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“Restorative justice” is an increasingly common idea used internationally today. Many of the modern movement’s founders and key participants hail from the Mennonite faith tradition. This is not coincidental; from its inception, Mennonite theology and ideology have pointed in the direction of peace and reconciliation within communities, values which almost perfectly mirror the priorities of the restorative justice movement. This paper delves into the annals of Mennonite history, exploring the origins of Anabaptism, of which Mennonites are a branch. It unfolds catalytic events and foundational theology which guided the revolutionary group of Christians in sixteenth-century Europe’s religious turmoil. After examining the roots, we pivot to examine the ancestral branches of the past century. How does Anabaptist theology, formed four hundred years ago, enlighten our understanding of Anabaptist activity today? Clearly many other events occurred in those four centuries which should not be discounted, but there is something to be said for the founders of a movement – their goals and vision.

Although Mennonites clung to their founding theology – focus on Scriptural authority, community, pacifism, and love modeled after the life of Jesus – various factors contributed to a unique flavor of Mennonite lifestyle in the early twentieth century. This time period saw a simple people secluded in rural farm communities, living holy lives almost completely separated from the world around them. Most United States Mennonites stayed contentedly within these communities and avoided societal, and notably political, involvement. However, the tragic events of the First and Second World Wars jarred this peaceful branch of Anabaptists from their secluded utopia of ignorance. The wars led to increased global involvement, which bred awareness and stoked an old, faded passion.
Out of these events came new frameworks and renewed concepts of pacifism and nonresistance. Organizations like Mennonite Central Committee emerged, allowing the quiet people group to expand its influence and begin having a voice. Among many other issues and areas of advocacy, Mennonites were at the forefront of the modern restorative justice movement in the 1970s. This movement, seeking to reassess the typical view of crime and justice, flows naturally from the base on which Mennonites’ Anabaptist ancestors crafted their faith and lives.

**The Birth of Anabaptism**

The Anabaptist movement did not form in a vacuum; rather, it was closely connected with and inspired by the Protestant Reformation. Sparked by Roman Catholic Church corruption, it began with Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses nailed to the Wittenberg Chapel door in 1517. Four main principles emerged from Luther’s ideas: Scripture alone has ultimate authority; all believers have direct access to God; salvation comes by grace through faith, not works; and every believer is at once justified, yet a sinner. (Snyder, 1995) The Reformation engulfed Europe like wildfire.

In Zürich, Switzerland, it was led by Ulrich Zwingli. He gathered a following of young, eager disciples, including Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, and George Blaurock. But Zwingli’s disciples soon surpassed him in zeal and reformative goals. In October 1523, Zwingli appeased rather than pressed the Zürich Council on the issue of the Lord’s Supper. Grebel was profoundly disappointed. The subsequent months saw increasing disparity between them, and Grebel later referenced December 1523 as the date of his split from Zwingli. (Estep, 1975) Grebel, Blaurock, Mantz, and their followers became known as the Swiss Brethren. ¹

Swiss Brethren were distinguished largely by their rejection of infant baptism. In the Roman Catholic Church, infant baptism covered original sin, and the mainstream reformers saw

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¹ Historians debate the polygenesis of Anabaptism’s origins. Keefer (2002) argues that the movement rose simultaneously in many European cities, not only or primarily in Zürich. This discussion is not central here.
no reason to reject the centuries-old doctrine. For Zürich’s government, therefore, adult baptism was both unorthodox and heretical. However, the Brethren appealed strongly to Scriptural authority and found no biblical support for infant baptism. Instead, according to Heinrich Bullinger (as quoted in Snyder, 1995), they advocated believer’s baptism, “given to believers to whom the gospel had previously been preached, who have understood it, and who thereupon requested baptism for themselves, and killing the old Adam, desired to live a new life” (p.54). This unorthodox position caught the attention of Zürich’s government, for whom adult baptism was heresy. Zwingli sided with the government, and a final disputation was held between Zwingli and his former disciples in January 1525. According to William Estep, “The council proclaimed Zwingli the victor and denounced the radicals. The alternatives were quite clear. The little group could conform, leave Zürich, or face imprisonment. It chose the last.” (1975, p.10)

Grebel, Blaurock, and a group of believers gathered at Mantz’s home a few days later. There Grebel baptized Blaurock, and Anabaptism (a derogatory title meaning twice-baptized) took flight. Under dynamic evangelical leadership, the movement grew and spread throughout Europe to areas primed for radical reform. Anabaptist communities emerged in Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, North and South Germany, and the Netherlands.

