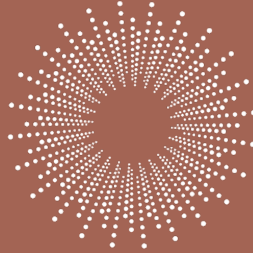


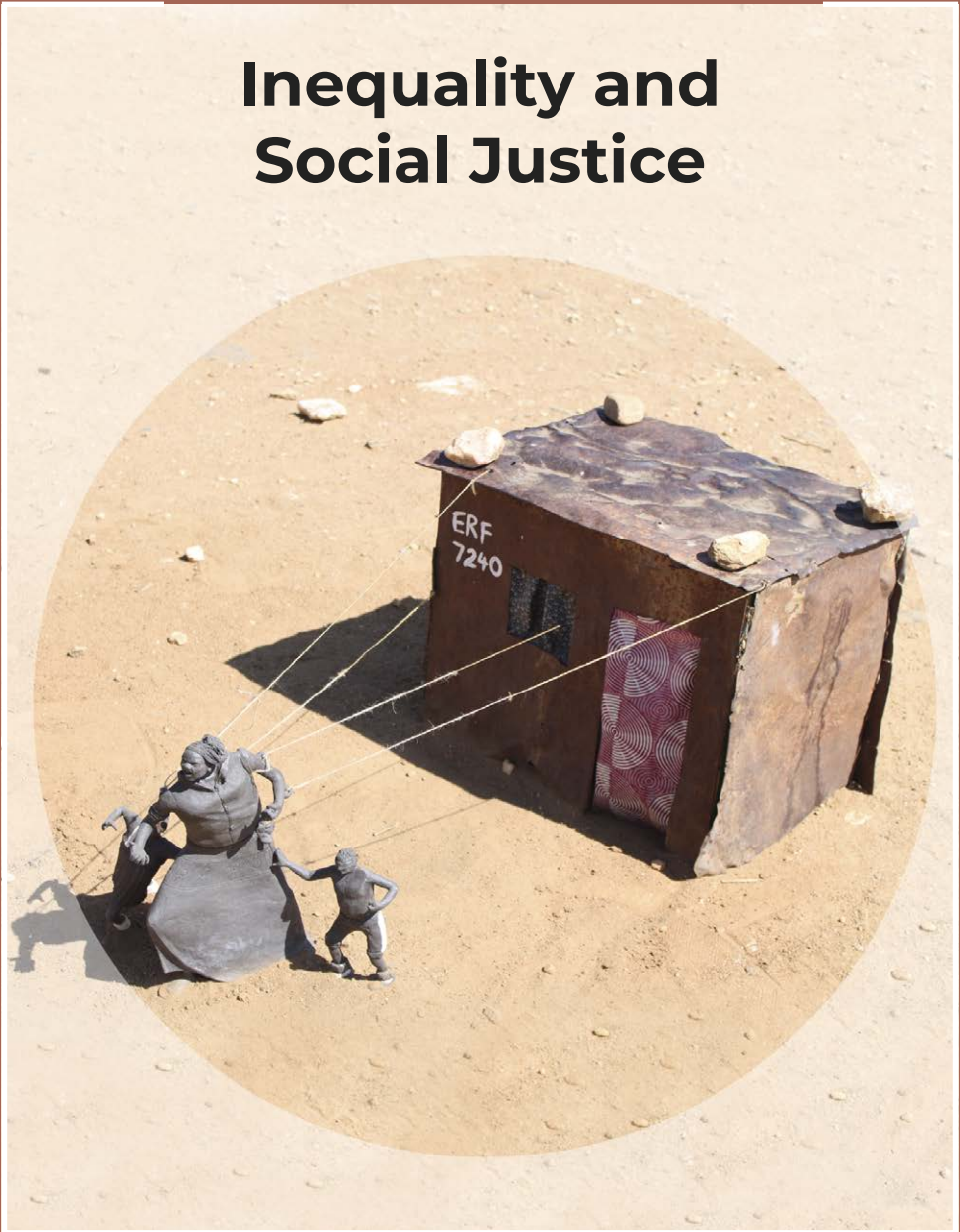
Volume 2

November 2022



Namibian  
Journal  
of Social  
Justice

# Inequality and Social Justice



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**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**   
**STIFTUNG**  
Namibia Office

