



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

Study Guides for

Patterns of Violence

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to examine some salient patterns of violence in the world and our prurient voyeurism of them, and to propose better responses to them for congregations. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

The Myth of Religious Violence 2

The idea that “religion” is peculiarly prone to violence is not based in fact, but is an ideological justification for the dominance of secular social orders, which can and do inspire violence. The myth of religious violence leads us to turn a blind eye to the causes of non-Western grievances against the Western world.

The End of Scapegoating 4

The cross can only be understood in light of a prototypical pattern of violence in human culture: scapegoating sacrifice. The biblical tradition and the passion accounts are themselves momentous steps in bringing that pattern to light, and rejecting it.

Christian Courage in a Violent World 6

The kind of courage that Christians living in relatively secure circumstances are likely to need these days is courage in honoring moral prohibitions. Certain kinds of acts are simply prohibited, regardless of the consequences that anyone might hope to gain by doing them.

Recovering from Moral Injury 8

When combat veterans and others affected by violence suffer moral injury, they can experience personal shame and estrangement from fellow human beings and God. The challenging task of making integrated peace requires faithful, patient, loving participation by communities of faith.

Consuming Violence 10

We are tempted to be voyeurs of violence, dangerously drinking it in as entertainment. Or we turn away instead to sentimentalized distractions, which promise to be safer and proclaim our moral superiority. Neither represents a cross-shaped response to the violence in our culture.

Responding to Violence 12

Victims of violence frequently turn to spiritual leaders and lay congregation members for refuge and support. How can faith communities respond in an appropriate and effective manner?



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

- 📖 Religion, Violence, Nonsense, and Power
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 11-19)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 American Religions and War
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 81-86)
- 📖 What Kind of Religion Is Safe for Society?
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 87-93)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

The Myth of Religious Violence

The idea that “religion” is peculiarly prone to violence is not based in fact, but is an ideological justification for the dominance of secular social orders, which can and do inspire violence. The myth of religious violence leads us to turn a blind eye to the causes of non-Western grievances against the Western world.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: James 4:1-3

Reflection

“People can and do commit violence in the name of God,” William Cavanaugh admits. Confessing this is a step toward a more humble faith. But he challenges the stronger claim that there is something called “religion” that is more likely to cause violence than what is not religion. Seeing through that “myth” is a step toward a more accurate understanding of violence in our world.

Cavanaugh outlines three reasons to be suspicious of the idea that religion is peculiarly prone to violence.

- ▶ *The distinction between “religious” and “secular” is too unstable.* The “myth” is supported in this way: religious and secular things (that is, beliefs, institutions, causes) can be easily distinguished, and the religious ones are more violent because they are absolutist, divisive, and non-rational. When counter-examples to this line of thinking are raised—e.g., most wars and exterminations are spawned by nationalism, totalitarianism, ethnic rivalry, control of resources and markets, atheist ideologies, and other “secular” causes—some curious fudging occurs. Some religion-and-violence theorists simply reclassify the entire offending cause as “religious,” or say whatever is violent about it is “religious.” Others enlarge the idea of “religion” to include whatever they want: “not only Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and the like, but also consumerism, secular humanism, football fanaticism, faith in technology, and a host of other ideologies and practices.”
- ▶ *The religious/secular distinction has a checkered past.* Historians do not find “religion” in ancient Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese societies. In medieval Europe the terms identify two sorts of priests. By the late seventeenth century, they are used in European nation-states to “exclude ecclesiastical authority from certain types of public power. Religion...was invented as a universal and essentially interior impulse, completely distinct from the mundane business of politics and economics,” Cavanaugh notes. As these states colonized the world, they used the religious/secular distinction “to fit the locals’ cultural systems—even those without gods, like Theravada Buddhism and Confucianism—into taxonomies of ‘world religions,’ despite resistance from native elites.” Thus, in India “to make Hinduism a religion was to take everything it meant to be Indian and confine it to a non-public sphere; to be public meant to be British.”
- ▶ *The distinction continues to mask acts of power.* “Where the line gets drawn between religious and secular” depends “on what kinds of power one wants to authorize and what kinds one wants to exclude.” For instance, “Until 1940 the Supreme Court invoked ‘religion’ as a unifying force in American society. Since 1940,



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

however, the Supreme Court has repeatedly raised the specter of religious violence in banning school prayer, banning optional religious education from public school buildings, banning public aid to religious schools, and so on." Religious violence has been at historic lows since 1940, but the myth is "a useful narrative that has been produced by and has helped produce consent to the increasing secularization of the American social order." Meanwhile, in foreign policy, the myth is used "to justify attitudes and actions towards non-secular social orders, especially Muslim ones."

Cavanaugh concludes, "Doing away with the myth of religious violence helps level the playing field: let's examine the violence fomented by ideologies of all kinds, including those we tend to regard as 'secular' and therefore benign."

Study Questions

1. What is the essence of the religious/secular distinction today? What does it mean that there is no word "religion" and no such phenomenon in ancient cultures?
2. How is the religious/secular distinction used to explain the current turmoil in the Middle East? Why should we be suspicious of this interpretive scheme?
3. According to Sarah Koenig, if U.S. wars are not spawned by religion, how and why do they take on religious meaning?
4. Discuss David Cloutier's observation: "Behind the current debate about the relation between violence and religion lurks the question of how one evaluates our advanced society. Is it basically benign, or devoted to world hegemony?"

Departing Hymn: "God of Grace and God of Glory" (vv. 1, 3, and 4)

God of grace and God of glory,
on your people pour your power;
crown your ancient church's story,
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.

Cure your children's warring madness;
bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of your salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving you whom we adore,
serving you whom we adore.

Harry E. Fosdick (1930), alt.
Tune: CWM RHONDDA



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 The End of Scapegoating
(*Patterns of Violence*,
pp. 20-27)

Suggested Article:

📖 Meditating on Christ's
Suffering
(*Patterns of Violence*,
pp. 60-62)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

The End of Scapegoating

The cross can only be understood in light of a prototypical pattern of violence in human culture: scapegoating sacrifice. The biblical tradition and the passion accounts are themselves momentous steps in bringing that pattern to light, and rejecting it.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 53:7-10

Reflection

"Violence is lodged at the center of the Christian gospel, in the crucifixion of Jesus," Mark Heim admits. But rather than condoning or inciting further violence, Jesus' crucifixion plays a key role in exposing one of the most violent ways humans deal with communal problems—the murder of a scapegoat—and rejects it.

We're familiar with scapegoating. René Girard believes it underlies much of human culture. As rivalries and tensions escalate among people we care about or must live with, it's easy to blame our intra-group problems on some innocent person or minority or foreign group. Oddly this works—at least for a while! By uniting together to 'punish' or even destroy the scapegoat, we build community of purpose and 'clear the air' among us. This newfound unity seems to confirm our collective judgment against the scapegoat—that person or group must have been the source of our problems! Thus, we continue on our way, failing to address our rivalries and setting the stage for the next scapegoat.

"Scapegoating...is demonic because it is endlessly flexible in its choice of victims and because it can truly deliver the good that it advertises," Heim writes. "It is most virulent where it is most invisible. So long as we are in the grip of the process, we do not see our victims as scapegoats. Texts that hide scapegoating foster it. Texts that show it for what it is undermine it." Many myths, ancient or modern—for example, "of the world being created out of the body parts of a deity,... of old women casting spells with an 'evil eye,' [or]...that Jews caused the plague by poisoning wells"—grow out of, disguise, and thus encourage scapegoating.

