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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/22731>

DOI: 10.4000/assr.22731

ISSN: 1777-5825

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 31 March 2011

Number of pages: 43-64

ISBN: 978-2-71322301-3

ISSN: 0335-5985

Electronic reference

Stephen Hunt, « Testing Chaplaincy Reforms in England and Wales », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [Online], 153 | janvier-mars 2011, Online since 26 May 2011, connection on 08 January 2020.
URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/22731> ; DOI : 10.4000/assr.22731

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Introduction: The Limits of Institutional Reform

Almost half a century has passed since Erving Goffman's seminal work *Asylums* in which he cultivated one of his key sociological concepts, namely that of the total institution. In his typology Goffman delineated the principal features of what amounted to a totalitarian sub-social system, a "social hybrid" (1961: 22), part formal, part informal organisation. For Goffman, prisons constituted merely one of several types of such institutions differentiated by their stated purpose which dictated their "totality" and, subsequently, their negative impact on the inmate's perception of self, in particular, the processes that systematically inflicted "mortifications" of self.

According to Goffman, prisons are a cluster of institutions (others include prisoner of war and concentration camps) organised to protect the community against those thought to constitute intentional dangers. Given this primary aim, emphasis on the welfare of inmates sequestered is not the immediate concern even if prisons may internalise an ethic of rehabilitation. It is perhaps for this reason that Goffman says little on the matter of reform, although what he did discuss was significant. Despite the concern of some total institutions "... with resetting the inmate's self-regulatory mechanisms so that after he leaves he will maintain the standards of the establishment on his own accord—they do not (...) have a long-lasting effect" (1961: 69-70). Operating primarily as "storage dumps for inmates" (1961: 23), the only consequential impact of institutional life was to generate post-institutional stigma, doing little to erode their negative moral career. Moreover, endeavours to rehabilitate are invariably lost in the mire of prevailing structural arrangements and bureaucratic restraints, alongside the negative consequences stemming from the dynamics of the "under-life" of prison experiences—the very stuff of institutional life. Attempts at reform and innovating procedures may be earnestly employed but invariably deteriorate into part of the "front-stage" of public image and justification of the institution itself.

All of these considerations, to one degree or another, have implications for the application of recent chaplaincy reforms in England and Wales. While this paper does not intend a thorough-going exploration of Goffman's typology of the total institution or its implications, it will engage with his work as applicable

to the relevant reforms and their limitations. This will be particularly so with reference to the insights that he provided in terms of bureaucratic constraints which mitigate against rehabilitation, thus highlighting how a distinct section of a prison population—prisoners of faith—find their religious and spiritual inclinations and practices contested, even in the light of innovatory reform measures.

The Context: Chaplaincy Reforms in the UK

As Furseth (2003) notes, the re-found conviction of the advantages of religiosity and spirituality in relation to rehabilitation through chaplaincy reform seemingly marks a reversal of secularising tendencies. This subsequently enhances the state's involvement in the realm of private religiosity in Western democracies. In much the same vein the prison chaplaincy reforms in England and Wales (instigated since July, 2001), originally derived from the initiative of the Chaplain General and broader HM Prison Service recommendations, advocated that provisions should fall into line with changes observable in comparable systems elsewhere. The broad aim of the Prison Service Chaplaincy (PSC), as envisaged by the spirit of reform, is to rehabilitate prisoners and instill an ethic of social responsibility after release in their return to full citizenship. The *Statement of Purpose of the Chaplaincy: An Operational Guide* (2003, p. i)¹ states:

By celebrating the goodness of life and exploring the human condition we aim to cultivate in each individual (prisoner) a responsibility for contributing to the common good. We will contribute to the care of prisoners to enable them to lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and release.

Enhancing the spiritual life of prisoners constitutes an important part of the chaplaincy mission in its own right and is viewed as being an integral part of the rehabilitation process. It follows that the reforms instituted have aspired to improving the following aspects of HM Prison service chaplaincies: religious registration; pastoral care; prisoners at risk; funeral arrangements; religious ritual; sacred places of worship and meditation; items of possession regarding religious artefacts; dress and headgear; and religious writings.

There is also the driving question of the role of prison chaplaincies in an ever-growing multi-ethnic and multi-faith culture.² The desire for such reforms in contributing towards these needs is exemplified in *The Operational Guide* (2003, p. i) which claims that:

the HM Prison Service is committed to serving the needs of prisoners, staff and religious traditions by engaging all human experiences. We will work collaboratively, respecting the integrity of each tradition and discipline.