## Acronyms and Initialisms

AMCU	Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union
BEPS	base-erosion profit shifting
BIEN	Basic Income Earth Network
BIG	basic income grant
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	civil society organisations
DSD	Differences of Sexual Development
ELCN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCRN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
ESOP	Employee Share Ownership Plan
FMS	Finnish Missionary Society
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GRB	gender-responsive budgeting
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
HDI	Human Development Index
HTA	Hai  om Traditional Authority
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	information and communication technology
IFFs	illicit financial flows
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	International Mineral Resources
IOC	International Olympic Committee

LMS	London Missionary Society
MAWLR	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MPUCT	Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfer
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NLF	Namibia Labour Force
NNSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher-level
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NSSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDS	Public Distribution System
PIT	personal income tax
RMS	Rhenish Missionary Society
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEM	structural equation modelling
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
TAA	Traditional Authorities Act (No. 25 of 2000)
TVUCT	Tribal Village Unconditional Cash Transfer
UCT	unconditional cash transfer
VAT	value added tax
WHO	World Health Organization
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
WSWB	willing-seller-willing-buyer



# ***Religion and Social Justice***

## **Social Justice as Praxis: A Socioreligious and Ethical Analysis**

*Basilus M. Kasera*

### **Abstract:**

*Social injustice is neither morally neutral nor does it happen in a social vacuum. To create an authentic environment which reflects some measure of social justice will need concrete symbols or life-enhancing goods. Thus, to genuinely reflect humane values requires outward expressions that concretise our social order. This socioreligious and ethical analysis, as a framework, explores the need for such a tangible response to social injustice. For instance, liberty, which is a central value for a civilised society, must provide more than conducive social conditions. It requires actual conditions of liberty that will authenticate and guarantee the continuation of post-independence social conditions. These conditions are needed not for political reasons but as an ethical pursuit to humanise society. We intend to explore tentative answers to the key questions: What does it mean to be human in Namibia? What are the symbols of justice needed to express a fuller human experience?*

**Key terms:** social justice; praxis; socioreligious; common good; socioeconomic; ethical

### **Introduction**

The quest for social justice is complex. This paper does not try to offer magical solutions. The reality and effects of injustice in Namibian society demand that we do away with pretentious answers. Instead, we need to raise new questions and suggest ways out of this socioeconomic inequality that blurs the prospects and vision to humanise the future. The good life is the *telos* to which humanity and all civilisations aspire. Namibia is no exception. Therefore, the level of socioeconomic inequality in Namibia is not only an economic issue but an ethical and cultural one; it is not just about jobs, housing and decent income, but also about social malfunction. Central to these ethical concerns we ask how the desire for a good life, so endemic to our social ontology, lacks representation in our economic systems and structures.

Government policies and programmes, although well-intentioned, struggle to right social injustices. Part of this is due to 1) lack of experience and skills among politically appointed officials; and 2) lack of taking seriously the effects of apartheid, permitting post-independence leaders to replicate the social conditions which created the problem in the first place. The living conditions of the less advantaged, due to historical injustice and failing state policies, continue to be deprived of life-enhancing receipts. Political campaigns use this socioeconomic disparity in their mottos as they attempt to regain public trust. Nevertheless, populist notions that speak of improving socioeconomic conditions remain as idealist railings without far-reaching measures. Politics, as usual, fails to intentionally examine the life of society and create tangible socioeconomic changes.

To remove the present socioeconomic inequality effectively would require more than slogans and mottos. Even opposition parties need to move on from just placing blame and participate in the proactive search to humanise society. Responding to these human needs safeguards our collective future, survival and democracy. While all these groups think of social justice, the popular social imagination has different issues in mind. This call for a collective effort and social imagination does not dispel the realities of Alasdair

McIntyre's relativist question, *Whose justice? Which rationality?* (McIntyre, 1988), to which there is no easy answer. Yet, this is an attempt to answer this complex question that will allow for a humanising *praxis* of social justice.

