

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND PRISON MINISTRY: A REFLECTION ON STRUCTURAL DIFFERENTIATION AND MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

My basic thesis for this article is that in order for prison ministry to be holistic, it needs a Christian education component that is formative, contextual, and relational. I begin by critiquing the notion that these two entities are separate in department and mission, and endeavor to put them in conversation through a vision for Christian education rooted in models of discipleship.

Introduction

In 1893, sociologist Emile Durkheim published his dissertation, "The Division of Labor in Society" (Durkheim, 1997) where he discussed the increasing nature of specialization in the workforce as industrial society required more efficiency to be productive. Contrary to the simpler societies Durkheim later studied as "mechanical societies", contemporary societies practiced a form of organicism, whereby society discerned the need for more specialized forms of work to correspond to the nature of an ever more socially complex structure. The division of labor became both practical and functional. The church followed suit.

Congregations have increasingly relied on specialization for ministry development. Complex modern societies call for complex solutions that recognize the need for specialization into areas that involve special populations. Durkheim never imagined that such specialization would include incarcerated persons. His was recognition of class

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issues and how class and industrialization impacts classes differently. But what the French sociologist uncovered was just as much the development of strata in the religious world as in the nonsectarian world. We now live in an arena of specialized ministry and the division of labor in the church, which both strengthens the particularity of targeted populations and issues, but also creates a sense of forfeiture of ministerial responsibility for specialized populations that permits people to point to a designated issue or population and say "that's not my ministry".

This essay explores the intersection between two such specializations, namely Christian education and prison ministry. The former spawns departments and programs such as Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, Adult Education, and even colleges, universities and theological schools. Virtually all congregations feature some sort of internal, institutionalized program(s) deemed Christian education, and participate in denominations, networks, and other affiliations that support larger efforts. The latter usually consists of voluntary efforts of congregation members that enter jails and prisons (these two types of correctional facilities are not the same) for purposes of weekly worship and evangelism, or Christian education in the form of Bible study.

In exploring the intersection between the two, this essay argues that the idea of ministry specialization greatly limits the possibilities for more creative and holistic forms of prison ministry and Christian education, and puts forth several models for consideration at the congregational, regional and denominational level. We begin with a discussion of theological resources for Christian education and prison ministry, with special attention to the implications of theological anthropology's affirmation of the humanity of inmates, and the love of God building relationships of discipleship. In the second section, we consider Christian education and the reach of the criminal justice system, noting that crime and incarceration affect more than just prisoners.

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Christian education must consider families of the incarcerated, victims of crime and their families, and communities impacted by crime and fear. A third section discusses the approach to the criminal justice system, arguing for a basic understanding of the stages, phases and institutions involved in the correctional system, including implications for ministry and Christian education subsequent to an inmate's release.

As one who has worked and conducted research at the intersection of religion and criminal justice for close to forty years, I will approach the intersection from the perspective of prison ministry, and invite ongoing dialogue with those whose "specialization" is Christian education. To be sure, there are issues within the field of Christian education that must be addressed in order for the nexus between the two specializations to produce effective ministry. One critical issue concerns the extent to which Christian education suffers from a populist reductionism that narrows its focus to the transmission of Biblical knowledge- content, doctrine, principles- or topical educational experiences- marriage, youth and family, gender specific issues- without corresponding relationships of support. What are the modes of accountability for learning in an information only ministry? In short, can there be true discipleship within a congregation where the singular of primary mode of Christian education is the transition of information? In response, how do more relational forms of discipleship transform the vision for Christian education?

Theological Resources for Christian Education and Prison Ministry

How congregations answer these questions will impact their ability to mine the potential for more robust forms of prison ministry, and develop a culture that welcomes and supports inmates and their families, crime victims and their

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families, and those returning from incarceration. This essay asserts that, at its root, Christian education goes beyond formal programming. The perpetuation of traditional institutional forms of Christian education can lead to a form of routinization of the infrastructures of ministry at the expense of mission. The mission of Christian education is spiritual formation and character development. Biblical knowledge, and its application to personal living, relationship building and social and community engagement, point beyond classrooms to creating a prophetic church culture. Such a culture, in turn, redefines prison ministry (Trulear, 2009, pp.4-7).