To Girard, the biblical narrative is unique in being so forthright about the violence of scapegoating sacrifice, and showing how God sides with its innocent victims. "The averted sacrifice of Isaac; the Joseph story; the prophets' condemnation of scapegoating the widow, the weak, or the foreigner; the complaints of Job against false accusations; the Psalms' obsession with the innocent victim of collective violence—like the passion narratives' transparent account of Jesus' death, all these point in the same direction," Heim notes. "They reveal the 'victimage' mechanisms at the joint root of religion and society, and reject them."

"Jesus' willingness to face death, specifically death on a cross, suddenly looks anything but arbitrary, and much more like the 'wisdom of God' that the New Testament so surprisingly discovers there," Heim explains. "God breaks the grip of scapegoating by stepping into the place of a victim who cannot be hidden or mythologized. God is willing to die for us, to bear our sin in this particular way because we desperately need deliverance from this particular sin. Jesus does not volunteer to get into God's justice machine. God



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

volunteers to get into ours. Jesus' persecutors intend his death to bring peace, to avoid an outbreak of violence between Romans and Israelites, between Jews and other Jews. Jesus' accusers intend his death to be sacrificial business as usual. But God means it to be the opposite."

The next chapter in the story is crucial too. After the crucifixion, not everyone comes together and embraces Jesus' death, nor do his disciples respond with retaliatory violence. Rather, "an odd new counter-community arises, dedicated both to the innocent victim whom God has vindicated by resurrection and to a new life through him that requires no further such sacrifice." The Church is equipped with more than new insight into the evils of scapegoating; it receives a substitute "way to overcome conflict in our communities without resort to sacrifice" – the Communion Table. There forgiven sinners gather to remember Christ's sacrifice "once for all," and to seek no more victims.

Study Questions

1. On René Girard's theory, how is scapegoating central to the formation of human society and creation of guiding myths? Why does scapegoating remain "hidden" from view? How is the biblical witness radically different from mythology?
2. How, according to Mark Heim, is the creation of the Church a part of God's unmasking and rejection of scapegoating?
3. For Heim, what light does René Girard's theory shed on Jesus' words of institution for the Lord's Supper, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19 / 1 Corinthians 11:24-25)?
4. Some have used the passion story to fuel anti-Semitism. Discuss Heim's critique of this misuse: "The moment we point a finger at some 'they' as Jesus' killers, we have enacted the sin that the very particularity of the cross meant to overcome."
5. According to Heidi Hornik, how does both the composition of Fra Angelico's fresco *The Mocking and Flagellation of Christ* and its physical location encourage the viewer to identify with the suffering of Christ as an innocent victim?

Departing Hymn: "Sing of the Lamb, Whose Love and Power" (vv. 1, 2, and 5)

Sing of the Lamb, whose love and pow'r
rescued the world in its darkest hour,
while angel hosts intently gaze,
and heaven is filled with holy praise.

Sing of the Lamb, whose blood was shed,
who lay among, yet left the dead;
to save from sin, and death's dread pow'r,
he triumphed in the darkest hour.

Sing to the Lamb, all kindred here,
who in his glorious triumphs share;
sing to the Lamb, with all above,
who taste the fullness of his love.

C. H. Whitecar (d. 1892), alt.

Suggested Tune: DUKE STREET



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

- 📖 Reflections on Christian Courage
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 28-34)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 Depicting Martyrdom
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 56-59)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

Christian Courage in a Violent World

The kind of courage that Christians living in relatively secure circumstances are likely to need is courage in honoring moral prohibitions. Certain kinds of acts are prohibited, regardless of the consequences that anyone might hope to gain by doing them.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:27-30

Reflection

A hallmark of Judeo-Christian ethics is that certain sorts of acts are forbidden—things like intentionally killing the innocent, embracing idolatry, committing adultery, falsely professing faith in God, and so on. These things are never to be done, regardless of the bad consequences we could avoid or the good consequences we could gain by doing them in particular situations. Such moral prohibitions, Candace Vogler notes, define the limits to what we do—like “points on a boundary surrounding the much larger field of kinds of acts that are sometimes good, sometimes bad.”

Since the mid-nineteenth century, many writers and thinkers in the West have moved away from that point of view. Nothing is absolutely wrong, they say; any act is right if its consequences are good enough—that is, it brings enough pleasure, avoids pain and death, accomplishes a significant goal, and so on. We often hear such “consequentialism” expressed in serious discussions of terrorism and war, sexual ethics, family life, business activities, and social relations; it pervades the games we play and the stories we read, or watch on television and in movies.

It will take courage to stand against this trend and to respect moral prohibitions. That’s because respecting prohibitions goes beyond simply “managing to avoid committing acts of murder or rape or genocide (or, I think, of torture),” Vogler notes. “We may also be called upon to intervene in order to prevent others from doing such things (when we have a chance to do so directly), or, at the very least, to raise a protest against such acts.”

Why do we (and should we) respect moral prohibitions? Vogler says such respect is built into how people commonly think about the future: they believe “good acts are supposed to bring good,” and “any bad that follows a genuinely good act...is supposed to be an *accident*.” The Christian belief, rooted in Judaic tradition, that “we have a just and perfectly loving Creator” provides further grounds for this orientation toward the future.

How can we muster the courage to respect such prohibitions? Sometimes just reflecting on these truths will bolster us. But Christian tradition says “grace supplies more than this rational basis for us when our faith is severely tested,” Vogler observes. “However well or badly we have done cultivating a virtuous character, grace can bring us special strengths (and the Holy Spirit can provide special gifts) to help us when we are in desperate need.” Just as God supports martyrs who witness for their faith, God can provide courage to “stand against inherently bad acts and policies—refusing to do or support a great many things that we know to be wrong.” Sometimes we will “need faith to stiffen our spines in the face of worldly calculation. It is one thing to seek forgiveness of sin when we do wrong and repent of our wrongdoing. It is quite another to sin in the hope that we will



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

save face or make the world a better place through sinning. All too often, worldly calculation sides with the latter.”

Vogler concludes, “We are charged both with developing plain, earthly courage and with orienting ourselves to the specifically Christian mode of standing firm in our faith when the world counsels siding with sin. Being called to Christ is being called to cultivate good character in the firm knowledge that both faith and reason teach that avoiding sin is crucial to this task, even though no amount of plain good conduct will lead us home to God. Our destination, like our source, is a gift of God.”

Study Questions

1. What moral prohibitions are we tempted to skirt in a violent world in order to achieve good consequences? What prohibitions are we tempted to skirt in personal relationships?
2. What features of God as creator give us grounds for *expecting* good things to come from good acts, and bad things to come from evil acts? Why might there be accidents in this pattern—that is, good (bad) things coming from evil (good) acts?
3. How are some people tempted to reduce Christian courage itself to cost-benefit calculation? Discuss why, according to Vogler, such reductions would be wrong-headed.
4. How do Andrea Mantegna and Caravaggio depict the early martyrs’ courage as relevant for the artists’ own day? How is a Christian martyr’s courage related to the courage we need?

Departing Hymn: “God, Whose Love Is Always Stronger”

God, whose love is always stronger
than our weakness, pride and fear,
in your world, we pray and wonder
how to be more faithful here.

Hate too often grows inside us;
fear rules what the nations do.

