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

FLOURISHING / SOCIAL SCIENCES

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My disciplinary area is armed conflict and largescale political violence, with a focus on prevention and protection of civilian populations. Flourishing is a concept that does not feature in this area of study, despite efforts among scholars in this field to advance global cooperation and standards to protect vulnerable populations from egregious forms of systematic and largescale violence. With an investigation into the more ominous side of human behaviour through the conduct of armed conflict, there is an overarching resignation to the fact that human propensity to wage violence is so pervasive that our best efforts will only ever manage to mitigate or alleviate human suffering. Efforts to pursue ‘justice’ likewise is increasingly conservative in reaching only the most serious offenders that are within arms-reach of international justice mechanisms as opposed to a more holistic, restorative notion of justice, peace and hence ‘flourishing’ within conflict-affected communities.

This preview points to three areas that align with practical efforts that do exist in the field to build or restore the capacity of societies to ‘flourish’ in the wake of violence (although not framed as such) to enable their agential capacity, restore the circumstantial context which they inhabit and to respond to the spiritual, psychological and social healing associated with one’s state of mind (peace, joy and contentment). These include through investing in restorative modes of justice, protecting human rights, and promoting governance outcomes that are representative of the weak or marginalised in societies.

A Christian reading alerts us to the limitations of fulfilling human flourishing through engineered social policies and interventions; human-led endeavours will always fall short of the completeness of ‘life, in all its fullness’ promised through Christ (John 10:10). Yet it holds out a normative ideal, as Volf, Croasmun and McAnnally-Linz propose, informed by Christian foundations to orient scholarship and practice towards a vision of flourishing for those populations most oppressed and vulnerable in our global community. To this end, this conception provides a valuable resource for thinking theologically about the human institutions of war, governance and social justice.

For more information

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