

# Offender Programs Report

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## Religion and Prison Programming: The Role, Impact, and Future Direction of Faith in Correctional Systems

by Thomas P. O'Connor and Jeff B. Duncan

A complex set of factors has propelled the growth of the religion-criminology conversation that is currently taking place around the country on many different levels. These factors include:

- The growth of the restorative justice movement, which often draws on biblical notions of justice (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006);
- The widespread appeal of Native American, Christian, Islamic, and other religious practices such as Transcendental and Buddhist meditation among prisoners (O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002; Pallone, 2003);
- A call from the U.S. Catholic Bishops for an end to the death penalty (U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000);
- The passing in 2001 and upholding by the Supreme Court in 2006 of an important law called the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) that substantially strengthens the constitutional right of people to practice their religion in prison;
- President Bush's faith-based initiative; and
- The growth of faith-based prisons or prison units around the country in

Alaska, Iowa, Louisiana, New Mexico, Texas, Florida, Ohio, Kansas, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and in other countries such as Brazil and England (Burnside et al., 2005).

### Religion on the National Criminological Agenda

Researchers have also responded to the reemergence of religion as a factor that requires explicit consideration in the development of the penal system. Camp et al. (2006) note that in 1990, Gartner et al. documented an almost complete absence of research on the relationship between religion and adult prisoner rehabilitation. Camp et al. (2006) then cite quite a number of studies on this topic, most of which are from 1992 forward. In a 2004 review of the research literature, O'Connor identified 12 studies, of varying methodological quality, that examined 16 associations between religion and rehabilitation (O'Connor, 2004, 2005). Today, the count of studies is closer to 20, and faith-based programs have been studied with a methodological quality that is rigorous enough to warrant their inclusion as a separate category in a meta-analytic study of the effectiveness

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of adult correctional programs (Aos et al., 2006).

The cultural, political, and research context surrounding this topic of religion and criminology presents a "window of opportunity" for working explicitly with religious, spiritual, and ethical themes in criminology. This window of opportunity is not without its dangers or threats, however. For example:

- How can practitioners work with religion without establishing a state religion and while maintaining an appropriate separation of church and state?
- How can we help policymakers not to use religion as yet another ideology to advance a political agenda that bears little or no relationship to evidence-based principles and findings from good criminological and good religious research?

The contentious and political ramifications of work in this area have already surfaced explicitly in both the United States and England (Burnside et al., 2005). The Federal Court of Appeals recently upheld most parts of a Federal District Court decision that held that a Christian faith-based prison unit run by Prison Fellowship in the Iowa Department of Corrections violated the separation of church and state because it was "pervasively sectarian" (*Americans United for Separation of Church and State v. Prison Fellowship*

*Ministries, Inc.*, 509 F.3d 406 (8th Cir 2007)). In the following sections, we lay out a series of steps to help practitioners promote the opportunities and avoid the threats of this window of opportunity for the developing U.S. penal system.

### Basic Assumptions Make a Difference: Two Dueling Models

Skotnicki (2000) has shown that religious movements and thought were not simply contributing factors, but rather provided one of the primary sources of motivation and direction for the creation of a new U.S. penal system in the late 18th century. This new penal system had rehabilitation as its goal and prison as its method. The founders of the new system of prisons intended to further a set of religious and political beliefs about people and society. They also intended to replace the purpose of the then-existing penal system, whose goal was not rehabilitation but the maintenance of society and the punishment of offenders through the use of fines, banishments, stocks, floggings, and hangings (Erikson, 1966; O'Connor, 2003; Skotnicki, 2000). At that time, however, two contradictory socio-religious views of the person and society meant that there were two different understandings of the meaning of rehabilitation. These differences in understanding the meaning of rehabilitation led to two very different penal goals and two very different structures of prison operation.

First, a version of Calvinist theology inspired the creation of the "silent" or New

York prison model, with its interpretation of rehabilitation. This theology tended toward the view that all people were basically flawed, but some were predestined to salvation and others to damnation. Society therefore was inherently unstable and could be maintained only through the virtue of obedience to laws. Thus, the New York system understood the rehabilitation of criminals (people who, in general, were not among the "saved") not as the process of changing their hearts toward goodness, but as the process of training and coercing them to obey the law. Elam Lynds, one of the first wardens in the New York system, and himself a very religious man, articulated the sentiments from that system in the following way:

We must understand each other; I do not believe in a complete reform, except with young delinquents. Nothing, in my opinion, is rarer than to see a convict of mature age become a religious and virtuous man. I do not put great faith in the sanctity of those who leave the prison. I do not believe that the counsels of the chaplain, or the meditations of the prisoner, make a good Christian of him. But my opinion is, that a great number of old convicts do not commit new crimes, and that they even become useful citizens, having learned in prison a useful art, and contracted habits of constant labor. This is the only reform I ever have

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reentry programs based on research-based evidence should be an inspiration to all correctional facilities looking to use research to assist in making treatment decisions. The article also discusses the mutual benefit that must exist for a good partnership to evolve. The authors observe, "Benefits include cooperation between correctional agencies and

researchers to collect data from consenting offenders, which includes logistical support in entering the institution, identification and location of eligible inmates for recruitment, and reserving space within the institution to meet with potential study participants."

