

THE DILEMMA OF EVALUATING FAITH-BASED CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS IN INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

Faith-based correctional programs are intended to produce inner change in participants. Research confirming positive effects of these programs may then support program continuation or expansion. Empirical evaluations can measure ethical action, but not redemption in terms of transcendent reality. This paper argues that evaluations of faith-based programs are incorrectly tied to empirical designs based in social science, rather than on understandings about the true redemptive changes that can occur in the lives of participants in the programs. We suggest that grace and redemption are beyond the reaches of scientific inquiry and that empirically-based evaluation studies of such programs miss the mark.

On January 29, 2001, President George Bush, by executive order, created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in eleven Federal agencies to provide a wide array of social services (The White House 2001). The eleven Federal agencies include the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, and the Agency for International Development. Eight years earlier, President Bill Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). This Act requires government to demonstrate a compelling interest in legislation that might pose a substantial burden to religious interests. The Supreme Court invalidated a portion of the RFRA Act as it applied to states and localities. As a consequence, Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 requiring the government to make accommodations to the religious interests of prisoners or to demonstrate a compelling interest in imposing substantial burdens on the free exercise of religion by inmates. President Clinton also had signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 that included a charitable choice section designed to allow a level playing field and equal opportunity for faith-based organizations to compete for federal welfare block-grant funds. However, participating faith-based organizations receiving funds were prohibited from discriminating against clients on the basis of religion or from using funds provided by the government for "sec-

tarian worship, instruction or proselytization (Personal Responsibility 1996)."

Each of these initiatives and Acts reflect the growing role of religion in contributing to the improvement of lives in the community and in certain institutions (i.e., prisons). In some ways they may even suggest a governmental reawakening in the tradition of evangelical movements such as the Great Awakening begun by Jonathan Edwards in New England during the 1730s and 1740s, the Second Great Awakening of the first third of the 19th century which led to a wave of social activism and reform, and the Third Great Awakening of the last half of the 19th century which ultimately produced the Social Gospel Movement built on the application of Christian principles for dealing with the serious social problems of the day (McRoberts 2002). But the evangelical movement from the early 1980s to the present represents the first time that religion has been directly used as a legal and political force to affect change. A clear ringing of the social gospel can be heard in President Bush's words establishing the Faith-Based and Community Initiative:

Faith-based and other community organizations are indispensable in meeting the needs of poor Americans and distressed neighborhoods....The paramount goal is compassionate results, and private and charitable community groups, including religious ones, should have the fullest opportunity permitted by law to compete on a level playing field, so long as they achieve valid public purposes, such as curbing crime, conquering addiction, strengthening families and neighborhoods, and overcoming

poverty. (The White House 2001)

Each of these awakenings has had strong supporters and critics; the last of these has even been soundly thumped by a federal appellate court. This paper focuses on the most recent of these awakenings and its infusion of religion and issues of faith into the prevention of crime and delinquency and the rehabilitation of undeterred criminals and the difficulties in empirically validating the products or outcomes of faith-based programs designed to accomplish these goals.

RELIGION AND THE PENITENTIARY

Religion has been an integral part of the institutional correctional process from the very beginning. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Walnut Street prison and Eastern State Penitentiary at Cherry Hill required inmates to read the Bible, contemplate God and their sins, renew their faith, and repent. They also allowed representatives of the local churches to visit inmates and talk about faith issues and their need for redemption (DeGirolami 2006). Quakers desired to transform the offender's character, to convert the criminal from sin to a God-fearing life of good and decent behavior (George & Bradley 2006). This emphasis on redemptive rehabilitation of inmates continued through the middle half of the 19th century when it was replaced by the Progressive era emphasis on punishment of criminals and rehabilitation based on the applications of medical, biological, and behavioral science positivistic understandings of criminality as a sickness. Crime, believed to be similar to a disease, could be compulsorily cured. The criminal no longer needed to be converted, but only be subjected to therapeutic treatment aimed at altering one's personal maladjustment (Skotnicki 1996; George & Bradley 2006; Lewis 1970). It was not until the late 1970s and a widespread disillusionment with contemporary approaches to rehabilitation that evangelical Christians saw an opening for their return to prison. Since simple warehousing of inmates and forced therapy appeared to have failed in affecting crime rates and recidivism of ex-prisoners, perhaps a return to touching the soul and introducing inmates to the potential of grace through faith was due (Martinson 1974; Colson 1976).

