



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Restorative Justice
(*Peace and War*, pp. 74-82)

Suggested Article:

📖 A Gentle Embrace
(*Peace and War*, pp. 44-45)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:

Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
PO Box 97361
Waco, TX 76798-7361
Phone 1-866-298-2325
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2004 The Center for Christian Ethics

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice, by dealing with crime and harm in a holistic way, promises to sew together the pieces of torn lives into a fabric of justice that is meaningful for victims, offenders, and the community. How can we implement restorative practices to transform our criminal justice system?

Prayer†

Merciful God, in your dear Son we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins.

Give us such strong belief in this the only power that can abolish evil that we shall be enabled to forgive our enemies. And grant us grace not only to forgive but to accept forgiveness through Christ, the crucified. *Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 85

Reflection

During a time of national failure and sin, the people of Israel were strengthened by the surety and rich complexity of God's justice. "Let me hear what God the LORD will speak," the psalmist pleads, "for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts" (85:8). God's righteousness (or justice) "will go before him, and will make a path for his steps," and befitting God, this righteousness will be a fruitful blend of steadfast love, faithfulness, justice, and peace that pervades the earth from the ground to the sky (85:10-13). William Blake, in the cover art for *Peace and War*, sees this gentle embrace of justice and peace in the blood-stained cross of Jesus Christ.

Concerning the criminal justice system in America, Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz asks hard questions: "Why has prison experience become 'normal,' with over two million citizens incarcerated?" "How can we care for one-and-a-half million children who have a parent in prison?" "How do we correct the system's persistent racism (e.g., African Americans, who are only 12.3% of the population, comprise half the prisoners)?" and "How can we help crime victims find justice outside of the legal system?"

Like the psalmist, Amstutz is asking us to "hear what God the LORD will speak" concerning our national failure and sin. She offers no quick solutions, but sees promise in a restorative justice model—"the use of inclusive, collaborative processes that involve the victim, the offender, and communities in identifying harms and needs that result from offenses." In contrast to the criminal justice system, restorative justice stresses:

- ▶ *crime* is a violation or harm to people and relationships (rather than a violation of law and harm against the state). "These violations create moral obligations for the offender toward both the victims and the community," notes Amstutz, yet the criminal justice system fails to address these obligations well. "Offenders are often discouraged from even acknowledging their responsibility; instead they must look out for themselves in the adversarial legal game."
- ▶ the *aim of justice* is to identify obligations, meet needs, and promote healing (rather than establish blame and administer



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, directs The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2004 The Center for Christian Ethics

punishment). Offenders are not well served by a system designed to “warehouse” rather than rehabilitate them. Likewise victims’ needs for healing are largely ignored.

- ▶ the *process of justice* involves victims, offenders, and community members in order to identify obligations and solutions (rather than being a conflict of adversaries, in which “the offender is pitted against the state rules, intentions outweigh outcomes, and one side wins while the other loses”). “Community collaboration is essential in order for the processes of justice to strengthen communities rather than weaken them.”

Restorative justice – emphasizing relationships, needs, and collaboration – helps us think about harm in a holistic way, and point toward long-term changes in the criminal justice system.

Study Questions

1. Comment on the view that “offenders are not well served by a criminal justice system.” According to Barb Toews, how can communities better meet the needs of offenders (p. 79)?
2. “The criminal justice system does not meet the needs of victims either,” writes Amstutz. “Victims must live with their dangerous memories” (pp. 79-80). When she and others interviewed victims in the Listening Project, what were the needs commonly expressed by victims of crime?
3. Imagine four voices – of mercy, truth, justice, and peace – coming before God with their varying perspectives on the American criminal justice system. What might they say?
4. Consider the most pressing needs in your community that might be addressed by the restorative justice model. How could your group or congregation minister to offenders, victims, or the community relationships disrupted by crime?
5. How has your group or congregation responded when one of its members was a crime victim? Or an offender?

Departing Hymn: “O Day of God, Draw Nigh” (verses 1, 2, & 3)

O Day of God, draw nigh
in beauty and in power;
come with thy timeless judgment now
to match our present hour.

Bring to our troubled minds,
uncertain and afraid,
the quiet of a steadfast faith,
calm of a call obeyed.

Bring justice to our land,
that all may dwell secure,
and finely build for days to come
foundations that endure.

Robert B. Y. Scott, (1937)

Suggested Tune: ST. MICHAEL

[†]Adapted from *A Prayer Book for Soldiers and Sailors* (1941), accessed online at justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1928/S&S_index.htm.