Growth brought diversity, as it often does. Nicholsburg, Moravia exemplified the variety and struggles, as three Anabaptist groups converged there. Snyder (1995) noted that dynamic leader and prolific theologian Balthasar Hübmaier represented “state Anabaptism” that had grown from the Swiss (p.120). He published On the Sword, wherein he articulated his nondiscriminatory pacifism, with the significant caveat allowing government force during war. (Estep, 1975) Another group of Swiss Brethren had signed the Schleitheim Confession, which rejected even government violence. Finally, Hans Hut led “south German apocalyptic
Anabaptism” (Snyder, 1995, p. 120). Opposing Hübmaier, Hut believed baptism signified the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation and preached the imminence of the End Times. Differences escalated into the Nicholsburg Disputation of 1527, after which Hut was imprisoned and ultimately escaped the city with his followers. Divisions remained between “sword-bearing” Hübmaier and the “staff-bearing” Schleitheim Brethren, and Hübmaier’s followers were asked to leave after his death in 1528. (Snyder, 1995)

Another snapshot of Anabaptism comes from Holland, with Melchior Hoffman, a former Lutheran missionary. Some of his ideas had clearly clashed with Luther’s, and he was banished in 1529 for rejecting the transubstantiation of the Lord’s Supper. He traveled to South Germany and Austria, picking up pieces of Anabaptist theology while maintaining an End Times prophetic focus not unlike Hut’s. Hoffman believed Brethren were never to use violence, but that God would use some other means of eliminating “ungodly clergy” before Christ’s second coming. When Strasbourg authorities sought his arrest, Hoffman returned north and ministered effectively there, where his greatest impact was in the Netherlands. (Snyder, 1995, p. 144)

Here the narrative turns tragically to Münster, a North German city representing the darkest mutilation of Anabaptist ideals. Münster had recently become a Protestant-run city; however, the radical Anabaptist population increased and, under Jan Matthijs’ leadership, challenged existing authorities. Consequently, a power vacuum was formed, into which Catholic Bishop Franz, who had been banished from Münster earlier, tried to step. But citizens preferred Matthijs to Franz, and the bishop retreated. Anabaptists won the next election. They imposed a new leadership board and implemented strict adherence to Anabaptist ideals. According to Snyder (1995), Matthijs was “convinced that God had given the sword to the elect,” of whom he was one, and thus justified his legalistic theocracy (p. 146).
While Old Testament laws were implemented within the city, Bishop Franz formed a blockade around it. The blockade held for several months until eventually the people began dying of starvation. Franz thwarted Anabaptists’ attempts to seek help, and on June 25, 1535, Münster was seized. Its leaders were tortured, executed, and hung in cages from St. Lambert’s Church. (Haude, 2000, pp.10-16) The city’s story appalled the continent and enforced Protestant and Catholic mistrust of Anabaptism. Hence the aftermath of Münster included increased Anabaptist persecution, most notably in previously-tolerant Moravia.

Even other Anabaptists were appalled by Münster, including Menno Simons. Simons, a former Catholic priest, was disturbed by “the excesses of Münsterite Anabaptism” (Williams, 1962, p.390). Simons had discovered Anabaptism upon reading the story of a martyr. Already dissatisfied with Catholic transubstantiation doctrine, he was alarmed by the degree to which Scripture supported believer’s baptism. Interestingly, the same events in Münster which repulsed him also challenged him. He was moved by the Anabaptists’ passion, misguided though it was, and left the priesthood in 1536. Simons was another great traveler, outrunning authorities and rallying dispersed Anabaptists wherever he went. The largest Anabaptist branch bears his name. (Williams, 1962)

