciliation is costly because it forces everyone to confront themselves. It removes all the hiding places and exposes the most vulnerable parts of the individual and the community for examination. Without this costly process to reveal the truth of oppression, suffering, greed and abuse, genuine liberation becomes impossible. However, not only does falsehood prevent liberation, but falsehood can itself be understood as a form of

oppression. Empire survives through lies; pseudo-innocence survives through denial; racism becomes sacralised through distorted narratives; and reconciliation fails where truth is denied. In each case, falsehood prevents persons and communities from relating rightly to themselves, their neighbours, and God. This suggests that truth is not merely useful to liberation but is itself a part of liberation. Here perhaps the words Jesus Christ speaks in John 8:32 are the most powerful: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free[2]".

Within Boesak's writings, authentic humanity requires truthful perception of self, neighbour, and reality. The prominence of truth within Boesak's account of liberation also raises further theological questions. If liberation requires truth, how is truth revealed? Is truth-telling merely a human activity, or does it also involve divine action? Following the implications of Boesak's anthropology also opens an eschatological horizon. Truth, justice, liberation, and reconciliation are not exhausted, or perhaps fully realised even, within present historical realities but point forward toward the fuller realisation of God's justice.

4. Divine justice as truth-revealing

If truth is necessary for liberation, then the question remains whether the revelation of truth is solely a human responsibility or whether it also forms part of God's activity in the world. The fourth argument this article makes is that Boesak's anthropology logically leads to an understanding of truth-revealing as an essential dimension of divine justice. This is not to say this is the only implication, or the most important, that Boesak's anthropology has for divine justice. However, it is yet an unexplored area within Boesak's own writings and has not been fully, or explicitly, developed in recent scholarship. Truth-revealing is not simply a matter of sharing information but bringing about justice. This means that divine justice is concerned with more than mere retribution, restoration, or distribution. Therefore, if truth-revealing is part of the nature of divine justice, and expressed in liberation, we can see God's just activity involved in all areas in the world

2 The NIV is used for all scriptures.

where truth is revealed and thus liberation, reconciliation and forgiveness materialise.

Boesak clearly thinks of distorted truth as more than simply a fight for accurate information, but a spiritual reality which requires God's justice. As already noted, he describes pseudo-innocence as demonic as it simultaneously conceals and justifies evil. Boesak (2019:111–113) also quotes Martin Luther King Jnr who writes, "within the wide arena of everyday life, we see evil in all of its ugly dimensions…we see it in high places where men are willing to sacrifice truth on the altars of their self-interest". For both Boesak and King, the embracing of lies and deceit, anything that "sacrifices" truth, is evil. Biblically, these concepts of evil and demonic forces are not something that human beings struggle against alone but directly relate to God's divine justice. God's justice will defeat all demonic and evil forces. To see pseudo-innocence and the colonised mind as embracing lies and deceit, and to describe these as demonic and evil, is to place the concept of truth and truth-revealing in justice and specifically God's divine just activity. If it is evil to distort the truth, it is just for truth to be revealed. If God's justice is dealing with evil, then one way must be through revealing the truth which evil seeks to suppress.

We can now return to one concern that van Wyk (2003) raised about Boesak's anthropology, namely, it not taking sin seriously enough. An integral part of Boesak's writings deals with how oppression exists due to lies and falsehood. These lies and falsehoods are sinful and flourish due to sinful human activity. Although not explicitly labelled "sin" or connected to the doctrine of sin, within Boesak's anthropology one can see how vast, pervasive, and detrimental human sin is by our embracing, disseminating, or wilfully accepting/allowing falsehoods to persist. Empire is built largely on the sin of human lies. Increasing the seriousness of this is to understand how this deliberately attacks God's desire for our authentic human existence. God created us to be authentically human; our sin of falsehood both oppresses ourselves and others, but also directly attacks that which God has ordained for human creation. It is a sin that attacks the self, others, and God. Stating this explicitly helps to show how Boesak implicitly takes sin very seriously and emphasises how divine justice must reveal the truth to defeat sin and evil. It is important to note that van Wyk

raised these concerns in 2003, and many of these observations of Boesak's work come from his recent writings.

To further this argument is to follow the logic that if falsehood itself is a form of oppression, and if truth is a part of liberation, and liberation concerns God's just activity towards an oppressed people, then one can conclude that in God liberating God's people, God's justice must also reveal the truth. Asked in a different way, can God liberate without revealing the truth? And if liberation is a matter of God's justice (which Liberation Theology and Boesak seem to hold it is), then would truth-revealing not also be a matter of God's justice?

