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Conning or Conversion?

The Role of Religion in Prison Coping

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Prisons today face what might be a nearly insurmountable task: somehow to meld humane, safe confinement and correctional programming within the context of expanding populations of offenders serving longer sentences. The use of prison religious programs presents one unique program opportunity to channel inmates' energies in meaningful and beneficial ways. Although religion has always played a vital role in correctional programming, it has also evoked controversy because uninhibited religious expression may conflict with concerns relating to security and safety. In this article, the authors assess a variety of issues surrounding the provision of religious services in prison settings.

Keywords: *prison adjustment; faith-based programming; coping in prison; spirituality and incarceration*

Prisons are known as places where violent crimes, drug violations, illegal gambling, and illicit sexual behavior occur daily. With the rapidly expanding populations of institutions and more offenders serving longer sentences, prison administrators face two difficult challenges. The first is to rehabilitate offenders while punishing them for their crimes. The second is to make offenders acknowledge their offenses while simultaneously helping them search for the good that lies within. Historically, prisons have variously employed solitary confinement, silence, and coerced therapies on inmates, all in the ostensible interest of eventually releasing these inmates into society as men and women better able to live in harmony with others than they were before imprisonment. The high rates of reimprisonment suggest that we have failed.

Because more than half of all prisoners serve fewer than 3 years (National Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000), most prisoners will be back on the streets relatively soon after incarceration. Therefore, most prisoners hope to adapt quickly to prison culture, do their time, and leave (Jones & Schmid, 2000). For them, the short prison stay may be insufficient to motivate any significant personal transformation. Prisoners who serve longer sentences have different adaptation mechanisms, and for them, adaptation is a longer, more complex process. It is these longer term prisoners in whom we are most interested. For some, adaptation entails reinforcing behavior patterns that are counterproductive and debilitating. For others, adaptation entails withdrawal. However, for a small but significant group, a personal transformation occurs in which they admit their offenses and attempt to redirect the focus of their life by transforming themselves and helping others (peer counseling). One source of this transformation is religion and spirituality.

Despite a growing number and variety of religious programs in prison, little systematic research exists to assess the impact of religious programs on inmates during incarceration or after release. Recent systematic studies (Clear et al., 1992; Johnson, Larson, & Pitts, 1997) have found little evidence that participating in prison religious programs significantly reduces recidivism but support religious programs nonetheless. More recently, Johnson (2004) also finds a weak link between recidivism and religious involvement. But he cautions that the relationship is complex and argues for more systematic research on the impact of faith-based programming. In this article, we join advocates for increased religious programming and suggest ways to expand research into its impact during and after incarceration. First, we summarize the nature of religious programs and describe its value in adapting to prison culture. Next, we summarize the current resurgence of institutional religious activity. Finally, we conclude by offering reasons to expand programming, laying them out as possible hypotheses for further testing.

Prison Religious Programs

Formal institutional programs include a variety of activities that can enhance, either directly or indirectly, the rehabilitation of offenders and their successful reintegration into the free community. Some correctional programs are common to most prisons, such as education, vocational training,

and group and individual counseling. However, there has been little research on the potential benefits of religious programs and the implications for institutional management and inmates' prison adjustment and reintegration of the offender into the community.

Administrators generally agree that programs are important in dealing with the problem of time on the prisoners' hands. They know that the more programs prisons offer, the less likely inmate idleness turns into hostility. Prisoner religious organizations present a unique opportunity to channel inmates' energies and use their talents in meaningful and beneficial ways (Fox, 1982). For some inmates, programs provide an alternative to involvement in gangs. Inmates with potential leadership skills may be able to channel their energies and talents in a positive direction and still earn the respect of their fellow inmates. Others may reject gang association, but may still want to participate in an alternative group to reduce the dead time of prison existence (Irwin, 1980). Informal religious activities also provide a means for prisoners to take advantage of available resources to use their time productively. Examples include the formation of Black Muslim groups in the 1960s, involvement in nontraditional belief systems such as Buddhism or Wicca, spiritual peer counseling, or individual faith-based exploration.

Both formal and informal programs provide mechanisms for adapting to the deprivations of prison culture. The key to the development of these programs, groups, and inmate participation in them is a prison administration that supports these organizations and encourages membership in them.

