

# What Works, Religion as a Correctional Intervention: Part I

by Thomas P. O'Connor\*

*Note: This first part of a two-part paper examines the history of the relationship between religion, crime, and rehabilitation and discusses the various theories regarding the impact that religion might have on reducing crime. The second part of the paper, to appear in the winter issue of JCC, will ask how religion works to rehabilitate offenders, will explore the spiritual history of incarcerated men and women and the religious process they go through while imprisoned, and will review the empirical research about the effectiveness of religion as a correctional intervention.*

## Introduction

Historically, religion has played a key, but often unrecognized, role in shaping the character, mission, and routine practices of the American penal system. The various religious traditions that have interacted with the developing U.S. culture since the time of the early colonies have all sought, in different ways, to bring about change in the behavior of people who injure other people, or society, through acts that society deems to be criminal. In this broad sense, religion has always operated as a correctional intervention. This review paper is about the ongoing relationship between religion and culture in the United States as both forces seek to address the problem of crime and offender rehabilitation. In particular, the paper examines the history of the relationship between religion, crime, and rehabilitation, and reviews the empirical research about

the role and the effectiveness of religion as a correctional intervention.

**Levels of Inquiry.** The discussion draws on historical, sociological, religious, theological, and criminological research to examine the meaning, impact, and relevance of spirituality and religion on the process of desistance from adult criminal behavior. It asks:

- What the experience and practice of faith and spirituality are among offenders;
- Whether spirituality helps offenders to change their lives and gradually or suddenly begin to live in a more pro-social and less-criminal manner;
- What place faith-based interventions have in the correctional process; and
- How such interventions are best structured.

To answer these questions, I review the research on several distinct but interrelated levels of inquiry.

**Spiritual Practice of Offenders.** First, I ask what the research tells us about the nature, extent, cost, meaning, and theory behind the religious and/or spiritual practice of offenders. How many people are involved and in what are they involved? What theories can we call upon to help us predict what the impact of such involvement might be? On this first level of inquiry, I review the research with a view to understanding the proverbial “black box” of the intervention or process under study.

**Relation Between Faith and Criminal Behavior.** Second, I ask about the truth of claims that are made for the relationship between faith and criminal behavior. On this second level of inquiry, the research question is not “What is it?” but “Is it so?” This is the question about whether or not religion as an intervention “works” to reduce crime among offenders. Do spirituality and religion have a positive, negative, neutral, or mixed impact on criminal behavior? Does the research currently answer this question, and if not, does the research point us toward certain answers?

Although the paper deals largely with these two levels of inquiry, it is important to mention that a third and fourth level of inquiry are possible and, indeed, vitally important to a paper about religion and corrections.

**Questions of Ethics and Morality.** One could, for example, ask what the

research can tell us about the morality or ethics of this relationship between religion, the criminal justice system, and the offenders in that system. Is this relationship between religion and corrections good? Do the faith-based programs under review violate the principle of the separation of church and state? And can religion be used by offenders for selfish personal gain and to avoid the need for real personal growth?

**Centrality of Love in Religion.** In addition, one could ask questions about the role of love and compassion in both the lives of offenders and the correctional system. Does the relationship between religion and the justice system help to make the justice system more humane and compassionate? This fourth level of questioning would take us beyond moral and ethical questions to what is, more precisely, the religious level of inquiry. All of the major world religions speak about the importance and centrality of love in the process of becoming a truly faithful, spiritual, or religious person. Asking the research to respond to, and inform, this fourth level of inquiry would help to ensure that we are actually talking about something that is authentically religious in nature. There is a danger when examining religion as an “intervention” that the uniquely religious dynamism or element of the intervention is transformed into a largely utilitarian “program” that is designed to control and change people in a predetermined way. Religion, in my view, is essentially about an internalized dynamism or spirit of liberation that frees rather than binds the dignity and inner resources of all people and communities. Asking this “is it loving?” question is therefore necessary if one is to make sure that spiritual interventions are not reduced to skill-based or utilitarian interventions that are devoid of spirit (Dunne, 2001).

Although I will touch on these third and fourth level questions throughout the paper, the main focus of the discussion will be on empirical questions. A full treatment of the ethical or religious questions will have to wait for a later paper.

## The Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

**A Normal, Necessary, Healthy Part of Society.** Several theorists have sought to understand punishment and its role in soci-

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ety from within a singular overarching framework of analysis. One of these theorists was Emile Durkheim (1961, 1983, 1984), whose work has particular relevance for a paper on the role of religion in corrections. Durkheim's functionalist approach to sociology led him to believe that crime was a normal, necessary, and healthy part of all societies. "To classify crime among the phenomena of normal sociology is not to say merely that it is an inevitable, although regrettable, phenomenon, due to the incorrigible wickedness of men; it is to affirm that it is a factor in public health, an integral part of all societies" (Durkheim, 1938, p. 85). Society, according to this theory, functions with or needs crime to define itself, because deviant forms of behavior provide the members of a society with a necessary limit or boundary that enables the development of a social identity. This means that when a country greatly expands (or contracts) its definitions of, and response to, crime, as the United States has done in the last 30 years, the country is essentially engaged in an identity crisis or struggle for self-definition. Punishment, according to Durkheim's view, is basically an emotional reaction by society that builds community and promotes social solidarity by reinforcing shared social sentiments about what is normal and sacred to the society. "Thus punishment has remained for us what it was for our predecessors. It is still an act of vengeance, since it is expiation. What we are avenging, and what the criminal is expiating, is the outrage to morality" (Durkheim, 1984, p. 47).

**Ascribed and Actual Roles of Punishment.** David Garland points out that the practical implications of Durkheim's views on punishment mean that the normal roles ascribed to punishment—those of control, deterrence, rehabilitation, or the prevention of crime—are not the actual roles of punishment. The "essence of punishment is not rationality or instrumental control—although these ends are superimposed upon it—the essence of punishment is irrational, unthinking emotion fixed by a sense of the sacred and its violation" (Garland, 1990, p. 32). For Durkheim, religion and the sacred are essentially social realities. "Far from pursuing individual ends, it [religion] exercises constraint over the individual at every moment. It obliges him to observe practices that are irksome to him and sacrifices, whether great or small, which cost him something. The religious life is made up entirely of abnegation and altruism" (Durkheim, 1984, p. 49). From Durkheim's

perspective, therefore, religion as a sociological force leads to a correctional system that is more punitive than rehabilitative in intent but that also exerts a force on people to constrain their freedom to harm others and to become more altruistic and thus less criminal. Perhaps this explains, in part, why a relatively "religious" country such as the United States has developed a penal system that is both more focused on religion as an intervention and more punitive than the penal systems of many European countries, which are not as "religious" in their political and cultural orientation or personal practice. In 1993, for example, the average length of time served by inmates in the United States was 26 months, compared to 11 months in Portugal and 1 month in Denmark. These differences in sentencing prac-

meditated murder. "The implication of Romans 13 is that by not punishing moral evil, the authorities are not performing their God-appointed responsibility in society" (Colson, 2004, p. 6).