For all their differences, early Anabaptists shared a set of core values. Pacifism was perhaps the most significant and controversial ideal. In addition to writing *On the Sword*, Balthasar Hübmaier articulated pacifism in his famous pamphlet, *Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*. There he denounced the use of violence against all people, regardless of their religious beliefs or any other criteria. Harmless as it may seem in modern eyes, pacifism was dangerous in Sixteenth-Century Europe. It meant refusal to serve in the military, and by association refusal to support one’s country. European nations needed all the support they could gather against their
greatest foe, the formidable Turks, who presented a feasible threat of invasion. Hübmaier and Hoffman allowed governments to use force in situations like a Turkish invasion, in what was not an uncommon view. (Keefer, 2002) But even if the Turks were to attack, the Brethren claimed they would not fight. William Estep (1975) quoted Catholics and Protestants who begrudgingly admitted the “heretics” were admirably nonresistant, no matter their circumstances (p.72-73). In the eyes of Europe’s leaders, though, Anabaptists were not admirable. They practically welcomed overthrow and unrest. Nonviolence thus became synonymous with sedition. (Klaassen, 1973)

In tragic irony, the “seditious” pacifists endured persecution. Reformation-era Catholics and Protestants both violently stamped out their respective versions of heresy. Both factions also had areas of political power and safety across Europe. Anabaptists did not. Consequently, they faced persecution virtually wherever they went. Eberli Bolt became the first known Anabaptist martyr, burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic authorities in Switzerland, and he was soon in good company. Grebel, Blaurock, and Mantz were all imprisoned, the latter two martyred. Anabaptists were persecuted to varying degrees for the next two centuries. (Estep, 1975)

Even amidst persecution, Anabaptists lived alongside each other, physically and metaphorically. They called themselves the Brethren, or Gemeinde (brotherhood-church) in German. The name referenced “a gathering of the reborn, an attempt to translate the kingdom idea into practical forms of everyday living – if not in terms of the fullness of the kingdom itself, then at least in what it foreshadows” (Friedmann, 1973, p. 43). Anabaptists were focused on mutual dependence and community. A group in Moravia, ancestors the Hutterites, even shared all their belongings with one another, much as they do today.
Hutterites also shared belongings with other people, and although they lived separatist lives, Anabaptist eschatology and focus on love pushed them into missions and evangelism. Friedmann (1973) specifically named eschatology as “the background of the extraordinary Anabaptist zeal for mission” (p.110). Grebel, Mantz, Hübmaier, Simons, and countless others traveled extensively and preached shamelessly. They believed firmly that their views were true, and felt the urgency of bringing as many people as possible into the fold.

As the church grew, its dedication to discipline remained strong. The Ban was an integral doctrine whereby failure to live consistently with what you professed resulted in permanent expulsion from the community. Anabaptists wanted their faith to permeate every aspect of their lives. Strongly dissatisfied with Christianity that blended into secular culture, they held a dualistic view of the world – the kingdom of man versus the kingdom of God, darkness versus light. As members of God’s kingdom, Anabaptists sought holy, set apart lives which reflected that priority. Discipleship and discipline, as per Matthew 18:15-18, have therefore been foundational from the beginning. (Friedmann, 1973) A believer who embraced and then neglected Anabaptism was entirely cut from the fellowship. As Keefer (2002) succinctly stated, “One could not have [Jesus] as Savior unless you acknowledged him as Lord” (p.249), and the Brethren required lifestyles which evidenced that acknowledgement. And upon acknowledging Jesus as Savior and Lord, believers experienced baptism – the most well-known and (at the time) controversial Anabaptist sacrament.

Finally, Anabaptists leaned toward Peter’s teachings as opposed to Paul’s. This is evidenced through the plethora of early references to 1 and 2 Peter as opposed to Paul’s epistles. Regardless, their primary focus was on Jesus’ life and teaching portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels. (Friedmann, 1973) Jesus’ most emphasized teaching was the Sermon on the Mount in
Matthew Chapter Five. Above all, love played a central role in Anabaptist thought and perspective. Friedmann referenced works by leaders Mantz, Denck, and Hutter all pointing to “Love [as] the countervailing force to sin” (p.61). Everything Anabaptists valued – pacifism, community, discipline, Scripture, to name a few – was rooted in and sprung from understanding God’s love and extending that to others.