Prophetic church culture offers an alternative worldview to that posited by contemporary culture, and its emphasis on personal success and individual entitlement. Rather, it creates an ethos conducive to affirming a theological anthropology that first, roots humanity in the Image of God; second, manifests relationships of mutuality which mirror the internal economy of the Trinity, and third, demonstrates love for that which God loves.

The Imago Dei: Affirming the Humanity of the Prisoner

Such a theological underpinning impacts not only the way a congregation lives its life in general, but also changes the way we view prison ministry. First, by affirming the Imago Dei, we affirm that prisoners are created in the image of God. Inmates tend to be defined by the fact that they have committed crimes, and become incarcerated. We respond to their existence with a sense of shame and stigma. We define their being in terms of their incarceration. After their release, we continue to define them as such, using terms such as ex-offender and ex-convict. However, a Biblical theological anthropology demands that no individual be defined solely by her or his mistakes. In teaching the doctrine of the Imago Dei, congregations can teach their members and stigmatizing society the true humanity of those behind bars. This is borne

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out in the other dimensions of theological anthropology: mutuality and love.

Mutuality of Relationships: Critiquing individualistic Reductionism and Unjust Institutions

Second, in teaching a mutuality of relationships, we prophetically subvert individualistic notions of prosperity and entitlement. Jonathan Walton has well documented the televangelist notions of personal success that supplant notions of social justice and transformation that have characterized the prophetic traditions of the Black church (Walton, 2009). In his chapter 'I Sing Because I'm Happy' he rehearses contemporary televised theology which echoes the earlier quip of prosperity progenitor Rev. Ike, "The best thing you can do for the poor is not be one of them! (Walton, 2009, pp.47-74; pp.167-198)."

Such theologies of entitlement mute critiques of social injustice and undercut any evaluation of the reality of mass incarceration and racially disproportionate corrections populations. These theologies both lay the sole blame for an inmate's situation on their behavior and promote a narcissistic flow of spiritual energy toward entitlement, acquisition and achievement. They offer no analysis of systemic forces or prophetic critiques of injustice. According to Michelle Alexander, who documents the social and racial roots of mass incarceration in her text *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Era of Colorblindness* (2010), the church struggles with understanding the social context of jails, prisons and prison ministries. (Alexander, 2014).

The sheer numbers of African American persons in prison or jail at any given time virtually insures that someone from even the smallest congregation has been impacted by mass incarceration. Yet almost all prison ministries are characterized as "outreach". The fact that family members of many incarcerated persons attend church points to our

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existential connection with the prison and jail populations, but we lack the theological resources to understand the exact nature of the connection. Hebrews 13:3 exhorts congregations to "remember the prisoners as if chained with them-those who are mistreated- since you yourselves are in the body also" (New King James Version). Christian education, which teaches the mutuality and interconnectedness of humanity, enables congregations to reject the alienation of prisoners to "otherness" and affirms a congregational responsibility to engage the population beyond the commissioning of a few volunteers for "outreach."

In the same vein, the challenge to care for prisoners in Matthew 25 suffers from an individualistic theological misinterpretation in its application. The message of Jesus in the Matthean text judges nations, not individuals for their treatment of the poor, the infirm and the incarcerated (Barber, 2014). While congregations debate the pros and cons of prison ministry and visitation, they lack the theological resources to understand their role in developing a prophetic assessment of mass incarceration. However, T. Richard Snyder in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* (2000) and James Samuel Logan in *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U. S. Imprisonment* (2008) both demonstrate the Theo-ethical resources for such a social critique. Snyder's discussion contrasts a culture bent on retribution with the historic notion of common grace. Logan's offers "healing past hurts an identity transformation as alternatives to retribution."

