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## THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PROMOTION OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE BY STEVE WINTERBERG

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the unique role of Christian higher education in the promotion of restorative justice within the criminal justice system and other systems of discipline. Christian higher education should integrate a faith that is active with all areas of knowledge, producing students who are promoters and practitioners of justice in every area of their lives. Restorative justice provides an opportunity for Christian higher education to live out the purpose of establishing the biblical concept of *shalom*, which is a peace that requires justice, restored relationships, and responsibility. A critical pedagogy allows for variations in practice, which leads to methods of humanization for all parties involved in the restorative justice process. Christian higher education should challenge students to live justly and promote justice and the restorative justice movement is one way of accomplishing that objective.

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INTRODUCTION

Christian higher education has a unique opportunity to influence the lives of its students in preparing them for life beyond the university. What does it mean to be a Christian institution of higher learning? Does having Christian professors in the classroom qualify an institution as being distinctively Christian? Does a university that claims to be a Christian institution have a role in missions and justice issues? Or are missions and justice issues distractions from the educational objectives of a university and better left to the church? Should the promotion of distinctively Christian values influence how educators, students, and the institutions respond to civic responsibilities and political life? One area of potential influence for Christian higher education is within the criminal justice system, attempting to bring about social action that promotes biblical concepts of justice.

### CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

There is not a consensus on what the purpose is for Christian higher education. Arthur Holmes (1975) claims that the goal of Christian higher education should not be to simply indoctrinate students or to simply train ministers for ministry and mission related positions. Conformity and unity of opinion should not be a goal, since Christianity has had a long history of diverse thought and practice. He argues that the distinctive for Christian higher education is “an education that cultivates the creative and active integration of faith and learning, of faith and culture,” (Holmes, 1975, p. 16). Holmes believes that faith and religion have been separated from other aspects of modern life, leaving faith on the margins even for those who are Christians. We have compartmentalized life in a way that separates faith and religion from impacting other areas of our lives. As a result, the process of faith integration for Christian colleges and universities provides a unique and distinct purpose. Other avenues for Christians in higher education cannot truly demonstrate faith integration in the same way as Christian higher education (Holmes, 1975). If we truly believe, as Holmes argues, that “all truth is God’s truth, no matter where it is found,” then Christian educators in Christian higher education should be motivated to attempt true faith integration in our teaching methods, practices, and curriculum (Holmes, 1975, p. 16-17). Holmes also goes further in saying that:

All of life with its culture and its learning must be penetrated with Christian perspectives, if Jesus Christ is to be Lord of all. All of a young person’s human potential must be as fully developed as possible, if the stewardship of his life is to honor God. The Christian has a mandate in education (Holmes, 1975, p. 29).

The process of Christian higher education should affect all areas of a student's life, infusing and integrating Christian principles in the hope of shaping a distinctively Christian inspired worldview that leads to action in all areas of life. A critical pedagogy allows for freedom to integrate faith and learning and fosters student learning within the context of Christian higher education.

Christian higher education has a greater calling to propel students and faculty toward a life where faith is fully integrated with one's vocation. There is a responsibility to God within Christian higher education that "involves the ability to respond to God" (Sullivan, 2004, 270). God calls us as Christians to be faithful influencers in the world. We have a responsibility to make a difference in every area of life around us, including the academy, the arts, and government. Our primary motivation should be nothing less than Christ himself. Therefore, Christian higher education should help us to understand the world in which we live and motivate us to serve God by serving the world and making a difference in it (Liftin, 2004). Christian higher education should not be satisfied with a knowledge based product, but with one that lives out what is learned and challenges the elements of society that are contrary to a worldview that is influenced and shaped by Scripture.

Charlene Kalinoski in her article, *Calling Students to Transformation*, also argues that education should be viewed as a transformative process that challenges the entirety of the student. The process should involve more than "an accumulation of knowledge in the form of course units or hours, opportunities for service, or special educational experiences such as study abroad" (Kalinoski, 2007, 146). She advocates a holistic approach that integrates ideas with the whole being. These concepts are grounded in a values system that Christian higher education aspires to promote, but secular institutions leave unanswered and open. She advocates this distinct purpose by saying that:

Christian higher education may be limiting or reductive in the eyes of its critics, but it aspires to wholeness, the sort that binds a student's education to his or her individual calling. It acknowledges that every person has a special calling entrusted to him or her by God. Secular higher education cannot make this claim and so places value on open-endedness, the freedom not to have to choose (Kalinoski, 2007, 146-147).

