The Significance of Christianity in ‘Reforming’ Prisoners:

Focussing on the Religious Experiences, Beliefs, Practices, And Needs of Christian Prisoners and Ex-prisoners in Victoria (Australia)


A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne

August 2000
Declaration of Authorship

I, Arthur James Bolkas, declare that this thesis comprises only my original work, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used. This thesis does not exceed 30,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies, footnotes and appendices.

............................................................................................................................................Date:...........................................
(Signature)
Abstract

This study investigates whether Christianity has a reformative influence in the lives of prisoners who consider themselves ‘genuine’ Christians. Interviews were conducted with forty-five prisoners and fifteen ex-prisoners (who had been released from prison as Christians) - all high/medium-security inmates with long sentences.

The study had two basic aims: to examine aspects of their religious backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs, and whether Christianity benefited and/or hindered them; second, to investigate their religious needs (in prison and post-release), whether they were being met, and the likely effect to potential benefits of existing support structures. It was anticipated that existing support would be inadequate to meet the men’s needs, particularly those who had been released from prison.

In relation to these issues the findings are both positive and negative. With few exceptions, Christian prisoners/ex-prisoners believed that being a Christian made a qualitative difference to life in prison, offering essential hope, meaning and purpose in life, a positive outlook, and productive use of time. Christianity provided a different way of life, with new morals, values, and a renewed sense of self that helped overcome guilt and generally enhanced relationships. Belonging to a religious group provided practical and moral/spiritual support, which assisted prison adjustment and personal security. Moreover, Christian inmates had more self-control and tolerance/respect (than they ordinarily would) for authorities and others, resulting in fewer institutional rule violations.

Conversely Christian prisoners were often vilified and victimised by staff and inmates alike, whilst the negative environment and unresolved personal problems caused
hardships, faith related doubts/insecurities, temptations, and moral lapses. Their greatest unmet spiritual need was inadequate religious servicing - Bible-studies, church services, and Christian personnel often simply inaccessible. The findings reveal that released prisoners experience dual difficulties of community reintegration and church assimilation - going from one extreme subculture (the prison) to another (the church). Displaced and vulnerable, whilst retaining faith in God many struggled to live it out - occasionally re-offending. Thus whereas Christianity was shown to have a salutary effect on Christian prisoners/ex-prisoners generally, lack of adequate support had the potential to thwart its rehabilitative potential.

An unexpected feature of the present research concerns Christian paedophiles. Significant in number, extremely needy, and at high-risk, they represent a group of offenders who appear to have been neglected by both Christian support programmes and researchers. Additional implications of this study for corrections and church administrators are discussed, and recommendations offered.
I would like to thank Dr Russell Smith (my original supervisor) for your faith in my ability and encouragement to undertake this important project in the first place. I also acknowledge the contribution of my supervisor, Dr Austin Love Grove, for your valuable guidance and assistance, and thank all those students and staff in the Criminology Department who affirmed me in my work. A special thanks to Mr John Griffin (Chief Executive, CORE - the Public Correctional Enterprise) for approving this research project and support along the way, as well as to the prison Operation Managers, Programme Managers, and other correctional staff who assisted me. I am sincerely grateful for the various kinds of support provided by the following: The Chaplains’ Advisory Committee and numerous past and present prison chaplains; Mr Ron Nikkel (CEO, Prison Fellowship International), Mr Reg Worthy (former Director, Prison Fellowship Victoria), Mr Richard Whaley (Director, Prison Fellowship Victoria), and to the many prison volunteers; my dear friends Kevin Maddock and Morry Gannon; The Titus Brandsma Foundation (Whitefriars); The Australian Research Theology Foundation Inc.; Malcolm Feiner, Resource Centre, Correctional Services Division; my family, and extended ‘family’ at the Footscray Church of Christ; and Noel and Jenny Patchett. A heartfelt thank you to my wife Andrea and son Demitri for your patience and sacrificial love. Finally, but most important, I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the sixty prisoners and former prisoners who participated in this study. Thank you for your cooperation and honesty, at times under difficult circumstances, and for everything I gained through meeting you. Hang in there, and God bless you.

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1: INTRODUCTION

Prison is generally perceived as very negative, the receptacle of society’s worst and wayward members. Yet, for whatever other reasons society imprisons its felons, an expectation (if not implicit aim) has been to return them to civil life in a better state than they were before - to rehabilitate them. The rehabilitation of prisoners is, and has always been, a vital, though contentious aspect of the modern prison system. Indeed, the western model of the prison, the penitentiary, was first founded by religious (Christian) leaders who wanted to reform the lawbreaker through a strict regime that included religious edification. Ever since the apparent failure of these early reformatory measures there have been ongoing attempts to alter the criminal character by using similarly intrusive techniques, only now under the guise of rehabilitation. In this sense, for example, the treatment model of the 1950s and 1960s (which viewed criminality as a ‘disease’ of the mind that could be treated) was arguably a scientific/secular parallel of the reformatory model of the earlier penitentiary builders (aimed at eliminating a moral ‘disease’ of the soul). For this reason does Professor Anthony Bottoms assert: it is only since the last war that the essentially Christian notion of “‘reform’ became ‘rehabilitation’ - that is, religious and moral impulses in reformation became secularised, psychologised, scientized” (1980:1). However even the notion of rehabilitation appeared doomed when, in his landmark research, Martinson’s review of attempts at rehabilitation confirmed what many believed: “With few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism” or, “nothing works” (Martinson 1974:25).

‘Nothing works’ - a Re-evaluation

A history of apparent failure, however, does not appear to have daunted the rehabilitative ideal, which remains a central and enduring principle of imprisonment (Gendreau and Ross 1987; White 1989; Gartner et al. 1990).\footnote{Referring to the US situation, for example, Cullen et al. (1989) assert that empirical} Indeed a growing number of scholars and

\footnote{Referring to the US situation, for example, Cullen et al. (1989) assert that empirical}
practitioners (Farrington, Ohlin, and Wilson 1986; Gartner et al. 1990) assert that since the 1980s rehabilitation has made a modest comeback. The consensus now, however, appears to be that “the effectiveness of correctional treatment is dependent upon what is delivered to whom in particular settings,” so that while no rehabilitation programme works for all prisoners all of the time, “some service programs are working with at least some offenders under some circumstances” (Andrew et al. 1990:372). Arguably, prison (religious) ministry is a case in point. However, before examining the possible effectiveness of contemporary prison ministries, and in order to fully appreciate the significance of Christianity vis-a-vis prisoners, we shall first consider a brief historical sketch linking Christianity and the prison. The pervasiveness of prison ministries will then be considered, and the possible reasons that the scientific community has largely overlooked it.

The Relationship Between Christianity and Imprisonment

The relationship between Christianity and imprisonment is as old as the Bible itself, with ministries to prisoners commencing from the first century of the church.\(^2\) In the late evidence was not sufficient to confirm that a wholesale rejection of rehabilitation had taken place; indeed, they conclude, a much larger body of survey data supported the opposite assessment. Furthermore, in their study of the extent to which policy makers continue to endorse rehabilitation as an appropriate goal of corrections, Hamm and Schrink (1989:170) found that, “Collectively, the various findings ... suggest that the rehabilitative ideal remains a critical part of contemporary criminal justice ideology despite the many attempts to tarnish it.” Significantly, within a few years of his controversial report, even Martinson had clearly reversed his position (Martinson 1979).

Many of the people about whom we hear in the Old and New Testaments had an actual physical imprisonment experience, and are addressed to people faced with the reality or at least the real possibility of imprisonment (Spykerboer 1991). Moreover through the centuries, and to an extent even today, Christians have been incarcerated because their faith was unacceptable to the established order. The earliest-known organized prison ministry was the Roman Catholic religious Order of Misericordin, created in 1488 (Smarto 1987). In sixteenth-century England (and subsequently Europe), Christian penal reformers were instrumental in the establishment of Bridewells - workhouses for misdemeanants that offered frequent religious services. However their greatest influence followed the massive crisis in crime and prison overcrowding spawned by the American War and Industrial Revolution, in a society where “Evangelicalism was as much a public ethic as it was a personal credo” (Boyd 1988:203).
nineteenth-century English penal reformers felt that the reformation of the criminal was genuinely possible and that it should be a primary objective of punishment and prison management. Advocates of the separate system of prison discipline - such as Quakers, and Evangelicals whose sense of the universality of sin meant that not even the vilest man was lost to God’s mercy - were confident that prisoners subjected to continuous cellular isolation throughout a sentence and intensively instructed, trained, educated and evangelised in their cells “...would emerge from prison either spiritually reborn or at least morally greatly improved” (Forsythe 1990:145,149; see also Norris 1985:12-13, 25; and Taylor 1985:160).

However as the reformed prisons were found wanting, and through the rapid growth of approaches in psychology, sociology and ethnology, increasingly after 1860 any idea that social action of an evangelical kind would lead to substantial spiritual or moral changes within ‘inferior’ human beings was strongly rejected (Evans 1982:393-394; Forsythe 1987:173-182).

Enthusiasm for the reformatory ideal made a brief resurgence in

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3 See David Garland’s (1990:196-204) insightful thesis on the important role which cultural values and sensibilities played in giving shape and limits to the penal measures deployed by these religious and humanitarian reformers.

4 The separate system drew heavily upon evangelical theology with its passionate faith in the possibility of redemption through the atonement of suffering and the sacrifice of Christ. To evangelicals the problem of crime was explicitly one of spiritual deterioration through the influence of worldly and sin inducing environment from which Christ was excluded. The rival version was the less optimistic silent system, which retained classified groups of prisoners but banned all conversation between them. This system drew upon associationist psychology: that human attitude is learned through interaction with environment and experience of pain/pleasure through that interaction (Forsythe 1990:145-146). For a discussion on the earliest possible forerunners of redemptive imprisonment see Evans (1982) and Wines (1895) - based on the monastic tradition of solitary incarceration, and Griffin (1981:99-100) - The Rome House of Correction for Boys, which Evans (1982:60) claims influenced English prison reformer John Howard (1777) whose writings in turn influenced the birth of the Penitentiary. However Cromwell (1989:77-81) credits American Quakers with spearheading the development of the world’s first penitentiary.

5 Moreover revisionist historians and theorists have called into question the penal reformer’s motivation, effectively reducing “...penal philosophies, ethical ideals, and humanitarian sensibilities to the harder currencies of economic interest or the will to power” (Garland 1990:196; see also Wannan 1972; Norris 1985; Forsythe 1990). Others believe revisionists are inaccurate (Garland 1985; Radzinowicz and Hood 1986), DeLacy (1981) and
the late nineteenth-century (Forsythe 1990:148-149) and, in the form of its secular equivalent, rehabilitation, came to the fore again after World War II as the ‘treatment’ model, until its apparent demise in the mid-1970s following Martinson’s dictum.

**Religion in Prison - a Significant but Neglected Variable**

Referring to the reformatory zeal of those early religious prison founders in America, Todd Clear and his associates argue, “Even today, religious programming is easily the most common and pervasive form of correctional rehabilitation available to prisoners” (Clear et al. 1992b:1). Moreover, Smarto (1987:231) asserts that the decade preceding 1987 saw a

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Saunders (1983) arguing that what actually happened in many prisons was often different from the claims of enthusiasts in London about new forms of prison discipline, and questioned whether the separate system was in fact ever fully operated in most prisons. In other words, the argument ran, revisionists like Foucault (1979) and Ignatieff (1978; 1983) “mistook the rhetoric of the state for actual administrative practice” (Forsythe 1990:142); the actual practice within reformatory prisons being frequently out of kilter with the pure theory (Forsythe 1987). Thus chaplains were often too poorly resourced and few in number to evangelise and instruct prisoners as intensively as separate system theory required; trade training schemes and education were often haphazard or non-existent; most prisoners were serving short sentences which, according to both evangelical and associationist theory, did not permit reformation; and covert negotiation between prisoners and warders, coupled with the ingenuity of prisoners, served to defy the aims of these systems (Forsythe 1990:146). Nowhere were excesses and failures more evident than in the Model Prison, Pentonville (opened in 1842), which epitomised the misapplication of the ideal of penitentiary discipline that it was intended to represent. Perspectives on Pentonville are provided by Evans (1982), Ignatieff (1978), Mayhew and Binny (1968), and Griffiths (1884).

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6 An American Correctional Association (1998:8) survey revealed the vast number of religious resources available to inmates in the U.S. and Canada. In addition to chapels most jurisdictions made other areas of the prison available for religious study or activities, and relatively few did not use technology to provide supplemental religious exposure by such means as cable television, videos or satellite down links. Sixteen US states (of 49 that responded to the survey) had residential pre-release, faith-based programs available for inmates; 22 additional states were considering such programming. Only three jurisdictions did not have formal community ties to religious groups for inmates upon release. At a local level, Matthews’ (1994) review of Victoria’s prison system outlined the diverse types of religious provision. She noted that volunteers from religious organizations visit prisons for a variety of purposes which can be primarily welfare, religious, or activity based, or a combination of all three, but are characterised by an intention to fulfil a religious mission by work in prisons. Of all prison ministries, Matthews identified Prison Fellowship as having the greatest presence in terms of hours, numbers
massive increase in the number of religious volunteers joining prison ministries in the USA - jumping in rank from 15,000 in 1977 to 60,000 in 1987, whilst the number of prison ministries also increased substantially from 214 in 1977 to 580 in 1987. In the United States alone 45,000 people have volunteered and trained to work with Prison Fellowship (PF) in some form of a ministry within the criminal justice system. The world’s largest volunteer organization involved in prison work, former Watergate prisoner Charles Colson founded this international non-denominational ministry in 1976 (O’Connor 1995a:16). Given the extent and potential benefits of Christian prison ministries (as the forthcoming literature review suggests), Clear et al. (1992b:1) express surprise that religion in prison has received so little attention from the scientific community. Concurring, O’Connor argues that despite its historical and practical role in the penal system religion has been a neglected variable in criminal justice research, especially research on adult criminality. Indeed, it has been neglected across the social sciences. Neglect of the religious variable is all the more surprising given that in Martinson’s original review of 231 rehabilitation studies from 1945 to 1967, no mention was made of religion as a rehabilitative intervention. “Thus, there seems to be a significant gap in knowledge about the role and effect of religion in the prison and range of activities.


8 Previous systematic analysis of quantitative research in psychiatry, sociology, family practice and, to a lesser extent, psychology, reflects a common neglect of religious variables (Gartner et al. 1990 Sec:2:5-6). Why this neglect of the study of religion? O’Connor suggests that some social scientists may simply be biased against religion or put off it by tarnished images of organized religion that stem from unpleasant personal experiences, scandal, or a type of religious leadership and practice with which they cannot identify. On the other hand religion itself may be responsible for the neglect; religious leaders not seeming overly eager to support social scientists as they ask difficult questions about how religion helps or harms people. Another reason may be that social scientists, for the most part, are not trained in the study of religion (O’Connor 1995b:4-5).

9 Nor was religion mentioned in a review of 100 rehabilitation studies by Bailey (1966).
system” (Gartner et al. 1990 Sec.2:5). Which is particularly surprising, according to Stark (1984), in light of the evidence of a negative relationship between religion and criminality.\(^\text{10}\) Clearly Christian influence in the prisons has persisted, arguably flourished, in the latter part of this century given the worldwide growth of prison ministries. Indeed Garland (1990:203-204) reminds us, “Throughout the history of penal practice religion has been a major force in shaping the ways in which offenders are dealt with,” whilst even today “In a practical sense, religion is a central aspect of the modern prison system” (Clear et al. 1992b:1). But why this persistent influence? Overzealousness and misapplication notwithstanding, is it possible that some aspects of the early prison reformer’s theory/theology were essentially correct? that fundamentally Christianity offers the imprisoned something intrinsically worthwhile, and should thus be encouraged? Or is their basis to the cynical view that, like the institutions it helped spawn, Christianity exists as a mere anachronism? Certainly, the negligible body of literature on religious interventions is significant given that prison ministries have always played (and will foreseeably continue to play) an important part in the prison system and in the lives of many prisoners, and may represent a potentially inexpensive and readily available rehabilitative force for some offenders.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Inspiration

This study was inspired both by the present writer’s personal experience of imprisonment (between 1977-1983), particularly his prison (Christian) conversion, and similar religious experiences reported by fellow inmates and/or observed by the writer. A feature common to all (and anticipated among people in this study) was both the distinctive nature of the

\(^{10}\) For example there is a negative correlation between people who attend church most frequently and involvement in crime (Ellis 1995:26). While Stark (1995:7) agrees that religious individuals will be less likely than those who are not religious to commit deviant acts, he argues that it is only in communities where the majority of people are actively religious. Stark’s thesis is elaborated elsewhere. More generally, a negative relationship has been found between religion and various forms of social deviance (Gartner et al. 1990 Sec.2:5).
experience and one’s religious zeal. Faith for these prisoners had ‘intrinsic’ rather than utilitarian value, was often costly, and, despite obstacles and setbacks usually endured, even beyond release.

Becoming a Christian was a defining event in the writer’s life, which had far-reaching implications in and beyond prison. Although community reintegration was difficult, the writer persevered in faith, to which his rehabilitation is largely attributed. Mindful of this, of the fact that convicts continue to embrace religious faith and that prison seems unable to reform offending behaviour, the writer intends to investigate what difference Christianity makes to prisoners’ lives - thereby contributing to a neglected area of research.

**Aims**

Against the above backdrop, then, the aims of this study are twofold: first, to examine aspects of the religious backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs of Victorian prisoners and ex-prisoners, and the extent to which Christianity has benefited/hindered them; second, to investigate their perceived religious needs (in prison and post-release), whether they are being met, and the likely effect to potential benefits of existing support structures. The writer contends that support networks are vital in the long term, and, at least in relation to the participants of this study, the nature and quality of available support is generally inadequate to meet their needs - sometimes to the point of being counterproductive. For inmates who are especially vulnerable on release - having served long sentences and/or lacking church experience - neglect in this crucial area may be inadvertently setting them up for failure.

**Exclusively Christian Focus**

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11 Aside from some theoretical writings (Smarto 1987), the religious experience of prisoners featured in most studies is generalised - ‘conversion’ being a generic term. Only Silverman and Oglesby (1983) specifically examine the ‘new birth’ phenomenon, which approximates the present writer’s conversion experience.
In the literature ‘religion’ is an all-encompassing term, one that either embraces the Christian and Muslim religions (particularly in American research), or refers only to Christianity. The present study focus is exclusively Christian - the most common faith in an Australian prison context. Whilst denominational divisions exist even within Christianity, this writer agrees with Clear et al. (1992a:28) that whereas these distinctions may be fiercely important in the free world “in the prison they often blend together.”

**Reformation and Rehabilitation**

A distinction also needs to be made about the reference to *reformation* in the thesis title - particularly vis-a-vis the idea of *rehabilitation*. Relative to modifying criminal tendencies and affecting pro-social behaviour, both terms are considered synonymous and thus apply interchangeably. In this sense Christianity (but also education or counselling) is re-forming/habilitating, and includes any service which may assist prisoners - like attending Bible study or having a chaplain to talk to, for example, vis-a-vis the Christian religion. However these words also have an altogether different application, one reflecting the kinds of “religious and moral impulses” alluded to by Bottoms (1980:1). Reference to the writer’s own ‘rehabilitation,’ for example, implied not just self-amendment and community integration but a fundamental moral/spiritual reformation or, more accurately, transformation of character commenced at the point of conversion. Indeed out of spiritual conversion does a new, ‘reformed’ way of thinking and living develop which foremost honours God, then man. The context in which this occurs is largely irrelevant. Even in prison, without prospect of release, a criminal can be rehabilitated. It should be stressed, however, that conversion *begins* a process of change that must be ‘worked through’ (Silverman and Oglesby 1983:181). Moreover, the writer believes that as individuals are at different stages of an ongoing process (new converts presumably less integrated in their faith than longstanding ones), they will invariably live out their faith differently - none perfectly. Occasional moral lapses should thus be viewed as normative to this process and not as a sign of failure. In a paradoxical sense, therefore, re-*formation/habilitation* could be occurring in an offender’s life in spite of what might appear ‘evidence’ to the contrary.
Which is why this writer believes individual re-form/habilitation cannot be determined by such rigid measures as institutional rule violations and recidivism figures alone, as some studies suggest.

One aspect of re-form/habilitate, then, implies a (potential) change in behaviour - which can occur in a variety of different ways; the second, a (potential) change of character - born out of personal religious faith. The present study is primarily interested in the latter aspect of re-form/habilitate: the experiences/beliefs/practices of those who profess to be sincere Christians, irrespective of how well or badly they (or others) may think they are living out their faith. Which is why the faith of participants in this study did not have to fit some predetermined model in order for them to qualify. ‘Christian,’ therefore, was used in a general rather than prescriptive sense, such that the informants could bring their own understanding and interpretation to it. In this way anyone who professed to be a ‘fair dinkum’ (genuine) Christian was accepted at face value.\(^{12}\)

In chapter 2 the literature reviewed will examine (a) what it means to be religious/Christian, and (b) the effects of religion on prisoners’ lives - focussing on whether or not it helps current/ex-prisoners to cope better and not re-offend, and the content/effectiveness of religious programmes. A series of research questions/problems formulated from both the literature review and the writer’s personal experience/insights will form the basis of the present study. In chapter 3, the methodology is presented (comprised primarily of semi-structured interviews and some participant observation); chapter 4 deals with analysis (presentation-interpretation) of the data; and in chapter 5, the conclusion (implications and recommendations for further research/practice) is presented.

\(^{12}\) A necessary limitation of this approach is the subjective nature of self-reports - this being a study of what people report about their experiences, not a study of their actual experiences. Ultimately, therefore, one can only speculate as to the nature and integrity of the informants’ beliefs and their possible motivations for engaging Christian faith/activities in prison.
2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Our review of the prison-religion literature begins by considering what it means to be religious/Christian; that is, whether or not it is possible to determine if a prisoner’s faith is devout. This contentious issue is especially pertinent in a prison context where inmates who ‘get religion’ are (usually for ulterior purposes) often suspected of faking it, even of being deranged. Indeed if devoutness can be objectively determined, it is mere speculation that the present informants are Christians at all - effectively discrediting the findings.

Determining Religiousness - an Impossible Task?
Johnson (1987) raised the question of measuring religious devoutness. While Johnson’s findings suggest that religion does not inhibit rule-violating behaviour among prisoners, he concedes that the measures of religiosity used in his study may have serious validity problems. Johnson goes on to say, however, that it is not possible to draw from this the conclusion that religiosity is unrelated to the occurrence of deviant activity within the prison setting: “An equally plausible interpretation of the findings,” he suggests, “is that the actual religiosity of prison inmates may not have been measured in this study” (Johnson 1987:24-25).

On this point Allport (1950; 1954) argues that the degree of religious commitment for individuals can differ greatly and yet seem identical on such traditional measures of religiosity as frequency of church attendance. Allport distinguishes between the intrinsically religious person (who is more devout, honest, and caring) and the extrinsically religious person (whose religion is self-serving, immature, and narrow in scope). In sum: “…the extrinsically motivated person uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion” (Allport 1966:455). It might well be, surmises Johnson (1987:25) “...that

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13 Allport and Ross (1967) give an extended definition of these concepts at page 434.
many inmates do ‘get religion’ in prison, but that it is more likened to extrinsic rather than intrinsic religiosity.”

Although Allport’s work has been criticized for fuzziness in the distinctions it draws (Hunt and King 1971), Clear et al. (1992a:30) found the notion of Intrinsic-Extrinsic orientations extremely useful in characterizing the religious “meanings” encountered in their prison study. However, their best attempts to actually measure religiousness were ultimately flawed, the authors largely attributing this to religiousness being a “complex multidimensional construct about which there is little consensus” (1992a:10-11). In other words: “Not only was there a low level of agreement between the instrument and the independent raters (chaplain, classification officer, ethnographer), but the independent raters did not agree much among themselves as to which inmates were ‘religious’” (1992a:23), which reflects Johnson’s earlier warning. As a result, the authors conclude, their attempts to identify the devout prisoner - to distinguish between what inmates refer to as “sincere” (respected) and “insincere” (scorned) religious inmates - are disappointing because to the extent that inmates’ self-reports are limited measures their measure of religiosity is correspondingly flawed (Clear et al. 1992a:18).

In light of Christianity’s diverse sects and denominations, identifying a Christian is not so simple, discerning the devoutly religious a seemingly impossible task. Whilst evangelical writers like Smarto (1987) and Colson (1980b) prescribe ways of determining the genuineness of a Christian conversion, recent research suggests that individual religiousness cannot be objectively measured (Clear et al.1992a). For this reason, and because religious experience not integrity is our main concern, this issue is largely immaterial to the present study. It is the men’s worldview, their subjective thoughts and feelings about faith and whether they believe themselves to be sincere that is valued here, not an objective scientific measure. Moreover, for the above reasons is participation in this study open to anyone who considers himself a genuine Christian, and are self-reports primarily relied upon. Also for these reasons is the distinction prisoners make between
sincere-insincere religious inmates a valid one (Clear et al. 1992a:50-53), in this writer’s opinion. Therefore, besides investigating how/where/why Victorian prisoners became Christians, this study will ask how they can discern whether a professing Christian is sincere or not, and why anyone who is not a Christian would make out to be one. The religious practices of Christian inmates will also be considered.

**Religious Conversion - the *Born Again* Experience**

Within Christendom intrinsic-extrinsic religious orientations appear to have widespread currency. In evangelical terms, for instance, the intrinsically religious person is more likely to have undergone a genuine spiritual conversion or been ‘born again.’ According to Silverman and Oglesby (1983) (authors of a unique study on the ‘new birth’ phenomenon amongst prisoners), the experience of coming into touch with “Reality Beyond Realities” is commonly preceded by a process of intense inner conflict leading to a breakdown of resistance to God. This is partly attributed to the view that most penal institutions are “dehumanising, authoritarian, oppressive, bleak, dangerous places.” However for the inmate, beyond the institutional problems, there are many psychological issues that cannot be ignored. These include: loss of personal identity; alienation from one’s previous society/family; sense of failure; sense of one’s finitude; overwhelming personal guilt; and loss of personal mythology as all of the prisoner’s life becomes an open book via the news.

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14 Smarto (1987) theorises that having dealt with the root-cause of his criminality, sin, through reconciliation with God, such a prisoner is most likely to both succeed whilst in prison and thereafter upon release. One of the differences between a prisoner who realizes he is forgiven of his sins and is growing spiritually and one who is not, suggests Smarto, is that a born-again prisoner stops blaming others and starts taking responsibility for his own actions. God’s forgiveness brings inner cleansing of guilt, freeing prisoners to accept responsibility for their past actions. Other significant attitudes begin to develop in born-again criminals, including a growing concern for others, a desire for peace rather than argumentation, and the forgiveness of enemies. By “all reliable accounts,” concludes Smarto, prisoners who experience spiritual rebirth do not become part of the mass recidivism statistic, and (contrary to Johnson’s (1987) findings) within prisons the number of violent incidents caused by Christian inmates is small (Smarto 1987:188-192). However, Smarto’s assertions do not appear to be based on scientific research.
media and he is exposed as the ‘sinner’ that he is. According to the authors, the experience of prison can affect a man in different ways (1983:180).

There are those who choose the oblivion of drugs or insanity, others who continue their maladaptive behavior at an increased level in prison, and others who choose to make positive change. Among the positive choices the movement towards a religious regeneration is common (Silverman and Oglesby 1983:181).

Regarding the ‘born again’ phenomenon, the authors suggest that “most descriptions” in the literature demonstrate a pattern of desperation, the introduction of the Good News of the Gospel, and a dawning awareness that God is indeed waiting for the “sinner” to come to him in repentance. It is precisely when the individual has nothing left, and is stripped bare of his own powers, that he may apprehend God (Silverman and Oglesby 1983:180-181). It was anticipated that there would be accounts of similar conversions in the present study. Apart from his interest in these and other conversion processes, the writer was interested to know whether anyone had been a Christian before incarceration, and, if so, how they reconciled faith-offending; and how imprisonment affected a pre-existing Christian’s faith.

New Lifestyle and Values

In regard to the element of personal choice affecting positive change in a criminal’s life, see Phillipy (1983:21); Colson (1980a:31-32); and Walters and White (1988:24-25).

It may be considered a weakness that these ‘descriptions’ in the literature are generally personal accounts of being born again. Although Johnson and Larson (1995:30) agree that “the evidence demonstrating the benefit of religion in terms of rehabilitation is largely anecdotal,” they nonetheless believe it is important. However while their interviews with various prison personnel over many years had provided them with numerous accounts of inmates’ lives being dramatically changed, they concede that such “accounts of the rehabilitative effects of religion are largely related to ‘testimonials’ found in inspirational books at religious book stores, which is little trusted by either researchers or policy makers.” These books include: Run Baby Run (Cruz 1971), Born Again (Colson 1977), Holes in Time (Constantino 1979), Breakout (Lemon 1981), Freed For Life (Nightingale 1982), Too Mean to Die (Pirovolos 1982), Inside (Greenaway 1985), Killing Time (Fellowes 1986), Changing Criminals (McCormack 1997).
Whilst acknowledging that ‘jailhouse religion’ suggests prison conversions are merely temporary and convenient poses designed to help an inmate with parole, Colson advocates a ‘reliable test’ for determining the sincerity of a Christian conversion - one that essentially reflects Smarto’s previously stated paradigm (Colson 1980b:169-170). “Through the power of the Holy Spirit,” concludes Colson, the “true disciple ... is renewed in mind as well as in heart” - a genuine conversion to Christ demanding “a new lifestyle and new values.”

In her dissertation *Values and Value Change in Christian Conversion*, Kathleen Bruce (1992:6-7) argues that ‘conversion’ is a term which, though used frequently, still masks a vague understanding of the concept, one difficulty being that we have not been able to ‘draw lines’ around a conversion experience. Who, she asks, can tell when the process of conversion starts, or when it is accomplished? Some conversions seem to take place but then they do not “stick.” And what does that mean? Are their changes that must take place in a convert’s life, or is a profession of faith sufficient? On one point, at least, Bruce and the preceding authors agree: *Values* are an integral aspect of conversion. According to Bruce, some of the dissonance that appears to occur in the lives of Christians (including prisoners) may arise as a result of an incongruence of values in the believer’s life.17

In psychoanalytic terms, suggest Silverman and Oglesby (1983:182), “the individual

17 “Often we see Christians, imperfect by definition, who live with a great amount of tension in their lives because they hold, or they think they hold, an idea of Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives, as Prime Value. Perhaps they are subconsciously trying to hold two or more prime values, but they claim to follow Jesus Christ. At any rate, they have for one reason or another not allowed that Prime Value to trickle down into their focal and specific values, and the result is a life of incongruence, inconsistency, guilt and ineffectiveness .... The individual must choose one prime value or the other to avoid such incongruence ... Actual conversion takes place as one begins to believe a new world view, gives primary allegiance to Jesus Christ as Primary Value in his life, and begins to allow subsequent value change to work its way through his life into behaviour aimed at pleasing God. There is always a period of overlap with the old worldview, values, and behaviour as one learns to understand, evaluate, and apply the truth and the standards of God to himself. This is the prolonged process of conversion, but the evidence of real conversion is a life of growing congruence between one’s worldview, values, and behaviour, all centred around Christ as Lord (Bruce 1992:45-46, 70-73).
withdraws his primary emotional investment ... in other objects such as inanimates (i.e. drugs, alcohol, money), intangibles (i.e. power, manipulation, social position), narcissistic (i.e. pride, physical strength), and erotic (i.e., sexual, romantic), and invests this in a transference with the Godhead.” Evidently there are those for whom the process of letting go of self, of basic trust in God, does not appear possible: “Here there is an affective component, an emotional high with a feeling of well-being ... but this does not endure and the individual gradually regresses to his/her previous level of functioning and feeling.” However the authors are quick to point out that this may be difficult to identify exactly since in the long run any process is fraught with regressions and progressions. As in any therapy, they conclude, the individual and his needs determine the length of time for the process to occur. Colson also acknowledges the inherent struggle that often accompanies conversion.

I do not wish to leave you with the impression that this process is either simple or unfailing or instantaneous. A person begins a new life with his conversion to Christ. But it is only the beginning. Like a baby taking his first steps, the new believer falters, stumbles and gets up again. It is not easy; indeed, it is hard (Colson 1980b:169).