## Theoretical Framework

This article uses a socioreligious ethical framework to articulate the need for a social vision to redress social injustice: a social vision that embraces the reality of our *teleological* nature and provides a somewhat fuller account of human intersubjectivity and sociopolitical institutions, to attain the common good. We employ a socioreligious ethical framework to develop more nuanced explanations to foster a contextual vision of a good life. We look to provide an implicit notion of what human flourishing could look like. The conversation partners, in this article, are intentionally chosen to help explore the kind of *praxis* needed to allow for human flourishing in Namibia.

## Social Role of Religion

The place of religion in the public sphere continues to prompt mixed opinions and, in some cases, even hostility (Trigg, 2007). While religion is not immune to criticism, its role in enhancing the common good should not be dismissed. Religion should not be kept in private. Belief in the transcendent requires concreteness that

“maintains that faith and sociopolitical-economic action are bound together. *Ora et labora*, that is, religious reflection (prayer) corresponds to effective societal engagement and liberational activism” (Isaak, 1997, p. 1).

While the above is the conceptual expectation, religion in Namibia has lost relevance in the public sphere. This decline is not in numbers of religious adherents. The growth of religions does not reflect their relevance in post-independence socioeconomic dialogues. Mainline denominations have ceded their imagination to partisan politics. Botha (2016) issues a sharp critique of the Christian church, which he thinks has become a political handmaid. However, not all hope is lost, even from Botha’s (pp. 33–34) critique, since he recommends that we can find ways of redescribing the deportment of religion to take part in shaping society for the common good.

Although Botha acknowledges the role of religion, he thinks of it as a *secularised religion*, one that should participate in changing society through human action, and not by relying on the supernatural. Nevertheless, religion has a social role, which secular systems cannot dismiss. What that role should look like in reconstructing the public sphere and the dialogues related to human flourishing is contestable.

Social injustice affects all people regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof. No society can survive a ceaseless onslaught of unjust structures, systems and practices by side-lining key institutions and communities. It requires a collective effort. One may not agree with every outlook of religion, but it is a necessary element in establishing a normative *praxis* of social justice that can counter discriminatory market ideologies. Thus, it would require joint forces to reconstruct the political and cultural background for a humanised future. Rousseau (1999, pp. 54–56) called this the social contract. I like to think of this as a social covenant. Africans have called it community, a concept expressed in the *ubuntu* philosophy. Thus, the future, to be humanised, would require attitudes and practices that are bound up in covenant and neighbourliness.

Using the language of covenant and neighbourliness brings freedom and relatedness into the conversation. It is not bargaining, bartering, or an exchange. It is an invitation to covenantal justice, to create a more just or equitable world based on covenant. It is a vow that we make to each other and a commitment to our neighbours around us for its own sake (Block et al., 2016, p. 46).

By using a socioreligious and ethical framework, I repeat that religion

can play a key role in our mission of humanising society. Asking the ethical questions, which religion does most of the time, could provide newer ways of enquiring how we can acquire symbols and practices that enhance living conditions, with a particular focus on the distribution of socioeconomic goods to allow for conditions of having more and being more (Goulet, 2006, pp. 28–30). Acknowledging the role religion could play in the pursuit of social justice for the less privileged would require a clear mapping of our social *telos*, or goal, as a society.

### **Mapping our social *telos***

To discuss the undoing of social injustice requires a clear grasp of the context within which we should then ask for the best way to live and dedicate our resources and energies to attain the good life for all. We refer to this as the mapping of our social *telos* or end goal. If our goal is a good life and social ordering, this must be planned and cannot be rushed. No part of our desire for a more just and equal society must be left to chance or speculation. To reach such a social *telos* will require the strengthening of our political and social institutions. By strengthening, we refer to more than fortifying them. We refer to humanising these institutions by searching for a political culture with a soul for the less advantaged and vulnerable of our society.