Anabaptism emerged in a complex, conflict-ridden society. Countless men and women contributed to its birth and expansion across Europe and the world, but this brief history lays a foundational background from which to understand Anabaptism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Doctrines articulated by sixteenth-century founders were altered, amended, and more importantly maintained over subsequent centuries. Nonresistance, community, holiness, and love were still central values for Anabaptists in the beginning of the twentieth century, to which we now turn.

**Mennonites in Recent History**

Anabaptists maintained their pacifism and nonviolence strongly over the next several centuries. In fact, Loewen (1985) found that every single confession of faith from 1527 to 1975 denounced revenge and contained strong nonresistance language. They also included a disproportionate number of references to the New Testament, and within that to Matthew Chapter 5 – the Sermon on the Mount, wherein Jesus admonishes loving enemies and refusing to retaliate. By the twentieth century, the deeply-rooted nonresistance influenced Mennonites’ cultural interactions in addition to their personal lives. According to Kraybill and Driedger (1994), it resulted in “political aloofness and separation from the larger culture” (p.34). The

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2 Although Hutterite and Amish branches of Anabaptism continued, and the Brethren in Christ denomination emerged and grew, Menno Simons’ namesake sect of Anabaptism became the dominant one in the United States. For that reason, and due to lack of space, Mennonites will be the main focus in this section.
forces which led Mennonites to form communities, when taken to the extreme, had created a people of isolated exclusion with little outside interaction. They existed in quiet, often rural, communities, with the attitude of J.R.R. Tolkien’s hobbits: “Well, it’s none of our concern what goes on beyond our borders. Keep your nose out of trouble and no trouble will come to you” (Shore, 2001).

But just as war jolted the hobbits from their utopia, World Wars I and II pulled Mennonites from their sheltered world. International events catalyzed a new mentality, beginning especially with the young adult generation. During World War I, Mennonite conscientious objectors found alternate forms of service which landed them far from their rural communities. Trips to urban cities, nationally and internationally, opened young Mennonites’ eyes to new perspectives; and as they witnessed the upheaval of war, their quiet pacifism was shaken and challenged. Rejecting the mandate to live within a restricted community and pursue a certain, usually agrarian, occupation, young men entered higher education, married outside the Mennonite church, and led the way in reassessing “nonconformity and nonresistance” (Stutzman, 1993, p. 89). According to Stutzman (1993), the “tightly knit plausibility structures constructed in Mennonite communities became increasingly loose and ambiguous” (p. 88). The younger generation became dissatisfied with old definitions of pacifism that had kept them separated from the rest of society. Disconnected, communities no longer seemed like the appropriate lifestyle for people called to love a hurting world.

Consequently, following the war, leaders began advocating more intentionality regarding politics and societal issues both at home and abroad. Their language began shifting from submissive to assertive. Organizations like the Mennonite Central Committee were founded to address global issues, of which many in the United States were just becoming aware (Shenk,
2000). The Mennonite Central Committee was begun in 1920 specifically to meet the needs of Russian Mennonites post-war. Culminating many years of Mennonites providing financial and hospitality aid to one another across the nations, it was a unification of multiple groups already bringing global relief. By joining various groups together under organized, focused leadership, the Committee began accomplishing vastly more than was previously possible. This was no small feat; finances shared in preceding decades were significant. In fact, Lehman (1945) showed millions of dollars passing between Mennonites in various parts of Europe and North America over approximately fifty years. But the Committee eagerly addressed the present needs and immediately began sending new workers into the mission field.

It is important to note that, amidst the beginnings of growth, the average Mennonite maintained fundamental quiet pacifism at least until World War II, which raised questions even for those who remained at home. (Kraybill & Driedger, 1994) They were challenged by the great evil of Hitler’s regime and the Holocaust. What role did their pacifism play against someone so powerful and determined to kill? The old ideas of nonresistance were losing relevance, becoming stale in the face of modern-day events. However, many Mennonites were reticent to simply discard their heritage. They feared the effects of too quickly entering the sin-filled world from which they had so carefully extricated themselves for decades.