There is a unique ability on the part of Christian higher education to focus holistically on developing students that other non-religious systems cannot. After all, the holistic approach to education was central to what the founders of many academic institutions intended. Kalinoski claims that education is enhanced and fostered due to faith. "Knowledge of the liberal arts is liberating, but more so when encompassed by the liberating effects of Christianity" (Kalinoski, 2007, 147). What will the results be from a methodology in Christian higher education that promotes faith integration and the creation of a holistic person? What will graduates from Christian academic institutions look like and how will they live their lives?

## **POSTMODERNISM**

The broader conversation challenging the established goals, objectives, and models of pedagogies in education has been shaped by postmodern thought and philosophy. Postmodernism has influenced the educational methods and practices in allowing for differing and varying views and opinions to be expressed and validated. Educators strive to implement methods that are "seen as relative to the needs of the students. Obviously, no one system fits all needs" (Anthony & Benson, 2003, 405). Postmodern philosophies allow for a diversity of people in the classroom and allows for methods and practices in education to be altered in order to fit the needs of the students in a multi-cultural society and world (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Are there ways for educators in Christian colleges and universities to use these methods to implement an active faith?

A critical pedagogy should develop out of an attempt to focus on the whole person and their individual callings in

life, which should challenge us to see each person as fully human. Paulo Freire (1998) argues that a significant problem in societies is that we do not always view each other as human, but we often view others as less than human. The process of dehumanizing others allows people to oppress and take advantage. This often leads the oppressed to rebel and attempt to overthrow the oppressors. The challenge for the oppressed is to restore their own sense of humanity while continuing to foster and encourage the humanity of those that have oppressed them. “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Freire, 1998, 46). This process is not easy, but is difficult and challenging. Freire compares it to childbirth because the people that arise out of the process are new and transformed individuals. “The same is true with respect to the individual oppressor as a person. Discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed” (Freire, 1998, 50). Both the oppressor and the oppressed undergo a transformation and humanization in this process (Freire, 1998).

How much more should we as Christians be able to live this out? We believe that God created all humans in the image of God and that He sent Jesus to die for each human being. We also recognize that we each were offenders of a holy God and are in need of mercy and forgiveness. This should shape how we live, how we relate to those around us and to how we educate. A critical pedagogy within Christian higher education allows for educators to move students toward a transformational, active faith within the whole person, challenging students to seek and promote justice.

### SHALOM IN EDUCATION

Christian higher education should compel and move students in the direction of action, living out their faith in their vocation and in life. The Christian community does not exist solely for its own benefit, but to make an impact on other people around them and to establish the Kingdom of God. If we believe this, then shouldn't Christian higher education play a pivotal role in establishing the *shalom* of the Old and New Testament in the world around us? *Shalom* means peace, but implies justice and right relationships with God, with other human beings, and with the entirety of Creation (Wolterstorff, 2004). According to Wolterstorff, “it is obvious that in the modern world, if the Christian community is to share in God's work of renewal by being witness, servant, and evidence, its young members will need an education pointed toward equipping them to contribute to that calling” (Wolterstorff, 2004, 7). These ideas flow out of an understanding of Scripture where justice and *shalom* are promoted and encouraged throughout. It seems to speak to the very character and essence of the Creator God. “The God who asks Christians to go into all the world to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ is the very same God who loves justice” (Wolterstorff, 2004, 25). That God should compel us to live differently and to be different, to be promoter and practitioners of biblical justice and to attempt to bring about *shalom*.