This will require a new conscientisation and a new ethical framework, a willingness to see humans at the centre of our social structure: that is, to embrace a vision and desire “for a better society than the one we have inherited from apartheid and which is now exasperated by corruption, maladministration and inadequate public policies” (Kasera, 2021, p. 199). The barriers to a clear blueprint and action plan to redress social injustice are internal. Political and social institutions without a soul cannot contribute towards the realisation of the good life. Even if they present public policies and programmes, these cannot be executed because they lack inward motivation to dream a better world.

What it means to be human (given corruption, poor governance, and maladministration) does not hold a collective *telos*. As a result, the idea of ‘the good’ and ‘the right’ lacks a wide-ranging contextual and conceptual framework and humane ethical system. Without injecting soul into our politics and social institutions we cannot provide an accurate response, or map a responsive and responsible social *telos*. We witness the absence of soul in such inauthentic public policies and programmes that do not meaningfully impact the lives of the less advantaged.

Mapping a social *telos* requires lucid notions of the highest good to which we can subject social justice. It should answer the questions of what is needed to experience life in its fulness, by Namibian standards. While social justice is a broad concept, mapping our social *telos* in this article deals with socioeconomic issues, to the kinds of goods required to experience authentic human flourishing. The notion of a social *telos* seeks concreteness rather than merely dwelling on academic abstractions.

Therefore, religious notions that dismiss the material suffering of the less advantaged embrace an unethical hermeneutical framework. Such notions undermine the social *telos* and the vision for the common good. Religious notions that fail to engage the social and political structures that undermine human flourishing contribute to diminishing the human person. To pursue mapping a life-enhancing social *telos* is to acknowledge that society will not change without an intentional roadmap. Thus, mapping the nature of the good life will require aspiring towards a particular *praxis*.

### **Social justice as *praxis***

This article does not deny that the government recognises the existence of social injustice. Unfortunately, government activities have collapsed into a survival system that now appears as the downward spiral of structural

deterioration. It has spawned a maintenance mode with no long-term sustainable and transformative goals, except a politicised appearance buried in empty sloganeering. The goal to enhance human living conditions remains ambiguous and what it means to be human continues to be indefinitely suspended. Post-apartheid politics and development strategies are proving unable to answer normative questions regarding socioeconomic progress (Goulet, 1971, p. 3).

A fuller understanding of social justice must require addressing the external or visible needs that manifest injustice. Access to life-enhancing goods is not a new concept but one even the early philosopher Plato in his *Republic* explored, in search of the meaning of *eudaimonia*. The social *telos* of the *polis* was to ensure that every person had access to goods that allowed them to carry out their responsibility for the common good. Medieval Christians would baptise this Greek notion into a Christian understanding. Thus, a vision of a good life requires practical measures to construct “the good of a whole human life” (Hauerwas, 1994, p. 32).

Abstract approaches to social injustice inhibit the progress of society and cannot specify the needed good for Namibia. Public policies and programmes that dwell on abstracts cannot provide a genuine vision of a path out of the realities

of socioeconomic inequality. When instruments of administration that ought to lead to socioeconomic transformation do not lead to an embodiment, they only create opportunities for delayed violent revolutions.

Humans, indisputably, can only measure progress in terms of action and not through a collection of beautiful ideas. Rather, progress is measured by our ability to translate thoughts into action. We are creatures who are embodied, yet public policies and programmes often fail to complement this reality of human existence. It is easy for political parties, for example, to wave manifestos (often abstract and vague) as the ground to motivate voters. However, these manifestos are barely pursued during the terms of office, leading to political cynicism. Material practices, in the search for social justice, are important in shaping not only our economic needs but also our identities.

Thus, the vision for a just society, to be realised, needs a radical re-evaluation of the philosophical anthropological assumptions regarding the human person. *Praxis*, in the context of social justice, recognises that humans are profoundly material beings with material desires and needs. Without the creation of systems, structures, and programmes that take human needs seriously, all talk of social justice will just be political

window-dressing. Religion presents interesting philosophical perspectives on anthropology. It argues that humans are endowed with dignity for they are God's image-bearers. Such anthropology adds a different layer regarding participation in liberating activities.

