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ML 295
12-4-19

Unraveling the Prison Culture

The prison system in America informs us a lot about our country's values and beliefs about the world. Our administrative rules, statutes, and case law indicate America's infatuation with retribution over rehabilitation, incapacitation over restoration, and deterrence over justice. This paper examines how America's religious beliefs influenced the prison culture and concludes that rugged individualism, institutional racism, and a distorted view of the biblical narrative justified mass incarceration and retributive justice, thus creating America's current prison culture. Overcoming this problem requires patient culture makers to challenge institutional policies as well as American culture by pointing out that retributive justice opposes rationalism, practicality, and grace.

The existence of prisons in the world assumes several things about society. First, people value safety. Second, the most modern and, presumably, the best method to accomplish this occurs through incarceration. Third, the fact that 95% of incarcerated people eventually return to the community assumes that people can be rehabilitated, redeemed, or deterred from engaging in the addictions, habits, and ways of thinking that led to their incarceration.

Prisons are religious in the sense that it shows what society values. The fact that America incarcerates more people than any other country in the world implies that it values a retributive form of justice. David Dark, in *Life's too short to pretend you're not religious*, declares, "show me your credit card, I'll show your religious convictions. What you put your energy into, you love and are compelled to continue doing."¹ America contains 5% of the world's population, yet confines 25% of the world's inmate population. Not only do we have the wealth to accomplish such a feat, but we also have the ideological underpinnings to justify such a system. America's penchant for retribution started in its foundational principles like rugged individualism, institutional racism, as well as a reverence for the biblical narrative, which includes the Mosaic law demanding eye for eye justice, that is, *Lex talionis*. Although the Mosaic law may have been superseded by the revelation of Jesus Christ, but many American Christians still endorse it as valid framework for civil authorities on a variety of issues, including the Sabbath, death penalty, and gay marriage.

According to the idea of rugged individualism, people are the authors of their destiny, and receive sole responsibility for their actions. This contrasts with behaviorism, which recognizes that biological, sociological, and psychological forces affect people's behavior, as opposed to being the sole product of one's free will.² Therefore, those who focus on agency find criminals and addicts culpable regardless of the circumstances, and thus, worthy of longer sentences. Thus, the number of people incarcerated and the time they received for the same crimes have increased dramatically over the past few decades. The primary culprits can be found in media coverage and political rhetoric. According to Carroll Bogert in "It's Time to Change the Way the media Covers Crime," violent crimes were at the lowest rate in the last 40 years, yet it remains to be the number one topic in the media.³ Therefore, it should not surprise us that people who watch television news everyday are 16 percent more likely to support punitive criminal justice policies.

¹ Pg. 50.

² Mooney, Linda A., David Knox & Caroline Schacht. (2015). *Understanding Social Problems 9th ed.* 129. (Cengage Learning). (Emphasis added).

³ Carroll Bogert, *Its Time to Change the way the Media Covers Crime*, (The Marshall Project, MICURE 2019).

The biggest change in America's criminal justice system over this period came about through Ronald Regan's war on drugs. Politicians played on stereotypes like the "criminal black man" to justify targeting African American communities by conversing about "gang bangers, welfare queens, and crack babies."⁴ Despite the fact that whites are just as likely to use and sell drugs, police forces continue to spend most of their resources in African American communities. Although white Americans are becoming aware of this injustice, many of them do not accept the idea of institutional racism. However, institutional racism is difficult to dispute, as statistics indicate that most of the people incarcerated for drug offenses are black or brown, despite that fact that whites are just as likely to use or sell drugs.⁵ Therefore, the existence of institutional racism implies that retributive justice primarily affect minorities.

While Whites and/or Christians accept retributive theory under the guise of *Lex talionis* or negative stereotypes, Europeans have taken a much kinder approach to drug abusers, as well as criminals in general. In return, they enjoy lower recidivism rates, a lower crime rates and much smaller prison population. For example, Norway has a 20% recidivism rate compared to the 60-70% average that that United Kingdom's and America's tough on crime approaches create.⁶ Someone might say that we reap what we sow.

While America can afford to essentially warehouse over 2,000,000 people, aging prison populations and out of control health care costs reduce the amount of money the state can spend per person on expenses such as food and clothing as well as correctional officer (CO) salaries. With decreasing resources, tensions rise among COs and prisoners. The groups essentially blame each other for their problems. Not only does retributive theology justify cutting off comforts from prisoners, it encourages officers to take on the duty of punishing prisoners by harassing them and writing them false tickets. Some justify this by believing that they are protecting society by keeping bad people incarcerated. Thus, the retributive mindset overwhelms all other goals of incarceration, including rehabilitation, because punishing people for negative behavior feels good.⁷ This only serves to perpetuate the cycle of crime.