**Punishments Must Achieve Some Good.** An alternative view, which argues that society is no longer justified in executing people because society has means other than the death penalty to keep people safe, stems from a Catholic theology that follows the argument of Thomas Aquinas that "punishments are meant to be medicinal" and so "the primary aim of punishment must be to achieve some good, either the sinner's correction, or at least his restraint so that others may enjoy peace and justice be defended and God honored" (Aquinas, 1947, p. 418). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* fills

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tices are caused, not by differences in crime rates, but by different views on the causes of crime and the best ways to respond to crime. Kuhn (1999) argues that Americans tend to view crime as the moral failure of an individual who can thus be held accountable for his or her failure. Europeans, however, tend to view crime as being caused by a mixture of free will and social circumstances and are thus more open to responses that include rehabilitative measures.

**Balancing the Scale of Moral Justice.** In fact, there is a body of research that argues that the "get tough" or punishment-orientated approach to corrections that has swept the United States since the 1970s has been partly propelled by a conservative evangelical Christian approach to religion that tends to attribute a kind of personal guilt to individuals who commit crime that is deserving of God's punishment as carried out by society (Grasmick et al., 1992). Thus, Charles Colson (1976), for example, who has worked tirelessly as a ministry activist on behalf of offenders since he was "born again" during the process of being convicted and imprisoned for a Watergate-related offense, has argued that the death penalty is justified as an act of fealty to God that is necessary to "balance the scales of moral justice which have been disturbed" by pre-

out the thinking of Aquinas in relation to punishment and makes it clear that although the right of the state to punish proceeds from the requirement of safeguarding the common good, punishment "in addition to defending public order and protection people's safety, has a medicinal purpose: as far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party."

**A Multidimensional Interpretative Approach.** Durkheim has shone a strikingly helpful interpretive light upon the phenomenon of punishment, but Garland (1990, pp. 12–13) argues that all unidimensional theorists such as Durkheim are limited in their ability to adequately explain the complexities of punishment. Garland believes that no one theory is capable of fully understanding the historical development and the contemporary operation of punishment. He argues instead for the necessity of a "multidimensional interpretative approach which sees punishment as an overdetermined, multifaceted social institution" (Garland, 1990, p. 2). Garland includes the family, the law, education, government, the market, the military, religion, and punishment among his list of social institutions, and he views each of them as "highly patterned and organized sets of social practices" that are society's

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means of “dealing with certain needs, relationships, conflicts, and problems that repeatedly recur and must be managed in an orderly and normative way if social relations are to be reasonably stabilized and differentiated” (Garland, 1990, p. 282). Garland does not aspire to a global theory or a total model that would explain punishment but to a “more open-ended, pragmatic theorizing that seeks to interpret the varieties of social and historical experience rather than search for iron laws and structural necessities” (Garland, 1990, p. 284).

In this paper, I follow Garland’s approach and consider punishment as “an overdetermined multifaceted social institution,” and I argue that religion is one of punishment’s many determinative factors. Garland puts it well when he states that social institutions typically “evolve slowly, over a long period of time, so that their present character is often shaped by history and tradition as much as by the contemporary functions which they perform” (Garland, 1990, p. 282). If this is true of social institutions, it is also true of the relationships between social institutions. My exploration of the dynamic relationship between religion and offender punishment and rehabilitation in contemporary society will therefore begin with a historical review.

### The New England Puritan System (Circa 1630 to 1693)

**Passive Obedience.** The Puritan settlers in the Massachusetts Bay area in the early 1600s were deeply religious people who founded and created their own penal system. The Puritans followed the political and theological beliefs of John Calvin (1509–1564), who, in turn, followed many of the beliefs of Martin Luther (1483–1546), such as the doctrines of passive obedience and predestination.

Luther’s stress upon the pure inwardness of religious experience, his respect for law and office, his need for political help, and his lack of confidence in the masses led him to counsel his followers to passively obey those in civil power even when the powerful acted unjustly. “It is in no wise proper for anyone who would be a Christian to set himself up against his government, whether it act justly or unjustly” (Sabine & Thorson, 1973, p. 338, quoting Martin Luther from *Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation*, 1920, p. 594). Calvin wholeheartedly embraced this doctrine of “passive obedience.”

Consider again the force and radical nature of Luther’s teaching on this point—“There are no better works than to obey and

serve all those who are set over us as superiors. For this reason also disobedience is a greater sin than murder, unchastity, theft, and dishonesty, and all that these may include” (Sabine & Thorson, 1973, p. 338, quoting Martin Luther in “On Good Works,” *Werke*, vol. 6, p. 250).

Calvin agreed with Luther on the need for passive obedience, and Calvin also agreed with an ancient Christian view that authentic belief could not be compelled. Calvin felt, however, that there was very little limit on the duty of the state to enforce outward conformity. Calvinist ethics therefore focused on discipline and obedience. “His morals taught not so much of love of one’s fellows as self-control, discipline, and respect for one’s comrades in the battle of life, and these became the sovereign moral virtues of Puritanism” (Sabine & Thorson, 1973, p. 341).

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**Predestined for Salvation.** The Puritans also believed that the way to redeem a person from the sinful condition that afflicted all humankind was through a conversion experience that was only available to those whom God had elected (or predestined) to be saved even before they were born. God revealed this salvation through preaching about the Bible, which brought about conversion, and the Holy Spirit, not reason, was the moving force behind this process (Doniger, 1999, p. 892). Citizenship and the right to vote in the New England colony were based on whether or not a person was a member of the church, and church membership was open only to those who were judged by the ministers to have undergone a genuine religious conversion experience (Allitt, 2001).

So, a particular set of deeply held religious motivations and beliefs lay behind the founding of the colony and also dominated the kind of administrative machinery and penal law that the colony set up to “make sure that each private conscience was rightly informed” and to enforce its laws, which often reflected religious tenets (Erikson 1996, p. 73). It was a crime, for example, not to attend church on Sunday (Allitt, 2001, lecture 5).

The Puritan experiment to build a model Protestant community, a purified “city on a hill” for all to see, could not, however, sustain itself in the face of social developments. It basically came to an end around 1693, after the colony was rocked by the infamous Salem witch trials, which left 22 people dead and 19 executed (Erickson, 1996).

**Predestined to Deviance.** Erikson (1966, pp. 196–197) argues that the New England “penal deployment pattern” had a self-righteous and emotionally distant feel to it that was characterized by two viewpoints. First, the Puritans understood deviant behavior to belong to a particular class of people: sinners who were essentially predestined to the role of deviance. Second, they allowed for little movement back and forth between the categories of non-deviant and deviant, and so people were locked into fairly permanent roles. In other words, they tended to assume

that people are born into their social roles and do not change. This means, of course, that the Puritans’ penal system was not concerned with rehabilitation as a penal objective. Their practices of banishing and branding deviants, for example, are stark illustrations of this tendency to mark people in certain roles.