Religion and Prison Subculture

As in the outside world, prisoners form a society with traditions, norms, and a leadership structure (Sykes, 1958). Some members of this society may choose to associate with only a few close friends (Jones & Schmid, 2000); others form cliques along racial or professional lines (Carroll, 1974). In addition, others may be the politicians of the convict society; they attempt to represent convict interests and distribute valued goods in return for support. Just as there is a social culture in the free world, there is a prisoner subculture on the inside. Membership in a group provides mutual protection from theft and physical assault, the basis of wheeling and dealing activities, and a source of cultural identity (Irwin, 1980).

The inmate subculture helps inmates cope with the deprivations of prison life by providing shared ways of thinking, feeling, and acting for

all aspects of prison life. Various factors affect the extent of an inmate's assimilation into the prison culture. These include personal characteristics such as age, race, marital status, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and extent of criminal involvement (Drowns & Hess, 1995). Clemmer (1958) found that inmates incarcerated for short periods, such as a year or so, were neither assimilated into the prison culture nor prisonized. Most people can endure deprivations for short periods of time because they can see an end to their torment. For those facing long sentences, prison becomes home, and prison life requires strategies for survival. To make it in this environment, inmates must adapt to its more unpleasant features (Zaitzow, 1999).

Identification with and internalization of the often unacceptable values and behaviors of the prison world and its subculture are more likely if inmates have little or no contact with outside society, have their primary external group relationships broken by prolonged absence, or feel they are unlikely to be reunited with their family and return to some meaningful position in the community on release (Jones & Schmid, 2000; Thomas & Petersen, 1977). Involvement in the inmate culture is also affected by an inmate's past criminal history. Habitual, professional, and gang-involved offenders who expect on release to return to criminal activities will find the prison subculture consistent with their criminal values (Zaitzow, 1998). Other factors affecting assimilation to the prison culture include psychological instability, opportunities for meaningful cell or work assignments with inmates involved in this subculture, and opportunities to engage in illicit activities such as gambling or substance abuse.

There is little question that the social environment of contemporary prisons also has been affected by and modified in relation to the type of people currently being sentenced to prison. These include dealers and dopers, violent predators, state-raised youths, and street gang members. These individuals and groups compete for power and respect. Similarly, the entrenchment of prison gangs founded on racial, ethnic, political, and geographic affiliation has fostered subcultures of violence in many institutions (Pelz, 1996; Ralph, 1997). The demise of traditional inmate codes of conduct, characteristic of prison social systems studied by Sykes (1958), Clemmer (1958), and others years ago, has also fostered an environment conducive to violence in complex ways (Faulkner & Faulkner, 1997).

Prisoners adjust to control by finding natural ways to adapt to unnatural surroundings. Aggression and predatory behavior, passivity, withdrawal, manipulation, and conning are a few of the more common adaptation

techniques that prisoners use, or are forced into, in their attempts to adapt to prison culture. However, another form of adaptation, one that has received little empirical research attention, is the role of spirituality, especially religion, in helping prisoners adjust to and become productive in their environment through self-development and peer counseling.

Ironically, despite overcrowding and forced proximity with others, prisons impose emotional isolation, which some see as the most debilitating aspect of confinement. Considerable evidence suggests that prisoners' contacts with the outside are crucial in adjusting to and coping with prison experiences. As Richards (1978) and Toch (1988) suggest, outside ties may help mitigate "the pains of imprisonment." But punishment includes restricting contact with the outside world. Gibbs (1982) argued that prisons shatter psychological equilibrium by keeping prisoners off balance and severing the outside anchors that could provide a source of security in a chaotic environment. Isolation stimulates attempts to reach out to others. The turbulence of constant threats to personal space and the challenges to physical and emotional stability increase the importance of outside contacts. Therefore, communication with the outside world provides a source of stability that reduces loneliness and alienation. Spiritual activities help reduce some of this isolation.