Wolterstorff (2004) also argues that Christian higher education should have a goal of establishing *shalom*. *Shalom* requires justice, right relationships, and responsibility. Other goals of Christian higher education have noble aims, including a call to participate in the cultural mandate and a desire to see Christians live faithfully within their workplace, but they “speak scarcely at all of injustice in the world, scarcely of our calling to mercy and justice” (Wolterstorff, 2004, 22). A call to promote *shalom* does not mean we sacrifice other fields of study such as history, science or literature. Rather, Wolterstorff argues that where these fields promote *shalom*, then they should be taught in an integrated manner and with a new sense of urgency. He promotes a model of curricula that promotes a “response to the moral wounds of the world” (Wolterstorff, 2004, 24). Wolterstorff argues that we should not only teach about justice, but “we must teach *for* justice. The graduate whom we seek to produce must be one who *practices* justice” (Wolterstorff, 2004, 24). He goes further in claiming, “the graduate who prays and struggles for the incursion of justice and *shalom* into our glorious but fallen world, celebrating its presence and mourning its absence—that is the graduate the Christian college must seek to produce” (Wolterstorff, 2004, 26). The potential impact on our society and our world is enormous.

Students graduating from Christian academic institutions should be practitioners and promoters of justice and help to establish *shalom*.

Faith integration should produce people who fight and advocate for justice. Faith in Scripture is not complete if it simply infiltrates our minds and then does nothing. We do not have to have a system of complete conformity on ideas and methods, but action and justice should flow from Christians and distinctively Christian institutions. Educators also desire for students to apply the skills and disciplines they are learning in the classroom to their lives and vocations in the world beyond their academic institutions. Biblical faith should lead to action and should drive us toward establishing justice and *shalom*. The aspirations to influence, educate, and shape students in a holistic fashion will compel us to foster a faith in students at Christian institutions that lead to action and transformation.

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

What are some practical ways for Christian higher education to foster and encourage justice among students? Advocacy for the poor, attempts to stop human trafficking, and assisting those in need are worthwhile objectives and should be promoted within Christian higher education, but an often forgotten population are those who have had issues with the law. An area where Christian higher education can promote justice in the lives of students that is often neglected is in the criminal justice system. Encouraging humanizing factors for both victims and offenders of crimes should be a part of our attempts to help establish the *shalom* of the Old and New Testament. Justice is a term that has become popular and trendy in recent years, but can have different meanings. Jarem Sawatsky in his book, *Justpeace Ethics*, argues that the term *justpeace* should be used as an alternative because “justice and peace belong together and are essentially inseparable. Peace without justice is suppression. Justice without peace is a new form of oppression” (Sawatsky, 2008, 2). Sawatsky claims that justice is not something that stays the same, but rather is changing, adjusting, and “is based in relationship rather than impartiality” (Sawatsky, 2008, 3). He uses the book of Amos from the Old Testament as his source and desires to promote restoration as a primary goal of justice. According to Sawatsky, the biblical concepts of justice are linked to relationship, both with God and with the broader community. He argues that Christians often promote and encourage ideas of love, forgiveness, and relationship in our personal lives, but fail to see how that should flow to other aspects of our lives, including those who are our enemies or outside of our immediate contact. The worldview of those who espouse a *justpeace ethic* is fundamentally different and unique from the mainstream in that Christians should live out justice and peace toward all human beings (Sawatsky, 2008). Sawatsky argues that peacebuilders believed that life is about relationships, beauty, change, identity, and diversity. They believed that everything that God created was indeed sacred, somehow reflecting the very being of God—justice, righteousness, truth, love. They also believed that we did not have to wait to die and get to heaven before we could touch and taste these essential characteristics of life (Sawatsky, 2008, 24).

As a result, peacebuilders focus on reminding people of these things and challenging others to live with these at the heart of who they are. They do not believe that these things should be confined to a narrow group of people directly surrounding us, but rather should extend to all people (Sawatsky, 2008). Christian higher education has a unique ability to promote *justpeace ethics* and to encourage people to live out these principles.