So we pray, when wars divide us:
Give us love, Lord! Make us new!

Love is patient, kind and caring,
never arrogant or rude,
never boastful, all things bearing;
love rejoices in the truth.

When we’re caught up in believing
war will make the terror cease,
show us Jesus’ way of living;
may our strength be in your peace.

May our faith in you be nourished;
may your churches hear your call.

May our lives be filled with courage
as we speak your love for all.

Now emboldened by your Spirit
who has given us new birth,
give us love, that we may share it
till your love renews the earth!

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2003)[†]

Tunes: BEACH SPRING, ABBOT’S LEIGH, or HYFRYDOL

[†] Copyright © 2003, Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights are reserved. She gives permission to Christian Reflection readers for free use in a local church.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Recovering from Moral Injury
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 35-42)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

Recovering from Moral Injury

When combat veterans and others affected by violence suffer moral injury, they can experience personal shame and estrangement from fellow human beings and God. The challenging task of making integrated peace requires faithful, patient, loving participation by communities of faith.

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for entering into this violent world with the gift of love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We thank you for those people who seek to counter hatred with love, who protect others in gentle and caring ways, who teach others to settle differences peacefully, and who bring hope to your hurting world.

We pray for all who are suffering because of violence in their communities. We pray especially for those whose spirits and bodies have been broken by violence.

May we, your church, bring your peace into a hurting world.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 18:15-27

Reflection

Though the term “moral injury” is of recent vintage, the trauma it identifies has long haunted those who participate in grave violence. Psychologist Brett Litz has described it as the “psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.” We know moral injury is one of the most lasting effects of warfare, but it is also a hazard wherever transgressive violence occurs. Its symptoms include “personal shame, feelings of estrangement from fellow human beings, and a sense of alienation from God or a spiritual sense of grounding,” Keith Meador, Bill Cantrell, and Jason Nieuwsma observe. Individuals may experience moral culpability for the violence when it occurs, or later as they reinterpret the extreme nature of the violence or their role in it.

An adequate response to moral injury requires more than “a standard mental health paradigm of diagnosis and medicalized treatment,” Meador and his colleagues explain. The injured need “the faithful, patient, loving” welcome of a community that embodies their moral commitments and practices. “Such a community forms the interpretive lens through which sufferers can challenge moral and cognitive dissonance as they examine the story that is now theirs with which to live responsibly. The task of making integrated peace with one’s story, without denial, and without excessive indulgence of the chaos precipitating the moral injury, is challenging.”

Meador, Cantrell, and Nieuwsma outline a church’s faithful welcoming stance toward the morally injured. The congregation

- ▶ *welcomes the wounded with eucharistically formed practices of hospitality.* “In gratitude for the great gift of the Eucharist, we can do no other than to invite the wounded and suffering neighbor into a community of redemption and healing,” they explain. “Such practices will nurture the ultimate renarration of a story of reconciliation with one’s self and finding a place of belonging with integrity.”



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

- ▶ *doesn't rush to "fix" the sufferers*, for it could "do great damage and show a lack of regard for [their] ongoing journey." Moral injury is more like a chronic illness. We must abide "with brothers and sisters working through their Holy Saturdays — who are beset with an uncertain sense of loss and fear, while sustained by a yearning hope of finding their way home."
- ▶ *grapples with how to welcome the injured*, for "reentry to a faith community can be a particular challenge as it may serve as a keen reminder of how they have been changed by their experiences while the community looks the same." We must discern when to "emphasize patience, when forgiveness, when truth, when kindness." Being present to the injured "is about finding a way to stand alongside them as they take the time needed to wrestle with difficult existential questions."

"Our redemptive Creator God has abided with us at a great cost, with a love that allows unfathomable forgiveness and mercy, as well as the space and time for the working out of our faith to grow in love and friendship with both God and our neighbors," Meador and his colleagues observe. That is why congregations can and should become "communities of hospitality and care who are not afraid of the pain of our neighbors, and who can welcome the wounded and suffering among us because of our shared hope in this redemption that sustains us in the midst of our common frailties and human creatureliness."

Study Questions

1. What types of experience cause of moral injury? Why should the sufferer's faith community be part of the response?
2. What significant resources in your congregation would help you respond to moral injury? What are some barriers?
3. Discuss Meador, Cantrell, and Nieuwsma's observation: "As fellow pilgrims who appreciate the challenge of living with the past and looking to the future with a holy hope, we can help those paralyzed by moral injury to be less fearful of being fully present in the moment, integral to our communities, and in relationship to us, their neighbors."

Departing Hymn: "God, Whose Love Is Always Stronger"

God, whose love is always stronger than our weakness, pride and fear,
in your world, we pray and wonder how to be more faithful here.
Hate too often grows inside us; fear rules what the nations do.
So we pray, when wars divide us: Give us love, Lord! Make us new!

Love is patient, kind and caring, never arrogant or rude,
never boastful, all things bearing; love rejoices in the truth.
When we're caught up in believing war will make the terror cease,
show us Jesus' way of living; may our strength be in your peace.

May our faith in you be nourished; may your churches hear your call.
May our lives be filled with courage as we speak your love for all.
Now emboldened by your Spirit who has given us new birth,
give us love, that we may share it till your love renews the earth!

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2003)[†]

Suggested Tunes: BEACH SPRING, ABBOT'S LEIGH, or HYFRYDOL

[†] Copyrighted © 2003 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights are reserved. She grants permission to *Christian Reflection* readers for its free use in a local church.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Consuming Violence:
Voyeurism versus Vision
(*Patterns of Violence*,
pp. 63-70)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

Consuming Violence

We are tempted to be voyeurs of violence, dangerously drinking it in as entertainment. Or we turn away instead to sentimentalized distractions, which promise to be safer and proclaim our moral superiority. Neither represents a cross-shaped response to the violence in our culture.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: *Philippians 4:8-9*

Meditation†

In our attempt to understand the United States and its relation to violence in the world, it is necessary to come to terms with...the staggering number of violent depictions in video games, films, and television. Seldom do we stop to ponder how these violent projections become embedded in the mythic consciousness of Americans.

S. Brent Rodriguez-Plate

Reflection

We are violence junkies. We have developed such a taste for it that news channels and reality TV shows loop images of gruesome violence to boost their viewership; writers and visual artists employ lurid depictions of mayhem to sell their novels, TV dramas, movies, and video games; and sports entrepreneurs invent more battering competitions to entertain us. Our voyeurism encourages and is constantly nurtured by a violent pop culture.

How can we break our voyeur addiction and responsibly relate to the violence in society? Daniel Train draws the following insights from two autobiographical literary works: Augustine's *Confessions* and Flannery O'Connor's "The Partridge Festival."

- ▶ *Isolation from violence can lead to dishonest, self-righteous sentimentalism.* "Perceiving violence (both actual and feigned) can corrupt the viewer's soul," Train notes. We see it in Augustine's story of Alypius succumbing to the grisly violence in the gladiatorial games. So, some Christians attempt to avoid all violence in the news and cultural objects; they retreat to "modern Christian 'alternatives' to popular movies, visual art, music, or literary fiction." Yet, there are spiritual dangers in doing this. The creators of violence-free imaginative worlds often "show a complete disregard for the integrity of their craft, materials, and audiences." Viewers may haughtily evade the "ugliness, injustice, and dishonesty" in the world, and sentimentalize those alternative imaginary worlds.
- ▶ *An 'all things are lawful' approach is dangerously naïve.* Reacting to isolationism and "the widespread caricature of Christian moral teaching as prudish, other believers emphasize the freedom we have in Christ to participate in culture." Yet this risks the "unspoken spiritual hubris that Augustine observed in Alypius." Some violence in sports, news, and culture today is "as spiritually destructive as the coliseum games were in Augustine's day" and we should "avoid these altogether."

