



NEWS

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc.
June 1996

Restorative Justice challenges 'myth of redemptive violence'

by Ron Claassen

Is there an alternative to vengeance and retribution as a way of responding to a wrong, an injustice? Walter Wink (in *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*) says that our society's preferred response is one of vengeance, and Wink has labeled it the "myth of redemptive violence."

The redemptive violence myth, he says, is the belief that violence is a necessary and appropriate response – and even healing for the victim – especially when administered by the state on a victim's behalf. Wink points out that Jesus clearly rejected violence as a constructive way of responding to a wrong or injustice and helps us to understand that there are some alternatives to violence.

One passage of scripture Wink uses to help us understand that there are alternatives to violence is found in the fifth chapter of Matthew, in which Jesus says: "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye....' But I say to you...." This is followed by a series of statements that sound awfully weak and seem to call for the offended party to become a "doormat."

Jesus says things like: "If one strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also"; and, "If you are forced to carry a pack one mile, carry it two miles"; and, "If one takes your coat, give him your cloak as well." And then, if that is not enough apparent passivity, Jesus adds this: "You have heard it said, 'love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'love your enemy....'" Here we really tune out because we know that we don't have warm and gushy feelings for someone who has just committed a serious offense against us.

So how, when we have been offended, are we to understand and take seriously what Jesus is saying? I have found Wink's work describing the context in which Jesus was speaking to be very helpful in understanding how Jesus might want us to respond. The easiest to explain of the three "doormat" suggestions is the one about carrying the pack. The context was this: soldiers in the Roman occupation force often

one mile, carry it two miles." It no longer seems like a "doormat" type of response. In fact, it seems rather aggressive. It is a nonviolent and assertive response – not a passive one. Try to imagine the situation. I think it would be something like this: at the beginning the soldier forces the local to carry the pack. Then, at the end of the first mile, the soldier asks the local to give the pack back. But according to Jesus' suggestion, the local, the one who had been forced to carry the pack, would just continue walking, refusing the order to give it back and knowing that this would put the soldier in jeopardy of possible punishment. The initiative had been seized by the local, the one who earlier appeared to be powerless. Not only is this not a passive response, it is very possible that it could become an abusive response in return. It appears that this is why Jesus immediately follows these suggested responses with the statement: "Love (*agape* meaning most literally 'to be constructive with') your enemy."

Restorative Justice must not be confused with approving, ignoring, or saying that wrongdoing is OK. Restorative Justice needs to develop assertive and constructive responses that bring appropriate attention to the problem in ways that encourage the offender to recognize and accept responsibility for the offense. Once this is done, victims are amazingly willing to consider how equity might be restored and how agreements might be made for the future so the injustice will not be repeated. If the offender accepts responsibility and keeps the agreements, trust grows and reconciliation (movement along a continuum from 'increasing hate' toward 'increasing care') happens. VORP cases provide a wonderful illustration and reminder that there is a viable, redemptive alternative to "an eye for an eye."

After street light shooting spree...

Offenders exchange B.B. gun for notepad

by Carol Pryor
with Ron Claassen

Our story this month is from Carol Pryor, volunteer VORP mediator and member of Northwest Church.

This case involved two very shy twin brothers, Eric and George. One evening, they went out with a B.B. gun they had borrowed from a friend. Just for fun, they started shooting at some of the street lights near their home. Someone called the police and they were arrested for damaging two lights.

I called to set a time to meet with them. Our individual meeting went well as I explained the program. Although the boys weren't very talkative, Eric and George seemed to understand the pro-

cess, and they were willing to meet with someone to try to make things right.

Their mother spoke very little English. She was very friendly and seemed anxious to know what was going on. George translated everything to her as we went along. She was very supportive of the idea when she fully understood it.

The victim in this case was the city, who was represented by Mr. Rodman. I met with Mr. Rodman at his office one afternoon. Right away, he told me he knew about VORP and had been through the VORP process before. He said he would be happy to meet with the boys and already had some ideas for

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had to carry heavy packs and had a practice of forcing the locals to carry their packs for them. It was a practice that was degrading and very inconvenient, and it was experienced as an abusive injustice by the locals. The soldiers, on the other hand, thought it was their "right" since, after all, they were the ones with the "power." The army authorities supported the soldiers' right to the practice but also realized that this should be limited to guard against becoming "too abusive." Therefore, they imposed a limit of one mile on the distance a soldier could force a local to carry his pack.

Now, it is in this context that Jesus makes the statement, "If you are forced to carry a pack

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City official uses VORP process to teach important lesson about community

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restitution. Mr. Rodman was even willing to go to their home for the joint meeting!

Everyone agreed that after school was the best time for the joint meeting. Mr. Rodman met us at the boys' home. Introductions were made and I explained how the meeting would proceed. I also explained to that I would stop the meeting at different times so George could translate the conversation for his mother. Everyone agreed and we began our meeting.

I asked George and Eric to tell Mr. Rodman what happened that evening. They did a fine job of explaining the incident. Then Mr. Rodman asked a few questions. Next, I asked Mr. Rodman to tell the boys how the incident impacted him. He told them that neighbors get really upset with city employees when the lights don't work. It also creates a financial burden on the city because it takes a lot of employee time to check and repair all the lights damaged by vandalism. He explained that the street lights are very important because they help people in the community feel safer. George and Eric listened intently and seemed to really under-

stand now that shooting the lights had a significant impact on the community.

For restitution, they agreed the boys would walk around their neighborhood after school and note the pole number of any lights that are not working or appear to be damaged. Mr. Rodman gave them his telephone number so they could let him know the condition of the lights in their neighborhood and the numbers of the damaged light poles.

The boys reassured Mr. Rodman that the incident would not happen again. The agreement was written and signed. I reminded the boys that keeping the agreement would build trust. They seemed anxious to keep the agreement. Though they didn't say much during our meeting, I felt they learned a lot about how to work together to solve problems and about how much effort it takes to make a mistake right again. They all shook hands as they left.

I'll never forget Eric and George, their mother, and Mr. Rodman.

Thanks Carol

Blessed are the Peacemakers!

Urgent Need for VORP Mediators Continues

Please consider becoming a VORP Mediator. VORP mediators attend a nine-hour training which continues throughout the first case and thereafter as needed.

Mediators often work in pairs or with assistance as needed from VORP staff. Cases are assigned and selected based on the mediator's experience and comfort level.

Mediators provide a significant service to the community and report significant improvement in their relationship and leadership skills.

For mediators who work with three or more cases, the cost for training is only \$20 (\$100 for those who do not choose to mediate VORP cases).

The dates for the next training events are:

September 13 & 14

September 24, October 1 & 8

November 15 & 16

VORP Relies on Your Contributions!

Each month, VORP mediators share the good news of restoration with scores of crime victims and offenders. Our mediators are not paid for their hard work, but their compensation – the opportunity simply to rejoice with those who experience healing and reconciliation through VORP – has greater value than anything we could offer.

Nevertheless, for this ministry to reach our community, full-time and part-time staff are needed for volunteer training, case management, mediator support, and case follow up. Your monthly gift of \$10, \$25, or \$50 enables VORP to

maintain this structure so our volunteers can offer the possibility of reconciliation to people impacted by crime and injustice.

There are two reasons we publish this newsletter each month: to remind you of the need to support VORP with your prayers, your time, and your finances; and to give you an opportunity to join us in celebration of God's healing power.

As VORP continues to grow, we invite you once again to remember VORP in your giving, and we thank you for all you have done to make peace possible in our community.

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