

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF CRIME - A VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE

**TEXT OF A PRESENTATION TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
ALBERTA CRIMINAL JUSTICE ASSOCIATION, AT RED DEER COLLEGE,
ALBERTA, MAY 26TH, 1994, BY J. MARTIN HATTERSLEY, Q.C.,
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[BIOGRAPHY

Martin Hattersley was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1932. In 1956, after graduating in Economics and Law from Cambridge University in England, he emigrated to join his family in Edmonton, and practiced law in association with Milner, Steer & Company. Between 1962 and 1964 he served on the staff of the House of Commons as Personal Secretary to Robert Thompson. M.P., then National Leader of the Social Credit Association of Canada, and has himself served as President and National Leader of the Social Credit Party of Canada. He is now senior partner of the law firm of Hattersley and Perry in Edmonton, and is a past Vice-President of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. He also serves as a priest "in secular employment" of the Anglican Church of Canada.

On August 3rd, 1988, his life was radically changed as a result of the murder of his eldest daughter, Catherine Rose Greeve. Since that time, he has become deeply involved in matters relating to the rehabilitation of those involved in crime: he is a graduate of the "Alternatives to Violence" program: he is a Director of the Alberta Long Term Offenders Foundation, and leads the visitation program of Prison Fellowship at the Edmonton Institution.]

[SYNOPSIS

The impact of serious crime on a victim is shattering, and extends far beyond mere physical or financial injury. Recovery of the victim's trust in the world and his or her mental stability is a demanding process, involving a deepening of theological outlook in addition to conventional psychological therapy. When we consider that a vast proportion of the criminal population has itself been the victim of (often unacknowledged) crime in childhood, we might well conclude that the techniques needed to stabilize the victims of crime are also applicable to the effective rehabilitation of the criminal population.]

Introductory

I would like to start by thanking the Alberta Criminal Justice Association for the honour of being asked to address this conference. At a time when it seems that hysteria and public ignorance on the subject of crime and punishment are being continually and ignorantly fanned by politicians and the media, it is indeed refreshing to be among a group of people who are not simply looking to find a scapegoat, but are really interested in developing effective social policies to deal with the eternal problem of crime. There are times when it seems to me that dinosaurs are not buried very far below the soil of the Province of Alberta: it is a pleasure and a relief to meet people here who are of a more modern frame of

mind!

The Victim's Point of View

My task tonight is to picture crime to you from the victim's point of view. I come to you with a rather strange set of qualifications. As a lawyer, I am familiar with the criminal justice system, and studied some criminology for my LL.B. degree. As an ex-politician, I know that justice issues can be some of the most inflammatory and ill informed questions that the public and politicians have to deal with. As an economist and a member of the Chamber of Commerce, I am thoroughly aware of the profitable business implications of expanding the justice and corrections industry, which can easily be done by creating public fear and hysteria: one only has to look southwards into the United States to see what a help it can be to full employment, at a time when peace with former bogeyman Russia has dealt such a blow to the business of National Defence. As a priest, I have had my share of difficult funerals to take, in cases of sudden and unexpected children's death. But I suppose the prime qualification I have is one that I wish had never come to me - to be the father of the Catherine Rose Greeve who was the victim of a homicide in a washroom at the Churchill L.R.T. station in Edmonton, on August 3rd 1988. And it is from the victim's point of view that I would like to speak to you this evening.

Can I start with a quotation from a book, "Men and Grief", by Carol Staudacher. Her words are as follows:

"Surviving the loss of a murdered child is one of the cruelest tests of human endurance and sanity a parent can experience. To remain sane and alive under such circumstances is an accomplishment."

The figures she quotes, of the percentages of families which disintegrate, of close relatives and siblings who have permanent mental problems as a result of a murder, bear witness to what she says. Sudden death is hard enough to bear, but here there is a special addition of horror and almost of contamination, that any human being could be so cruelly and shamefully treated. Add to this also, a sense of devastation and waste over "what might have been", that never, ever, passes away as the years go by.

