

## A Time and Season for Restorative Justice

For some fifty years I've been a supporter of restorative justice. For over a dozen years I was an officer, including president, of the Community Justice and Mediation Center and its earlier incarnations. In 2002 I authored the Resolution on Restorative Justice adopted by the Presbyterian Church (USA). Consistent with my commitment, I have publicly opposed so-called "enhanced penalties" for hate crimes, precisely because they are punitive in nature. They also tend to serve as a salve to the conscience without doing much if anything to reduce prejudicial hate or promote greater social justice and reconciliation.

The goal of restorative justice is the healing of rifts in the social fabric, and reconciliation of persons who have been parties to actions causing injury, animosity, and estrangement. Restorative justice requires that those who have been victims or recipients of such actions be able to forgive. But those who have been perpetrators or agents of such actions must be able to acknowledge, come to understand, and express regret for the harms they have inflicted, take responsibility for their actions, and where possible try to set things right.

Our President-elect, Joe Biden, gave a "victory" speech soon after being declared winner of the election in which he cited scripture to say, regarding the state of the nation, that now is "a time to heal." His words seemed heartfelt and altogether fitting for the occasion. Later he indicated reluctance to pursue criminal charges against his predecessor. Recent developments indicate, however, that healing the nation will be hard if not impossible to accomplish.

Our nation's divisions are deeply rooted, far beyond anything accidental or circumstantial, and there is plenty of blame to go around. But those divisions have been amplified and systematically exacerbated by the person, policies, and party of the man Joe Biden has been elected to replace. Where is the desire on Trump's part, or that of his supporters, to be healed? Where the acknowledgment of injury inflicted on the body politic and countless human lives? Where the expression of regret, or taking of responsibility, for actions resulting in needless suffering and death?

I'm not someone who has ever idolized any President, and I surely won't idolize Joe Biden. In my 73 years I've never known a President who was blameless, or who could stand before God without a guilty conscience – except for Donald Trump, who mistakenly thinks he is blameless and who has no discernible conscience.

Joe has said that we should stop demonizing our opponents. Our fellow citizens with whom we strenuously disagree are not our enemies, he says. I fully agree that we must not demonize those who are not demonic. The problem is, I cannot think of any figure in American history who more fully embodies the demonic than Donald Trump. My Christian theology tells me that nobody is beyond redemption. Yet Trump seems hellbent on the ruination of himself, the nation, and the planet. Were it not that he possesses enormous capacity for harm and destruction, he would simply be a miserable soul greatly to be pitied.

What does justice require regarding his actions? Not punishment per se. Rather, an independent,

non-partisan Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with powers to subject him to constraints and demands that will insure he is held morally and legally accountable for all the harm he has done – if only to let all those who have suffered at his hands know that they did not deserve such fate, that they have been deliberately, cruelly, and criminally maligned, defrauded, defamed, excluded, exploited, abused, tortured, and denied the blessings of liberty and justice for all.

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