As such, social justice and its ensuing activities carry moral weight. Social justice is not an exercise in the processing of immaterial ideas. Rather, it is a holistic enterprise that involves the whole human person. Social justice then is not only about what we think, as it seeks to reorient our desires, redirect our imagination, and set us on a new course of life. This stands in contrast to political manifestos, policies, systems and programmes that traffic only in ideas and often fail to result in tangible socioeconomic transformation.

However, to develop such transformative *praxis* would require a cultural theory that can help us construct dignity-enhancing practices. The cultural theory recognises the complexity of social injustice but has a stable base to advocate for tangible manifestations of justice among the least advantaged. Such a cultural theory would generate a "commitment to responsible action; action that would satisfy some standard of what is deemed a decent life in Namibia" (Kasera, 2021, p. 224). This approach needs to ask, what kinds of goods are

needed to provide the best possible harmony and living conditions?

The point of this question is not to find the best abstract answer but to discern the context to provide a tangible presence of social justice. Approaching social justice with such intentionality will embrace practical measures to address real life-affecting socioeconomic conditions. To achieve such transformation will require visionary leadership and institutions that can identify important entry levels to life-enhancing living conditions. For government institutions, which are *de facto* custodians of the state's resources, it means going beyond policies. For those with power to direct the country's resources, it means envisioning a more humane society and ensuring the humanisation of the future.

While national documents like the *Fifth National Development Plan* and *Vision 2030* may have been designed to craft a national way forward, they have not done so well at creating a more just society. They are easily supplanted by political agendas which create secondary visions that delay an already unclear national development agenda. The *Harambee Prosperity Plan* (I & II) is a classic example of political vision which hijacks a national vision for a personal political one. In the end, resources are diverted to promote egocentric, unachievable and hasty

political promises that pretend to be visions for the national interest.

By the end of 2019 (after five years of supposed implementation), a review indicated how the *Harambee Prosperity Plan* had failed to deliver its socioeconomic promises (Immanuel & Likela, 2019). Instead of admitting that the programme had failed, President Geingob's administration reinstated a revised version of the same programme in 2021. This administration, which championed itself as one that would change the fortunes of the Namibian people, became a maintenance administration. It failed to demonstrate how it would practically engage the huge socioeconomic inequality and redress economic imbalances inherited from colonialism and apartheid. It continues to fail to redress the post-independence problems of corruption and maladministration which affect the distribution of resources and services.

These programmes show the difference between a theoretical articulation of social justice and *praxis*-embracing theories of social justice. The former is satisfied with producing policy documents that are never followed up on until the next crisis or election. The latter is a humane response to right the wrongs of history, sociopolitical power and resource maladministration. Socioeconomic systems do not have the ability to

self-correct. Therefore, just policies alone will not bring about the needed changes. Socioeconomic inequality by nature is violent in its manifestation, with roots in historical and political structures, and to change it would require intentional intervention. What should be the nature of this disruptive *praxis*?

### **The Nature of *Praxis***

Given that socioeconomic inequality raises ethical questions, the way to mitigate it will require robust rethinking of our approaches. Von Hayek (1982, p. 62) rules out the possibility of human agency in nature even in society's socioeconomic order regarding the distribution of life-enhancing goods. The concept of a self-ordering yet impersonal process capable of bringing "greater satisfaction of human desires" conveys the language of privilege which puts unquestioning trust in economic systems. However, when von Hayek criticises social justice, he fails to recognise that the structures of society and the social, economic and political markets are not self-correcting and are incapable of producing happiness in line with the common good.