The approaches above—"no garbage in" isolation and "all things are lawful" participation—rate the *content* of cultural objects as permissible or not, but ignore "our own, often self-serving, motivations." The



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

next two insights, drawn from a Flannery O'Connor story, suggest "real violence occurs not only in *what* we consume, but also in *how* we consume it."

- ▶ *Disguising the violence in culture is a form of violent sentimentalism.* People in the fictional village of Partridge scapegoat a man named Singleton who murdered five city leaders after they publicly humiliated him at a "mock court" in the town's signature Azalea Festival. They proceed with festivities as though nothing happened. Without excusing Singleton's horrific acts, O'Connor refuses to "absolve the town for its violent sentimentalism – namely, its efforts to cultivate an image of politeness and civility whatever the cost." She reveals why we often gloss over violence in our communities.
- ▶ *'Studying' the violence is a subtle, self-righteous voyeurism.* The focus of the story falls on Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth, a would-be novelist and aspiring academic who milk the tragedy for their self-serving projects. With "self-righteous disgust for the town and its festivities," they show no concern for those involved in the tragedy. O'Connor "unmasks the voyeuristic postures of both the academic and the artist." There is remarkable self-critique here: the story is based on an event in O'Connor's hometown, and Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth speak lines and display attitudes reminiscent of the author. Perhaps O'Connor realized "the impulse to make a character either out of the real life Singleton or her own town would be to engage in the same abstracting and 'othering' that fueled the violence in the first place," Train observes. "She could not write that story without in some way using the event for her own gain – either as an opportunity for entertainment or as a way to bolster her self-righteousness." By focusing on "people's efforts to retell the story...she includes herself and her audience among those chastened."

Train urges us to "cultivate practices of reception and self-examination that give us a more honest assessment of and loving appreciation for both the world and ourselves." His explorations in Augustine and O'Connor suggest "a clear-eyed vision of our world is a gift of God's grace. It is a gift that has been modeled for us in both the way Christ lived and the way he died."

Study Questions

1. What features make a person's approach to violence in the culture voyeuristic? Where are you most tempted to voyeuristically consume images of violence?
2. Which of the four insights in this study best describes your temptation to voyeurism of violence? Have you changed your approach to violence over the years? If so, why?
3. Consider how Augustine and O'Connor, in their authorship, relate to violence. How do they exemplify what Train calls "a cross-shaped vision of the violence in [their] culture"?

Departing Hymn: "O Christ, You Did No Violence" (vv. 1, 2, 4, and 5)

† S. Brent Rodriguez-Plate, "A Nation Birthed in Blood: Violent Cosmogonies and American Film," in John D. Carlson and Jonathan H. Ebel, eds., *From Jeremiad to Jihad: Religion, Violence, and America* (University of California Press, 2012), 49.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 Responding to Domestic Violence and Spiritual Abuse
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 71-74)
- 📖 The Disturbing Work of Resurrection
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 75-80)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

Responding to Violence

Victims of violence frequently turn to spiritual leaders and lay congregation members for refuge and support. How can faith communities respond in an appropriate and effective manner?

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for entering into this violent world with the gift of love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We thank you for those people who seek to counter hatred with love, who protect others in gentle and caring ways, who teach others to settle differences peacefully, and who bring hope to your hurting world.

We pray for all who are suffering because of violence in their lives and communities. We pray especially for children who are abused in their families, for little ones who are hurt by powers that put self-interest and profit before love, for women who live in fear of domestic violence, and for others who are hurt and manipulated by those who are stronger.

O God of peace, may we, your church, bring your peace into this hurting world. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 146

Reflection

There is no secret trick, or single stratagem, to preparing ourselves to address the victims of violence – to welcome, care for, and minister alongside them. The diverse paths into service to victims for Al Miles (to individual victims of domestic abuse) and Walt Draughon (to a community torn apart by racial injustice) support that conclusion. Al Miles kept meeting victims and survivors of domestic violence and spiritual abuse in his role as hospital chaplain, and so he thought long and hard about how to show Christian compassion to these individuals. On the other hand, Walt Draughon, was caught unprepared in the middle of “chaotic and sweeping race riots” in St. Petersburg, Florida, where he had just arrived as pastor of the First Baptist Church.

Yet in Miles’s and Draughon’s stories we discern some common patterns to their cooperation with God’s work. These patterns can help us and our congregations prepare to respond to the victims of violence who come to us for refuge and support.

- ▶ *We must identify with and support the victims.* The psalmist writes, “The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin” (146:9). Similarly, our response to violence is not to make all who are involved – victims and offenders – feel better, but to care for victims and to hold offenders accountable. This insight governs Miles’s differing relationships to the victims and the abusers.

Identifying with victims led Draughon “to build meaningful, cross-cultural relationships with the people and congregations of Midtown” where racial violence had torn civic institutions apart, and to deflect some of his congregants’ concern that doing so would change the demographics of First Baptist Church.

- ▶ *We must be patient.* Caring for the victims of domestic abuse is complex, Miles notes. It ranges from helping them quickly prepare a safety plan to accompanying them over several months to various



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

court hearings. He warns about setting boundaries to one's emotional relationship with victims, in part because the process of caregiving to them is long and involved.

Draughon discovered that the ministry of reconciliation in Midtown would be for the long haul. His church and the nonprofit organization that it sponsored were involved for fifteen years, as one focus of caregiving led to another.

- ▶ *We must know our limitations and seek expert help.* Miles and Draughon discovered they were amateurs in the best sense of the word: they were motivated by love to care for victims of violence, but not experts who knew everything necessary to care for them well. "Seek education and training," Miles advises, but also realize you will never have "the knowledge and training to deal alone with all the complexities associated with these pervasive problems" of domestic abuse.

Draughon's church created a nonprofit organization, *Rise Up! St. Pete (RUSP!)* to bring together "governmental, civic, community, and religious leaders from Midtown," and church members with various expertise. *RUSP!* formed "action teams" to tackle specific needs "such as job development and training; health care acquisition; parental, filial, and marital counseling; provision of food; domicile renovations to meet city code requisites; public education support; and so on."

Al Miles and Walt Draughon are realistic about what our caregiving can accomplish. We will not eliminate the patterns of violence that are sending victims our way. (As Draughon admits, "Most of Midtown's challenges continue to this day.") But we can be faithful in preparing ourselves and then doing our best to care for those victims of violence who come to us, relying on the followers of the God "who keeps faith forever" (146:6).

Study Questions

1. What patterns of violence in the world, nation, or local community regularly send victims your congregation's way?
2. You probably identified more than one pattern in response to the question above. If so, for which one is God calling you to provide support and refuge to the victims? In what ways is your congregation well prepared to respond? How should it become better prepared?
3. Al Miles notes that "Victims and survivors of domestic violence... attend worship regularly; sing in our choirs, teach in our parochial and Sunday school classes, and preach from our pulpits. So do their offenders." What are the implications of this? Does it make his advice easier or harder to follow?
4. When it comes to supporting the victims of violence, "Most people, even concerned, invested people, prefer objectification over obedience, definition over devotion, analysis over action," Walt Draughon observes. How do some elements of Draughon's advice address this problem?