1. The document is primarily a guide of conduct for members of chaplaincy teams.

2. HMPS has informally encouraged the development of a “multi-faith” chaplaincy since 1999.

The core institutional and procedural changes carried out in the light of recommended reforms have engendered the establishment of chaplaincy “teams” which “should include chaplains of all traditions and faiths” under the specific leadership of the appropriate chaplain (*Operational Guide*, 2003, p. T-1). These “teams” have the primary role of encouraging the pastoral care of prisoners of various faith traditions, providing “sacred space” for worship and other opportunities for expressing and enhancing religious conviction and practice. While still led by an Anglican clergyman,³ the teams ideally allow the opportunity for representation from those religious traditions other than Christian.⁴ The working ethic of these broadly constituted teams includes the desire for impartiality, mutuality and collegiality in carrying out their stipulated roles.

Research Questions

Despite the fact that Goffman had set an almost impossibly high analytic standard in developing the concept of the total institution, his work has inspired academic scrutiny of attempted rehabilitation in the penal setting (Buntman, 2009; Cox, 2009). Nonetheless, there are relatively few studies conducted of prison chaplaincy services in recent times and this is certainly in respect of England and Wales. Among the most significant is the work of Beckford and Gilliat (Beckford, 1999a; Beckford, Gilliat, 1998) which earlier outlined the chronic need for a reform of the chaplaincy system, pointing out that compared to the policy of other liberal democracies in attempting equal respect for all religious faiths, the PSC of England and Wales employed only Christian chaplains and was effectively controlled by the “established” Anglican Church. Hence, prisoners who belonged to minority faith communities and new forms of religiosity experienced unequal opportunity in practicing their religion; their needs being largely restricted to the efforts of volunteer Visiting Ministers who, in turn, relied on full-time Christian chaplains to facilitate access to prisoners, meeting rooms, religious artifacts and so on. This dependency gave rise to feelings of resentment, discrimination and marginalization among members of minority faiths that subsequent reforms seemingly addressed.

More widely, there is a growing field of international academic literature which highlight many of the areas that such reforms would seem to encompass. One dominant theme focuses on the legal implications of the right to practice one’s religion during incarceration and, in the context of the United States at least, has become a constitutional matter (Hodgson, 2006; Vezzola, 2007). This

3. Anglican chaplains, representing the church of the state, have been central to prisons for more than two centuries in England and Wales. The Prison Act 1952 (still in force) requires every prison to have at least one clergyman of the Church of England.

4. As a result of the reforms there are currently around 40 full-time Muslim chaplains in England and Wales, alongside just over a hundred working in a part-time capacity.

theme is related to a second field of enquiry that focuses upon religious conviction and practice in the prison setting in the context of increasing diversity of religious expression. Among the pertinent questions raised here is what does or does not constitute a “religion” (Hodgson, 2005; Gagnon, 2008). This diversity is clearly related to the increasingly multi-faith and multi-ethnic nature of Western societies (Gagnon, 2008; Grobsmith, 1994) with a central concern focusing on the well-being of Muslim prisoners (Beckford *et al.*, 2005; Spalek, 2006; Spalek, El-Hassan, 2007) and the implications of militant strains of Islam in the penal setting (Hamm, 2009; Trujillo, 2009).

Further fields of investigation include the connection between religion, spirituality and long-term rehabilitation (Giordano, 2008; O’Connor, 1995; O’Connor, Perreyclear, 2002) and the role of faith-based initiatives, many of which point to their success rates in motivating rehabilitation (Camp *et al.*, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Johnson *et al.*, 1997). Related academic concerns explore the degree to which prisoners of faith adjust to the prison environment (Adler, 2008; Clear, 2003; Clear, Sumpter, 2002; Johnson, 1987; Lacey, 2009; Schneider, 2009), their conformity to the prison regime (Kerley, 2005) and their involvement in official prison religious activities (Clear *et al.*, 2000; Fernander, 2005).

This paper seeks to supplement and engage with a number of such themes, as well as more directly exploiting Goffman’s insights, and is based on a small but detailed survey of a chaplaincy covering two male prisons in England and Wales⁵ in order to measure the impact of the 2001 reforms. Both prisons were under the auspices of the same chaplaincy “team” and sited in a relatively close geographical location. The research project, carried out during 2005-2006, focused upon inter-related research questions examining reform and general indicators of spiritual well-being. A number of these research questions will be addressed here:

- To what extent have prisoners of faith experienced a positive impact of chaplaincy reforms and are they satisfied with provisions offered in terms of their religious beliefs and practices?
- More specifically, are there appropriate access to places of worship and/or further areas (“sacred places”) for other religious activities?
- Are there improved opportunities for spiritual well-being and growth of prison inmates in relation to their background in one or other of the faith communities?
- In which ways do current institutional arrangement in the broader prison context mitigate against the spiritual development of prisoners of faith?
- How do prisoners anticipate their spiritual lives developing after release?