Erikson (1966, p. 204) also argues that these penal deployment patterns of deviancy, together with the emotional tone that accompanied their implementation, have profoundly influenced the development of American cultural sensibilities about crime and punishment and continue to play a vital role in forming America’s penal policy and practice. So began the history of the dialogue between religion, the community, and the justice system in the United States.

This evolving dialogue reached a critical and different point in the late 1800s and early 1900s when a less “sinful” or more “optimistic” Christian understanding of the person provided momentum for the construction of the first penitentiaries in America in what was to become known as the “separate” prison system. This second phase of the relationship between religion, the community, and the justice system changed and deepened the role of religion as a correctional intervention.

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## The Separate Prison System in Pennsylvania: The Quakers

**The Glory of God and Good of Mankind.** Much like the earlier Puritan settlers, who wanted to build a model Protestant community (“a city upon a hill”), William Penn (1644–1718), who founded Pennsylvania in 1681, wanted to build a model community that would magnify the glory of God and the good of mankind (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 31). Penn, however, was not a Calvinist; he was a Quaker and a friend of George Fox (1624–1691), who was the founder of the Quakers in England. Like Fox, Penn was arrested and imprisoned several times for his religious beliefs, and he disliked religious intolerance so much that the first article in his new Pennsylvanian constitution protected the freedom of people to worship according to their conscience (Beck, 2002, pp. 1–10). The Quakers, or Society of Friends, were a pacifist group that developed out of the English Puritan movement but went even further than the New England Puritans in their rejection of the formalism and traditionalism of the Anglican or established church in England (Doniger, 1999, p. 356). Skotnicki, drawing on the work of Sidney Ahlstrom, argues that the Quakers were another example of the general Puritan movement away from the hierarchical, sacramental, and objective Christianity of the Middle Ages toward a radical version of Christianity in which intensely individualistic and spiritual motifs predominated (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 31, drawing on Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 1972, p. 76).

Despite their common Puritan background, however, the Quakers were very different from the Puritan settlers in Massachusetts. One of the key differences was that the Quakers believed that if people fully submitted their will to God, they could become completely free and perfect. As Skotnicki (2000, p. 76) puts it: “This tendency toward perfectionism was more optimistic than the Puritan belief that a community of discipline was necessary to ensure obedience and maintain the integrity of individual commitment.” Skotnicki (2000, p. 31) argues that these two different views on social ethics led to a “natural disparity of outlook” when the two belief systems, one dominant in Pennsylvania and the other in New York and Massachusetts, began to shape their respective penal institutions.

**Respectful Interaction.** The Quakers believed that the age of revelation was not

over, and that the Holy Spirit continued to provide inner guidance—the “inner light”—to Christians. The Quakers also had little interest in the doctrine of predestination, for George Fox had counseled his followers to “walk cheerfully over the earth, answering that of God in every one.”<sup>11</sup> Fox and his followers believed that a respectful interaction with other people, even with those who had committed a crime, would bring out that presence of God in others. Quaker spirituality emphasized silence, as silence allowed the Holy Spirit or the inner light to quicken and manifest itself. “The soul, in Quaker theology, hungers for stillness in order to perceive the inner voice” (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 59). The promptings of the Holy Spirit and the inner light were more authoritative for Fox than the Scriptures, even though they should be checked for their authenticity against the Scriptures. Fox challenged his listeners to discern their own inner light: “You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say?”<sup>12</sup> This Quaker theological anthropology had a profound effect on Penn’s penal philosophy, which was more humane than anything that had been seen up to that time in England or its colonies. For example, Penn abolished the death penalty for all crimes except malicious or premeditated homicide. Pennsylvanians also sought to reconcile their differences by reasoning together, and “peacemakers” were appointed by judges in every precinct to help settle disputes, thus avoiding prosecutions (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 31). Skotnicki argues that these community-based practices were examples of a “novel and cooperative approach to criminal justice” (p. 32).

### Deleterious Effects of Punishment.

In 1787, a group of influential Quakers met in the home of Benjamin Franklin to discuss a paper on prison reform by Dr. Benjamin Rush that made a case for the deleterious effects of punishment. It is fascinating that Rush’s conclusion has been largely substantiated by the current body of criminological research (Andrews et al., 1990; McGuire, 2002):

The reformation of a criminal can never be effected by a public punishment. Experience proves that public punishments have increased propensities to crimes. A man who has lost his self-respect at a whipping post has nothing valuable to lose in society. Pain has begotten insensibility to the whip; and shame and infamy. Added to his old habits of vice, he probably feels a spirit of revenge against the whole community, whose laws have inflict-

ed his punishment upon him, and hence he is stimulated to add to the number and enormity of his outrages upon society (Barnes & Teeters, 1943, p. 412, quoting Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1787).

**Rehabilitation Through Spiritual Conversion.** This kind of thinking led the Quakers in Pennsylvania to believe that penitentiaries and their penal regimes (which included religious instruction, practice, and reflection) could bring about an internal spiritual conversion that would restore criminals to virtue and honesty. The process of building the new prison system began in 1790, with the addition of a three-story wing onto the Walnut Street jail in Philadelphia for the long-term confinement of prisoners. The Quaker model included:

- Compulsory work in solitude and silence;
- Solitary spiritual instruction;
- A strict timetable;
- The partitioning of types of offenders;
- Solitary confinement for the most serious offenders; and
- An overall effort to prevent communication between prisoners (Dammer, 2000, p. 7; Foucault, 1995, p. 124).

Clearly therefore, the intention of the Quakers was to use the penitentiary to bring about rehabilitation through a spiritual process of conversion. The meaning of rehabilitation for the Quakers was, to use the words of Roberts Vaux, a devout Quaker and a key leader in persuading the Pennsylvania legislature to open the Eastern State Penitentiary in 1829, “to restore the tenants of the jails to virtue and to happiness” (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 36; emphasis added). The rehabilitation of the criminal lay in the inner person, and it would emerge in the worst of us under the right circumstances of penitence and solitude. Dishonest men and women could become virtuous. In this sense, the Philadelphia “separate system” was a grand and hopeful religious correctional intervention that reached out to embrace and restore rather than punish or exact vengeance on people.

## The Silent Prison System in New York and Massachusetts

**Conversion Open to All.** The separate system of prisons in Pennsylvania was not the only model for prisons in the United States in the early 19th Century. In New York and Massachusetts, a more Calvinist than Quaker theological anthropology still flourished, and this led to a different system

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of punishing and reforming offenders that came to be known as the “silent system.” Although New York at the time contained many different religious groups, it was primarily Calvinist, because the most influential and prevalent body of settlers in New York had migrated from New England. In addition, Skotnicki argues, New York was heavily influenced by a newer evangelical style of Christianity that swept the north-eastern part of the country in the 1820s during a religious revival called the “second great awakening” (Skotnicki, 2000, pp. 37–38). This newer evangelical style of religion still believed in the primacy and necessity of an individual conversion experience to turn sinful people around; however, it now believed that this conversion experience was open to everyone, not just the “elect” few who were predestined to be saved.