EVANGELICALS, PRISONS, AND THE COMMUNITY

While prisons continued to have faith-based services available to inmates, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or otherwise, the introduction of evangelical Christian programming during the past three decades has transformed the role of faith-based activities. One of the earliest, and most prominent, prison ministries is Prison Fellowship, founded in 1976 by Charles Colson (Prison Fellowship 2006). Prison Fellowship currently has more than 50,000 volunteers serving in a wide variety of prison programs in all 50 states (Loconte 1997). Programs range from Bible studies and in-prison seminars to life-plan seminars for inmates preparing to leave prison as well as operating full-scale, day-to-day faith-based programs in prisons in Texas and, until 2006, in Iowa (Johnson 2004). In 1997, Prison Fellowship established its InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) which became an independent organization operating in prisons in various states.

The Kairos Prison Ministry, established in 1976, operates faith-based programs in prisons in Florida, Ohio, and Arizona. In 2003, Corrections Corporation of America, partnering with the Dallas-based Bill Glass Champions for Life, launched a plan to implement faith-based programs in each of its correctional facilities (Corrections Corporation of America 2003). A year later, in 2004, the nation's first faith-based prison program for women opened in Tampa, Florida (Farrington 2004). Florida is also home to H.E.L.P., a Jewish faith-based prison program designed to promote the

rehabilitation of inmates and improved family, social, and work ethic accomplished by behavior modification modalities that integrate principles of Jewish Law and tradition. (Aleph Institute 2006)

Religion has also become directly infused in community corrections, primarily through re-entry and crime/delinquency prevention programming. For example, CORE (Corrections Organized for Re-Entry) is a Louisiana faith-based initiative combining pre-release faith-based prison ministry programming with post-release Freedom of Spirit Ministries at the New Orleans Re-Entry Center (Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections 2006). The Rest Philly Project

combines pre-release and post-release in its faith-based program IRAP (Inmate Restoration and After-Care Program). Begun in 2001, more than 1400 inmates have gone through the 14 week group therapy program (I-Rest 2006).

Other community faith-based correctional programs include Ready4Work, which combines the efforts of community and faith-based organizations to address the needs of offenders released back to the community. Operating in 11 cities, Ready4Work was designed as a set of demonstration projects in which faith-based organizations take the lead at six of the sites; at three other sites, secular nonprofit organizations direct programming (Farley & Hackman 2006). Bethany Christian Services partners with the Kent County Department of Social Services in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to provide faith-based foster care for at-risk children and residential care for juvenile sex offenders as well as for abused and neglected children (Sherman 1995).

THE FEDERAL COURTS AND FAITH-BASED CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMMING

It would appear that faith-based correctional programs have become well established in both prisons and the community. However, two important questions arise from this intersection of faith and correctional programming. First, are faith-based programs involved in public ventures (i.e., operating in state prisons or using public tax dollars) constitutional? Might they be constitutional if the faith-based program guarantees that it will not mention or teach about its faith aspects or proselytize to participants in the program? Second, assuming there is no significant church-state conflict, are faith-based correctional programs effective, and what is it that they are effective in doing? That is, are they effective in reducing recidivism or preventing delinquency? Are they more or less effective than secular programs? But most importantly, at least for this paper, are faith-based correctional programs designed to help offenders find and strengthen their faith, to find grace and redemption, and to change as whole persons amenable to empirical measurement of their effectiveness in achieving such goals?

With regard to the constitutionality of faith-based programs in correctional settings, it appears that, at least at this moment, the

jury is still out (although at least one judge has spoken). In June of 2006, U.S. District Court Judge Robert Pratt ruled that the faith-based InnerChange Freedom Initiative program operating within the Iowa correction system violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment by receiving public money in support of its efforts to bring about religious change in inmates as part of its program to reduce recidivism (*Americans United for Separation of Church and State v. Prison Fellowship Ministries* 2006). InnerChange is essentially a transformational, rather than therapeutic, model for changing offenders into good citizens, to reduce the recidivism of current inmates, and to prepare inmates for their return to society by providing educational, ethical, and religious instruction (InnerChange 2006).