Restorative Justice

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To introduce the principles of restorative justice.
2. To explore how the criminal justice system fails to address the needs of offenders, victims, and the community relationships torn by crime.
3. To consider how a congregation might discover and minister through restorative justice to the pressing needs of offenders, crime victims, and the community.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Peace and War (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn, “O Day of God, Draw Nigh,” locate the familiar tune ST. MICHAEL in your church hymnal.

Begin with a Story

Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz begins with this story of restorative justice:

“The sacred meeting occurred in the men’s prison in Frackville, PA, between an inmate and the mother of the man he was convicted of killing a decade before. Another facilitator and I, who met with them for six hours, were standing on holy ground as they began cautiously, but then became immersed in conversation....

“Each knew what they wanted to say to the other. In a moment of silence at the close of the session they simply looked at one another, each one knowing they had received what they needed to hear. Then they hugged.

“A few weeks later I phoned the woman to ask her an important question. The inmate had talked to his own mother after the meeting, and she had written a letter to the victim—mother to mother. I was calling to know if the woman wanted to read this letter from the inmate’s mother. She was astounded. ‘Isn’t this what we were put on this earth to do,’ she told me, ‘to be in community with one another, to find the connections where we can?’” (*Peace and War*, pp. 74-75).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 85 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The violence of crime against persons and property can rend the fabric of individual lives, families, and communities. Restorative justice is a model that is being developed by Christians who want a more holistic response to crime. Begin the study by reflecting on the psalmist’s conception of God’s righteousness (or justice) as a rich blend of mercy, truth, justice, and peace. Encourage the group to use this biblical framework to evaluate the American criminal justice system and the alternative model of restorative justice.

If group members are aware of the unmet needs of criminal offenders and victims, move ahead to discuss questions 4 and 5. Otherwise, explore these needs by discussing questions 1, 2, and 3. Be sensitive to the experience of members with crime. Some members or their close relatives may be suffering as victims. Others may have been offenders. As these group members are willing, encourage them to share their personal stories. Yet, keep the discussion focused on the solutions proposed by restorative justice, and your opportunities for healing ministry to offenders, victims, and local community relationships damaged by crime.

Study Questions

1. Based on her interviews with prisoners in Pennsylvania, Toews urges caring communities “to invite incarcerated men and women into dialogue to learn about their experiences and to elicit their insight on the resources and programs they need. Communities should provide opportunities for meaningful accountability and making amends that do not depend solely on face-to-face interaction with victims and offenders. And we should respect the life experiences of offenders, including those with victimization, and find restorative ways to address these experiences without absolving offenders of responsibility to their victims” (p. 79). What are the closest jails and prisons, and what sort of offender is incarcerated there? Are they local men and women, or do their families live at a great distance? What opportunities do they have for worship, education, and interaction with the community?
2. Being victimized by crime “creates crises of self-identity, meaning, and personal relationships that impact all aspects of life,” Amstutz writes. “We need an appropriate sense of control over our lives and a certain amount of personal power; yet for victims, someone else has taken control over their lives in a way that leaves them feeling vulnerable and dehumanized. And they may have a crisis of religious faith, if they had a belief that God would keep them safe” (p. 79). Though victims deal with their trauma in individual ways and there is no formula for healing, many need “to incorporate their encounter with crime into their lives” by retelling their story to others. In the Listening Project she discovered that victims feel neglected and betrayed by the criminal justice system. They want to articulate their own needs, and not be represented only by surrogates (e.g., prosecutors). The Listening Project report is online at www.restorativejustice.org/rj3/Full-text/ListeningProject.pdf.
3. Subdivide into four groups—for mercy, truth, righteousness, and peace—and brainstorm on what each perspective, to the exclusion of the others, would emphasize as important in the criminal justice system. Of which features of the system would each perspective approve? Of which aspects would it disapprove? As John Paul Lederach used this exercise, he discovered that “truth...wanted to establish what really happened; mercy desired to forgive and move forward; justice called for a full accounting of wrongdoing; peace was ready for healing to begin” (p. 45). Is there value in combining the insights of the four viewpoints? Or should one perspective be privileged over the others in evaluating a system of justice?
4. After members brainstorm on this question in a general way, they might focus on one type of crime or on a single group—such as youth offenders, victims of physical abuse, relatives of murder victims, etc. Are there opportunities for joining other congregations or groups in an appropriate ministry? Do members know of successful ministries in other cities?
5. Answering this question may be an opportunity to minister to a member who has suffered as a crime victim or as an offender. Encourage members to reflect on how the congregation responded through its worship, education programs, and counseling, as well as ministries of service to victims, offenders, and their families. This is an opportunity to evaluate the response and to make plans for future ministries.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.