The ‘Working Through Process’
Dissonance and tension in a convert’s life may result from neglecting what Silverman and Oglesby refer to as the process of working through. These authors contend that as with any therapeutic change in a person, there is an “affective experience” followed by “a process of ‘working through,’ ” which “is essential if the religious experience is to be enduring.”

Prayer, communion, confessions, study, and Christian fellowship mark this process as reinforcers of the experience.18 Out of this can come recognition

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18 Highlighting the effectiveness of spiritual discipleship/nurture, Gareis’ (1981) study shows that intensive pastoral care and attention make it possible to instil religious values in incarcerated youth and to modify negative attitudes.
of responsibility in a covenant relationship with discipline and obedience. If the convert can accept these as outcomes and not some magical disappearance of tribulation, and can accept that prayer does not give immediate, or for that matter, even the wished-for answer, then the experience has the makings of an enduring one. Deliverance is not to be construed in a physical sense, but only in a spiritual way (Silverman and Oglesby 1983:181).

Mindful of this crucial process, Colson says:

Sometimes in our Christian literature and preaching we make conversion seem like instant sanctification, as if simply at the name ‘Jesus’ and at the snapping of one’s fingers a person is converted from a hardened criminal into a saint. It just doesn’t work like that. The truth is that conversion may occur in an instant, but the process of coming from sinfulness into a new life can be a long and arduous journey (Colson 1980a:40 - emphasis present writers).

In one respect, then, conversion is a means to an end (the beginning of a new way of life) rather than an end in itself. But the longer and deeper one has been immersed in ‘sinfulness,’ as many prisoners have, arguably the more difficult it is to extricate oneself. For such people the working through process (which includes a Christian support network, among other things) is essential both during imprisonment and especially post-release. As the literature will show in this regard, while attempts have been made to meet the needs of prisoners, significantly, a study has not been found which identifies needs/problems from the actual prisoners’ perspective - which the present study aims to address. This study will further examine: whether informants think their needs are being met, and, in relation to this, the perceived role and effectiveness of prison chaplains/volunteers; the nature/extent of involvement with religious personnel and their importance; and generally what more should be done to support Christian prisoners/ex-prisoners.

**THE EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON PRISONERS**

As previously stated, prison-religion research is conspicuously limited. Overall, however, the available findings reflect favourably on prisoners who engage in religious activities and/or consider themselves religious. The contemporary literature shall be examined
following a brief historical perspective.

**Historical Perspectives on the Reformation of Character**

Forsythe (1987:119-123) tells us that in an attempt to gain some understanding of the impact on prisoners of reformatory prisons during the 1850s, the Directors of Convict Prisons examined large numbers of letters sent by prisoners after release. In these, discussion of spiritual progress was common. The writers also wanted to express their thanks to the staff (mainly chaplains) for what had been done on their behalf whilst in prison. There was frequent reference to newly learned moral lessons, to attendance at worship and to the comfort derived from religion and a new status as a law-abiding man. On the other hand Mayhew and Binny (1968:111) document many cynical views about ‘jailhouse’ conversions in Pentonville prison.\(^\text{19}\)

The other convicts generally believe these displays of religion ... to be mere shams. We have been assured, too, by the warders, that the prisoners know the very footsteps of the chaplain, and that many of them fall down on their knees as they hear him coming, so that he may find them engaged in prayer on visiting their cell; whereas, immediately he has left, they put their tongue in their cheek, and laugh at his gullibility.

Some believed that these ‘displays’ were a way of obtaining a ticket-of-leave from the chaplain long before one’s sentence had expired - perhaps the modern equivalent of gaining (early) parole. However, even chaplains were wary.

We do not intend to deny that supernatural conversions of men from wickedness to righteousness occasionally take place; but, say we, these are the exceptions rather than the rule of life ... and so long as we seek by our present mode of prison discipline to make saints of thieves, just so long shall we continue to produce a thousand canting hypocrites to one real convert (The Rev. Kingsmill, in Mayhew and Binny 1968:111).

\(^\text{19}\) Their book was first published in 1862.
The authors themselves were “inclined to believe that there is a greater desire for religious consolation among prisoners than is usually supposed,” however the problem is that “criminals are essentially creatures of impulse, and though liable to be deeply affected for the moment, are seldom subject to steady and permanent impressions.” Or these ‘reformations’ might in fact have been a form of “derangement” caused by long confinement. The authors conclude, “Amid all this fickleness of purpose and its consequent semblance of hypocrisy, and amid, too, a large amount of positive religious trickery and deceit, there are undoubted cases of lasting changes having been produced by the discipline of separate confinement” (Mayhew and Binny 1968:169-172).

**Contemporary Findings**

Despite their seemingly hopeless predicament, Peck (1988) found a positive correlation between religious inspired hope and coping among habitual offenders faced with a prison sentence of life without parole. Under the stress of incarceration the prisoner must find some means of adapting to a tremendous increase in the subjective experience of helplessness. As maximum-security inmates especially experience many unresolved fears, according to Croake, Myers, and Singh (1986), it is reasonable to expect them to explore every option available, including religion, to gain gratification, to establish meaning and purpose within the prison subculture, and to cope with fears attendant to their loss of freedom. In this way, for those who embrace it, religion may serve a reformative function (Goldfarb and Singer 1972; Halleck 1971). Peck concludes that religious salience may facilitate a maturing out process and have a positive effect on inmates’ psychological well-being; indeed, “hope grounded in a religious orientation may be the means to survival” (1988:216-217; see also Petersen and Roy 1985).

The most comprehensive research on religion in prison is that by professor Clear

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20 Griffiths (1884:150,158) is another primary reference that questions the moral/religious reformation of prisoners.
and his associates in 1992. The authors reported that “religious participation can help an inmate overcome the depression, guilt, and self-contempt that so often accompanies the prison sentence,” and help to ameliorate the harsh environment of the prison which includes a lack of safety, material comforts, and heterosexual contact. Further, the study found that inmates who participate in prison religious services or consider themselves religious adjust better to prison life; moreover, they have fewer disciplinary problems and infractions. Religion also offers inmates a new way of life in which the failures of the past can be totally replaced with a “new, fully developed way of living,” and religion can give prisoners a sense of inner peace to help them deal with the trauma of prison life, especially the loss of freedom (Clear et al. 1992b:4-7). Similar benefits are described in Silverman and Oglesby’s study on the ‘new birth’ phenomenon.

21 The study, entitled *Prisoners, Prisons and Religion*, involved interviews with prison religious staff and over 700 inmates in 20 prisons across the USA, and was supplemented with ethnographic observations. Focussing on Christianity and Islam as the dominant prison religions, this multi phase study explored the meaning of religion in prison as well as its effect on prisoner adjustment.

22 The religion-adjustment correlation is borne out by Panton’s (1979) study. Panton reported that prisoners classified as management problem inmates according to institutional records of maladjustment frequently present histories of non-identification and non-participation in religious services or activities before incarceration, whereas inmates with histories of religious identification and participation before incarceration frequently make an adequate adjustment to prison confinement.

23 In the longer term, however, inmate conformity within prison may not be an unqualified good. Resistance through a number of forms, including rule violations, may have a positive psychological function for inmates both in prison and after release (Bottoms and Light 1987:39). According to Sapsford (1978:128) some inmates who conform and adjust to prison life risk institutionalisation: “characterised by apathy and reduced motivation coupled with extreme dependency on routine and the support of the institution - which may render the man unfit to cope with the outside world upon release.” John Irwin (1974) also questions whether “passive” reform of the inmate is encouraged by personnel (like chaplains) who might be facilitators of inmate religious conversion, and whether this in fact hinders re-integration into society by discouraging autonomy, etcetera.

24 These findings are supported by Clear et al. (2000), whose study calls attention to the significant role of religion in preventing devaluation and fostering survival amongst prisoners.
The convert experiences a feeling of well being, a curious sense of peace, and a completeness never really felt before. There may be added for some others much more outward behaviour, but it is generally an inward experience. Along with these is experienced a forgiveness of sins, a sense of belonging and identity as a ‘child of God,’ victory over death, and the feeling of finding the answer to a lifelong quest (1983:181).

An Opposite Perspective

Clearly at variance with these positive findings is the study by Peretti and McIntyre. Interviews with 86 male offenders - who had been incarcerated at least 12 months and who indicated a specific religious preference upon entering the institution - revealed that incarceration had a negative influence on the functions of religion. Subjects stated that before incarceration their beliefs in sacredness and in God were stronger than after incarceration. Now their attitudes toward prayer were more negative and they had less faith in an Almighty Being as a compassionate and loving figure; indeed, the men tended to feel as if God had abandoned them. They were also found to accept violations of social norms. In particular, many maintained that they were unwilling to comply with various law-abiding values, attitudes and beliefs, and expressed less willingness to interact with others in society in a spirit of cooperation, honesty and trust. The greatest disparity between the before and after incarceration responses were found with support and consolation: the subjects no longer having a belief based on the faith that life has a purpose; that someone or something was in control of the universe. Indeed some reported becoming atheists or agnostics while incarcerated (Peretti and McIntyre 1984:179-180).25

25 However methodological and other shortcomings may have skewed the results of this study. For instance, the data is based solely on self-reports that are generally held not to be the most reliable method (Johnson 1987). Also, the mean time of one-half hour per subject per interview was arguably inadequate to explore the complex issues and their implications. (By comparison, Phillip (1983), Scarnati et al. (1991), and Clear et al. (1992a) were intensively and extensively immersed in the field of research; in the first two instances the researchers actually employed there - although this could have raised issues of possible bias.) Indeed given the nature of the subject matter, this study (a quantitative survey) might have been supplemented with a qualitative examination of the issues. That is, a study to “determine the effects of incarceration on religious functions” (Peretti and McIntyre 1984:178) would arguably be strengthened if not
To some extent, Johnson’s (1987) study supports sceptics who believe ulterior motive prompts many a prison convert’s change of heart. His research examined the relationship between religion and deviance from the perspective of religious commitment as an inhibitor of institutional deviance. Johnson set out to test a belief held by many religious people, especially fundamentalists, that people who have repeatedly committed deviant or criminal acts can genuinely change their evil ways only by adopting religious values and precepts. His findings suggest that while religion may inhibit deviance for the general population, it does not inhibit rule-violating behaviour among prisoners.

Those inmates who claim to be the most religious, those inmates the chaplains perceive to exhibit the greatest degree of religiosity, and those inmates who attend religious services and activities more frequently than other inmates are just as likely to spend time in disciplinary confinement for committing deviant acts within the prison (Johnson 1987:24).

However it should be reiterated that Johnson (1987:24-25) admits the three measures of religiosity used in his study may have serious validity problems. The possibility that inmates were motivated by ulterior motives meant that the first two measures of religiosity - self-reported religiosity and attendance at religious services and activities - had to be viewed with scepticism, while the difference between chaplains’ perceptions of inmates’ religiosity and that of prison employees (the third measure) represented a serious discrepancy.26

Only religious beliefs per se were determined, but also the extent to which such beliefs were actually applied. Notable differences will exist, for example, in the beliefs of nominally and devoutly religious persons; just as religious beliefs will vary according to whether (and the extent to which) subjects may have actually practised their beliefs both before and after entering prison. In this way attitudinal and behavioural factors and not just denominational or religious preference are examined - the approach adopted in the present study. Lastly, nothing was said about the quality and extent of religious support services, which may have affected the outcomes.

26 A further consideration is that the prison in question was a minimum security facility for first-time commitments, the dynamics therein being arguably different to a maximum-security prison of hardened recidivists. Indeed, Jolley asserts that “the sample itself could be a major factor” in the findings of this type of research, arguing that inmate samples are different from the
As some of the above research appears to conflict about whether or not religion assists prison adjustment, inhibits rule violations, and provides hope and meaning in life, etcetera, the present study will investigate these and related issues to determine if being a Christian in prison generally helps or hinders (creates problems for) inmates. More specifically, informants’ views will be sought in regard to ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘guilt.’ Apart from Clear et al. who said, “With the exception of loss of freedom, the most powerful message of imprisonment is guilt” (1992a:35; see also Clear et al. 2000:58-60), this issue was raised but not satisfactorily addressed in several studies (Silverman and Oglesby 1983; Smarto 1987; Scarnati et al. 1991).

THE EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON FORMER PRISONERS

Post Release - the Real Test of Faith?

As with anything that holds out rehabilitative promise in prison, a general expectation is that the ultimate ‘test’ of religious faith will occur when an inmate is returned to the community. If prison-religion research has been neglected, post-release outcomes of religious inmates fare even worse - much of the existing literature appearing to suffer methodological shortcomings. For instance in 1990 Prison Fellowship Victoria made the following claim:

Based on the general recidivism rate of about 75%, some 45 of the 60 former prisoners with whom Prison Fellowship has continued to work after general population in a number of ways which sets them apart as unique (see p.86 for some of these factors.) Moreover, in relation to instruments used to measure religious variables in a prison context, Jolley asks whether some of the traditional questions frequently used in such instruments have been standardized to such an extent on non-prison populations that they somehow misrepresent the inmate views either in the way they are asked or by excluding relevant information. Jolley posits that it is reasons such as these “which might explain the gap between intended behavior and actual behavior as it is measured in research.” In any event, he suggests, because prison life is complex and dynamic, whereas respondents may “really” intend to believe or act some way in the future their behaviour and attitudes may well change due to unanticipated circumstances (Jolley 1975:85-86).
their release during the last eight years should have re-offended. In fact, only six have subsequently returned to prison (Worthy 1990:35).

Faith-based rehabilitation programmes like APAC, Prison Fellowship Discipleship Seminars and, more recently, Detroit TOP (Transition Of Prisoners), all duly elaborated, have made even more impressive claims. On the other hand, recruiting prisons that had strong PF Ministry programmes, Clear et al. (1992a: 22-23) also proposed a follow-up study to assess the relationship between in-prison religious activity and post-release adjustment. Professor Clear informed this writer that a preliminary telephone interview with ex-prisoners (approximately half) indicated poor church attendance, among other things, and raised negative speculation regarding their likely outcomes. Difficulties experienced by religious prisoners post-release was also reflected in the aforementioned letters of 1850s ex-(reformatory) prison inmates. According to Forsythe (1987), although many referred to spiritual progress made in society, others seemed to be losing the struggle whilst alone and unaided in the world. Moreover, many of the abovementioned PF programme participants also ‘failed’ post-release. Before analysing these issues more

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27 However an assessment based on such limited information lacks reliability. Matters which should have been addressed include: the amount of time ex-prisoners had remained out of prison, and the possibility that, though undetected, offending may have continued; given the nature of their offences and criminal histories, the type of risk they represented; and, whether factors apart from PF contributed to the (allegedly) reduced recidivism rates.

28 APAC is an acronym for the Portuguese ‘Amando ao Preso, Amendo ao Cristo’ (Loving the Prisoner, Loving Christ).

29 However, Sumter’s (1999) ‘before-after’ prison study – an extension of the study by Clear et al. (1992) – assessed the effect of inmate religiosity on post-release community adjustment as measured by official FBI criminal history reports, with favourable results. Whereas very little difference was found between “religious” and “non-religious” inmates in overall reduction of recidivism, inmates who reported high levels of participation in religious programs and reported high levels of belief in the supernatural were less likely to be arrested after release regardless of whether they were classified as being “religious” or “non-religious.” “These findings provide evidence that religious programs are important in the prison setting and should be considered as a potential tool of rehabilitation” (Sumter 1999:X). The importance for a prisoner to maintain a ‘high’ level of participation in religious programs is supported in the upcoming section ‘The Significance of Religious Programming.’
closely, however, we shall consider the possible problems religious prisoners face following their release.

**Problems of Release and Reintegration**

In discussing community reintegration of prisoners (Christian or otherwise) it is important to remember the impact upon them of release, for it is at the point of regaining freedom that ominous challenges are faced. In his day Wines (1895:305) believed that post-release support was crucial because, “The most terrible moment in a convict’s life is not that in which the prison door closes upon him, shutting him out from the world, but that in which it opens to admit of his return to the world...” For it is from a predominantly deviant culture that the ‘ex’ will have emerged; at worst, one in which processes of criminalisation and prisonization have been assimilated to the degree that a prison sentence results not in a new and improved law-abiding citizen, but one who has crystallised his thinking about his deviant lifestyle and becomes a “better criminal” (Bartol 1995; see also Hawkins 1976). Even if institutional treatment is successful, its effects will quite possibly dissipate once the offender returns to society. Programmes may alleviate some ‘pains of imprisonment’ (Sykes 1958) and foster better prison adjustment, yet life in the free community is an entirely different matter. A good prisoner, therefore, may not necessarily make for a good citizen (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals 1973). While many prisoners return to society sincerely believing that they will not offend again, their good intentions are soon overwhelmed by that same set of personal and social problems that contributed to their offence in the first place. The cumulative effect of environment, background, family pressures, group loyalties, unemployment, alcoholism, addiction, and a host of other factors will all frequently bring to nought the best efforts of both staff and prisoner (Wood 1991:23).

**Particular Needs of the Christian Ex-prisoner**

If the transition from captivity to freedom is a daunting one for prisoners generally, arguably it can be more so for the Christian who is released. To a person who is struggling
on ‘the outside,’ Christian support may mean the difference between going on and giving up.

Smarto (1987:297-298) contends that the church can be a spiritual home for a new and growing Christian ex-convict who “needs spiritual oversight, a place of worship, a loving community, encouragement, and prayer just as all believers do.” (It is unfortunate, he adds, that “many churches are eager to minister by mail and visitation but feel reluctant to encourage ex-prisoners to join their church”). However in addition to spiritual care, support of a practical kind must extend to the problem areas outlined above by Wood (1991:23). In Smarto’s words, a “holistic approach” is required, one that tends the mental, physical, and spiritual needs of the prisoner, as “attention of any one factor to the neglect of the others reduces the effectiveness of reform.” Prison visitation, correspondence, evangelistic efforts, Bible studies - all can therefore end in failure if a released prisoner (and his family) does not receive this vital element of after care from the church (Smarto1987:126, 297; also Stark 1995:9; O’Connor et al. 1997:15).

Relating personally to the problems outlined, the present writer will investigate, inter alia: the kinds of difficulties prisoners experience with community/church assimilation; if they find living as a Christian harder in or outside of prison; whether any have compromised/abandoned their faith or re-offended; and if they are/were involved with other Christians and/or church, or chaplains/volunteers whom they knew in prison.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING

With regard to establishing and developing prisoners’ faith, then, the literature clearly reflects the importance of religious programming. As we shall see, these programmes are generally ‘holistic’ in nature and seek to actively engage the Christian (and wider) community in the rehabilitation process. Especially in relation to prison converts, it should be reiterated that for the religious experience to endure it must be followed by a process of ‘working through’ (Silverman and Oglesby 1983:181). Prison Fellowship Discipleship Seminars probably originated in response to the needs of prison converts undergoing this
difficult process, hoping to help establish them in their faith.

**Religious Instruction - an Attempt to Integrate Values into Behaviour**

Perhaps the best-known programme devised to integrate Christian teaching and values into inmate behaviour is PF’s In-Prison Seminar Programme. Garner and his colleagues (1990) report that an original study of PF’s Washington, DC Discipleship Seminars (held between 1975-1979) found that participation in these seminars was associated with lower rates of recidivism. A further study - which provided long-term follow-up on recidivism rates of participants in the initial programme - provides evidence to suggest that religious involvement helps some ex-offenders under certain conditions to lead crime free lives. That the programme was associated with better outcomes for some groups than others is consistent with the literature on rehabilitation. Thus whereas the programme worked better for white males, women, and low risk prisoners, high risk (and black male) PF prisoners showed relatively little change; they recidivate as quickly and increased in severity as much as the control subjects. According to Garner et al. (1990 Sec.3:13) the findings re high

30 Whilst the particular model being discussed is American, it represents the general approach to PF Discipleship Seminars elsewhere. Though largely evangelistic in nature, the seminars are open to all prisoners who can also benefit from other non-religious activities such as receiving visits, letter writing, sport and recreational activities, post-release and family support - all predominantly through Christian volunteers. The seminar program (over several days) is intended to lead a person through a progression of teaching that begins with the opportunity to make a commitment to Christ and then lead to deeper levels of understanding of Christian discipleship. An adjunct to the overall strategy of logical progression in teaching calls for Bible studies to be offered (sometimes by prison chaplains) as a follow-up to an In-Prison Seminar and usually covering the same basic subject matter. As with Phillips’s Bible study model (discussed below), the materials used in these studies are aimed at areas of major struggle for prisoners (Chase 1989:95-96).

31 Women who participated in the PF program showed a drop in recidivism four times greater than that evidenced by men. The author’s suggest that because “Women are generally both more religious and less prone to criminal behavior ... they may be more amenable to rehabilitation generally, and a religious rehabilitation program in particular” (Garner et al.,1990 Sec.3:14). It is also notable that child molesters/paedophiles, who are high risk offenders, were not included in this study. Moreover, it was acknowledged that a possible shortcoming of the original study is that participants may have been better risks than the average prisoner because
risk inmates are not surprising as this group “...have evidenced a more chronic and severe pattern of criminal behavior which is more resistant to change.” They conclude, therefore, that “...there is a need for a more intensive or specialized type of service to higher risk prisoners” who “...may need to be served by prison ministry in a more direct and intense way” (1990 Sec.1:12). Nonetheless, in his evaluation of PF programmes, O’Connor (1995a:16) concludes that the Washington, DC and the New York studies support the hypothesis that religious programming under certain conditions reduces the recidivism of some offenders.

As a chaplain at Tennessee State Penitentiary, David Phillipy observed a number of inmates experience some form of conversion to the Christian faith. For some, he claimed, conversion led to important changes in their lives; even enabling them to stay out of prison. On the other hand, the conversion experience of other inmates did not lead to personal change; while professing the faith, they continued to engage in antisocial behaviour that caused them to return to prison. According to Phillipy, whilst the inmate exposed only to religious teaching might benefit, it appeared that some converted inmates required ongoing instruction that had to be integrated in order for them to successfully live-out their new faith. Phillipy (1983:13) believed that “Inmates who change have integrated their religious beliefs into their personalities in a holistic way. Those who do not change compartmentalize the religious experience, failing to integrate it into their thinking, feelings and behaviour.” Thus an individual may be successful and seemingly well adjusted in much of his life but sabotage himself and his best intentions by engaging in self-defeating behaviour in one part of his personality. For instance, inmates typically have problems in dealing with anger, depression, anxiety, relationships with authority, self-discipline, trust, work, money, the use of leisure time, sexuality, relationships with helpers, and conflict. These problem areas in the inmate’s life become translated into antisocial and criminal
behaviour. Which is why, suggested Phillipy, “the integration of religious faith involves specific cognitive-emotional-behavioural areas of life” (1983:13).

Phillipy argued that most prison religious groups are directed toward either the emotional or cognitive dimensions of the faith experience, concluding, “It is the rare prison religious experience that intentionally attempts to integrate the content into behaviour, particularly in such a way as to modify the self-destructive behaviors mentioned above” (1983:14). Phillipy attempted to address this problem by developing a Bible study designed to integrate scripture into the thinking, feelings and behaviour of inmates - a model that presents scriptural readings in ways that increase their functional values in real life situations.\textsuperscript{32}

A ‘Holistic Approach’ to Prison Ministry
The benefits of a holistic approach to inmate care referred to by Smarto (1987) and Phillipy (1983) is mentioned elsewhere. For example research by Scarnati et al. (1991) revealed that violent psychiatric inmates who had received (and previously served) long sentences for very serious multiple crimes showed decreased levels of aggression, hostility and acting-out, and found more meaning for their lives after participating in a programme that emphasized religion as part of a bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach to inmate care. Apart from decreasing their desire to practice devil worship and preventing the majority of patients from harming themselves or others, religious influence also motivated them to be involved in their mental health treatment programme - an unusual practice according to the authors. Moreover the inmate patients were said to have a “constructive mission in life ....

\textsuperscript{32} The importance of integrating scripture in this way is reflected in Hightower’s study (1930), which concluded that mere knowledge of the Bible is not an adequate base to ensure proper character development. Thorndike (1939:99) similarly asserts that mere identification with religion does not mean that the belief system is internalised. And a study by Gannon (1967:224-225) of Catholic religious instruction among male adolescents at a State Training School revealed that only a slight increase in religious commitment and little change in ethical orthodoxy occurs as a result of merely teaching religion.
a ray of hope, and believed that they would be able to change their lives for the better” - which is significant given that most patients felt guilt and were trying to make amends for past wrongdoings. Evidence of healing of guilt and self-forgiveness was their ability to extend forgiveness to their peers, the staff, and to others, making religious practices “good preventive medicine for our patients” according to the authors. They suggested, moreover, that the result of their “holistic approach” to treating inmates (meeting the mental, physical, and spiritual needs in order for the whole person to emerge) demonstrates the importance of mental health therapy and religious services and practices working together to help patients (Scarnati et al. 1991:13-15).

A “holistic approach to rehabilitation” is also advocated by Ahrens (1998). Ahrens asserts that results of community studies which have found that religious beliefs and practices are associated with less risk of self-destructive behaviours, less perceived stress and greater overall life satisfaction, might also apply in correctional settings and impact positively on inmate health care. A holistic model would require the development of a “team ministry” (involving health care providers, inmates and spiritual leaders) to promote better mental and physical health care for the incarcerated population. By way of example, Ahrens cites a fledgling model of spiritual health care that entails trained members of a community network working with institutional chaplains to provide counselling, education and referral for HIV-positive inmates. Ahrens stresses that an important component of the project is the establishment of some sort of consistent, cooperative, working relationship between spiritual leaders and health care providers (Ahrens 1998:6-7). This brings us to two remaining models that arguably exemplify a holistic approach to prison ministry.

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33 A possible shortcoming of this study concerns the independence of the researchers. If, as appears likely, they were the actual chaplains who worked on the treatment unit, then possible bias could affect the collection and interpretation of data. Furthermore, simply stating that “data were obtained from the patients and their records” (page 3) - without explaining how/what data was generated thus and how it was used - tells us very little. Also, given their average and below-average IQ, unimpressive education record, multiple diagnoses and long histories of mental illness, the patients’ ability to comprehend/respond to the more conceptually complex questions and issues may itself be called into question.
The APAC Model

APAC is a Biblically-based correctional programme that provides prisoners with multiple opportunities for religious training, education, fellowship and worship within a pervasively Christian environment. Christ-centred core programmes emphasize the prisoners’ need for restoration with their family, community, and the Lord. This three-phase programme begins while prisoners are still in prison, involving them in 18 to 24 months of pre-release programming, and then extends into the community for an additional 6 to 12 months of after care. The core elements are built on Biblical principles delivered by Christian staff and volunteers. However the impressive claims of APAC have, until recently, been based on unsubstantiated anecdotal evidence. An exploratory study by Byron Johnson compared the recidivism rates for two “model” Brazilian prisons: Humaita (faith-based and managed by religious volunteers) and Braganca (focussing on vocational training and prison industry). Results of the three-year recidivism analysis produced the following results: The rate of recidivism for former prisoners from both Humaita and Braganca was extremely low (16% and 36% respectively), and was significantly lower among prisoners from Humaita (this finding holds among high as well as low risk former prisoners.) Further, in addition to a lower likelihood of re-arrest, ex-prisoners from Humaita were charged with

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34 APAC was originally established in Humaita prison Brazil in the 1970s and operates today in more than 40 other prisons throughout that country. Humaita prison is unique in that it has been operated by PF volunteers on principles involving a high level of prisoner trust and responsibility, and its claim of a recidivism rate of less than 4 percent. The APAC method was most notably and successfully replicated in Quito, Ecuador’s San Pablo Prison, and again at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Jester 11 unit in Houston in April 1997 - both officials and inmates attesting to positive changes in the lives of participants (PFI World 1998, cited in Set Free 1998:2-3). The Brazilian experiment has also become the inspiration for Britain’s first Christian jail, based in Dorset. At the Verne prison in Portland, the inmates of D-wing hope eventually to run their own regime and rehabilitate themselves - a former armed robber evidently ‘returning’ to prison as director of the scheme (Grey 1997).

35 This finding is all the more impressive given that Humaita prisoners had committed 59% (77 of 131) of the violent crimes despite having a smaller study sample than the Braganca prison (Johnson 2000:4).
significantly fewer arrest charges (i.e. multiple offences) during the three year follow-up period; and, where disposition data were available, ex-prisoners from Braganca were significantly more likely to be re-incarcerated than offenders from Humaita (Johnson 2000:7).

While Humaita program participants were found to recidivate at a higher rate (16%) than previously claimed (4%), if it is nonetheless significantly lower than Brazil’s national average (estimated between 50-70% - Johnson 2000:3) could one possible deduction be that, unlike their forebears, these Christian prison administrators have managed to better align their theory of reformative imprisonment with practice? - in a sense, the penitentiary ideal revisited. The implications are certainly interesting; especially in light of Stark’s thesis, that basically endorses the concept of a ‘Christian-run’ prison.

According to Stark (1995:6), what counts is not whether a particular person is religious, but whether this religiousness is, or is not, “ratified by” the social environment. The idea here is that “religion is empowered to produce conformity to the norms only as it is sustained through interaction and is accepted by the majority as a valid basis for action.” The problem, asserts Stark, is that prison communities seem likely to be lacking in organised religious participation. That being the case, he concludes, variations in individual religiousness ought not influence moral behaviour of prisoners unless they are embedded in a strong prison subculture rooted in common religious commitment. “Put another way, it may be of little consequence that a given inmate ‘finds’ religion in prison unless this also involves or is followed by immersion in a like-minded group” (Stark 1995:9).

The findings of the New York Study reflect the significance of such

36 The nature and effect of prison environment is significant here. Young posits that the institution described as a “cognitive slum” is the major factor in lower levels of moral reasoning in prisoner populations: “The prison setting serves to stagnate moral development” (Young 1991:162). Or as Duguid argues, “What we see in the adult offender as a fully developed ‘criminal personality’ is really a personality formed in part by the prison itself” (1981a:424).
In part, this follow-up study found:

PF in-prison programming is associated with a reduction in recidivism for ... religious inmates ... who are faithful to a high level of program involvement ... The findings on low participators also suggest that limited exposure or commitment to religious programs is simply not enough to help an inmate change his anti-social attitudes, values and behaviors (O'Connor 1995:16).

**Detroit TOP (Transition Of Prisoners)**

Commenced in 1993, arguably the most significant PF Ministries program is Detroit TOP, a transition support program aimed at reducing the level of recidivism among select moderate to high-risk African-American prisoners. In their final evaluation report of TOP, the

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37 Only the studies by Clear et al. (1992, 2000) consider the issue of religious groups. They suggest that the group aspect of religion is important in providing, inter alia, safety, material comforts, access to outsiders (particularly women) and inmate relations: “The social support can have the flavor of a community within a community” (Clear et al. 1992a:39-47). However these studies do not distinguish between officially programmed and exclusive inmate (‘cell’) groups, which, in this writer’s opinion, raises interesting questions especially vis-a-vis prisons where religious servicing is inadequate/non-existent and prisoners are (forced to be) more self-reliant. Accordingly, the present study will investigate these and related issues.

38 The New York Study was part of a larger study conducted by Prison Fellowship (see Garner et al. 1990) and represented a methodologically more rigorous approach to research than previous studies.

