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PREVIEW RESPONSE

Is There a Christian Propensity Towards Injustice?



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Justice · Humanities · 1 min read

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My research connects pretty directly with Nicholas Wolterstorff's reflections, and with his published work on justice and rights, which I greatly appreciate. I'm preoccupied by the problem of injustice in Christian history:

- The Christian propensity towards injustice. Christians have not only been complicit in racial slavery and religious coercion - Christian nations/cultures took these practices to new heights, and took centuries to recognise them as injustice.
- The ideological uses of the Bible. Here I'm using the term 'ideology' in its pejorative sense, as the (often self-deceptive) legitimation of injustice. The Bible was insistently used to justify religious coercion and slavery (each defended as a means to the good end of conversion). This raises a *theological* question: Why is inspired Scripture so susceptible to abuse? Perhaps this is like asking why the created order is so open to human abuse - the prestige and power of the Bible meant that it was bound to be recruited to dubious causes. Unjust uses of the Bible and of Nature tell us more about humans than about God. But it does raise a *hermeneutical* question: How (given the susceptibility of the Bible to abuse) do we read it so that we do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God?
- The limits of the drive towards justice in a fallen world. Postcolonial critics allege that 'religious freedom' and 'antislavery' were both employed to justify Western cultural imperialism. There are problems with that claim, but some truth in it too. Even the greatest triumphs of Christian abolitionists were not as unsullied as we like to think. The Africans liberated from British slave ships were often subjected to further abuses as apprentices or conscripts; the West Indian slaves emancipated in the 1830s continued to be subjugated under white colonial rule. How can we maintain a thirst for justice while recognising (with Augustine) that life in a fallen world is not perfectible, and that even our best efforts fall short and have downsides we never imagined?

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Document type	Preview Response
Dialogue	Justice
Discipline	Humanities
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Read online	facultyinitiative.net/article/is-there-a-christian-propensity-towards-injustice



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