Departing Hymn: "O Christ, You Did No Violence" (vv. 1, 2, and 5)

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

The Myth of Religious Violence

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how the distinction between “religious” and “secular” arose in early modern Europe, and how it is being used today.
2. To examine the arguments for the myth of religious violence—i.e., the view that “religion” is more likely to cause violence than beliefs, institutions, and causes that are not religious.
3. To trace the relations between religion and warfare in American history.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “God of Grace and God of Glory” locate the familiar tune CWM RHONDDA in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with an Observation

In some circles of cultural discourse the Church’s prophetic analysis of the patterns of violence in the world and attempt to offer solutions for them has been muted because it is assumed that religions are peculiarly prone to instigating violence today. “Religion is dangerous,” is it said. “It undermines society by causing interreligious or intra-religious fighting.”

We may be hearing this claim more often today, William Cavanaugh notes, because “the recent frequency of Islamist militant attacks in the name of God has added fuel to a long-standing Western notion that religion has a dangerous tendency to promote violence.” But, he explains, the focus of the charge “is not just certain forms of Islamism or Islam in general but ‘religion,’ a category that is commonly held to include Christianity, Hinduism, and other major world faiths. The common Western notion is meant to be neutral with regard to particular religions; it does not discriminate against Muslims, for example, but sees religion as such as potentially dangerous. Any time disagreements are ratcheted up to a cosmic level, there is the danger of blood being spilled. For that reason, the Western liberal ideal has insisted on the domestic separation of church, synagogue, mosque, and so on from state, and the privatization of religion. And it has generally insisted that foreign policy promote this ideal in non-Western countries whenever possible.” (*Patterns of Violence*, p. 11)

In this study we examine the history and the basis of this “long-standing” and “common” Western notion about the relation of religion to violence.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to give members humility, charity, and insight during their study time.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read James 4:1-3 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Before the next studies consider the Church's prophetic analysis of and response to some dominant patterns of violence in the world, this study responds to the common accusation that the Christian Church, along with other religions, is especially responsible for human violence. This myth not only sidelines the Church's witness, but also (ironically) prevents us from properly identifying and repenting for those times that Christians have misunderstood the gospel in ways that have spawned violence.

If the group would like to extend this study of the myth of religious violence, they might study some of the books and essays that David Cloutier reviews in "What Kind of Religion Is Safe for Society?" To explore other relations between Christianity and violence, they might discuss some of the books reviewed in Sarah Koenig's "American Religions and War."

Study Questions

1. The essence of the distinction is that religion is "private" and secular is "public." William Cavanaugh writes, "To make a long and complex story brief and simple, the distinction is the result of the struggle between ecclesiastical and civil authorities for power in early modern Europe. The new territorial states arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in part by appropriating powers formerly in the hands of the church; ecclesiastical courts were abolished, and the rights to nominate bishops and abbots, control over church revenues, monopoly on the means of violence, and the primary allegiance of the people were transferred to the nascent state.... The church would henceforth be confined to the ambit of religion."
Ancient cultures did not have this concentration of power in a political entity. There was continuity and interaction between the economy, politics, family, devotion to the deity, and so on, but not in a single way. There was much diversity among ancient patterns of life.
2. Cavanaugh writes, "We assume that the reason for turmoil in the Middle East is religion. Muslims have not learned to separate mosque from state, religion from politics, and so the passions of religion continue to wreak havoc in the public sphere. Our foreign policy is geared toward moving them – by force, if necessary – toward liberal, Western style democracy, which is the key to peace." The New Atheist author Sam Harris bluntly summarizes this war on behalf of secularism: "Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them. ... This is what the United States attempted in Afghanistan, and it is what we and other Western powers are bound to attempt, at an even greater cost to ourselves and innocents abroad, elsewhere in the Muslim world."
Cavanaugh fears the myth of religious violence will obscure the threat of "so-called 'secular' ideologies and practices [which] can be just as absolutist, divisive, and irrational as devotion to so-called 'religions.'" It paints Muslim anger as "irrational" and casts "a convenient fog of amnesia over Western aggressions [in the region] on behalf of Western interests."
3. Sarah Koenig notes Americans "have a difficult time separating nationalist aims and self-righteous crusades from genuine justice." They see their cause as a holy war that justifies increasing violence (and, in the Civil War, this was true on both sides). Some see "soldiers' deaths as salvific in and of themselves, irrespective of any prior religious faith," and believe the dead have submitted themselves to God's fatalist will. Some become "religious" and "spiritual" in ways that depart from and violate their faith tradition. Why do these strange theologies blossom? "It provided soldiers with ways of coping with senseless violence, language and symbols to make sense of death and suffering, and, perhaps most importantly, a model of masculine Christianity that made soldiering a noble and Christian calling."
4. David Cloutier distinguishes two responses to the myth of religious violence. First, Keith Ward would replace particular traditions with a generalized spirituality; while any specific religion can be misused for violent purposes, he would avoid this by adopting a "true" religion that promotes "humane and liberal values" and encourages us to be "self-critical" and "open and responsive to the things that make for true reverence for the Supreme Good and for true human fulfillment." Second, William Cavanaugh and the contributors to the Keith Chase and Alan Jacobs volume promote internal critique within particular traditions. Ward assumes the "humane values" of advanced society can be our guide. The others are more suspicious of our society, and turn to internally reformed religious traditions for guidance.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The End of Scapegoating

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To outline René Girard's theory of scapegoating sacrifice.
2. To discuss the light Girard's theory sheds on Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.
3. To consider how the Church is a continuing part of God's exposing and rejecting the violence of scapegoating.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Sing of the Lamb, Whose Love and Power" locate the familiar tune DUKE STREET in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymn-time.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with an Introduction

Meet René Noël Théophile Girard (1923-2015), the eminent thinker who is behind Mark Heim's reflection on violence and Christianity in *The End of Scapegoating*. Girard was born in France and studied to be an archivist and librarian like his father. But in 1947 he entered the University of Indiana to study history, and the rest of his academic career would be in America.

Girard proposed a novel interpretation of what it means to be human. His view is hard to characterize, because it crosses boundaries of literary criticism, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, theology, and philosophy. Here's the basic idea: we gravitate toward wanting what other people want (that is, our desires are mimetic), which brings us into conflict with others, but we manage to coexist with them by redirecting our frustration against an outsider, a scapegoat. In other words, humans are not essentially violent, but we often turn to scapegoating in order to preserve the peace we deeply desire. And now for Girard's most interesting idea: our scapegoating violence works so well that we would never know this dark truth about ourselves, except for one scapegoat who reveals it to us and thereby undermines the pattern: Jesus Christ.

How should we take Girard? Some think he has explained everything—the origin of human community, our religious impulse, mythology, violence, and so on. Theologian Mark Heim presents a more modest reading: that Girard helps us understand why Christ's death was so violent, and why the Church is called to be a radically different form of human community.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to make members more aware of their scapegoating tendencies and thanking God for drawing us to himself in love and repentance.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Isaiah 53:7-10 from a modern translation.

Reflection

In this study we explore the pattern of scapegoating violence and the Church's response to it. In his seminal work on scapegoating, René Girard expressed ambitious goals to explain the origins of human community,

our religious impulse, mythology, and violence generally. Here we put those claims to one side and focus only on the light that Girard's theory can shed on the role of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection in God's fundamental rejection of scapegoating. To read more about René Girard's interpretation of Scripture (and especially its differences from ancient myths), see his *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Orbis Books, 2001).