Religion in Prisons

Historically, despite the cultural salience of religion, prisoners' rights to religious expression emerged rather gradually, and there was little Constitutional protection of religious rights until the mid-20th century. In expanding the broader Constitutional rights of prisoners, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron White argued,

> But though his rights may be diminished by the needs and exigencies of the institutional environment, a prisoner is not wholly stripped of Constitutional protections when he is imprisoned for crime. There is no iron curtain drawn between the Constitution and the prisons of this country. (*Wolff v. McDonnell*, 1974)

These protections extend to the practice of religion in prison. As with other prisoners' rights, security and punitive interests may trump the Constitution. But as Palmer (1985) notes, although religious freedoms may be permissibly modified by prison administrators, they may neither be repressed

nor ignored by prison officials without adequate reason. Despite the tensions between religious freedom and control, a strong body of statute and case law has given prisoners at least limited rights to wear religious clothing and symbols, to hold religious services, to proselytize, to contact outside clergy, to engage in reasonable religious or related practices, and access appropriate religious documents.

Religion has, in one way or another, been a cornerstone of the carceral in the United States. The two earliest U.S. prisons, Auburn in New York and Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, were grounded on redemptive principles when they opened in the 1820s. Auburn, stressing redemptive discipline and hard labor, reflected what some see as the spirit of the "Protestant ethic." Eastern State Penitentiary, although later adopting the labor–discipline model, began as a Quaker experiment to create a system in which prisoners would be confined to their cells to study and receive religious instruction so that they might reflect on their offenses. Both systems were guided by an implicit notion of the malleability of human nature: Auburn, through changing behavior by instilling discipline, and Eastern State Penitentiary, by changing character through religious instruction (Johnston, 1994).

The influence of religion in prisons continued through the 19th century and into the 20th century, as prisons began including chapels in their design. By the mid-20th century, religion was recognized as an accepted program in virtually all U.S. prisons, and most prisons employed prison chaplains and allowed volunteer lay persons to attend to prisoners' religious needs. However, with limited exceptions, religious rights extended primarily to the two Christian doctrines of Catholics and Protestants. In 1963, the Warren Court also handed down its landmark decision in *Cooper v. Pate* (1964), which resurrected 19th-century civil rights legislation and provided the legislative justification for redressing state civil rights complaints in federal courts. The *Cooper* decision for the first time explicitly allowed state prisoners to file federal litigation under the Civil Rights Act. This opened the door for litigation challenging restrictions on prisoners' exercise of religion.

The growth of the Black Muslim religion in prisons set the stage for litigation demanding that non-Christians receive the same rights and privileges as people of other faiths (special diets, access to clergy and religious publications, opportunities for group worship). For example, in *Fulwood v. Clemmer* (1962), the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia ruled that Black Muslims have the same right to practice their religion and hold worship services as do inmates of other faiths. A few years later, the federal courts

extended prisoners' Constitutional religious rights, albeit with considerable restrictions, when it recognized the legitimacy of Black Muslims (*Cooper v. Pate*, 1964). In *Cruz v. Beto* (1971, the court further expanded protected groups in ruling that a Buddhist prisoner must be given a "reasonable opportunity of pursuing his faith comparable to the opportunity afforded fellow prisoners who adhere to conventional religious precepts."

The rights of some religious groups were curtailed by prison administrators' fears that prisoners were using religion as a ploy for political action, as a shield for gang activity, or as a means to obtain illicit resources. For example, up to the 1970s, many prison administrators continued to believe that Black Muslims were primarily a radical political group posing as a religion, and they did not grant them the benefits accorded to persons who practiced conventional religions. Some prisoners were using religion as a means to promote gang activity, such as the El Rukns in Illinois prisons in promoting their version of the Moorish Science Temple of America in the 1980s. Other prisoners creatively attempted to establish idiosyncratic religions with esoteric needs as a means of acquiring resources, such as "ritualistic" wine, steak, and less restricted access to sex. Although litigation on such trivial grounds were often dramatized by the media and prison officials hostile both to prisoners and their litigation, such cases were relatively infrequent and quickly dismissed by the courts.