Here the narrative of the Exodus event, which is vital to Liberation Theology, is helpful. In this event, God is not only liberating God's people from Egypt but is also revealing truth. The story is not merely about liberation from Egypt but liberation through revelation. Liberation in Exodus is accompanied by a sustained unveiling of truth concerning God, Pharaoh, Israel, and covenantal existence. This is seen through God revealing: God's divine name (Ex. 3:13-15), the powerlessness of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:16), Israel's identity (Ex. 6:6-7), and covenantal reality (Ex. 24:3-8). Remove truth-revealing from the story, and it does not seem like the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt would be possible. They would still carry the "slave mentality", the "colonised mind" with them. They would be leaving Egypt but still be in bondage. As Boesak (2017:3) writes, "returning the people to Egypt is returning them to slavery and a mindset of slavery …". Egypt does not just involve, or symbolise, physical and political oppression; it shows how distorted truth enforces and maintains oppression and how necessary it is for justice to reveal the truth so liberation can occur. To return to Egypt is to once again embrace a distorted reality, to choose lies over truth and evil over justice.

This Exodus story also reveals two more points. First, in Exodus, true liberation could not occur without God's intervention, specifically the truths which God revealed. The Israelites needed divine revelation to "open" their eyes and combat the pseudo-innocence and colonised consciousness of their time. The point being, any liberation movement may too be dependent on Godly revelation for its success. In the words of God to the prophet Zechariah (4:6): "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit".

Second, Laubscher pointed out divine solidarity within Boesak's writings. What can now be said is that this divine solidarity is not simply to "be with" or "suffer with" the oppressed. It also includes the revealing of truth from a place of embodied relationality. God's justice in the narrative is not truth-revealing from a distance but is enacted through God entering, and embodying, our realities.

The point is perhaps most clearly made in Boesak's (2020b) "the need for a fighting God". Referring to Biko's use of the term, and Jesus overturning the money-changing tables in the temple (Mt 21:12-13; Mk11:15-17; Lk19:45-46), Boesak (2020b:14) writes that the Black Messiah of Black theology is a fighting God who challenges lies:

> Since all oppression begins with lies, the revolution of this fighting God begins with exposing and challenging the lie. It is for this reason that Jesus' confrontation with the tempter, the "father of all lies," (Jn 8:44), is placed so early in the synoptic gospels (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13).

Boesak (2020b:15) attributes the beginning of God's revolution as revealing the truth (exposing the lie) and repudiating the liar. By not allowing a lie to remain unchallenged, God is an active God, and Christ is a fighting God. The activities "of colonialism, post-colonial realities, re-colonisation and perpetual imperialism" are lies and thus Boesak (2020b:18) says "From the beginning, we recognised that all oppressions begin with the permanent lie". While not stated by Boesak, he considers the nature and character of divine justice to vitally include truth-revealing. God is a fighting God whose fight is to reveal the truth to confront lies and falsehoods.

Taken together, Boesak's treatment of pseudo-innocence, his understanding of liberation, the Exodus paradigm, and the identification of a need for a fighting God present the argument that divine justice includes a truth-revealing dimension[3]. Boesak's anthropology also explains why God's justice is concerned with revealing the truth; because God desires us to live an authentic human existence, and pseudo-innocence and a colonised consciousness threaten this. As God's justice is directed toward the

3 This intuition is not confined to Boesak's context: The TRC, Zondo, and Madlanga commissions suggests the same conviction, that revealing the truth is itself an act of justice, not merely a precursor to it.

recovery of authentic humanity, it necessarily opposes the falsehoods that obscure human dignity and distort human relationships. Divine justice necessarily includes the unveiling of reality to both expose the fictions that make domination appear normal and to reveal the humanity of the other. In this way, divine justice is liberation for the oppressed through restoring the truth necessary for authentic humanity and reconciliation. Judgment becomes truth made public. From this perspective, divine justice may include retribution, but retribution alone cannot be regarded as its essence. Simply punishing wrongdoers without addressing the epistemic regime (empire) that made domination possible through the embracing and dissemination of falsehoods leaves the structures of oppression fundamentally intact. Divine justice must therefore include revelation to expose the lie and reveal the human other as truly human.

A further question to ask, raised by Laubscher (2025:12–13), is whether Boesak's framework can be critically self-reflective. Laubscher draws on Wessel Wessels' concern that Boesak might be stuck in an anti-colonial mindset which ends up mirroring the very colonial logic it opposes. The "Pharaohs on both sides of the Blood-red Waters" is mostly "the other" (PW Botha or Cyril Ramaphosa) and not the self (p.20). But the Pharaoh could be a mirror for the self, recognising ourselves in the other and not treating the other as a scapegoat. If pseudo-innocence is, as this article argues, an epistemic distortion available to oppressor and oppressed alike, then truth-revealing as a dimension of divine justice cannot exempt liberationist discourse itself from exposure. As Laubscher notes, perhaps Black Theology of Liberation "too should be liberated" (p.12). If so, certain truths would need to be revealed. This does not undermine the argument developed here; rather, it sharpens it; divine justice's truth-revealing must be understood as self-reflective as well as directional, disrupting comfortable identities on both sides of a struggle, including the revolutionaries, rather than only unmasking the oppressor.