While such concepts may seem lofty for some congregations for Christian education, they are not for a learned ministry, especially pastors who have been graduated from theological institutions that teach care for the sick in core courses and care for the incarcerated as an elective. And the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference has succeeded in building the bridge from formal theological and historical analysis to congregation-based Christian education in its production of A

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Study Guide for Alexander's The New Jim Crow (2014). The American Baptists created a similar Study Guide for Judson Press' *Ministry with Prisoners and Families: The Way Forward*. Such congregation-focused resources for rethinking the intersections between the church and mass incarceration in general and Christian education and prison ministry in particular offer promise for reframing vision, resisting the silos of specialization, and prophetic holistic practice.

The Love of God: Teaching Character-Based Action for Ministry

The third affirmation of a prophetic theological anthropology, demonstrating a love for what God loves, points to love as the driving force of creation, the sacrificial provision for salvation, and the eschatological press toward full redemption. God's love creates humanity in God's image, and then God acts sacrificially for those God loves. This points to congregations creating cultures of sacrificial giving as a prophetic critique of consumerist culture (Dewald, 2010).

Christian education can be a tool to teach principles of ministry in general and prison ministry in particular that reflect sacrifice. Most education for ministry is heavily skill laden, overlooking the theological norms of Christian character and spiritual formation that empower ministry. The emphasis on programming often obfuscates the issue of the qualities of persons necessary for successful implementation of a program itself. To the extent that Christian education views training for ministry as its purview, then it will need to adeptly combine the norms of formation and the skills of practice. In 2000, I noted that programming for incarcerated youth and those formerly incarcerated finds its best efficacy in its personnel, not program content. The right staff trumps the right stuff (Trulear, 2000, pp.16-17).

Teaching sacrifice as a Christian norm presses a congregation beyond tradition forms of convenient prison

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ministries, and presses us to look at time investment, budgetary support, and emotional capital as areas for the sacrifice that leads to salvation. While holding worship services and Bible studies are good uses of time, the time to support visitation of prisoners, accompanying family members on visits, even transporting them to prisons and jails (as well as meeting them at the facility upon release) requires an ethic of sacrifice. The work is time-consuming, inconvenient and at times emotionally draining. Volunteers in prison ministry have preauthorized clearance and rigorously scheduled time slots as well as a level of familiarity with corrections staff that families of inmates do not. Hence visitation takes longer for clearance, and often requires more rigorous forms of security. A mother who "does not want to see her son that way" and withholds visits because of her own pain requires a real time investment to deal with her own sense of shame and often projected failure. Teaching theological principles of ministry that reflect sacrifice empowers a congregation to slow down from the busyness of programs, and affirm real time investment in persons in pain.

Teaching a vision for redemption recognizes the possibility of redemption for all, and the heart of God for such redemption. Redemption is a central theological construct in the teaching material of the Healing Communities Prison Ministry and Reentry curriculum, designed as Christian education for entire congregations, not just prison ministry volunteers (2008). Rooted in the love of God, redemption provides an alternative vision for the future of those who are incarcerated, one which prophetically critiques popular notions of their inability to change or be changed. Such an alternative vision also supports the replacement of structures of retribution with those promoting transformation and purpose.

Belief in redemption of the incarcerated begins with their destigmatization. Affirming their identities beyond definitions rooted in incarceration helps de-stigmatize persons

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behind bars. It also challenges the concept of silo-specialization residing in those who claim that working with incarcerated persons is "not my ministry." In that vein, what would Christian education look like if it included the reality of incarceration in the lives of Joseph, Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, John, John the Baptist, Paul and Silas, and Peter? If we taught that on Good Friday, Jesus was in custody? The redemptive transformation of criminals finds root on the cross with "the dying thief" but also with fugitive murderer Moses, homicide conspirator David, accessory to murder Paul, and potential felon Peter, whose assault on a law enforcement officer would be met with deadly force in contemporary America.

