

RESENSIES/ REVIEWS

P. Dibeela, P. Lenka-Bula & V. Vellem (Eds.)

Prophet from the South: Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak
(Johannesburg: SUN PReSS, 2014). 281 pp.

Price: R325

ISBN: 978-1-920689-24-7

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v35i2.12>

Allan Boesak emerged as a liberation theologian in 1976 after the publication of his doctoral thesis, *Farewell to innocence*. Since then, liberation theology guided his work in South Africa and abroad, in the church, and on public issues. Liberation theology enticed him to struggle against the injustices of both apartheid and democracy, albeit not without some mistakes. It is, therefore, no surprise that Boesak's work had such an influence as to warrant not only a Festschrift, but such a global Festschrift as *Prophet from the South*. A quick overview of the list of contributors reveals Boesak's influence, in the global North and the global South, on a diversity of people from all walks of life.

Prophet from the South is structured in four sections. The first section (2014:11-89) is entitled *Boesak's theological roots*. The focus falls both on how Boesak's theology was formed through the traditions of liberation theology and reformed theology, as well as how he inspired others to take up similar convictions. It is asserted that Boesak's theological roots are founded on his consciousness of real power dynamics and the universal Lordship of Christ (2014:32-33, 48). The contributors rightly affirm that such theological convictions change the way in which theology is done, society is approached and how hope is perceived, as has been the case in the work of Boesak.

The second section (2014:93-118) is entitled *Liberative liturgical conversations*. The contributors delve into Boesak's homiletic, rhetoric and liturgical capacities. Unfortunately, with a mere 25 pages, this section is rather meagre, especially since it claims that Boesak's liturgical contributions are necessary for the current plight of preaching in South Africa and globally (2014:98). Moreover, there exists the conviction that justice, peace and human rights are in need of liturgical sensitivity. Or rather, that a liturgical sensitivity, such as that of Boesak, fathoms a sensitivity for justice, peace and human rights (2014:118). This section could certainly have been developed further to include a more prominent investigation into Boesak's rhetorical, homiletic and liturgical contributions.

The third section (2014:121-198) is entitled *Echoes of Boesak's tradition in the diaspora*. The contributors return to the traditions of reformed and liberation theology. This time, it is not about Boesak's foundation as in section one, but about his hermeneutics. Liberation theology is the reinterpretation of the White man's theology in such a way that Black religion becomes a liberating force from God for the oppressed in the present time (2014:129). The last three articles extensively articulate how Boesak has influenced and enriched Caribbean and womanist theological thought and the public debate on racism in democratic South Africa and the United States of America (2014:144-198). These three contributions are fascinating and of a very high quality.

The fourth section (2014:201-281) is entitled *Black public theology*. This section emphasises one of the most important aspects of Black theology: activism to change the world for the better and how this is part and parcel of Boesak's repertoire (2014:206). Boesak is described as an activist, a public academic theologian and a public speaker/preacher, both locally and globally. Just when I thought that Boesak is viewed in too much of an idealistic light, Maluleke's honest contribution comes to the fore, shedding light on both Boesak's success and shortcomings: "I was most aware that before me stood a man who had been not only to the highest mountain top, but who had also been to the deepest valley." (2014:224).

Some critical thoughts. First, for a book that praises Boesak's rhetoric and homiletic abilities almost constantly, the vivid absence of close engagement with Boesak the preacher is troubling. Is Boesak not the preacher as much as he is the activist? Or rather, is Boesak not the preacher whilst he is the activist, the political commentator and the academic? Secondly, there is a void with regard to Boesak's later work, where he seems to have come to grips with the shortcomings of liberation theology in its democratic implementation. Was *Prophet from the South*, therefore, not a few years too early? Is Boesak not moving towards a liberation theology which expects shortcomings and, therefore, focuses on God's promise of *hope* within shortcomings? Lastly, it seems to me that liberation theology, as received and passed along by Boesak, has become a theology solely for the marketplace and the activist. Has it not left the church to be overwhelmed by prosperity preachers and all new forms of escapism? Should liberation theology not endeavour to find a more responsible balance between the ecclesial and the public, a theology more in service of the real and often rejected church in the diaspora?

Resensies/Reviews

As far as the technical qualities of the book are concerned, it is a soft-cover book with a picture of Boesak on the front page. The binding seems to be strong. The language is of high academic quality. The structure of the book is sensible. The professional technical care of all the articles makes for effortless reading.

All in all, this is a valuable contribution for conversation on Boesak's liberation theology and public theology, with unfortunate shortcomings in liturgical foundation.

Wessel Wessels

MTh student

University of the Free State