This research is a good example of what needs to occur everywhere for correctional facilities to be successful and for researchers to make an impact. This

article should be mandatory reading for anyone currently either working within or providing assistance to a correctional treatment facility. It is an example of what good teamwork can do and how strong community partnerships help everyone.

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expected to produce, and I believe it is the only one which society has the right to expect (de Beaumont & de Tocqueville, 1979, pp.163-164).

Second, a version of Quaker theology led to the creation of the "separate" or Pennsylvania prison model, with a different interpretation of rehabilitation. Quakers believed that God was in everyone, and given the right prison circumstances, the Holy Spirit or the "inner light" in every offender would "quicken" or awaken and restore him or her "to virtue and happiness" (Skotnicki, 2000; O'Connor, 2003). Clearly this system did believe in internal change. Two famous French commentators, de Beaumont and de Tocqueville (1979), who traveled from France to study the early American experiment with prisons, summed up the two rival prison systems: "The Philadelphia system produces more honest men, and that of New York, more obedient citizens" (p. 60).

One wonders what assumptions about human nature lie behind the secular model of prisons today, and also what a Buddhist, Evangelical Christian, Pentecostal, Catholic, Native American, or Muslim model of rehabilitation might look like. Perhaps more to the point, one wonders what a secular model of prisons that took the question of spirituality seriously might look like, in what is now a more religiously diverse society than the society in which the original penal models of rehabilitation were developed.

After a heated public struggle, the New York system became the prevailing model, and the Pennsylvania model largely disappeared as a guiding philosophy of rehabilitation for prisons in America (O'Connor, 2003; Skotnicki, 2000). We posit that this essentially spiritual

and moral struggle across a continuum of more pessimistic to more optimistic sets of assumptions about the nature of a person/society and the role of prisons persists in the minds and hearts of many Americans today. Thinking of most offenders as basically bad people who have strayed from obedience is much more likely to lead to a punishment/control approach, whereas viewing most offenders as basically good people who have learned to do bad things is much more likely to lead to a treatment/change approach. A combination of both approaches (the New York prison system emphasis on the role of structure in teaching new skills and the Pennsylvania prison system focus on the need for a spiritual awakening and internal change) probably matches the realities of the processes of desistance from crime more closely than an either-or approach.

Our point here is twofold. First, it is important for us as practitioners to clearly understand and articulate our own religious/spiritual or secular/moral beliefs about human nature and society, because our basic assumptions about humanity will profoundly influence the kind of criminal justice system that we seek to construct. Second, from its inception, the U.S. penal system was guided by a moral and spiritual vision, and there remains a need to have and articulate a guiding ethical vision (whether or not such a vision contains spiritual elements or is purely secular) for the prison system. For as many authors, such as the philosopher Charles Taylor (2007), the politician Madeleine Albright (2006), and the criminological ethicist Andrew Skotnicki (2007) argue, the social and political sciences err significantly when they leave out any consideration of the ethical and spiritual in their understanding of how to solve social problems.

**The Extent, Role, and Cost of Faith in Corrections**

Almost every prison in the United States has a chaplain or team of chaplains responsible for assisting inmates to practice their constitutional right to practice and express their faith. Data from the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) shows that in 2005, approximately 51% of all incarcerated men (8,312 out of a rolling population of 16,387) and 86% of all incarcerated women (1,336/1,555) attended a religious or spiritual service at least once, and the average attendance was slightly less than once per week. These figures confirm the finding that religious involvement is one of the most common forms of "programming" in U.S. state prisons (Beck et al., 1993). When we followed only the people who had entered prison during 2005 and looked at the subset of those people who were still incarcerated after a full year from the time of their intake, we found that fully 95% of women (333/349) and 70% of men (2122/3009) attended at least one religious or spiritual event during their first year in prison after intake.

Thus, a very high proportion of people attend religious services during incarceration, and women attend at higher rates than men. (See Figure 1.) This higher level of religious attendance among women mirrors a higher attendance level among women in the general population. In over 49 different countries around the world, and across different religions, studies have found a pattern of significantly higher interest in religion among women compared to men (Stark, 2002). Interestingly, we also found that there were racial differences in attendance rates for the men, but there were no real racial differences in attendance rates for the women.

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As Figure 1 shows, Native American men were more likely to attend religious events than men who were Hispanic in origin, and Hispanic men were in turn more likely to attend than Whites, Blacks, or Asians.