The first prison in New York was the 1796 Newgate prison in Greenwich Village. Newgate housed eight prisoners in each cell, issued an open invitation to all ministers of the Gospel to visit the prison, and had a system of early pardons for prisoners. Violence among the prisoners and inadequate funding, however, meant that the experiment failed. Despite its failure, a new prison was built in Auburn in 1817 that was patterned on the Newgate model (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 39). According to Skotnicki, the Auburn prison “did not reflect the Quaker doctrine of the inner light as much as the Calvinist belief in the natural depravity of men and women.”

**Calvinism, the Contract System, and Obedience.** This more Calvinistic theological anthropology meant that “normative guidelines were established in accord with Calvinist values of order and financial stability” (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 39). So Auburn developed the “contract system” that allowed outside businesses to employ prisoners in a prison and pay the state a fixed rate for their labor (Rothman, 1971, pp. 104–105). The contract system was to have a long and controversial history in U.S. prisons, but it never really achieved its financial goal—to make the prisons economically self-sustaining—and it was always open to abuses. Despite the new contract system, Auburn prison was unable to make itself financially viable, and Skotnicki (2000, p. 40) argues that the legislature was spurred on by monetary losses and escalating violence in the prison to place greater emphasis on the “other durable value of the Calvinist heritage, obedience.” In

1819, the legislature passed a law legalizing flogging at both Newgate and Auburn. The various experiments at Auburn were to lead to a series of innovations that would “eventually fuse the Calvinist concerns of obedience and economic productivity with the revivalist desire to reform the hearts of the wayward” (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 40).

**The Silent System.** Auburn developed a new system that was called the “Auburn,” the “congregate,” or the “silent system.” The silent system sought to engage the benefits of solitude without its pitfalls by locking the convicts up in solitary cells at night and having them work during the day in common workshops in absolute silence. The enforced silence would prevent contamination among the convicts and cause the criminal to reflect upon and realize his or her need for moral reform. The work would teach the convicts

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 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).

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useful habits that would help them to conform their behavior to societal expectations, and perhaps more importantly, “inculcate the discipline that negligent parents, evil companions, taverns, houses of prostitution, theaters, and gambling halls had destroyed” (Rothman, 1971, p. 82).

#### Curbing Our Inherent Wickedness.

Both Skotnicki and Erikson find in the silent system a connection to and a continuation of the Puritan way of thinking about deviancy. “The doctrines of separation, obedience, and labor become the trinity around which officials organized the penitentiary” (Rothman, 1971, p. 105). The Auburn or silent system was cheaper to run than the separate system, but it was founded on a pessimistic view of the human condition and seemed more bent on curbing humanity’s inherent wickedness than on transforming that wickedness into honesty. Gustav de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville met with Elam Lynds, the first warden of Auburn, during their famous tour to examine the newly emerging American prison system, and they comment that Mr. Lynds continually stressed that it was most important of all to curb or break the spirit of the prisoner. They quote Mr. Lynds on his understanding of whether reform of a great number of prisoners is possible:

#### Two Very Different Rehabilitative Aims.

The contrast that Lynds makes between becoming a “religious and virtuous man” and a “useful citizen” who does not commit new crimes marks the central difference between the silent and the separate systems: these are two very different rehabilitative aims. The two systems were trying to realize two fundamentally different visions of the person and his or her relationship to self, society, and God. From this perspective, it is little wonder that there was a tremendous rivalry and competition between the two systems.

The system that proved to be the most influential was that of the Auburn or silent system. The Pennsylvania or separate system gradually disappeared as each new prison in the United States adapted the Auburn model. This of course meant that the “penal deployment pattern” of the Puritans with regard to punishment was to continue to be the dominant pattern in the United States, albeit in a way that was very definitely transformed by Enlightenment thought about the role of reason, the individual, and progress in social affairs, as well as by religious thought about a process of conversion that was open to all and could ultimately reform society as a whole.

Table 1 summarizes six of the central dis-  
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inctions that can be made about the two systems. The focus of the Philadelphia or silent system was on facilitating the growth of individual virtuous citizens by developing their inner light in a system of power that ultimately relied on cooperation as its method of change and that derived its core meaning from spirituality. The focus of the Auburn or separate system was on facilitating the growth of groups of obedient citizens by developing their skills and habits of work and discipline in a system of power that ultimately relied on control as its method of change and that derived its core meaning from reason. The separate system was religiously optimistic, and the silent system was religiously pessimistic.

The founders of the U.S. prison system, therefore, whatever theological and criminological theory they followed, had a guiding moral vision for the development of the penal system that was rooted in a religious understanding of life. Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville argue that both the silent and the separate systems sought first to avoid the spread of corruption by isolating prisoners from each other (each in its own way) and then to reform them by means of the moral and religious instruction that formed the basis of each system (de Beaumont & de Tocqueville, 1979, p. 82).

### From Penitentiaries to Correctional Institutions

The success of the Auburn system, however, was to be short lived, for the era of the penitentiary with its explicitly religious basis for bringing about rehabilitation did not survive beyond the Civil War period in America. Rising incarceration rates, with consequent overcrowding of the prisons, difficulties with providing work for the prisoners, the failures of the system to make itself economically viable, scandals over the brutal use of force and punishment to impose silence, and the consequent banning of the use of corporal punishment as a penological tool in 1847 gradually made it apparent that “the original vision of behavioral uniformity, silent congregate labor, spiritual renewal, and an institution that paid its own bills was an impossible illusion” (McKelvey, 1977, p. 264; Skotnicki, 2000, p. 92).

**Pedagogical Penology.** After the Civil War, the era of the penitential prison was replaced by the progressive era in penology, which had the reformatory prison as its central institution for bringing about rehabilitation. The reformatory system formally began with the establishment of a prison

in 1886 in Elmira, New York, by its warden Zebullion Brockway, who has been called the “creator of pedagogical penology” (McKelvey, 1977, p. 169). The reformatory system relied heavily on a scientifically based socialization process through education to reverse the criminal effects of the environmental and hereditary factors that were, according to Brockway, essentially beyond the control of the prisoners (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 121). In a stunning quotation from Brockway, we see a complete

found shift in the religious sensibilities of his time (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 134). By the end of the 19th century, the religious revivalist tradition was no longer the dominant inspiration for the penal system in America (McKelvey, 1977, p. 143). The 20th century continued this more secular, scientific, and rational tradition as “reformatories” developed into “correctional institutions” that relied on a varying mixture of punishment and treatment programs to bring about rehabilitation (Cooperman, 2004; Cullen et

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**“The original vision of behavioral uniformity, silent congregate labor, spiritual renewal, and an institution that paid its own bills was an impossible illusion.”**

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reversal of the Puritan and later revivalist notion that an individual conversion of the heart was a necessary prerequisite to reform:

The ancient doctrine of the independent freedom of the human will and the correlative belief in the unconditioned retributive moral accountability was also put aside as an incomprehensible theory for any human administration. We must invade the will of those committed to our charge and determine their behavior quite outside their own election. This dismissal thus of these old doctrines . . . cleared the field of our endeavor and opened wide to science that which had been dominated by sentiment alone (Skotnicki, 2000, p. 121, quoting Brockway, 1969 [1912]. *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, p. 85).