Unless people themselves have had a similar experience, they are unlikely to be able to understand how far these consequences of crime extend. When there is a murder within a family, we obviously start from the fact that there is a sudden and unexpected death, with all the grief and loss that that entails. But that is just a beginning. If the murder is unsolved, then there is the question of the identity and the motive of the criminal. Will there be a repeat offence? Are other members of the family in danger? Is it possible that the murderer himself is one of our circle of friends and acquaintances? So whom can we trust? Every friendship, every relationship that we have, is threatened. There is the sheer economic cost of this death - the expense of the funeral, of travel for relatives, of loss of the income of the person killed. One's own business ability and mental functioning are impaired by the impact of grief: we may no longer be competent to carry out our daily work. There is the cost of counselling, and bad counselling not only costs money, it can do devastating harm as well. Many people dissociate themselves from the victims of misfortune as if it were contagious. This has a real impact on our morale and our feelings, but also in dollars and cents, particularly for someone in business for himself. There is the impact of the media, those self appointed guardians of the public's "right to know", which gives them the right in their own eyes to pry into and publicize every detail of our tragedy, to invade our homes with their cameras, to ask us to disclose our most intimate feelings in public, to speculate on the name of the offender - sometimes in a very hurtful way. Those who are accustomed to being in the public eye usually have built up channels and defences against this type of pressure. The poor victim of

crime, who never anticipated what was about to happen, suddenly finds himself or herself without any preparation or experience, thrust into the public spotlight to talk about questions and emotions and political issues that his or her mind is totally unprepared to deal with, knowing full well that whatever is said is likely to fill the front pages or the evening news, whether they like it or not.

Beyond that, the victim has the problem of cooperating with the police investigating the crime. That means statements, reconstructing painful memories, going through lists of friends and acquaintances to consider all of them in the light of possible murderers. It means identifying the body, in whatever mangled state it may be. It may mean being a suspect, and facing endless hours of questioning and possibly heavy legal expenses before suspicion is removed. It means involvement in the court process, with all its tedious delays and procedural wrangles - and the emotional trauma we suffer, when suddenly the whole bias of the case changes, the prosecutor seems indifferent, and the victim is treated as if he or she is the malefactor by defence counsel anxious to shift the blame onto another. It means the disappointment of justice not seeming to be served, when a perpetrator "gets away with it" on some technical point, or receives a trivial sentence.

The world forgets the whole matter of a crime fairly quickly, and is surprised when the victim does not do the same - but within the family there are long term problems that cannot be swept aside. How are children to be cared for, when their mother has been suddenly snatched away? How can adequate care be provided and paid for? How can the family itself stay together, when all the times that used to be happy ones - birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, for instance - now bring up only an aching sense of what isn't there? How can members of a family relate to each other, when each has to handle his or her grief in his or her own fashion - some silent, some wanting to talk to the point of nausea - and the very faces of the different family members cause pain to each other because they carry a resemblance to the one who has been lost?

There is the problem of one's own psychology. To be the victim of crime is a tremendous emotional blow. We, who up until now have gone through life with a degree of self confidence, have now found that we are vulnerable. One of the results of this is that we become immensely sensitive and suggestible. The least kindness to us from others is received with enormous gratitude. On the other hand, the least hint from anyone that slights the immensity of a loss that is never far from the forefront of our thoughts, fills us with either depression or anger. Our normal responses to the normal challenges of life are dulled, so that (to the amazement of others who cannot understand why we can't 'snap out of it'), we easily sink into a powerless mood of despair, over what in happier times would seem to be trivialities.

Responses to Grief

When she writes on the subject of dying, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identifies five responses of grief at the approach of death. These can also be seen in our response to the loss we have received from crime.

The first response is Indifference. We are so numbed by the tragedy that we don't really take it in. We may know the facts intellectually, and think we are coping very well, but it may literally be months before the emotional impact takes hold. This is a defence mechanism that helps us keep going in the hectic days that follow the tragedy - but it may well lull both victims and onlookers into thinking that life is ready to resume normally for us, far sooner that is actually the case.