Religious research increasingly makes a distinction between spirituality and religion because there has been a modern trend among the general population to distinguish these two concepts (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Many people will say, "I am not particularly religious; however, I am a spiritual person." By saying this, people tend to mean that they do not attend organized religious activities, but they do feel that they have a sense of ultimate meaning in their life that is connected to a relationship they have with a divine or ultimate source of meaning. For many people, both spirituality and/or religion help to answer the major questions of life: purpose, matters of sickness and health, and death.

Despite this growing distinction between spirituality and religion, the majority of the general population, when given the choice, identify themselves as being both spiritual and religious. In other words, there is considerable overlap between these two concepts or dimensions of a person's life. As Figure 2 shows, in one study of the general population, 74% of the people surveyed said, "I am spiritual and religious"; 19% said, "I am spiritual but not religious"; 4% said, "I am religious but not spiritual"; and only 3% said, "I am neither spiritual nor religious." When asked the same question, the adult offenders at ODOC intake respond in the following manner: 57% of the men and 60% of the women said, "I am spiritual and religious"; 25% of the men and 29% of the women said, "I am spiritual but not religious"; 10% of the men and 5% of the women said, "I am religious but not spiritual"; and 8% of the men and 6% of the women said, "I am neither spiritual nor religious."

Two observations are striking about these figures. First, the percentage of people saying that they are "spiritual but not religious" may be higher among adult offenders than among the general population. These figures are merely suggestive of this fact, however, because the above figures are not a scientific comparison. The other striking thing about the figures is that the vast majority—93% of the general population, 83% of adult male offenders, and 89% of female offenders—say they are either "spiritual and religious" or

Figure 1

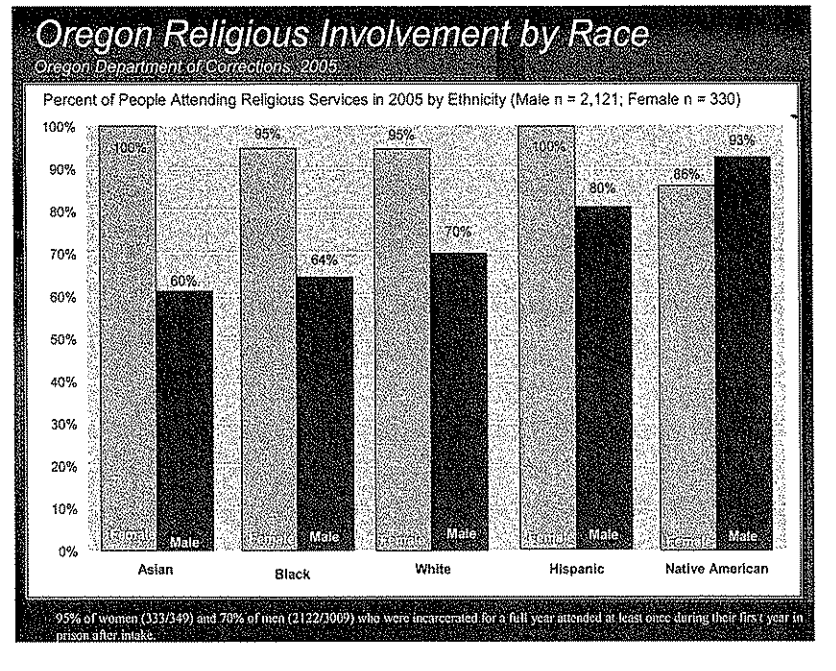


Figure 2

Personal Spiritual Perspectives

Choose one statement that describes you the best \*

	Male %	Female %	Gen Pop <sup>1</sup> %
I am spiritual and religious	57	60	74
I am spiritual but not religious	25	29	19
I am religious but not spiritual	10	5	4
I am neither spiritual nor religious	8	6	3

<sup>1</sup> Source - Zinnbauer, B., Pargament, K.I., Cowell, B., et al (1997). Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the fuzzy. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion  
 \* Male and female did not differ significantly - 2003 ODOC intake cohort (n=1495)

"spiritual but not religious." In other words, very few of those sampled say that they have no spiritual or religious life. So once again the offender population looks very much like the general population of America, who we know are extremely likely (86% in a 1999 Gallup poll) to say that they believe in God.

Because the practice of spirituality and/or religion is so pervasive among people who are incarcerated, it is important that we begin to train counselors, parole and probation officers, case managers, and

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other staff who are involved in assessing the criminogenic risk, need, and responsibility factors for offenders to also take a short spiritual history from their clients. Failure to acknowledge and incorporate the importance of this area as a possible strength and source of coping for people who are seeking to change could have a negative impact on those people, because it sends a signal that the person assessing and developing a case plan is not concerned about and does not understand a very important part of the client's life.

