Thinking About the Role of Religion in Crime Prevention, Prisoner Reentry, and Aftercare

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American Piety in the 21st Century:
New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the US

Selected Findings from The Baylor Religion Survey
September 2006
The four types of God views in the USA:

**Authoritarian**
The Authoritarian God is highly involved in the daily affairs of the world. Believers think God helps them in their decision-making and influences global events. The Authoritarian God is angry and punishes the unfaithful or sinful.

**Benevolent**
Believers think the Benevolent God is a positive influence on the world, not as angry or wrathful as the Authoritarian God. The Benevolent God is heavily involved in the lives of humans but less willing to punish them.

**Critical**
The Critical God watches the world from afar with displeasure but does not interfere. Believers think the unfaithful will feel God’s anger in another life.

**Distant**
The Distant God is a creator who set life and nature in motion. He is not active in the world or angry at what happens. God does not help people or hold opinions about the world or human beings.

Source: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, "American Piety in the 21st Century"
Credits: Web Bryant, David Evans, Cathy Grossman and Alex Newman, USA TODAY
How the USA views God

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Religious Affiliation in America

- Evangelical: 33.6%
- Unaffiliated: 10.8%
- Other: 4.9%
- Jewish: 2.5%
- Mainline: 22.1%
- Catholic: 21.2%
- Black Prot.: 5.0%
The Great Escape
How Religion alters the Delinquent Behavior of High-Risk Adolescents

Byron R. Johnson, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Religious Inquiry Across the Disciplines
Professor of Sociology, Baylor University
Senior Fellow, The Witherspoon Institute

Marc B. Seidel
Assistant Director, Robert A. Fox Leadership Program
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A Better Kind of High:
How Religious Commitment Reduces Drug Use Among Poor Urban Teens

Byron R. Johnson, Ph.D.,
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Senior Fellow, The Witherspoon Institute
The Role of African-American Churches in Reducing Crime Among Black Youth

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Senior Fellow, The Witherspoon Institute
Figure 2. The Effects of Neighborhood Disorder on Serious Crime at Low, Medium, and High Levels of Religious Involvement

Low, medium, and high levels of neighborhood disorder and religious involvement are estimated at one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean, respectively. All the other variables are held constant at their means.
Religion in Prisons

• Early prisons in America used religion as a rehabilitative tool
• Religion remains in the vernacular of today’s prisons
  – corrections
  – penitentiary
  – reform
  – retribution
Rehabilitation through Religion

• Prison Fellowship (PF) – most pervasive religious ministry
• PF offers a variety of in-prison programs:
  – Bible studies
  – One to three day Seminars
• High participation in Bible studies is associated with reductions in recidivism (Johnson, et al., 1997; 2004)
Survival Chart for PF and Non-PF Inmates

Arrest Survival Chart
High and Low Bible Study Participation

Incarceration Survival Chart
High and Low Bible Study Participation
The InnerChange Freedom Initiative
A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program

BYRON R. JOHNSON, Ph.D.,
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Senior Fellow, The Withrow Institute

WITH DAVID R. LARSON
International Center for the Integration of Health and Spirituality
Why start a Faith-Based Prison in Texas?

• Unique Public-Private partnership
  – Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and Prison Fellowship
• The collaboration between TDCJ and PF
  – First for Texas, if not the entire country
InnerChange Freedom Initiative
Background

• 1996 - Prison Fellowship introduces idea of Faith-Based Program to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ)
• 75th Texas Legislature directs TDCJ to develop rehabilitation tier of programs
• April, 1997 – InnerChange Freedom Initiative launched by TDCJ after recommendation of then-governor George W. Bush
What is the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI)?

• First full-scale attempt to offer around-the-clock religious programs in a prison environment
• Three phase program
• 16 to 24 months of in-prison biblical training
• 6 to 12 months of aftercare while on parole
• Development anchored in:
  – Biblical teaching
  – Life-skills education
  – Group accountability
IFI – Phase One

• Lasts 12 months
• Focuses on inmate’s spiritual and moral foundation as well as educational and survival skills
• Heavy emphasis placed on:
  – Biblical education, GED, tutoring, etc.
  – Work
  – Support Groups
  – Mentoring
  – Peer Groups
IFI – Phase Two

• Lasts 6 – 12 months
• Similar to Phase One
  – Although now inmates are allowed to perform community service work off-site
• Special emphasis is placed on leadership issues
IFI – Phase Three

• Lasts 6 – 12 months
• Assists members in their reentry into society
  – Helps with housing and employment referrals
  – Facilitates mentoring relationship
  – Makes connections between the offender and local church communities
Selection Criteria

• Participants are:
  • Within 16 – 24 months of release
  • Inmates who volunteer to participate
  • English-speaking males
  • Non sex offenders
  • Returning to Houston or adjacent county
  • Minimum out custody status
Matched Design