In 1944, two books written by leading United States Mennonite thinkers addressed some of the theological turmoil and provided critical new ideas. Guy Hershberger’s book War, Peace, and Nonresistance (1944) “argued for a single moral law, threaded throughout the Scriptures, that upheld nonresistance” (Kraybill & Driedger, 1994, p.75). He rejected a total political and societal disconnect but did not accept violence under any circumstances. Concurrently with Hershberger’s work, Harold Bender’s Anabaptist Vision (1944) created a “third way,” a middle
route between fundamentalists and modernists. He advocated the sound doctrine of the former with the social concern of the latter. Both authors moderated between total separation and extreme activism, becoming foundational works for Mennonites for the rest of the twentieth century. (Kraybill & Driedger, 1994)

Meanwhile, progressive Mennonites continued their efforts. One of the young men doing relief work with Mennonite Central Committee in Europe was John Howard Yoder. Yoder saw European Mennonites organized to help Russian and German refugees. The refugees were fleeing the Russian Army, in whose eyes they were indistinguishable from Nazis. As Yoder interacted with German and French Mennonites, and later with the global Mennonite church, his new pacifism grew stronger and he developed passion for social justice. No longer fully agreeing with European or American Mennonites, he challenged the former’s willingness to enter war, and the latter’s lack of grace for cultural contexts outside its own. (Zimmerman, 2007) At the time, older generation leaders like Bender were not fond of Yoder’s activism, and tension persisted between the established leaders and their emergent successors.

Changes globally were accompanied by a cultural shift toward modernity in the United States. Kraybill and Driedger (1994) described modernity with three concepts – “differentiation, rationalization, and individualization” (p. 40, emphasis theirs). Twentieth century society valued people with very specific skill sets who used calculated thinking and saw themselves as unique, independent individuals. Mennonites were not immune to these pervasive ideas. Men and women who entered higher education became differentiated and learned rational thinking. The communal, meek, self-denying attitude prominent since Anabaptism’s birth was replaced with self-confident assertion. This paradigm shift, coupled with the experiences of men like Yoder, pushed Mennonites into active societal roles. (Kraybill & Driedger, 1994) By the 1950s,
Mennonite leaders had begun seeing the necessity of political activism in order to see the changes they wanted. It was no longer uncommon for Mennonites to visit Washington, DC and speak with high-ranking politicians. This marked a sharp change from attitudes just thirty years earlier which had kept Mennonites completely outside the political realm.

If the church was already experiencing tensions and confusion, increased global tension only added to the division. The 1950s were filled with fear as the United States went head-to-head ideologically and militarily with the Soviet Union in the start of the Cold War. Conservatives maintained a philosophy of non-involvement, but they were also defensive against the perceived threat of atheism. Consequently, they maintained the classic dualist view, tracing to the seventeenth century, that the state may use force even though individuals should not. Progressives, on the other hand, championed the cause to love their communist neighbors. They rejected even state use of violence. The Vietnam War of the next decade similarly divided the church. Progressives rejected the government’s options for alternative service, claiming even that was too close to cooperating with the military. Instead, they began participating in non-cooperative activities like returning their draft cards and insisting on finding other ways to be conscientious objectors. (Stutzman, 1993)

In the 1960s, some people in the church began adjusting their mindsets from opposing problems on purely moral grounds to denouncing them for social and political reasons as well. Forward-thinking, highly-educated Mennonite leaders promoted social action for its own sake. Many Mennonites participated in protests, in Washington, DC and even on college campuses. They also petitioned the government heavily, even establishing a Mennonite Central Committee base in Washington, DC. These changes led Yoder, in 1972, to publish *The Politics of Jesus*, a book that “rearranged the landscape of theological ethics in the last third of the twentieth
century” (Zimmerman, 2007, p. 23). *The Politics of Jesus* analyzed Jesus’ teachings for their political meaning, not just their moral implications. Yoder encouraged his fellow Mennonites to assess their political involvement in light of Scripture, which he saw as “active engagement” (Stutzman, 1993, p.110). His work was effective; Kauffman and Harder’s (1975) profile of United States Mennonites showed that an average of 61% agreed that using political involvement to reach the nation’s legislatures was part of the church’s role.