The findings disseminated below point towards the constraints of chaplaincy reform in terms of the characteristics of the prison as a total institution and

5. Scotland and Northern Ireland have different chaplaincy arrangements.

may be subsumed under the limitations of 1- bureaucratic inertia; 2- spatial and temporal restrictions; 3- the hierarchical control of religiosity; 4- institutional relationships; 5- and rehabilitation and stigmatisation.

Methodology

The prisons researched provided a contrast between a secure prison—a sex offender’s institution (250 prisoners)—and an “open” prison (170 prisoners).⁶ The research embraced a multi-method strategy of sociological investigation, seeking to operationalise both qualitative and quantitative methods:

A six-page detailed questionnaire of some thirty questions was administered to forty prisoners (twenty-five were returned).⁷ The answers were framed either in terms of “Yes”, “No” or “Unsure” responses, or allowed respondents to choose from a number of pre-set answers and, where relevant, provided space to elaborate. Questions explored such areas as the prisoners’ religious background, allegiances, socialization, place of worship, conversion experiences (where applicable), encountering prison life in the context of religious practice/spiritual development and perceived improvements to chaplaincy provisions.

Twenty-four interviews were conducted of those prisoners willing to participate.⁸ Those selected in the sample frame included those identified by the chaplaincy as regularly attending Christian services in the prison chapels, as well as those who indicated that they were members of one or other of the faith communities other than Christian on entry to the prisons (prisoners were also encouraged to speak of experiences in other jails). The interview sample also sought a rough representation of prisoners’ demographic background by age, education, ethnicity, occupation, religion etc. The sample was comprised of fourteen mainstream Christians; one Jehovah’s Witness; one Mormon; four Muslims; two Buddhists; one Sikh; and one Pagan.⁹ The interviews explored issues at length in regard to sections two and three of the questionnaire¹⁰ (entailing approximately 10-12 questions) and took place on a one-to-one basis. They lasted on average

6. The “open” prison is an institution for Category D prisoners the least secure prison for non-dangerous prisoners who, subject to approval, are given ROTL (Release On Temporary Licence) to work in the community or to go on “home leave” once they have passed their FLED (Full Licence Eligibility Dates). The sex offenders prison constitutes a Category B institution where the prisoners are those who do not require maximum security, but are deemed as a danger to the public.

7. Reasons for non-return of questionnaires included inability to read, concerns regarding the use of findings and the nature of crime committed.

8. The interviews were conducted between February and June, 2006. The real names of the prisoners mention below are replaced by pseudonyms.

9. Six respondents had been converted in prison, five Christians and one Buddhist.

10. Some interviewees preferred to be interviewed rather than putting their views down in writing on the questionnaire.

for some 40 minutes and were held in the chaplaincy or the prison library. A representative selection of responses are quoted below in addressing the research questions. Two interviews were also conducted with the head Anglican chaplain around a number of pertinent and related issues.

Participant observation, carried out for the first six months of the survey (July-December, 2005), supplemented the quantitative methods and ensured they were sufficiently “grounded”, throwing light on other important areas not previously anticipated. A good part of the observation took place in the chaplaincy area and largely entailed the attendance of religious services or organised events such as Holy-text studies, prayer meetings and discussion groups. Attending these occasions allowed the opportunity to talk to prisoners of faith informally in a suitable environment, sometimes in groups, regarding issues central to the research.

Bureaucratic Inertia

Research Question # 1—To what extent have prisoners of faith experienced a positive impact of chaplaincy reforms and are they satisfied with provisions offered in terms of their religious beliefs and practices?—was addressed via two “coded” questions on the questionnaire. These two questions sought, firstly, to tap the prisoners’ observation of the impact of provisions attempted by the reforms and, secondly and relatedly, whether their religious and spiritual needs were being suitably addressed:

Have you noticed an improvement in provision for the requirements of your religious faith in the time that you have been in prison? The questionnaire solicited fifteen “Yes”, ten “No” and one “Unsure” range of responses. More strikingly the questionnaire and interview responses indicated that all prisoners sampled were oblivious to the fact that any chaplaincy reforms had in fact been implemented, enforcing Goffman’s assertion that the flow of official institutional information which may be applicable to the inmate’s circumstances rarely percolates down to their level (1961: 19). This ensures that they remain unaware of new innovations and policy, leaving them ignorant of their new rights or opportunities. Typical affirmative statements attributed all positive changes of the chaplaincy to the relatively new head chaplain, suggesting that his personal charisma and willingness to offer supportive measures were often irrespective of recent reforms.