The narratives for Christian education and formation are there, from Bible to biography and text to testimony. We must create a different lens through which to view them, thus enabling the creation of an alternative congregational culture. Christian education rooted in an alternative theological anthropology can transform a church, and provides a holistic vision for engaging the criminal justice system.

Christian Education and the Reach of Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system affects more than just prisoners. Most prison ministries focus on inmates without recognizing how many persons feel the impact of crime and the criminal justice system (Goode et. al., 2011). A holistic vision for both prison ministry and Christian education recognizes that there exist multiple populations impacted by the system, all in need of the attention and support of a Christian education ministry with a discipleship focus.

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Christian Education and Incarcerated Persons

The first and foremost population, which is at once the most visible and the most invisible one, are the inmates. Their visibility resides in their being the "target" population of traditional prison ministry. They attend the worship services and the Bible studies. Too often, however, their participation in these activities subjects them to a healthy dose of evangelism, with little attention given to discipleship. While evangelism is important, intentional emphasis should be given to what prison ministry expert Lenny Spitale calls "discipling the church behind bars" a recognition that a significant number of inmates either come to correctional facilities with a faith commitment, or make such a commitment while incarcerated (Spitale, 2010).

Increased efforts to offer discipleship courses for inmates would reflect purposeful thought both about content of curriculum for inmates and the character of those who deliver instruction. With regards to the former, too often Bible study material ignores the real situations of inmates, men and women who made up to 150 decisions per day about things to do- from choice of food, meal times, dress, etc.- while free, but make less than 30 such daily decisions while incarcerated (Williams, 2012). Put simply, **Christian education for inmates must address ways to make meaning in a world where moral agency is circumscribed by limited available choices, and the militaristic culture of obedience in a situation of "punitive degradation".**

One way to address spiritual formation in an institution of circumscribed moral agency is through use of musical, visual, literary and dramatic arts. Just as workshops and classes in traditional Christian education use techniques from role play to poetry to visual arts in order to promote Christian growth, so too can the Christian education that takes place in correctional institutions. If it is true that "Fine Arts is the bridge that connects and greatly links the

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spiritual, academic, social, and physical aspects of learning” (Salazar, n.d.) then they can be useful in enhancing spiritual life within correctional institutions where inmates can make music, draw, compose and act.

Employing the arts makes prison worship a context for formation and expression as well. Instead of a sermon heavy, information based experience in prison worship where the volunteers are the actors and the inmates are spectators, prison worship should be interactive, where worshippers can express themselves to God as well, thus creating greater space to exercise moral agency. The Calvin Institute for Christian Worship has offered resources to prison ministries such as the Cornerstone Church of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Partnering with St. Dismas Fellowship, these prison congregations - denominational churches consisting entirely of prisoners - sought “to encourage deeper participation in the worship of prison congregations by teaching prisoners how to develop drama, lament, prayer, poetry, and music” (Cornerstone Church, 2007).

Obviously, such creative efforts require the right persons for implementation. Hence, the inmate’s invisibility should be understood. The invisibility of the inmate is reflected in the few church and family members who actually evangelize, disciple, write and visit them. They are out of sight and out of mind. Their spiritual development receives attention from only a handful of members of the congregation because of the silo of specialization, as well as the theological deficiencies noted earlier in this essay. Christian education that focuses on spiritual formation includes more than Bible study classes. A culture of discipleship resists tendencies toward invisibility. It bids members and families visit, send cards and letters, take phone calls, as demonstration of the love that God sheds on God’s people. The Healing Communities USA project (www.healingcommunitiesusa.com) stresses a robust practice of engagement in connecting inmates with their

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families and the congregations in which many of these families participate.