Even without these factors, the prison environment does not facilitate positive behavior. For example, Zimbardo's Prison Experiment demonstrated that the natural power dynamic between guards and prisoners creates antagonism.⁸ When 21 students from the University of Stanford pretended to be prison guards and prisoners, they stopped the study after six days because the "prison guards" were forcing the "inmates" to clean toilets with their bare hands and smashing food into their faces.⁹ While most prisoner-guard interactions are not so extreme, this example shows that the imbalance of power can create huge issues in the absence of proper mediation. In U.S. prisons this takes place through administrators who discipline officers. However, this may only be done when conduct is extreme according to particular prison culture's standards, or if the media somehow attains proof of the conduct. Prisoners find it difficult to attain media attention because administrators can make proof of misconduct

⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, (The New Press New York 2012), 48-49, 105-107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶ Kirby, Emma Jane, "How Norway Turns Criminal into Good Neighbours," <http://www.bbc.com/news/stories-48885846>, July 7, 2019.

⁷ According to *Violence*, aired on PBS on 11-22-19, attaining revenge activates the amygdala, and even children as young as three months preferred people who punished those who have misbehaved.

⁸ Upton, Candace L. (2009). "Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate." *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3, Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate (Springer). 103-115, 105-106.

⁹ *Ibid.*

disappear, some prisoners have made false reports in the past, and prisoners do not have money to pay attorneys who would bring credibility to their case.

While administrative rules sometimes resolve issues between prisoners and COs, they create problems as well. For example, in order to reduce smuggling, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) created a policy to remove prisoners from a facility when they seem too friendly with officers. Often called "overfamiliarity," this doctrine has been unreasonably carried out to such an extent that they prevent prisoners and COs from interacting through normal activities like sports, recreational events, or friendly conversation. The fact that most prisoner-guard interactions remain negative places prisoners and COs in an "*us versus them*" stance. This creates anger and bitterness among both groups, as well as a lens through which everything "the other" does is interpreted as some intentional act of hostility, when said action may simply be a normal response to the prison environment. For instance, prison administrators must maintain their authority in regulating some behavior, as the environment would become very dangerous for everyone if they were to completely withdraw.

Despite necessities of security, it is the most over-used excuse to treat prisoners poorly. To ensure that no one gets too large of a head start during an escape attempt, inmates are locked down for count anywhere from five to twenty times a day, depending on which facility they are being housed. These counts can last fifteen minutes to four hours. When locked in a room without a toilet, the only way to get the officer's attention to allow the inmate to use the bathroom is to pound on the door. Since officers usually ignore this, prisoners regularly pee in coffee bags (we often see these on the ground outside the units). Furthermore, benign situations disrupt normal facility operations. At MTU, administrators shut down the entire facility when an ambulance arrives on the premises, something that no other prison does in the state.¹⁰ These organizational habits are based on the doctrine of retribution, as administrators will use any means to justify in their own minds to reduce the privileges of prisoners.

Many politicians, as well as the American public, decry the benefits of what prisoners receive, from "three hots and a cot" to "free" cable (despite the fact the prisoners themselves pay for the latter through the prisoner benefit fund [PBF] that taxes most prisoner purchases). Prison administrators respond by cutting the total amount of money spent on meals per prisoner per day to less than \$2. Meal quality may be poor because lack of resources, but more so because prisoner workers who are paid pennies have no incentive to do a decent job (like cleaning potatoes of grit before cooking), and food stewards do not hold them accountable for even the most blatant of health code violations, including dropping trays on the floor and continuing to use them to serve the prison population. Furthermore, some COs harass inmates while they are eating, even forcing some to eat their meals in less than 10 minutes, despite the fact that MDOC policy states that they have 25 minutes. Officers also agitate prisoners through ruthless shakedowns, leaving rooms with clothes and books on the floor. They also fan the flames of resentment among prisoners by punishing all of them for the actions of one person. For example, the MDOC took prisoner visiting clothes because a staff member mistakenly identified a prisoner as a visitor and asked him to leave the facility.¹¹ Instead of overreacting to incidents, administrators need to take in consideration what is most effective for the entire system when creating policy. Failing to do so finds its roots in the retributive mindset, as anything that appears beneficial for prisoners is subject to being taken at the drop of a hat.

