



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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LEADER GUIDE | JUSTICE MODULE 1 | WHY JUSTICE?

Session Objectives

1. To identify justice issues in the world and the academy
2. To reflect on the salience of justice in our scholarship

Reading

Wolterstorff: [Theology Brief Preview on Justice and Rights](#) [10 minutes to read]

Summary

Implicitly and explicitly, justice and rights are on the agendas of party politics and policy-making around the globe. Injustice and rights abuses animate the traditional and social media and bring crowds into the streets on every continent. Many notable international organizations, including the United Nations, orient their programs towards foundational civil and legal rights and economic and social justice, among others. University students frequently are at the forefront of calls for justice and rights in both the wider world and in academic institutions. Yet many churches and many Christians too often are mute or underplay the centrality of justice and rights to the Christian faith.

By contrast, philosopher-theologian [Nicholas Wolterstorff](#) writes that justice is fundamental in Christian scripture: God's love of justice recurs repeatedly in the Old Testament, and it is integral to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Justice should be seen, he says, as an essential part of the good and moral life of individuals and communities. Further, there are questions every scholar might ask about the salience of justice and rights for her or his own research and scholarship and for the character of the academic institutions in which we serve.

Questions

Q1: In the present or past, are there issues of justice and injustice, rights and abuses, that you find particularly moving/salient? Drawing on your area of expertise, what are likely to be the dominant issues in the future?

Leader prompts:

- Past – child poverty, dispossession, colonialism, environmental degradation, subjugation of women, slavery and racial discrimination, deprivation, genocide, lack of food and shelter, child labor.
- Present – corruption, crimes against humanity, deforestation, disasters, displaced persons, market failure, racial injustice, pandemics, pollution, poverty, sexual and gender degradation, gender inequality in the workplace (gender-pay gap).

Q2: [Nicholas Wolterstorff](#) is the Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University, a world-renowned Christian philosopher whose wide-ranging work has had a major impact on both the academy and the church. His autobiography, [In This World of Wonders](#), reveals that he came relatively late to the issue of justice. He describes his encounter in South Africa with the injustice of apartheid and later his growing involvement with the plight of Palestinians under Israel's occupation.

Have you personally experienced a growing or sudden awareness of rights or justice issues in your life? Do you know of other Christian scholars who have awakened to the importance of justice and rights issues?

Leader prompts:

- For growing and sudden awareness of rights and justice issues: armed conflicts like the Ukraine War and the Sudan conflict in 2022-23, which have displaced many civilians who bear heavy costs from conflict.
- For the work of Christian scholars on justice and rights: Day on the distribution of Covid-19 vaccination and the obligation to provide development aid ([vaccination nationalism](#), Day), Hastings on space communications and internet accessibility ([internet accessibility](#), Hastings), Hays on displacement of people in Colombia's civil conflict ([internal displacement](#), Hays).

Q3: [Wolterstorff](#) writes that because justice is fundamental in Christian scripture, there are questions every scholar must ask about the salience of justice and rights for our own research and scholarship and for the character of the academic institutions in which we serve. [More than 50 GFI academics](#), in fields as diverse as urban planning, engineering, the humanities and fine arts, medicine and law, and social, biological and natural sciences, among others, agree with Wolterstorff. They find connections between this powerful biblical theme, and millennia of reflections on it in church history, in their fields of scholarship and indeed in their current scholarly work. **Is justice an implicit or explicit issue salient to your scholarly field?**

Leader prompts:

history ([Atlantic slave trade](#), Coffey); international relations ([atrocities accountability](#), Jacob); medicine ([psychiatric therapy](#), Peteet); public policy ([internal displacement](#), Hays); architecture ([disaster zones](#), Davis); biology ([bioethics](#), Hardin); sociolinguistics ([language discrimination](#), Bell); sociology ([international law](#), Halliday); law ([rape and sexual injustice](#), High); pure science ([the worth and dignity of God's creation](#), Hutchinson); public health ([the right to be as healthy as possible](#), VanderWeele); economics and climate change ([climate justice](#), Hay and Menzies).

Q4: Do you see issues of justice and rights in your university setting and/or the collegial institutions, such as academic societies, scholarly publishing and grant-making?

Leader prompts:

- Treatment of part-time, untenured, junior faculty.
- Dominance of academic gatekeeping by a small unrepresentative elite ([implementing biblical justice](#), Yeo).
- Bias against women, people of colour, people who speak English as a second language ([language discrimination](#), Bell).
- The disadvantage of Global South scholars in global academic fields ([the production of knowledge and barriers in publishing](#), Samararatne).
- The need for humility and constructive engagement in the academy ([biblical understanding of justice](#), Yeo).

Q5: Can you identify justice and rights issues that arise in the impact of your scholarship, or that of others, in the wider world?

Leader prompts:

- See Yeo for a general discussion of justice and its demand for shalom for all people in diverse contexts ([implementing biblical justice in the disciplines](#), Yeo).
- Specific examples given by GFI scholars include: unequal distribution of economic resources ([economic justice and redistribution](#), Sloman); weak integration of developing countries into space communications infrastructure ([justice in space-based communication infrastructure](#), Hastings); inequity in research funding ([academy as site of justice and injustice](#), Wolterstorff); [bias against](#)

[certain populations in public health](#) (VanderWeele); unfair treatment of poor countries during the COVID pandemic ([vaccination nationalism](#), Day); civil disobedience in defense of rule of law ([rule of law and the autonomy of Hong Kong People](#), Tai); the protection of children when families break down ([rights and justice in family relationships](#), Parkinson); the role of transnational legal orders in pursuit of international justice ([international law](#), Halliday); the impact of poverty, inequality, governance on disaster relief ([Disaster planning and relief](#), Davis).

In Depth

Direct links to the rich collection of extracts by GFI scholars

[Three reasons Christians should widen their justice horizons](#) [Day | Law | Australian National U]

[Why questions of justice and rights should motivate Christian scholars](#) [Temple | Philosophy | Bakke Graduate U]

[Justice in work, public finance, economic security](#) [Sloman | Politics | U of Cambridge]

[Challenges to academic publishing in the Global South](#) [Samararatne | Law | U of Melbourne and U of Colombo]

[Recognizing traditional knowledge](#) [Gomez | Human Sciences | U of Rosario]

[Post-colonial residues of unjust linguistic ideologies](#) [Bell | Language | Auckland U of Technology and Laidlaw College]

[Black Lives Matter and the history of racial injustice in the US](#) [Coffey | History | U of Leicester]

[How wealthy western nations should care for refugees and the displaced](#) [Glanville | International Relations | Australian National U]

For more information

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