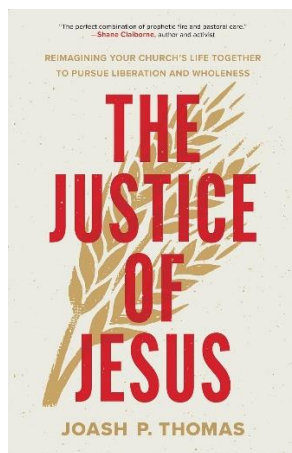


BOOK REVIEW

The Justice of Jesus: Reimagining Your Church's Life Together to Pursue Liberation and Wholeness

by Joash P. Thomas

Reviewed by Clark Buys



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The Justice of Jesus is a pastoral and practical call for Christians (especially in the Global North) to rediscover or reinforce the pursuit of justice as a normative part of Christian discipleship. Joash P. Thomas challenges the familiar Western instinct to treat justice as an optional supplement to the “real” work of evangelism or spiritual formation. He contends that such instincts reflect colonial and dualistic theological habits rather than the gospel Jesus proclaimed. Combining autobiographical insight, Global South perspectives, and concrete proposals for church life, Thomas offers a compelling vision of Christian community that is decolonising, holistic and oriented toward healing in a divided world.

The book is organised into three parts. Part 1, “Cheap Justice versus the Justice of Jesus,” examines why many Western Christians have struggled to regard justice as integral to discipleship. Thomas attributes this resistance to colonial legacies and the theological frameworks they produced. He critiques what he calls the “coloniser’s gospel,” identifying and challenging four key assumptions: that Jesus came primarily to “save souls,” that justice is secondary to evangelism, that

social hierarchies are divinely sanctioned, and that unity requires uniformity. Alongside this critique, he highlights expressions of the global church where justice is embraced as central to Christian discipleship.

Part 2, “Decolonizing the Western Church,” explores how local congregations might begin the internal work of decolonisation. Its three chapters address decolonising theology, communities, and budgets. Thomas encourages churches to diversify their pulpits, cultivate postures of mutuality, and pursue unity centred on the Nicene Creed rather than cultural conformity. Through a series of grounded pastoral stories, he exposes how an overemphasis on the immaterial “spiritual” dimensions of the gospel can subtly displace attention to our neighbours’ material needs. His chapter on budgets is especially practical, inviting churches to reallocate resources in ways that reflect solidarity with oppressed people and marginalised communities locally and globally.

Part 3, “How Your Local Church Can Prioritize the Justice of Jesus,” considers how a decolonising church engages systemic injustice through prayer, advocacy, and partnership. Thomas offers a justice-centred reading of the Lord’s Prayer, provides examples of advocacy in practice, and proposes reimagining mission trips as vision trips shaped by humility, learning, and reciprocity. These chapters offer concrete guidance for churches seeking to embody justice in sustainable and relational ways.

A central contribution of this book is the vantage point Thomas brings as someone shaped by both the Global South and the North American church. This dual perspective enables him to articulate concerns that many Western Christians may not immediately perceive, while also offering a bridge of understanding between contexts. For practitioners in relief, development, and advocacy, his analysis helps readers move from general post-colonial awareness toward a more intentional decolonial posture, particularly in how churches understand power, partnership and mutuality.

The book’s most practical contribution is its sustained invitation for churches to reassess how

resources are allocated. The chapter on budgets offers concrete pathways for congregations to embody justice through redistribution, a topic of direct relevance to churches, NGOs, and Christian agencies seeking to align finances with mission. In addition, Thomas models a decolonised approach to theological reflection through the voices he cites, spotlighting perspectives from the Global South in ways that reframe justice as a normative expression of faith rather than a contested political category.

Furthermore, his justice-centred reading of the Lord's Prayer makes integral mission accessible without technical language. The book offers a hopeful and unifying vision that can help Western churches integrate justice more deeply into spiritual formation and public witness.

While this book offers a compelling and accessible vision, it also has some limitations that readers should note. The book does not attempt to develop a full biblical theology of justice. Although Scripture is engaged meaningfully throughout, those seeking a sustained exegetical treatment of justice across the biblical canon, including prophetic literature or key biblical terms for justice and righteousness, will need to look elsewhere. This, however, reflects the book's pastoral and public-theological aims rather than a lack of theological seriousness.

At points, the analysis also risks oversimplification by attributing theological distortions almost exclusively to colonial influence. While colonialism has undoubtedly shaped Western Christianity (and spotlighting this is needed), some of the tendencies Thomas critiques have deeper roots within Christian history. Greater historical nuance could have strengthened the argument without weakening its core claims.

Finally, the book is written primarily into a North American context, with some relevance for the UK. Readers in other cultural settings may need to transpose its insights carefully into their own political and ecclesial realities. Even so, these limitations do not significantly detract from the book's overall value.

In terms of genre, *The Justice of Jesus* occupies a space between academic theology and popular Christian writing on justice. It resonates with integral mission voices such as René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, while remaining more accessible than exegetical studies by writers such as Christopher Wright or Michael Gorman. Popular-level texts including Ken Wytsma's *Pursuing Justice* and Lisa Sharon Harper's *The Very Good Gospel* explore similar themes for Western audiences, yet Thomas's work is distinctive in its consistent centring of Global South perspectives while addressing churches in the Global North. For CRDA readers, the book functions as a formative and grounding resource, helping practitioners reconnect

justice with Christian discipleship. While its treatment of advocacy and partnership is intentionally non-technical, it provides a theological and ecclesial foundation upon which more specialised development and advocacy literature can build.

The Justice of Jesus is a timely, accessible and pastorally engaged contribution that will be an eye-opener for many readers in the Global North. For those who have not yet recognised the enduring impact of colonialism on Christian theology, church life, and public witness, the book offers both clarity and challenge, alongside practical invitations for action. For readers already familiar with integral mission and justice theology, it remains an inspiring and reinforcing read. While justice continues to function as a politically contested issue, particularly in North American contexts, Thomas's proposal of pursuing justice as an integral piece of Christian discipleship deserves a wide hearing. His Global South-shaped perspective offers a vital corrective and a hopeful invitation for churches and Christians seeking to embody the just and liberating gospel of Jesus.

References

- Harper, Lisa Sharon. 2016. *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*. New York: Waterbrook.
- Wytsma, Ken. 2013. *Pursuing Justice: The Call to Live & Die for Bigger Things*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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