¹⁰ At least, as far as my 12 years of experience indicates.

¹¹ Interestingly enough, it was the prisoner that notified the officer of his mistake.

Like any oppressive regime, the MDOC attempts to use the results of their system to justify their system. For example, in that they use recidivism rates as well as an aging and growing prison population to convince legislators to build more prisons, create harsher laws and increase the MDOC's budget. However, if the MDOC was releasing lifers, the least dangerous prisoners, money would not be an issue.

MDOC administrators also justify the oppression they impose on prisoners by displaying the level of violence prisoners sometimes engage in as a response to that very oppression. They create a climate in which people feel like everyone must break the law simply to survive. As Andy Crouch in *Culture Making* notes, "History is written by the winners," where "the survivors get to write the stories of how culture changed."¹² Nonviolent protests are often met with violence, which unsurprisingly leads prisoners to start destroying property. I personally saw what led to the riot at Kinross in 2016. The prisoners' complaints included poor food, one microwave per 180 people, and new living arrangements that included 8 men living in a 30'x30' open dorm cube. After several nonviolent marches around the compound, prison staff raided the place with an emergency response team firing off pepper balls, so the prisoners began burning and destroying property. Many prisoners suspect administrators and COs intentionally create hostile living conditions¹³ to encourage violence because it justifies the need to have prisons and to increase prison guard wages. I used to frown on this idea, but experience has shown that the retributive mindset helps people to justify all types of behavior. Furthermore, administrators and officers carry the brunt of the blame for a negative prison culture, as they have the most power to change it, as I will show below.

Crouch states that power is "the ability to successfully propose a new cultural good."¹⁴ Prison administrators have incredible power to propose changes in the prison culture, as prisoners are completely dependent on the prison for their food, clothes, medical care, etc. Furthermore, their power to shape the environment's rules and conditions can be seen in how the same state can produce different prison environments, as wardens are given broad discretion in how they run their facilities. Upon moving from C-Unit to A-ward within the same facility (RMI), or even Kinross (KCF) to Hiawatha, in which the prisoners and administrators were the exact same individuals, I noticed the behavior, energy, and very atmosphere differed radically. In RMI, people consistently yelled day and night, fought on a regular basis, shot off warning shots, etc. in level four. However, prisoners in A-ward were relatively free to enjoy the privilege of using the shower, microwave, and TV room pretty much whenever they wanted. In response, the prisoners were quiet and well-behaved.

Power is "deeply and absolutely dependent on the nature of the particular public we find ourselves among."¹⁵ In the MDOC, parole agents have the ability to grant or deny the release of inmates, as the courts have empowered them through the use of long-term and mandatory minimum sentences. Any conduct that they deem inappropriate justifies their decision, including a prisoner's original crime. Administrators use this power to coerce inmates to accept arduous rules and inhumane living conditions. While only parole boards and judges may make the final decision, any official in the MDOC can write a bad report that almost guarantees a parole denial. However, this does not guarantee good behavior. No one has the power to *impose* a cultural good

¹² Crouch, 193.

¹³ Some even brag about how they started a fight with an inmate so that they could get a paid vacation.

¹⁴ Crouch, 219.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

(or behavior), as others can accept or reject them. Therefore, cultural goods “reshape the world in unpredictable ways.”¹⁶

In response to America’s retributive culture, prisoners form subcultures. Research indicates that police forces who seek to enforce unnecessary rules and dominate situations by force often escalate problems, create resentment, weaken police legitimacy, and undermine voluntary compliance with the law.¹⁷ In some prisons regular operations include 23 hours of no-movement per day and officers consistently fire off warning shots out of gun towers to stop “conventional” fist fights. In prison, people respond to oppressive conditions and authorities by engaging in anger, bitterness, drugs, gangs, and other illegal activities. People develop anti-authoritarian and anti-social philosophies like, “don’t snitch,” to encourage each other to take care of their problems through their own means, implying we do not need the interference of authorities. Gangs are created to develop relationships in which people can trust others to protect and support them even if the world falls apart around them. Gangs also demonstrate a desire to attain a unity and comradery among prisoners to stand against the powers that be.