39 This holistic program engages community churches and volunteers, the business community, social service agencies, and other local resources to serve as a network of encouragement, assistance, and accountability for participants in transition, and to help their families. Participants enter the program well before parole, normally while they are residing at a pre-release facility. They voluntarily apply for admission and are selected on the basis of an application and interview process. Participants undergo a thorough assessment that identifies their overall risk of criminal recidivism and their levels of need. Based on this information, TOP’s case manager works with each participant to establish a transition-treatment plan identifying specific goals and strategies to meet them. Each participant is matched with a trained mentor who acts as a resource person and advisor, and who helps the participant fulfil the details of his plan. Each mentor-participant match is also connected to a church that has an expressed commitment to the TOP participant, offering a base of support and community. To the extent possible, participants’ close family members or significant others are also included in the churches’ scope of assistance. Participants remain in TOP for up to two years following their
Centre for Social Research compared outcomes among three groups: TOP program participants, those who applied to TOP but were not accepted, and a sample of prisoners who qualified for TOP but did not apply for the program. It was found that 33% of those who were ever admitted to TOP recidivated. However by separating the men who “really participated” in the program from those whom staff discharged (55%) we find that only 25% of people who were active in the program (including graduates) recidivated, compared to 39% of those discharged from TOP for lack of participation (including failure to complete probationary period) or program violations. The findings differ even more if one eliminates from consideration the TOP participants who entered the program in its first six months - when the program’s selection system, service model, and case management were still incipient. These outcomes show that 17.6% of TOP’s active participants returned to prison for a new crime or parole violation, compared with 40% of those discharged from TOP. These may also be compared with the recidivism of the other groups in the study: 20.9% of those who applied but were not accepted into TOP, and 34.3% of the sample of prisoners who were eligible to apply to TOP but did not (O’Connor et al. 1997:4). In their summary of the report evaluators made the following assessment:

The TOP program stresses the role of social integration in reducing crime, and the TOP participants have increased their attachment to pro-social institutions like employment, family, leisure, and church and decreased their attachment to substance abuse and anti-social attitudes and friends. In terms of recidivism we know that TOP program has dramatically reduced the rate release from prison in which time they are expected to have successfully met their goals - which include remaining drug and alcohol free for a year, maintaining employment, securing a stable residence, establishing and maintaining a Christian, sobriety-based support system (mentoring), and consistent participation in group Moral Reconciliation Therapy. However the intensity of program involvement wanes as participants increase in their levels of responsibility and capability and move toward graduation. The success of Detroit TOP is evidenced in its endorsement by government officials and proposed expansion - to include a wider category of prisoners, including women - and replication elsewhere in the USA (O’Connor et al. 1997:8-9, 12, 23).

Arguably, the participants who were discharged from TOP should not be distinguished from other program failures in this way, as it could be seen as a misrepresentation of the findings.
of return to prison for escape among its participants who have a high risk of recidivism. Although we also know that the men who participate in the TOP program have a lower rate of return to prison for parole violations or new crimes than the general population of ex-offenders, further research is necessary to establish a clear link between the TOP program and a reduction in returns to prison for parole violations and new crimes. Prison Fellowship has conceived and successfully implemented a unique program model that, though needing work, is providing a valuable and much needed service to the community and to the ex-prisoners who truly participate in the program (O’Connor et al. 1996:23).

In summary, an overview of the prison-religion literature presents mixed findings: On the one hand providing prisoners with religious inspired hope, meaning and purpose in life, a sense of forgiveness of sins and inner peace, better adjustment to prison, and possible reform/rehabilitation; on the other hand suggesting that, compared to being incarcerated, offenders generally find it harder to live-out their faith after they are released - all reflecting the researcher’s beliefs/experience. In relation to needs, prisoners require extensive practical and spiritual support - the ‘process of working through’ integral to their faith/reformation. Moreover, in the broader context of the present study, reformation is understood to apply to any process that promotes a prisoner’s well being. In this sense, for example, Phillipy’s (1983) integrative Bible-study, the therapeutic-spiritual models of Ahrens (1998) and Scarnati et al. (1991), and church ‘after care’ advocated by Smarto (1987) represent a ‘holistic approach’ to inmate care wherein the person’s total needs are addressed. Arguably this approach is embodied best in the faith-based rehabilitation program APAC, and Detroit TOP. The concept of nurturing religious inmates throughout their prison sentence and in the community (essentially Christian ‘discipleship’) is central both to these programs and the present study. To this end several propositions are

However, like the PF Washington DC Discipleship Seminars, TOP does not accept paedophiles (and sex offenders generally, nor offenders with very serious patterns of violence or psychological difficulties - O’Connor et al. 1996:5) who would rank among the highest risk categories most in need of assistance. Moreover, Johnson’s study (2000:9) indicates that whereas Humaita prison (APAC) dealt with violent offenders - five imprisoned for unspecified rape/sodomy-rape - neither were child sex offenders specifically mentioned.
advanced: First, that adequate support is essential for prisoners’ spiritual welfare (particularly new converts) as they face numerous personal/institutional problems in relation to, and by virtue of, their faith; second, in order to sustain their faith and enhance individual reform, released Christians (especially paedophiles) require ongoing and specialized care.

3: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

TYPE OF STUDY
The writer seeks to investigate the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of Christian prisoners and former prisoners, especially with regard to how religion is used to attach meaning to and organise their lives, and how this in turn influences their actions. For this purpose qualitative methods have been applied - the present research essentially a phenomenological study based on field experience involving, primarily, semi-structured interviews,
observation and participant observation, several case studies, and informal conversations. These particular strategies were adopted because they allow the researcher to learn about his informant’s social world at first hand; to “gain access to the motives, meanings, actions and reactions of people in the context of their daily lives” (Minichiello et al. 1995:10). As Burgess puts it, a phenomenological perspective is one where:

...researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events for people in particular situations. The focus is upon the way in which participants interpret their experience and construct reality ... The ultimate aim is to study situations from the participants’ point of view (Burgess 1984:3).

Having spent a considerable portion of his life in prison and become a Christian there, the researcher is able “to take the role of the actor and see his world from his standpoint” (Blumer 1966). Indeed the focus of many interview questions in this study reflect the researcher’s ‘informed’ insights and theoretical assumptions on particular topics. On the other hand, the researcher is also aware of the complex and dynamic nature of the subject matter; that apart from proposition testing the research is potentially exploratory, calling for openness to the possibility of unanticipated themes and theories.\(^{42}\)

**DELIMITATIONS / SCOPE**

While this study will investigate the reformatory aspects of Christianity on prisoners, the only ‘evidence’ it provides of this is through informants’ personal testimony. To keep the study within manageable limits, and through design, only Christian prisoners and ex-prisoners were interviewed - religious/correctional personnel and non-Christian prisoners omitted. The argument that self-reports may constitute a weakness in method because of their subjective/limited nature, whilst generally true, holds less currency given that this “qualitative researcher is not primarily geared to finding out the truth \textit{per se} but rather the truth as the informant sees it to be” (Minichiello et al. 1995:94). To reiterate, it is the

\(^{42}\) As Glaser & Strauss (1967) explain, propositions and theories are developed from the many pieces of evidence that are interconnected concurrently with the data-collection process.
informants’ beliefs/experiences that are central.

Regarding identification/recruitment of prospective candidates, whereas chaplains’ and volunteers’ opinions as to the genuineness of religious inmates were considered, eligibility ultimately rested on a person’s perception of his own devoutness. Accordingly, a scientific measure of religiousness was not used. The religious orientation is exclusively Christian; most participants were Protestants, with fewer Catholics. Although any ex-prisoners and prisoners (throughout Victoria and from every security classification) were eligible to participate in the study, about five were overlooked because of excessive travel requirements. An exclusively male focus was taken.

SAMPLING - VIA PRISON CHAPLAINS, VOLUNTEERS, AND NETWORKING

The writer’s original expectation was that participants would mainly be identified and recruited by prison chaplains and volunteers (primarily Prison Fellowship), who would give (or explain the content of) a written outline of the project objectives to likely candidates and invite them to participate.

Prison Chaplains

At a meeting of the Chaplains’ Advisory Committee (whose endorsement this project

43 However the wider prison population reflects an opposite trend. As at 25.7.01, a snapshot of prisoners by religion (as self reported by prisoners at time of reception) reveals:


Notwithstanding the significant number of prisoners who nominated Christianity, it is likely that many had nominal or ‘extrinsic’ faith.
needed), some members objected to the idea of identifying ‘committed’ (let alone ‘born again’) Christian prisoners, saying they could not make such value judgments.\textsuperscript{44} They also considered some interview questions intrusive and judgment laden - for example, those that explored religious experience and sincerity - preferring a general approach which gave interviewees greater latitude.\textsuperscript{45} Whilst appreciating the general tenor of their criticism, the writer referred to his experience of prisoners whose religious conversion/commitment did ‘stand out,’ and to Clear’s study, where “inmates noted that those who adopt a truly religious lifestyle stand out as different in the prison environment” (1992a:11). Only half the chaplains agreed to recruit self-professed Christian prisoners known to them using the prescribed recruitment method.\textsuperscript{46} There were few ex-prisoner referrals from chaplains; none by those critical of the study. Overall, then, there was a mixed response amongst Chaplains’ Advisory Committee members to the proposed research project: half (tentatively) helpful, the rest suspicious and cynical.

**Christian Volunteers**

Among official sources, most participants were recruited through Prison Fellowship by

\textsuperscript{44} Paradoxically, whereas one chaplain stressed that an evangelical model of chaplaincy was outmoded, several others referred to themselves as ‘born again’ and ‘saved.’ The problem of gauging individual religiousness is exacerbated by the sheer diversity of theological opinion. Bottoms and Taylor (1980:226-227) contend that there is no universal agreement amongst Christians on many matters, indeed, even if we restrict ourselves to our own understanding of theology and its task we are confronted by a daunting variety of opinion.

\textsuperscript{45} A further concern was the possible negative reflection on chaplaincy of a series of questions regarding their effectiveness. As for value judgments, it is ironic that the most outspoken chaplain should refer to some born again prisoners that the chaplain knew as “crazy.”

\textsuperscript{46} Their alternative suggestions were to introduce potential candidates directly to the researcher, or that the researcher attend chapel services and solicit recruits himself. Only one of three initial attempts to recruit in this way succeeded, possibly because inmates either felt uneasy being formally addressed by a stranger who wanted something from them, or were reluctant to declare their faith so openly, or considered themselves insufficiently ‘committed’ - as two men stated. One long-term inmate who attended chapel “to get away from prison for awhile” said that sincerely religious inmates definitely existed, but elsewhere in the system. This recruitment method was abandoned following obstructions at several other prisons.
contacting regional volunteers who were asked to nominate potential candidates in/outside of prison. Those who could help were sent written information (in plain language) about the project and their possible involvement in it both for themselves and to pass on to candidates (Appendix A). Additional recruits were solicited via a Prison Fellowship mailing list to ex-prisoners, and a Care and Communication Concern staff member who provided numerous successful leads.  

**Networking**

Networking (or ‘snowballing’) was the best recruitment method, providing a good source of inter/intra prison contacts and referrals to Christians who had been released. Aware that ‘insiders’ are most likely to know the status of other members within their group, the researcher asked interviewees if they knew or could enquire about other possible candidates, who in turn referred him to others, and so on. The researcher also recruited some ex-prisoners whom he had met when he himself was imprisoned. Data was also continually generated in the field via informal contact with prison officers and other correctional services/religious personnel.

**Population**

Sixty in all, informants comprised 45 prisoners and 15 ex-prisoners located throughout the state of Victoria. They included a broad age range, offence type, and criminal history. A detailed population profile is presented in the following chapter.

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47 Care and Communication Concern (C&CC) is a non-denominational Christian welfare organization engaged in prison ministry, amongst other things.


49 Although paedophiles comprised about 52% of the total population of this study, one cannot extrapolate from this that half of all Victorian Christian prisoners were paedophiles as this was not a representative sample. An explanation for their unexpectedly high representation in this study is that whilst not all mainstream prisons were approached for possible candidates (neither were some prospective candidates interviewed) because of time/travel constraints on the
TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviewing

A data-collecting method was required which enabled the writer to investigate his own research interests, themes derived from the literature, and other perspectives that might emerge. Accordingly a flexible interview schedule was devised. Comprising a form of in-depth interviewing of a semi-structured (or focussed) kind, this instrument facilitated informants’ open sharing but within a framework which (for comparative/analytical purposes) enabled a degree of question ordering and response standardization. Descriptive, structural, and contrast questioning was mainly employed, along with selective probes (See Burgess 1984:111-112; and Minichiello et al. 1995:88-89). Prior to implementation, the interview schedule was ‘tested’ amongst colleagues, practitioners, and several ex-prisoners for possible flaws (grammar, clarity, relevance, etcetera) and revised accordingly.

Ideally, on one or more occasions before each interview, a private and informal meeting was held, or, as in country prisons where this was often not possible or convenient, an informal ‘lead in’ time preceded the interview. This was designed to: produce a “productive interpersonal climate” (Minichiello et al. 1995:78); explain something of the aims of the interview, preferred manner of recording it, and that participants were free to pull out of the interview at any time; and to allow for clarification of any points that were made. Prior to commencing informants were asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix B) - several requiring it to be read for them either because they needed reading glasses or could not read (well). Interviews were around 1-2 hours in duration, although some went twice as long or more over several sessions. Prison interviews were usually conducted in a separate room away from general activity, however the level of privacy from writer, a large number were recruited from a single facility for sex-offenders. However as not all candidates among the sex offenders were identified/recruited either, ultimately one can only speculate about possible numbers. Certainly, in a general sense, paedophiles appear to be disproportionately represented among the Victorian Christian prisoners in this study.
interruption and noise varied considerably between (and even within) prisons - several interviews having to be temporarily abandoned. Ex-prisoners were mostly interviewed in their homes or in the writer’s home, or somewhere nominated by the informant - clarification and follow-up occasionally occurring by telephone. All interviews (except part of one which was scripted) were taped using a battery powered, unobtrusive audiocassette recorder. Prison authorities never enforced their right to examine the content of any interview. To ensure confidentiality informants’ names were not mentioned in interviews and, where they may be directly quoted in a report, pseudonyms are used. The researcher used a transcribing tape recorder and word processor to create a transcript of the interview testimony. Both the hard copy and computer disc version of the interviews was kept in a safe, secure facility.

Coding the Data
A coding system was also developed. It was anticipated that data would fit into either of two general classifications: Prisoners and Former Prisoners. However given the unexpectedly high number of paedophiles amongst the prisoners (nearly two-thirds), coupled with the nature of their offending and effective isolation within the prison system, it was decided to create three classifications: Mainstream Prisoners, Paedophile Prisoners, and Former Prisoners. Next, a number of major themes that had earlier been identified were listed - e.g. ‘working through process,’ ‘rehabilitation,’ ‘post-release issues.’ Each theme contained a series of research topics/questions derived from the interview schedule or which evolved during the research process. An informant’s response to a particular topic/question was located in the hard copy of his transcript file (stored alphabetically in an easy-to-access container) and recorded in abbreviated form into a Research Findings file. Transcript that might later be directly quoted (either to illustrate a point or because it represented informants’ general response to a question) was highlighted, and identified by including the person’s name and a corresponding page reference alongside his response. The next informant’s transcript file was similarly processed. His response either created a new response sub-category (included in abbreviated form beneath the first response) or
matched/resembled the first person’s response (in which case the figure 2 preceded the response), and so on with succeeding transcripts. This ultimately resulted in the creation of a series of response sub-categories, which were also graded according to numeric frequency of response. Often unwieldy in number, this list of sub-categories was clustered under general headings to assist interpretation of the data.\(^{50}\) All other research topics/questions were essentially processed in this way using a computer word processing program. As some categories were found to overlap one another they were collapsed. The above procedure was used with all three aforementioned groups. Coding data in this way allowed for individual-comparative and collective analysis of these groups. To this end, individual coding booklets were produced for *Mainstream/Paedophile/Former Prisoners*, plus an integrative piece entitled *All Informants* that combined the results of all three.

**Participant Observation Amongst High-profile Offenders**

Participant observation was also used to collect data amongst the inmates of ‘Unit X’ (a pseudonym), a high security protection unit. However the researcher quickly realised that if he also wanted to interview these prisoners first rapport/trust had to be established.\(^{51}\) Notorious for their heinous crimes and wary of any kind of publicity, these men were suspicious even of one who shared a common background and faith to theirs. Of the dozen or so residents in Unit X, at least six were self-professed Christians who had routinely engaged in religious activities over more than twelve months that they had been together. The significance of this group to its members raised many matters of interest, including: personal safety and support issues; the extent and effectiveness of religious servicing; the implications of Christian community/discipleship, and; of particular interest given the group’s imminent relocation or possible disbandment, the effect of such displacement on an individual’s faith.

\(^{50}\) Typologies (Minichiello et al. 1995:266-267) were sometimes constructed to help the researcher organise and understand information.

\(^{51}\) See Minichiello et al. (1995:79-80) regarding establishing rapport.
Surprised but grateful to receive unrestricted access into this ‘prison-within-a-prison,’ the researcher considered participant observation an effective way to gain both the men’s confidence and unique insights of religious life, especially given the confined environment and homogeneous nature of the group. In short, this methodology provided “direct experiential and observational access to the [prisoners’] world of meaning” (Jorgensen 1989:15). Participation was intensive and extensive: several weekly visits over a six month period, often engaged for entire days in the routine events of prison life - ‘killing time’ round-and-round a razor-wire courtyard among the less memorable. Of the official programs, two weekly Bible study-discussion groups were most popular; one run by a PF volunteer, the other by the Salvation Army chaplain. The researcher regularly participated in these meetings, as well as a multi-religious version of the latter group held amongst mainstream prisoners. On a much restricted basis contact was maintained with all but one of the Unit X group members following their relocation. Ultimately four of the original six (and, surprisingly, an anonymous Christian who had been monitoring events) consented to giving interviews - which vindicates the approach taken.

Rapport is established slowly and with time. Much discussion and activities proceed it ... Establishing a good rapport with subjects increases your chances of hearing the ‘true’ story (Minichiello et al. 1995:234).

This assertion certainly reflects the researcher's experience with inmates of Unit X. One who was initially wary of being recorded and unable to share his crisis of faith with anyone eventually unburdened himself on tape; another who had refused even a scripted interview because “I don’t trust anyone” ultimately provided among the most open and honest accounts - even offering follow-up recorded interviews; whilst others shared personal information which evidently they would normally not.

Participant observational and general fieldwork notes were contained in a Field Journal - a record of experiences and observations in the field. Initially, brief handwritten
(and occasionally recorded) notes were made in the field with regard to: key places, times, people; major activities and events; casual conversations and interviews; personal feelings, impressions, hunches, speculations and; any analytic comments which may have arisen about these matters (Jorgensen 1989:96-105). Soon after visiting the field these notes were word processed (usually in an expanded form), then sorted into files according to subject matter. The data was then analysed for possible themes and issues that might support/contradict the interview findings, or from which new theoretical perspectives might emerge. Similar confidentiality/security measures adopted with interview transcripts were applied to fieldwork notes.

A Multi-Method Approach
The researcher also interacted with a handful of Christians in ‘A-Unit’ (a pseudonym): comprising about thirty, middle-aged to elderly, predominantly paedophile offenders segregated from other prisoners for security reasons. In addition to formal interviews, varying levels of social contact with Christian ex-prisoners also provided an invaluable, and otherwise inaccessible, information source, as did several case studies. Supplementing interviews with information from other sources in this way served to enhance the reliability of the data. Or as Marshall and Rossman (1989:82) put it: “Combined with observation, interviews allow the researcher to check description against fact.”52 Indeed, the writer contends that a multi-method approach helped to address issues of validity and bias in the present study.53

STRENGTHS / WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

52 Marshall and Rossman (1989:79-82) provide a valuable discussion on observation as an information gathering technique vis-a-vis in-depth interviewing.

53 Also known as triangulation, this approach involves combining different methods in the same study to highlight different dimensions of the same phenomena, to compensate for shortcomings of each method or to validate the findings by examining them from several vantage points (Reinharz and Rowles 1988; also Minichiello et al. 1995:187).
The Researcher’s Personal Biography and Experience

Burgess (1984:88) argues that personal characteristics such as biography and experience can influence the field researcher’s role, field relations, and the research process. For instance in a similar way that Becker’s insights as a jazz musician “influenced [his] selection of the research problem together with the collection and analysis of data” (Becker 1963, cited in Burgess 1984:89), clearly the present researcher’s imprisonment/conversion experience has influenced him. Arguably this might impair one’s ability to take a neutral, value-free stance. However regarding objectivity within interpretive approaches to social science, Minichiello et al. (1995:180-181) remind us that “Methodologies and methods are not constructed or chosen in isolation from ontological and epistemological positions ... our choice of research topic or question will be influenced by our world views or meaning systems ... the bias is inherent, it ... is simply counted in to the research process.” Indeed McCracken asserts that the qualitative researcher should not treat personal experience as bias and set it aside as “this material is the very stuff of understanding and explication ... without which analysis is the poorer” (1988:34). What, then, are the possible implications for the present study?

Having ‘been in the prisoners’ shoes,’ this researcher assumes the status of an ‘insider’ (Minichiello et al. 1995:182) who himself “serves as a kind of ‘instrument’ in the collection and analysis of data” (McCracken 1988:18). Although it has its limitations, “[p]ersonal experience derived from direct participation in the insiders’ world is an extremely valuable source of information, especially if the researcher has ... experienced life as an insider” (Jorgensen 1989:93). This acquaintance “gives the investigator a fineness of touch and delicacy of insight that few ... can hope to develop” (McCracken 1988:32). Put differently, the ethnic researcher or insider is arguably “more attuned to the informant’s meanings” (Minichiello et al. 1995:184) because he is “able actually to feel” an

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54 This metaphor is a useful one according to Miles (1979:597) because it emphasizes that the investigator cannot fulfil qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable.
experience from the standpoint of an insider and thereby gain access to an “absolutely
crucial aspect of human existence”: a person’s emotions and feelings (Jorgensen 1989:94).
Moreover as empathetic insider the researcher is more likely to engender prisoners’ trust
and cooperation - several reluctant prisoners agreeing to be interviewed after learning about
the writer’s background. Relating personal experience also noticeably relaxed nervous
interviewees. All of the above is borne out in the present research findings.

On the other hand, insiders are warned, “deep and long-lived familiarity with the
culture under study has, potentially, the grave effect of dulling the investigator’s powers of
observation and analysis” (McCracken 1988:32). To retain the integrity of the phenomena
being studied, Minichiello et al. (1995:184) assert that the ethnic researcher must “attempt
to straddle his or her insider’s perspective with his or her outsider’s stance” - or

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55 Burgess (1984:104-105) cites several examples (feminist and otherwise) of how
personal experience/attributes helped researchers to obtain normally inaccessible information.

56 (Whereas findings would normally not be presented here, for convenience an exception
has been made in this instance.) Informants generally agreed it made a difference having the
writer do the research/interviews because an ‘ex-crim’ can empathise with their experience:

[W]hen I’m talking about things that are going on I know that you’re understanding because
you’ve experienced it ... having been a prisoner you know what it’s like ... and that understanding
helps me to talk to you, helps you to understand what I’m saying, but also helps you to understand
my feelings. See that’s what empathy is (Lindsay p.29).

Moreover an ‘ex’ was more likely to be a “trustworthy” person with “genuine” motives who
knew “the right questions to ask,” understood the “rules” and “language,” and wanted “to better
the system.” The opportunity to be interviewed also enabled one “to engage in an unusual form
of sociality” which led to numerous benefits, including: the opportunity to make oneself the
centre of another’s attention; state a case that is otherwise unheard; engage in an intellectually
challenging process of self-scrutiny; and even experience a kind of catharsis (McCracken
1988:27-28). Again, the findings confirm this: “You’re the first person I’ve spoken to openly
like this ... because you’ve asked me to ... no one has asked me” (Wayne p.9). “It’s been good for
me ... every time I talk about my situation I think it helps with the healing process” (Lindsay
p.30). Informants felt gratified that their contribution might help dispel ignorance and raise
awareness, thereby benefiting them and others. In addition, the fact that a former prisoner had
‘made it’ was an inspiration and encouragement: “[W]hen ever anybody puts down the possibility
of rehabilitation and suggests that it’s not possible ... it shows me that it can be done” (Max p.26).
“manufacture distance” as Von Hoffman and Cassidy (1956:197) put it. One way investigators can manufacture distance is to bring themselves to “see with new detachment the categories and assumptions that organize their worlds. The classic method of doing so is to go off to another culture for an extended period of time and then return to one’s own” (McCracken 1988:23). The present writer believes that fifteen years out of prison has created sufficient distance. With professional guidance he has closely examined himself, his prison/conversion experience, and re-evaluated ideological assumptions and religious beliefs. This has resulted in psycho-spiritual healing and personal wholeness. Significantly, whilst the writer has in a sense created distance from his prison experience, essentially it remains a fundamental ‘reference point’ - one that serves to shape and sharpen his research. Nevertheless this approach may leave the researcher vulnerable to bias as he risks reporting what he ‘wants to see.’ To whatever extent this might happen the research is flawed.

**Recruitment Difficulties**

The relatively small number of ex-prisoners in this study (15) may be seen as a shortcoming, however recruitment was generally very difficult. For example, of eight leads from a Prison Fellowship mailing list only two agreed to interviews, and then only after a follow-up letter. Whereas this letter included a pre-paid/addressed envelope and was marked ‘If undeliverable return to…’ there were no other responses. Neither was telephone contact with ex-prisoners possible; four having silent numbers, two unlisted. Many other leads proved similarly unfruitful. A possible reason for this is that the letters were never received, numerous men having a ‘nomadic’ existence. Perhaps disinterested, they simply did not bother to reply, or, like one man, were annoyed to have been bothered at all. Indeed they may have been “inmates who use religion to survive the harsh psychology of the prison [but] no longer need it once released” (Clear et al. 1992a:98). Others (like a successful businessman) feared the possibility of having their past exposed. Lastly, there was drug and/or alcohol addiction. Along with those men who had evidently lost their way spiritually or become disillusioned with church/Christians, they avoided being interviewed. These suppositions are confirmed in the research findings.
Seven prisoners also declined interviews: one awaited deportation; two preferred not to be tape-recorded; the remainder never specified why. Gaol authorities excluded an inmate for security reasons; several pre-arranged interviews not eventuating through prisoner transfer/release. Furthermore prison musters, lock-downs, work schedules, delayed location/escort of inmates, interruptions - all resulted in some hurried and/or incomplete interviews.

The Problem of ‘Gatekeepers’

A more serious concern was the deliberate obstruction of some ‘gatekeepers.’ To undertake the present study, for example, access to prisoners was negotiated at three levels (four including the University’s Ethics Committee): with the Chief Executive of public corrections (and staff); the Chaplains’ Advisory Committee; and site specific Programs Managers and/or Operations Managers (Governors) of prisons. Moreover as access occurred throughout the research process it involved what felt at times like interminable negotiation and renegotiation - on two occasions negotiation irreversibly breaking down.

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57 Gatekeepers are “those individuals in an organization that have the power to withhold access to people or situations for the purposes of research” (Burgess 1984:39; see also Minichiello et al. 1995:171). They are especially powerful in the bureaucratic hierarchy of a prison system where different approaches have to be made to individuals at different levels in the organization.

58 The first incident was early in the research process. The Operations Manager of a regional prison (who knew the writer as a prisoner) publicly snubbed the writer at reception saying, “I don’t want an ex-crim in here.” Embarrassed and offended, the researcher momentarily felt like a prisoner again. Although the researcher could not be officially denied access, it was limited to strictly controlled interviews. This effectively stopped the further use of ‘participatory observation’ as a research method - the findings obtained this way restricted to Unit X. Moreover permission to interview additional informants (identified through networking) was refused, and correspondence regarding this matter ignored. Consultation with the Chief Executive Officer (public correctional system) resulted in an apology and permission to conduct outstanding interviews.

The second incident involved a private women’s prison. The original research design included participation at religious events and interviews with female prisoners. Midway through
Leaving the Field

When it came time to leave the field emotional disengagement was difficult for the researcher and certain prisoners, especially those relationships formed over months where the parties had been mutually vulnerable (Minichiello et al. 1995:173-174). Disengagement was particularly difficult from prisoners whom the researcher found unnervingly reminiscent of himself. It was not a matter of preventing them from entering one’s psyche; in a sense they were already there.

Too often the researcher was conscious of time, which informants had in abundance and he so little. With schedules to meet, informal talks before/after interviews were usually rushed, if entered at all, yet everyone seemed to have questions to ask - often about post-release adjustment and, invariably, their unmet needs. There was a powerful urge to counsel young and/or inexperienced inmates, and sometimes to suggest maintaining contact; more difficult still when prisoners themselves suggested staying in touch. Occasional cards and letters followed the researcher’s immediate departure from the field; on-going contact consisting mainly of greetings exchanged via a prison worker. Conscious both of his limitations and the long term implications of a prison friendship, the researcher has remained actively involved with only one prisoner, Rick, among the youngest and longest serving of all. In addition to several pre-existing friendships, a relationship has also been established with one ex-prisoner.

this process, alleged misconduct by the researcher vis-a-vis certain staff resulted in revocation of his visiting privileges. An offer for him to correspond with informants was declined, resulting in females being eliminated from the study. Unsuccessful attempts to meet with management over these allegations left the writer feeling his right of due process had been denied. Even as a prisoner, ‘Governor’s Court’ would have been his entitlement, after all. Under the circumstances, then, it was tempting to believe that the discrimination felt by the writer in both instances was somehow linked to his past.
4: ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter both presentation and discussion of the findings will occur. Each research topic will be introduced, the relevant question/problem identified, data presented, and directly followed by analysis-interpretation (usually designated by a triple asterisk break). Topics for analysis include: informants’ demographic/personal details; their religious backgrounds, experiences, beliefs; how they practice faith in prison; the positive/negative implications of being a Christian; rehabilitation; needs and supports (prison/post-release).
DEMOGRAPHIC / PERSONAL DETAILS\(^9\)

The present study comprised a total of 60 adult male informants - 45 current prisoners (including 28 paedophiles) and 15 former prisoners (3 paedophiles) (*Table 1*). They were asked a series of background questions (Appendix C: 1.2-12), with the following results: Informants’ average age was 43.5 years (*Table 2*), and three-quarters were of Anglo-Saxon descent (*Table 3*). Thirty-two percent were single, 26% married, and 38% divorced or separated/estranged (*Table 4*). Manufacturing/trades was their most common occupation, followed by service/retail industry, ‘jack-of-all-trades,’ pensions, rural/primary, and professional (*Table 5*). Ten percent had reached primary education level, 73% secondary, and 17% tertiary (*Table 6*). Just over half were classified maximum-security and one-third medium-security inmates (*Table 7*), with current prisoners facing an average minimum sentence of 7.9 years (*Table 8*), having already served 2.7 years (*Table 9*). Thirty-eight percent had been in prison before, most at least once (*Table 10*), although former prisoners had remained outside prison an average of 6.4 years since their last release (*Table 11*). The principle offences for which informants had been imprisoned included: child sex offences, murder, armed robbery, assault, rape, and theft (*Table 12*).

\[* * * *

The average informant, then, was a single, white Australian, working class, middle-aged

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\(^9\) Compare informants’ details with a description of the general characteristics of the Victorian male prison population: As at 30 June 2000 there were 2,970 male prisoners. Their mean age was 34.6 years, and 81.2% were of Anglo-Saxon descent. 57.6% were never married, 29.8% married/defacto, and 11.4% separated/divorced. Before imprisonment 33.8% were employed, 60.1% were unemployed, 1.1% were students, and 4.2% fell into the category ‘other’ (which includes pensioner). Regarding education, 0.3% had no formal schooling, 1.1% part primary, 2.7% completed primary, 84.2% part secondary, 6.3% completed secondary, and 3.8% tertiary/other post secondary. 21.6% were rated maximum-security, 53.0% medium, and 25.4% minimum-security inmates. Sentenced prisoners were expected to serve an average minimum of 3.1 years, and 60.5% had experienced prior adult imprisonment. Prisoners’ most serious offences/charges were: Offences against the person 32.2% (sex offences 12.8%, murder/homicide 12.2%, assault 5.3%, other offences against the person 1.9%); property offences 26.6% (theft, etc); robbery and extortion 12.9%; drug offences 11.8%; offences against good order 9.9%; motor vehicle/traffic 2.8% (Statistical Profile: the Victorian Prison System 1995-96 to 1999-00).
male recidivist serving a long custodial sentence for violent crimes - often sex offences against children. By comparison few ex-prisoners were sex offenders, and they had spent an encouraging length of time outside of prison.

List of Tables

Table 1.
Characteristics of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protection (paedophiles)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(45)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former prisoners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protection (paedophiles)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
Mean Age of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>average age in years &amp; months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

60 With a mean age of 43.5 years, compared to 34.6 years for Victorian prisoners (as at 30 June 2000), the present sample constitutes an atypical group. Only 15.6% of Victorian prisoners fell within the 40-49 age group, and 11.2% were 50+ (Statistical Profile: the Victorian Prison System 1995-96 to 1999-00 p.19).
mainstream 33.6  
paedophiles 49.8  
former 43.1  

**Combined** 43.5

Table 3.

**Nationality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
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<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
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<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100</td>
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Table 4.

**Marital Status**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>single</td>
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<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separated/estranged</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
widowed          1          2
Total           60         100

Table 5.