A second response is that of anger. Perhaps anger is too mild a word. It can be described better as raging fury. It can be directed against rational objects - the criminal, the police, the justice system, for instance, though even in such cases, the intensity of the emotion is likely to be out of proportion to the fault of the offender. It can stretch much further than this, against neighbours, family members, the

church, God himself, and you will probably have noticed even from what I have said up to now, I still have a way of being quite unreasonably bitter about the Press. This anger is not necessarily evil - it provides us with the energy we need to deal with the mounting problems that have come from our victimization. It does, though, need to be directed in constructive directions, and we may need help from outside in finding out what those directions may be.

Thirdly, there is the bargaining stage. Isn't there something we can work out to stop this sort of thing from happening? So we may look into the workings of the police and the criminal law. We may organize petitions to toughen up the Young Offenders Act. We can write to newspapers and to Members of Parliament, or join organizations devoted to fighting crime. It's a useful outlet for the energy our anger provides.

Fourthly, though, there is depression. The enormity and the complete finality of our loss overwhelms us: the world looks utterly black. Everything terrifies us. We cannot make decisions. The smallest obstacle looks like a mountain. Often enough, we are on the verge of tears. Our energy has left us. The kindest and most well intentioned advice from outsiders seems like a reproach that breaks our hearts. Life seems so worthless that the best thing may seem to us to end it all. It is a dangerous state that can pour over us in waves, and may persist for years. The suicide may indeed take place - or we may kill the pain we feel instead with drugs and drink.

Finally, there is acceptance. A bit like someone who has lost a limb, we learn to make the best of a bad job and live with our scars - to carry on with what we have left. We are sadder. We are wiser. One great gift we have received is an ability that we never had before, to enter into the griefs of other suffering people, and empathize with them in the sorrows they are going through.

Coming to Acceptance

To get to this position of acceptance, therefore, we have to pierce our wall of denial: we have to control and direct our anger: we need to learn to see our situation objectively, and we have in some way to get back our courage and overcome depression.

To achieve this, I would like to venture into an area that psychologists and criminologists are very loath to enter - the area of belief and religion.

Besides our relationship with ourselves, and with our fellow humans, there is one more relationship that has been broken. That is our relationship with God. Regardless of the terms we use, I mean that unknown and perhaps unknowable factor on which we base our concept of how the Universe works, and with it, our own concept of where we fit in to it, and what purpose there is to our own lives. We may not dare to say so, but in our heart of hearts we carry a terrible secret. God has let us down. The Creator of the Universe, who has promised "never to fail us nor forsake us" has left us in a horrible mess.

In Cathy's case, here was a young woman of exemplary life, full of devotion to Christ, human sympathy and love, full of the "joy of the Lord" - and suddenly, in the middle of a working afternoon, her life is snuffed out. To the Christian of what I call the "I found Jesus and made a million dollars in real estate" variety, this was a blow that simply shattered their theology. This is what happens to any person whose religion is in fact a kind of talisman: a belief that by following some prescribed form of ritual, all the world's evils will be bypassed. Would that life were so simple!

But even if we are less plunged into religion than that, many of us have some sort of idea of a God in heaven, or a process of justice in the world, that will see that bad guys get punished and good ones come out on top. What sort of world are we in if life doesn't work out that way? What's the use of being good? Our belief that there is any justice in the Universe is sadly shaken. And if we don't blame God,

we may very well blame ourselves, seeking for some obscure religious law we may have broken, to explain the disasters that have struck us. "What have I done to deserve this?" Indeed, our 'religious' friends, like the Comforters in the biblical Book of Job, may well try to ease their own theological bewilderment by insisting on loading us with guilt over imaginary sins that are completely irrelevant to the situation.

Perhaps our view of the Universe is even more basic and non-personal. We may follow Rabbi Kushner, who in his well titled, but to me very disappointing book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" is even more dispiriting. God has nothing to do with it at all. We are simply a temporary collection of atoms formed into living cells, which has become the victim of random events. In which case, life indeed looks purposeless and grim. Perhaps most of us inwardly believe that we are worth something more than that!