Dr. Christina Puchalski (1999) has developed a two-minute spiritual-history questionnaire for doctors who are helping patients to address end-of-life care and concerns, and questionnaires like these can easily be adapted to a correctional setting. Dr Puchalski's spiritual-history questionnaire asks four simple questions:

1. What is your faith or belief?
2. Is it important in your life?
3. Are you part of a spiritual or religious community?
4. How would you like to address these issues in your program/plan?

It is important to note that asking these questions does not violate any principle regarding the separation of church and state.

The Oregon Department of Corrections spent approximately \$230 per person per year for the 9,647 men and women who attended regular religious services in 2005. Although not directly comparable, this figure pales in comparison to Joan Petersilia's (1995) estimated cost of between \$12,000 and \$14,000 per person per year for quality correctional programs that reduce recidivism. The ODOC sustains this low level of cost for religious programs by having a relatively small staff of about 23 correctional chaplains and seven other staff. (The seven other religious services staff run the volunteer program and the victim services program and support central administration.) That small staff provides direct services to prisoners, as well as recruiting, training, supporting, guiding, and supervising over 1,400 volunteers from diverse faith groups as they minister to the men and women in the Oregon prison system.

This religious services team provides, in a constitutional manner, a wide variety of faith services in prison including Native American, Protestant (a wide

variety of denominations), Islamic, Catholic, Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness, Hindu, Jewish, Pentecostal, Pagan, Earth-Based, Latter Day Saints, Messianic Jewish, and Seventh Day Adventist. The volunteers donate an estimated 250,000 hours of service each year, the equivalent of 121 full-time staff positions or over \$4.5 million in value if one uses the Independent Sector figure of \$18.04 per volunteer hour to estimate the value of volunteer services (Independent Sector, 2006).

### Faith-Based Prisons: Some Reservations

Beyond the basic religious and spiritual services that exist throughout every prison, there are now faith-based prisons or prison units emerging that seek to immerse prisoners in an almost monastic or total experience of religiously based living. Like the regular religious services in prison, these more in-depth programs rely on a mixture of staff and volunteers, but unlike the regular services, they usually explicitly aim and purport to reduce recidivism. These programs also tend to be more expensive than the provision of basic religious and spiritual services and can accommodate only a very small percentage of the prison population.

In our opinion, the current trend around the country to put large sums of money and a great deal of public, political, and criminological emphasis on a few hundred prisoners who are involved in these more in-depth faith-based programs is mistaken in several ways:

1. This initiative comes at a time when chaplain positions are being cut in many states, which often means that the regular faith-based services that reach thousands of prisoners are overlooked and underfunded. The state prison system of Oregon has one of the best chaplain-to-inmate ratios in the United States, but the Oregon prison system houses about 13,500 prisoners and has a religious services staff of 30 people. By way of comparison, the Canadian federal prison system houses about 12,500 prisoners and has over 150 full-time chaplains. The English and Welsh prison system also has ratios of chaplains to inmates that are similar to the Canadian ratios. So, one must ask, how serious is the United States about protecting the constitutional right of prisoners to

practice and express their faith, a right that is neither lost nor severely curtailed for those in prison?

2. These more in-depth faith-based programs, prisons, and prison units are often presented as an alternative to (or better than) other correctional treatment programs, despite the total absence of any evidence to justify this viewpoint. This juxtaposition tends to pit "faith-based" programs against "secular" programs like drug treatment. As we shall see later in this article, the separation of faith and religion over and against other parts of a person's life is deeply problematical from both a treatment and a religious point of view. It is far better to ask not whether "faith-based" programs work, but whether faith has an appropriate role to play in effective correctional systems and programming.
3. These faith-based prisons or prison units tend to raise the specter of a host of constitutional difficulties, and the entanglement of church and state issues.

It seems to us that the more important dialogue today between faith and corrections should center around two ideas:

1. How to integrate the widespread practice of religion and spirituality among the prison population into the assessment, programming, and case management processes that correctional systems are working so hard to build into the incarceration experience as the only viable way to prevent future recidivism and increase public safety; and
2. How to integrate more of the ethical and compassionate principles of spirituality into our correctional systems, so as to render these systems more humane and more conducive to the growth and development of the full human person.

The other important work for correctional chaplains and religious services staff is to figure out how to make the work they are already successfully doing inside the prisons, which is reaching thousands of people and involving thousands of volunteers from the community, more effective and more efficient. Next, staff needs to determine how to connect and continue that work to the outside and have it play an appropriate role in helping

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people overcome the barriers to their successful reentry and establish sources of prosocial attitudes, support, and acceptance in the community.

