



# Global Faculty Initiative

**The Faculty Initiative  
seeks to promote the integration  
of Christian faith and academic disciplines  
by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars  
across the spectrum of faculties  
in research universities  
worldwide.**

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Preview Response

## **JUSTICE / SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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1/ I used Wolterstorff's work on justice a while back when I was giving a talk on the use of reading / literature and being a Christian. So this was a pleasure to read.

- One thing I wonder as I read this short paper is the place of environmental justice and whether justice is always only about human to human relations. Environmental justice links to my work in that resource extraction is closely connected to (very often behind) human displacement. But beyond that link, there is an element of in/justice even in our relationship to the non-human creation. Is there a third-order justice that recognizes "undue burdens" on the land?
- Another thing I wonder about is how Christian theology of the 'imago dei' and the way it is connected to human rights relates to historical attempts to exclude certain kinds of persons from the 'human' category. I've taken to using the term 'people' rather than 'human' because of this baggage.
- Lastly, I'm teaching on forced displacement cultures in globalization right now and students are really struck by the injustice of powerful nations who intervene globally or fuel conflicts in other regions, but then, in turn, do not accept the responsibility for the resulting forced displacement (closing refugee resettlement, for instance). How do we get to that macro-level using the first order (human to human) and second-order (consequences and penalties) justice framework? Does this framework allow for injustice infecting the very bones of an institution, a system, and etc, quite apart from the human beings who inhabit or create it?

2/ When I'm teaching undergraduate students the idea of structural injustice, here are the kinds of things I talk about in broad strokes:

- Structural violence both creates and then impacts migrants who have been forced to move: a. in the way human rights are (in the end) dependent on citizenship in a nation-state; b. insofar as a piece of paper (passport) proves or disproves a person's very existence in the world (thus a person born into a 'state' that doesn't recognize their humanity because of their ethnicity or race or what have you, can exist without recourse to human rights claims their whole lives); c. in the way a globe completely demarcated by political territories labels people who move, in order to manage them closely while continuing to free up the movement of goods that contribute to capitalism; d.

in the way nation-to-nation relations keep states from dialoguing about human rights abuses, and world peace comes at the expense of hidden suffering everywhere; e. in the way a refugee claim process asks a vulnerable person to demonstrate fear, uncover their bodily wounds, and recount trauma—all in a context where suspicion and distrust are the very motivation for listening.

- Individuals can be co-opted by and participate in structural violence; individuals can also mitigate and even undermine structural violence. And structures can be more and less violent, even as violence exists in every structure.

3/ I agree with the assessment Wolterstorff gives of justice in the academy. A few extra thoughts:

- The inequities within the academic system are glaringly obvious and difficult to process: they are not something I want to dwell on because it becomes a distraction from good work but they produce disillusionment at times. In Covid, for instance, the experience of working from home for both students and faculty with less stable home environments or less resources disadvantages them considerably. Lots of good work is being done to support first generation students and to support students who are minorities in university classrooms where their lives and histories are discussed in dehumanizing ways. Parents who take their "best years" away from work to give to their children (the most vulnerable of people) often pay the cost of that work in their careers, and I see this also as a justice issue—the relational justice of nurturing kids alongside the need for relational justice in making sure people are supported to make that choice (not treated as if they have a 'shelf life.'
- I also think of academics who do work that is relationally complicated because they are trying to work slowly through issues of justice. I wonder how Christian universities might be a different witness: making sure the slowness of just work is not disincentivized. One example might be researchers who interview in a community, but choose to do it relationally rather than in a way that feels like data extraction to the community. This may take an enormous amount of time but be more just. Yet, publications will come slower. Can the relational work of justice be recognized as academic output?

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