Brockway was a religious man who had himself undergone a religious conversion experience, but he came to distrust what he saw as a sentimentality behind the revivalist tradition. So Brockway’s faith in the ability of science to socialize anti-social thought through a process of education marks a pro-

al., 2000; Kleiman, 2003; O’Connor & Pallone, 2003; *Wall Street Journal*, 2003).

#### A More Explicit Role for Religion?

Today, however, there is an emerging public discourse, which is at times contentious, about whether society might benefit from recovering a more explicit role for religion as an intervention to address issues of crime, punishment, and rehabilitation (Cooperman, 2004). Indications of the religious diversity and vitality of this latest chapter in the religious-rehabilitation-punishment dialogue include:

- The formation by President Bush of a White House office for Faith-Based and Community Partnerships in the first two weeks of his presidency;
- A call from the U.S. Catholic bishops and the Pope for criminal justice reform and a virtual end to capital punishment (U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000);
- The growth of the restorative justice movement, which often draws on Biblical notions of justice (Van Ness & Heetderks Strong, 1997; Zehr, 1996);

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**Table 1: Predominant Concerns of the Silent and Separate Penitentiaries**

The Auburn or Silent System	The Philadelphia or Separate System
Desire for obedient citizens	Desire for virtuous citizens
Development of habits and skills of work	Development of inner light
Emphasis on power as control	Emphasis on power as cooperation
Emphasis on group deterrence	Emphasis on individual treatment

- The widespread influence of Islamic, Native American, and other religious practices such as transcendental and Buddhist meditation among the prison population (Dix-Richardson & Close, 2002; Pallone, 2003); and
- The growth of faith-based prisons or prison units in several states such as Minnesota, Ohio, Texas, and in the Federal Prison System that explicitly place the role of religion at the center of the correctional process (Johnson & Larson, 2003).

One could easily argue that society has arrived at another critical point in the dynamic relationship between faith, the community, crime, punishment, and rehabilitation.

## Theoretical Framework

**The Social Control Thesis.** Perhaps the main theory that is used to explain why religion might have a positive impact on reducing crime is the informal *social control theory* that derives from the functionalist perspective elucidated by Durkheim. Essentially, the social control thesis holds that informal social controls are an important influence in reducing crime alongside the formal social controls of the law enforcement and correctional systems in the country. People who are attached to and invested in the major social institutions of life have something to gain from strengthening these institutions and a lot to lose from violations of the rules that maintain these systems. Religion helps people become attached to and involved in a myriad of informal social networks that help to bind them to the major social institutions of life such as a family, education, work, politics, and church (Hirschi & Stark, 1969; Putnam, 2000; Sampson & Laub, 1990).

**The Hell Fire Thesis.** Another thesis has been called the “Hell Fire” thesis because it posits that people conform to social controls out of fear of punishment in this life and the afterlife from a God who prohibits certain immoral behaviors and judges people in the afterlife according to how they live in this life (Hirschi & Stark, 1969). Thus, religious people have an extra factor operative in their life that is deterrent in nature. Refinements of these theoretical perspectives point to the type of crime, the type of community, and the type of religion that is operative in a person’s life to further explain why it is that religion might prevent crime or rehabilitate criminals who have turned religious.

**The Type of Crime Thesis.** The type of crime thesis, also called the “anti-ascetic theory,” specifies that the religious effect

on reducing crime is likely to be stronger for illegal acts that are traditionally condemned by the religious traditions to which people belong but are no longer condemned by the general secular society (Middleton & Putney, 1962). Examples of such acts would be drug use, gambling, or illicit sexual involvement. Burkett & White (1974) expanded this anti-ascetic thesis to include victimless offenses. Others have argued that impulsive crimes such as assault, which tend to happen in the spur of the moment and therefore do not allow a person’s religious and moral sensibilities and thought patterns to be engaged, will not be affected by a person’s religiosity. Crimes that require forethought, however, such as burglary, will be affected by a person’s religiosity. These less impulsive crimes allow a person’s religiosity time to influence a person’s deliberations about whether or not to commit the crime (Ellis, 1991, 1995).

**The Type of Community Thesis.** The moral community and the secular social disorganization theories specify that the religious effect will be stronger depending on the type of community in which people live. Some researchers argue that the religious effect will be more pronounced in what they call “moral communities,” because the religious beliefs of people will be fostered by the people with whom they tend to associate and live. Thus, Stark argues that it is not an individual’s religiosity but the religiosity of a person’s community or family and friends that will predict whether or not the person engages in crime (Stark, 1984; Stark et al., 1982).

Opposite to this point of view is the belief that the religious impact will be most pronounced in societies that are most secular or most socially disorganized. In such communities, people are surrounded by disorganization and a wide variety of secular views. This means that their own religiosity will stand in stark contrast to their surroundings and enable them to stay free from crime. In other words, their religiosity will not be diluted by the general population and will therefore be more potent (Tittle & Welch, 1983).

**The Type of Religion Thesis.** Finally, there has been the type of religion thesis or argument that some religious groups, because of their specific cultural and religious traditions, will have more of an impact than other religious groups in helping their adherents stay free from crime. This viewpoint has fostered an array of studies that have compared crime rates across religious groups, particularly Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish (Ellis, 2002). All of these theoretical perspectives argue that there is reason to believe that religiousness will have a pos-

itive impact on criminal behavior, and they specify, in a brief way, the ways in which that positive impact might come about.

**The Spurious-Association Thesis.** Against these theories, however, the “spurious association” thesis argues that all of the studies that have found a relationship between religiosity of one sort and reduced crime of another sort are based on spurious findings, because they ignore other variables that are closer to the real causes of reduced crime. Thus, when more control variables are added to the research or when other kinds of variables are included, the religious effects will disappear. For example, Ellis argues that religious people have a very low need for arousal because they tend to participate in and enjoy social events like church gatherings that are not particularly high in thrills. Criminals, on the other hand, have a very high threshold for arousal and need the thrill of crime to stimulate their high arousal needs. The different biologies, therefore, of people who are religious and not religious will always make it look as though religious people commit fewer crimes (Ellis, 1987; Ellis & Thompson, 1989).

## A Uniquely Religious Impact

Each of these theories is helpful to a degree, and a review of the research shows that some of them have found more empirical support than others (see Part II of this paper, forthcoming in *JCC*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Winter 2004–2005)). However, all of the theories seem disjointed and lacking in specificity, and I have not found them to be particularly helpful for guiding research into whether and how the religious and spiritual involvement of offenders or inmates might have an impact on reducing their criminal behaviors. Moreover, each of these theories fails to do justice, in any serious way, to the religious or spiritual traditions and content of a person’s faith. In other words, the theories are more sociological in nature and lack theological or religious theoretical content.