Litigation to expand the religious rights and privileges of prisoners led some critics to argue that the judiciary, not prison administrators, had gone too far and that prisoners could easily circumvent prison rules simply by invoking a religious premise. However, case law applies the reasonableness test to inmates' exercise of religion with regard to the special security needs of prisons. *O'Lone v. Shabazz* (1987) challenged a corrections department regulation that prevented a Muslim inmate from returning early to the institution from a work detail to attend religious services held only on Fridays. The inmate had a security classification that severely circumscribed his movements. He argued that the regulation violated his right to the free exercise clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. The Supreme Court denied Shabazz's appeal, finding that to require the institution to bring this inmate back to attend services would pose a security risk. Shabazz's argument that he be allowed to remain in the prison on the day of services (Fridays) and make up his work on the next day would require the institution to devote additional resources to supervise his movements. This would impose an unreasonable burden on the prison. The U.S. Supreme Court has found such restrictions appropriate as long as they are necessary to further

legitimate penological objectives (see *O'Lone v. Shabazz*, 1987, and *Turner v. Safley*, 1987).

In the past 20 years, Muslims, Orthodox Jews, Native Americans, Sikhs, Rastafarians, and other groups have gained some of the rights considered necessary for the practice of their religions and have broken new legal ground in First Amendment issues. Court decisions have upheld prisoners' rights to be served meals consistent with religious dietary laws, to correspond with religious leaders and possess religious literature, to wear a beard if one's religious belief requires it, and to assemble for religious services. Federal and state governments have contributed to the expansion of legitimate religious groups and practices in prisons by enacting legislation that, although intended primarily to protect the religious rights of free individuals, have also expanded those of prisoners.

In the 1990s, the religious rights of institutionalized persons were driven by a series of federal and state legislative acts intended to protect religious expression. The first, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA, 1994), explicitly affirmed that the exercise of religion is an inalienable right and that "governments should not substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification." Governments should, the act dictated, strike "sensible balances between religious liberty and competing prior governmental interests. Even when restrictions are required, the compelling governmental interests should be attained with the least restrictive means." The act provided the right to claim judicial relief to any person who could demonstrate an excessive restrictive burden on the expression of religion imposed by a state, the federal government, or any official acting "under color of law." This altered religious expression beyond previous U.S. Supreme Court decisions (Opata, 2001). However, in 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the act as it applied to states (*City of Boerne v. Flores*, 1997). Since then, at least 12 states have enacted their own versions of the RFRA, although in Illinois, the governor vetoed language that would expand the rights of incarcerated persons. In 2000, two subsequent Congressional acts, the Religious Liberty Protection Act and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, reaffirmed the doctrine that religious expression should be protected.

In the past 5 years, state and federal legislation strengthened religious freedoms for state prisoners who could demonstrate sincere attachment to the tenets of a specific religion. These extended a number of rights, including the right of Christians to wear crosses, to vegan diets, to fasting rituals, and to participation in sweat lodge purification rituals. However, expanding

and protecting the religious freedoms of nonincarcerated people opens the spiritual door to criticisms. For example, despite advocating religious freedom, some conservatives rebelled when Jamyi Witch, a Wiccan priestess who advocates a faith based on the worship of nature and meditative healing, was hired as the prison chaplain at the Waupun Correctional Institution in Wisconsin (Chapman, 2002; Simon, 2002). Nonetheless, proponents of religious diversity in prisons have made a compelling case that expansion of recognized groups serves the interests both of prison staff and prisoners (Beckford & Gilliat, 1998; Opata, 2001).

An Example: Prison Ministries

Despite the diversity of religious orientation, Christianity dominates in prisons with aggressive and well-organized proselytizing and promoting Christian values in the integrated content of programs. For example, Florida's proposed faith-based prison has been criticized for building prison programming and control around denominational precepts (Besen, 2004). Prison Fellowship Ministries, the largest and best known organization, has developed partnerships with at least four states to implement Christian-based programs intended to provide a model for other prisons (Nolan, 2002). Brazil's Humaita Prison was designed to turn the prison into a Christian community, reportedly with some success (Johnson, 2002). The Baptist Experiencing God program in Angola prison is given credit for reducing violence, escapes, and providing stability to the inmate culture (Frink, 2004).