By the 1970s, some inner-church changes were apparent. These changes provide evidence that some of the leaders’ new ideas had permeated the church population at large. First, the Mennonite church removed the office of bishop and individual congregations began to self-govern. A central leadership was no longer as prominent, although it still existed in the two leading denominations, the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church. Secondly, Stutzman (1993) claimed that pastors increasingly needed higher education and theological training to effectively hold their position, and many clergymen began to receive salaries for a previously volunteer job. Finally, the Mennonite dress code also began to relax, until many Mennonites were no longer immediately distinguishable from the general population.

The influence was not complete, though. For example, even while Mennonite leaders protested racial injustice and the church as a whole sought equality, the general Mennonite population remained more conservative. Kauffman and Harder’s profile showed that less than 70% of Mennonites in the United States agreed with the statement, “the several races of mankind all share equally in such human qualities as intelligence, physical capacities, and emotional makeup” (1975, p. 139). This evidences strong cultural influences from a deeply divided society. It also serves as a reminder that Mennonites are not perfect, and while they consistently sought to love and serve, they still had room to grow. (Stutzman, 1993)
The 1980s and 1990s brought new challenges. In the 1980s, Mennonites experienced a world in relative peace for the first time since before they formed their new view of pacifism and nonviolence at the beginning of the century. The difficulty then became exploring active lifestyles of peace in the absence of a tangible conflict. As a result, groups such as the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPTs) formed to continue working globally in areas of “low-intensity” conflict (Christian Peacemaker Teams, 2007). Even as CPTs became active, though, the Gulf War commenced. It placed Mennonites in the uncomfortable position of being lone protestors. Most Americans, including Protestant Christians, believed the war was just and acceptable, unlike Vietnam. Mennonites had embraced sociopolitical motivations for pacifism, but now those reasons did not exist in most people’s eyes. The Gulf War raised questions of the pacifist movement. Was the sociopolitical opposition to war effective? Should Mennonites have so quickly supplemented their moral reasons for nonviolence? (Stutzman, 1993)

These questions continue as Mennonites wrestle with conservative and liberal leanings, politically and theologically, within the church. In recent decades, the church has become more open to new members without Mennonite roots. Consequently, its member profile’s doctrine has loosened somewhat. Some of the changes brought about a significant reorganization when the General Conference Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church, both operating in the United States as well as Canada, formed Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA in 2000 and 2002, respectively. Not all Mennonites were satisfied with the change, specifically the new confession of faith that emerged. A group of congregations that felt their conservative evangelical emphasis was being lost in the changes branched out and created the Alliance of Mennonite Evangelical Conferences, which is still developing (2000).
Amidst all the questions that accompany faithful Christianity in a secular world, the church continues to grow in its theology and effectiveness. The Mennonite Central Committee is thriving. It has placed over 13,000 people in one- to five-year assignments and organized thousands more volunteers in sixty-five countries worldwide (Mennonite Central Committee, 2009). The paradigm shift that began with young World War I conscientious objectors has permeated large portions of the North American Mennonite world. Even the most conservative branches of the Mennonite Church are involved in organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service, as well as various mission organizations through which they travel the world.

**Restorative Justice**

As Mennonites continued advocating for peace abroad, they were also involved in an emerging North American movement now called “restorative justice.” While by no means the sole creators, various Mennonites played crucial roles. For example, the pioneers of the modern restorative justice concept emerged in Canada in the 1970s with victim-offender mediation processes designed to improve upon the normative criminal justice procedures. (Arzdorf-Schubbe, 2000; Wiese, 2003) According to Wiese (2003), the first Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) meeting took place with a probation officer, a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer, the offenders, and the twenty-two victims. The idea for mediation came from a local organization and MCC. Four years later, after a probation officer visited Kitchener, Ontario (the site of the first VORP), he brought the idea back to Elkhart, Indiana and began a similar program there (Wiese, 2003). The program in Elkhart was first directed by Eastern Mennonite University professor Dr. Howard Zehr, sometimes “called the grandfather of restorative justice” (Zehr, 2002, p.74).
What is restorative justice? Although hesitant to restrict its definition, Zehr (2002) offered a flexible general concept: “Restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (p.37). The goal is to see victims’ stories heard and their needs met. Restorative justice also wants offenders to receive the support they need to understand what they have done and become (or remain) contributing members of society. The roots of restorative justice are sometimes traced back to biblical concepts, and throughout history to various indigenous people groups and philosophies. However, Richards (2004) argued persuasively that these “roots” are sometimes inaccurate portrayals of various cultures. Furthermore, there is often no direct or even causal connection between historical concepts and the modern movement. The fact that restorative justice values are consistent with Scripture and some cultures throughout time does not automatically mean anything more; the correlations may be imposed. In fact, in his study of restorative justice concepts in the New Testament, Marshall (2007) admitted, “The extent to which I read restorative justice conceptions into the biblical text, or draw out of the text what was already there, is hard to say” (p. 3).