A similar case has been filed in the United States District Court in the District of New Mexico (*Freedom from Religion Foundation, Inc., et al., v. Governor Bill Richardson, et al.*, 2005). The plaintiffs argue that the New Mexico Department of Corrections, through its contract with Corrections Corporation of America, Inc. provides faith-based programming to inmates designed to encourage the inmates involved to establish or strengthen a relationship with God and convert them to a fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity. According to the New Mexico Department of Corrections, the underlying premise of faith-based programming is that a relationship with God, and involvement in a Christian faith community, is necessary to prevent criminal recidivism.

On February 28, 2007, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in another case brought by the Freedom from Religion Foundation. This case, *Hein v. Freedom from Religion Foundation, Inc, et al.*, (2007), was another challenge to federal funding of faith-based initiative programs. The essential argument in the case focused on whether taxpayers have legal standing to challenge an executive program not created by Congress, specifically to challenge the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. One of the programs noted in the suit, MentorKids USA, was alleged to have received federal grant monies "directly and preferentially funded with Congressional taxpayer appropriations," and to have used the funds for services that "integrate religion

as a substantive and integral component" of their program in violation of the Establishment Clause. MentorKids USA, established in 1997 in Phoenix, Arizona, matched

caring Christian adults with youths ages 8-17 who showed warning signs of becoming criminal offenders. Youth targeted for mentoring included those who had either trouble with the law, significant school problems, dysfunctional family backgrounds, or drug or alcohol abuse. (MentorKids USA 2006)

CONVERSION, REPENTANCE, GRACE, AND REDEMPTION

In 1976, Charles (Chuck) Colson published his first book, *Born Again*, in which he describes his fall from power and influence in the White House and eventual incarceration in a federal prison. The key factor in the book, however, is not his fall, but rather his conversion and redemption experience while in prison. Accounts of prison and jailhouse conversions have been widely disseminated and read by the faithful and skeptics alike. The truth or reality of the conversion experience gets debated in the media, among law-makers, and by the public.

Sometimes a conversion experience makes it to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1981, William Payton was tried and convicted of a brutal rape and murder. During the penalty phase, his defense attorney focused on Payton's conversion and commitment to God that had occurred during the year and a half he spent in jail awaiting trial and argued that this should be considered by the jury to be a mitigating circumstance in their deliberations. In his closing argument, the prosecutor incorrectly told the jury that California law prohibited them from considering anything that happened after the crime and that "you have not heard any evidence of mitigation in this trial," suggesting that the jury should disregard Payton's conversion. The judge instructed the jury that the prosecutor's statements were merely argument, but did not clearly explain that California law requires juries to consider "any other circumstances which extenuates the gravity of the crime even though it is not a legal excuse for the crime." The jury found special circumstances in the crime and returned a verdict recommending a death sentence, which the judge then imposed. The California Supreme Court af-

firmed the sentence and Payton appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which overturned the California Court's decision, arguing that the prosecutor's statements may have misled the jury (*Payton v. Woodford* 2003). The case was then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in 2005 reversed the Ninth Court's ruling, thus allowing the original sentence to be enforced (*Brown v. Payton* 2005). Part of the argument by the U.S. Supreme Court was that "it was not unreasonable to find that the jurors did not likely believe Payton." Apparently, they were not offered empirical proof of his conversion. But what proof could have been offered? Could social scientists have confirmed his conversion or the conversion of others?

According to professor of theology Andrew Skotnicki, a conversion experience involves "a positive and demonstrative transformation in character" (Skotnicki 1996). He suggests this involves the

idea of falling in love with the transcendent, which involves mimesis, a conscious patterning of one's life on that of the deity from whom one has formerly felt separated, (Skotnicki 1996 37)

Skotnicki also suggests that most writers dealing with the nature of conversion emphasize that the experience is "personal but not individualistic." An individual's religious conversion brings the individual into communion with others of the particular faith community.

The conversion process also typically includes a strong sense of repentance and reconciliation. Repentance, or atonement, not only allows for reconciliation between God and man, but establishes the basis for reconciliation between an offended party and the offender. To repent means more than to simply become aware of one's wrong, sin, or crime, rather it involves a turning to God whose gift of grace makes the process of self-understanding and repentance possible in the first place (DeGirolami 2006).