Usual Occupation

category          number  percentage

manufacturing industry/trades         16         28
service/retail industry              13         23
jack-of-all-trades*                  7          12
pensions                          5           9
rural/primary industry              3           5
professional                  3          5
unemployed                      2          4
priest                           1          2
other                           7          12
Total                          57         100

* One who can turn his hand to anything but who has no one special skill.

Table 6.

Education Attainment Level

category         number  percentage

primary            6          10

61 Education levels attained by informants are high compared with prisoners generally, only about 10% of whom had completed secondary, trade, or tertiary education - although 84% had undertaken some secondary-level schooling. Note also that 27% (16/60) of informants had undertaken/completed educational etc, courses in prison, and three had done so post-release.
secondary 44 73

(average: year 9)
tertiary 10 17

(uncompleted: 3)
Total 60 100

Table 7.

**Security Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maximum</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>medium</td>
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<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maximum-medium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.

**Average Minimum Sentence** *(excludes former prisoners*)

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62 Fifty-seven percent (34/60) were classified ‘protection’ prisoners (requiring isolation from mainstream prisoners for their safety), and of these 91% (31) were paedophiles.

63 Mainstream includes 5 men remanded in custody. If any of them received prison sentences (2 faced murder charges) the combined average minimum sentence length would obviously increase. Likewise, the paedophile category includes a sentence of ‘never to be released,’ which would significantly raise the overall average if it were calculated. The present sample have significantly longer sentences on average (7.9 years) than other Victorian prisoners: as at 30 June 2000, for example, 38.7% received sentences of less than 1 year, 57.3% under 2 years, and 80.3% under 5 years (Statistical Profile: the Victorian Prison System 1995-96 to 1999-00 p.26).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>years/months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paedophiles</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*former prisoners* 15 3.9

Table 9.

**Average Time Presently Served** *(excludes former prisoners)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>years/months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
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<tr>
<td>paedophiles</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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Table 10.

**Prior Adult Imprisonment**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>category</th>
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<th>percentage</th>
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<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

64 At 38%, informants had a relatively low rate of prior adult imprisonment compared to 60.5% for the Victorian prison population (Statistical Profile: the Victorian Prison System 1995-96 to 1999-00 p.20).
Total    60    100

Number of Prior Imprisonments

(Note: only 21 of the 23 who had been in prison before responded to this question)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
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<td>two</td>
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<td>three</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>many</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Table 11.

Former Prisoners - Length of Time Outside Prison

<table>
<thead>
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<th>years</th>
<th>number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year or less</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

65 Six informants had served juvenile detention in a Youth Training Centre. YTC sentences are not included in the number of prior imprisonments. Eight informants had served prior sentences of more than two years.
Average continuous time outside prison since last release: **6.4 years**

Table 12.

**Principal Offence for Which Imprisoned**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>child sex offences</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murder</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>armed robbery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assault</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rape</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manslaughter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culpable driving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auto theft/driving offences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drug importing (marijuana)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drug cultivation (marijuana)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Note that two child murders fell within the category of child sex offences, raising the overall percentage of child sex offences to 51.6% (31/60). By comparison, only 12.8% of Victorian prisoners had committed ‘sex offences.’ Moreover, whereas about 45% of Victorian prisoners were incarcerated for ‘offences against the person’ and ‘robbery’ (violent crimes), approximately 88% (53/60) of the sample present had committed violent offences (Statistical Profile: the Victorian Prison System 1995-96 to 1999-00 p.31). On average, then, informants perpetrated twice the amount of violent/serious crime as Victorian prisoners generally.
CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND AND BELIEFS

This section will investigate what being a Christian means to informants. The question of religious sincerity is examined – moreover, why some people might ‘make out’ to be Christian in prison - and where/how informants acquired their own faith. Pre-existing Christians are then asked how they could have ended up in gaol, and the impact of imprisonment on their faith. Three informants were initially tentative about calling themselves Christians due to their uncertain doctrinal beliefs and/or perceived lack of spirituality, but accepted this definition after being reassured their faith did not have to fit some predetermined model. ‘Christian,’ after all, was used in a generic not prescriptive sense so that informants could bring their own understanding and interpretation to it.  

RECONCILING WORDS AND ACTIONS - THE QUESTION OF SINCERITY

In relation to other professing Christian prisoners that they had come across, informants were asked how they could distinguish sincere from insincere inmates (Appendix C:4.1). Responses fell into a number of broad categories - “walking the talk ... not just talking about it” (Ross p.3), that is, conduct which conformed to a person’s words considered the distinguishing feature of a sincere Christian. Thus attendance at religious services alone was not a reliable indicator of devoutness; too many people exhibiting a ‘double life’

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67 Asked how they would define a Christian, informants said a Christian believed in the death-resurrection of Jesus Christ, in salvation through faith, and in eternal life. Having a ‘personal relationship’ with one’s ‘Lord and Saviour’ and trying to live out Jesus’ written word (the Bible) in daily life was stressed. To this end, spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and prayer were essential. Obedience, faithfulness, and commitment - these were the hallmarks of an authentic Christian life in which God was loved and worshipped in an all-encompassing way. Moreover a Christian ‘loved one’s neighbour as oneself” - even enemies.

68 Apart from being asked how they could distinguish sincere/insincere Christians, informants spontaneously and often repeatedly made this distinction themselves in interviews and informal conversations.
outside of church. In one sense, however, a person’s words also constituted ‘behaviour’: swearing/blaspheming, gossiping, lying, talking crime/sex, threatening others - a genuine Christian would forego all, according to informants.

In the prison crucible, where behaviour determined character, genuine Christians reportedly dealt with sin, accepting responsibility for their actions and exhibiting integrity. Strength of character was further evidenced in their uncomplaining manner, serenity, and self-control. “The genuine ones ... all had one thing in common,” noted a long-term inmate reflecting a wide held view, “They didn’t belong anymore; they didn’t fit into the prison system” (Jack p.6). Moreover a devout believer was loving, helpful, tolerant, and uncompromising, irrespective of setting or circumstance.

Whereas chaplains might be fooled by seasoned ‘con men,’ inmates who lived with them in the microcosmic world of prison claimed to be more discerning. Yet even they admitted to being fallible given the tendency among Christians to simplistically “…reduce things to neat formulas,” which resulted in a lack of insight and compassion (Reece p.5). Situations likely to confound such ‘neat formulas’ included: being at different stages of Christian growth/maturity; experiencing an angry “denial period” of feeling let down by God (Jake p.4); and, straying or ‘backsliding’ from faith (even abandoning it) for different reasons. Certainly some informants felt that none were so righteous to judge.

* * *

On the question of religious discernment, the findings reflect an obvious tension between, on the one hand, strictly judging a person by his actions, and on the other taking possible underlying considerations into account. Wary of applying simplistically ‘neat formulas’ to complex human/spiritual issues, the truly discerning walked a middle ground. However, if prisoners did misrepresent themselves to be Christians, for what possible reasons?

**MOTIVES OF THE INSINCERE / THOSE DRAWN TO CHRISTIANITY**
Based on informants’ responses to the preceding question (Appendix C:4.3), the following categories were created:

**Self-Serving** (32)
A common response was that prisoners who misrepresented themselves as Christians were more selfish than spiritual; they used Christianity for parole assistance, character references, or access to other ‘perks’ including goods and services, night activities, women, mates, and food. Such people tended to “crawl up other people’s backsides to get me this and get me that and get me something else” (Dillon p.4). Whilst manipulators were resented, some suggested that for habitual criminals it was merely “a survival skill” (Sandy p.3), indeed, that “…even the ones that went along just for the ride got something out’ve it too” (Luke p.11).

**Mistaken Perception of the ‘Insincere’** (12)
On the other hand it was suggested that the perception inmates were making out to be Christians was misinformed (and that it was wrong to judge anyway). A preferred explanation was that prisoners with sincere faith were for various reasons simply not showing it in their lives.

I don’t think they’re setting out to … intentionally pull the wool over other people’s eyes …. In most cases I think their … Christianity is a rough’n’rocky road and they’re having trouble with it, having trouble adjusting and coping (Rodney p.10).

**Utilitarian** (35)
Far from exploiting Christianity, some prisoners used it to cope. Stripped of individuality and reduced to the barest essentials within a hostile environment, it was understandable that one might cling to Christianity for survival. In this sense Christianity served a utilitarian purpose: assisting adjustment to prison, providing safety/security, something to do, access to outsiders, and enhanced self-esteem/identity.
Some’ve them initially came to the groups like the Bible classes and that through ... sheer desperation. This fellow had his cell burnt out a couple’ve times [by] inmates who were ... standing over him ... and he came to Bible studies and he ... got some succour and protection from the group y’know, and some personal strength to perhaps withstand the ... incredible pressures he was under (Simon p.15).

**Mistaken Doctrine / Theology** (12)

Others had a distorted or mistaken theology. Sincerely believing themselves to be Christians, they had an incorrect/incomplete understanding of what this entailed.

[A] lot of ‘em did go to church and ... have been baptised n’christened and they assume that that made them a Christian. And to tell them that there’s more - they’ve gotta accept a personal saviour - seems too much for a lot of ‘em; they just can’t comprehend it (Rolf p.4).

**Escapism** (17)

Less innocuous were those who tried to use Christianity “to escape from reality” (Barry p.4), “…deceiving themselves and trying to deceive others into believing that they’re very good persons” (Rex p.5). Christianity was a ‘crutch’ to feel good about oneself without facing personal responsibilities.

Whilst they’re on about that [Christianity] they don’t necessarily have to address anything else in their lives. Y’know, “I’ve been forgiven and saved so therefore I don’t need to worry about doing anything else ... God’s done it all.” And ... that isn’t the case at all - you know, we’ve done wrong we’ve got to do something about it (Don p.5).

*          *          *

This writer contends that distinguishing ‘would-be’ (fake) from sincere Christians is important, because undetected their actions serve to undermine Christian activity in prison by reinforcing a pre-existing negative image. However the findings suggest that it was uncommon for someone to be entirely deceitful about their ostensible ‘Christian’ faith. Other than religious reasons, Christianity was more likely embraced for utilitarian or ‘extrinsic’ purposes (Allport 1950), although inmates who ‘used’ Christianity in this way
risked alienating themselves from ‘sincere’ Christian and non-Christian prisoners alike. In an extremely polarised, culture having one’s ‘foot in both camps’ was likely to attract suspicion and derision. As a forthcoming section (The ‘Criminal-Christian’ Paradox) will show, the question of religious sincerity is increasingly complex. At this point we shall examine the factors surrounding acquisition of faith.

WHERE / HOW ONE ACQUIRED FAITH
A number of questions were posed vis-a-vis how informants became Christians and whether this occurred before/during incarceration (Appendix C:3.1 and 2.4 respectively). Two-thirds (40/60) of informants said that they became Christians before their imprisonment, of whom 62.5% (25/40) were paedophiles and 37.5% (15/40) were general offenders. Of the remaining third who acquired faith after entering prison 30% (6/20) were paedophiles and 70% (14/20) were general offenders. And of the entire population just eight men reported no church/Christian background whatsoever - 87% (52/60) indicating some religious background, even if only slight.

Before Imprisonment
Eleven of forty informants who acquired faith pre-imprisonment had always been Christians. Having either been born Christian, baptised, or ‘grown up with it,’ Christianity was integral to their lives. However the experience even of those who had “never known anything else” (Tom p.2) was not without problems and failings. This may explain the high number of informants overall (17 of 40, which includes at least 4 that had always been Christians) who claimed to have become, or were in the process of becoming, ‘genuine’ Christians only after their arrest and/or imprisonment. There were accounts of sincerely committed teenagers who had gradually drifted away from Christianity; of spiritual confusion, struggles, and lapsed faith; of life-threatening accidents (and other crises) bringing men to faith; and the sudden realization that one’s ‘faith’ was not real. In the face

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69 This meant that of the total number of paedophiles (31), 81% (25) were Christians before their imprisonment.
of a crisis, a feature common to the men’s stories was the vital help of other Christians vis-
a-vis their life/faith, and the providence of God.

An interesting aspect of the findings concerns seven paedophiles. Notwithstanding their apparent pre-existing faith they claimed to have experienced genuine spiritual conversion for the first time, or to have had a nominal, lapsed, or confused faith renewed/deepened either only after their arrest, in the police cells/remand, or whilst on bail awaiting court.

I believed I was a Christian, I believed I had been all my life, but I knew when I was committing my offences that something was wrong. I wasn’t aware that my faith ... was in my head but not in my heart - I wasn’t fair dinkum .... The day after my arrest ... I decided to ... tell everything and not lie .... and in the middle of praying this uniformed policeman came and handed me ... a Gideon New Testament ... and I was picking up things that I had never known, or noticed, or understood before ... I became aware that I’d made a renewal of my faith, basing my worship and my living and thinking on a spiritual level... (Max pp.3-6).

Four others who had become Christians for the first time were similarly converted after their arrest - three-quarters of them being paedophiles. This raises two possible deductions. First: that the trauma of arrest/exposure itself inspired such a godly turnabout; and the second deduction: of the twenty-five paedophiles who called themselves Christians pre-imprisonment, 40% (10/25) either had no faith or, at best, a dysfunctional faith at the time of their arrest. If ‘backslidden’ Christians whose faith was renewed during imprisonment were also taken into account, then the number of offenders with possible rationalisations (some might argue excuses) for their unacceptable behaviour would rise considerably.

**During Imprisonment**

For many of the twenty prison converts the processes leading to conversion were similar to those outlined above. One may have discovered real meaning in a prior nominal faith or Sunday school experience, or returned to the church long abandoned. Informants had left church, inter alia, because of its hypocrisy and irrelevance, unscrupulous (even abusive)
clergy/Christians, negative life experiences and perceptions of God, and unresolved personal problems. The lifestyles of a few ‘career criminals’ effectively excluded religious activity. Indeed six people converted in prison said they had no Christian background whatsoever. Prison converts also strongly agreed that other Christians (prisoners and outsiders) had significantly influenced their lives. Whereas informants generally felt their time in prison was spiritually profitable, notably more prison converts (8/20) than pre-existing Christians (3/40) reported some kind of transforming supernatural experience after being arrested/incarcerated.70

I experienced the presence of God, y’know in my cell ... I was sort’ve rendered immobile I s’pose by this incredible force, and I just sunk to m’ knees involuntary and this force kept pressing at me and I was a bit startled for a while ... I started crying, I was just washed and imbedded and electrified by this force ... this incredible power and feeling of love ... I think it was the Baptism in the Spirit ... a healing thing, it lasted for something like five hours ... I was at peace after that... (Simon p.3).

Hence the people in this study tended to be Christians prior to entering prison - paedophiles making up most of these, but comprising fewer prison converts than mainstream prisoners. Which raised the further question (Appendix C: 14.5) as to how pre-existing Christians reconciled actually ending up in prison with being Christian beforehand, the assumption being that Christianity-criminality are irreconcilable - a paradox that was not lost to prisoners: “Why am I here for the reasons I’m here is one of the most difficult and mysterious kind of questions that I guess a lot’ve people would be struggling with as well as myself” (Lindsay p.23).

THE ‘CRIMINAL-CHRISTIAN’ PARADOX

Having earlier described others who did not ‘walk the talk’ as ‘insincere,’ pre-existing

70 A further 5 pre-existing Christians reportedly had a supernatural conversion experience before being arrested. Overall prison converts (8/20) had twice the number of supernatural conversions as pre-existing Christians (8/40).
Christian offenders apparently now faced similar inconsistency in their own lives. Acknowledging this with heavy sighs and nodding gestures, their explanations made up the following broad response categories:

**Questionable Faith / Commitment** (12)

The same ‘distorted/mistaken’ faith of those who had ‘made out’ to be Christians or been attracted to Christianity was now said to have applied to themselves: “I believed I was a Christian but ... my faith ... was in my head but not in my heart” (Max p.3). Again, they were said to be “quasi-type Christians on the outside...” (Daryl p.23) who had nominal faith or who had not fully appropriated faith in their hearts. These were the men claiming to have been genuinely converted after their arrest/imprisonment. Some claimed their offences had occurred before they even became Christians - one man as long as twenty-five years earlier.

**Immature / Struggling / ‘Backslidden’ Christians** (29)

Other pre-existing Christians had previously been young/immature, impressionable, insecure, and so distraught about conflicting beliefs-behaviour that they felt confused about their faith or disqualified from being Christians. Still others believed one could remain a Christian notwithstanding wilful disobedience to God - after all a Christian was still a free-thinking, responsible moral agent. Certainly in the *battle of the flesh against the spirit* many related to a backslider’s compromised faith:

> Y’get to the dark side and y’get tempted t-to do wrong, and ya *forget*, y’forget about doin’ good for the Lord and um y-y-you stray ... from the good side (Sid p.16).

Whilst nobody suggested that ‘the devil made me do it’ some felt he contributed to their downfall:

> Satan’s not gonna give up.... The flesh wars against the spirit, and ‘Satan
walks around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour’ ... it’s a major battle” (Lewis pp.22-23).

Unresolved Problems

Psycho-sexual (23)

Offending behaviour was mainly attributed (by paedophiles: 16) to unresolved psychosexual problems including: marriage difficulties, loneliness and depression, retarded sexual development/identity, repressed sex drive/needs, pornography, and childhood sexual abuse. 71

The phenomenon of ‘dual identity’ was particularly intriguing. “Officially I was ... a preacher; I was living a great lie ... I was two different people living two different kinds of lives (Lindsay p.5). Or as one inmate starkly put it: “There must be a Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde in all of us...” (Wayne p.13). There was a tendency to block out offences, or at least to minimise and justify them in one’s mind. Certainly the need to address both spiritual and psychological problems was stressed: “[I]f you don’t get to the stage of getting yourself sorted out at a psychological level with God you’re still prone to the problems that can hit people” (Reece p.21).

Mainstream prisoners generally experienced drug and/or alcohol and gambling/financial problems.

71 Of the paedophiles who were asked whether they had been sexually abused as a child/young person (15 of 31) (Appendix C: 17.2), 80% (12/15) said that they had been sexually (and otherwise) abused - one man also sexually assaulted by prisoners. Moreover 62% (8/13) believed such abuse contributed to their own offending behaviour (Appendix C: 17.3). A person’s ability to “...identify with the child because’ ve things in their own childhood...” (Lewis p.29), it was suggested, could possibly trigger the ‘victim-offender’ cycle. The remaining 38% (5/13) were uncertain about a possible victim-offender correlation. Two men who had not been sexually abused admitted (when they were youngsters) to either engaging in consenting sexual activity with other children or developing voyeuristic interest watching homosexual acts between them. At least several non-sex offenders were also sexually violated as children.
Inadequate support (7)

Facing excessive problems without sufficient support from Christians also contributed to a person’s downfall. In some cases requested help was unavailable either before or after offending; on the other hand help was resisted through shame or fear of exposure/reprisals, driving one even further down.

I was trying to get up enough courage to go and see a priest. Basically ended up going there and ... it was sort’ve like very pitiful that when I confessed to him ... he said that I have a sickness, and just left it at that (Sid pp.16-17).

Additional explanations (10)

Criminality was also described as impulsive/uncharacteristic: a domestic dispute hitting flashpoint. Some paedophiles claimed mental blanks had impaired recollection of (alleged) offences; others professed innocence or guilt to lesser charges, or admitted selfishness simply overrode consideration for victims and the consequences. Still others explained their inclination towards children over adults on bad experiences with adults, or considered children easy/attractive targets.  

* * *

Whereas most informants were ostensibly Christians pre-imprisonment, the findings suggest that they were ‘extrinsically’ religious not devout - nominalism commonplace among churchgoers. That such people might have come to ‘real’ faith via the means described is not extraordinary. However the fact that 62.5% (25/40) were convicted  

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72 According to paedophiles (Appendix C: 17.4) children could not hurt offenders, were trusting and less likely to inform, and one had power over children and opportunity to offend. Moreover, conditioning may have created ‘willing’ participants: children accustomed to sexual abuse like pornography, for example, considering it ‘normal.’ They may also have been manipulated through bribes, anticipated pleasure, or threats of violence. Again, viewing sexual activity as a game or prior experimentation with older children were possible factors that attracted children to paedophiles. On the other hand, some children had allegedly exaggerated/ lied about offences. Finally, paedophiles believed society’s neglect of its children contributed to their plight. Ours, they charged, was a self-serving society that deprived children of positive role models and love.
paedophiles presents another possible scenario: one of evil men drawn to churches to prey on children. The truth of this was not disputed; some offenders admitted as much themselves. But was it the only explanation? The findings show that at least some paedophiles genuinely struggled to reconcile faith-offending in the community, seemingly caught in a kind of moral tug-of-war between ‘flesh and spirit.’ As the Apostle Paul put it: “...the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice ... O wretched man that I am!”  

Variously confused and immature, racked with temptation, guilt (as we shall see), and other psychosexual problems, is it not conceivable that one could be both paedophile and earnest believer? Without clear evidence to the contrary, and setting personal prejudice aside, this writer suggests that the testimony of these people should not be cynically dismissed. Certainly an imperative rests on the wider Christian community both to believe and help them given that all Christians are sinners, according to doctrine, and thereby prohibited from judging others. 

THE EFFECT OF IMPRISONMENT ON FAITH

Given that two-thirds of prisoners had become Christians pre-imprisonment, and in order to determine the impact of imprisonment on their faith, they were asked if going to prison had had a positive or negative effect (Appendix C:2.5). Eighty-three percent (35/42) said their experience was positive overall; 12% (5/42) had struggled, trying to work through personal/faith issues; and only two informants said it was negative. The data generated various sub-categories - subsumed for convenience within the following two:

Positive Experience

The faith of half this group (18/35) initially weakened in prison but was duly renewed and

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73 Book of Romans, chapter 7, versus 19 and 24.

74 Book of Romans, chapter 3, verse 23.

75 Whereas the total number of people who were Christians pre-imprisonment is 40, there are 42 responses here because two informants gave answers that fell into more than one response category.
strengthened, lapses attributable to the shock of incarceration and other difficulties - particularly among first-timers and especially paedophiles who reported terrible victimisation.

I was really bashed up badly, and for about a fortnight I was locked away so nobody could see me - because of all th'facial damage' n everything ... and it took me eighteen months before I started losing that fear (Rolf pp.2-3).

Compounding this was a sense of abandonment by everyone, including God - with whom those who claimed wrongful imprisonment were especially upset. Yet such setbacks and difficulties considered inherent to prison life were overcome; sheer necessity often making paedophiles more reliant on God than others.

[P]rison can be a pretty dangerous and unpleasant and nasty and untrustworthy place ... Since coming in here I’ve learned lessons in drawing closer and being totally dependant on Him; I’ve grown immensely... (Richie p.2).

Indeed the reflective time and space afforded by imprisonment was instrumental in revitalising faith. Thus could a captive say, “I’m glad that I came here and ... became stronger and picked up my faith again...” (Jon p.3). To this end reading/applying the Bible, prayer, and church attendance was considered a fundamental, maturing way of life. Only the strongest, independent men did not consider others vital to their Christian development. Former church members/ministers, Christian friends and family, chaplains and volunteers, fellow/former prisoners, even prison officers - all provided invaluable encouragement and support.

**Negative Experience**

Seven Christians entering prison struggled with faith overall, two chronically.

[G]oing to prison has taken away all the trappings ... those who have been your backstops ... and left me at lots of times with nothing ... You come
back to the basic question of ‘Where is the God in your life? Is there a God in your life? Does it mean anything? What does it mean?’ (Tom p.3).

Prison had not destroyed their faith; their very lives needed salvaging. It was as if they had been devastated by a series of crises which culminated in, and were compounded by, their imprisonment. Which is why, fearful of attracting further negative attention, whatever faith they did possess was usually played down. It is worth noting that of these seven all had long prison sentences, four were paedophiles, all three marriages were in trouble, and five had some kind of Pentecostal background.

* * *

Going to prison clearly enhanced not hindered the faith of pre-existing Christians, which is consistent with the aforementioned number who reported experiencing true faith only after their arrest/incarceration. Exposed, condemned, banished to arguably the most anti-religious place, their faith not only survived severe testing but also flourished. Indeed the hostile prison environment itself seems to partly account for this. In a sense reflecting the nineteenth-century penitential ideal, it is precisely when the individual has nothing left, and is most vulnerable, that he may truly apprehend and rely upon God. However the findings (reinforced elsewhere) also suggest that few prisoners were able to sustain their faith alone. Christian support within/outside prison was crucial to long-term, positive outcomes - especially for the seven prisoners who had badly struggled with their faith. These men’s enormous personal problems appeared to be exacerbated by distorted religious beliefs/expectations. To alleviate some of their suffering, clearly their faith needed to be revised. As with all those who had entered prison with a pre-existing faith, ironically, it seemed imprisonment had actually helped free them of some damaging religious ‘baggage.’

THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Having considered the backgrounds and beliefs of Christian prison inmates, we now examine the nature and extent of their religious practices, or, how they ‘walk the talk.’ An expectation of the writer was that within a largely hostile and irreligious prison subculture, the members of a minority Christian group would bind to each other and to their faith using
whatever resources were available. Following an overview of their level of involvement in religious activity, the two principal types of religious practice (personal/group) will be discussed - ‘religious congruence’ among prisoners featuring as a positive outcome.

**EXTENT OF RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT**

The question was posed: *Are you involved in any religious activities in prison? If so, what kind?* In relation to currently serving prisoners only, 91% (41/45) reportedly engaged in organised religious activities in custody - paedophiles (96%-27/28) to a greater extent than mainstream prisoners (82%-14/17). Moreover 55% (25/45) were involved in everything available, the rest more selectively for reasons within and outside of their control. A commonly cited shortcoming, for example, was insufficiency of religious services (especially during prison reception) and/or lack of denominational choice.

> [W]hen I went to [prison] having no access to any service - in fact hearing nothing from chaplains for four weeks even - was quite traumatic ... It was impossible ... to find if there were any [religious services] .... And although two of my friends had organised with the ... chaplains theoretically to meet me I never met one until the last day I was there ... I was without a Bible for ten days ... that was frightening, I felt really lost... ([Kim] p.3).

Consistently avoided activities (primarily church services) were considered either too formal, irrelevant, confusing, threatening, hypocritical, ‘unspiritual,’ or doctrinally unsound. Largely for these reasons - besides work commitments and experiencing a “fluctuation stage” in faith ([Allan] p.2) - three of five prisoners abstained from organised activities altogether, although they had been involved previously. However all five maintained a private devotional life.

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76 Ex-prisoners had been involved in religious activities to a similar extent (93%-14/15).

77 These issues will be more thoroughly examined in the section on chaplaincy and volunteer services.
TYPE OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

There were two principal kinds of religious practice: personal and group related. The degree of intersection between these was largely determined by individual character, (religious) experience, and needs. For example whereas loners preferred their privacy, the young in faith and vulnerable relied more on group support to survive. Generally, however, prisoners’ faith was practically embodied in both ways.

Personal Devotion

A personal devotional life was considered essential to spirituality - greater discipline producing stronger faith. All informants practised some kind of private devotions; prayer (meditation) followed by Bible reading most common. Daily devotionals were also popular, providing disciplined scripture reading and timely messages. Other literature included Christian autobiographies, magazines/newspapers, ‘how to’ and denominational prayer books.

Out of necessity, enterprising prisoners found substitutes for scarce resources. Hence inadequate services were offset electronically through Christian radio and TV - taped sermons and gospel music enhancing religious experience.

Sharing faith/evangelising and helping others (including chaplains in their duties) was considered an important religious activity; likewise personal talks with chaplains/volunteers and interaction among Christian prisoners themselves.

78 Except perhaps when entering prison, the Bible was reasonably accessible. Revelational to those who had never read the Bible, even experienced readers were reportedly enlightened through it in prison.

79 Those preferring casual contact avoided organised activities, while others limited contact to only one or two others, if any, outside of these groups. For personal/doctrinal reasons, still others kept to themselves regardless of possible group involvement - several maintaining religious anonymity.
Group Activity

Informants were asked whether they ever participated with other Christian inmates in group activity (Appendix C: 12.2). Seventy-five per cent (34/45) of current prisoners said they did, whilst 22% (10/45) said they did in the past. \(^{80}\)

Church services

A 76% (32/42) attendance rate among current prisoners meant church services were the best attended group activity. \(^{81}\) Though generally willing to attend anything, prisoners were critical of the limited choice of services - especially Pentecostals whose denomination was not officially represented within chaplaincy. Other impediments included prison transfers, work commitments, fear of victimization, aversion to groups/church, and distrust of chaplains.

Bible study-discussion groups

Regarded the most important but least attended religious activity, a mere 27.5% (11/40) of prisoners participated in official Bible study-discussion groups. \(^{82}\) The main reason?: Bible studies were unavailable - some compensating with correspondence courses or material solicited through Christian TV. Chaplains and volunteers, notably Prison Fellowship, ran Bible studies.

‘Cell’ groups

Cell groups were informal fellowship groups established by inmates for inmates. Sometimes an adjunct to official services, they were usually created to meet an unmet need, for example where there was no/inadequate Bible study. Moreover these groups facilitated prayer, discussion, and general support, and even extended to living together and teaching illiterates to read. However cell groups were relatively uncommon - 79% (31/39) of current

\(^{80}\) At 93% (14/15), former prisoners had a considerably higher rate of group activity.

\(^{81}\) Former prisoners attended church services at a lower rate of 60% (9/15).

\(^{82}\) By comparison, 64% (9/14) of former prisoners attended an official Bible study group.
prisoners having not had any previous involvement. Less common groups included: personal development, sporting-recreational, unofficial music and (gospel) singing, official concerts, prayer, and art/painting.

**Importance of the Group to an Individual**

Asked whether group involvement was important to them (Appendix C:12.4), virtually all informants (52/55) agreed that it was important (or ‘very/quite important’) - the main response category being that the group positively influenced faith. In a demoralizing environment it provided spiritual support and fellowship and a mutual source of hope and encouragement. Group activity also offered temporary respite from prison life; for perhaps an hour or two a week one could ‘escape’ the endless tedium and feel ‘normal’ again. Further, the group provided practical support: personal safety, goods and services, help with problems, and empathetic friendship - which often endured beyond prison.

It was somewhere where they could talk ... the company of others if you like, and it was safe company ... They were offered a hand stretched out with a gift; whether it was a gift of knowledge of the Bible, of Christianity, or the gift of a cup’ve tea’n’biscuit, or just ... a friendly ear for a few minutes (*Jack* p.22).

Although group members (17/25) said they were (likely to be) negatively affected when their group disbanded (Appendix C:12.5), many believed they would cope because their “...faith is in God not the circumstances...” (*Reece* p.20). While this might strengthen relationship with God, those with poorly integrated faith were considered vulnerable.

**RELIGIOUS CONGRUENCE**

Informants were then asked whether denominationalism created problems among Christian prisoners (Appendix C:12.6). Most current prisoners (86%-38/44) did not consider this a

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83 Compared to only 20% (3/15) of former prisoners who had not been involved in a cell group.
serious problem; in spite of their churches’ traditional differences, they generally experienced ‘congruence of religious belief.’\(^8^4\) Nationality, colour, and denomination - all were subsumed by a common belief in God; though expression of faith may have differed, they essentially embraced the same fundamental and unifying creed: “[T]he basic belief’s the same; we all believe in Jesus...” (*Don* p.12).

Enforced coexistence in prison created tension but also tolerance. Others’ habits, language, personalities, beliefs, all had to be tolerated to some extent. For the Christian prisoner this usually meant adopting an ecumenical outlook.

I had a problem with talkin’ t’ other Christians from different denominations ... But I’ve learned now ... it doesn’t matter what church you go to ... there are definitely Christians from all different denominations (*Anastasius* p.13).

Bound physically and by a common belief, with relatively few supports and outlets, prison taught (perhaps forced) people to be (more) open to and appreciative of others: \(^8^5\) “Prison

\(^8^4\) However over half (59%-16/27) surmised that denominationalism would bother them post-release - the possibility of encountering a controlling, condemning, and judgmental spirit within and between churches an understandable concern for men familiar with these. While no (14/14) former prisoners had trouble with denominationalism in prison, it did affect them post-release - as we shall see.