Despite these and other problems perceived to exist in faith-based programs, they can contribute substantially to prison life for staff and prisoners. As an example, Operation Starting Line, a national program intended to establish Christian programs in 1,800 U.S. prisons, a well-organized, well-funded coalition of Christian evangelists and prison ministries (Thorne, 2000), typifies these programs. The goal is to offer Bible studies and prepare inmates for release (Operation Starting Line, 2002). One state provides an example of the way these ministries operate.

In North Carolina, where one of the authors of this article currently resides, prison chaplaincy dates back to 1876. In the spring of 2000, the North Carolina inmate population of more than 31,000 was being served by more than 100 chaplains. Annually, numerous worship services, scripture studies, counseling sessions, segregation visits, and special events are

conducted by chaplains and a variety of faith-based volunteers. The number of inmates, staff, families, and volunteers touched by the combined ministries of these people of God, who are called chaplains, is immense.

The role of the chaplain is a ministry of presence, giving attention to prisoners' spiritual needs (Opata, 2001). This includes times for direct ministry to individuals for assistance through grieving processes, emotional trauma, and other personal concerns. Chaplains and the thousands of volunteers listen to the angry, the frightened, the lonely, the poor, those who are hurting in one way or another. It may be a long session or a brief encounter. Either is an opportunity for genuine human contact. Pastoral counseling addresses multiple issues of the inmates and may bring temporary relief. A prison chaplain can help tip the scales of behavioral adjustment in a positive direction. One must remember that no matter the crime, human dignity has not been forfeited. To recognize and to respect each person is essential.

Because security is the primary goal of prisons, a prison chaplain learns to work in a restrictive environment and must balance the delicate line between security and nurturing. To work and function under stress is learned and practiced. Taking steps—typically through prayer and meditation—to be sensitive to all races regardless of background and personal history is needed. A basic understanding and appreciation of other faith groups is an ecumenical approach. For example, if a chaplain receives a request from a Jewish inmate for a rabbi to visit, this request would be acted on, and a rabbi would be contacted to visit the particular inmate. Each person has a right to worship in his or her own belief system. Commonly, the prison chaplain of one denomination also organizes services and activities for members of other faiths, as occurs when a chaplain who is a priest organizes services and activities for Protestants or Jews. However, normally the person best suited to assist is the minister or pastor of that particular faith who has the relevant expertise.

As in any ministry, the goal is to encourage the community to join with volunteers and assist with worship and visiting. The values and beliefs of the particular ministry guide many of their social and political pursuits. For example, many support community crime prevention programs and inmate rehabilitation through spiritual, educational, and vocational programs, which may help ex-offenders avoid returning to prison. Group worship, scripture study, and preparation for the sacraments are important facets of ministry work. Their challenge is to bring hope and light into darkness. As James Gondles, Jr., executive director of the American Correctional Association says, "You do the best you can for everyone concerned" (Graziano, 1999, p. 1). The

positive impact on society when one prisoner's life is transformed can have subtle yet lasting impact.

Reassessing Religion in Prisons

Advocating more religious programs may be like preaching to the choir. Who, after all, would oppose spirituality? Yet in spite of the general consensus, administrators tend to be cautious in lifting restrictions. Because the primary goal of custodial institutions is security, and because providing resources for religious activities can strain budgets, the concerns are more than entrenched conservatism or rigid ideology.

The challenges faced by administrators include defining the boundaries separating beliefs and practices that constitute a legitimate religion from idiosyncratic or manipulative attempts to circumvent rules. Durkheim (1915/1965) defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things set apart and forbidden. The content includes beliefs and practices that unite a single moral community called a "church" and all people who adhere to them into a system of thought and action guided by and devoted to a "supreme entity":

> And since the object of religion is to regulate our relations with these special beings, there can be no religion except where there are prayers, sacrifices, proprietary rites, etc. Thus we have a very simple criterion which permits us to distinguish that which is religious from that which is not. (pp. 44-45)

Yet this seemingly clear definition does not provide sufficient guidance for administrators. If a street gang affiliates with a religion, such as the Chicago El Rukns's attempt to form a prison-based Moorish Science Temple of America in Illinois's prisons, should members be granted the same rights and privileges as an established denomination? How can the rights of freedom of religion be balanced with security interests if a street gang uses religious services to congregate and discuss illicit activities? Should unconventional belief systems that believe in witchcraft and magic, yet otherwise meet the standard definition, be accorded the same rights as Christians or Jews? Should a Wiccan priestess be hired as a prison chaplain? How should U.S. administrators provide security and obtain resources for sweat lodges, which have been recognized in Canada for decades and are a core element in some Native American belief systems, or provide kosher or Passover meals? How do administrators protect against litigation resulting from

granting some religions rights but not others? There are no simple answers to these and other complex questions. But we can begin addressing the issues by more systematic research into the impact of religion on prisoners.