As Christians, we should have a greater understanding of justice and the problem of injustice because it is deeply personal for us. The Fall of humankind in the book of Genesis reveals the first criminal activity and the whole biblical story reveals that we are all, as humans, essentially criminals. “We are all criminals at heart because we have broken God’s perfect standards,” thus breaking our relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation (Smarto, 1987, 189). We also believe that Christ came to restore these relationships and to show us that God is concerned about behavior, but also transformation of people on the inside. “Finally, Jesus issued a call to love and forgiveness in

circumstances where we have been wronged, a call to defuse the natural tendency to act aggressively and vengefully” (Smarto, 1987, 198). How should we as Christians, and how should Christian institutions respond to this understanding of human relationships, in particular as it relates to our criminal justice system? Is there a role for Christian higher education in the promotion of restorative justice within our society? Should this change how we handle conflict and deal with disciplinary actions within Christian institutions?

In Scripture we see that God is both just and merciful. Sometimes it can be difficult for us to understand how both of these attributes and characteristics can coexist, yet both are intricately woven together as revealed through the actions of God with the people of Israel in the Old Testament and through the life, teachings, death, and Resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament. Donald Smarto (1987) quotes Luke 6:35-36 as a call to love our enemies and to bring about restoration and forgiveness to those who have violated or offended us. He argues that this should apply within our criminal justice system as well and fully recognizes that this is difficult for the victims of crimes. He claims that we are still able to judge the behavior of a criminal, but this should not equal judging the individual. We often categorize people as either good or bad, rather than seeing all of us equally as fallen creatures with the hope and reality of redemption (Smarto, 1987). Charles Colson argues that this worldview is rooted in the Enlightenment, that humans are essentially good and progressing in the right direction (Colson, 2001). Smarto also argues for compassion as we work with criminals rather than simply having sympathy for them. “Sympathy is an attitude that implies feeling sorry for the plight of another, but compassion is an action. Compassion means that we are motivated by love to do something for another person,” (Smarto, 1987, 209). This does not necessarily excuse offenders from punishment, but it allows them to be viewed as human and should allow a degree of discretion when applying sentences. Restorative justice allows for implementation of a critical pedagogy where individual stories, experiences, and opinions are valued and appreciated. It allows for victims and offenders to come together to deal with a situation in a unique way, as opposed to approaching things in an established, uniform way. It challenges people to unlearn what they know about others and the circumstances they are in and to relearn according to new stories and experiences.

Our concepts of justice are determined by our worldview and culture and are not formed in isolation, but rather within the context of our lives. A society also shapes these ideas within the context of broader societal goals and objectives, or should do so if it does not. Modern American society seems to be attempting to redefine justice as there have been changes in values, worldview and culture, but this has been difficult due to the rise of postmodernism and relativism. Charles Colson argues that “Human rights cannot be justified in a relativist system,” (Colson, 2001, 39). Our society may not fully understand these questions and does not always seem to have answers, but we as followers of Jesus do have a model and example and a call to be promoters and doers of justice and mercy. This call should affect the role of Christian higher education and the goals of those institutions, hopefully bringing about a system where biblical *shalom* is taught and lived out.

If we truly believe in justice and mercy, then our actions as Christians should reflect that worldview. The criminal justice system in the United States generally believes that punishment dissuades criminal activity. “The theory was that even though prisons didn’t rehabilitate, if we could get tough enough, we would discourage crime. The emphasis thus shifted to deterrence,” (Colson, 2001, 57). This system does not seem to have functioned in a way that has significantly deterred crime and is generally viewed as a retributive system (Colson, 2001). Retribution does not restore people and reconcile people to their community. Restorative justice does not negate the need for restitution, but is opposed to actions that are vengeful (Colson, 2001). If a retributive system of criminal justice does not truly deter crime, then what system should we promote? Does retribution promote the practice of justice and peace as understood in the biblical concept of *shalom*?

Colson argues that restorative justice is “based on restitution or to some extent making right the wrongs done,”

(Colson, 2001, 113). Colson claims that relational justice and restorative justice are not necessarily the same, but his view argues that they instill concepts of humans being created in the image of God, thus being created in need of relationship with God and in need of relationships with other human beings. He incites the biblical concept of *shalom*, which is “a peace that is intrinsically relational and righteous,” (Colson, 2001, 114). Justice fails to be achieved when “individual responsibility under law but in the context of community, individual transformation, and healing of relationships” are not in harmony and emphasized in a balanced way (Colson, 2001, 115). How then does a society promote a system of criminal justice that is restorative in nature? How does this have any impact on Christian higher education?