The market is not a mindless self-ordering entity. Instead, it is "determined by the deliberate acts of [human] will" (ibid.) and produces an "underclass" which is a manifestation of violence against those who are made

vulnerable by either the free market or historical socioeconomic injustices. And this is where the dialogue of morality comes into play. The creation of "the underclass is against God's will" (Block et al., 2016, p. 33). Social justice comes as a response to the stifled liberty to access life-enhancing goods and opportunities for a life of dignity. It is not just a form that decries inequality but one which calls for a radical reset of the *status quo* that promotes conditions under which the less advantaged cannot attain lives of dignity.

The reset requires *distributive* measures. These are necessary to reset the course of social interaction, power and progress. If national programmes truly intend to address social injustice, especially economic disparity, they need to ensure that "the economy must be subordinated to the viability of society" (ibid., p. 34). Otherwise, we risk creating a permanent socioeconomic underclass – thereby aiding and abetting the vision of colonialism and apartheid. It is not enough to tell those at the bottom of the economic ladder that they need to work harder when the structures are not designed to allow for collective thriving.

Religious ethics have always argued for a counter-cultural way of doing things. Instead of writing up elaborate documents that pretend to tell us the way out of poverty, they have always



embraced *praxis* that generates the common good. If human happiness is the *telos* of all our efforts for social justice, then the required *praxis* needs to be clarified. We need tangible symbols that bear witness to the reality of the *praxis* we intend to see in society, that is, to what needs to be done to minimise social injustice in our generation so that the next generation will be spared the present harms.

The nature of such *praxis* needs to be grounded in a moral imperative to improve the quality of life of the less advantaged in society. The essence of human rights is that the state creates a conducive environment that minimises socioeconomic barriers: that is, to “provide equal access to primary goods for communities that will never be able to achieve such goods without some strategic intervention” (Kasera, 2021, p. 224). Social justice reforms, in this case, need to be interventionist, not just recommended. Social injustice implies evidence of inequality in social and economic power, resulting from unjust interventions in history which have resulted in the current conditions. Only a resetting intervention will level the socioeconomic playing field.

### Meeting Needs

*Praxis* in social justice is embodying i.e., it is action-oriented and meets needs. It is not a blind *praxis*, carried out from the privileged offices of

consultants. Instead, it knows and engages the target groups, and shapes distributive justice from an informed position. From such understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of the less advantaged can arise social safety nets that are meaningful, functional, strong and sustainable.

These social safety nets must include but not be limited to:

- 1) A guaranteed minimum wage set at a living wage: The less advantaged at present earn a minimum wage, but this does not enable decent living and is a state sanctioned slave wage.
- 2) Quality public healthcare: Access to any healthcare is difficult, let alone healthcare which provides quality services and care. Improving healthcare and access is not just about medical care – it is a way of elevating the human worth of the least advantaged.
- 3) Decent and affordable housing: Since 50% of Namibians live in shacks, this is an urgent issue to be addressed. It is about more than just shelter – it is a social good that gives a sense of belonging, safety and being able to construct a culture for one’s family.

4) Skill producing education: Access to education *per se* is not the biggest challenge in Namibia. A literacy rate of over 80% means that education is widely accessible. However, whether this education provides skills that can propel self-sustaining economic activities remains a worrisome question. The average youth will have at least ten years of schooling but leaves school without a single marketable or economically viable skill except a leaving certificate.

of its exercise. If a man is too poor or too ignorant or too feeble to make use of his legal rights, the liberty that these rights confer upon him is nothing to him ... The obligation to promote education, health, justice, to raise standards of living, to provide opportunity for the growth ... is not necessarily directed to the promotion of liberty itself, but to conditions in which alone its possession is of value, or to values which may be independent of it.

(Berlin, 1969, p. 45)

5) And finally, a universal basic income grant: Such a grant is a much-disputed subject, but a distributive theory will require this as one key means of radically uplifting socioeconomic fortunes. If money is the measure of economic power, then granting access to this source of power to the economically disempowered is a virtuous entry-level to redressing unemployment and poverty (Ward, 2021, pp. 216–217).