What are we to make of the number of recent cases in which inmates facing the death penalty have provided accounts of conversion experiences? Are these conversion experiences real? Was there a moment of true grace and redemption (a reconciliation to one's salvation that would lead the person away from sin and crime) involving an

inmate facing execution? Because it is impossible to confirm or deny scientifically such a conversion experience, the conversion is regarded as something unverifiable, and the execution proceeds. If conversion was verifiable, is that sufficient to mitigate punishment by the State for the condemned person's crime?

In Flannery O'Connor's (1955) short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," O'Connor describes the moment of possible grace and redemption the Misfit (an escaped murderer) faces. The Misfit may be what Camp et al. (2006) refer to as a seeker, a person just beginning to look through the window at a possible religious experience. The Misfit has actually been obsessed with religion but cannot bring himself to act on the notion that Jesus is God incarnate. Consequently, he believes there is "no pleasure but meanness," which is a not uncommon criminal stance. However, at the end of the story, the Misfit, having just murdered five family members on vacation, glimpses momentarily the power of God to redeem him just as he shoots and kills the grandmother. O'Connor seems to be suggesting that a person may be likely to commit crimes, even horrific ones, to test the no-pleasure-but-meanness world view. Would a criminologist have been able to provide scientific evidence of the Misfit's experience? Might demographic and other social data on inmates experiencing conversions or criminals like the Misfit facing but then rejecting Christ really tell us much on which to develop policies or establish programs? Certainly, descriptive survey data correlating conversion experiences and reported subsequent behavior can suggest a possible causal relationship. Yet, while we can reasonably accept self-reported offending as modestly valid, it would take a leap of faith for most social scientists to accept the validity of the conversion. At best we would be left with demographics of those who "claim" conversions correlating at some level with behavior. Can we measure ethical or moral reform or redemption in terms of transcendent reality (a belief in something beyond life with which we must reckon)? We can measure criminal acts or the absence of criminal acts over a period of time for particular individuals, but can we accurately tap into the deeper religious dimensions of that person's motivations?

MEASURING THE UNMEASURABLE

Social scientists have gone about measuring the relationship of religious commitment or involvement and delinquency (Hirschi & Stark 1969; Johnson, Li, Larson, & McCullough 2000; Baier & Wright 2001; Jang & Johnson 2001), religion as a tool for delinquency prevention (Johnson, Larson, Li, & Jang 2000; Bauldry & Hartmann 2004), denominational differences among delinquent youth (Ellis 2002), the effect of religion on inmate behavior (Clear & Sumter 2002; Pass 1999; Dammer 2002), and the role of religion in offender reintegration and recidivism (Johnson 2004; Johnson, Larson, & Pitts 1997; Young, et al. 1995; O'Connor & Perrey-clear 2002).

Empirical explorations of religion, offenders, prevention, and prison are increasingly available. For example, Scott Camp and his colleagues (2006) identified factors associated with inmates who volunteer to participate in a faith-based prison program and suggested that knowledge of such factors may help us to understand better the differences in prison outcomes, including prison adjustment and post-release success. The most important distinguishing characteristic appears to be that participants are likely to be "seekers" or inmates who have typically only begun their faith journey since entering prison. Camp et al., also seem to suggest that faith-based programs are not only more attractive to seekers, but that future research might demonstrate that these programs facilitate participating seekers in experiencing more positive prison outcomes. Research confirming the effects of faith-based programs would then provide support for expansion of these programs.

Another example of these empirical studies includes Johnson and Larson's (2003) use of a matched design to evaluate the faith-based InnerChange Freedom Initiative program in a Texas prison. Inmates who were eligible for participation in the program were randomly selected from a pool while the control group was composed of inmates who had applied, met the criteria, were initially selected for admission into the program, but randomly assigned to another pre-release facility.

A final example is found in an evaluation of the Kairos Horizon prison ministry program (Lewis 2004). The Kairos Horizon program assists prisoners, ex-prisoners, their fami-

lies, communities, correctional institutions, and state social service agencies in building important social bonds that will lead to reduced recidivism and increased independence.