To properly examine the impact of religion or spirituality on crime, we must take the religious reality seriously and develop a theory that explains how religion or spirituality might have a uniquely “religious” impact on crime. My own theoretical framework, therefore, integrates and draws on both criminological and religious theories about:

- Social learning;
  - Social attachment and informal social control;
  - Religious conversion; and
  - Program integrity, or the principles of
- See *RELIGION*, next page

effective correctional programming (see O'Connor, 2003, for a more detailed discussion of these conceptual foundations).

**Social Learning Theories.** Social learning approaches to rehabilitation stress that offenders can learn new behaviors and attitudes by observing role models perform non-criminal acts, by practicing these acts and having them positively reinforced, and by replacing their criminal friends and acquaintances with non-criminal friends and acquaintances (Bandura, 1977, 1989; McGuire, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2000).

**Social Attachment and Informal Social Control Theories.** Social attachment and informal social control theories hold that the more attached persons are to the main social institutions of life—family, education, work, politics, and religion—the less likely they are to commit crime, not only because they have something of value to lose by committing crime, but also because they have informal sources of control in their lives that help in a powerful way to prevent crime (Hirschi & Stark, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1990, 1993).

**Religious Conversion Theories.** Most religious conversion theories understand religious conversion, not as a single event, but as an ongoing and deepening process of faith development that changes a person's way of relating to God, others, self, and the world in a positive manner (Conn, 1978; Lonergan, 1972). The analogy that the Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan (1972) chooses to explain religious conversion is the process of "falling in love" with another person. When people fall in love and are able to sustain that love, their compassionate and other positive qualities emerge in a stronger fashion. This is also so in religious conversion, except that in this process, the personal object of love is God or the Divine. Just as a parent's love awakens life within a child, God's gift of love is constantly awakening and deepening life within people. Human beings can and do relate to an ultimate reality that many call the Creator, God, or the Divine, and this relationship is life-giving in a uniquely positive way:

By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his world. Normally it is a prolonged process though its explicit acknowledgement may be concentrated in a few momentous judgments and decisions. Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction. It is as if one's eyes were opened and one's

former world faded and fell away. There emerges something new that fructifies in inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living (Lonergan, 1972, p. 130).

From this perspective, spirituality is the highest, and therefore the integrative, principle of our lives. "So the gift of God's love occupies the ground and root of the fourth and highest level of man's intentional consciousness. It takes over the peak of the soul, the apex animae" (Lonergan, 1972, p. 107). One inmate at Lieber prison in South Carolina who was involved in religious programming seems to be referring to this sense of spiritual conversion or awakening that results in more truthful and moral behaviors when he said in a group discussion on religion and prisons: "Before it was all me. Now I know that life is about relationships. I have to think of others and about God. If you're serious about God, you have to take on the nature of God, and God cares about other people too." Another, non-religiously involved inmate in the group, however, exemplified a lack of spirituality and absence of conversion when he insisted: "Life is dog eat dog and I will do anything I have to: lie, cheat, steal, or kill to stay out of here when I get out."

**Four Roles for Religion in Prison.** I posit, that all three of these processes—new pro-social learning, increased social control/attachment, and religious conversion—can awaken and/or become more intense when an inmate becomes immersed in the religious or spiritual milieu of a prison. Clear and Myhre (1995), for instance, have documented four roles for religion in prison—explanatory, prescriptive, experiential, and social—that could facilitate these three processes:

- First, religion helps to explain the mysteries of life;
- Second, religion prescribes a set of governing rules and practices for its followers;
- Third, religion helps prisoners to experience religious conversion and faith; and
- Fourth, religion puts prisoners in contact with a larger pro-social network, through fellow inmates, religious volunteers, and chaplains, than is commonly available in prison (Clear et al., 1992; Clear & Myhre, 1995).

Durkheim (1961) had a great deal to say in this context about the role of religion in helping society and people to establish and follow a normative set of socially positive behaviors. Clear and Myhre also 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 dealing with the loss of freedom. In addition, religious involvement helped the prisoners deal with the various deprivations that accompany imprisonment, deprivations that might include:

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

#### **Mitigation Whether or Not Sincere.**

Harry Dammer collected and content-analyzed ethnographic data gathered in interviews with correctional staff, by participant observation of religious programs, and through 70 individual interviews with prisoners in two large maximum-security prisons in the northeastern 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 study, the reasons for religious involvement differed among inmates along a "sincere" to "insincere" continuum. Those prisoners who are sincere in their religious practice derive 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 study stated: "Religion is a guide to not get out of hand, it gives you a straight path." Insincere prisoners, however, practice religion for different reasons—to gain protection, to meet other inmates, to interact with women volunteers, and to gain access to prison resources. Interestingly, Dammer found that religion helped both the sincere and insincere religious practitioners to mitigate the psychological and physical deprivations of being incarcerated (Dammer, 1992; 2002).

#### **Powerful Role Models: Chaplains and Religious Volunteers.**

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 main social institutions of life and very committed to pro-social behaviors and attitudes. A nation-

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al study of correctional chaplains found that 79% of them had a master's degree or higher. In addition, prison chaplains had an average of 10 years of correctional experience and believed strongly in a philosophy of rehabilitation (Sundt & Cullen, 1998, pp. 271–298; Sundt & Francis, 2002).

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

Chaplains are also responsible for coordinating the work of thousands of religiously motivated volunteers who work in prisons. In the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC), for example, there are approximately 1,300 religious volunteers who minister to 12,800 inmates (approximately 1 volunteer for every 10 inmates) on a regular basis. An exploratory study in South Carolina surveyed 82 prison ministry volunteers and compared these volunteers to the general population of the southeast region of the United States using South Carolina Census data and data from the General Social Study (a biennial survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center since 1972). The study found that the volunteers had the same gender and ethnicity demographics as the general population but tended to be older. The volunteers were also more involved with (and presumably more attached to) the major social institutions of life than the general population was. For example, the volunteers:

- Earned more from their jobs than the general population (91% earned more than \$20,000 per year vs. 72% of the general population);
- Were more likely to be married (80% vs. 54%);
- Had more education (57% vs. 23% had some college education);
- Were more involved in politics (86% vs.

64% voted); and

- Went to church once a week or more (90% vs. 30%; O'Connor, Parikh & Ryan, 1997, pp. 2–12).

In other words, the volunteers appeared to be a group of people who had learned how to successfully negotiate and derive satisfaction from the five major institutions of social life: work, family, education, politics, and religion.

Offenders, by contrast, tend to have trouble negotiating these areas of life, and we know that problems in at least some of these areas are predictive of crime and recidivism. Thus, the volunteers are well-poised as role

I do that? So what do they do? The hope, the hope says that these people have changed their lives, and if they can do that, so can I."