Research Directions

Contrary to the beliefs of many clergy, we argue that it should not really matter whether the effectiveness of religion changes character. The important outcome is whether it changes behavior. One need not be good to act good. The value of religion in prisons can be assessed on the degree to which it changes predatory and other socially unacceptable behaviors. There is considerable evidence that by addressing "criminogenic needs" such as antisocial cognitions, values, and behaviors, rehabilitation works (Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996)

Here, we offer 10 reasons to justify expanding religious services in prison. We cast them as rough hypotheses to push beyond the traditional focus on recidivism or reduction of disciplinary infractions. Our intent is to begin offering new ways to assess the impact of spiritual activity on prisoners and provide evidence that could support policies that increase formal and informal prison programs. Some of our points may seem to be common sense; others may seem relatively less plausible. But confirming or disconfirming these points is an empirical issue based on synchronous and longitudinal studies, not one to be decided by common sense.

First, we have not made a clear distinction between religion and spirituality. Religious activities are generally formal programs, or at least those tacitly approved by prison administrators, that represent an established and accepted doctrine, such as Christianity. By limiting assessment of the impact of formal religion and religious programs, we exclude the potential positive impact of other spiritual endeavors. Spirituality refers to involvement in alternative self-directed or group informal activities that are intended to elevate prisoners to a higher level of contact with something outside themselves. Such involvement is equally as important as formal religious activities on inmate well-being (Opata, 2001). Further research could differentiate between types of formal and informal activities, including content, to more sharply differentiate the factors that seem to influence behavior and attitude. If we are correct, then sincere commitment to alternative forms of spirituality would be approximate to the value of formal religious activity.

Second, in some ways, religion functions similar to gang affiliation and the need to connect to other people. Like gangs, religious affiliation can provide safety, access to otherwise unobtainable resources, contact with others (including the opposite sex) in a relatively safe environment, and a sense of social solidarity and higher purpose. If so, the availability of religious programming would be expected to reduce the likelihood of gang affiliation.

Third, some evidence suggests that group therapy and other forms of interaction reinforce prosocial behaviors (James & Johnson, 1983; Martin, 1990). Therefore, religion in prison may lead to increased prison adjustment as measured by reduced disciplinary infractions (Johnson et al., 1997). The rules and discipline that the serious practice of religion requires helps inmates develop stronger bonding mechanisms with others and better self-control and thus can reduce staff and inmate confrontations. Moreover, not all disciplinary infractions necessarily reflect asocial behavior. There are many situations in which discipline reflects minor infractions, such as too many articles of clothing in one's cell or unauthorized movement. It remains possible, therefore, that in controlling for minor infractions, higher spiritual investment translates to lower serious infractions.

Fourth, there is considerable evidence that religion contributes to feelings of well-being, reduces stress, and increases general health (Ellison, Boardman, Williams, & Jackson, 2001; Idler, 1995). Therefore, religion in prison may lead to increased prison adjustment as measured by such psychological factors as reduced stress, increased feelings of self-esteem and feelings of efficacy, and the feeling that one has some control over one's life and ability to change the self and the environment (Barringer, 1998; Colson, 1979). This is especially important for those with special needs, such as prisoners diagnosed as HIV-positive, those receiving geriatric or hospice care, or those with debilitating physical or psychological problems. Affiliation with a religious group may be the only place where these inmates can interact with other inmates in a positive manner and have a sense of psychological well-being.