Study Questions

1. René Girard notes that our desires are mimetic – that is, we learn to value and want what other people around us value. This drives us to compete with one another for things, recognition, and power, which leads to frustration and conflict. When we cooperate with others to vent anger against a scapegoat – that is, an “outside” person or group whom we blame for our troubles – we restore some community feeling. Girard says this is how communities form and preserve themselves – by uniting to fight a common enemy in the scapegoat.
“Myths are stories that reflect the scapegoat event, but do not describe it,” Heim writes. They retell the story of community-formation in a way that occludes the underlying problem, the scapegoat's innocence, the community's mistake, and so on. Ironically, because scapegoating brings temporary peace, some myths may lionize the scapegoat as having special powers or being a god. The Bible, on the other hand, is brutally honest about human sin, communal violence, and the victims' innocence. Heim continues, “The Bible is frequently criticized for exhibiting so much violence in its narratives. To Girard, this is extremely ironic. Truly mythical texts are rooted in sacrificial violence, prescribe it and shield us from awareness of our complicity in it. That is why they do not show it directly. The Bible makes violence visible, and therefore makes its victims uncomfortably visible too.”
2. Here's the usual pattern after a successful scapegoat sacrifice: “peace temporarily descends, true memory is erased, and the way is smoothed for the next scapegoat.” Heim says the formation of the Church after Jesus' death disrupted each element of that pattern. First, its members did not “close ranks” with Jesus' executioners and agree that he had been the problem. Second, they did not forget Jesus' death or their sinful complicity in it, but made the cross an emblem for remembering his love and forgiveness. Finally, in the practice of the Lord's Supper, they found a substitute way of bringing peace without any further scapegoating sacrifice. Heim explains, “One of the crucial things that makes the Church a new community is its constitution in solidarity not *against* some sacrificial victim, but by identification with the crucified one. The moment we point a finger at some ‘they’ as Jesus' killers, we have enacted the sin that the very particularity of the cross meant to overcome.” Consider how your congregation actively stands in solidarity with innocent victims today.
3. “This” refers to “a humble meal and prayer.” We are to gather together, seek God's and one another's forgiveness, and then eat and pray. Heim explains that after we realize the pervasiveness of scapegoating, “we need a substitute, a way to overcome conflict in our communities without resort to sacrifice.... Christians undertake the hope that this meal of the new community may accomplish the peace that sacrificial violence could, and more. In it, we recall a real sacrifice and practice a substitutionary atonement. On that table, bread and wine are to be continually substituted for victims, substituted for any, and all, of us.”
4. Since the Jewish religious leaders and crowd participated (with political rulers and soldiers) in scapegoating Jesus, some Christians and others through the centuries have blamed Jews for killing Jesus. But to do this is to participate in the very sort of scapegoating that Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection exposes and rejects, Heim notes. To identify with Jesus' suffering requires that we see the victims of human violence as together with Jesus on the cross. He describes how Helen Prejean, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the whistle-blowing U.S. military guard at Abu Ghraib prison, and Marc Chagall have done this.
5. Hornik notes that Fra Angelico does not identify the figures who mock and reject Jesus, but shows only their body parts that do him violence. The focus is on Jesus' suffering as an innocent victim. The other figures – Mary and Dominic – model identification with and quiet meditation on Jesus' suffering. The fresco is painted on the wall of a senior cleric's room to guide him in “habits of prayer, liturgical customs, and practices of reading and studying.”

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Christian Courage in a Violent World

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine the nature of moral prohibitions and how they put limits to “consequentialist” ways of thinking about what we should do.
2. To understand why we are (and should be) drawn to honoring moral prohibitions.
3. To reflect on specific temptations we face to disregard moral prohibitions.
4. To consider how the courage that we require to honor moral prohibitions is related to the martyr’s courage.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “God, Whose Love Is Always Stronger” locate one of the familiar tunes BEACH SPRING, ABBOT’S LEIGH, or HYFRYDOL in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with an Observation

What kinds of hardships and suffering will we have to endure to be faithful followers of Christ? Where and when will Christian courage be required of us?

As Candace Vogler notes, “In the early church, being called to Christ often meant being prepared to suffer for one’s faith. It is no accident that the Greek term ‘martyr’ meant *to witness*, and early Christian witness was perilous. This suffering is predicted in Scripture. For instance, the Apostle Paul writes, ‘For [God] has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well’ (Philippians 1:29).”

The courage required for martyrdom is still required in those parts of the world where believers “face rape, murder, mutilation, and the like because of their faith,” Vogler remind us. But what kind of courage is needed by Christians who live in relatively secure circumstances today? Her answer strikes home: we’ll need courage to do what is required and to avoid what is prohibited, even when we think there are advantages to doing otherwise.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to grant members the courage to be faithful in all their thoughts and actions.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Philippians 1:27-30 from a modern translation.

Reflection

In the previous study we discussed the temptation to deal with our problems by scapegoating. That process is usually disguised from us, but we may embrace other and similar forms of violence with more or less full awareness – for example, when we choose to do something evil because we think it will have good consequences (like avoiding a greater evil or bringing about a great good). Candace Vogler shows how the temptation to consequentialist thinking is rooted in our orientation toward the future. To resist it, we’ll need a new orientation and courage to live according to it.

Study Questions

1. In the contexts of international terrorism and warfare, our leaders may be tempted to abuse and restrict the rights of innocent co-religionists, to authorize torturing people for information, to disregard the deaths and suffering of bystanders as “collateral damage,” and so on. We are tempted to support them or (at least) look the other way. But we are also tempted to skirt prohibitions in our personal relationships: we find excuses for adultery and sexual immorality, lying to colleagues, betrayal of friends, abortion of the unborn, neglect of children, abuse of the poor, and so on, when we think some greater good (for ourselves, for others we care about, or for the world) will come of it.
2. Candace Vogler mentions the perfect love and justice of God the creator. God’s perfect love draws us into communion of purpose with God, and we have reason to believe God has made the world such that our good acts will contribute to God’s good future. In justice God has promised to punish evil, and we can trust that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This is the pattern according to which creation is meant to function. But there is brokenness in the system: we may do what is good, but others resist our effort or even turn it to evil; or we may do what is wicked, but God and others turn it toward good in some way.
3. “The world thinks that we are doing one of two kinds of special calculation (because the world has a strong tendency to try to understand what people do by thinking about calculation),” Vogler writes. The first way of reducing Christian courage to cost-benefit calculation is this: Christians believe there is always an immense cost to doing something evil – (the threat of) going to hell – and no amount of good can offset that cost. Vogler responds, “It’s not that someone who fears eternal damnation has the wrong idea about eternal damnation. But this sort of calculation is at odds with both the rational basis of a Christian orientation to the future and the support we have from grace.” Christians are motivated by God’s grace and desire to “walk with Christ as best we can with his help.”

The second reduction is this: Christians believe God makes good acts pay off more than bad acts in the long run (that is, in an afterlife). Vogler agrees “God holds creation in his hands,” but objects that this attitude adopts “the wrong sort orientation to the future – the merely predictive sort.” The proper attitude is “to walk with Christ...[and] to live in such a way that our powers and passions are appropriately governed.... Christian courage follows the paths of right reason, appropriate emotion, and proper obedience. It tracks how things are supposed to go, whether or not things go in the way that they are supposed to go. As such, Christian moral courage exemplifies the way that Christians refuse to be drawn into merely predictive calculation in deciding what to do. We know better.