### **THE PRIMARY METHOD OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

Restorative Justice in its modern form developed experimentally in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to bring about relational reconciliation between victims and offenders of crimes. A common method used by advocates of restorative justice has developed into what is known as Victim Offender Mediation (VOM) and Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP). These programs do not represent the entirety of the restorative justice movement or methodology, but they do reflect a significant aspect of it. The main idea is to have victims and offenders sit down in face-to-face dialogue. Often times community members are brought in to the process as well, since crime does not simply affect the victims and the offenders, but it also affects all of society and other members of the community (Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2006). The space and atmosphere for this process needs to be deemed safe for both victims and offenders because “program staff realize that victims have already been victimized and that many offenders have also been victimized” (Umbreit, Coates, and Vos, 2006, 54).

VOM and VORP recognize a need to be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, both victims, offenders, and the broader community and emphasizes that the program needs to be voluntary. It is believed that victims and offenders should have a choice as to whether or not they participate in these programs and to what extent they should be involved. Following-up is another foundational aspect of the process in VOM and may involve continued meetings between staff and offenders or victims. VOM also encourages a restitution process for offenders as well. In general, participants have had a higher degree of satisfaction after having participated in these programs when compared with other processes (Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2006). The process of VOM promotes a restoration of human dignity for both the victim and the offender and allows a reconciliation between them and the broader community. It allows the oppressed, in this case the victim, to seek a degree of restitution without dehumanizing the oppressor, thus enabling a humanizing process for all parties. It also allows for the process to be altered and adjusted in order to meet the needs of the parties involved.

Restorative Justice does have limitations. First, while there is a healthy dialogue and discussion about restorative justice, there is not one uniform method or goal. Is restorative justice complete in being a process that will hopefully lead to reconciliation? There is no agreement on the answer to this question. What is agreed-upon is that restorative justice generally deals with offenders after they have been deemed guilty of a crime, although prevention of crime is an element of the movement. It believes that victims should play a more significant role in the outcomes and decisions made regarding justice. Restorative justice also promotes aid for victims and normally involves face-to-face dialogue between the victims and the offenders. While still expecting offenders to be held responsible for their actions, restorative justice hopes to accomplish this while avoiding stigmatization (Daly, 2006).

Another limitation for restorative justice is the exceptionally high ideal of bringing about restoration for all involved and the goal of reconciliation. While the process of Victim Offender Mediation (VOM) is generally viewed as fair, it is more

difficult to truly bring about restoration through the processes as it is currently implemented. Also, victims often want and desire what is perceived to be a genuine and sincere apology from the offenders, and this expectation is often not fulfilled. While having high expectations and ideals is not necessarily bad, we should approach restorative justice with reality in mind, recognizing that restorative justice does have its limits (Daly, 2006).

VOM is a method within restorative justice for the pedagogy of the oppressed to be lived out practically in the promotion of justice. By allowing those who are victims to encourage the process of humanization for the oppressors, they are not continuing the cycle of dehumanization. In attempting to restore relationships and human dignity to all parties involved VOM is in a small way fulfilling the pedagogy of the oppressed and implementing biblical concepts of justice and *shalom*. Vengeance and violence would only be a continuation of oppression, but restorative justice aims to provide hope and honor to all parties, and to reconcile human relationships, which is central to the Gospel of Christ.

### **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Restorative justice is not the only social problem in our society and world, but attempting to provide human dignity to all parties involved in the criminal justice system is worthwhile. Advocating for justice, *shalom*, and action does not necessarily imply that Christian higher education should be involved in restorative justice within the criminal justice system; however, the arguments presented here hopefully challenge educators within Christian higher education to consider restorative justice as a way, a method, to challenge and engage students to think and live justly. Certainly other areas of concern and injustice need prioritization as well, but the challenges within the criminal justice system are seemingly under-noticed and unengaged by the Christian community. How then can Christian higher education be involved in the restorative justice movement?