Although it is difficult to identify what former movements directly impacted restorative justice, there is no confusion over the reasons for Mennonite involvement. Even a quick backward glance into Anabaptist history reveals priorities which mirror the values of restorative justice. From the early advocacy of Conrad Grebel, concepts of community, love for all, and pacifism hold prominent places in Mennonite heritage. Early Brethren forgave offenders, refused to violently oppose their enemies, and cherished relationships. The life-changing developments of the early twentieth century certainly molded the Mennonite psyche in preparation for a
movement like restorative justice. More recently, twentieth century wars returned Mennonites to that heritage in ways newly relevant to their culture. The eye-opening worldwide experiences and subsequent social and political activism certainly paved the way for the events of the 1970s.

The actual term is seen as far back as 1955, and the concept of restorative justice is taken from a work in German by Walther Schönfeld (Richards, 2006). Although psychologist Albert Eglash initially rejected the term “restorative,” he wrote extensively on new concepts of restitution. Many of Eglash’s works were referenced by writers in the 1970s as they formed restorative justice ideology. Richards (2006) noted, though, “that often, the expression ‘restorative justice’ has been applied to various programs and procedures retrospectively” (p. 9).

In other words, the movement for victim-focused reconciliation emerged as individuals and people groups, such as the Maori in New Zealand, recognized its value and began advocating for its widespread use. Simultaneously, scholars were coining the phrase “restorative justice” to describe this phenomenon, and eventually the two converged so that now most restorative justice programs work within that label (or some variation thereof).

Currently one of the leading restorative justice organizations is the Victim Offender Mediation Association (VOMA), based in Minnesota with branches throughout the United States and worldwide. VOMA proceeded from the original group in Kitchener and is now an international restorative justice organization, which provides conferences and resources to sustain the movement. Prison Fellowship International also operates a Center for Justice and Reconciliation, implementing restorative justice practices worldwide through a number of organizations and programs. The broadest use, though, is in New Zealand, whose justice system was entirely reorganized in the 1980s. Its criminal justice system now centers around restorative justice principles. (Restorative Justice NZ, 2009)
Restorative justice models have been applied as mediation tools in schools and workplaces. However, the largest focus remains on crimes, most commonly as a supplement to existing criminal justice systems. How have United States Mennonites continued their involvement in restorative justice? In what arenas are they involved – juvenile justice, adult prison systems, ministry, reform – and why? To what extent does their theology motivate their actions? These questions will be explored further in the second half of this research project, which will look to Mennonites involved in restorative justice around the nation but focus on the juvenile justice system in Pennsylvania.

**Conclusion**

The Mennonite tradition is rooted in commitment to Scripture, peace, love, and community. Early Anabaptists gave their comfort and even their lives for the chance to live in holiness and faithfulness to Jesus’ calling. Their extreme pacifism, which extended beyond refusing to participate in war and included daily interactions with those around them, laid a lasting foundation. Three centuries later, the founders’ descendants in the Mennonite Church continued placing peace among their highest priorities. While this commitment to peace was drastically challenged and altered in the twentieth century, it remains firm. One of the church’s most significant emergent concepts entering the twenty-first century is that of restorative justice. Restorative justice is a practice entrenched in peace. It grows from people deeply concerned with pacifism that touches every aspect of their lives and the lives surrounding them. As a movement specifically applied to the criminal justice system, restorative justice has strong roots and will continue to impact victims, offenders, and societies worldwide.
References