### **The Life Connections Program: A Multi-Faith Initiative**

Having stated some of our reservations about the difficulties related to the wave of faith-based prison units and prisons that is crossing the country, we would like to turn our attention to one of those programs that seems to be doing a very good job of overcoming the three problem areas that we outlined above. The Life Connections Program (LCP) is run by the chaplains in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. LCP is basically a reentry preparation program that brings people of all different faiths together to work on a common curriculum that was designed by a group of chaplains in consultation with the Change Company. As part of the program, the members of the different faith groups work on the common curriculum. Program participants then take that work back to volunteers from their own faith tradition, where they work the material again in the context of discovering what the resources of their own faith tradition have to say about the content of the curriculum. For example, part of the common curriculum concerns "spirituality" in general, and part of it concerns "building community," but each faith tradition might work with and understand these topics in a faith-specific way. Because the program is truly a multi-faith program that supports many different faith traditions, it avoids many of the constitutional difficulties of the religious prison units that are single-faith programs.

Camp et al. (2006) discovered some important information about what kind of prisoners volunteer for LCP. Volunteers tend:

- To have high levels of religious attendance and reading in prison;
- To see themselves as moderate compared to fundamentalist in their religious views; and
- To be highly motivated to change their lives and desist from crime (Camp et al., 2006).

LCP is essentially a spiritually based reentry program that begins in prison, and in many departments of correction, such

as those in Florida, Texas, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Maryland, the religious services staff and volunteers are also actively working to assist prisoners with their reentry into the community. The Home for Good in Oregon (HGO) program and the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) program in Canada are two other examples of multi-faith programs that allow hundreds of faith-based people to assist with the reentry process in the community in a way that supports the mission of both prisons and probation and parole offices to increase public safety (O'Connor et al., 2007; O'Connor et al., 2004; R.J. Wilson et al., 2005).

Practitioners who wish to harness this incredible array of faith-based services and volunteers, while maintaining the separation of church and state and avoiding the use of religion to foster a political ideology, should remember three points:

1. Every spiritual leader (e.g., Native American, pastor, rabbi, or imam) and the group of people whom they lead in their tribes, churches, synagogues, and mosques, by definition, knows almost nothing about corrections or working with offenders in the process of desistance from crime.
2. These faith-based communities, again by definition, know almost nothing about assisting faith groups, other than their own, to grow and develop. Each of these faith-based communities, however, knows a great deal about how to create a prosocial support network of people who have a prosocial way of thinking and behaving. Both of these factors (developing a prosocial support system and a prosocial set of values and beliefs) are known to be crucial predictors of success upon release.
3. Religious volunteers cost very little, but they are not free because they require knowledgeable staff to train, support, and encourage them. The trend among practitioners in most U.S. states is to look for more help from faith-based volunteers and places of worship while at the same time reducing the number of paid correctional chaplains and other staff who work with the chaplains. This strategy will not work for the three reasons outlined here. Only professional chaplains and other religious services staff are in a position to have the appropriate vision, knowledge, skills, and aptitude

to engage, train, and supervise a wide diversity of religious volunteers in an effective manner for correctional purposes, and in a way that maintains the nonestablishment of any given religion and the separation of church and state.

Ideally for us, the term "chaplain" refers to a religious leader who is trained in and recognized by his or her own religious or spiritual tradition and is also trained in how to assist members of all faith groups and people who do not belong to any particular faith to develop spiritually. Chaplains commonly work in institutions such as hospitals, the armed services, or prisons, and a few work in large companies that increasingly understand the importance of spirituality in the day-to-day lives of many of their employees. A chaplain's job is to serve the spiritual needs of all people in those institutions regardless of creed (or lack thereof). Correctional chaplains are also trained in corrections: they have some knowledge of "what works" and "what does not work" to help offenders desist from crime and make the public safer. Criminal justice systems, therefore, need to support and invest in the development of professional correctional chaplains/religious staff and to work with them to mobilize and guide the various faith traditions as religious staff seek to partner with the justice system to help reduce the problem of crime.

### **The Meaning, Impact, and Future of Faith in Correctional Systems**

Clear and Myhre (1995) found that the religious involvement of inmates helped them to adjust psychologically to prison life and to deal with the emotional strains of incarceration. These emotional strains included dealing with guilt, finding a new way of life, and coping with the loss of freedom. They also found that religious involvement helped the prisoners to deal with the various deprivations that accompany imprisonment, including:

- Finding a place of safety within the threatening situation of prison by attaching themselves to a group of religious prisoners;
- Obtaining some extra material comforts by being involved with outside volunteers who often bring in food and refreshments along with their programs; and

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- Having greater access to outsiders and the community (Clear & Myhre, 1995, pp. 23-24).

Harry Dammer (1992) collected and content analyzed ethnographic data gathered in interviews with correctional staff, participant observation of religious programs, and 70 individual interviews with prisoners in two large maximum-security prisons in the Northeast United States to discover the reasons for religious involvement in the prison environment. According to a consensus of prisoners and correctional staff in Dammer's (1992) study, the reasons for religious involvement differed among inmates across a "sincere" to "insincere" continuum. Those prisoners who are sincere in their religious practice derive the following:

- Motivation;
- Direction and meaning for their life;
- Hope for the future;
- Peace of mind;
- Positive self-esteem; and
- A change in life style.