The affirmative action policy, by design, ought to serve as a social safety net. However, its effect has been weakened by corruption, greed and self-serving public officials who have used the policy as an opportunity for self-enrichment. These internal factors, over and above ineffective policies and a lack of implementation, hamper socioeconomic progress. The above meeting of needs is “a complex social and political dialogue, yet choices (even difficult ones) must be made to counter the socioeconomic structures and systems that protect historically acquired privilege” (Kasera, 2021, p. 225). This change will require more than “creating social and political spaces which emphasise human rights and human dignity” (ibid.). The aim is to expand the meaning of liberty and dignity by creating structures that can

Meeting these needs affirms human worth. It expresses true liberty, as Berlin (1969) argues, through meeting basic human needs. Rights alone are not adequate:

It is important to discriminate between liberty and the conditions

avail the symbols of a fuller expression of being human in Namibia. To be human then “implies being able to enjoy access to food, water, home, education, health, and decent employment” (ibid.).

Those opposed to the demands of practical social justice are happy to provide social conditions without actual conditions of freedom, which they claim would threaten democracy. This is evident in von Hayek’s attack on social justice and Peter Nelson’s work which claims that the basic income grant system is a threat to democracy (Nelson, 2018). This is social schizophrenia in which certain privileged persons are glad to see a continued dehumanisation of millions of people, simply because such freedom does not fit in their scheme of economic politics. Societies that are unequal and whose socioeconomic outcomes are still deeply affected by histories of injustice will only change with a redistributive course of action. Small nations like ours need to safeguard not political systems but humans, without whom these systems will not continue to exist. While advocating for a distributive system, we acknowledge the difficulties that such a system entails, but that does not mean that it cannot be achieved.

## **Analysis and Recommendation**

A distributive system should not be romanticised – this is no simple

task. Berlin (1969, p. 47) points to this difficulty: “The right policy cannot be arrived at in a mechanical or deductive fashion: there are no hard-and-fast rules to guide us; conditions are often unclear, and principles incapable of being fully analysed or articulated.” Understanding and discerning the context requires visionary leadership and collective participation, part of which is the need for moral awakening to conscientise society about the moral aspects of social injustice – not a conscientisation towards guilt, but a renewed sense of humanity in which we look at the humanity of others through our humanity and discover our connectedness.

The socioreligious analysis of this paper is not necessarily of religion alone but an appeal to our humanity, a call for community and a revival of the very African practices of *ubuntu* that made us inter-dependent and tied our existence intrinsically to the rest of the community. The post-apartheid context, even under the majority black government, has lost the memory and ability to create new and human socioeconomic conditions. Boesak (2017, p. 117) points out how African governments, led by people who are supposed to be “steeped in the principle of *ubuntu*”, a socioreligious concept that holds that “we are humans because we affirm the humanity of the other”, do not promote this reality in their politics, management and social interventions.

While we strongly advocate for a distributive approach that meets needs, this distribution needs a locally grown conceptual framework rooted in moral principles that sees humans before structures and that encourages true self-propagation and human affirmation. For a society like Namibia, and many other African nations, the nature of the desired social *praxis* must find a true African identity. This is where national development must not ignore the role which the reality of the people's religious beliefs can play in creating a humanised social order.

Those who think that achieving social justice in Namibia can be realised on purely secular principles will be cutting off a large and important aspect of society. Realising that this society could be re-ordered to be more just would require a collective effort. Religious communities need to be part of these dialogues because of their social significance in Namibia. We are not creating a justice of our own making but of people from diverse levels of society affected by dehumanising conditions. This means that the way forward should be through creating allies in identifying notions and practices from diverse perspectives that we can put together to develop the kinds of social safety nets to redress socioeconomic inequality.

Suggesting a distributive approach is not an attempt to have one answer for all the socioeconomic woes of Namibia. Instead, the dialogue around this is for entry level intervention which should have been implemented during the early years of independence. Unlike the romanticised totalising solutions of some neo-socialist groups, this paper does not espouse the “notion that there must exist final objective answers to normative questions, truths that can be demonstrated or directly intuited ... to discover a harmonious pattern in which all values are reconciled, and that it is towards this unique goal that we must make” (Berlin, 1969, p. 47). Such hyper-animation in search of solutions is logically invalid and is the reason for “absurdities in theory and barbarous consequences in practice” (ibid., p. 48).