4. Heidi Hornik describes how Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) and Caravaggio (1573-1610) exemplify the Renaissance and Baroque styles of painting respectively. Mantegna depicts the third-century martyrdom of Sebastian in a thoroughly contemporary Renaissance setting, but with elements (positioned in a classical Greek *contrapposto* stance and surrounded by decaying Roman ruins) that remind viewers of the martyr’s military position in late antiquity. Caravaggio’s figures have the very realistic physicality of contemporary art of his day; the straining men are dressed as poor workers might dress in the artist’s day. Both artists are saying, “This event might occur in our day.”

Of course, the martyrs from antiquity to the current day face greater threats and suffering than we do. But their courage is grounded in their faith in God’s goodness and their obedience to God’s prohibitions, and is graciously sustained by the Holy Spirit in the moment of their greatest trials. These are features of the courage we need in order to honor moral prohibitions and resist temptations to do evil things in order to bring about some good.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Recovering from Moral Injury

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the nature of moral injury.
2. To consider why recovery from moral injury requires the faithful, loving welcome of the injured back into a community with their moral commitments and practices.
3. To outline the resources within congregations to address moral injury.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “God, Whose Love Is Always Stronger” locate one of the familiar tunes BEACH SPRING, ABBOT’S LEIGH, or HYFRYDOL in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with a Story

Psychiatrists Keith Meador and Jason Nieuwsma, and chaplain Bill Cantrell, who direct the Mental Health and Chaplaincy Program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, give us this glimpse of the personal experience of moral injury through the words of a young veteran:

I cannot quite clearly distinguish the war as something ‘out there’ or in the past—it is like something I own personally. It lives in me. Sometimes I feel condemned not only by my own actions, but by the war as a whole. I do not mean condemned by some cosmic force or condemned by society. I mean that I condemn myself. This is a paradox. Of course the war is a part of me. I cannot avoid it. I cannot escape my experience. And yet who I am rejects what war is—and what I was in the war.

Meador and his colleagues wonder if we know the men and women in our communities who are suffering such pain, and whether we are prepared to welcome them into our congregations. “The determinative factor for veterans’ healing,” they observe, “may well be the capacities for hospitality embodied within faith communities to welcome those struggling to conduct soul searching, to belong again, and to find integrity for themselves.” (*Patterns of Violence*, 37)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 18:15-27 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study and the next two—“Consuming Violence” and “Responding to Violence”—focus on practical ways that individuals and congregations can respond to salient patterns of violence in our culture. The story of Peter’s denial of Jesus (John 18:15-27) shows the moral injury Peter suffered as he witnessed and refused to interfere in the violent scapegoating of Jesus. Peter’s restoration by Jesus through the Church, begun at the breakfast by the sea served by the risen Christ (John 21:15-19), could be a model for the patient, ongoing welcome for the morally injured that Keith Meador, Bill Cantrell, and Jason Nieuwsma commend to congregations. For more information about the Mental Health and Chaplaincy Program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs that Meador and his colleagues direct, see www.mirecc.va.gov/mentalhealthandchaplaincy/.

Study Questions

1. Meador, Cantrell, and Nieuwsma explain that moral injury may be experienced by either “perpetrators or bystanders of violence,” and note that the “distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders can tragically blur over time, as cycles of violence often lead to individuals inhabiting each of these roles in different capacities.” Sufferers are injured because they bear some responsibility for causing, failing to stop, or witnessing violent acts that seriously violate their moral commitments. Moral injury has been diagnosed in those who participate in war or police work, and in others who may have to use, or witness and respond to, grave violence. If it is appropriate, invite members to share experiences of moral injury in the lives of people they know. Discuss how the story of Peter in the scripture reading is a case of moral injury.

The morally injured feel cut off from their moral identity and from the commitments and practices that shaped their identity. This view may occur at the time of the violence, or over time as they reinterpret the violence or their participation in it. To restore this identity and make moral sense of their lives, the morally injured need the welcome, forgiveness, correction, and restoring guidance of a community that shares those commitments and practices.

2. Meador and his colleagues refer to the “eucharistically formed practices of hospitality” in the Church. These practices (of the Lord’s Supper, prayer, confession, humble gratitude and praise, and mutual correction) shape a welcome that invites “the wounded and suffering neighbor into a community of redemption and healing” and helps them integrate their experience into the story of God’s reconciliation with sinners. It does this “while acknowledging the dissonance of violent and injurious experiences” and “avoiding presumptuous denials of the depths of suffering, confusion, and struggle experienced.”

Some barriers to our offering such hospitality might be impatience with ourselves when we cannot “cure” others’ problems; exasperation with those who are slow to understand and seek forgiveness for their moral failure; naïveté regarding the experiences of the morally injured; or fear or disdain that distances us from them. Barriers to the injured seeking such hospitality might be reluctance to be reminded of their fractured moral identity; fear of rejection by those they most admire; or the belief they must be “healed” before they can rejoin the community. Ask members if they can think of other barriers. Consider how the Christian gospel addresses each barrier.

3. Meador, Cantrell, and Nieuwsma realize that most people, both the morally injured and their companions in community, would prefer “to avoid difficult thoughts, memories, and experiences.” This may lead them to ignore or minimize the injury, and try to “cure” it very quickly. They identify this as a sort of pride that undermines trust between the injured and others in the community who would help them. A more humble stance would acknowledge “the true difficulty posed by certain morally injurious challenges” and realize that the community must live with hope *and* the continuing injury. Following the Christian tradition, they call this the “pilgrim way” of life.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Consuming Violence

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine four temptations to voyeuristically consume the depictions of violence that we encounter in the news and in popular culture.
2. To identify, by contrast to those, how we might responsibly relate to those depictions.
3. To glimpse, through the creative writings of Augustine and Flannery O'Connor, defining features of what Daniel Train calls "a cross-shaped vision of the violence in our culture."

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Because Augustine's friend Alypius was ashamed of his fascination with the gruesome gladiatorial contests in fourth-century Rome, he vowed to avoid them. Daniel Train tells us what happened when some fellow-students persuaded Alypius to accompany them to a gladiatorial event. "[Alypius] was determined not to pay any attention to the gory spectacle before him; he even hoped that his condemnation of it (and scorn for the debauched friends) would be strengthened by being present, but refusing to watch. Not surprisingly, the roar of the crowd proved too much for his willpower. Augustine explains,

His curiosity got the better of him, and thinking that he would be able to treat the sight with scorn—whatever the sight might be—he opened his eyes and was stricken with a deeper wound in the soul than the man whom he had opened his eyes to see got in the body.... Seeing the blood he drank deep of the savagery. He did not turn away but fixed his gaze upon the sight.... He continued to gaze, shouted, grew hot, and when he departed took with him a madness by which he was to be goaded to come back again, not only with those who at first took him there, but even more than they and leading on others.