Prisoners also respond to incarceration by developing an honor culture. According to Charles Stangor, an honor culture is “[t]he social norm that condones and even encourages responding to insults with aggression.”¹⁸ Prison conditions magnify people’s actions, thus making privacy and respect highly esteemed values. Consequently, people interpret even mundane, unintentional actions as forms of disrespect. When combined with the stress manifested from living in a retributive environment without power, people find it easy to justify violence. For example, some people become very hostile when their bunkie has a serious case of flatulence, even if the bunkie cannot leave because the cell is administratively locked down. Disenfranchised people are more likely to utilize violence because it is the only form of influence that seems to attain results. However, this honor culture accomplishes some positive outcomes by making many people (but far from enough) mindful of how their actions affect one other. While respect is a highly touted cultural belief, it is all too often trampled. More often than not, this is the result of obliviousness in overcrowded areas.

The retributive model also leads to idleness. Prisoners and COs experience different forms of death such as boredom, isolation, stagnation, idleness, limited access to recreational activities, as well as opportunities to engage in meaningful projects. While inmates have little wealth, their endeavors are primarily circumscribed by prison officials, who highly restrict what materials and physical spaces prisoners can use, sometimes arbitrarily. For example, many prisoners are willing to facilitate educational classes, but administrators deny such requests without much explanation, despite the fact that the class will not cost the state a penny, the school building has plenty of empty rooms, and staff simply needs to keep track of people through the electronic callout system. These restrictions prevent people from carrying out their calling to make “something of the world” in which they find themselves.¹⁹ Doing anything positive in prison often feels like it takes an act of Congress, from purchasing books, sending out cards through the mail, attaining chairs (instead of stools) for our rooms, sending money to a charity, etc. Therefore, most prisoners engage in idle activities simply to zone out of their

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Stephen J. Schulhofer, Tom R. Tyler and Aziz Z. Huq, “American Policing at a Crossroads: Unsustainable Policies and the Procedural Justice Alternative,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (2011), Vol. 101, No. 2. Northwestern University School of Law, pp. 335-374, 344, 351.

¹⁸ *Introduction to Psychology* (2011), 828.

¹⁹ Crouch, 23.

problems and pass the time. While games can be good in moderation, playing cards all day, every day, creates stagnation and boredom, which amounts to a sort of repetitive death.

Contrary to what the average prisoner feels about prison, the culture here has a variety of positive aspects. Perhaps the two best aspects of prison culture are that it encourages inmates to engage in exercise and education. Most of the general public are aware that prisoners like to exercise. However, contrary to pop culture, this is not for protection, at least not primarily. Inmates exercise for their mental well-being, in part because exercise *feels* like a productive activity. People were made to create things, and since prison takes away many opportunities to do so, inmates take exercise more seriously than people in the free world.

Prisoners can grow their power through education. Some attain positions as tutors to empower others. Others utilize their education to file lawsuits challenging their prison conditions or motions to attain their freedom, write letters to legislators to encourage criminal justice reform, or write grievances about violations of policy relating to the prison environment (which are usually ignored). Education not only gives these prisoners credibility, but it also makes their pleadings more effective, as many prisoners can barely write. The latter makes it easy for authorities to ignore prisoner complaints.

The education prisoners can attain, however, is strongly circumscribed by prison administrators in the form of limited book vendors, banned books lists (which often contain books that the MDOC has in its prison libraries or uses them to teach in state sponsored classes), and a refusal to allow educated prisoners to facilitate classes for others. For example, several Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) students facilitated several classes, including Basic Math, Algebra, Geometry, Moral Formation, Study Skills, and the Employment Workshop to help vocational student attain employment readiness. These programs were disbanded as soon as employment counselor Fults transferred because the subsequent administrator refused to continue the program. I am unsure as to whether this was because he wanted to reduce his workload, or if he simply believed philosophically that prisoners should not be teaching.

This program termination demonstrates that the spirit of retributive justice is neither practical nor rational. The Rand Corporation's MetaAnalysis (spanning 32 years of research) on the effectiveness of correctional education has demonstrated that education reduces recidivism rates by 43%, thereby saving taxpayers the cost of re-incarceration and fostering public safety by preventing people from committing future crimes. However, lawmakers with a retributive mindset eliminated Pell grants from prisoners in the early 1990s, something that has been only partly reinstated recently.

