

A REVOLUTION IN THE MAKING

INTRODUCTION

The seeds of a revolution have taken hold on the most notorious maximum security unit in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the John B. Connally Unit. It's not a revolution of blood or force, but one of faith, intellect and resolve.

Our mission is to build a world of hope, opportunity and enduring freedom in an oppressive and predatory environment that does little to encourage positive change. This revolution is not against society or the TDCJ (system). It's against ourselves, our past, our fears, our lack of faith and indifference to the moral virtues valued most by humanity.

It is in the midst of the Moral Relativism phenomena that every sector of our christian society has instilled extraordinary permissiveness and complacency among the old, while sowing aimlessness and confusion among the young.

Aimlessness and confusion, the root of crime, creates a psychological schism in one's understanding of himself, pitting what he is vs. who he is. It's a struggle where one defines himself by social trends, associations or material possessions, rather than the moral absolutes governing a mutually beneficial relationship with God and others, regardless of trend, peer pressure or material gain.

The criminal element is an end result to this wave of relativism in that, by strictly focusing on what an individual is, he is more willing to lie, cheat or steal to achieve the notoraity or material goods he so cherishes, in spite of God's law. While those who are morally conscious are willing to make due with what they have and earn what they desire through hard work and perseverance, for the sake of God's law.

While incarcerated, we have an opportunity to discover who we are as individuals (honorable, dignified and righteous in the eyes of God) and what we're capable of as men in this society, which when governed by a moral conscience will help rather than hurt our fellow man.

This opportunity is being lost, however, as we face a systemic infrastructure that breeds hate and descension in the hearts of men and the social stigmas that oppress the spirit, forcing one to lose hope soon after he is reclaimed by society.

What are we without hope?

Without hope, do we not exist merely for the sake of existing? Well, even a dog has the natural benefit of that. Some dogs have it better now'a days.

In this penitentiary hope has become an illusion. With little if anything positive to cling on to, very few are able to weigh choices beyond delving into the negative. This is a backward place that cannot, by virtue of its very nature, condition men to adequately function in a stigmatic society prepared to shun our presence. This is our reality.

We are men desperate for hope, desperate for opportunity and very aware of their absence. Thus, many of us act accordingly.

But society demands that we change our ways in order to reenter our respective community. Is this demand outrageous? Of course, not. It's not only right, it's also very possible for most, if not all, incarcerated. The problem is that TDCJ can't support the programs needed to reach these men. So we're left with individuals surrendering to a negative environment, abandoning any compulsion, even hope, for positive change.

When you have a system that makes people worse, the result of which is to be layed upon the community they return to, you have to ask, is this justice?

In the book, The Crime of Punishment, the author reflects upon the idea of justice:

"The laborious effort made in the noble name of justice results in the very opposite. The concept is so vague, so distorted in its application, so hypocritical and usually so irrelevant, that it offers no help in the solution of the problem it exists to combat, but results in the very opposite -- injustice -- injustice to everybody.

Socrates defined justice as awarding to each that is due him. But Plato percieved the sophistry of this and admitted that justice basically means power, "the interests of the stronger," a clear note that has been repeated by Machiavelli, Hobbs, Spinoza, Marx, Kalsem, on down...

Contrast the two ways in which the word is commonly used. On one hand we want to obtain justice for the unfairly treated; we render justice to an oppressed people; we deal justly with our neighbor. We think of justice in terms of fair dealing and rescue of the exploited, and we associate it with freedom, social progress and democracy.

On the other hand, when justice is "meted out", justice is "served", justice is "satisfied", or "paid", it is something terrible which someone "sees to it" that someone else gets, not something that's good, helpful or valuable, but something that hurts. It's the whiplash of retribution about to descend upon the naked back of transgressors. The ends of justice is to give help to some, pain to others." (end of excerpt)

This passage, written over forty years ago, continues to capture the essence of our constant struggle as a society and the foundation upon which new leadership must lay: the ends of justice.

When looked at with a clear eye, the ends of justice may be gauged the very moment a man walks out of prison; his faith, education, skills and mindset. Every rehabilitative tool developed while incarcerated is about to be put to the test: can he compete in a struggling job market? Will he stay clean and sober, provide for his family and contribute to society? Is his faith and mindset strong enough to stay the course?

It is from this moment on that these few factors will determine whether he stays out or returns to prison.

It is also the moment society is put to the test: will be able to accept him? Can it give him the benefit of the doubt and support his efforts?

When reduced to its most fundamental element, the end of justice amounts to a person who has paid his debt to society, has learned how, is willing and accepted in becoming part of it. At least, that's how it ought to be.

But there is the way things ought to be and the way things are. As this is true with most things in life, it is especially true with the Texas criminal justice system, where words like, "reform" and "rehabilitation" are showcased in mission statements, political speeches and written law, but in practice, are thrown in the trash and words like "condemnation" and "punishment" take their place and become our reality.

This is the motivation behind our revolution. Because politicians have focused less on true justice and more on a "lock 'em up and throw away the key" philosophy; penological academics have sat around tables strategizing methods to "pacify" an aggressive prison population with administrative tactics designed to preemptively break a man's spirit; and those of us who are released to parole face a hostile society with a damaged spirit, easily discouraged from building the dream life once envisioned in our cold prison cells.

In our society we have the upper-class, middle-class, lower-class and sub-class. We, incarcerated are squeezed into this sub-class where we find few rights and even fewer opportunities to rise above such existence.

There are those who believe it is only right. Afterall, we are murderers, thieves, drug dealers and sexual offenders, just to name a few of the worse crimes against society. Why should we expect to be treated with respect and dignity? Why would we expect to be released back into a society that we couldn't handle in the first place? Why are we even allowed to continue breathing,

sucking financial resources that could be better spent on education, health care or job creation? Why not just die and rid society of its problems all together?

It's called redemptive value.

Mental disorders aside, no one is born inherently evil. That's not to say those with mental disorders are evil, but that they are less likely to recognize an evil being committed. Thus, "innocent by reason of insanity."

That being said, the vast majority of the incarcerated are redeemable. But, even though TDCJ's actual infrastructure is designed to promote and facilitate positive change in our behavior (yea, it's written in their mission statement), there is little being done to do so, especially now with the department's budget cut.

This is a true injustice to society-at-large because the potential for an individual to change does exist. But it is squandered in an environment that breeds the dark side of the human condition. So, we end up with human potential that will never be tapped, nurtured, harvested or enjoyed by the individual and society, both.

Now, we have the revolution, designed to tap and individual's potential by promoting and/or instituting in-system programs that build the faith, knowledge, character and confidence needed to face the negative environment he lives in and obstacles once released; to nurture that potential with family integrity programs that help families play an active role in the rehabilitative process; to harvest that potential with free-world

programs that help guide individuals through the parole process with job searching and housing services; and to maintain that potential by establishing support groups across the state.

A REVOLUTION IN THE MAKING is a living, breathing monument to society's potential. Our mission does not only encompass the incarcerated, but our families, friends and the communities we are bound to reenter.

The truth is truth. Sometimes it hurts, other times it inspires, but it cannot be veiled into a falsehood when the facts are right in front of your face. It is this truth, founded upon God, that nourishes our movement. A truth that explains where we come from, where we are and where we're going. A truth that dictates that our two worlds will ultimately merge into one. So, what we do in here will affect you later because prison is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. If TDCJ is financially strapped and unable to maintain an effective means, then society must become involved in the processes that prepare and deliver reformed citizens to their respective communities so that we may all share a better end: justice -- justice for everyone.