For many faith-based institutional or community crime prevention or reintegration programs there is little or no difference between them and similar nonreligious programming aimed at the same problems other than denominational affiliation, mission statement and overtly religious name (Harden 2006; Lawrence et al. 2002). For example, tutorial and GED services, providing psychological counseling, job placement, life skills training, arts programming, mentoring, anger and stress management, improving family relations and fatherhood, alcohol and drug treatment, and financial management. Evaluating the impact of faith-based programs in such instances would be no different than evaluating the impact of secular programs (McNabb 2003; Annie E. Casey Foundation 2003; Spring Research Forum 2003). As the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2003) notes:

Faithfulness takes many forms, some of which make the worth of faith-based groups and non-faith groups appear similar. What differentiates the two groups, however, is that [faith-based] programs also focus on faith as a means of transformation and sustained change.

Similarly, in their report on the role of faith-based organizations in the social welfare system, the Spring Research Forum (2003) states that "the faith-based organizations and the nonsectarian organizations really are quite similar to each other." In fact, in many instances, volunteers in faith-based correctional programs are prohibited from sharing their faith beliefs with participants, encouraging church attendance, Bible study, or any other act that might be considered stepping over the fine line prohibiting the mingling of church and state. The activities of the faith-based groups are limited to secular services and secular outcomes.

How might social scientists measure those "successes" that are at the core of the faith itself? Although President Bush's comments on the key elements of his faith-based initiative appear to assume that the "results" to be delivered can be measured and separated from the religious practices of the faith-

based groups, such separation is often impossible (The White House 2002). Indeed, the outcomes of faith-based programming that involve conversion or transformation of individuals are not amenable to empirical measurement.

The problems social scientists run into in studying faith-based programs are not much different from those who attempt to study evil from a scientific perspective. Evil, like faith, is beyond empirical explanation, although numerous social correlates of both evil and faith can be tentatively measured. According to Thomas Kubarych (2005), evil reflects non-empirical value judgments. Others, such as M. Scott Peck (1983), suggest that even though evil includes such things as intentional harms, the use of overt or covert coercion against others, the destruction of both corporeal life and the human spirit, and even narcissistic personality disorders, we still are ultimately unable to apply rigorous scientific research to its true nature.

Paul Knepper (2003) suggests that the exercise of faith is not just another social institution and that an explanation of how social control is exerted by or through faith requires a metaphysical examination, rather than a scientific one. Can social scientists move beyond thinking about faith as little more than another mechanism of social control or as a social variable to be manipulated for the sake of public policy? Knepper argues that an evidence-based approach to faith-based programs and interventions, claiming objectivity and refusing to specify whether religion is true or false, eventually leads to "an argument for the irrelevance of moral beliefs in human activity" (Knepper 2003 343). It may well be, as Knepper contends, that policy makers might do better to seek out the observations and beliefs of the faithful themselves, rather than relying on an

intellectual narrow-mindedness that might be best described as *academic fundamentalism* (italics in original). (Knepper 2003 347)

Faith, grace, and redemption are notions poorly understood by secular social scientists. Even social scientists of faith too easily compartmentalize their desire to adhere to the rigors of the scientific method and seem to forget that the practice of religion involves much more than measurable expressions

of faith (i.e., church attendance, reading the Bible or other religious tracts, or adherence to particular commonly held religious beliefs). Yet the faithful, as well as seekers progressing toward belief, also have little understanding of exactly how faith works. *Not* being able to understand fully is an essential element of faith, and as Knepper (2003 342) suggests, "social scientists cannot know more about any social activity than the participants themselves."

Positive change, even redemptive change, within the individual, whether brought about by traditional rehabilitative treatment techniques or a religious conversion experienced by a seeker participating in a faith-based program, is obviously a desired outcome for those we incarcerate. Such change might, but does not necessarily, lead to a reduced inclination to commit new crimes. This stems in part from the sociolegal construction of crime, which is often, but not always, related to notions of morality. Changes in the moral character of an offender as the result of participation in a faith-based program may not be sufficient to overcome the overwhelming social, economic, and biosocial forces that contribute to individual criminality.