Many prisoners seek education because it is one of the primary ways that prisoners can attain more power. While Crouch states that people should not seek to attain power,²⁰ I would modify this belief that people should not do this solely for their own benefit. In contrast, people like to share their knowledge and experience. They want to help others feel the joy of coming to new a understanding, and "[n]o one awakens all by themselves."²¹

Aside of education, many prisoners engage in hobbies that they would not be able to balance with work if they were free. Often, this is a way to deal with stress and boredom. Many people learn to play chess, pool, and cards as well as taking reading more seriously. Others earn college degrees, teach themselves how to practice law, knit, draw, paint, and train dogs. Prisons give people a break from the hustle and bustle of everyday life in order to reeducate, rehabilitate, and redeem themselves from the sociological, psychological, and biological (addiction) problems

²⁰ pp. 235.

²¹ Dark, 15.

that led them to their crimes. If, that is, they engage in the transformative process. Prison allows people to take a break from the rat race of life and to ponder how their actions affected their families. Although they may turn from their criminal lifestyle while in prison, many struggle to live a productive life in the free world because freedom allows their addictions to be easily satisfied. In contrast, prison administrators and other inmates hold them accountable while they are incarcerated. For example, stealing from other inmates will sometimes result in serious repercussions.

People of a certain age in American society find making friends difficult, preferring rather to stick to the same churches, friends and jobs they had in the past. In contrast, prison requires people to create new relationships because administrators regularly transfer prisoners around the state, often without much notice or reason. Not only do people need to simply know their neighbor, roommates, etc., they are also motivated to seek help spiritually, or with concrete problems, like not having any food, or how to write a legal pleading. In Michigan prisons, the state allows a vendor to provide store goods to prisoners every one to two weeks. Since food is not simply a 10-minute drive away, and one can only keep so certain types of food in his locker without being tempted to gorge himself, the service of "store men," or prisoners who loan out food for interest, become a valuable service.

Aside from promoting friendship, prison culture also creates forced diversity. Inmates are exposed to different types of cultures, including people with different values, languages, food, race, environmental backgrounds, and religious beliefs (in the normal sense of the word). Racial tensions are a side effect of this, as some people from the country have biases against African Americans, and others from larger cities have biases against whites. However, according to the contact hypothesis, people who regularly interact with one another tend to become less biased. Prison compels people to deal with these issues, whereas Americans in the broader culture can ignore them by choosing to primarily deal with people of the same race/ethnicity.

While the proximity of people in prison encourages the association of people, the instability created by administrative policies makes many of those relationships shallow. For instance, parolees are prevented from interacting with one another or from contacting any ex-felon, which prevents them from visiting the friends they made in prison. Furthermore, prisoners can be sent to the other side of the state at a moment's notice for "bed space." Michigan prisoners are not allowed to write other prisoners in Michigan, thus destroying more relationships, and making prisoners, surrounded by other people, feel alone.

Although prison culture does not always promote positive relationships, few doubt that penitentiary institutions produce creativity. The inability to buy many of the comforts people see in society motivates people to make things like coat hooks out of popsicle sticks, or shelves out of cardboard. This creativity also trickles down to academic studies and religious beliefs. The lack of options for recreational activities, as well as having plenty of time, encourages people to engage in religious reflection and services. They are more likely than Christians in the world to read scripture, know their denomination's beliefs, and challenge those beliefs, often looking for what others say about scripture.

Granting that the prison culture has some positive aspects, the majority of the evidence indicates that America's retributive model of justice opposes rationalism and practicality. The prison culture creates hostility and violence, which undermines all of the goals of incarceration except retribution, including incapacitation and rehabilitation. Focusing on retribution undermines rehabilitation because the people who commit violent crimes often do so under arduous circumstances. Furthermore, authorities lose legitimacy when they create arbitrary and

unnecessary rules, as it destroys inmates' belief that they are worthy of trust and respect.²² Therefore, they are much less likely to voluntarily follow the rules,²³ and there is no reason to believe that prisoners will not take these antisocial values with them when they are released.

Negative conditions of confinement are not the only illogical aspect of America's criminal justice system; Professor Lackey of Northwestern University also argues that strict (not open to revision) long-term prison sentences are irrational. Punishment ought to be sensitive to the relevant evidence available to decision makers before *and* after sentencing, not just to factors during the crime. If an offender's mental state changes after his or her initial sentencing, and we know everyone changes overtime or through significant events, then their sentence should be adjusted accordingly. Since American jurisprudence prevents this except in the unique event of clemency, then America's criminal justice is irrational. Furthermore, harsh conditions and strict, long-term sentences undermine incapacitation, as people who have no hope of obtaining their freedom are more likely to attempt an escape.