Some Significant Experiences

There were three major experiences that I recall as guiding me into a new and very challenging development of my beliefs during this period.

First, there was the incredible number of strange coincidences that piled up around this event. The sermon that I preached the Sunday before, centering around the untimely death of a child of King David, on the theme "the innocent suffer". I started it with the words "Sometimes the stories in the Bible are more up-to-date than the headlines in tomorrow's newspaper." The course I had taken earlier that summer, from John and Paula Sanford, on the mentality of criminals arising from abuse in infancy. The insurance policy Cathy's Credit Union had put on the lives of its directors, of which she was one, approved at a meeting only the evening before her death. My involvement in visiting at the Edmonton Institution, that had only started the previous month, and had led to my being already slated to speak to the Prison Fellowship group there August 6th, three days after the murder. The fact that the murder itself took place on the date now set for the feast of St. Stephen, first Christian martyr. The thunderstorms in which I never seemed to get soaked - one while returning to Waterloo University from an evening seeing "Murder in the Cathedral" at Stratford, two weeks before this event. Another thundershower during the funeral. Another square and threatening cloud that came up while we were burying the ashes, and growled with thunder but never rained. And the final storm that came up as we moved the family to a new house bought in a day at a price we could afford from life insurance monies, only a hundred yards from Cathy's old school. The sense of the presence of not just Cathy, but also her friend Kate, killed in an accident two years before, as we were upstairs in the funeral home selecting a casket - it was as if they were having as much fun picking it out as a bride would have selecting her wedding dress. The meeting we had had at the beginning of the year with a cousin from Australia, whom I had not seen for over forty years: she had become a professional family therapist, and was able to come over to Canada twice thereafter with her husband, to give us most valuable courses in dealing with anger and grief. It is possible, of course, to write all such things as these off as strange coincidences. To me, they conveyed a message that there was a purpose in all that was going on, even if at the time, the purpose was hidden.

Secondly, was the passage assigned for a sermon I had to give August 14th, eleven days after the murder, at a church where I was filling in for the pastor who was on holiday. It was another story about King David. It was about how broken hearted he was when his son Absalom, who had raised a rebellion to throw David off his throne, was killed contrary to orders by David's loyal commander, Joab. David's words were "Would I had died for thee, Absalom my son." This gave me a new picture of God the father, not as a tyrant sitting on Mount Sinai and throwing thunderbolts at whom he will, but as

an incredibly Christ-like lover, so crazily caring even for his deliberate enemies that he preferred the death of his own son to their destruction.

Thirdly, a rather strange experience in the basement of our home during my morning workout, eighteen months later. Feeling myself the victim of an unexplained depression, and having been taught the connection between depression and repressed anger, I took the advice my second daughter Nancy had given me, to express my feelings by striking out in a physical way, in the hopes that the real cause of my anger would come out - a sound Bioenergetic technique. So I started shadow boxing, and before long reached a pitch of fury I had never expected. But even more unexpected was the object of my fury that came into my mind's eye. It was Jesus Christ himself. If the soldiers who flogged him before his crucifixion were not doing their job well, I would have willingly stepped in and done the job ten times over. I punched and I punched and I punched.

When I came to the end of my anger, I began to reflect on what all this was about. After a while I began to understand. It was the anger of the elder brother who resented his father welcoming home the son who had squandered half the family fortune. It was the anger of the workers who had put in a full day's work, and saw the landowner pay people who had only done a single hour's work just as much as they got. It was the anger of the rich man, who could not stand to see a poor beggar raised to the privileges of heaven ahead of him. It was the anger that drove a particular young man called Saul to zealously strive to wipe out the infant Christian church. It was the anger that all the virtuous, law abiding citizens of the world have against a God who loves sinners - and against the people, including ourselves, who try to befriend them.