**Majority of Volunteers Motivated by Religion.** Figure 1 shows that 75% of the volunteers operating in the ODOC are religious volunteers, with the next largest group (14%) belonging to spiritually based drug and alcohol programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. There are also a small number of volunteers in workforce development and education and even fewer administrative volunteers who work for the institutions. This breakdown of volunteers would sug-

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**Chaplains and volunteers are potentially very powerful role models, because they are very attached to the main social institutions of life and very committed to pro-social behaviors and attitudes.**

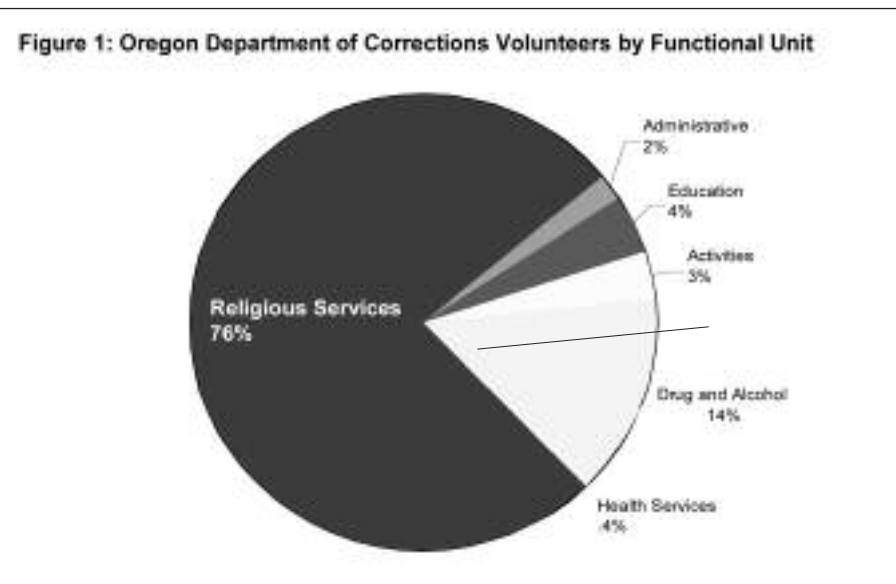
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models who can help offenders in a social learning process of working on a variety of areas of need that lead them to repeat crime. One inmate who had attended a volunteer religious program in a prison in Texas explained to me how the modeling of religious volunteers, some of whom were successful ex-offenders, provided him with hope by their example of overcoming adversity: "I have come to my own place of healing. . . . I've seen myself do some things, or think some things, or say some things, or act in a manner that I know was inappropriate. And still it makes me unhappy. And so, the question still comes to me, why did

gest that the majority of people who are willing (or who can be mobilized) to volunteer in a correctional setting are in fact motivated to do so by religious and/or spiritual motivations.

**The COSA Program.** The Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) program in Canada provides additional confirmation of this hypothesis. COSA is a volunteer community-based support program for very high risk sex offenders who have been released from prison at the end of their sentences and who are, thus, not under any form of official

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supervision by the criminal justice system. COSA surrounds these very high risk sex offenders (called “core members”) with a team of about four to five highly committed and trained volunteers who are willing to provide active support on a weekly basis to the core member of the group, often over a period of several years. Although COSA is not a traditional “faith-based” program, and it does not work along religious lines, the program was formed, in large part, out of the work of community chaplains who work for the Correctional Services of Canada. In addition, the COSA program found that, most often, only people who were religiously motivated on a personal level would volunteer for the large commitment that the program demands. COSA is currently under evaluation. So far, COSA has produced favorable results and has been associated with reductions in sex offender recidivism (Wilson & Picheca, 2004).

In the exploratory study of correctional religious volunteers by O’Connor, Parikh & Ryan (1997), the two main reasons given by the prison ministry volunteers for volunteering were to:

- Act upon their faith (or put their faith into action); and
- Make a difference in the lives of individuals (or in society).

The religious communities are, thus, a huge source of support and help to a correctional system that allows and encourages volunteers to put their faith into action and seek to help offenders progress toward desistance from crime. If it is true, as some research has theorized (Grasmick et al., 1992), that religious thought and sensibilities among conservative Christian evangelicals in the United States have helped to perpetuate the contemporary “get tough” movement in the United States, it is also true that there are many religious volunteers (many of whom are also conservative Christian evangelicals) who are willing to invest their own personal time and resources to help offenders in the rehabilitative process of desistance from crime.

**Program Integrity: Evidence-Based Treatment.** The fourth and last aspect of my theoretical underpinning derives from the meta-analytic findings that correctional programs with “program integrity,” i.e., programs that follow certain principles of effective treatment, have “an average impact on reducing recidivism by 40% in community settings and 30% in custodial settings” (McGuire, 2002). Four of the main principles of evidence-based treatment are:

- Risk;

- Criminogenic need;
- Responsivity; and
- Community context, support, and involvement (Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau, 1996; McClung, 2003).

**Risk.** Give high levels of service to high-risk offenders and low levels of service to low-risk offenders. In general, religious services in a prison do not apply this risk principle, because they tend to give the same level of service to everyone regardless of their risk for recidivism. However, they do apply the principles of criminogenic need and responsivity in some fashion, and the principle of community context, support, and involvement in substantial fashion.

**Criminogenic Need.** Religious programs, for example, tend to target two areas of criminogenic need that are among the top four predictors of recidivism: 1) anti-social/pro-criminal attitudes, values, beliefs, and cognitive-emotional states; and 2) pro-criminal asso-

analytic reviews show that on balance, community-based interventions have larger effect sizes (bigger reductions in recidivism) than the same interventions delivered in a custodial or prison setting (McGuire, 2002, p. 19). It seems that the more that members of the general community and members of the offender’s family support and directly engage in correctional treatments, the more effective they are. As we have seen above, religious programming in prison gives inmates direct contact with and support from members of the community.

### Using the CPAI to Assess the ODOC Program

To explore the treatment and evidence-based context for religious programming in a more empirical manner, I measured the quality or appropriateness of the overall Religious Services program within the ODOC using Gendreau and Andrews’ (1995) Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI; as

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**“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.”**

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ciates and isolation from anti-criminal others (Latessa, 2002). Religious volunteers can teach and model pro-social attitudes and provide the inmates with pro-social companionships that help them to lessen the influence of their criminal thought patterns, the “inmate code,” and their antisocial associates.

**Responsivity.** The principle of responsivity states that people learn in very individual ways and need to be matched to programs and people who work with them in a way that best suits the ways in which they learn and respond to the world (Bonta, 1995; Kennedy & Serin, 1997). I will show below that 30% to 50% of inmates voluntarily respond to religious programming in prison. By definition, therefore, the responsivity principle is operative in a very powerful, if as yet undefined, manner.

**Community Support and Involvement.** In a presentation to the ICCA conference in 2002, the Commissioner of the Correctional Services of Canada stressed the importance of building community support and involvement into treatment programs for prisoners (McClung, 2003, p. 7). Also, several sets of findings from the meta-

updated by Latessa in 2004). I assessed the Oregon Religious Services division on July 1, 2000, then on July 1, 2004, and then projected an assessment for July 1, 2008, that was based on current plans for the implementation of an assessment and correctional planning process within the ODOC, as well as on program development plans for the religious services division that is part of the Transitional Services Division of the ODOC.