\(^8^5\) The more homogeneous a group, presumably the greater the likelihood there was of tolerance and cooperation. Such was A-Unit: comprising about forty middle-aged to elderly paedophiles segregated for their safety from other prisoners. Entering their small unit in the midst of a tense security prison was disarming. Informants attributed the relaxed atmosphere to offenders’ compatible character, their sense of safety, and the humane treatment of specialist staff. Whereas shortcomings in religious servicing were identified, A-Unit inmates could at least explore and express their faith free of the (fear of) persecution evident elsewhere. Fated to live together they pulled together, putting personal and religious differences aside in a rare display of ecumenism that embraced even adherents of other faiths. However, more than a religious gathering, as we shall see, theirs was a persecuted minority group - a kind of socio-spiritual collective that forged a legitimate micro-culture within the dominant prison sub-culture. In a sanctuary where basic human needs (of security, relationship, etc) are met, it is reasonable that religious faith would also benefit. Whether or not the ideal next step is a Christian-run facility
showed me that denominations aren’t much different than racism... *(Daniel p.11).* Conversely, dissension among Christians was attributed to doctrinal issues (‘speaking in tongues’ among the more divisive, even between inmates and chaplains/volunteers), religious elitism, rivalry, and being judgmental.

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Consistent with their belief that Christians should ‘walk-the-talk,’ prisoners actively participated in organised religious activities. Indeed, regardless of denominational lines, some attended everything possible. However devoutness alone did not explain attendances; often there was little if any choice available, with access to religious services varying considerably between prisons.

Religious service attendance rates were generally proportionate to the level of service provision. Hence church services were reasonably well attended simply because they existed - though frequently not, if ever, according to denominational choice. Conversely, in spite of its popularity Bible study participation was negligible because the service was generally unavailable, which is inexcusable in this writer’s opinion. Arguably the most profitable of all religious functions, Bible study-discussion groups provide an informal forum for the vital exchange of ideas/feelings and relationship cultivation – which is unachievable through correspondence courses or Christian TV. Meanwhile the success of ‘cell’ groups depends on having competent mentors/leaders - their recruitment/training perhaps a matter for religious service providers.

A comparison of prisoners and ex-prisoners shows that both groups were highly involved in religious activities (91% and 93% respectively), and that every individual had some form of private devotional life. However marked differences exist in their levels of group activity: 75% for prisoners and 93% for former prisoners. Yet, while only 27.5% of

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shall be considered in a forthcoming section.
prisoners compared to 64% of ex-prisoners attended Bible study, more prisoners (76%) than ex-prisoners (60%) attended church services.

The data suggests, then, that both current Christian prisoners and their predecessors actively engaged in (private/corporate) religious activities, but that former prisoners had significantly more group involvement - especially Bible studies (reportedly much less available to current prisoners) and cell groups. It appears church services were reasonably available to both groups, although some people deliberately avoided them. Moreover, a few ‘hermits’ did not engage in any Christian activities; either through choice or dissatisfaction with official services, theirs was a far more private spirituality. Yet, however the prisoners of this study practised faith, a constant among them was a personal devotional life. Novice or seasoned Christian, ‘one-out’ or sharing a cell, ridiculed or reinforced - whatever their circumstance, in diverse ways all men prayed and read and worshipped God in prison.

THE (POSITIVE & NEGATIVE) IMPLICATIONS OF A CHRISTIAN FAITH

Having looked at the religious backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of Christian prisoners, this section will investigate whether Christianity makes a qualitative difference to prison life. To determine the effect of faith on their lives, informants were asked: Does being a Christian make any (positive/negative) difference to your life in prison? In what ways? (Appendix C:7.1). The majority (93%-55/59) said faith had had a positive effect on their lives overall. In a general sense, more than anything faith/God was said to provide (spiritual and practical) hope, help, and strength to cope with imprisonment.

I cry out to the Lord ... he’s there when I’m battlin’ ... when I wanna give

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86 Having only ever experienced life as Christians, two of the remaining four informants could not discern faith making any difference to their lives in prison; the sanctimonious attitude of the other two creating problems for them amongst other prisoners and staff.
up, when I’m sick’ve th’routine, sick’ve the bullshit in gaol, sick’ve being locked up ... he helps me get through it all (Bert p.23).

More specifically, informants’ responses fell into (and across) a number of broad categories. The main areas that Christianity helped them were:

**Purpose, Meaning, and Direction in Life** (35)

In a demoralising situation faith offered something to believe in and live for. According to informants, unlike most inmates Christians were optimistic about their prison sentences and life post-release.

[Faith] gives me a different perspective on life and what it’s all about and how to look on this whole experience in a more positive way ... rather than, *This is just one big hell, and there’s nothing good and nothing useful about it at all ...* It helped to change my attitude to ... being sentenced and spending time in prison ... It makes it a bit easier emotionally to cope with (Lindsay p.13).

For long-term prisoners especially, one’s philosophical view of time could be crucial. Faith also offered an alternative lifestyle, one resistant to the inmate code that was more fulfilling as it guarded against the prevailing apathy and aimlessness.

[I]t’s led me is to live each day to the full ... living in the moment and appreciating everything as it is. And my life is better now, regardless of the fact I’m in gaol, than it’s ever been before ... I do useful things with my time; I-I-I wasted y’know twenty odd years ... drinking and using drugs... (Richard pp.7-8).

**Well-being, Self-esteem, and Survival** (44)

Having God to rely on provided a sense of safety, even invincibility, which was complemented by the support of other Christians. As a result, despite facing enormous pressures, Christians were reportedly more relaxed and at peace. Composure, patience, a sense of mental ease and inner freedom were all attributed to Christian faith.
I feel very free. I have a freedom in my mind which I’ve never ever had before. I feel released within myself, I don’t feel burdened, I don’t feel depressed... I have a peace that I don’t believe I could possibly have if I wasn’t a Christian ... I have joy... (Rolf p.9).

Being a Christian positively affected the way prisoners felt about themselves as they learned to overcome fears and insecurities and to develop strength of character.

I think that if I hadn’t have become a Christian ... I’d’ve kept shrinking and shrinking and shrinking inside, and I really don’t think that I would’ve survived... (Kelly p.9).

Indeed, without faith at least fourteen prisoners doubted that they would have survived prison unscathed - most suggesting they would/might have committed suicide.

I would’ve killed misself straight off, no problem. I wouldn’t have done this time ... I couldn’t a done it ... God gives me the strength ... when I wanna give up Jesus just keeps me goin’... (Bert p.11).

Significantly, all these men had received (very) long prison sentences and most were paedophiles. Those who remained suicide risks were especially worrying, having actually attempted suicide in prison and before.

**Self-Control** (43)

Among the most significant outcomes of faith was self-control, particularly in a violent ‘dog-eat-dog’ culture where restraint over anger and aggression was extremely difficult.

I’d be one very, very angry son-of-a-bitch; I’d be tearing’ th’place apart ... without that faith ... there’s no way that I could be as I am now (Bob p.6).

Faithlessness would probably have meant being ‘one of the boys,’ a ‘crim,’ into ‘rorting,’ lying, thieving, ‘stand over,’ ‘bagging’ others, and blaspheming. Faith also affected one’s
moral outlook re sex and especially drug use/dealing: “I could easily ... take a drug and no-one would know, but I know that my God would know, and that’s enough” (Anastasius p.12). However for all the benefits derived through faith many stressed that it was an ongoing struggle.

**Relationships and Relating (28)**

Christianity enhanced pre-existing relationships, helped establish new ones, and assisted general intercourse with prisoners/staff. Faith provided the patience, tolerance, and wisdom to effectively deal with other people, many whom were problematic and difficult. Rather than *react* under stress informants were able to *act* constructively.

One bloke he ... couldn’t get extra food so he called me a dog right ... I sat there and thought about it, never hit him, got him some food (cos I worked in the kitchen), and he said, “Thanks, I’m sorry about that.” So, there’s a big difference ... Before, straight away I would’ve went bang and then done something worse to him (Luke pp.7-8).

Faith also engendered respect, compassion, and support for others - even ‘untouchables’ and enemies.

* * *

Receptacles of human misery and pathos, prisons are depressing, degrading, dangerous places where survival is paramount. For the prisoners of this study survival equated to faith in God, which provided the hope for them to cope with imprisonment - especially those who had already served long sentences, with years remaining. For them faith-hope were synonymous; a bulwark to despair, providing meaning amidst futility and a vision beyond interminable time. Even in life’s mundane decisions faith offered alternatives to the status quo - not always popular, but life giving. Obedient to a higher standard than the prisons’ standards or their own, in numerous ways Christians exhibited remarkable self-control - particularly gaol-hardened career-crims whose lives had been turned around. Faith also enhanced interpersonal relations as Christians embraced others without fear or favour - love (of God, self, others) their standard.
Clearly being a Christian made a profound difference to prisoners’ lives, probably none more so than some long-term paedophiles. Fragile, ageing, tormented inwardly and by those around, theirs might literally have been a ‘life’ sentence. Indeed without their faith suicide was likely - sometimes in spite of it for the highly vulnerable.

**AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE**

Informants were asked: *Does being a Christian affect your attitude towards the authorities and prison rules in any way?* (Appendix C:8.1), 88% (46/52) saying their faith had had a positive affect on them. They were reportedly more helpful, honest, understanding, and civil vis-a-vis authorities, and had greater patience, tolerance, and self-control.

The whole thing with faith is it doesn’t restrain me ... it liberates me ... cos if I feel I wanna get this officer, right, cos he’s really upset me, then I’m restraining myself because of the consequences. With faith it’s, “Oh he’s done something nasty, but that’s not really a problem,” and it sort of like, it lifts the restraint of having to attack him (*Franco* pp.6-7).

An altered perception of authority helped explain this attitude change: “I’ve learnt t’respect authority now because authority comes from God ... so if I respect them I respect God” (*Bert* p.11). Respecting (or at least accepting) authority made for more compliant, law-abiding prisoners, which, in turn, might attract officers’ trust and favour. Occasionally rapport developed even to the point (unacceptable by prison standards) of friendship. In spite of being mistreated by prison officers some men even prayed for them.

**Rule Violations**

A further question was put to all informants: *As a Christian, have you ever been charged or in trouble with the authorities or with other prisoners? If so, briefly, what happened?* (Appendix C:8.2). Sixty-two percent (24/39) said they had not been charged or in trouble with the authorities/other prisoners - paedophiles claiming substantially fewer incidents
than mainstream prisoners (20%-3/15 compared to 46%-613). However some men preferred to be punished than to compromise their faith/principles.

I’ve been into trouble for what I see as Christian values, standing up for them ... because the Bible says if y’don’t stand up for your values then you’re not doin’ th’right thing (Glynn p.9).

These exceptions aside, informants believed they were generally better behaved and less troublesome than their non-Christian counterparts.

I think Christian prisoners tend to accept the situation that they’re in and don’t go around causing trouble. Many others can just make life a real misery for the officers; they try t’ get ’round th’ rules and they’re continually fighting the system causing trouble with other prisoners (Richie p.9).

Apart from traffic fines, 85% (11/13) of ex-prisoners said they had not offended or been in trouble with the authorities since their release - those who had, mentioning drink-related misdemeanours and undisclosed crimes for which they could have been charged. Ex-prisoners reported a more balanced and positive outlook towards society’s laws and the authorities, and tried to respect and uphold the law. They understood the law was necessary, applied to everyone, and that consequences followed non-compliance. Although aware, and wary, of police/authority figures who abused their power, informants still believed that “...as a Christian ... I have to stand by the rules” (Jake p.8).

* * *

In the highly regimented prison environment prisoners’ traditional enemies are ‘screws.’ Representing the human face of a bureaucratic system deemed cruel and unjust, prison officers are usually regarded with contempt by ‘crims,’ resulting in their reluctant compliance with the prison rules. However, a Christian response was different as it was founded on attitude (and behaviour) change, trust, and self-discipline - a significant shift.

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87 Incidents mainly involved prison officers and included prohibited smoking and ‘home brews,’ damaging property, driving whilst on leave, arguing/fighting, insolence, and ‘standing up for one’s rights.’
from enforced to volitional rule observance. Although the level of prison and post-prison rule violations were impressive (62% and 85% respectively remained trouble free), it should be noted these results are solely based on unsubstantiated self-reports. In principle they do, however, suggest that religion does inhibit rule-violating behaviour among prisoners.

Christianity helped break down traditional barriers between officers-prisoners, especially if they shared common beliefs. A poignant reminder of this for the writer was an officer kneeling with prisoners in a cell praying - such intimacy risking a backlash from crims (against ‘screw lovers’) and officers (against ‘crim-lovers’). Improved staff-inmate relations could in turn reduce management/security issues, thereby improving morale overall.

NON-CHRISTIAN INMATES AND PRISON PERSONNEL

For all the positive implications of prison religion, Christians were a minority group in prison who faced possible opposition from other inmates and staff alike. This section, then, will investigate how non-Christian prisoners and staff both perceive and treat Christian inmates.

Others’ Perceptions of Christian Prisoners

Informants were asked what they believed most non-Christian prisoners thought of Christians; likewise, what prison staff thought of them (Appendix C:11.1-2). Their respective answers created a number of categories that, for economy, are presented in précis.

Prisoners

88 Neither were these results compared with institutional/police figures to establish their validity; it is only assumed that they are better.
According to informants, non-Christian prisoners generally considered Christians manipulative hypocrites who used religion to avoid responsibility for their actions and further their own ends. They were weak, brainwashed ‘Bible bashers,’ deserving of contempt and to be treated with suspicion - especially ‘rock spiders’ and ‘tamps’ (paedophiles) who even presumed to call themselves Christians!\(^{89}\)

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\text{[T]he moment you become a Christian you’re a weak bastard ... there’s something’ wrong with you, you oughta be suspected ... They think that once you become a Christian you become a dog - you’re gonna give ’em up or ya gonna tell on ’em or whatever (}\text{Luke p.5)}.\]

At best non-Christians thought only ‘whackers’ (fools) entertained religious beliefs.

**Prison Staff and Authorities**

Prison officers were not much different: they were generally cynical of religious inmates who were, at worst, exploitative hypocrites or fools. Some exhibited mixed feelings or professional neutrality; a few interacted positively (especially Christian officers), encouraging inmates in their faith. The attitude of the prison Governor/Operations Manager vis-a-vis religious ministry was considered crucial, particularly if his/her underlings opposed it (Appendix C:11.4). While there were accounts of positive intervention by Governors, the prison authorities’ general attitude to Christian prison ministry was considered negative - too many accused of being apathetic, not supportive, and prejudiced. Constrained by law (and unwanted publicity) to provide religious services,

\(^{89}\) Asked what they thought about these paedophiles (Appendix C: 17.1), mainstream Christian prisoners also had mixed feelings about them. Compelled by Jesus’ example to love despised and rejected people, some accepted them regardless that they would probably be stigmatised; others’ acceptance was much more conditional: based, for example, on whether or not paedophiles ceased offending. Ironically mainstream Christians viewed these paedophiles in a similar way to what non-Christian prisoners generally viewed Christians: that is, paedophiles used religion to cope with guilt and imprisonment, and were either genuine/remorseful or manipulating opportunists who only regretted being caught.
it was suggested, the authorities only “tolerate it because they have to” (Harold p.18).  

Possible Trouble Because of Faith

Informants were then asked whether they had ever experienced trouble or been treated unfairly in prison because of their faith (Appendix C:11.3). Seventy-five percent (42/56) reported some kind of negative reaction to their faith (mostly verbal abuse/ridicule) from prison officers and especially inmates. Again, for the sake of economy, the response categories created from their accounts of victimization are presented in summary form.

Some Christians were considered timid and weak, ‘soft’ targets to be ‘stood over’ (intimidated) and manipulated.

I had some pretty awful experiences in there when I became a Christian. Like sometimes me whole cell’d be ripped up. This one particular time they’d taken all me dunny paper, streamed it all around the cell and tipped all’ve me talcum powder everywhere, and tipped me shit bucket all over me mattress an’ all the piss and that over it and I had to carry that mattress down while they were all standing there laughing and carrying on (Kelly p.15).

While prison officers were not accused of violence, at least six religious motivated assaults (and attempted assaults) by prisoners on Christians were alleged - including “the occasional punch in the face or whack over the head” (Jake p.16) to a potentially life-threatening situation. Rather than ‘turn the other cheek,’ some Christians physically retaliated. To have had a reputation for being ‘bad’ or ‘tough’ before becoming a Christian also held one

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90 Of particular concern was the treatment of three highly regarded chaplains - two having left prison chaplaincy in the course of the present research, the other just prior. All confirmed to the writer that they had been undermined by hostile elements within the system.

91 While only 9% (4/42) identified prison officers/staff as the cause of their troubles, and 24% (10/42) identified other inmates, 67% (28/42) said that both groups were responsible. Conversely 25% (14/56) said they were not victimized because of their faith - all but two men attributing this to their discreet (but non-compromising) approach which excluded ‘Bible-bashing’ and proselytising.
in good stead. Paedophiles were victimised most but normally for their crimes not faith, although their perceived religious hypocrisy inflamed many. More so than prisoners, prison officers were accused of disrupting religious services by mocking and obstructing those wanting to attend.

Some ... are against Christianity and they’ ll sorta do everything they can to stop ya from following it through. One day I was coming to a church service and ... this particular officer ... was sitting at the desk, he knew I was there [at the gate], he was having a cup’ve coffee and then when he finished his coffee he went into the toilet. He was in there for awhile and he come out and just sat down and read the paper, and had another cup’ ve coffee, and I was just waitin’ to get through the gate (Wilbur p.6).

Moreover there was alleged interference with religious worship, damage to and confiscation of religious materials, and discrimination against Christian friends/visitors - including chaplains and volunteers. Some felt that such adversity actually strengthened faith. Conversely, positive interaction also occurred: non-Christians occasionally avoided profanity around Christians and respected their religious devotions. Others went even further:

I had prison officers ... sit in my room and tell me their family problems. And the heavies of the gaol ... used to call me ‘Rev’ and they called me cell ‘the chapel’ and they’d sit down and just talk to me (Daniel p.5).

The Pressure to Compromise

Out of concern for what others might think/say and do, informants (44/53) believed that prison life could cause religious faith to be compromised (Appendix C:11.5). Under pressure to fit-in and uphold the ‘inmate code’ conformity was synonymous to survival, especially in tough prisons where the sheer unnaturalness, evil, and “soul destroying ... heaviness of the place...” (Larry p.6) increased vulnerability. Ultimately, to compromise faith was not to abandon it, argued some; others, that a true Christian could never compromise.

By overtly calling yourself a Christian you’re putting yourself on a pedestal,
and it’s a gift to other people who have nothing else better to do ... I mean they’re always lookin’ for someone to bag ... to attack, whatever ... And when you’re aware of that you begin to understand that, well, y’know I’ve gotta get through this sentence and I’ve gotta live in this place, and ... I certainly don’t wanna make them my enemy. So in that sense you would compromise your desire to proselytise, or to be public about your Christian faith (Terry p.13).

* * *

According to the above findings, then, non-Christian prisoners and officers alike generally viewed Christian prisoners with contempt and suspicion - the attitude even of some prison authorities questionable. The outcome: victimisation; Christians allegedly abused, vilified, obstructed, discriminated against, intimidated, and assaulted because of their faith - some veritable prison martyrs.

Aside from personally experiencing religious discrimination as a prisoner, the writer actually encountered it in the field of research among (usually lower ranked) prison officers who openly disparaged religious inmates to the writer. The attitude, ‘They’re an incorrigible bunch of scumbags’ (low, worthless people) was common, especially among officers of a sex-offender prison who should have retained professional neutrality like their A-Unit (footnote 80) counterparts given the importance of their work. The unfortunate irony here is that offenders may have been persecuted at a time when they were genuinely trying to reform themselves - possibly causing their faith to be undermined as a result. While such behaviour is endemic among prisoners and hence not easily controllable, it should definitely not be countenanced from prison staff.

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

Given the importance of pre-existing relationships to prisoners, informants were also asked what family and friends thought about their Christian faith, and whether it had affected

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92 In light of the prison’s rural location and the nature of the work, a limited prospective staff pool may partly account for this perceived shortcoming.
relations between them in any way (Appendix C:13.1 and 13.2 respectively). Eighty-nine percent (32/36) said their faith had affected relationships (especially with family members), most in a positive way. This occurred through enhanced self-esteem and communication, greater patience, trust, and respect for others: “It’s helped me ... to find more positive aspects within me and feel good about me and let go negatives and ... respect other people more ... there’s trust” (Allan p.19). There was reportedly reconciliation with fathers and especially estranged wives/families, besides the strengthening of several troubled marriages.

Once my faith picked up ... I started getting contact with my family; they begun writing me letters and I’d begun replying .... After a few months of writing they actually came and started visiting (Jake p.18).

On the other hand some pre- and post-prison marriages of long-term inmates experienced difficulties or failed. Clearly marriage did not necessarily succeed just because a couple were Christians. However the findings did suggest the likely establishment of strong bonds when prisoners had regular contact with loved ones who embraced and/or affirmed their faith. Meanwhile non-religious family members/friends either caused informants to feel shame and intimidation, or were more open to and supportive of their faith. Still others were unaffected, having no family/friends or little to do with them. Finally, honouring faith sometimes required termination of friendships.

93 Three men had Christian marriages in prison. At the time of interview one marriage had survived, another couple were estranged, the third marriage having dissolved after the prisoner’s release - as did several other post-imprisonment marriages. Further, the marriages of at least two imprisoned child molesters ended after their incarceration, with several other marriages (mainly involving paedophiles) experiencing serious problems.

94 The writer believes that other factors were important: such as age/maturity, interpersonal skills, nature of crime, sentence length, and support network.

95 At least 18 informants said family/friends thought their faith was a good/positive thing - 15 informants having Christian families/wives/friends.
It was hard coz one of my best mates jumped in front of bullets for me in armed robberies and everything, and here I am saying, “I want nothin’ t’do with you.” But I had t’do it ... t’change my life ... If I didn’t do that then there was no point me becoming a Christian (Rick p.26).

* * *

The findings show that prisoners’ Christian faith generally had a salutary effect on relationships with family members/friends. This is especially encouraging given that many relationships had pre-existing problems and/or were damaged by pressures associated with imprisonment. In many ways marriage was the greatest beneficiary and casualty: on the one hand pre-existing rifts were healed following a prisoner’s religious turnaround; on the other hand Christian marriages broke down in prison and post-release. The writer’s experience confirms the limited data that suggests that relationships formed in prison or soon after were most vulnerable, generally being superficial and idealistic in nature. How is it possible, after all, to maintain a healthy relationship under wholly unnatural circumstances? And, as we shall see in a forthcoming section, post-release reintegration difficulties are likely to further undermine such relationships - not to mention unresolved personal issues and problems with church assimilation.

**MORAL / VALUE CHANGE**

According to 91% (42/46) of informants religion also affected values and morals - determining what is important in life and between what is right and wrong (Appendix C:14.1).

As far as possible informants wanted to live normal, decent, happy
lives, where they could be creative, pursue interests, and be content and at peace with themselves. To this end many yearned for life-giving relationships; the opportunity to give and receive love. While some sought marriage and a family, others wished that they could be reconciled to estranged children and former wives. Relationships generally were more highly valued - even the lowliest of people esteemed.

Faith provided not only new standards but also the means to (begin to) achieve them, besides helping previously unattainable ones to be realised. A new moral outlook, greater insight, honesty, and determination - all undergirded by God’s spirit - led to a renewed way of thinking and living. So radical was this change that at least nine offenders reportedly gave themselves up and/or cooperated with police. Faith also challenged existing priorities and warned against the danger and futility of materialism.

Almost unanimously (31/34) the Bible was credited with promoting morals/values (Appendix C:14.2). God spoke through it - imparting knowledge, wisdom, and instruction for right/holy living; moreover self-esteem, comfort, forgiveness, and love all derived from this inspirational book.

Asked what happens when they compromised their Christian standards (Appendix C:14.3), most (15/24) said they felt ‘bad/sorry/let down’ - repentance and confession reportedly the best way to overcome this (Appendix C:14.4).

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In the present study it was as if a moral ‘revolution’ had transformed offenders’ lives. To underscore the point, this was an actual way to live life complete with instructions and advice. For wayward, aimless men anything less was a mere theological exercise. Illustrating the extent of change in their lives, several ex-prisoners actually engaged in prison ministry.

However as earlier findings indicate (see ‘The Criminal-Christian Paradox’), the
process of coming from sinfulness into a new life can be a difficult journey, arguably hardest for those entrenched in sinfulness the deepest. Old instincts, habits, thinking patterns, environment - all served to undermine a ‘new lifestyle,’ highlighting the importance of a Christian support network in reinforcing positive change among prisoners and former inmates. The present findings revealed inadequate supports and a corresponding pattern of progression-regression among informants - moral precepts becoming torturous ideals for those battling to uphold them. (This issue will be elaborated in the section ‘Post-release Issues’). Experiencing dissonance over compromised principles, they tried to persevere in the knowledge that faith was an ongoing process of repentance over sin. Arguably their biggest stumbling block was guilt.

GUILT AND FORGIVENESS
Assuming that offenders are contrite about their crimes, the writer considers guilt resolution crucial to their long-term welfare - especially perpetrators of heinous crime. Apart from feeling guilty about victims, offenders may experience guilt over the impact of their crime(s) on victims’ families, their own families/friends, and from being condemned in the courts, the media, and in prison. In the writer’s experience (personal and as a penal practitioner) unresolved guilt can deleteriously affect a person in prison and post-release - Christianity presumably absolving the ‘sinner’ of guilt. Because the literature barely mentions how religious prisoners deal with guilt, the present study will explore the implications of guilt-forgiveness in their lives.

Informants were first asked whether or not they felt remorse for their crimes (Appendix C:6.1), 96% (46/48) expressing remorse or, if professing innocence, sorry for past offences/behaviour. In response to the next question: Do you feel guilt or forgiveness about your offences? (Appendix C:6.2), 13% (7/53) reported feeling guilt about their offences; 25% (13/53) both guilt and forgiveness; and 57% (30/53) said they felt forgiveness - the remainder giving different answers. Among current prisoners 35% (8/23) of paedophiles compared to 53% (8/15) of
guilt/forgiveness were categorised, and are summarised below.

**The Guilty**

Whereas the members of this group mostly believed that God had forgiven them for their crimes, because of the nature and gravity of their offences they could not/struggled to forgive themselves.

> [I]t consumes me ... the possible harm, damage, confusion, affliction, corruption, that I’ve caused ... One’ve the kids I was involved with ... died at fourteen in my arms from an OD ... The money I was giving him ... he was spending on smack ... so guilt, it is a big thing (*Lewis* p.11).

Even forgiving oneself did not necessarily erase painful memories of victims, which included an offender’s loved ones indirectly affected by their crimes. A few saw guilt as inescapable.

> I’ve got no doubts that God has forgiven me ... but my [guilt], that’s the consequence of the things that I’ve done, that’s my punishment (*Kuong* p.5).

Their grief palpable, such men bore the kind of destructive guilt that led *Kuong* to say he would willingly be executed if possible. Inconsolable, they considered the Christian notion of repentance-forgiveness simplistic, struggling to understand how forgiveness could just be appropriated through faith; indeed, for people who had had little if any experience of forgiveness, how it was even possible. For others forgiveness depended on more than only penitence: “I believe and know that God has forgiven me, [but] I will only be able t’forgive myself when I get outside and can prove to *me* that I won’t ever offend again” (*Max* p.10). However guilt was also reinforced in the prison and wider community.

> I still feel guilty because you’re made t’feel guilty in here ... you’re made to feel like you’re unclean, and you’re a *scum*, and you’re you know less than a mainstream prisoners felt unqualified forgiveness (indicating more unresolved guilt among paedophiles), whilst only one ex-prisoner did not feel total forgiveness.
human .... I know God has forgiven me ... but in the eyes of the law I’ll never wipe the slate clean because it doesn’t matter what y’do there’ll always be someone that’ll remind you of it... (Leon p.7).

**The Forgiven**

Unlike the guilt-ridden, these men not only knew of God’s forgiveness but had internalised and been empowered by it. The essential difference, it seemed, was that they emphatically *believed* they had been reconciled to God/Christ by repenting of their sins and receiving his unmerited grace. “I don’t feel guilty about it now because I’ve confessed it to the Lord and I believe, you’ve just gotta believe that He’s forgiven you...” (Wilbur p.3). Repentance, in this sense, meant the *disposition* to turn your life around through feeling sorry for your sins, and not, as some of ‘the guilty’ believed, that living a godly life was a prerequisite to forgiveness.

[R]epentance not only means askin’ forgiveness, it means a complete turnaround; it means accepting what you’ve done, recognizing what you have done, admitting to what you’ve done, and a complete turnaround from it (Ken p.7).

However even the forgiven had reportedly had to overcome guilt - the ability to forgive oneself being crucial. Self-forgiveness was seldom instantaneous, particularly for serious crimes that usually involved a long and painful process. Acceptance/support from other Christians was an important (for some, essential) part of this healing process.

I s’pose the main thing that’s helped me feel forgiven ... is that Christian people have actually been nice to me, cared for me for who I am ... It helps me to see that [although] I’ve done this I don’t have to stay that type of person ... I can be something else (Allan p.7).

Although infrequent, offender-victim reconciliation was considered vital.\(^97\) There seemed

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\(^97\) Assisting victims was considered the most likely way to enhance one’s sense of forgiveness: “If I could somehow *ease* the pain of my victims; if I could take away their burden from them...” (Don p.6). Short of changing the past, offenders yearned for forgiveness by their victims (who included one’s family) or to be reconciled with them - which benefited offenders
to be a delicate interplay between self-forgiveness and a sense of God’s forgiveness and the forgiveness of victims. Certainly those who were able to confess (to police, victims, families, etcetera) generally appeared more free and hopeful. Inner healing reportedly also occurred through secular/religious programmes and services pre/post-imprisonment, and via supernatural/spiritual experiences. Lastly, having ‘paid their debt’ and atoned for their mistakes, some argued guilt was a misplaced sentiment.

Perceptions About Oneself

The writer suspected a correlation might exist between informants’ sense of guilt-forgiveness, and what they thought others felt about them and their feelings about themselves. Having earlier established that informants believed non-Christian inmates and staff perceived them negatively (page 85), this issue was now explored from other perspectives.

God’s perception

Informants were asked: How do you think God feels about you (and what you’ve done)? (Appendix C:6.4), the greatest response category showing that most believed God had forgiven them. Consistent with this, the majority of informants (75%-39/52) perceived God to be forgiving (not punishing) in nature (Appendix C:6.5) - a compassionate deity who understood their humanity, pain and struggle.98

The general public

However informants generally believed that the public perceived them negatively (Appendix C: 6.6), with adjectives such as condemning, unforgiving, hateful, and

98 A further 8% (4/52) thought God’s nature was both punishing and forgiving; 17% (9/52) seeing him as loving, merciful, gracious, compassionate, understanding, righteous but loving, all powerful, and hard.

and victims. Absolving one’s wrongdoing through ‘confession’ to another person was a valuable substitute.
vindictive abounding. Prisoners were usually stigmatised, they argued, through media generated stereotypes promoting fear and ignorance. Regardless, some were immune to criticism; having paid their ‘debt’ and battled guilt, they reasoned, hatred could only hurt those who harboured it.

Other Christians
Whereas fellow Christian prisoners were considered forgiving/supportive (Appendix C:6.7), many felt the attitude of outside Christians reflected the general public’s - worse according to some paedophiles: “It’s the people that call themselves Christians are my biggest judges” (Rolf p.9). Although informants understood why outsiders might struggle to forgive them they expected ‘true Christians’ to at least try - negativity attributed to ignorance and confusion vis-a-vis the issues. Still others optimistically believed that they were viewed in a positive light, particularly by familiar Christians.

Self perception
Lastly, over half of the men (63%-26/41) said that they generally felt positive about themselves. Indeed some believed they were better people because of their prison experience. Notwithstanding past mistakes and setbacks, personal faith had empowered them to approach their imprisonment and future with optimism. However the importance of a support network to this process was emphasized, without which things might have been very different.

*          *          *

Feeling condemned by the general and Christian public alike, and within prison, it is not surprising that informants (especially paedophiles) would experience guilt. However they were not crippled by guilt, more than half saying they felt forgiven for their crimes/sins and good about themselves. In this regard Clear et al. (1992a:35) suggest two ways that prisoners can turn to religion to relieve guilt: the first is a kind of exculpatory acceptance of

\[99\] A further 17% (7/41) felt both positive and negative, 7% (3/41) felt negative, and 12% (5/41) gave other responses.
the workings of evil in the world; the second is atonement and forgiveness. Reinforcing Clear’s findings, the present study found that religious inmates generally did not adopt an exculpatory view of their guilt - even paedophiles who had themselves been sexually abused as children tended to accept personal responsibility for their crimes and for the wrongfulness of their conduct.