The writings by South African womanist theologians like Sandisele Xhinti (2021) and Fundiswa Kobo (2020) are such powerful self-reflective works which reveal the type of exposure necessary for the liberationist discourse. They exemplify how self-reflexivity cannot stop at political power and have raised a related but independent concern: that Black Theology of Liberation, in centring race and class, has often overlooked or minimised patriarchal

harm within Black communities and churches themselves. Xhinti (2021:7) writes, "In BTL, the core was the 'black man'. The 'black woman' was overlooked, be it unconsciously or consciously". She also notes how black women face the same struggle as black men but also the added form of oppression by being misused by black men and defined as being inferior. If truth-revealing is genuinely reflexive, Black Christians, churches, and theologians must also be named among the Pharaohs where the oppression of Black women has gone unexamined.

Truth-revealing is therefore not identical with liberation itself. Rather, it constitutes one of the conditions that make liberation possible, since authentic humanity cannot emerge where falsehood continues to distort human self-understanding, neighbourliness, and social reality. This exposure of falsehood performs a theological function within Boesak's work that deserves specific attention and for its logic to be more fully explored. Divine justice emerges as a response to the dehumanisation that occurs when lies persist and seeks to restore authentic humanity through revealing the truth. If divine justice is truth-revealing, the final question to ask then is: how does it reveal the truth?

5. Conclusion

It is important to note that this article has made primarily an ontological argument, namely that Boesak's anthropology logically leads toward a deeper understanding of divine justice as including a truth-revealing dimension. The question of how truth is revealed belongs more properly to the realm of epistemology. Nevertheless, Boesak's writings provide important indications regarding the means through which God reveals the truth. Throughout his work, Boesak expresses how truth is revealed through Scripture, prophetic witness, preaching, the cries of the oppressed and communities of resistance. The bible functions as a witness to God's liberating truth; prophetic voices expose the falsehoods of empire; the cries of the suffering reveal realities that privilege often seeks to conceal; and communities of resistance become places where distorted understandings of humanity are challenged and transformed.

This understanding has important implications for liberation. If divine justice includes a truth-revealing dimension, then liberation cannot be

achieved through the mere replacement of one system of domination with another, nor through deception, manipulation, or the suppression of truth. Truth-revealing is integral to liberation because authentic humanity can only emerge where falsehood is exposed and reality is genuinely seen. For this reason, liberation is neither purely human achievement nor a passive waiting for divine intervention. Human beings are called to participate in the work of truth-telling, while remaining dependent upon God's ongoing activity of revelation and justice. Here the eschatological dimension becomes important. Van Wyk (2003) noted that Boesak's anthropology can lean toward the politically optimistic and revolutionary, without sufficient attention to eschatology. This article's constructive turn toward divine justice's truth-revealing dimension takes that caution seriously: if truth-revealing were treated as fully achievable by human beings within history, it would risk the very over-realised optimism van Wyk warns against. Placing truth-revealing eschatologically, pointing toward but not fully identical with its historical instantiations, answers this concern without abandoning the constructive claim. It also notes the importance of revelation, which too has a strong eschatological significance. As divine revelation also has its part in revealing the truth (as the Exodus narrative supports) we can hold the eschatological perspective of Christ's return in mind and what truth that revelation will bring to the world.

The argument developed throughout this article has been that Boesak's anthropology is fundamentally concerned with authentic humanity. Yet humanity is threatened by pseudo-innocence and colonised consciousness, both of which distort reality and prevent persons from understanding themselves, their neighbours, and God truthfully. As liberation requires freedom from these distortions, truth becomes a necessary condition for authentic human existence. Following this logic further reveals an often-overlooked implication of Boesak's work: divine justice includes a truth-revealing dimension. Such a conclusion does not replace traditional understandings of divine justice as restorative, distributive, or retributive. Rather, it suggests that these dimensions cannot be fully realised where falsehood remains unchallenged. Divine justice therefore includes God's ongoing work of exposing lies, confronting denial, dismantling distorted forms of consciousness, and restoring persons and communities to truthful existence before God and neighbour. In this sense, truth-revealing becomes

one of the ways in which God liberates, reconciles, and brings authentic humanity to human beings within the world.

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