Not only does retribution theory contradict rationalism, it also runs contrary to the grace of God. While incarceration itself is necessary to protect the community, seeking excessive sentences in poor conditions of confinement indicates a desire to attain revenge that Jesus forbade. Conversely, allowing people the chance to change indicates an understanding that everyone has done something that they are ashamed of, and given time, most people recognize their errors and change. Prison originally started as a Christian institution to provide a place for sinners to repent instead of utilizing barbaric forms of corporeal punishment. This institution needs to be redeemed from the powers that have made it into a pursuit for profit. The only "positive" thing that retributive theory accomplishes relates to some kind of balancing the metaphysical scales of justice. Therefore, retributive theory contradicts practical wisdom, rationalism and grace.

Despite the obstacles of changing prison culture, I have hope that the U.S. prison system will one day become focused on rehabilitation rather than retribution. Within the last 20 years, America's perception on how they should treat prisoners has drastically changed. Across the country, the powers that be have altered statutes and case law regarding expungement, mandatory minimums, and juveniles. Today, criminal justice reform is one of the only bipartisan issues that the legislators agree on. Additionally, the Christian Church is embracing restorative justice. Academics teach college students the immorality of institutional racism and the effects of the environment on human behavior. When both the Church and academics work together, great things can occur. The culmination of these efforts resulted in CPI, a privately funded program that offers free college scholarships to prisoners.

CPI embraces Dark's idea of witness, acting *witness*, grappling with the same problems inmates see and giving them access to a vision they could not have in isolation.²⁴ Inmates cannot imagine changing the prison culture on their own, as they need the power and social capital to change the powers that be and institute the programs, activities, etc. necessary to change prisoners. However, CPI also could not accomplish this without prisoners as "boots on the ground" either. In response to CPI's gift students feel compelled to.

CPI seeks to change prisoners in order to change the prison culture. After almost 5 years at MTU, Administrators use statistics, such as how much the violence has been reduced, to show that the programs are working. However, this is misleading, as the culture essentially changed

²² Schulhofer, et al., 344.

²³ Ibid., 347.

²⁴ Dark, 88.

overnight when administrators transferred a bunch of knuckleheads to another facility, transferred in upstanding nonviolent prisoners, and gave them incentive to put up with all of the garbage that MTU has used to controlled prisoners for the past 50 years. However, the things prison administrators and COs regularly do aggravate people intentionally and unintentionally, and a slow anger is boiling below the surface. In this environment, it should not surprise anyone when a prisoner explodes seemingly out of nowhere or attempts to take his life. Therefore, CPI changes within the prison culture have been most prevalent when it has moved the administration to treat prisoners differently, such as allowing them to have laptops.

The scale on which culture making occurs ranges from as little as two people to the world's population.²⁵ While CPI helps about a 100 prisoners at any one time, the average prisoner may influence a few dozen people a day. However, policies affect almost 40,000 people a day, and the power behind these often result in absolute dictation. Unless those in power seriously consider the arguments of academics and the complaints of incarcerated people, no radical change will take place. People cannot flourish under oppressive rules or life sentences.

According to Professor Lackey, the best way to facilitate criminal justice reform is to convince the public about the wisdom of it.²⁶ I personally like to advocate for this change by writing articles for newspapers and creating proposals for legislators. However, I have had limited success, partly because I do not have the necessary connections. After I am finished with my Calvin University degree, I plan to social network using my new connections to attain a writing advisor to help improve my articles and to coordinate my interactions with publishers in newspapers. Perhaps one of the best ways I can combat America's religion of retributive justice is by promoting restorative justice in churches. I plan to address this problem as well as the others I have seen in the system by writing the book *How to Fix America*. I am afraid that my 22 to 52-year sentence has launched an obsession that will last the rest of my life.

The spirit of my ministry follows that of Jeremiah 29:4-7, where God commands the Israelites to wholeheartedly serve Babylon, the city that destroyed their country and enslaved them. Likewise, inmates must buy into the notion that they should be working to improve their environment as well as the system itself. However, the administration and officers must begin this by first communicating their desire to attain prisoner input on how the facility should be run, and then implementing many of the suggestions that do not compromise the prison's security. While at first this seems impossible, all things are possible with God. He is at work lowering the high places and raising the low places.²⁷ However, "...any change that will profoundly move the horizons of possibility and impossibility will almost always, by definition, take lots of time."²⁸

²⁵ Crouch, 45.

²⁶ Discussion at MTU on 11-20-19.

²⁷ Crouch 212?

²⁸ Crouch 56

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