Arguably, however, religion’s effectiveness in dealing with guilt can only be truly tested post-release and in the long-term. For example what might one’s reaction be to a possible moral lapse or crisis in faith when coping mechanisms learned in prison fail against pressures unique to society? Furthermore if all-important self-forgiveness is best experienced through offender-victim reconciliation, one has to question the extent to which guilt can be addressed given the unlikelihood of such reconciliation occurring either in prison or the community. Certainly the number of prisoners who struggled to forgive themselves because of what they had done highlights a need for prison and post-prison ‘guilt resolution’ counselling services. Whereas it could be said that these men had not been properly converted or grasped the significance of atonement in their lives, a further possible explanation - particularly given the complex issues of heavily represented paedophiles - is that they had (often deep-seated) unresolved psycho-sexual-spiritual

100 According to the authors, exculpatory uses of religion to relieve guilt use the idea of evil to explain how the prisoner ended up in prison. Evil in this sense was an ‘inactive’ part of all of us against which we must build internal disciplines if we are to resist them, religion being an important internal discipline for combating the baser urges. Conversely, some viewed the evil as ‘active’ - a real ‘devil’ who would work within the bodies of those who would let him (ibid).

101 Rather than being exculpatory, religion was a way for prisoners to atone for the wrong they had done and to receive the forgiveness they needed to re-establish personal self-worth. The teachings of Christianity provided ways for the believer to admit guilt without experiencing guilt as a dead end. Instead, guilt could be experienced as a doorway to a better life. By adopting a religious identity, the inmate aligned with a logic that allowed guilt, but surpassed it, with a stronger self-image intact (Clear et al. 1992a: 36).

102 Given that only one ex-prisoner experienced guilt, it would be worthwhile undertaking further research to examine the extent to which religion, as opposed to other factors, contributed to this outcome.
REHABILITATION

A premise of the present study is that Christianity helps to reform/rehabilitate prisoners. This issue will now be investigated, beginning with informants’ views on existing approaches to rehabilitation and Christianity’s potential to rehabilitate. The significance to religious faith of a conducive environment will be examined next, specifically the prospect of a Christian-run facility.

In response to the proposition: One of the stated aims of imprisonment is to rehabilitate offenders (Appendix C:16.1), 75% (40/53) of informants responded negatively. According to one category of response, rehabilitation was said to be an idealistic notion that did not exist in practice.

What rehabilitation! It doesn’t exist in this system ... They talk a lot about it, they talk about doin’ programs, where is it? it’s all on paper (Glynn p.20).

Others thought rehabilitation was something you did for yourself; motivation to change a prerequisite. Still others believed faith/Christianity was integral to the process. Lastly, some argued that the negative environment of prison itself precluded rehabilitation, although imprisonment possibly provided time for introspection.

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103 See ‘The Criminal-Christian Paradox’ (p. 65). A final comment on the possible relationship between whether informants feel guilt/forgiveness and how they both perceive themselves and think others perceive them. While limitations in the data prevent conclusive findings on this issue, the following is instructive: If informants who felt forgiveness for their pasts (57%-30/53) were combined with those who felt both guilt and forgiveness (25%-13/53), a total of 81% (43/53) would have experienced some kind of forgiveness. In relation to God’s nature and attitude, by similar calculation (75%-39/52 = forgiving + 8%-4/52 = punishing & forgiving) a total of 83% (43/52) believed God was forgiving towards them. Again, a total of 80% (33/41) had positive feelings about themselves (63%-26/41= positive + 17%-7/41 = positive & negative). That is, offenders who were likely to experience forgiveness in their lives had a positive sense of self and believed God was benevolent. In this regard, how others perceived them (Christians and non-Christians alike) was less important.
[P]rison sort’ve did everything *but* actively rehabilitate me ... [I]f my rehabilitation was solely and wholly reliant upon the prison system I would’ve been in there for the rest’ve my life. And I say that because ... everything is negatively geared ... there’s *nothing* constructive about it or positive (*Terry* pp.40-41).

**Professional Assistance**

Assembled whether they had received professional help/treatment for their offending behaviour (Appendix C:16.2), 44% (17/39) of informants claimed they had not. Whereas all mainstream prisoners reported getting some kind of professional assistance, either because services were insufficient or unavailable over half the paedophiles (56%-15/27) did not.\(^{104}\) Although many paedophiles wanted therapy, they complained that prison authorities delayed their access to the few available programmes because they had not served enough of their sentences - several getting help from alternative sources.

[T]hey leave it until you’re in the last little bit of your sentence ... before you’re even sort’ve looked at. ... I’ve had me name down for ’em ever since I came in - haven’t even done one, not even done a stress and relaxation one yet! (*James* p.13).

Moreover 67% (14/21) of those who received professional assistance considered it inadequate for the following reasons (reported almost entirely by paedophiles).\(^{105}\)

Insufficient service provision - simply not (extensive) enough programmes/qualified personnel - and failure to properly address the causes of offending (like background and upbringing) or individual needs; immature and inexperienced staff - often lacking empathy and love, patronizing, punitive-minded, disorganized/unprofessional, tending to over-

\(^{104}\) It is noteworthy that a third (4/12) of these paedophiles had actually received this treatment before entering prison, which effectively raises the number who claimed not to have had professional help in prison.

\(^{105}\) Although just one man said professional services were adequate, a further 19% (4/21) said they were both adequate/inadequate, and 10% (2/21) remained neutral.
medicate - who actually undermined rehabilitation; compulsory programming that only reinforced distrust - some men objecting on moral/philosophical grounds to controversial sex therapy techniques.

Again, offenders criticised professional services for addressing psychological but neglecting spiritual needs/problems, which they considered essential to healing. Indeed sometimes staff were reportedly critical of Christian faith/reformation, although it was conceded that the behaviour of ‘religious fanatics’ often attracted this response. Furthermore, secular courses were reportedly limited because they educated criminals without edifying them - ultimately only God able to affect lasting character change. Conversely, a handful of inmates approved counselling services and the following components of two sex therapy programmes: victim empathy, relapse prevention, sex education, and the psychological dynamics of offending.

**Rehabilitation and Christianity**

Having rejected the proposition that imprisonment rehabilitates, informants were asked whether they thought Christianity was a way of rehabilitating prisoners (Appendix C:16.3). All but one (56/57) answered yes. Responses were formulated into a number of categories, which again are summarised.

In addition to all the aforementioned benefits, Christian faith and/or prison ministry was said to provide insights into problems, healing, fulfilment, and reduced re-offending. More than a religion, Christianity was a practical way of life that offered guidance and direction: “The principles in the Bible can ... help you get on with life, how t’live life prop’ly” (Bert p.23). Christianity instilled non-criminal thinking and behaviour as a renewed way of thinking led to a renewed way of living. “[T]he old person dies, that’s how dramatic it is ... yer whole mind starts being renewed, based on that relationship with Christ” (Ross p.17). Aside from changing one’s thinking, religious faith affected a (spiritual) change of heart.
[T]he only way you rehabilitate somebody is to change their heart not their circumstances - even though circumstances can affect people - basically they’ve gotta change from the inside (Larry p.18).

However some gave qualified assent, saying Christianity would benefit only truly devout offenders committed to live it out/change. And there was the need for ongoing discipleship and pastoral care. Further, Christianity was said to have rehabilitative potential provided one’s practical needs were also met, especially post-release. Unless personal/psychological issues were addressed, warned some paedophiles, Christianity risked becoming a way of avoiding problems.

If you’re a drug addict, you’re gonna remain a drug addict, and until you actually ... deal with what caused you to take the drugs then you’ll still be a drug addict, and just because you become a Christian drug addict doesn’t mean that you’re rehabilitated .... Too many people say “Jesus’ll fix it.” Jesus WON’T fix it! Jesus’ll HELP YOU FIX IT ... and you need help to get it fixed, and Jesus’ll ... send someone along to help ya fix it (Glynn p.22).

Whereas secular services were criticised for addressing psychological but neglecting spiritual needs, conversely, a Christian approach might favour spiritual but neglect psychological issues. There had to be balance. As Lindsay (p.25) put it: a “holistic” programme was needed that embraced “the whole gamut of Christian and life experiences.” Anything less, warned Kim (p.17), and Christianity could “easily be a band-aid rather than a solution.”

*       *       *

The findings are unequivocal: imprisonment per se does not rehabilitate criminals. Informants believed that rehabilitative initiatives were simply not supported and encouraged enough. An indication of this was the large number of paedophiles who, despite being incarcerated awhile, had not received professional ‘treatment’ at the point of interview. That high-risk sex offenders committed to change were on a therapeutic ‘waiting list’ is questionable practice in this writer’s opinion; likewise the mandatory attendance
requirement of some programmes. Thus, according to the findings, rehabilitative regimes should be intensive, extensive, and voluntary. However existing services were also inadequate according to service users, critical of both the quantity and quality of programming and personnel. A particular criticism was professionals’ intolerance of paedophiles who supposedly ‘used’ religion to avoid dealing with their problems. Authorities must remain alert to this but receptive to an ‘holistic’ approach to inmate care wherein health therapy and religious services and practices work together to help prisoners. Thus while informants agreed that Christianity could achieve what imprisonment failed to achieve, rehabilitation was ultimately contingent on meeting a person’s total needs. Given the difficult context where this should happen, the significance of environment will be examined next.

Environment - A Crucial Consideration

Both the literature and the present research suggest that the more homogeneous a group of prisoners the fewer problems likely to arise between them. The importance of a secure environment to Christian inmates (and prisoners generally) is well illustrated by the now defunct ‘prison-within-a-prison’ referred to as ‘A-Unit.’ Again, Lindsay (a long term resident) explained:

> We’d be mainly sex-offenders .... We’ve got a special kind’ve atmosphere in the group ... because, first-of-all, our supervisors are women, so there’s more of a gentle touch and gentle atmosphere; there’s no tolerance of any kind of abuse ... Some prison officers are marvellous ... they’re just so compassionate and respectful ... So there’s not the same pressure on a person who is a Christian to be quiet about it, to stop wearing a cross around his neck, to stop reading the Bible, to stop praying ... - it’s just a freeing, liberating experience ... Christian or not Christian, we’re all sort’ve thrown together and we have to protect each other; it’s ‘the rest of the gaol against us’ sort’ve mentality ... a little colony that needs to be protected (Lindsay pp.7,19-20).106

106 A comparable group was ‘Unit X’ (a pseudonym) housing about a dozen inmates of various offence types, six of them Christians. The writer had observed that this high-security unit
It seems that environment significantly affects the way prisoners approach their faith. A potentially conducive environment might comprise a Christian regime for like-minded prisoners and personnel - in effect, a Christian-run prison.

**A Christian-Run Prison**

Informants were asked whether, given the opportunity, they would attend a Christian-run facility (Appendix C:16.4). Sixty-four percent (38/59) said they would attend (especially paedophiles 73%-19/26) because the positive atmosphere, shared beliefs, and mutual support base were likely to strengthen faith and make it “...a great place to do time” (*Don* p.15).

> I think it’d be a lot better ... because everybody there would be the same faith. I think it’d be a lot easier for the prisoners and ... for the guards as well. I think you’d have a lot more respect for each other (*Wayne* p.14).

While this model would obviously target Christian inmates, a few suggested that even non-Christians could benefit attending through more profitable use of their time. Sixteen men seemed relaxed and relations with officers cordial. Except for occasional harassment of several notorious paedophiles, other prisoners generally tolerated Christians - presumably because all had ‘protection’ status and long sentences in common, and because of the closely monitored environment. However, notable changes followed the Christian group’s relocation to a harsher prison with less tolerant officers and inmates: There was greater intimidation of Christians (especially paedophiles) and correspondingly less involvement by them in (official) religious activities. Such was the pressure that *Peter*, an avowed evangelical, became secretive about his faith: “This place is a totally different culture ... we’ve had to condition ourselves for the environment in which we came into, whereas at [Unit X] people conditioned themselves when they came into the environment we had there ... and those who came later sort’ve adopted our ways, whereas here ... we’ve had to, well, not adopt their ways, I’d never do that, but adopt the defences I suppose; the defence mechanisms, the language - I catch myself out talking the same sometimes ... just in order to try and fit in ... And there are people here that are of a hard element ... that *remind* you all the time ... what you’ve done to be in gaol in the first place, and ... it kind’ve makes you think if you’re really a Christian at all. It’s a real test ... a spiritual struggle...” (*Peter* pp.20-21).
(27%) said they would attend a Christian prison but on certain conditions. These included having professional administrators and committed Christian staff; holistic programmes embracing psycho-spiritual techniques; frequent interaction with outside believers; and, voluntary attendance. Leadership and doctrinal issues would also require clarification. Again, there were concerns about becoming insular and bigoted - possibly “...living in a cult ... and condemning everything outside the walls” (*Peter* p.26). Moreover ‘segregation’ precluded evangelisation of non-Christian inmates, and denied one the life-shaping challenges in ‘normal’ prisons: “I might’n’t have learnt to stand up for misself if I had’ve gone straight to there ... Even though it hurt me and maybe scarred me in some ways, I needed that” (*Kelly* p.18).

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The research findings suggest that Christian inmates (paedophiles in particular) feel greater personal security, and in turn confidence to practice their faith, in an environment that is tolerant, respectful, and addresses ‘holistic’ needs. Arguably the most conducive possible environment is a Christian-run facility. Engaged in Christian programming amidst like-minded, supportive people, offenders’ rehabilitation prospects would probably increase. Given the level of specialisation/privatisation in modern penal systems, the prospect of housing Christian offenders in this way in not untenable. In principle, the majority of informants agree.

**NEEDS / PROBLEMS AND SUPPORTS**

Having established that Christianity has a salutary effect on some prisoners and ex-prisoners, we shall now examine their perceived needs/problems and whether or not informants believe that they are being (satisfactorily) addressed. An assumption of the writer is that religious service provision is inadequate to meet the (intensive/extensive) needs and problems of Christian prisoners and ex-prisoners alike. Issues to be examined include: *In prison* - experiencing doubts and insecurities with faith; the hardest aspects of being a Christian in prison; the role and effectiveness of prison chaplains/volunteers; *Post prison* - difficulties re-integrating to society and with church assimilation; and the
significance/effectiveness of a Christian support network. In prison and post prison findings are presented respectively.

**IN PRISON**

**Doubts / Insecurities with Faith**

Informants were asked: *In prison, have you ever felt doubts and insecurities about your faith?* (Appendix C:5.1). To varying degrees, 67% (38/57) did experience such doubts and insecurities. Some felt abandoned/let down by God for allowing their wrongful imprisonment or excessive sentence, or angry with him when things went wrong. Questioning/re-evaluating their faith, others struggled to come to terms with certain teachings and practices. Vulnerability through spiritual warfare was also mentioned - the battle for one’s soul waged against evil supernatural forces.

There were a lot’ve ... spiritual troubles and struggles ... visions of the negative side of the spiritual world and ... they were attacking me in the cell, and ... they were able t’move ... into other inmates to give me a hard time as well (*Kelly* p.6).

Intensely pressured, some succumbed to sin then questioned their religious integrity, even their salvation. Others neglected their devotional life through poor prioritising, experienced fluctuating faith/zeal, and difficulty trusting God or maintaining a relationship with Jesus.

[Int’s very hard to say ... “Yes the Lord’s going to look after me,” it’s very, very difficult to say that and believe it. Even now I question myself ... do I have that much faith?; am I losing the faith I have? (*Bob* p.3).

Personal problems also contributed: paranoia, a bad attitude, obsessiveness, sensitivity to criticism, low self-esteem, self-inflicted pressure - all were identified as debilitating factors; likewise the initial shock of incarceration and ongoing struggle to survive. Adversity notwithstanding, longer standing Christians said their faith endured and that doubts and insecurities were normal.
Hardest Aspects of Being A Christian in Prison

Informants were then asked what they found were the hardest things about living as a Christian in prison (Appendix C:5.3). Below is a summary of the numerous response categories.

Exposure to ridicule, rejection, and abuse reportedly made it difficult to live as a Christian in prison. Nor was it easy being told you could not be a Christian because of your offences, or constantly monitored for ‘proof’ of hypocrisy, or discriminated against because you were a ‘threat’ or ‘different.’ Tolerating (let alone forgiving/loving) such people was very difficult.

Deprivation of liberty per se was an unrelenting hardship, compounded by overcrowding, boredom, and separation from loved ones. Cut off, powerless, depressed, prisoners felt unable to share even their feelings.

Being in an ‘evil’ environment created other problems, like forced cohabitation with non-Christian and/or incompatible cellmates (and high cellmate turnover). Exposure to TV/closed-circuit video violence, profanity, and sex was distracting and distressing, some seeing the relentless pressure to submit to temptation and sin and obstacles to religious practice as evidence of spiritual attack/warfare.

Not surprisingly, inadequate support networks and programming/services (to provide discipleship and pastoral care) were identified as factors that made it hard to live out faith in prison. Indeed a network of supportive Christians (regarded spiritual mentors or

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107 One prisoner had no contact whatsoever with the outside world, another only had contact through letters, the remainder (55/57) received both visits and letters - and probably telephone calls (Appendix C: 15.1). Although prisoners desired more visits, excessive travel demands on visitors often prevented this - even their letters declining over time.
role-models) was overwhelmingly nominated the single most important means of faith enhancement, without which faith was likely to be compromised or abandoned or at best a greater struggle. Conversely some believed adversity increased dependency on God, or that there was nothing hard about being a Christian in prison.

*          *          *

According to the findings most Christian inmates experienced difficulties in relation to their faith. It was as if a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual forces battled against them, which is not surprising given their intention to supplant prison mores with a contrary way of life. Clearly it was one thing to embrace a new lifestyle, quite another to sustain it in a predominantly negative environment over time. If not through external pressure, internal fear and insecurity undermined and weakened faith, sometimes resulting in ‘chameleon-like’ behaviour patterns among Christians. While these findings reflect some of the problems and needs of Christian inmates, they underscore the importance to them of Christian prison ministry.

CHRISTIAN PRISON MINISTRY

Both the literature and present findings agree that support from other Christians is vital to Christian prisoners. While Christian friends/family, outside churches, and fellow inmates are important in this regard, prison chaplains and volunteers are arguably prisoners most significant support base - presumably being familiar with prison and prisoners’ needs, equipped to help, and accessible. This section proposes to examine these assumptions with chaplains and volunteers respectively. To prevent informants possibly confusing the two groups, the writer first clearly distinguished between them.

PRISON CHAPLAINCY

Extent of Involvement

Ninety-two percent (55/60) of informants had been involved with prison chaplains (Appendix C:9.1). Involvement varied greatly: some prisoners open to all chaplains, others interacting selectively. Contact generally occurred weekly-fortnightly - large metropolitan
prisons and/or protection inmates accessing chaplains most. Seventy-five percent (41/55) of informants were dissatisfied with the level of contact (Appendix C:9.2). Country prisons (17/41) rated marginally worse than metropolitan prisons (13/41), their remoteness creating visiting difficulties for mostly city-based chaplains. Asked how often they wanted to see chaplains, 51% (20/39) said daily/many times per week, 15% (6/39) said at least weekly, 21% (8/39) said when a problem arose or they needed to, and the rest gave different answers. Inmate-chaplain interaction mainly occurred through church services and Bible study-discussion groups. Apart from ‘official’ activities, informal discussion was the most common form of interaction - the opportunity to share personal thoughts and feelings with a sympathetic listener considered to be vital.

**Role / Purpose**

Asked what they considered the chaplain’s role or purpose to be (Appendix C:9.3), informants’ main response was a religious/spiritual one (61). S/he was also somebody to talk to: neutral, trustworthy, a good listener with whom to share personal feelings and problems (40). A kind of ‘general support person,’ s/he was expected to provide, inter alia, encouragement, compassion, love and understanding, hope, friendship, advice, and a good example (26). Further, the chaplain was there to assist with prisoners’ practical/welfare needs (19), including family/marital problems (13). Chaplains were meant to be a link with the outside (4), advocates for prisoners’ rights, mediators between prisoners-authorities, and monitors to keep the system accountable (5). Either as a representative of the church or a neutral presence, at the very least they served an important purpose by simply being there (10).

[A] person ... who’s not of the system ... who’s able to be a comforting person ... get messages out and get money in and things like that ... be available ... have a talk with you ... is always a cheerful person ... someone

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108 Obviously, where numerous denominations serviced a prison/unit, multiple contacts with the respective chaplains was possible; conversely in poorly serviced facilities contact was likely to be substantially less.
who’s interested ... a Christian presence ... someone who is there, that has a spiritual interest ... a spiritual slant on the answer that they give or the care they give is important (Lindsay p.14).

Effectiveness

Whereas 79% (45/57) of informants considered chaplains effective in their role (Appendix C:9.4), only one thought ‘all’ were effective, under half thought only ‘some’ were effective (20/45), less than one third ‘most’ (12/45). From their responses the following categories were formed:

Unreliable/unavailable (50)

Chaplains’ greatest shortcoming was a singular lack of availability and reliability - simply too few chaplains who were too busy to meet existing needs. Criticism included inconsistent visiting, being inaccessible in a crisis, not honouring their word/appointments, too high a turnover, and insufficient (denominational) services.

[Chaplains don’t get enough time to talk to everyone ... it’s a brief handshake, “How ya goin’ - see ya later,” and ... see the next person. And you’re bottlin’ up somethin’ that ya wanna tell ’em, but by the time they’re ready t’get to you ya can’t remember what it is that ya wanted t’say (Daryl p.10).

Inappropriate conduct/behaviour (34)

Chaplains whose behaviour was hypocritical, who talked a lot to officers, gossiped, or practised favouritism and discrimination were unacceptable.

Some’ve ’em ... spend more time in the office ... than what they do outside with us. And what do they talk about, in the office? ... they have divulged to the guards what the prisoners have said to them ... That’s put a barrier up to me as far as I’m concerned (Wayne p.10).

Not genuine/committed (23)

They were also accused of not being committed to their work/faith - career chaplains who
approached chaplaincy as ‘just a job.’

[H]e was coming in because that was a part’ve his duty, not because he wanted to ... And you’d sit down and have a conversation, it’d be as hollow as anything .... It’s the one’s who really desire to get in there that do great work; and the ones that don’t, you can read it a mile away ... [I]t must be the right people t’go in ... more of a calling than a career (Daniel p.8).

**Unsuitable personality/skills (22)**

Temperament and personality may have been unsuited to prison work, or chaplains lacked experience and the ability to relate to inmates.

[H]e ... he wanted to help, but he didn’t know how the prisoner ticked.... Guys in here want personal one-on-one help, and ... when he got one-on-one with people he got lost and he just couldn’t help them (Rolf p.11).

**Inappropriate religious approach/orientation (19)**

Chaplains were variously accused of being ritualistic/rigid, liberal-permissive, ‘Bible bashers,’ and not evangelical enough.

I see it more as religious activities ... they’ve got the set prayers, the set candle n’everything - it’s too rote ... there’s nothing in there as in trying to find ... Christian strength, Christian values, sense of love, sense of peace, understanding anger and hate, how they fit together as part of the world, part of yourself  (Alan p.17).

**Other**

Additional shortcomings included being too ‘welfare’ oriented, opposition from prison authorities, and inadequate chapel space. Lastly, prisoner apathy/laziness was considered part of the problem.

Given the multifaceted nature of their work among a diverse, problematic group of people, it seems that different chaplains performed better in some areas of work than others
and related better to some inmates than others. It was the rare individual who excelled generally.

**Support**

However despite chaplains’ perceived shortcomings, 84% (48/57) of informants had reportedly been helped by them at some time in prison (Appendix C:9.5): for example to rekindle, strengthen, even discover religious faith: “[H]e sort’ve like sparked it up and made my faith blossom again” (*Sid* p.10). They treated men with dignity and kindness, raised spirits, provided encouragement, hope, someone to confide in, and practical help. Reflecting godliness and integrity, they were positive role models.

I tended to feel safe with these people because ... these were not prison people ... they took me as I was, as a person, not like, *You’re another crim* ... And I found a totally different feeling, a bonding if you like ... feeling like a human being ... inner calmness... (*Leonard* p.3).

**Enhancing Effectiveness**

Responses to the next question, ‘*What should or shouldn’t chaplains be doing to be more effective?’* (Appendix C: 9.8) are briefly summarised:

It was suggested that chaplaincy could be improved by better informing inmates (especially new receptions) about their services. There needed to be more church services (and chapels to conduct them) coupled with wider denominational representation. Still more important was the need to provide Bible study-discussion (and prayer/meditation) groups.

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109 This finding should not be seen as contradicting the previous one because help may have been given much earlier in one’s sentence or during a previous sentence. Moreover a chaplain may provide an inmate with help in one area but still be considered ineffective overall. Lastly, as most informants believed at least one chaplain was effective, they may only have been referring to assistance from that particular individual.
There are guys that have Bibles that don’t know how t’use them ... don’t understand what they’re readin’ ... [I’d like] contemplative prayer or meditation rather than just going through a by rote service ... y’know, things that have a bit of meaning that the people will learn something (Richard p.9).

Nor should non-mainstream (protection, etc) prisoners’ needs be overlooked. Other possibilities included: more orthodox, Bible-based preaching/teaching; use of religious videos; less formality/ritual; uplifting songs/music; ecumenical discussion groups/services; (additional) Christmas/Easter activities; and involving inmates more. The most popular suggestion was that chaplains should simply be more available/accessible.\(^{110}\)

[T]hey should be ... giving each prisoner more opportunity to be able to speak to someone ... if need be allow more pastors, priests, chaplains, whoever, to come into the prisons (Jake p.11).

[M]y own chaplain is available only once a week and ... there are say twenty others there with him .... [G]oing to mass every Saturday is my use of a chaplain at the moment (Tom p.10).

Apart from raising staff levels, chaplains needed to be more proactive, relate/communicate more with all prisoners, establish genuine friendships, and maintain contact after an inmate’s transfer - indeed assist with pre-release preparation and post-release, and in other practical ways.

Availability, reliability, trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity - informants identified these as the hallmarks of a truly effective prison chaplain.

**CHRISTIAN VOLUNTEERS**

**Extent of Involvement**

\(^{110}\) Informants unanimously agreed (51/51) that every prison should have a full-time chaplain (Appendix C: 9.14). Other than make chaplains more accessible, they believed, this would compliment the work of other professionals by being a pacifying/healing influence that affected change/rehabilitation.
Eighty-five percent (51/60) of informants reported some kind of involvement with (one or several) Christian support groups - Prison Fellowship clearly the most popular (88%-45/51) (Appendix C:10.1). Casual interaction/conversation was the commonest form of contact. Contact generally occurred on a weekly-fortnightly basis, 78% (38/49) considering it inadequate (Appendix C:10.2). Given a choice, over half (20/35) the informants wanted to see volunteers ‘daily’ or ‘many times’ per week.

**Motivation**

Asked why volunteers might get involved with prisoners (Appendix C:10.3), informants said they were primarily motivated by a sense of care and compassion for prisoners, whom they wanted to support, encourage, and befriend (51).

They can only come in for one reason and it’s because they care - that’s the only real reason to bother doing it (Franco p.14).

These were ‘good’ people who believed in the inherent worth/dignity of all human beings, even ‘criminals,’ and sought to provide a positive/normalising influence that might help offenders to re-evaluate and amend their lives.

[I] saw them as just genuine human beings, and a ray of light in a sea of darkness too, coz these people were from outside ... they showed us ... that the world didn’t consist of basically four walls and there was something actually happening on the other side of ’em... (Jack p.18).

Volunteers were also said to have religious motivation (26) - such as providing spiritual support, ‘sharing the Gospel’ and seeing lives ‘saved’ - or preferred meeting practical/welfare needs (5). Finally, it was suggested that some volunteers may have had personal imprisonment experience or had a loved one incarcerated (5). Lonely themselves, they also

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111 Additional contact/support included: Bible study/personal development groups and seminars; correspondence, phone calls, and visits; Bible study notes/aids and other reading material; moral/spiritual encouragement and worship services; counselling; assistance during prison reception; family/practical support; and, sporting/recreational activities.
may have enjoyed comforting others, or derived meaning and purpose in life through prison ministry (4).

**Effectiveness**

Eighty-one percent (33/41) of informants thought volunteers achieved their purpose (Appendix C:10.4) - almost one-third saying ‘all/most’ (10/33) volunteers were effective in prison ministry, under one-quarter (9/33) only ‘some.’ Their responses, which created similar categories to that of the chaplains, are summarised here. Like chaplains, the main reasons volunteers were reportedly not/less effective was through being unavailable, excessively busy, or spending insufficient time with prisoners (21).

> [T]here’s not much support network ... y’don’t see them much in gaol, and ... I’m disappointed ... because they’ve got access to th’prisons but they don’t come and see us on a regular basis (Bert p.16).

There was also criticism of ‘old fashioned’ volunteers being out of touch, of proselytising ‘Bible bashers’ and rigid ‘fundamentalists’ with simplistic, ‘kindergarten-like’ approaches to Bible study, and the over-spiritualising of complex issues like sexuality (12).

> I’ve seen some blokes turned totally against religion ... somebody’s tried to push the Bible too much down their throat or tried to belittle them as a person for some reason ... some blokes come back very hostile against religion after trying to get involved into it (Allan p.14).

Again, some were accused of being judgemental or put-off by certain offenders’ reputations - even fearing them (4). Others were not ‘spirit filled,’ lacked real love, or were simply

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112 Some men put the needs of others first, as a result, by deliberately avoiding volunteers or seeing them less than they would have liked so that others had more time with them.

113 Fundamentalism is a movement in Protestantism that stresses the authority and literal application of the Bible.
‘gawks’ driven by voyeuristic interest (4). Volunteer ineffectiveness was also attributed to obstruction from authorities and high turnover of inmates, or their apathy and resistance (7).

Some so-called Christian organizations that come to prison ... they’re full-a-shit ... because their heart’s not in it ... it’s like a circus, they're enjoyin’ comin’ t’ see the circus or somethin’ ... they’re not fair dinkum (Bert p.13).

Support

As asked whether they had ever been helped by volunteers (Appendix C:10.5), 83% (38/46) of informants said that they had - most (29/38) by Prison Fellowship. The most commonly cited form of help across all volunteer ministries was talking/listening to prisoners (24), followed by practical support (19), boosting confidence/self-esteem (16), friendship (14), providing a normalising influence through outside contact (14), religious/spiritual (14), just being there (9), counselling/advice (8).

They’re wonderful people to talk to ... very good listeners ... they remember what ya talk about, your problems and y’know things y’do, and they encourage ya, they praise ya ... it doesn’t matter if you’re a Christian or Moslem ... they talk to everybody (Ramon p.17).

Enhancing Effectiveness

Informants were then asked what volunteer groups should/should not be doing to improve their effectiveness (Appendix C:10.8), the results similar to the chaplains. It is ironic that volunteers most commonly cited form of help, talking/listening to prisoners, was regarded the area of their work that needed to increase most. Volunteers needed to maximise interactive opportunities, such as having set meeting times that did not clash with prisoners’

Spirit filled is normally taken to mean filled with God’s Holy Spirit, usually evident through supernatural manifestations.
commitments and ensuring inmates were notified (perhaps through chaplains) of intended visits/activities. The need for additional Bible study-discussion groups was again stressed. Other recommendations included: employing younger and/or more experienced workers; producing a Christian prison newspaper; providing advocacy re prison rights violations; (more) personal development courses, debating clubs, and music; pre/post-release preparation and support; objective/informal religious programmes; and better planned/organized activities - none compulsory under any circumstances.

[Y]'never knew when they were coming in ... Now they could be more efficient if they were able to make sure that the information actually reached the prisoners ... [There were] very few well organised programmes ... it goes back to their planning ... how ad hoc it gets (Jack p.19).

**Care, Rapport, and Trust**

Successful relationships are usually founded on mutual care, understanding, and trust. Establishing whether informants felt cared for/understood by Christian prison workers and trusted them was the object of several questions (Appendix C:9.9-10, 10.9-10).

**Care and Understanding**

Fifty-seven percent (29/51) of informants thought chaplains cared about and understood them - more than half (16/29) saying only ‘some’ did, just three ‘all’ - whilst 68% (27/40) thought volunteers cared about and understood them - less than a fifth (5/27) saying ‘all’ or ‘most.’ A further 22% (11/51) said chaplains cared about them but could not understand them, whilst 30% (12/40) said this about volunteers. It was felt that neither group could really understand prisoners unless they had personally experienced imprisonment.