Train notes that "In no time at all, Alypius had traded places with those friends whom he scorned. He was rendered absolutely powerless against his self-corroding addiction to viewing the bloodshed" (*Patterns of Violence*, 63-64). Surely the story of Alypius's voyeurism and failure strikes home for many of us in a culture of violence-soaked news and entertainment.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to help members discern how they should view the depictions of the violence in the news and in popular culture.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:8-9 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This is the second of three studies – begun with “Recovering from Moral Injury” and concluding with “Responding with Violence” – that focus on practical ways that individuals and congregations can respond faithfully to salient patterns of violence in our culture. Daniel Train finds layers of voyeurism, some obvious and others more subtle, in the ways we consume depictions of violence in cultural objects – the news, visual and literary arts, video games, etc. As members examine and critique each layer, consider how they point back toward a more self-critical, empathetic, and Christ-like engagement with violence in our culture.

Study Questions

1. Daniel Train describes the voyeurs in terms of why they watch violence and how they are related to the suffering caused by that violence. First, regarding motive, Alypius is “self-serving” and “self-indulgent” because he watches the gruesome gladiatorial violence to satisfy his desire for distraction and entertainment; Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth are eager to use Partridge’s mayhem for their profit (writing a novel to entertain, or producing research to advance an academic career), or as a foil to showcase their own self-righteousness. Second, regarding their relationship to those who suffer the violence, Alypius is distant, seeing himself as (morally and socially) “‘above’ the spectacle,” and as “controlling” his relationship to its participants; Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth show little empathy for the townspeople, and make them and Singleton “abstract.” The voyeurs typically avoid self-examination of their motives and attitudes toward the sufferers (though, initially, Alypius has a twinge of conscience and feels shame); they accept without question that their viewing is all right.

Encourage members to discuss where violence appeals to them as entertainment, or as a foil for their own righteousness. Do they find themselves watching more violence or less? When does their watching bother them?

2. Form four small groups to discuss the insights regarding the “no garbage in” isolationist approach, the “all things are lawful” approach, the disguising the violence approach, and the distant studying approach. Ask the groups to give concrete examples of the approaches and consider how they are voyeuristic. Daniel Train suggests the second one is often a reaction (in society and, perhaps, in an individual’s life) against the limitations of the first approach. Are members tempted by more than one type of voyeurism? Have they migrated away from one approach and toward another? Does age and experience lead them toward a type of voyeurism? How has their “taste” for violence in news and popular culture changed over the years?
3. A “cross-shaped vision of the violence” does not avoid knowledge of the violence or of the suffering it causes. It empathizes with victims and does not stand aloof from their suffering. It does not adopt a self-righteous attitude that we are “above” the violence, or that it is perpetrated by or happens only to others, and so on.

Augustine and O’Connor do not tell stories of violence to entertain their readers, but to reveal how violence occurs and why we are drawn to watch it. They reveal how voyeurs do further violence to the victims. They engage in an examination of conscience, and invite their readers to do the same.

While their example does not yield a complete account of what Train calls a “cross-shaped vision,” it helpfully points away from the four approaches he criticizes. Invite the four groups formed above to reflect on how Augustine and O’Connor’s storytelling exposes and undermines the sort of voyeurism of violence they studied.

Departing Hymn

“O Christ, You Did No Violence” is on pp. 43-45 of *Patterns of Violence*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Responding to Violence

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the insights from Al Miles and Walt Draughon on how we can support and provide refuge to victims of violence.
2. To identify the patterns of violence that are sending victims your congregation's way.
3. To apply the advice from Miles and Draughon to become better prepared to support and provide refuge to those victims.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Walt Draughon was drawn into ministry to the victims of violence quite unexpectedly. He explains, "Following the shooting and death of an African American teenager during a traffic stop in the fall of 1996, the city of St. Petersburg, Florida, experienced what the national media described as 'chaotic and sweeping race riots.' I had been the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of St. Petersburg for one month."

"The day after the first 'riot,' I drove into Midtown where the shooting had occurred – a population block of approximately forty thousand people, which was a veritable seedbed of gang activity, poverty, and violence. The carnage from the night before continued to burn with a 'societal heat' that laid bare the obvious: the death of a teenager, while tragic, was not the only fatality of that dark night. In a real sense, our entire city, the seventeenth largest in the United States, had 'died.' Fragile relationships had been severed; accusation was the majority response, and blame was the weapon of choice."

Draughon immediately went into action. He thought he would "schedule a few meetings of church and civic leaders, provide a platform for the right people to 'be heard,' and voila, a resurrection we [would] have!" (*Patterns of Violence*, 75)

But the first lesson Draughon learned is that the "resurrection" of a community fractured by violence is a long-term project. Indeed he led his church to work with the Midtown neighborhood for the next fifteen years, until the end of his ministry there.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 146 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study, like the previous two – "Recovering from Moral Injury" and "Consuming Violence" – focuses on practical ways that individuals and congregations can respond to salient patterns of violence in our culture. Focus on one of the patterns in the articles – either domestic abuse or racial violence – or another pattern of violence that is sending victims your congregation's way. As appropriate, employ the insights from the other materials to help your congregation prepare to support and provide refuge to victims.

Study Questions

1. Use this question and the next to focus on one or two of the patterns of violence that impact your congregation. The pattern might be related to members' professions (for example, social workers, attorneys, armed service members, physicians, etc.), the church's location (it is near a military base, near an international border crossing, along an interstate highway, in a neighborhood troubled by racial violence, in an economically depressed neighborhood, near a correctional facility, etc.), or other factors (it is known for particular ministries to the community, has relationships with missionaries in war-torn countries, sponsors worship services for an immigrant population, etc.).
2. If your congregation currently has a ministry that addresses the pattern of violence, access that ministry and discuss how the congregation could bolster its response with more resources (prayer partners, volunteer workers, paid professionals, building space, equipment, relationships with government agencies and nongovernmental groups, financial gifts, etc.).

If your congregation does not have a ministry, brainstorm how you might start one, or participate in a ministry in another church or NGO. Sometimes a congregation's resources (in personnel, training, finances, etc.) do not match its call. How can you grow those resources or partner with others to meet the victims' needs?

3. That we already have close relationships with them seems to have different implications for victims and offenders. Regarding victims, these prior relationships may foster their trust that allows them to seek our help and receive our support. Because we know their situation, we may be better able to help them. It may be easier to enlist other members in sharing support for the victim. However, those prior relationships might make the victim uneasy in sharing the painful aspects of their story. They may fear that sharing their pain with us may disrupt those prior relationships that they value and need.

Regarding the offenders, these prior relationships may make it difficult for us to be objective. We may be reluctant to side with their victims – perhaps because we fear losing the relationship with the offenders, or are uncomfortable about confronting and correcting them. We may inappropriately share information with the offenders. We may focus too much on the shame the offender's actions bring to us (as fellow church members), and neglect the needs of their victims.

4. The "objectification" of victims and offenders, and distancing ourselves from the violence through "definition" and "analysis," reminds us of the patterns of voyeurism of violence that we discussed in the previous study. Perhaps we prefer these responses because they are more comfortable. Walt Draughon warns us to "expect a strong pull toward equilibrium, back to the previous status quo" before the violence erupted to reveal underlying problems.

Draughon responded by concluding planning "conversations and meetings with a simple question: 'Now, what are you going to do?' Then, and this is key, I waited until each person identified and committed to a particular action." He also encouraged folks to act in ways that were repeatable. "Many are the folks and entities who engage challenges among people-groups but soon are nowhere to be found; their absence becomes toxic to the personal relationships on which [the response] pivots!"

Departing Hymn

"O Christ, You Did No Violence" is on pp. 43-45 of *Patterns of Violence*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.