I really cannot tell you whether the conclusions I have come to are correct or not. I can only say that from all of this, I found that it is possible in my mind to understand the meaning of the Universe, and of our place in it whether as 'good guys', criminals or victims, in terms of a God who loves every part of the universe he has made, who wants people freely to accept him for his goodness, and has deliberately created a world in which evil can exist, so that we can recognize the goodness of the good against a background of the evil, and choose the former in preference to the latter. In such a Universe, everyone has his purpose. Even the worst of us can serve as horrible examples! Perhaps strange. Perhaps unwelcome. Possibly overpowering. But at least rational. And so I became reconciled with the idea that, whether I liked it or not, I was dealing with a world where the power in charge had such a concern for the sinners and the underdogs, that he was prepared to suffer to the point of death to give them a break - and expected all the 'good guys' in the world to do the same. That insight is what still motivates to me to stay close to the prison ministry.

Dealing with the Perpetrator

Now I have gone on at some length about this concept of restoring relationships as victims, because I believe it is also key to our handling of the question of criminal rehabilitation. More and more, we are beginning to realize the connection between defective early childhood upbringing and criminal behaviour, so the last topic I would like to bring up is that of the criminal as victim. Can we adopt the psychological approach that we need to stabilize ourselves as victims, to also help the criminal turn his own life around? After all, in the criminals we see, we find precisely the same attitudes of indifference, furious anger, manipulation and depression that we have encountered within ourselves as victims, and that Kubler-Ross describes. Is it not possible that this is connected to the loss, victimization and mistreatment that offenders have suffered in their own lives?

Claude Steiner, in his book "Scripts People Live" describes three life patterns that develop as the result of abuse in early childhood - the mindless script, when the child's ability to understand and reason is

undermined: the joyless script, connected with drug use, alcoholism and suicide, when a child is not allowed to be aware of his feelings: the failure script, where the child becomes convinced that he is powerless to succeed at anything. Most of our criminals rate heavily in all these three directions. Alice Miller, in her book "For Your Own Good", gives a most powerful account of the childhood abuse that lay behind the infamous career of Adolf Hitler, and the Dutch serial child killer, Jurgen Barch. Childhood abuse, especially if the abused person is in some way denied the opportunity of expressing genuine feelings about that abuse, is a key element in the compulsive and self-destructive behaviour that lies behind so much of our crime. What is so terrible about it all is the way in which an abusive, legalistic, punitive element gets laid down in the personality of the abused child, and gets passed down from generation to generation, leading to a chain of failure, frustration and unhappiness. Nowhere is that punitive attitude, and that frustration and unhappiness, more prevalent - and more destructive - than in our jails, not only among the guards, but also among the inmates themselves.

Crime is the problem, not just of criminals, but of all humanity. Instead of regarding criminals as alien monsters, therefore, can we not treat our offenders as damaged personalities: victims themselves, who need all the support we can give them to overcome hurts they may not even know that they have? It is possible for victims to recover - and part of the process is to get a new vision of their own worth, and how and why they fit in to the world they live in. Success is possible. I referred earlier to the case of a young man Saul - later to become Saint Paul - a legalistic serial murderer with a personality profile that at one time was not unlike that of Jack the Ripper or many "hang them high" religious fanatics. A touch of the power of God gave him a sudden change of understanding on the road to Damascus, and led to an entire change of personality in a very positive direction. As the major theologian of the early church, a key element in his teaching was the importance of avoiding legalism in order to lead a life of freedom and self control. We cannot deal with our problems of behaviour, unless we get away from the stifling legalistic framework that binds us: this horrible 'us' and 'them' mentality, that differentiates the 'good' folks from the 'bad', and instead learn to 'walk in the spirit'. I sometimes think that even the organized church is slow to get this message, let alone the public and the politicians. The fact that 'all have sinned', and 'there, but for the grace of God, go I' may be on our lips, but it is not a message that everyone takes to heart.

Conclusion

So may I end by expressing my appreciation to all of you at this conference, who in one way or another have received this message of concern and healing both for the offender and the victim. There are plenty of unthinking people in the world who will criticize you for neglecting the law and punishment that offenders deserve, and for being entirely too soft on crime and criminals. But we know that the secret of reconciliation in the world does not come from legalism. It comes from forgiveness and from love.

(c) May 1994: J.M.Hattersley (jmartinh@shaw.ca)