A lot of ’em try to understand with their heads but they don’t really understand with their hearts ... you’ve gotta go through the actual experience, to understand the experience (Rolf p.17).

**Trust**
Fifty-seven percent (27/47) of informants trusted chaplains compared to 59% (24/41) who trusted volunteers. Significantly, many only trusted people who were interested in their lives and with whom genuine relationships had been established: 49% (23/47) in relation to chaplains, 41% (17/41) volunteers. Such people genuinely cared and helped, loved unconditionally, maintained confidences, and were respected.

[T]hey’d be important to me because we talk freely, we trust each other ... if you haven’t got trust then you can’t open up ... whereas with them I feel like I give a hundred percent of myself ... They’ve built a friendship up as in caring for you, respecting you for who you are - even though you’ve done some horrendous crimes ... They’ll give you a hand ... by just listening to you and talking to you (Allan p.15).

Conversely some men distrusted chaplains/volunteers because of a prior bad experience, through learning not to trust anyone in prison, or because they were dangerous ‘do-gooders’ who did not understand prison politics.

Finally, asked whether they would select prison chaplains or volunteers in a hypothetical situation where informants had to choose between the two (Appendix C:10.14), 26% (10/38) chose chaplains, 42% (16/38) volunteers, and 32% (12/38) were non-committal. Informants who preferred chaplains considered them (especially full-timers) to be more involved with inmates (3) and familiar with the prison system (4). Their training better qualified/equipped them to perform religious functions, respond to theological issues, provide information, and stimulate discussion (4). A kind of religious ‘every man,’ the chaplain not only provided prisoners company and support but also performed important clerical/spiritual functions. On the other hand volunteers outnumbered chaplains. With more time to interact (7), volunteers were more consistent, reliable (3), and, as a result, easier to relate to/confide in (3). Genuinely loving people (3), they established relationships with prisoners (3). Unlike remunerated chaplains, their voluntary commitment of time and resources to help prisoners was more unqualified (9). Moreover financial independence from the system meant volunteers were

115 Regarding chaplains: a further 11% (5/47) said they did not trust chaplains, 17% (8/47) said both yes and no, and 15% (7/47) said they were not involved enough to comment. Regarding volunteers: 10% (4/41) said they did not trust volunteers, 5% (2/41) said yes and no, 12% (5/41) specified individuals, and 14% (6/41) said they did not know them well enough, besides giving other reasons.

116 Informants who preferred chaplains considered them (especially full-timers) to be more involved with inmates (3) and familiar with the prison system (4). Their training better qualified/equipped them to perform religious functions, respond to theological issues, provide information, and stimulate discussion (4). A kind of religious ‘every man,’ the chaplain not only provided prisoners company and support but also performed important clerical/spiritual functions. On the other hand volunteers outnumbered chaplains. With more time to interact (7), volunteers were more consistent, reliable (3), and, as a result, easier to relate to/confide in (3). Genuinely loving people (3), they established relationships with prisoners (3). Unlike remunerated chaplains, their voluntary commitment of time and resources to help prisoners was more unqualified (9). Moreover financial independence from the system meant volunteers were
The research findings suggest that chaplains and volunteers had a significant influence in convicts’ lives. Providing a mix of pastoral-practical care to needy prisoners and their families, they were among the few normalising influences. With a mandate to love and serve society’s ‘outcasts,’ these Christians represented a benevolent presence to people who had often reached their lowest emotional and spiritual point - as previous sections have shown. Offering hope amidst hopelessness and meaning from despair, they were soul mates and ‘lifesavers’ to many. Primarily for these reasons were chaplains and volunteers generally well regarded and their activities well attended. However the findings also indicate significant failings in service provision.

For all their worth and potential, neither chaplaincy nor volunteer agencies could meet the demand for religious services - limited Bible studies a prime example. The most proactive and popular of all organised religious activities, there were simply insufficient resources to provide Bible studies on a regular and uniform basis - the primary deficiency being people. Indeed Christian personnel were conspicuous by their absence or, paradoxically, excessive busyness even when ‘available.’ The likely outcome of all this

less likely to be compromised (2). In their favour, volunteer groups were also multi-denominational (2). It is notable that across all three response categories (to the question of whom informants preferred between chaplains-volunteers), 26% (10/38) stressed that both chaplains and volunteers performed an important/complementary role, whilst 24% (9/38) said either the question was difficult to answer, they preferred not to have to choose, or simply could not. It is also noteworthy that whereas some prisoners found it hard to differentiate chaplains-volunteers they had no difficulty distinguishing uncaring from caring ones, or those merely doing it as a job/duty.

Given their common aims and difficulties, it was unfortunate that chaplaincy and volunteer agencies operated so independently of each other, as pooled resources may have enhanced efficiency overall. Certainly the traditional rivalry expected between these groups was less evident to this writer than the rift within (conservative-liberal quarters of) the Chaplaincy Advisory Committee itself. Whether resulting from a clash of theologies, personalities, or politics, ultimately a perception of disunity among Christians was reinforced. However neither were volunteer groups immune to ‘competitive’ rivalry - this writer privy to at least two recent occasions outside Victoria where this happened, effectively discrediting Christian prison
for existing personnel, in the writer’s opinion: an onerous, unrealistic workload, burn out and attrition; and for religious inmates: disillusionment, cynicism, and possible dissonance in converts impeded in the process of ‘working through.’ Nor was a ‘holistic’ approach to rehabilitation likely to succeed without the unfettered input of chaplains and volunteers.

Chaplains especially were in a catch 22. Arguably more under resourced and overworked than volunteers, accountable to both prisoners and gaol/church authorities, inevitably their credibility had to suffer - which was reflected in informants’ stated preference of volunteers over chaplains. However, another possible interpretation is that factors other than workplace efficiency and success determined one’s ultimate worth. Certainly, informants believed few chaplains or volunteers met the criteria of a good Christian prison worker. Those who did were exceptional human beings; genuine people-caring-people who sacrificially embraced prisoners as friends and equals. This quality distinguished fellow ‘brother/sister’ from ‘professional’ Christian - which prisoners were quick to discern. Unconditional acceptance in turn attracted trust, essential for effective ministry.

A final word on Christian ex-prisoners. Informants were asked whether, compared to other Christians, it would be useful having ex-prisoners helping in and outside prison (Appendix C:10.15). Considered better able to relate than others, it was strongly agreed (27/27) that the contribution of ex-prisoners would enhance prison and post-prison ministry.

Reiterating Silverman and Oglesby (1983:81), this process is marked by prayer, communion, confessions, study, and Christian fellowship, and is essential if a prisoner’s religious experience is to be enduring. Ideally placed to facilitate this important task, chaplains and volunteers must now be properly equipped to do it.

For a discussion on ‘holistic’ inmate care and relevant references, refer to the section ‘Rehabilitation and Christianity’ on page 101.
An ex-prisoner is someone who understands what it’s all about ... he would understand more fully where prisoners are coming from, and if he’s a born again believer ... he’d be able to do the job very well (Wilbur p.13).

Which raises the question why only two ex-prisoners (to the writer’s knowledge) are actively involved in Christian prison ministry;\(^\text{120}\) moreover, over the years why Bible studies (organised by ex-prisoners for themselves or by support groups) have failed. The answers may lie in the following sections.

**POST PRISON**

Having explored some issues that Christians face in prison, we now consider what confronts them after release. This section, then, will address the topic of social reintegration generally, church assimilation specifically, and the importance of a Christian support network. However given prisoners’ traditionally high recidivism rates, first we shall consider the number of prison returns among our sample. Thirty-eight percent (23/60) of informants said they had been in prison before\(^\text{121}\) - around a third (8/23) saying they were Christians at the time of their (last) release. Which suggests that those who had been previously imprisoned experienced problems following their release - regardless of whether or not they returned to society as Christians.

### Problems Reintegrating to Society

This question was put to people who had been in prison before (Appendix C:18.1): *I’d like*

\(^{120}\) Past involvement in prison ministry should be acknowledged, particularly the contribution of Stan McCormack. Concerned about negligible after-care following his own release from prison in 1983, at great personal cost Stan established a Christian drop-in centre which is today the state’s primary (secular) offender support agency and employs a Christian ex-prisoner. Stan continues to work among prisoners in his own right.

\(^{121}\) This does not take into account a person who may have re-offended but not been charged, convicted, or re-imprisoned.
to find out what happened to you after your release from prison. Could you tell me what it was like getting out - what you felt like, the kinds of difficulties you faced, and so forth?

Their answers generated a large number of response categories, presented here in précis:

Recidivists said prisoners often had good intentions to ‘go straight’ but ended up in trouble after being released. Having to learn to live in society again, or unlearn the prison lifestyle - “It wasn’t just gettin’ outta gaol and slippin’ back inta life again, I had ta learn how to live on the outside again, just like ya learn to live when you’ve been inside” (Daniel p.12) - disorientation was a huge problem.

I hadn’t had to deal with supermarkets and people ... work ... being with my family all the time - y’know I’d been locked in a single cell for fourteen months ... it was very difficult ... I went down the supermarket, and the sound’ ve all the cash registers and the people walking everywhere and cars - I freaked out mate ... I couldn’t handle it. And I mean how much more difficult ... must it be for somebody who’s spent ten years in gaol; they’ve lost their family, their friends, get out with a hundred bucks ... course they’re coming back t’gaol (Larry p.19).

Long-term inmates (especially prone to institutionalisation) described a form of ‘social retardation’ wherein inappropriate behaviour/response patterns and coping mechanisms led to social ineptness.

[I]n the prison environment ... I sort’ve felt quite confident about myself ... and then you sort’ve come out here and come into another environment and it disillusions you ... you sort’ve have to really question, “Well where do I fit in here? I knew where I fitted in there, and I knew my role in there,” and so ... it challenges your identity (Terry p.42).

Emotional immaturity, self-consciousness, paranoia, anger and fear, difficulty relating to and trusting others, loneliness and alienation (even from family/friends) - to varying degrees this was the experience of released prisoners.

I just done nearly seven years gaol and I’m getting out and I’m still, in my
mind, nineteen years old, not twenty-six - even though I’m twenty-six ... I’m getting out at the age that I come in at (Rick p.34).

Arguably the most stabilizing influence in prison, relationships were often unsettling post-release. How was the role of father, husband, or boyfriend resumed again (or assumed for the first time) after a long absence? Not surprisingly, ex-prisoners married prematurely, and experienced high rates of relationship breakdown. Finances, accommodation, employment, education, food, clothing, company - after depending on others for these in prison one was suddenly expected to be self-sufficient. Making matters worse, anticipated help was sometimes not forthcoming.

[Y]ou won’t find a job if you tell anybody that you’ve been in prison. Society itself completely creates ... an outcast of you irrespectively from the day that you are an ex-crim ... the whole thing works against you (Marcus p.14).

The stigma of being in prison was another terrible burden, especially for those (paedophiles mainly) alleging public/media vilification, (police) harassment, and abuse. Faced with such difficulties, it is understandable that former prisoners considered inadequate or non-existent support networks a major problem. Many men found it hard, even impossible, to discuss problems or request/receive help, highlighting the need for (more effective) pre-release preparation.

Even now I can’t ask for help. When I was out I couldn’t ask for help that I

122 Five men who experienced relatively smooth community reintegration attributed this to having short sentences, graduated prison leave programmes, family/church etcetera support, prearranged work, total dependence on God, and the unusual case of having been “cushioned and protected...” by living in a monastery (Simon p.18).

123 Asked to speculate on the kinds of problems they anticipated post-release, prisoners (especially first-timers) mentioned all of the above. Furthermore older, mostly long-term sex offenders worried about the possible extent of change within society and their ability to cope with health/welfare related matters, particularly if loved ones had died. Paedophiles also feared possible social persecution and rejection.
needed. Everyone was helping me but not the help that I needed; I needed help like someone to talk to (Rick p.35).

Through alienation and loneliness some people engaged ‘bad’ though familiar company, or, having unresolved problems/addictions, felt vulnerable to temptations.

I don’t think so much drugs were the problem, they were sort’ve like more the solution ... loneliness was the problem ... [I]inside you’ve got all your friends ... you’re never lonely, and y’get out and, y’know, it’s a spin out after all those years ... I had no confidence you know, I mean I had had so much confidence inside and I just had none (Victor p.9).

* * *

Paradoxically, initial fear of imprisonment can become a fear of being freed - re-adjustment to society taking time just as adjustment to prison did. According to factors such as sentence length and age, therefore, ex-prisoners experience degrees of personal and social dislocation.

[A]bout two weeks after being out ... I went and sat in front of Pentridge for about four hours in my car. Just sat there looking at the gaol ... to see if I wanted t’be in or out, coz I was institutionalised when I got out ... And I sat there ... until night, just looked at the prison, just spoke out to myself, “Wow man I’m free...” (Rick p.32).

Soon after this young Rick was re-imprisoned on a much more serious charge. He typifies the prisoner whose ‘rehabilitation’ seems permanently compromised. Which is all the more tragic given Rick’s attempt to redeem himself through Christianity, whilst probably neglecting psycho-social needs like so many others. Certainly for Rick and his counterparts practising faith was vastly different in prison than in the community.

**CHURCH ASSIMILATION**

In addition to social reintegration, released Christian prisoners (both with and without church backgrounds) faced the challenge of church assimilation - a potentially daunting one in the writer’s opinion.
Church Attendance

Whereas most prisoners proposed to attend a church/fellowship outside of prison, proportionately fewer ex-prisoners actually attended (Appendix C:19.1). Even churchgoers were inconsistent - church ‘hopping’ (regularly changing churches) among ex-prisoners commonplace (5/11). “Well I did go to a few churches ... I stayed at one church for awhile but then I got restless and I used t’travel around...” (David p.3). Disillusioned with mainstream denominations, some opted for ‘home’ churches; others struggled to attend at all. Those most involved in church life tended to have supportive Christian friends/families.

Church Assimilation - Anticipated Problems

Prisoners (excluding those previously released as Christians) were asked whether they anticipated any problems fitting into church post-release (Appendix C:19.2), about half (17/35) saying ‘yes.’ The categories compiled from their responses are summarised: Some wondered how they would ever be accepted into church life and ministry given the stigma of being an ‘ex-crim’ (5), or overcome self-consciousness and paranoia (3), or others’ gossip feeding it (4). Other prisoners worried how they would relate (16), let alone fit in, to cliquey, self-righteous, judgemental congregations (23), unwelcoming to strangers.

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124 As the data shows, however, overall informants’ proposed/current level of church attendance was higher than the rate at which they attended pre-imprisonment: 69 % (31/45) of prisoners attended church before entering prison, compared to 82% (32/39) who proposed to attend after release - 18% (7/39) saying ‘maybe.’ And while 47% (7/15) of ex-prisoners attended church before their last imprisonment, 69% (11/16) currently attended - three of five non-attendees having attended church at some time since their release. Non-attendance resulted from unfavourable working hours, wanting to be left alone and not told what to do, bad experiences, cynicism, and the unusual case of a man being legally restrained from ‘interfering’ with a church service. Still, some expressed possible future interest.

125 Thirty-seven percent (13/35) did not anticipate difficulties either because they had: some kind of church background (3), Christian wives/families (7), actual/expected support networks (6), and former churches to return to (4) - or expected to find receptive churches/Christians (10). A further 14% (5/35) gave different answers.
and unresponsive to people’s needs (4). Whilst a few were undaunted, believing faith/God would sustain them (5), if faced with excessive problems others would consider changing churches (7) - one man leaving altogether. Other possible impediments included denominational rivalry and exclusiveness (2), distorted doctrine (2), dogmatic leadership (1), church politics (1), and difficulty readjusting to church after a long absence (1).  

**Church Assimilation - Actual Problems**

The experience of former prisoners (and those released as Christians but who re-offended) vis-a-vis church assimilation reflected the speculative responses above, with roughly equal numbers saying they did/did not encounter problems: 47% (7/15) and 53% (8/15) respectively.  

From their answers several categories were created:

**Relating/Fitting-in**

Difficulty relating to other Christians/fitting-in was reportedly the main problem (16).

> I found it pretty difficult at first to try and fit into church life because I acted very differently, or more-or-less I ... felt so different coz’ve my experience and my character and nature and ... the things I used t’joke about, and being with people who were very clean ... I never quite knew how I came across *(Ross p.19)*.

There was also the problem of personal paranoia (4).

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126 Informants generally believed that ‘stereotypical’ crims - hardened, institutionalised, unchurched - would encounter serious, if not insurmountable, assimilation problems. Such people (indeed anyone who had done considerable gaol time) would have to contend not just with social reintegration but a form of ‘culture shock’ unique to the church. However some believed assimilation depended on the style of church service and type of support received - the ability of Christians to relate being critical.

127 Six of the eight who did not experience problems were Christians prior to entering prison and had reasonable support networks, to wit, Christian families and receptive churches to return to; three remained anonymous, fearing possible repercussions. By choice and because of work commitments, the other two (prison converts) had simply not been involved in church. Eight (of fifteen) ex-prisoners had been in prison more than once, and of these only one man had been released from his last sentence as a Christian but re-imprisoned.
I’d never been to church, and I started goin’ to church ... it was absolutely terrifying, and also paranoia set in ... I had people ... putting their arm around me and saying, “Oh how are you today Daniel?” ... and in the back’ve my mind the old thinking was still there: ‘Whadda they want? Why are these people being nice to me for?’ (Daniel p.13).

Judgement/Discrimination

However some ex-prisoners were reportedly distrusted, feared, and alienated (7).

[O]ne particular person resented my whole family ... wanted nothing to do with us ... wouldn’t even sit within the church if we were there ... She didn’t know what I’d been in for ... only knew that I was an ex-crim (Jake p.22).

Over-exposure

Ex-prisoners also risked assuming a kind of dangerous celebrity status within the church (5); ‘bad’ people come good, whose premature (over) exposure often led to burn out - prompting several to keep their pasts secret.

[People from church] took me around to a number of other churches to share my testimony, took me to a couple’ve schools where I spoke about drug abuse and shared my testimony as well, so that was a regular thing....I do think sharing my testimony was in some ways harmful to me; I think it gave me false identity. I should’ve been finding my identity in other areas than ‘Terry the ex-crim who is born again’ - there was a lot more to Terry than that ... I just wasn’t old enough to know whether that was what I wanted to be known for, or what I wanted to do ... I just received some acceptance that just meant so much to me ... strengthened me if you like ... but it was ... never gonna be long lasting unless I addressed my problems (Terry p.49).

Denominationalism/Control

Nor were informants comfortable with the superior attitude, and closed, controlling nature of some churches (9).
[T]hey became elitist. It was okay for you to bring another church member from another church there, but it wasn’t okay for you to got to their church ... it was a real cultish thing ... and I started to question that ... but I was seen as ungrateful: you know, how the church helped me and now I was turning ... I could see that there was a spirit of fear an’ bondage there, and I just knew that wasn’t right (Larry p.20).

Materialism/Uncaring

Disconcerting too was the materialistic preoccupation (3) of some churches, and their lack of compassion and care for needy people (5).

[T]he rejection ... it’s not only with me; I see it with y’know all different types: the mentally ill, whatever ... And I was the same when ... I had lots’ve money ... I’d think, ‘I’m going alright now,’ you know, and I’d see someone coming further down ... “How ya going mate? Is everything alright?” And he’d say, “No.” And I’d say, “Well sorry about that. Anyway it’s good t’see you, I’ll catch you next week” (Kelly p.24).

Past Hurts / Grievances

From across the interviews there was evidence of alienation from the church through being let down or hurt by former churches. The most common criticism of church was its failure to help when most needed: namely, after arrest, religious conversion or, especially, after one’s imprisonment. Instead of getting support, informants often felt ostracized and abandoned.

I’d written to the minister ... apologized to her and to the congregation, and ... I got a letter back ... saying that my name had been stricken from the church role. No word if they acknowledged my repentance or that I’d been forgiven or anything else, and that hit me very hard... (Max p.6).

And when help (such as counselling) was offered Christians tended to ‘spiritualise’ problems, intent on ‘soul saving’ at the expense of follow-up/discipleship - some Christians allegedly even ignoring (suspected) serious offending behaviour. Churchgoers were also
accused of being hypocritical, self-righteous, closed-minded, superficial, unreliable, autocratic, and unapproachable.

I’d heard about God’s love right through childhood but never really had seen it demonstrated in a tangible way; in fact as a child I’d seen it demonstrated with hypocrisy, and with some obscurity (Ross p.3).

**Prison or Community - Where is it Harder Being A Christian?**

The combination of difficulties experienced post-release caused informants to struggle more with their faith in the community compared to when they were in prison. They attributed this to numerous factors, broadly categorised thus:

**Responsibilities/Distractions/Support**

Without Christian supports (3) and the familiar routine of prison, and facing greater responsibilities in the community, one risked becoming distracted and complacent vis-a-vis religious issues (10).

In prison it’s easier ... because you don’t have too many things to deal with ... But to keep the faith on the outside would be more difficult because there you would have to consider your day-to-day survival. And ... unless you’re an exceptional Christian ... selfish inclination comes out ... I need to get a job, I need to do certain things ... and sometimes in doing those things the bigger picture is lost (Dola p.5).

Certainly Terry’s comment regarding the discipline and focus he had in prison reflected a wide held view: “I want the life I had in prison out here” (Terry p.43).

**Temptations/Problems**

128 Asked whether they found it harder being a Christian in or outside of prison (Appendix C: 19.3), 53% (9/17) of informants (predominantly ex-prisoners) found it harder outside of gaol, 24% (4/17) found it harder to live out faith ‘inside’ - the rest believed it made no difference either way.
Vulnerability to temptations could be a terrible scourge, particularly if one returned to society with unresolved problems/addictions (4) and maintained ‘bad’ company (2).

Like after a certain amount’ve time inside, and you’ve been away from the gear, ya mind changes where when ya wanna do something you’ll do it, right, but then when ya come outside y’have a taste and then y’want a bit more ... and once you’ve got that habit again ya saying, “Oh God I don’t wanna do this” ... and y’go and have y’hit and ya go to church and then ... all’ve a sudden you’ve just lost it (Dermot p.4).

The ‘True’ Test of Faith

According to informants it was ultimately a case of faith being truly tested only after exposure to the ‘real world’ (7); a non-idealised world where “…you can end up falling away so subtly that you don’t realise it until you have fallen away...” (Terry p.46).

I’m in here, I’m away from the temptation ... it ultimately won’t be tested until I get out ... It’s just the same as all their rehabilitation programmes ... the bottom line is it’s when you get out in the real world that counts (Lewis p.23).

Reluctance of Prospective Interviewees

Moreover informants were asked why they thought some ex-prisoners who were Christians in prison might now be reluctant to participate in the present study (Appendix C:19.4). Informants offered the following possible explanations: These people felt shame over compromised or abandoned faith (11); they struggled to come to terms with/hang on to their faith (4); disillusioned with church (God), they rejected everything (5); faith was not/less vital to them outside prison (6); they were never really genuine (5). Again, they may not have wanted to relive the past (12) or divulge their crimes (5); were distrustful/fearful of: losing their anonymity (12), the nature/content of the interviews (3) and how the tapes might be used (4), being labelled (2), and not fitting the criteria (2) or taken seriously (1). Lastly, they may not have considered the exercise important (2).
Progress of Faith Post-release

Nor were such concerns lost to informants, who were questioned about the progress of their own faith since being released (Appendix C:19.5). Some (6) had continued to grow in faith through church attendance, personal devotions, and involvement in Christian/welfare work. Having earlier been zealous Christians actively engaged in ministry, others’ faith had mellowed over time (3).

[M]y faith is prob’ly not as passionate ... getting out there and witnessing to people ... I’ve just mellowed out a lot more ... it’s been ... a bit up-and-down, as in my faith and how I perceive God (Charlie p.13).

Still others said their faith had undergone re-evaluation/modification (3).

I hadn’t done a lot’ve reading and I was ill-informed, and there were a lot of questions ... I had but I didn’t know how to articulate, and I found it always a struggle to just accept in blind faith church doctrine, or even some’ve the beliefs that a lot’ve Christians would have about scripture and about God (Terry p.15).

Or faith had been weakened - for similar reasons to why ex-prisoners avoided being interviewed - and needed strengthening (4).

[A]t the moment I feel a bit weak in my faith. I haven’t had a great deal of church involvement ... because we’ve moved and so many things have gone on ... we’re not involved in any prayer group or Bible study group or anything, so I could do with a bit more strengthening (Ross p.19).129

129 To reiterate, the potential even to re-offend was evidenced by the fact that eight men (seven current prisoners) were released from their last sentence as Christians but been re-imprisoned (one man over a pre-existing offence he admitted to, not something he did post-release). All had histories of violence, at least three were career criminals, four were gaol for sex offences - at least three of the four for paedophilia - all four claiming to have been sexually abused themselves as children. A comparison of their experiences post-release indicates that the main difficulties they encountered were disorientation, unsuitable accommodation, unresolved spiritual/psychological problems, acute self-consciousness, loneliness and difficulty relating (especially to Christians), rejection, and disillusionment. The resulting cycle: gradual alienation from Christian influences = reversion to old friends/behaviour patterns = re-offending = guilt/remorse = recommitment, etcetera.
The Significance of a Christian Support Network

A series of questions were asked to determine the importance of chaplains/volunteers to informants both in prison and post-release (Appendix C:9.11-12, 10.11-12).

In Prison

Given the nature/extent of prisoners’ needs, regardless of their shortcomings chaplains and volunteers were considered (extremely) important.\(^{130}\)

[T]hem people are the most valuable resource in this gaol ... some of them ... reflect Christ’s character (Bert p.14).

I really don’t like to think what I would’ve become without them. I had the potential there to become a monster, and very nearly did ... and they stopped me. They didn’t pull me up and say, “Y’have to change” ... just the way they were made me stop’n think - raised a lot of important issues (Jack p.15).

Post Prison

Likewise, prisoners anticipated that chaplains and volunteers would be important to them after their release.\(^{131}\) Ex-prisoners also believed that maintaining post-release contact was

\(^{130}\) Chaplains: very important - 18; genuine ones, very important - 8; important - 5; moderately important - 5; slightly important - 3; not important - 5.

Volunteers: very important - 19; genuine ones, very important - 6; important -3; moderately important - 1; slightly important - 2; not important - 1.

Some said that in prison chaplains (7) and volunteers (9) were much more important to others with greater needs/less support, and that chaplains (6) and volunteers (4) might be important if one had (more) contact with them.

\(^{131}\) Chaplains: very important - 7; genuine ones, very important - 11; important - 5; not important - 6.

Volunteers: very important - 8; genuine ones, very important - 5; important - 5; not important - 1.
vital (13), especially for those without adequate support (6).

If a genuine friendship is formed between a prisoner and chaplain the friendship shouldn’t be lost because you’re in a different place. They would help keep me in line, keep me aware ... they’d help me to blend into society again, make phone calls, visit people, do things (Peter p.12).

Indeed both prisoners and ex-prisoners strongly believed that prison workers’ responsibility should include post-prison follow-up (Appendix C:9.13, 10.13). Among non-prisoners, who, after all, could better appreciate their difficult transition-reintegration process? Who better to have contact with occasionally, share a problem, give the kind of feedback that might help keep them in line? How would you not feel bewildered and angry, asked one prisoner, if a person who represented ‘Christ’ to you in prison abandoned you at the gate? Familiar and trusted, ideally friends, it was felt that chaplains/volunteers should help to establish interested ex-prisoners in suitable churches (or at least arrange suitable contacts) and provide spiritual/pastoral support. Thus would a person’s “holistic needs” be met (Simon p.20).

[W]hen you get out there’s gotta be some sort of familiarity with who you’re talking to, ya can’t just go on to someone else. It’s like a child going straight to school, there’s no familiarity there, y’know, it’s like losing yer parents on the first day except you’re a bit older. And for someone to bridge that gap for a few months and just ease them back into society, and especially spiritual society, y’know I think that sort’ve stuff is paramount if a bloke has given his heart to the Lord in prison, and he needs that period of time to come out and merge into society. I think a prison chaplain, or some sort’ve chaplaincy would be perfect for him (Nick p.23).

Some said that post-release chaplains (4) and volunteers (3) were likely to be more important to others with greater needs/less support, and that chaplains (3) and volunteers (3) could be important if one had (more) contact with them.

86% (30/35) of prisoners said staying in touch post-release should be part of a chaplain’s job. 95% (20/21) said it should be part of a volunteer’s duties. 93% percent (13/14) of ex-prisoners believed both chaplains/volunteers should have this responsibility.
In light of the perceived importance of chaplains, it is significant that just 31% (4/13) of ex-prisoners had contact with chaplains post-release - two-thirds of them having had very little/nothing to do with chaplains in prison. On the other hand 93% (13/14) of ex-prisoners reported some form of involvement with volunteers. Mutual friendship (usually formed in prison) was integral to these relationships. Among other things, volunteers helped ex-prisoners to find churches, accommodation, and work.

* * *

While Christians experience similar reintegration difficulties to other released prisoners, the findings suggest that they face an additional burden in attempting (perhaps for the first time) to assimilate into the church. Insecure and different to most Christians, ex-prisoners felt conspicuous, alienated, lonely - their backgrounds attracting either ‘celebrity status’ or discrimination. Removed from the secure familiarity of prison, saddled with expectations and responsibilities, exposed to temptations, ill-equipped to cope - little wonder they might have problems with their faith and find practising it easier in prison.

The present research suggests that churches generally respond inappropriately to the problems of ex-prisoners. For example just like new converts who fail to realise religious experience is more than “some magical disappearance of tribulation” (Silverman and Oglesby 1983:181), ‘miraculous healing’ can mislead and damage those expecting instant solutions to complex psycho-sexual problems - ignoring the problem, unwittingly or otherwise, similarly harmful. Lonely and burdened with cares, unsurprisingly many ex-prisoners were religious ‘nomads’ after somewhere to belong; others (like those released as Christians but reimprisoned) so acutely damaged even their faith was institutionalised.

All of which highlights the crucial importance to pre-release-transition-reintegration processes of effective support workers. Significantly in this regard, in a similar way that

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133 The rest mainly had limited social interaction, although several had met regularly through a Bible study group. Two former chaplains had also helped released prisoners with accommodation.
reintegration to society was smoothest for prisoners who received outside support, those who successfully assimilated into church (or expected to) also had appropriate support from Christian families and/or churches. Which in turn highlights the fact that, at a time when perhaps they needed to most, released prisoners had relatively little to do with prison chaplains. Irrespective of the reasons for this - such as work overload and correspondingly poor interaction in prison - the writer believes it reflects a deficient model of prison ministry. While volunteer groups had significantly more contact, their ad hoc approach meant the degree and quality of support was generally inadequate, particularly for high-risk repeat offenders. Even friendships established in prison, and Bible study/prayer meetings among ex-prisoners themselves, gradually yielded to new priorities/commitments in their lives.

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134 This is reflected in the fact that whereas most of the eight Christians who re-offended post-release had pre-existing support networks, they were not suitable to meet their extensive needs.
5: CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Christianity in prison, who embraced it and why, its effect on prisoners, their needs and adequacy of support - these kinds of issues informed the writer’s initial enquiry which arose out of his own prison conversion. The writer believed that whilst religious belief/practice had a salutary effect on prison inmates, Christian prisoners and ex-prisoners generally did not receive adequate support, which had the potential to thwart their faith/rehabilitation prospects. These contentions are borne out in the present study. The research method employed was qualitative (phenomenological) in nature, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews and some participant observation.

The Research Findings

According to the research findings, whereas two-thirds of Christian prisoners were Christians before entering prison (two-thirds of these being paedophiles), almost half became ‘sincere’ Christians only after their arrest/imprisonment. Devout in their faith, all inmates held personal devotions and most engaged in organised religious activities. United by a common belief, they avoided denominational differences.

Christian prisoners/ex-prisoners believed that, with few exceptions, being a Christian made a qualitative difference to life in prison. In a demoralising situation, Christianity offered essential hope, meaning, and purpose in life, a positive outlook and productive use of time. It provided an entirely different way of life with new morals, values, and a renewed sense of self, which helped overcome debilitating guilt and generally
enhanced relationships. Moreover, belonging to a religious group provided practical and moral/spiritual support that promoted prison adjustment and personal security - in some cases faith instrumental in preventing suicide. Lastly, Christian inmates reportedly had greater self-control than they would otherwise have had and more tolerance/respect for the authorities and others, leading to fewer institutional rule violations. Certainly unlike imprisonment per se, for those who genuinely embraced it, Christianity held out hope of rehabilitation, which transformed an otherwise wholly negative experience into one potentially redemptive.

