



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 / THEOLOGY

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Here in Colombia, the armed conflict has resulted in literally millions of documented human rights violations; the government has responded by making human rights a major part of the educational curriculum for the past generation. Rights discourse is pervasive, and generally in a "second order" fashion. There is a lot to celebrate in that, to be sure. But a couple of downsides have attended the prominence on rights discourse, at least in a Colombian context.

A) The emphasis on rights has fostered a great deal of passivity and a certain attitude of entitlement in Colombian society, including in relation to things that are not actually human rights but may be legal rights.

B) The government is seen as the primary conveyer of second order justice and restorer of violated rights, in spite of the fact that the government has neither the resources nor the bureaucratic & moral capacities to fulfill that task. And,

C) As a combination of A and B, people in this context think very little about their own agency and responsibilities vis-a-vis either first or second order justice; quite the contrary, the nation is marked by an endemic corruption and lack of integrity (including among Christians), and people seldom consider that they have an obligation to either practice integrity or to be an agent of restorative justice. These create pretty vicious social dynamics.

Because of the context in which I work in Colombia, I was struck by the way that Prof. Wolterstorff's statement that "rights are grounded in the worth (excellence, dignity) of the rights-bearer". Here in Colombia, people would ground rights in our inherent dignity, but not *excellence*. But I think that, in my context, a great deal could be gained by speaking about rights in a way that balances not only the rights you have because of your inherent dignity with the fact that being the sort of person with such profound and irreducible dignity means that you are, by your nature, a person of excellencies, excellencies with ramifications for the way in which you are also an agent of justice (first and second order) for others. This

is not by any stretch to deny the necessity of protecting against human rights violations nor to undercut the role of the state in doing so. It is rather to try to activate individuals and communities as being agents of justice, rather than simply being claimants for justice.

Maybe the Colombian situation is not pertinent to the US or European discourse, but those are the thoughts that came to my mind when reading Prof. Wolterstorff's excellent preview.

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