- 3 Comparison Groups
  - Match Group – met criteria, but did not enter
  - Screened Group – met criteria, were screened but were not selected
  - Volunteer Group – volunteered but did not meet requirements

- Comparison participants matched to IFI participants using the following:
  - Race
  - Age
  - Offense type
  - Risk Characteristics
Study Group

- Participants had the potential to be out for at least two years by Sept. 1, 2002
- 177 IFI participants met this requirement
- This study tracks the two-year post-release recidivism rates for these prisoners
- Almost half released prior to Sept. ’99, many were released before Sept. ‘98
Selection Bias

• No random assignment
• Are those most likely to succeed selected for IFI?
• Do the most devoutly religious prisoners volunteer?
• Matched comparison group does not control for religious commitment or spirituality
Results of IFI Texas Two-Year Recidivism Analysis

- % Arrested: 36.2% (All IFI Participants), 35% (Match Group)
- % Incarcerated: 24.3% (All IFI Participants), 20.3% (Match Group)
Results of IFI Texas Two-Year Recidivism Analysis

- % Arrested: IFI Grads 17.3%, Match Group 35%
- % Incarcerated: IFI Grads 20.3%, Match Group 8%
Mentors Matter

• My mentor has really helped and wants to help me when I get out of here. That makes me feel great. I’m only two months from completion of my GED. And the volunteers have been very important in my spiritual growth. (Andy)

• The volunteers have really helped. One volunteer had a wife dying in the and he still came to visit me on Tuesday night. (Wil)
Aftercare is Critical

• Mentor contact is associated with lower rates of recidivism
  – The more regular the contact the less likely the individual is to be incarcerated or arrested
  – Lower recidivism rates for cases in which the parole officer knew the mentor
Spiritual Transformation

- Conducted unstructured interviews with IFI members from different groups and different stages
- IFI participants simply asked to share any thoughts they had about the program
- Five spiritual transformation themes revealed from narratives of IFI members
Theme 1: I’m Not Who I Used To be

• Inmates verbalized themes indicating they are thankful to have the opportunity to start life over again
  
  – *I have discovered a lot of flaws in myself in the last nine months – flaws in myself, not the InnerChange program. I used to always have a lot of anger, but things just don’t upset me like they used to, you know. Now I’m trying to turn spiritual knowledge into wisdom.* (Stan)
Theme 2: 

*Spiritual Growth*

• Inmates spoke of their life in terms of a spiritual journey
  
  – *For the first time I have respect for others. I even encourage others, and pray for them. The books we use here and the Bible have really helped. Praying has helped. When I stumble, now I repent. When I get out of here, the church is going to be a big part of my life.*

  (Juan)
Theme 3:  
*God Versus the Prison Code*

- Statements were made indicating offender’s decision to prioritize faith rather than the prison code
  
  *The prison system says you must play tough. But that’s not real. Confession is good for you according to the Bible. I’ve come to realize that the inmate code is really nothing but a façade. I can be myself now.*

  (Neal)
Theme 4: *Positive Outlook on Life*

- The longer IFI participants are in the program, the more positive their outlook on life
  
  *I’m a stronger believer in God, I have grown in patience, I have a peace of mind that I never had in the world. I have joy. I stopped asking God for parole. Whenever He wanted me out is okay, I’m willing to stay in the program another year. My father passed away while I was here, but this program has helped me deal with his death.* (Phil)
Theme 5:
The Need to Give Back to Society

• Many IFI participants feel a need to give back to society when they get out of prison.
  
  – I don’t see things the way I used to. I used to be a loner, and didn’t care about much else. I’m finding myself being more sociable and trying to help others. That wasn’t true of me before I got to InnerChange. Helping others find purpose in their life through God has been a real blessing. (Lou)
Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council
Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community

WWW.REENTRYPOLICY.ORG

A public/private partnership funded in part by the US Department of Justice, US Department of Labor, and US Department of Health and Human Services
The Report calls for:

• (1) collaboration and coordination
• (2) data, monitoring, and evaluation in prisoner reentry
• (3) housing
• (4) employment
• (5) ongoing aftercare for ex-offenders
A more realistic Reentry Plan has to be:

- (1) Collaborative
- (2) Achievable
- (3) Replicable
- (4) Economical
Welcome Back

• Started in 2002, by several members of Huntsville 1st Baptist Church

• 15 volunteers connect with 55,000 prisoners leaving prison each year

• Connects former prisoners with congregations in their home town
• Americorps*VI STA Members
• Community and organizational catalysts
• They give at least one year of service
• 6,000 VI STA workers currently confront social problems
Councils of Government (COGs) - Texas

An Accelerated Prisoner Reentry and Aftercare Plan Collaborative Partners:

• Americorps*VISTA
• COGs
• Faith based volunteers and workers
South Carolina