Conversely, Christian prisoners often bore a cruel stigma that saw them vilified and victimised by staff and inmates alike. By virtue of the negative prison environment and unresolved personal issues they experienced other hardships, deprivations, faith related doubts/insecurities, temptations, and moral lapses. Their greatest unmet spiritual need, which might have ameliorated these difficulties to some degree, was the inadequate quality and extent of religious servicing - popular Bible-studies, church services, and Christian personnel often simply inaccessible. Offenders had even less access than they would have liked to professional/therapeutic care and programming - those who did finding it clearly inadequate. In spite of these drawbacks, however, Christian prisoners persevered in their faith.

In many ways the plight of Christian ex-prisoners was worse - particularly high-risk, long-term offenders attempting to negotiate the difficult process of institutionalisation-social reintegration-church assimilation. Feeling displaced within ‘normal’ society and alienated from other Christians, with few (if any) supports and mounting problems, while retaining faith in God they often struggled to live it out - occasionally re-offending. For these reasons was it considered easier to be a Christian in prison than outside. In one sense, then, the capacity of Christianity to ‘reform’ offenders was contingent on what happened following their return to society, especially vis-a-vis the church.
Methodological Limitations

As this study is about prisoners being reformed through Christianity, it could be said that because only Christian prisoners/ex-prisoners were interviewed the sample is biased. Certainly self-reporting (as to whether one was a Christian/reformed) is subjective ‘evidence.’ To the extent that others (non-Christian staff/inmates and religious personnel) were not used to confirm/contradict informants’ testimony, then, this criticism may be valid. However restrictions did apply to the study size, and, in regard to informants’ religious bona fides, it was not possible (Clear et al. 1992a), nor the writer’s intention, to measure devoutness. On the other hand, to the possible extent that rehabilitation is evidenced through behaviour, failure to check offenders’ prison/parole/police files for possible violations is a limitation of this study.

Further, the relatively small number of former prisoners (15) would affect the validity of the findings vis-a-vis post-release outcomes. Moreover given that ex-prisoners had been released for over six years on average (in which time prison conditions/circumstances could have changed), data may be distorted to some degree - likewise comparisons between current-former prisoners.

Relevance of Findings to the Literature

The present research findings generally confirm the prison-religion literature. The overall and ultimately important consensus reached in the literature is that prisoners who actively engage in religious activities and/or consider themselves religious are likely to derive significant benefits both whilst incarcerated and post-release. These benefits are reformative in nature as they foster positive socialization and moral/spiritual development in offenders who, given the opportunity, commit to ‘working through’ personal and faith

related issues within a framework of religious support. Indeed a viable support network is vital to the process of individual change and social integration; prisoners without appropriate support finding it harder to live out their faith in the community. The most complete embodiment of a viable support network is a Christian-run prison/programme providing ‘holistic’ care (tending a person’s mental, physical, and spiritual needs) both pre- and post-release.\textsuperscript{136}

Conversely, the present research contradicts Peretti and McIntyre’s (1984) study, with one qualification. While these authors found that incarceration had a negative influence on the functions of religion (faith in God, meaning in life, religious observance, etcetera being stronger before than during imprisonment), the present findings show that this happened to very few inmates - even then, usually only during initial reception into prison and diminishing with time. Moreover the present research challenges Peretti and McIntyre’s (1984) and Johnson’s (1987) findings which suggest that religion does not inhibit rule violating behaviour among prisoners, and confirms the contrary findings of Scarnati et al. (1991), Clear et al. (1992a), and Detroit TOP (1997) on this issue.\textsuperscript{137}

An unexpected feature of the present research concerns religious paedophiles. Significant in number, extremely needy, and at high-risk, they represent a group of offenders who appear to have been completely overlooked not only by the general scientific community but also by prison-religion researchers. To the extent that religious paedophiles have been identified here, their issues raised, and a challenge extended for further research, a contribution has been made to the literature. A further contribution has been made regarding offenders’ views on the capacity of imprisonment/Christianity to rehabilitate.


\textsuperscript{137} As the present study is phenomenological and relies only on self-reports, this finding is necessarily limited and should be interpreted with caution.
IMPLICATIONS

The present research suggests that whereas Christian faith/programming has rehabilitative potential “...with at least some offenders under some circumstances” (Andrew et al. 1990:372), it is not being adequately supported in Victoria’s penal system. This is unacceptable given inmates’ inviolable right to adequate religious servicing in prison, and arguably beyond. For whatever reason, to obstruct offenders intent on reforming themselves is, in this writer’s opinion, wrong, short sighted, and debunks the notion of rehabilitation - especially given the high-risk offenders in this study. Church and state have a responsibility, indeed the church is duty-bound, to provide prisoners receptive to Christianity with adequate religious servicing in a conducive environment - paedophiles requiring particular assistance given their relatively large number and unique problems.

138 Australian prisoners may not have a 1st Amendment guarantee to freedom of religious practice like U.S. prisoners (Sumter 1999:6-7), however their rights in this regard are enshrined in certain international instruments. For example, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 to which Australia is a party has as a vital tenant a “freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs…” Similarly, the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners states (under the heading ‘Religion’) the following:

41.(1) If the institution contains a sufficient number of prisoners of the same religion, a qualified representative of that religion shall be appointed or approved. If the number of prisoners justifies it and conditions permit, the arrangement should be on a full-time basis.

(2) A qualified representative appointed or approved under paragraph (1) shall be allowed to hold regular services and to pay pastoral visits in private to prisoners of his religion at proper times.

(3) Access to a qualified representative of any religion shall not be refused to any prisoner. On the other hand, if any prisoner should object to a visit of any religious representative, his attitude shall be fully respected.

42. So far as practicable, every prisoner shall be allowed to satisfy the needs of his religious life by attending the services provided in the institution and having in his possession the books of religious observance and instruction of his denomination.

The Victorian Corrections Act (1986) Section 47l(1)(i) also outlines the religious observance rights of prisoners.
This implies greater openness by correctional policy makers/practitioners to religious issues, more and specialized Christian/corrections personnel, improved resources/facilities, new programme initiatives, and, of course, funding dollars. The long-term investment is worthwhile and, for our collective sake, not one society can afford to shirk.

However, the research further suggests that appropriate post-release follow-up of Christians is essential to affect rehabilitation. In the writer’s experience the process of transition to society means to be neither truly prisoner nor free; a kind of amorphous entity that wars against itself because instincts and emotions conditioned in captivity react when suddenly released. While reintegration to society is difficult for any prisoner, it is harder for those who have served long sentences at a young age - more so if they wish to join a church and have little or no background experience. Such people are expected to make a ‘transcendent leap’ from one extreme subculture (the prison) to another (the church) - many falling somewhere in between. Conditioned to one way of life, the transition to another is inherently difficult because prison and church are ideologically different institutional subcultures with unique codes of conduct, customs, language, and punishment-reward systems, etcetera. Moreover, irrevocably changed by his prison experience, the ‘ex’ is

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139 A particular criticism of professionals was intolerance shown to paedophiles who supposedly ‘used’ religion to avoid dealing with their problems. Authorities need to be alert to this but open-minded given the positive results of an ‘holistic approach’ to inmate care, which demonstrates the importance of health therapy and religious services and practices working together to help prisoners (Scarnati et al. 1991; Ahrens 1998). Featured elsewhere in the literature (Smarto 1987; Phillipy 1983; O’Connor et al. 1997), a holistic approach was also advocated in the present study. Thus while informants agreed that Christianity could achieve what imprisonment failed to achieve, rehabilitation was ultimately contingent on meeting a person’s total needs.

140 A distinction should be made between pre-existing Christians whose faith is renewed in prison and prison converts with no religious background. Although both share a common faith, their reference points in relation to it are different: pre-existing Christians can draw on invaluable insights and experience to help them negotiate religious life whereas prison converts’ inexperience can be a liability, particularly post-release where the sheer size and diversity of denominations might confuse them given their only experience of church has been a simple Christ-based unity of believers.
likely to feel and see things differently to other Christians. Prison-freedom, life-death, good-evil, love-hate, spirit-flesh - such extremes have shaped his world view, perception of self, and faith...which mainstream Christians may find strange and overbearing. Having been part of a religious minority in prison an ‘ex’ risks similar marginalisation in church where he may find nobody to relate to, accentuating loneliness. For like the wider community a predominantly middle-class church is generally ignorant and/or apathetic about prison and the people who go there, which only serves to alienate. Worse still should he encounter a judgemental attitude - which is not uncommon according to the findings and to Speller. An altogether different form of discrimination occurs when the Christian ‘ex’ is elevated to a kind of ‘celebrity’ status. A dramatic example of ‘sinner come good,’ he risks becoming a kind of antihero - ironically the very background society rejects endearing him to Christians. Undoubtedly esteem building in the short term, the danger of celebrity is premature exposure to public speaking/ministry when unresolved personal problems (that likely led to imprisonment and were exacerbated there) still afflict the individual. For instance, consider the stress of ‘witnessing good news’ whilst harbouring guilt about past or continuing sin and being afraid to share the truth; or, should the truth come out, the disconcerting cautiousness sensed (or imagined) towards you afterwards - if not outright

141 “There are those within the Christian community who are aware and concerned about issues of penal policy and criminal justice. Many, however, have given little thought to this area of human need and relationships and have absorbed wholesale the myths and prejudices fostered by certain sections of the media. Others mistakenly equate ethical seriousness on penal issues with excessive severity of punishment. The strident retributivism of some Christians bears little resemblance to the Gospel message of love and hope, nor is it informed by Old Testament insights on justice. They claim the right to pluck out their brother’s eye, but cannot see the truth because of the plank that is in their own. They fail to see that belief in retribution alone is like believing in sin and the fall without believing in redemption. Criminal justice is an area of public policy in which some Christians tend to canonise secular prejudices or to practise a form of apostasy, denying that this is an area over which God has any sovereignty” (Speller 1986:154-155).

142 This excludes convicted paedophiles who are also likely to be ostracized by Christians, resulting in several possible outcomes: first, distortion or non-disclosure of an offender’s criminal history (which reinforces subterfuge and lack of personal accountability in their lives), and second, simple church avoidance.
rejection.

Which leaves us to consider what more informants think the church should be doing to help Christian ex-prisoners (Appendix C:20.1). Their most common suggestion: increase transition-reintegration assistance, especially for long-term prisoners and/or those requiring a suitable Christian fellowship. Extensive psychological help and ongoing religious discipling and pastoral care were reportedly also needed. Ideally, sex offenders advocated a kind of therapeutic facility where they could go for help, and unrestricted (telephone) access to a professional crisis counselling-support service, especially when they felt vulnerable to offend.\textsuperscript{143} Having a support group (like Alcoholics Anonymous) to ensure accountability and compliance of court directed treatment initiatives was deemed essential; likewise the need to correct public misconceptions about offending by focussing on causal factors, not retribution, which only increased anti-detection/apprehension measures by offenders. Certainly publications like \textit{The Australian Paedophile and Sex Offender Index} (Coddington 1997) and \textit{Crime Net} (a recent Internet web site disclosing criminal histories) perpetuated fear and discrimination. Society generally, and parents in particular, also needed to invest time in and value children more, and better educate them about sex(uality) and inappropriate sexual contact.

However there also had to be more in-prison support, and family assistance. To properly target the causes of offending, paedophiles advocated intensive/personalised care and long-term healing over group work and psychological ‘pigeon-holing.’ To this end they suggested an overhaul of clinical services, including: treatment throughout one’s gaol sentence, not (towards) the end; elimination of judgmental/punitive-minded staff, and; single cell accommodation (to decrease stress/‘contamination’). All of which would necessitate expansion of the church’s ministry. A church, informants suggested, that needs

\textsuperscript{143} The writer suggests that ex-prisoners (especially sex offenders) would benefit from having access to the Christian equivalent of ‘Lifeline.’ A discreet phone-in service could provide timely crisis counselling and referrals for further help.
to be better educated on penal issues, more caring, compassionate, and involved with marginalized and broken people. Christians had to show (practical) love, mindful that some people found responding to love difficult; they had to choose tolerance and trust over prejudice, which meant including ex-prisoners in church life/ministry - sex offenders suitably monitored and restricted. Embracing humility, essentially, these Christians should learn to metaphorically ‘break bread’ and ‘wash their brothers’ feet.’ Finally, some felt the church needed to make a fundamental moral change. Preoccupied with wealth and power, confusing ‘churchianity’ for Christianity, lukewarm, worldly, soft - the church was said to have lost integrity, authority, and many disillusioned followers ... including ex-prisoners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further Research
Given Christianity’s longstanding involvement with prisons and its potential to assist some prisoners, and because religion per se “...has been a neglected variable in criminal justice research...” (O’Connor 1995b;4; also Gartner et al. 1990 Sec.2:5), there should be more research on this topic as a matter of course - especially Australian research which is virtually non-existent.

Whereas the views of corrections/religious personnel and other inmates would have enabled a more thorough comparative study, practical considerations restricted the scope to Christian prisoners and ex-prisoners - a limitation which future research should correct. More specifically, there is a need for post-prison research: ideally longitudinal studies that trace a prisoner’s attempted ‘transcendent leap’ between prison-church sub-cultures – particularly focussing on those who appear to struggle/fail.

Finally, we need greater insights into paedophiles who featured so prominently in this sample, particularly if custodial treatment is likely to be countervailed in society by personal and environmental pressures. What percentage of the Christian inmate population do paedophiles comprise, how many recidivate, and why?; do Christian in-prison and/or
community programmes exist to address their specific needs, and if not, what potential models are there?; what is the church’s position on this issue, and what more could it be doing to assist? - such questions require further investigation. The current research is only a starting point.  

**Current Practice**

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made to Victorian Government/Corrections and Church/welfare policy-makers and practitioners in the field, social scientists, and other interested persons:

- A ‘holistic’ approach to inmate care should be trialled in Victoria whereby the total needs of offenders are met. To this end, interested health care providers, religious personnel, and inmates agree to work together in a spirit of mutual cooperation and trust, with a psycho-spiritual component included in sex-offender treatment programmes addressing, inter alia, guilt-forgiveness. This framework would best facilitate the ‘process of working through,’ essential for religious experience to be enduring (Silverman and Oglesby 1983). However a holistic approach must also encompass the difficult transition/reintegration process. In this regard Prison Fellowship Victoria proposes to pilot ‘Lives in Transition’ (LIT), a new church-based mentoring programme providing pre- and post-release ministry to prisoners. This important initiative will need unqualified support within the church/corrections, especially in light of the present findings that suggest an anti-Christian element among prison staff and ex-prisoners’ difficulty assimilating

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144 Arguably the foremost transitional support model is Prison Fellowship’s Detroit TOP (O’Connor et al. 1997), whose aim is to re-establish prisoners in their own communities via extensive church/social supports and a programme of mentoring/accountability.

145 This programme is featured in the May 2000 edition of *Set Free* - PF Victoria’s newsletter. The need for Prison Fellowship Victoria to increase the post-release component of its work is reflected in the total amount of prisoner (3131) and ex-prisoner (66) contact/support between Jan-March 2000 (figures courtesy of Prison Fellowship).
church culture. High-risk offenders are a potential cause for concern, sex offenders in particular. Should Prison Fellowship Victoria take what appears to be the unprecedented step of accepting paedophiles (or other high-risk offenders) into its programme, a very high level of care will be required. On the other hand by excluding them their needs remain unmet; their futures uncertain.

- It appears from the findings that environment significantly affects the way prisoners approach their faith. To reiterate Stark (1995:6), what counts is not whether a particular person is religious but whether this religiousness is, or is not, “ratified by” the social environment. An environment conducive to the enhancement of religious faith, then, might comprise a Christian regime for like-minded prisoners and personnel; in effect, a Christian-run prison - arguably the ideal ‘holistic’ model. The replication of APAC-style prisons around the world is evidence of this. Moreover in an era of ever increasing fiscal constraint and government decentralisation, rising prison numbers and overheads have seen a major restructuring of our correctional system. Private (profit-driven) prisons entering the marketplace have been at the forefront of change. Resulting public-private sector competitiveness has become a byword for (budgetary) efficiency, bringing

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146 Discriminatory behaviour of any kind by prison staff (and prisoners) towards religious inmates, personnel, visitors and/or activities must not be tolerated, and respective prison administrators should adopt uniform standards vis-a-vis religious service provision in their prisons.

147 Research by Gartner et al. (1990 Sec.3: 13) found that whereas involvement in prison-religion programmes helped some ex-offenders under certain conditions to lead crime free lives, recidivism amongst high-risk prisoners showed relatively little change. This finding did not surprise the authors who said high-risk inmates “...have evidenced a more chronic and severe pattern of criminal behavior which is more resistant to change,” and concluded that “…there is a need for a more intensive or specialized type of service to higher risk prisoners [who] may need to be served by prison ministry in a more direct and intense way” (1990 Sec.1: 12). This especially bears upon the paedophiles in this study, in the writer’s opinion, as no Christian prison/post-prison program was identified which addressed their specific issues/needs; indeed, often the nature of their offences effectively excluded them from existing programs (see footnote 41).
specialisation to new levels. Specialisation by gender, age, offence type, sentence length, psychological profile; the growth of client specific facilities, consultants, subcontracting - though not all are attributable to the new power play they are increasingly driven by the forces behind it. In such a climate future consideration of a ‘Christian’ prison/unit in Victoria is not unreasonable, especially given the church’s longstanding prison ministry/welfare experience, potential resource/support base, prospective client pool, and successful practice abroad. Certainly the present research findings suggest that Christian prisoners are a discriminated against minority group who should be housed together for their, and society’s, ultimate good.

- Chaplaincy services must be augmented in size and quality to have credibility. Ideally all institutions should have specially trained, permanent (full/part-time) staff assigned, and the casual use of inexperienced local clergy/lay people to service regional prisons reviewed. Where unavailable or inadequate, Bible-study/prayer groups and church/counselling services should be implemented, and consideration given to having Pentecostalism officially represented within the ranks of chaplaincy. Building relationships with inmates is paramount. Established relationships should ideally be maintained when a prisoner is transferred, and, at least to the extent suggested below, consideration given to support with community reintegration.

- As with chaplaincy, volunteer prison ministry requires qualitative and quantitative augmentation - Prison Fellowship’s proposed Lives In Transition (LIT) programme

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148 In an increasingly litigious age, given the rapid rise and influence of Pentecostalism in Australia and its growing number of prison devotees, it may not be long before the religious observance rights of prisoners are invoked in relation to service provision. Certainly by American prison standards (embroiled in black-Hispanic-white and Christian-Muslim tensions) we are fortunate to have a remarkably homogeneous, non-militant inmate religious group.
calling for extensive overhaul of its staffing/resources. Whenever possible, chaplains-volunteers (and volunteer groups themselves) should be more proactive in order to optimise the effectiveness of limited resources. For example mutual cooperation/support could help to avoid potential ministry duplication and rivalry, address unmet religious service needs (church/Bible studies), present a united Christian front, and further the LIT initiative - chaplains linking suitable prisoners into the programme.

- Every facility should ideally have a designated chapel (not ‘multi-purpose’ room). Mindful of prisoners’ varying literacy levels and stages of faith, suitable Christian resources including books (especially autobiographies), audio-tapes (music/teaching), and Bible study aids, etcetera, should be made available - perhaps through a (church sponsored) mobile library service.

- Prisoners are a largely untapped human resource. Consideration should be given to better utilizing their diverse gifts, skills, and qualifications in the official preparation/delivery of religious services, and with peer counselling and/or discipling. This would potentially help to occupy prisoners, promote their confidence/personal development, and assist a depleted chaplaincy. Christian ex-prisoners also present a potentially useful resource in regard to prison/post-prison ministry.
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APPENDIX A

PROJECT INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE INTERVIEWEES

Below is a copy of the written information in plain language that was provided for prisoners who might participate in the study. An appropriately modified copy was given to ex-prisoners.

CAN YOU PLEASE HELP?

My name is Arthur Bolkas. Many years ago I also did time in prison. These days I’m at Melbourne University, studying Criminology for a Masters degree. My study is about Christianity in prison. I’d like to find out how and why prisoners get involved in Christianity, and what sort of an affect it has on them. I’m especially interested in talking to people who’ve either had some sort of a religious conversion, are going on with their faith, or have given their faith away. (I also want to interview ex-inmates who were Christians inside, in order to find out what happened to them after they were released.)

If you are such a person, questions will focus a bit on you (such as your sex and age, length of sentence, whether you are a first time or repeat offender), but mainly on your experiences and thoughts / feelings. If you find a question too personal or upsetting, don’t worry, you don’t have to answer it. In fact, because this interview is voluntary, you can pull out of the interview at any time or even withdraw any information already given to me before it is analysed.
The interview will be about one hour long and (with your permission) I’d like to tape record it. Recording makes the interview quicker, more accurate and helps it to flow. It also makes my job of analysing the information you give a lot easier. Your name won’t be asked, and a false name will be used if a direct quote of yours is included in my report. Once I’ve typed the information I need from your interview into my computer, the taped interview will be erased. Although the authorities have agreed to let me tape record interviews, they reserve the right to check these tapes if they think it is necessary. However as the information you give will not affect prison security, I’ve been assured that it is highly unlikely any tapes will be checked. Still, if you prefer not to be tape recorded, we can try to make some alternative arrangement.

Your opinions on this subject will help the public (especially Christians) to learn about prisoners and former prisoners, their needs, and how they might be of (better) use to them. Academics, policy makers and the authorities will also learn whether Christianity serves a useful purpose in our prison system and should be encouraged more.

If you have any other questions to do with this project, I can be contacted through the person who gave you this information, or by writing to 58 Swan Street Footscray, 3011. If you agree to be interviewed, before we start I will read you a consent form saying that you agree to take part in the interview, and ask you to sign it.

I hope to meet you soon.

Arthur James Bolkas
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWEES

Below is a copy of the consent form that a person was asked to read (or was read to them) and sign before the commencement of the interview.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINOLOGY

Consent form for persons participating in research projects

Name of participant:

Project Title: The Significance of Christianity in Reforming Prisoners

Name of Investigator(s): Dr Austin Lovegrove (Supervisor) & Arthur James Bolkas

1. I consent to participate in the above project, the details of which have been explained to me and are outlined below.
2. I agree that:

(a) The details of the project have been explained to me to my satisfaction;

(b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any information previously given before it is analysed;

(c) The project is for the purpose of research and possible publication;

(d) I have agreed for the interview to be tape recorded (with the right to have it turned off at any time), as long as a false name is given with any direct quotes that might be used elsewhere;

(e) I understand that CORE-the Public Correctional Enterprise reserves the right to check any tape recorded interviews if it is deemed necessary;

(f) I have been informed that the information I give will be kept safe, subject to legal requirements.

Signature: Date:
Below is a slightly modified copy of the interview schedule. Two versions of the schedule were originally designed to overcome obvious grammatical differences when addressing current and former prisoners, and also because some questions were only relevant to one or other of the groups.

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. **Demographic/Personal Details**
   
   *I’d like to begin by talking a little about your personal background.*

   1.1 Status? (mainstream/protection)
   1.2 Age?
   1.3 Nationality?
   1.4 Are you: single/married/separated/divorced?
   1.5 What’s your usual occupation, if any?
   1.6 What level of education have you reached?
   1.7 Is your security classification maximum/medium/minimum?
   1.8 What’s your minimum sentence?
   1.9 How much of it have you served?
   1.10 Have you been in prison before?
      *(If yes) How many times?*
   1.11 *(former prisoners) How long have you been out of prison?*
   1.12 You can choose not to answer this, but in general terms, what are you in prison for?

2. **Background of Christian Faith**

   2.1 Do you belong to a Christian denomination? Which one?
   2.2 Are you a Christian? *(yes/no/not sure answer only)*
   2.3 How long ago did you become a Christian? *(years/months)*
2.4 So you became a Christian before/after entering prison?
2.5 (If before) Did going to prison affect your Christian faith in a positive or negative way?
2.6 Are you involved in any religious activities in prison? What kind?
   (e.g. bible study/prayer/attend church services, etc)
2.7 Did you attend Church before coming to prison?
2.8 Could you briefly tell me, what’s your definition of a Christian?

3. **Conversion**
3.1 So how did you become a Christian? Describe what happened to you?
3.2 Have you ever heard of any prisoners being ‘converted’ or ‘born again’? Explain.
3.3 What do you think of these people?

4. **‘Intrinsic-Extrinsic’ Religious Orientations**
   *I’d like you to discuss your thoughts about other prisoners you’ve come across who call themselves Christians?*
4.1 How can you tell whether a prisoner who calls himself a Christian is sincere or not?
4.2 Do you consider yourself to be a sincere Christian?
4.3 Why would some inmates make out that they’re Christians when they’re not?
4.4 Do you think chaplains and other Christian prison workers can pick those inmates who are fakers?

5. **‘Working Through’ Process**
5.1 In prison, have you ever felt doubts and insecurities about your faith? Explain.
5.2 How did you get over it?
5.3 What have you found are the hardest things about living as a Christian in prison?
5.4 What are the most important things a Christian prisoner needs to help him to grow in his faith?
5.5 What’s likely to happen if these things aren’t available?

6. **Guilt, Remorse, Forgiveness & Self/God Concepts**
6.1 Do you feel remorse/sorry for things you’ve done which got you into trouble?
6.2 Do you feel guilt or forgiveness? Why/why not?
6.3 What would help you to feel (even more) forgiven?
6.4 How do you think God feels about you (and what you’ve done)?
6.5 So would you describe God’s nature as punishing or forgiving?
6.6 How do you think the general public feel about you (and what you’ve done)?
6.7 How do you think other Christians feel about you (and what you’ve done)?
   (chaplains/prison volunteers/Christian prisoners/outside Christians generally)
6.8 Overall, how do you feel about yourself as a person?

7. **Qualitative Difference to Life in Prison**
7.1 Does being a Christian make any (positive/negative) difference to your life in prison? In what ways?

8. **Disciplinary Problems & Infractions**
8.1 Does being a Christian affect your attitude towards the authorities and prison rules in any way?
8.2 As a Christian, have you ever been charged or in trouble with the authorities or with other prisoners? Briefly, what happened?
8.3 Without revealing what it was, have you done anything wrong that you didn’t get caught for?
8.4 Who would you say gets into trouble more with the authorities, Christian or non-Christian prisoners? Why?

9. **Chaplains**

   *Now I’d like to talk a bit about Christians who work in prison. (Distinguish b/n chaplains & prison volunteers). Let’s start with the chaplains:*

9.1 Have you had anything to do with the chaplains? What?
9.2 In a week, how often do you see them?
   Is this enough?
   How often would you like to see them?
9.3 What do you think is the role or purpose of the prison chaplains?
9.4 In your opinion, are they effective in their role?
9.5 Have the chaplains ever helped you? How?
9.6 Have they ever let you down? Explain.
9.7 Are any of the services or activities organized by the chaplains especially helpful to you? Which ones and why?
9.8 What should or shouldn’t chaplains be doing to be more effective?
9.9 Do you feel that the chaplains really understand you and care about you?
9.10 Do you trust the chaplains?
9.11 How important are the chaplains to you in prison?
9.12 How important do you think they’ll be to you when you’re released?
9.13 Should staying in touch with you when you’re released be a part of their job?
9.14 Do you think every prison should have a full-time chaplain? Why?

10. Christian Volunteers
10.1 Have you had anything to do with Christian volunteer groups/individuals who visit or help prisoners? With who and what?
10.2 In a week, how often do you see them?
   Is this enough?
   How often would you like to see them?
10.3 For what reasons do you think they get involved with prisoners?
10.4 In your opinion, do they achieve their purpose?
10.5 Have any outside Christians ever helped you? How?
10.6 Have they ever let you down? How and why?
10.7 Are any of the services or activities organized by these Christians especially helpful to you? Which ones and why?
10.8 What should or shouldn’t they be doing to be more effective?
10.9 Do you feel that they really understand you and care about you?
10.10 Do you trust them?
10.11 How important are these Christians to you in prison?
10.12 How important do you think they’ll be to you when you’re released?
10.13 Should staying in touch with you when you’re released be a part of their job?

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10.14 If you had to make a choice between the chaplains and the Christian volunteer workers, who would you prefer to have coming into prison, and why?
10.15 Compared to other Christians, do you think it would be useful having a Christian ex-crim helping in prison and post-release? Why?
10.16 Of all the people both in and outside of prison, who would you say has helped you most?
10.17 Who has helped you most with your Christian faith?

11. **Other Inmates & Prison Personnel**

*I’m interested to learn how other inmates and prison staff treat you and fellow Christians?*

11.1 In your opinion, what do most non-Christian prisoners *think* of Christians?
11.2 What do most prison staff think of Christians?
11.3 Have you ever had any trouble or been treated unfairly by inmates or staff because of your faith?
11.4 What is the attitude of the Governor/administration here to Christian activities?
11.5 Can prison life/the prison environment cause a Christian inmate to compromise his faith? If so, how?

12. **Group Support/Dynamics**

12.1 Are there any other Christian prisoners in here with you?
12.2 If so, do you do anything together as a group? What?
12.3 How long have you been in this group?
12.4 Is this group important to you?
12.5 How do you think it would affect you if the group broke up?
12.6 Does the fact that some inmates are from different denominations to yours create any problems? What about in the group?
12.7 When you’re released, do you think it’ll bother you that outside Christians stick pretty much to their denominations and don’t have much to do with each other?

13. **Family/Friends**

13.1 What do your family and friends think about your Christian faith?
13.2 Has your faith affected your relationships with family and friends in any way?

14. **Morals, New Lifestyle/Values & Dissonance**

14.1 Has your faith affected your values and morals in any way - deciding what is important to you and between what is right and wrong? How?
14.2 (If unmentioned) Does the bible play any part in this? How?
14.3 What happens when you compromise or don’t live up to these Christian standards?
14.4 Is there any way that you can get over this? How?
14.5 (Christians pre-imprisonment)
   If you were a Christian before coming to prison, how do you explain your presence here?
14.6 If you were to be released, what would stop you from re-offending or going back to your old ways of thinking and living?
14.7 What do you want to do with the rest of your life?

15. Visitors
15.1 What about contact with the outside - do you get visits or letters?
15.2 Do you receive visits or letters from Christians? Who?
   (Yes:) Is this contact helpful to you? How?
   (No:) Would such contact be helpful to you? How?

16. Rehabilitation
   One of the stated aims of imprisonment is to rehabilitate offenders...
16.1 What do you think of rehabilitation?
16.2 Have you received professional help/treatment?
   (No:) Why not?
   (Yes:) Has this treatment been adequate? Why/why not?
16.3 Do you believe that Christianity is a way of rehabilitating prisoners? How?
16.4 If a Christian run unit or prison existed, would you want to go there? Why?
16.5 Why do you think some ex-prisoners who were Christians inside might now be reluctant to talk to me about their faith?

17. Child Sex Offenders
   (mainstream prisoners only)
17.1 What are your thoughts/feelings about Christian child sex offenders?
   (paedophile prisoners only)
17.2 Were you sexually abused yourself as a child or young person?
17.3 If yes, do you think it contributed to your offending behaviour? How?
17.4 What other possible factors do you think contributed to your offending behaviour?

18. **Community Reintegration**

18.1 I’d like to find out what happened to you after your release from prison. Could you tell me what it was like getting out - what you felt like, the kinds of difficulties you faced, and so forth?

19. **Church Assimilation**

19.1 *(prisoners)* Do you propose to attend church after being released from prison?

*(ex-prisoners)* Did you attend church after being released from prison?

19.2 *(prisoners)* Do you expect to have any problems fitting into the church after your release?

*(ex-prisoners)* Did you experience any problems fitting into the church after your release?

19.3 Do you think it’s harder being a Christian in or outside of prison?

19.4 Why do you think ex-prisoners who were Christians in prison are reluctant to talk to me about their faith?

19.5 What has happened to your own faith since you were released?

20. **Sundry**

20.1 Is there anything more the church should be doing to help Christian ex-prisoners?

20.2 Does it make any difference to you having me, an ex-prisoner, doing this interview?

20.3 In closing, are there any other thoughts or feelings you have about this interview?

*End of interview*