What is presently needed in our socioeconomic planning is an honest, ethical and humane search that will answer to the question: “What are the symbols used in the Namibian context that represent a just order?” This search will devise means that will minimise the arbitrary sacrifice of the vulnerable among us to the forces of the markets. It is an effort to embrace a thicker meaning of nation building by ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected. This will come at the cost of some. Such cost is exactly what a covenanting

society should look like, where the responsibility to care for the less advantaged is a collective responsibility. It is a move towards realising national neighbourliness to attain the *telos* of a good life. This takes governance out of mere abstracts and seeks their concrete expression in society.

While the distributive model does not promise a utopia, it is a practical way of relating the freedoms we promote to equality of access to life-enhancing goods (Lebacqz, 1986, p. 87). The most appropriate way of answering what it means to be human is by availing the symbols that signify what a good life looks like in Namibia. Attaining these goals will remain an area of conflict. Using Niebuhr's (1944, p. 234) argument, however, we do not rule out coercion within rational justification to realise a distributive measure to arrest the progress of present social inequality. This does not imply violent revolution, but rather an attempt to find reasonable responses to address unjust principles and their manifestation (Rawls, 1999, p. 336). We suggest social justice that integrates a comprehensive moral theory and a political theory of social justice. The two are complementary approaches to redressing social injustice, justifying the need for distribution as a valid entry-level. While religion needs to be engaged as a key ally in the social order, it does not mean that religion should

trump all other views. However, in the values of a secular state, religion should find its place and participate actively to ensure that the values it holds can be used for the common good.

The common good is embedded in social relationships. Thus, the state alone cannot fulfil the functions of social justice. The right human relationships need to be cultivated. Social injustice in forms of inequality of wealth, and of access to life-enhancing goods and opportunity reflects broken human relationships. One way forward in such a socioeconomically disparate society is through restoring human relations. These include family, friendship, and inter-cultural relationality – which are common goods humans can share to construct meaningful engagements. In so doing, we promote common societal values that recognise the humanity of each other and come up with specific actions to meet needs. We need to realise that we are relational beings and “starting from this as a ‘given’, to work out how we best fulfill the demand and opportunities of being human; how we cultivate the life of virtue” (McGrail & Sagovsky, 2015, p. 23). This life of virtue would make us a society that will advocate for a more equal society expressed through humane banking systems, a fairer market, provision of education, housing and the opportunity for decent employment and wages. Added to this would be collective

solidarity with the less advantaged and collective responsibility to hold government accountable to serve the common good. This implies that the politics we choose serves the common good by minimising social injustice and creating robust political structures and social safety nets.

## Conclusion

We explored what social justice might look like in practical terms. We used socioreligious ethical analysis as the framework to answer the question of what it means to be human and what symbols are required to affirm whether the Namibian socioeconomic context affirms human dignity. The lack of robust systems enhances the prevalence of unjust socioeconomic conditions. To embrace a comprehensive vision of human dignity, liberty and justice needs a dynamic way of engagement to create a humanised future. Thus, we need to generate a particular *praxis* that will satisfy our social *telos* of attaining the good life. This has to be done through a comprehensive moral theory and a political social theory that would motivate us to action. This action would be the outward expression of the values we hold, and manifest them in tangible forms that allow for human flourishing, especially among the less advantaged. Social justice that is driven by *praxis* and centred on meeting needs is a way of advancing the common good. While we call upon the government to create

robust, functional and sustainable systems, society also needs to nurture human relationships that express covenant and neighbourliness so that we create communities that are looking out for the needs of the less advantaged and do not leave that task solely in the hands of the state.

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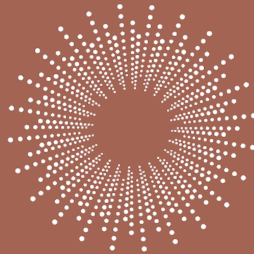
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