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Criminal Justice as Ministry

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Criminal Justice as Ministry

Abstract

"While the Lord stores up final judgment, He also appoints ministers in this world charged with upholding the good and vindicating the victimized."

Posting about the purpose of the U. S. Criminal Justice System from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/criminal-justice-as-ministry/>

Keywords

In All Things, justice, society, victims, judgment

Disciplines

Christianity | Criminal Law

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at [Dordt College](#).

Criminal Justice as Ministry

 inallthings.org/criminal-justice-as-ministry/

Donald Roth

The Criminal Justice System is designed to protect the flourishing of society by helping to establish and enforce behavioral guidelines for social interactions. Although the powers of this world do not recognize it, this designed purpose is actually a divine mandate. The Lord says “It is mine to avenge, I will repay” (Deut. 32:35), but while this teaches God’s people to look for vindication and salvation in the Lord alone (largely in a promised final judgment), the Father does not abandon the men of the earth to their own devices in the here and now. Instead, after quoting this passage in Romans 12, the Apostle Paul goes on in Romans 13 to say, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

Paul not only calls these governing authorities “God’s servant for your good” but also “the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.” The word “servant” in all these verses could also be rendered as “minister.” While the Lord stores up final judgment, he also appoints ministers in this world charged with upholding the good and vindicating the victimized. These ministers are, of course, imperfect in the execution of their task (Paul wrote these words first in reference to the Roman government!), but they nevertheless act as part of God’s restraining and sustaining hand in this groaning creation.

In this role, the justice system actively upholds the good by proactively protecting the community and seeking to care for victims and rehabilitate those who are willing to reintegrate into society. The justice system also hears the complaints of those claiming to be victims and determines the veracity of their claims, and, given the limitations of this fallen world, at least ideally withholds judgment until a wrongdoer is proved so beyond a reasonable doubt. The Criminal Justice System is not solely about meting out punishment, neither is it solely about rehabilitating and restoring the broken, although it fills all of those roles at times; rather, the Criminal Justice System is principally charged with restraining evil and upholding good, however imperfectly, while the redemptive harvest continues, and Christians should joyfully flock to this ministry confident that they are providing true service in the Lord’s Kingdom.