Fifth, merely participating in spiritual activities is an insufficient measure of spirituality. Inmates may be inclined to con, manipulate, or otherwise use attendance in religious services for less noble ends. A better indicator is the nature of programming and participation in it. Programs should be expanded to facilitate practicing the positive core values of belief systems into other aspects of prison existence. Drawing from social learning theories, especially differential association (Sutherland & Cressey, 1978), future research should examine the intensity, duration, priority, and

frequency of spirituality involvement as it influences both behavioral and attitudinal changes. As religious activities are expanded in a way that become more integrated with prison existence, participation in groups and behaviors judged asocial would be less frequent.

Sixth, again drawing from social learning theory, future research should examine whether the impact of participation in religious programs carries over into participation in other prison programs. As prisoners' attitudes shift from identification with and internalization of the unacceptable forms of prison culture to the conventionally more functional values and behaviors rewarded by the broader society, this could also facilitate a shift to participating in other forms of prison programming or self-help activities. Immersion in religious activities may be positively associated with involvement in other productive individual and group behaviors, such as peer mentoring.

Seventh, social learning theory suggests that a critical mass of individuals with similar values and behaviors would influence the broader subculture by providing alternative rewards for behaviors and attitudes perceived as important. This, in turn, would have a humanizing effect on prison culture by reducing the saliency of predatory and manipulative behaviors normally required to survive. Thus, higher levels of participation in religious and spirituality activities have the potential to decrease identification with the less productive behaviors and values of conventional prison culture.

Eighth, religious programs should be assessed in controlling for the security level of the institutions and the number and types of programs available in them. Because maximum security institutions—with more stringent control mechanisms, fewer resources and programs, and a greater number of serious felons—are presumably more debilitating, the motivation to participate in religious activities could be higher than in prisons with fewer controls, more leisure time activities, and fewer violent offenders. Participation in and identification with religious groups may be a function of the number and variety of programs available to inmates depending on their individual and institutional classification.

Ninth, because delivering and sustaining religious programs and activities generally requires few resources other than hiring a prison chaplain and making space available, religious programs, especially those that rely on volunteers or are self-directed, are cost-effective. Future research should examine the costs of program delivery and the benefits derived from them as a way to guide policy changes. For example, Lovell and Jemelka (1995) calculated the extraordinary institutional costs of disciplinary hearings. We hypothesize that a significant reduction in disciplinary hearings could lead

to substantial savings for correctional systems. The costs associated with sustaining and expanding religious programs are a better investment for institutions, because they are cost effective and also have a positive impact on altering undesirable inmate behaviors.

Finally, further research should be conducted on the relationship between participation in religious activities and postrelease adjustment. In a meta-analysis of what works, Gendreau et al. (1996) recognize the limitations of rehabilitative programs, but they conclude that we cannot ignore the power of addressing prisoners' needs in reducing recidivism. Prison ministry involves meeting the spiritual and physical needs of persons who have become involved with the criminal justice system or who are at risk of future involvement. Several programs (see Conquest Offender Reintegration Ministries and Prison Congregations of America) base many of their services on studies that illustrate that when ex-offenders receive adequate support when they are released, there is less likelihood that they will return to prison. Moreover, future research should examine the crimes for which a recidivating prisoner returns and compare violent or predatory crimes with others, such as substance abuse and drunk driving. Therefore, there is a need to focus on quality-of-life issues, such as family integration, employment, and other factors related to well-being. We suggest that the greater the prisoner's involvement in religious activities, the less likely the return for serious crimes and the greater the enhancement of personal well-being.

Conclusion

Prisoners' behavior while incarcerated and their potential for successful reintegration after release depend on many factors. Andrews and Bonta (1994) have distinguished between static factors over which practitioners have little control (e.g., past criminal record, background variables) and dynamic factors that can be addressed (e.g., education, cognitive skills, interpersonal interaction). Because religious programming provides an opportunity to alter prison behavior, we have argued that the resurgence of interest in religion and spirituality in the United States should begin to be reflected in an expansion of available prison programs. Our intent has been not so much to state the obvious but rather to promote the systematic investigation of the impact of religious activity on prisoners, both during and after incarceration. Therefore, an evaluation of the religious and spiritual programmatic needs of inmates should be conducted in an effort to facilitate

their successful re-entry into free society. How such research efforts play out in institutional and societal policy will probably depend as much on politics as on the merits or faults of the research findings.

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