As one inmate in Dammer's (1992) study stated, "Religion is a guide to not get out of hand; it gives you a straight path."

Insincere prisoners, on the other hand, practice religion for different reasons:

- To gain protection;
- To meet other inmates;
- To interact with volunteers; and
- To gain access to prison resources.

Interestingly, Dammer (1992, 2002) found that religion helped both the sincere and insincere religious practitioners to mitigate the psychological and physical deprivations of being incarcerated.

**Religious Services Providers as Role Models.** The religious milieu also places prisoners among chaplains and volunteers (and some other inmates) who are potentially very powerful role models because volunteers and chaplains are very attached to the major social institutions of life and are very committed to prosocial behaviors and attitudes. A national study of correctional chaplains found that 79% of them had earned at least a Master's degree. In addition, prison chaplains had an average of ten years of correctional experience and believed strongly in a philosophy of rehabilitation (Sundt & Cullen, 1998, 2002). The correctional chaplains in this

national study reported spending most of their time counseling inmates, and they used methods of counseling that treatment studies have found to be effective in reducing recidivism, such as cognitive and behavioral-based counseling.

The fact that chaplains are knowledgeable and skilled advocates for inmates can be discerned in comments made to me by Chaplain Brown at Lieber Prison in South Carolina:

With regard to corrections and ministry, it's not just about getting people to go to church—"save those wretched souls"—that is part of it. Salvation is very important from a theological perspective. More, however, is needed from a sociological perspective. To reduce recidivism we have to work with psychological, sociological, mental, and physical problems also.

As for the impact of volunteers, an exploratory study of Christian religious volunteers in a South Carolina prison found that the volunteers were more educated, had higher incomes, and were more likely to be married, more likely to vote in elections, and more likely to attend church than the general population in the southern region of the United States (O'Connor et al., 1997a). Thus, religious volunteers in prison, as a group, seem to be very accomplished in the spheres of education, work, family, citizenship, and religion. Most people in prison are not very accomplished in these areas of life, so there is a tremendous potential for them to learn how to be successful in these areas by interacting with the religious services staff and volunteers in the kind of social learning/role modeling framework that has been described by Andrews and Bonta (1998). Becoming successful in these areas would contribute to lowered recidivism for people who leave prison.

**Spiritual Outcomes.** Apart from any potential role in reducing recidivism, Clear et al. (2000), after looking at faith in prison from the perspective of inmates, argued that the real outcome or purpose of religion in prison is not to reduce recidivism but to counteract the tendency of prisons to dehumanize people and help prisoners prevent a further decline in their humanity (Cullen et al., 2000). Similarly, the English and Welsh prison service states that the primary purpose of religious services in prison is "to preserve the rights, decency, and dignity of prison-

ers" and not to change prisoners' behavior (Her Majesty's Prison Service, 2002).

We would add a third, more specifically spiritual, purpose or outcome to the possible outcomes of recidivism reduction and a prevention of a decline in humanity. This spiritual outcome can be named in many ways, depending on one's spiritual tradition: enlightenment; rebirth; redemption; sanctification; salvation; divination; reconciliation; growing in love for the divine, oneself, others, and the world; transcending human suffering; having one's sinful nature transformed; or realizing one's basic goodness.

### "What Works" for Faith-Based Programs

In their meta-analytic study of "what works" and "what does not work" to reduce adult criminal recidivism, Aos et al. (2006) report on six faith-based studies that were of sufficient methodological rigor for inclusion in their study. In other articles, we have reviewed many of the faith-based prison program studies that Aos et al. did not include in their meta-analysis because they judged the studies not to be of high enough methodological quality for consideration (O'Connor, 2004, 2005). In this article, however, we have chosen to focus on the findings from Aos et al. (2006) because these findings are important and present the most succinct and methodologically sound summary of the research to date.

Before turning to Aos et al. (2006), we would, however, like to make one point about the findings from the studies not included by Aos et al.: Aos and his colleagues looked only at recidivism studies, but there have been at least nine studies of the impact of religious and spiritual involvement in prison on *reducing prison infractions*. As in the case of recidivism studies, these nine studies of the relationship between religion and prison infractions vary greatly in terms of their methodological quality. Six of these studies have found a positive relationship between religious involvement and reduced infractions, and three have found no relationship. Although this research regarding impact on in-prison infractions is inconclusive, it does suggest that there may be an impact of religious involvement on prosocial behavior in a prison setting.

Aos et al. (2006) set strict and generally accepted methodological criteria for

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including studies in their meta-analytic study of what works and what does not work in adult corrections programs. They included 291 rigorous evaluations conducted throughout the United States and other English-speaking countries during the last 35 years and grouped these evaluations into broad categories, such as:

- Programs for drug-involved offenders;
- Programs for domestic violence offenders;
- Work and education programs for general offenders; and
- Treatment programs for general offenders, such as cognitive-behavioral or faith-based programs.