Christian Education and the Families Left Behind

Many inmates leave behind family members variously impacted by the inmate's journey through the system. Additionally, many of those left behind attend our congregations, with little by way of resources for their own pain and healing. These family members range from adult parents, grandparents, spouses, siblings and other relatives, to school children with less than adult skills to grapple with the reality of an incarcerated parent. A report of The Sentencing Project reported that 62% of all women in state prisons had school-aged children (2012). Seen from another perspective, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that by 2007, 761,000 children and youth under age 18 had an incarcerated parent. Clearly, we have a significant number of these children in church, Sunday school or Vacation Bible School.

A large number of researchers have documented the difficulty the incarceration of a parent presents for children, especially younger ones (Travis and Waul, 2003; Zollinger, 2006). Their measures of pro-social behaviors decline, educational achievement suffers, and emotional trauma develops. Prudence Zollinger documents that such behavior is exacerbated when the child witnesses either the actual arrest of their parent, or the parent's illegal activity.

Many sectors of society have begun to produce resources for children of the incarcerated that can be adapted to the Christian educational program. Sociologist Bahiyyah Muhammad, whose ground-breaking ethnography of the lives of children of prisoners (Muhammad, 2011) led her to developing tools as a scholar activist on their behalf, has published the *Prison Alphabet Coloring Book* (2014) to help

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children understand the experience of having an incarcerated parent. It contains instructions for their caregivers on how to use the coloring book to engage these children: to assist them in articulating and validating their feelings concerning the incarceration of their parent in a healing manner.

Dr. A'Shellarien Lang has demonstrated the capacity to adapt such nonsectarian work to the needs of the church by creating a faith based curriculum for children of prisoners that revolves around Sesame Street's important toolkit: "Little Children: Big Challenges". This toolkit, geared toward ages 3-8 and their caregivers, contains resources that revolve around stories of children with incarcerated parents, including a reading book and a DVD episode. With Sesame Street's approval, Dr. Lang created a training course for how to integrate the toolkit into the Christian education curriculum of a congregation through Sunday school, Vacation Bible School or some other venue of address.

Children of the incarcerated have special needs that can be addressed by Christian education when we understand the pain and trauma affecting these young people. What may appear to be some form of learning or emotional disorder may actually be response to the trauma of having an incarcerated parent. By creating the type of culture where such issues are openly addressed, congregations can minister to the actual pain of the situation, rather than the misdiagnoses that leave such children unable to articulate and address their emotions.

Similarly, having classes and support groups for adults with incarcerated children and grandchildren gives voice to their hurt, pain and even projected guilt about a loved one. Congregations such as the New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Washington, DC hold regular study and support groups for these adults who have brought their sense of pain and shame to the altar and found relief. Through Bible studies that review the ways in which biblical characters have endured incarceration, the culture of the congregation has

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normalized the experience, not through its justification, but rather through understanding its reality affecting many throughout the ages. Just as congregations began to "break the silence" surrounding domestic violence in the 1980s, congregations which make discussions about incarceration normative discover both healing for the emotions of families of the incarcerated and the voice to address the injustices of mass incarceration, disproportionate minority confinement, and the horrific conditions of correctional facilities. Support groups and classes become the incubators of dissent with respect to current criminal justice policy. As noted by the late sociologist Carl Dudley, congregations are mobilized to engage policy only after they engage the persons affected by policy itself (Dudley, 1991, pp.xi-xii).

Christian Education and Victims of Crime

Thirdly, another demographic that populates communities affected by incarceration is that of crime victims. Statistics vary with respect to victimhood. For the purposes of ministry, those numbers must include the families of victims, who in many cases feel the impact of crime as well. Victims and their families often struggle with issues of shame, pain, and forgiveness. Congregations that persist in dealing with forgiveness as a matter of obedience to a concept (transmission of information) rather than a matter of discipleship underestimate the pain suffered by victims and their families. A strategic response to offense requires a disciplined pattern of relational instruction that goes beyond the classroom or the pulpit. There are good resources available for those in Christian education to mentor people through a process of forgiveness (Volf, 2006).

