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BOOK REVIEW

Justice and Rights: Nicholas Wolterstorff in Dialogue with the University

By Terence C. Halliday and K. K. Yeo (eds), Langham Global Library, Cumbria. EBook.
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This is an astounding work. Nicholas Wolterstorff's Theological Brief (NWTB) leaves no stone unturned to apply the notion of justice to every aspect of academic discipline. It is an ambitious and humble take but bold and commendable. The dialogue amplifies the nature and challenge of doing theology in the 21st century. In his quest for justice, he risks engaging Christian scholars from different disciplines to join in risking to think in daring ways about their professions. In this groundbreaking work, Wolterstorff is extending the reach and imagination of justice. What is particularly innovative is how he makes himself vulnerable to critique. His goal of this Theology Brief 'is to bring to light the roles of justice for the academy and the importance of being alert to that role' (p. 10). This review is to highlight discussions emanating from this goal; however, I will not address all his interlocutors. To make it manageable, I only address the key ideas to give the reader a foretaste of the book. This choice is for practical reasons and not a dismissal of brief commentators.

Wolterstorff uses the theoretical framework of rights as the basis for justice. He argues that since the Bible does not provide a theory of justice, Christians may need to borrow from philosophy and the UN Charter. He is also not blind to the reality of the limitation of the concept of rights language in understanding justice. From the look of it, Wolterstorff's awareness of his own limitation could be the reason he invites various interlocutors. His essay, Justice and Right, in as much as it is an argument for a specific view, is also an invitation to engage him and a humble admission of his own potential blindness. Wolterstorff's invitation of others to the dialogue is not so he may change

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his position; he presents it with deep conviction and admissive humility. Thus, he is not saying to his interlocutors, 'this is my view, change my mind'. Instead, he seems to be saying, 'this is my understanding of justice from my own reading of Scripture, external sources and socio-political conventions. I do not say that it is the only way of understanding what justice is. Therefore I am willing to engage you to help me see beyond my own perspectives. In so doing I get to learn from you, and you learn from me, and together forge a vision for Christian participation in academia.'

What is of particular interest is how the NWTB provokes major fields of academia (and beyond) to realise their duties and obligations. This is not an easy feat. However, Wolterstorff risks seeking to engage the various fields. He interrogates, through his interlocutors from diverse disciplines, a global interdisciplinary conversation of how justice and rights intersect with their academic work and issues that concern society. What makes it particularly challenging is his proposal of a theistic grounding for human rights. This proposal, while it is Wolterstorff's common practice, places Christian dialogue in academia in a whole new light.

I do not intend to summarise each chapter. The Preface gives a helpful overview of the different parts. The outline of the book gives a logical structure: 1) clarifies theological foundations of justice (pp. 9-14, 35-38); 2) distinguishes between first order and second order justice (pp. 3-5, 9-17); 3) interlinks justice with love (pp. 11-14, 52-54); 4) encourages scholars to reflect on justice in their various disciplines (all of Part III); and 5) courageously fosters a global but interdisciplinary Christian scholarship involving over 170 scholars.

The book is a remarkable conversation starter. Considering the courage, rigour and global spread, it is a provocative and daring piece of work. As such, it makes it difficult to critique. What I will refer to as potential areas of improvement, therefore, is not a critique. I am fully aware that it is not possible to cover every range of issues in the world, and sometimes conflicting visions of justice.

Firstly, while Wolterstorff and Martha Nussbaum differ on matters of theology, it would have been interesting to see how he responds to her notion of love in justice. Although the Christian concept of love is theological and emanates from God, perhaps Nussbaum has been pointing philosophical discourse into a less explored direction in the studies of justice. Secondly, in regard to African or global south post-colonial studies in relation to justice, I think of my own context of dealing with post-apartheid and post-German colonial atrocities. Thirdly, I am curious to know what first order justice should look like in academic interaction between powerful academic institutions of the Global North in relation to those in the Global South. Fourthly, this

is a brief dialogue. The conversation could be expanded to unpack this daring route that Wolterstorff has paved. It has not only placed cross disciplinary conversation on another level, but it also demonstrates what public theology should look like in practice.

I think the goal of Wolterstorff's quest has been met. The conversation has taken place, and Christian academics are challenged to rethink their role in academia. The book is written in a simple language; it really reads like a conversation of enquiry. What stands out is its honest theological quest and grappling with the subject of justice. For everyone reading this, especially if you are a Christian academic, it leaves us all with a practical challenge. The challenge comes from his postscript, and in form of a question: How does justice relate to your research, teaching and institutional life?

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