Aos et al. included six evaluations of faith-based programs in their study and grouped five of these studies together because they focused primarily on promoting Christianity among offenders as a way of reducing recidivism. Four of the five studies (Burnside et al., 2005; Johnson, 2004; O'Connor et al., 1997b; Trusty & Eisenberg, 2003) failed to find an overall program effect on reducing recidivism, and one of the studies (L.C. Wilson et al., 2005) found that the faith-based program had a significant impact on reducing recidivism.

The sixth study examined a faith-based program for very high-risk sex offenders released to the community with no further supervision. Called Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), the program was conducted by professional correctional chaplains and faith-based volunteers, with the support of other correctional professionals. COSA, however, focused not so much on developing a particular religion, but on connecting high-risk sex offenders with an informed community support group of four or five volunteers. The COSA program resulted in a 32% reduction in recidivism (R.J. Wilson et al., 2005). After reviewing these findings, Aos et al. (2006), placed faith-based programs in a category that they called "inconclusive and in need of further study." Added together, the effect size for all six studies was not significant.

It is our hypothesis that three of the faith-based programs (Burnside et al., 2005; Johnson, 2004; Trusty & Eisenberg, 2003) that had no discernible impact on recidivism probably did a good job of faith development but failed to reduce recidivism because they did not follow what are known as the principles of effective correctional treatment, such

as criminogenic risk/need, responsiveness, family/community context, program integrity, and program delivery type (Latessa, 2004). The COSA program (R.J. Wilson et al., 2005) and the study of a faith-based reentry program called "Transition of Prisoners" in Detroit, (L.C. Wilson et al., 2005), however, did follow many of these principles of effective correctional treatment, and both of them had a significant impact on recidivism. Furthermore, one of the four studies that did not show a significant impact on recidivism was a study of the Transition of Prisoners program in Detroit in its early stages (O'Connor et al., 1997b).

Thus, this first study of the Transition of Prisoners program, which was designed by Prison Fellowship to follow the principles of effective correctional treatment, may have found no discernible impact on recidivism because the program was in a learning mode during its early years. In both the COSA and the Transition of Prisoners programs, faith-based staff and volunteers worked with the criminogenic needs of higher-risk people who were responsive to the program, and they did so in a community context. All of these factors have been shown to be important predictors of program success (Andrews et al., 1990).

Given the state of the criminological evidence, we urge great caution and honesty on the part of practitioners while engaging with this topic of religion and corrections. The topic is close to the passions of many people who are either intuitively in favor of or against faith-based programming for prisoners. This area of research is too new for us to reach any firm conclusions about in-prison infractions or recidivism impact. Much more quality research is urgently needed. For this reason, we eagerly await the findings from a study that is currently underway by Camp and colleagues on the impact of the Life Connections Program on reducing recidivism in the federal prison system. Camp et al. (2006) have already shown that LCP has a significant impact on reducing in-prison infractions.

### **An Interdisciplinary Initiative**

Our own understanding from religious and criminological theory, along with the little criminological evidence that is available, leads us to the following hypothesis. Authentic faith development (Fowler, 1981) can make a significant contribution to humanizing prisons and the process of

desistance from crime for some people, but only in so far as that faith development supports and aligns with the evidence-based or "what works" principles of effective correctional programs and with other research findings on social support (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Faith development is not a panacea or a "silver bullet." The question is not, do faith-based, educational, or employment programs work? The question is, what roles or contributions can a person's faith, education, or employment, or combination thereof, play in his or her rehabilitation/change process, and how can we effectively foster those roles? Answering these questions is an essentially interdisciplinary task between criminology and religion.

We offer a four-part framework of inquiry and a language to help practitioners foster the potential for religious people to learn from and support criminological findings, and the potential for criminology to learn from religious insights. The framework asks four distinct but interrelated questions that build on each other and must be answered satisfactorily if religion and criminology are to have an effective dialogue that truly informs and advances each discipline:

1. A question for understanding (What is it?);
2. A question of truth or "works" (Is it so?);
3. A question of ethics/morality (Is it good?); and
4. A question of religion or humanity (Is it loving?).

Criminologists must work with and challenge the faith-based volunteers/community to fully articulate what they think their work in corrections is about, and how or whether that understanding is true. In other words, we need to find out more about the content of faith-based programs and whether they actually have a role in fostering criminal desistance for certain people. On the other hand, the faith-based community must work with and challenge criminologists and practitioners who take a purely secular approach to go beyond the "what is it" and "does it work/is it true" questions to ask whether the systems and programs that they create are good and loving. Many things "work." For example, prisons incarcerate, atom bombs create great destruction, and coercion succeeds in forcing people to act against their

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will—but it is not always good or ethical, and certainly not always loving, to use prisons, atom bombs, or coercion.