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Christian Education and Returning Citizens

Men, women and youth who have spent time in prison also populate our neighborhoods and congregations. While they have been traditionally labeled as ex-offenders of ex-convicts, in congregations within several networks, such as the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches USA and the Healing Communities USA network, they use the name “returning citizens” to reflect a theology of belonging and future, rather than an identity which refers to the penalties of the past. Christian education can assist in creating a climate that critiques and transcends identities that limit people to their involvement with the criminal justice system and invoke a biblical theological anthropology affirming their full humanity (Alexander, 2014).

The challenge to the development of curriculum addressing these needs lies in the myth that employment and housing are the primary issues facing returning citizens .However, because pro-social attitudes and associations are twice as likely to determine successful reintegration to society than employment and housing, congregations should boldly insert themselves into the reentry process as a resource for returning citizens (Goode, et.al., 2011). By joining forces with prerelease programs in prisons and jails, such as the partnership between the congregations of Healing Communities New Orleans and the Orleans Parish Prison, a steady educational focus on the attitudes and thought processes necessary for successful Reentry can be established (Jones, 2012).

Christian Education and the Culture of Fear

Finally, the presence of high crime rates in many neighborhoods breeds a culture of fear among residents. In his research on the Mott Haven neighborhood in the Bronx, Dimas Cortez noted that even though the homicide rate was

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down in the community, residents lived with more fear because the recklessness with which guns were being used increased the number of innocent people shot, though overall numbers of homicides were down. "Neighborhood stakeholders felt that the residents of Mott Haven, particularly the children, were far more respectful during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when [drug gangs] ruled the streets," he said. Residents reported feeling safer when neighborhood blocks were controlled by local drug dealers, who kept crime within their ranks (Cortez, 2013). How does Christian education address the fears of those whose communities are plagued with violence, even when the statistics seem to offer hope?

Christian education should address the reality of trouble in the neighborhood, the reasons for Hope, and the strength to give voice to an advocacy for change. In his groundbreaking popular text *Don't Shoot*, David Kennedy suggests that the majority of residents in neighborhoods plagued by crime want to see change, and seek avenues to address their fears, and resources to make communities safer. Given the opportunity, they participate in initiatives that address behaviors which create a climate of fear (Kennedy, 2012). Christian education in a prophetic culture lifts the veil of fear, and takes advantage of the hidden courage of community residents.

In short, holistic Christian education intersects prison ministry best when a full view of the impact of crime and incarceration receives attention from the church in general, and those charged with its educational ministries in particular. Bible studies have their place. But there are a variety of forms of engagement beyond traditional Bible studies.

Approaching the criminal justice system

An apocryphal comment attributed to Gardner C. Taylor reads "Prison ministry is more than showing up at the

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prison with a Bible and a tambourine!" Indeed, we can start with the fact that many congregations with so-called "prison ministries" have never sent someone to a prison at all. Rather, they take their services to the county jails, not recognizing that these are correctional facilities which house (1) persons awaiting hearings, trials or sentencing, (2) persons sentenced to short sentences often ranging from 30 days to 1 or 2 years depending on the state, and (3) persons sentenced to longer terms, but are awaiting an assigned place in a state or federal prison. Therefore, the population at a county jail is transient, with people heading to one of three places: prison, court or home. Knowing the population to which one ministers should impact ministry in jail facilities. If persons are awaiting trial (detainees), ministry should reflect the uncertainty of their circumstances. If persons await placement in the state or federal prison system, then ministry requires preparation for a long stretch for incarceration, isolation, and family strain. If ministering with those serving short sentences, volunteers should be preparing people for the transition back into society, often in a neighborhood with challenges and disadvantages of its own.

