Syllabus

Crime, Punishment and Restorative Justice

June 10, 11, 16, 17, 18 2011
9:00-5:00
Professor: T. Richard Snyder

Background

Our society’s response to crime is essentially punitive. In the past 30 years the number of prisoners has more than quadrupled, giving the U.S. the distinction of incarcerating the largest number of people per capita of any industrialized nation. Little attention has been given to the needs of victims, the rehabilitation of offenders, or the restoring of the community fabric. Money spent on imprisonment has diverted critical funds from other needs such as education, health care, affordable housing and economic development, and safety nets for the most vulnerable.

The death penalty has been re-instated in a number of states and over 3500 persons currently wait on death row. The number of crimes for which the death penalty can be imposed has been increased dramatically. The age at which children can be tried as adults has been lowered in some states and the percentage of persons of color caught up in the criminal justice system is out of proportion in the extreme. Following September 11, 2001 many constitutional protections have been systematically removed.

Dostoyevsky said that we know the soul of a society by the condition of its prisons. By that measure, our nation’s soul is tragically sick.

Purposes of the Seminar:

- To understand the current state of criminal justice in the U.S.
- To explore some of the root causes of crime.
- To analyze some of the theological and ethical foundations of our culture of punishment.
- To examine the alternatives offered by Restorative Justice principles and practices.
- To encourage engagement in this issue by people of faith.

Students will be evaluated on their:

- Familiarity with the state of criminal justice in the U.S.
- Ability to articulate key ethical issues/problems with the current situation.
- Understanding of the ways in which class, race and gender are implicated.
- Appreciation of the impact of various crimes on the victims.
- Understanding of the main principles of Restorative Justice.
• Ability to connect the practices of Restorative Justice with their own setting.
• Integration of biblical, historical, theological and pastoral disciplines.
• Clarity and cogency of written and oral presentations.

Format
We will utilize readings, lecture, role-play, film, papers and seminar discussions, as well as a visit to a correctional facility. Due to the intensive nature of the course, it is expected that students will have done the majority of the required readings and a reflection paper before the first class session. This is critical for the course to function as a seminar.

Week One
Required reading in preparation for June 10: all of Logan and Alexander; Snyder, Introduction and Chaps. 1-3; Taylor, Introduction and Part I

Required paper in preparation for June 10: (3-5 pages) Choose one

Either
• What is right and what is wrong with criminal justice in the U.S.?

Or
• What bearing should Jesus’ admonition to forgive “seventy times seven” have upon society’s response to crime?

Or
• The Death Penalty should/should not be abolished and why?

Required viewing in preparation for June 10.
Watch an episode of a television crime show of your choice

June 10:
• Opening worship
• Introductions to the course and to one another
• Discussion: Your experience with crime and/or the criminal justice system.
• Lectures and Discussion:
  o What’s going on? The Shape of Criminal Justice in the U.S.
  o Roots of our Condition: Political Economy, Ideology, Culture and Theology

June 11
• Opening Worship
• Roots discussion (continued)
• What Role Should Punishment Play?
• What About Forgiveness?
Week Two

Required reading in preparation for June 16: Snyder, Chaps. 4-6; Taylor, Part II; Zehr.

Required paper in preparation for June 16: (2-4 pages). Two or three critical questions related to each of the three readings. These will serve as the basis for small group discussions.

June 16

- Opening Worship
- Restorative Justice roots, principles and practices
- Restorative Justice Models (National and International)

June 17

- Opening Worship
- Strengths and weaknesses of Restorative Justice
- Afternoon visit to a correctional facility: conversations with corrections officers, prisoners and chaplains.

June 18

- Opening Worship
- Debriefing of the visit
- Steps toward Restorative Justice

Final Paper: A Restorative Response to Crime: What We Can Do?

Taking into consideration the specific location of your life and work, analyze and set forth a plan for a corporate restorative justice response to victims or offenders. To the extent possible, the plan should seek to work toward change in some aspect of the criminal or juvenile justice.

choose either I or II.

I. An action plan. 10-12 pages

1. Focus: Who are the people most affected—victim(s),offender(s), community. This should include your understanding of the need and a realistic assessment of your congregation’s or organization’s potential to address the issue. Eg. key persons, resources, networks. 2 pages (maximum)

2. The Plan: What people will you seek to involve and how? What specific steps will you take? What aspect of the system (eg. corrections, judicial, law enforcement) would you hope to impact and in what way? How will you involve members of the larger community? 5-6 pages

3. Ethical Foundation: What moral and/or theological rationale would you offer to your congregation/organization for their involvement? 3-4 pages.
Or

II. An analytical paper. 10–12 pages

What are the several most critical moral issues posed by our current response to crime and how would you address them? In what ways does your particular faith tradition inform you? Draw upon the required readings, lectures, discussion, as well as additional bibliographic resources in your response.

The final Paper is due by July 8. Please submit a copy by email (word doc., not docx) to trsnyder@midcoast.com as well as a hard copy to me at PO Box 273 Lincolnville, ME 04849.

**Required Reading:**


Class Handouts.

**Recommended Reading:**


Herman, Judith, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence— From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997)