First, raising awareness of the problems within the system is a tangible and realistic goal for educators. In bringing attention to the challenges and victimization of the offenders, compassion could motivate students to become involved in local VOM and VORP processes or, at a minimum, be aware of dehumanizing factors that limit the reintegration into society by those who have committed crimes. Fostering a desire to break the cycles of oppression and victimization within the criminal justice system is a start. Awareness creates opportunities for students to learn more and begin to consider options and implications that may affect them in their own personal lives. Awareness is a first step toward action, advocacy, or involvement.

Second, faculty in various academic departments could attempt to connect themes from their fields with the restorative justice movement. For example, the subject of literature when looking at the writings of Victor Hugo and Fyodor Dostoyevsky could connect the discussion to modern day challenges within our criminal justice system. Another example could be the connection of history and the colonization of Australia and other regions of the world with criminals and restorative justice efforts underway today. It is recognized that not every field will lend itself to include a discussion on restorative justice naturally, but it is possible for many to consider possible connections within their disciplines. Also, faculty could employ a critical pedagogy in making attempts to integrate justice principles into service-learning projects for students. The goal should be to connect projects with the academic discipline being taught in the classroom, while challenging students to become aware of injustices and attempt to determine ways to live and promote justice.

Another option for Christian higher education to be involved in restorative justice is through student life and spiritual life departments. These departments, working in collaboration with other departments on campus could assist faculty members in connecting with the restorative justice movement. Service projects, ministries, and Chapels all could play a

role in attempting to instill justice principles through restorative justice in the lives of students. They could connect with local VOM and VORP facilitators and engage in prison ministries or ministries working with individuals who are attempting to restart their lives after prison. Many colleges and universities have service requirements and these projects could be presented as a way for students to fulfill them.

This is not an exhaustive list of possible ways to be involved, but it is an attempt to provide tangible ways for Christian higher education to connect with the restorative justice movement. It moves us forward in an attempt to integrate our Christian faith and principles with the educational process as we strive toward justice and *shalom*.

## CONCLUSION

Restorative justice is one practical area in which Christians have potential to impact others and attempt to bring about *shalom* and justice within our society. The criminal justice system currently promotes vengeance and retribution that does little to raise the humanity of the victim and generally dehumanizes the offenders in the process. The Creator God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, even though we were in rebellion and offenders of His goodness, mercy, grace and holiness. As Christians, we have a restored relationship with the Most High God and the promise of restored relationships with one another and with all of His Creation. We should demonstrate the same love that has been provided to us through Christ to other people and strive to bring about redemption, justice, and restoration for all of God's creatures. Micah 6:8 says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (NASB). As Christians, may we strive to follow Him in bringing about justice.

Christian higher education, as the academic extension of the Christian community should be more than simply having a Christian in the role of professor and teacher. From the beginning, Christian higher education had loftier goals of holistically shaping students to fulfill Kingdom purposes and objectives. Aspiring to influence a student to integrate all areas of learning with an action-oriented faith is challenging, but the potential of impacting our society and the world is significant if Christian educators are able to fulfill this aspiration. The hope is that faith integration would be a part of truly leading students and faculty toward life transformation. As the Christian higher education community is transformed, students and faculty should continue the process by being doers of justice and through advocating for and bringing about change within the broader society. After all, "it should become obvious that only a biblical worldview can produce true justice. For justice is impossible without the rule of law; and the rule of law is impossible without transcendent authority," (Colson, 2001, p. 41). Being promoters of a biblically-influenced worldview, Christian higher education should strive for true integration of an active faith with all areas of knowledge. Faith integration should produce and lead to the formation of graduates that are promoters and practitioners of justice.

The criminal justice system needs to have a Christian worldview and perspective infused and integrated into its methods and theories. The system generally does not encourage restoration for either the victims or the offenders. Often, both the offenders and the victims are dehumanized and the system seems to invoke retribution and vengeance in a way that is not restorative or redemptive. Restorative justice provides methods for humanization because it encourages and promotes the listening and hearing of one another's life stories. For Christians, our stories are all connected in the overarching story of God. Christian higher education has an opportunity to promote biblical concepts of justice in a way that helps to establish *shalom* in a unique way through the restorative justice movement.

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