**Failing but Rising Grades.** Figure 2 compares the average score on the CPAI for 317 adult and juvenile correctional programs to the scores for Religious Services within the ODOC. It shows that the average total score for the 317 correctional programs was 53%. The total score for Religious Services has grown from 44% in 2000 to 56% in 2004 and could potentially grow (best-case scenario) to 78% in 2008. Although the religious program in Oregon receives an “unsatisfactory” grade on the CPAI in July of 2000 and a “satisfactory but needs improvement” grade in 2004, just as many other programs do, its grade is increasing over time. Furthermore, the current grade is very close to 60%, which is the satisfactory grade that seems to predict

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program efficacy in reducing recidivism (Latessa, 2003). This level of program quality or integrity therefore needs to be and is being improved; also, it may be of sufficient quality to predict positive recidivism outcomes from faith-based services in prison.

Figure 2 also breaks down the Oregon religious services programming scores for the assessments over time into the six main components that the CPAI measures. The figure shows that the religious programs in 2000 received good marks in the program areas of implementation, staffing, and miscellaneous (a category that contains a number of unrelated program items), but did not do well in the areas of assessment, program content, and evaluation. In other words, the religious program was well implemented, was staffed by well-trained and experienced staff, and had a few other strong factors such as good community support, but it did little to assess the people they were working with on risk, need, and responsivity factors and did not follow recommended guidelines for programming content, such as using social learning models or cognitive and behaviorally based curricula, and did nothing to evaluate their effectiveness.

Theoretically, as Figure 2 shows, however, those deficiencies are being addressed to some degree by bringing the religious programming in line with the evidence-based practices of correctional treatment. I would also note that incorporating evidenced-based practices into these religious services has, to date, not changed the “religious” or “spiritual” nature of these services. The context and content of these services have remained

essentially unchanged from 2000 to 2004.

**Religion and Spirituality Outside Scope of CPAI.** Furthermore, it needs to be said that religious and spiritual programming, by its very nature, brings something unique to the field of correctional treatment. Most of the religion that is practiced in prison is more akin to a way of life and fits uneasily, by definition, within the realm of a treatment “program” where program is taken to mean “a structured sequence of opportunities for learning and change” (McGuire, 2002, p. 23). Although there has been an increasing trend

valid to hypothesize that the increased levels of pro-social learning, social attachment, informal social control, community support, and faith development that may occur in the lives of offenders as a result of religious programs using a language and community-based context to which many inmates naturally respond are likely to promote the process of rehabilitation. Essentially, the religious or spiritual language that is spoken in these services is a language or vocabulary about goodness, sorrow, prayer, responsibility, hope, forgiveness, justice, confession, mindfulness, the “red” (or right) road,

**Most of the religion that is practiced in prison is akin to a way of life and fits uneasily within the definition of a treatment “program”—that is, “a structured sequence of opportunities for learning and change.”**

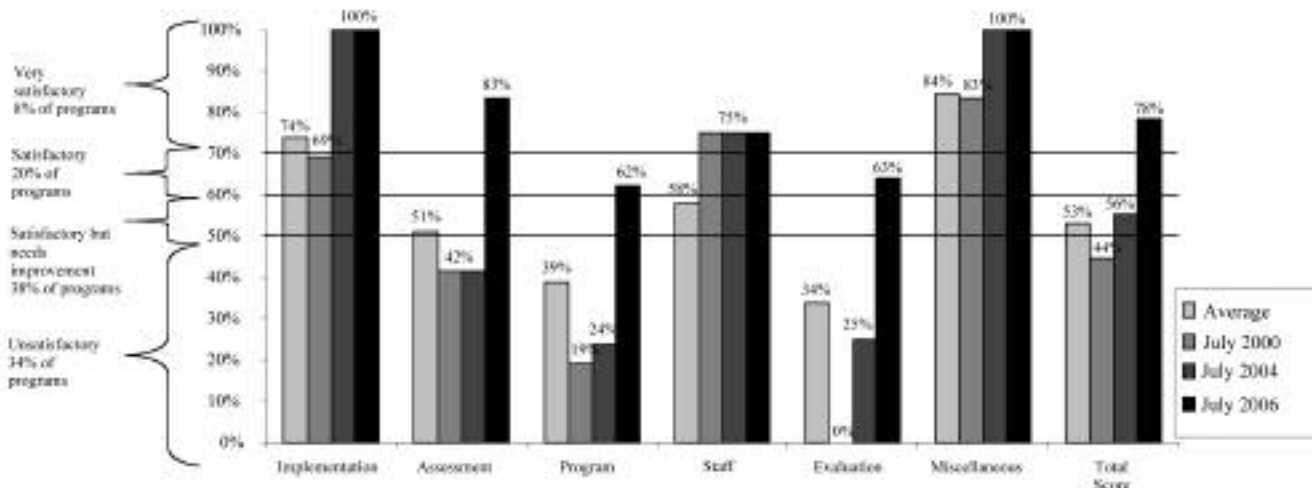
to design so-called faith-based “programs or interventions that do present a structural sequence of opportunities for learning and change” (e.g., Johnson & Larson, 2003), these are not the norm. The CPAI does not contain any reference to religion or spirituality in the program factors it assesses. So, by definition, the services provided by the religious services staff and volunteers in prison bring something unique to correctional programming, and that unique factor may have a relationship to reduced recidivism that is being overlooked and under-researched by the field of correctional treatment.

**Natural Response to Language and Context.** Accordingly, it seems theoretically

salvation, redemption, human dignity, internal motivation, and mercy. These language systems introduce their own realities, and they are capable of setting the skill- and knowledge-based traditions of our secularized correctional system within a broader context of communities of people who are concerned about and willing to work for the well-being of inmates (Clear et al., 1992; Dammer, 2002; O’Connor, Parikh & Ryan, 1997).

**Dosage.** Based on the substance abuse and correctional treatment literature, we also know that the amount of treatment or “dosage” a person completes affects the rates of program effectiveness (Booth et al., 1996, See RELIGION, next page

**Figure 2: The Correctional Program Assessment inventory Ratings for the Religious Services Program in the ODOC Over Time Compared to the Average Rating for Correctional Programs**



consistent with the findings from the few studies that have looked at the impact of religious programming on rehabilitation and found some evidence that intensity of religious involvement is related to good outcomes (Benda, 1997; Clear & Sumter, 2002; O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002; Sumter, 1999). We would not expect a person who went to only one religious meeting during a year of incarceration to have the same success rate as a person who went to 52 religious meetings during the year. I therefore hypothesize that as religious programming increases among offenders, in-prison and reentry success rates also increase.

## Conclusion of Part I

This concludes the discussion in Part I of this paper. As has become clear, much of the correctional evaluation research is focused on outcomes and tells us little about the processes that went into achieving those outcomes. This first part of the paper has described the historical and theoretical background for this "How does it work?" question. The second part of the paper will explore the spiritual history and practice of the men and women who are incarcerated in the ODOC, will describe the religious process that offenders go through while they are incarcerated, and will review the empirical research about the effectiveness of religion as a correctional intervention.

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