The loving question, especially, is not commonly asked about our prisons, our punishments, or our policies. We would like to suggest, however, that practitioners, whether or not they are “faith-based” in their own lives, must always ask this question. All of the major world religions believe, in different ways, that compassion is at the core of their faith and the fullness of what it means to be human. It is, after all the golden rule, and most of the great world religions have their own version of this rule. But the world religions can not lay sole claim to this fourth question, for most secular humanists and great atheistic philosophers, such as Albert Camus, would endorse love as being at the center of what it means to be fully human.

We do not think that we should ask questions such as, “Is it Catholic, or Protestant, or Native American, or Islamic, or secular?” Only those who are actively engaged in being Catholic, Protestant, Native American, Muslim, or secular should ask these questions. Practitioners must stay away from such questions, for these questions become sectarian in the context of representing the public and maintaining an appropriate separation of church and state. Practitioners have everything to gain from fostering a dialogue between criminology and religion/spirituality, provided that the dialogue addresses the fullness of what it means to be human. To have an authentic future, therefore, the religion-criminology dialogue must address each level of inquiry that humanity poses about the criminal justice system: what is it, does it work, is it good, and is it loving?

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**Defining the Containment Approach**

In the early 1990s, we originally wrote about the containment approach in two articles describing the program, which had started in Southern Oregon a decade earlier, and its success (Edson et al., 1991; Martin & Robinson, 1992). We described the model as a triangle with the authority of the probation/parole officer (PO) at the apex and the therapist and polygraph examiner at the other points. The supervised sexual offender was assigned his station inside the triangle. We called this model the "treatment triangle," but later it became known as the containment approach.

By 1996, the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) (English et al., 1996, 2000) defined the containment approach as "a model approach for the management of adult sex offenders [that is] conceptualized as having five parts" (English, 1996, p. 21). Our approach to the containment model adheres to all five of these principles:

1. Public safety, victim protection, and victim reparation;
2. Agency coordination, multidisciplinary partnerships, and job specialization;
3. Holding sex offenders accountable through offenders' internal controls, external criminal justice control measures, and the use of the polygraph to monitor compliance;
4. Informed public policies to create and support consistent practices; and
5. Program monitoring and evaluation.

**Treatment Phases**

We organize the containment approach into three phases:

1. *Phase I: Crime of conviction.* The first issue is whether the offender denies the scope of the crime for which he stands convicted. If the offender continues to deny his guilt (or its gravity), then he submits to a specific-issue polygraph examination, and consequences can follow, including expulsion from treatment and revocation, if he fails the test and continues in denial.
2. *Phase II: History.* In phase II, the offender completes a comprehensive report of all of his offending behaviors, including listing all victims, regardless of whether he was caught or accused of these offenses. Furthermore, he discloses all paraphilias and other deviant and criminal behaviors. When the report is complete, our team (a community corrections practitioner, a polygrapher, and a therapist) schedules a polygraph examination. As much as possible, admissions are not punished but are instead rewarded. (In full disclosure, offenders are not normally prosecuted for admitting past crimes. This arrangement requires concurrence and a written agreement from the case prosecutor.) The APPA's report on a containment approach (English et al., 1996, 2000) generally discusses history disclosure and application of polygraph exams, but it does not appear to describe these separate procedures.
3. *Phase III: Treatment.* In phase III, a comprehensive treatment is individualized to an offender's risk level and other needs. Treatment content includes:
  - Cognitive distortions;
  - Cognitive restructuring;
  - Relapse prevention;
  - Boundaries;
  - Victim empathy; and

- Other subjects to meet the risks and needs of the individual.

**Beyond Monitoring Compliance**

From the start of supervision, the client regularly participates in maintenance/monitoring polygraph examinations, which continue throughout supervision. We believe that disclosures of crimes of conviction (phase I) and full sexual history (phase II) go beyond monitoring compliance, and polygraph exams are crucial in these processes. These disclosure processes serve critical criminal justice values, including public safety and offender accountability, for the following reasons:

- *Offender assessment and public safety.* Often the true extent of the crime goes beyond what the conviction represents or even what the victim reports. Also, the offender's complete history (not just arrests and convictions) often includes offenses quite different from those at conviction. Only by knowing these facts can programs adequately assess an offender's risk and judge how to manage him.
- *Victim recovery or restoration.* Families may be confused about whether to believe the victim or the offender. Determining the truth about crimes almost always validates victims' accounts and thus improves their safety and chances for recovery.
- *Treatment, accountability, and offender rehabilitation.* It is widely accepted that treatment is ineffective until the afflicted person admits his or her problems. Justice is unlikely without the truth.

**Collaboration**

In our program, we devote considerable attention to ways that the probation officer,

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