More importantly, a religious conversion of a "seeker" in a community or institutional correctional program, at least a Christian conversion experience, is only the beginning of change in a person. The notion of being "born again" comes from the Bible. In John 3:3, Jesus teaches, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In 1 Peter 2:1-2 we read:

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

Rebirth is only the start of learning about grace and how faith may work in one's life. Although the inmate has accepted forgiveness and begins to walk down the path of change, it could be years before there is sufficient clarity in his or her salvation to notice measurable change in behavior. However, even if these internal changes fail significantly to reduce recidivism or immediately correct an offender's behavior, to those of faith they are likely to have profound impact on the per-

son, but again in ways social scientists may find impossible actually to measure.

Do the limitations of social science to measure grace, redemption, and salvation that may occur in offenders mean that we should not support faith-based programs or even expand their availability? Of course not! The argument we are presenting here is that faith in faith-based correctional programs has been incorrectly tied to empirical findings from social science, rather than to the true redemptive changes that occur in the lives of many participants in the programs. Funding for faith-based prison programs, as well as for faith programs in the community, should be provided because offenders or would-be offenders are given opportunities through these programs to have their lives affected and redirected through grace. Rather than make funding available based on positive findings from research, support should be extended because we have faith in these programs and their ability to provide the possibilities of redemptive change.

Should social scientists *not* apply their research tools to the study of religion and faith? On the contrary; as criminologists we have great faith in the ability of social science to explore and explain much of our social world, especially the observable behaviors and expressed attitudes of people of different faiths. Yet as people of faith, we strongly believe that grace and redemption are well-beyond the reaches of scientific inquiry. We also believe faith-based programs give those providing community and institutional correctional programs one more element for bringing about change in the lives of those offenders they work with.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY

On a practical basis, what kind of policy recommendations might emerge from this perspective? We would argue that although community and institutional corrections is largely the business of the state, and one could therefore argue that it is a secular activity, radical change within offenders may be better viewed as a personal commitment. Regarding offenders in prison, it is common for inmates to be subjected to various forms and degrees of punishments and treatments while in prison. Traditionally, treatments have been at the hands of secular psychologists and counselors, operating well-removed

from the potential of religious intervention. And as C. S. Lewis (1970 293) notes, many of those in the field of psychology regard religion as a neurosis. Lewis goes on to imply that the practice of correctional reform and its emphasis on secular change is largely misguided. According to Lewis (1970 292-293):

The practical problem of Christian politics is not that of drawing up schemes for a Christian society, but that of living as innocently as we can with unbelieving fellow-subjects under unbelieving rulers who will never be perfectly wise and good and who will sometimes be very wicked and very foolish.

If Lewis is correct, then it might behoove us to develop correctional policies that recognize the fully legitimate role of religion and religious programming in state-funded correctional systems and programs. It should not be a question of using federal tax dollars to "support" religious enterprises. Instead, we should embrace the potential of what those of faith might bring into our prisons and community-based programs. Radical change, conversion, grace, and redemption are not tools of the state, but are real forces that work in the lives of people. Faith-based programs should be widely permitted and encouraged, largely unfettered by secular administrators and counselors, and permitted to provide the opportunity for offenders to experience the power of God to redeem. Not all will accept the grace and redemption God offers, but we should do all we can to ensure the opportunity for such offers to be made.

One last policy issue needs to be addressed, and it has to do with how the state should respond to offenders who have had conversion experiences while in prison. Should an inmate have a reduced sentence, gaining early release based on our faith in his or her redemption? Should William Payton or other inmates on death row have their death sentences commuted because they testify to encounters with grace? We would argue that decisions about state-imposed sentences should not be tied to inmates' participation in faith-based prison programs or to behavioral changes in participants as a part of their faith journeys, except as those same behaviors would also determine policy with regard to the treatment given non-believers.

In the final moments of "A Good Man is Hard to Find," the grandmother finds grace just before she is shot and dies. Grace and redemption do not preclude facing physical punishment and death. Decisions about sentencing and its reductions or commutations are not in the realm of faith. In Matthew 22:21, Christ says, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's; render unto God that which is God's." Sentencing is the province of the state, and conversion experiences should not be used to seek changes in sentences. Incarcerating or executing an offender should be tied to questions of innocence and guilt. Good conduct and early release are also matters of state policy determined by observable behavior—available to non-believers as well as believers. People of faith commit crimes, and criminals sometimes become people of faith. Faith-based prison programs should not become involved in managing Caesar's policies on crime and punishment. But Caesar also should not interfere with opportunities for offenders to find grace.

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