Because prisons house inmates for longer periods ministry in those facilities should reflect the type of discipleship characteristic of Christian education. This may include Bible study, but increasingly, advocates are calling for programs that address the need for pro-social behaviors and pro-social associations both in prisons and upon release to society. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) addressing both attitudes and behaviors reflect the research findings that pro-social attitudes and pro-social associations are the primary criminogenic needs for helping men and women returning from incarceration avoid recidivism (Gnall, 2012; O'Connor, 2012). Siang-Yang Tan argues that the correlation between strategies of CBT and Christian faith point to its usefulness as a strategy for Christian counseling (Tan, 2011). In the same vein, the principles of CBT can serve as a foundation for the

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development of long-term strategies of discipleship for inmates, and follow-up when they return to society. Christian education in long-term correctional facilities presents an opportunity for long-term solutions for people seeking transformation within prison.

The criminal justice system, however, continues beyond jail and prison. In the late 2000s, a shift in terminology began, as departments of probation and parole became "community corrections," along with halfway houses and house arrests. Experts in the field wrestle with the responsibility of the correctional system to define community corrections, or community supervision, especially since few departments actually involve any input from the community. In 2012, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that over 850,000 men and women were on state or federal probation or parole. However, the large numbers of persons under some form of community supervision also presents an opportunity for holistic Christian education, as well as the expansion of prison ministry to include the re-entry of prisoners- returning citizens- and their families.

A discipleship model of Christian education can be used in providing a role for congregations to work alongside community supervision officers as part of a community's ownership or involvement in community corrections. Given the difficulty facing recently returning citizens in finding jobs, housing and access to other services, discipleship through dealing with difficulty can serve as a buffer against the frustration that can lead to probation or parole violations or repeat offenses.

The discipleship model parallels contemporary nonsectarian and government investment in mentoring programs. In its 2014 solicitation for proposals for the "Comprehensive Community-Based Adult Reentry Program Utilizing Mentors" the Bureau of Justice Assistance defines mentoring as a "process that includes the informal transmission of knowledge." Though such transmission may

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be informal, the recruitment of mentors and the matching of mentors with returning citizens are quite formal. Indeed, if a congregation possesses existing social capital within its community and with inmates and their families, such transmission can be made in the historic modes of discipleship, i.e. the normal building of relationships that form and inform the character development of those seeking growth.

Christian Education and Leadership Development

Finally, Christian education can take seriously the notion that inmates are not simply the objects of education, but subjects who, when involved with substantive thoughts, ideas and people, hone the leadership skills necessary for change within the prisons and jails, and beyond the walls. Inmate education that takes seriously the potential of leadership development and the actuality of current exercise of leadership by inmates has proven successful at levels from GED education through college and even theological education (Trulear, 2013).

New York Theological Seminary has offered an accredited Master's degree at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility for three decades. The Southern Baptist Convention provides bachelor's level education in biblical studies and pastoral leadership in several correctional facilities, notably the notorious Louisiana Penitentiary in Angola, where the average inmate sentence, not including lifers, is sixty-five years. Over one hundred inmates at Angola have received their bachelor's degree, and the climate at the prison has been greatly impacted by their presence (Franco, 2013).

The recognition that inmates can provide leadership within the Christian community, the correctional system, and beyond can fuel Christian education for more programs and

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relationships that yield positive change, both in individuals and society.

This essay has sought to introduce readers to a variety of issues where the intersection of Christian education and prison ministry serve as a field ripe for harvest. To the extent that Christian education expands its vision beyond the specialized silo, it will support robust forms of prison ministry through the development of a prophetic culture of embracing the humanity of all affected by incarceration. To the extent that prisons ministry can be freed of the limited outreach of worship and Bible study, it will provide healing for past and present hurt, reconciliation for families and communities, and leadership both within and outside the walls of the correctional facilities. With vision and will, these historic silos will combine to form a holistic ministry that will undermine the very foundations of mass incarceration, and bring us closer to the visions of justice framed in Scripture.

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