Would you say that your religious/spiritual needs are being adequately catered for? Fourteen respondents thought they were, eleven did not. Commenting in the questionnaires on why some inmates were not satisfied, the most common retort was to point to inflexibility within the institutional setting, typically prisoners stated “No—Some prisons/some ministers are stifled in what they do—domineered by prison management” and “He’s (the chaplain) very busy

and the way that the prison is run". This sentiment was often accompanied by a certain degree of resignation. George was asked whether being a Buddhist meant a difficult life in prison:¹¹

No, I recognise where I am, I realise that there is a certain line you can go to for getting what you need. It's bureaucratic and all that stuff is going on around you. You can't influence any of that. You have to accept it.

Interviews occasionally identified inertia resulting from the chaplaincy itself. Here was evidence that chaplains bring with them an earlier occupational socialisation carrying expectations about their work that may mitigate against change including a more diverse set of roles (Hicks, 2008; Sundt, Cullen, 2002). One inmate interviewed¹² responded as follows:

You see, it's very traditional here. The chaplain goes by the book, as did the man before him. They all have their way of doing things. Of course, they have to go by prison regulations. But they are not very innovating.

Q. Do you think that much depends on the chaplain himself?

Yes, very much so. Some are more traditional than others. Some have certain ways of doing things and they don't want to be different and change.

Spatial and Temporal Restrictions

Goffman (1961, 15) noted that "Every institution captures something of the time and interest of its members and provides something of a world for them (...) every institution has encompassing tendencies". These tendencies are not merely enforced by boundaries of a physical nature, secluding the inmate from the outside world, but separate activities within the institution, typically sleep, play and work (*ibid.*: 17) that are enforced by "house rules", a relatively explicit and formal set of prescriptions that lay out the main requirements of inmate conduct, spelling out the austere round of life of the inmate in these spheres (*ibid.*: 51). It follows that places of worship and related activities are separated physically from other aspects of life. For instance, Phillip,¹³ an evangelical Christian, stated in an interview that

There is only the time of the Sunday service. Nothing outside of that for prayer or other activities with the fellowship. Then there are things like... well on one occasion I was praying for this other prisoner. I was talking to him and he wanted me to pray for him. I could only do it at the (meal) table in front of everyone else. There was nowhere else to go... Then this prison officer told me to stop. It wasn't allowed.

For those with a religious faith before entering prison the experience of institutional life automatically brings a curtailment of flexibility in partaking of religious activities, fellowshiping with others of the same faith, and attending

11. George, interviewed in the prison's chapel 9/3/06.

12. Adrian interviewed in the prison chapel 18/4/06.

13. Phillip, interviewed in the prison's library 19/4/06.

places of worship. Hitherto, such activities constituted what Goffman (1961: 23) referred to as the inmates “presenting culture” which is derived from their “home world”—a way of life and taken-for-granted round of activities. Contact between inmates, regulated by time and place, restricts fellowship with those of the same faith. The accessibility to places of worship is necessarily enforced by security considerations that underpin the principal aims of the prison. Then there is the simple matter of inadequate facilities, some of which may have informed religious activities in the outside world. These matters were addressed by Research Question # 2—are there appropriate access to places of worship and “sacred places” for other religious activities?—through two questions on the questionnaire related to access and fellowship opportunities:

a) Do you think that the practical needs of your faith are adequately met? For example, access to Holy Scriptures, a special place for worship, prayer, or meditation, diet, religious ritual, or the celebration of Holy Days. The majority did not concur with this statement as evident to the responses that indicated that 17 agreed while 8 did not. At the open prison one prisoner,¹⁴ a convicted murderer and long-time Christian evangelical convert, complained in an interview about the lack of facilities at the open prison and the tendency of inmates, as Goffman (1961: 186) recognised, of “making do” with what was on offer:

Q. You say in the questionnaire that going to the chapel is an anti-climax for you.

Nick: Yeah, its a kind of husk. We have to make the most of it. It's like a hut with a cross in it. It doesn't do anything for you. It's like “can you make do with that?”

Q. Is that your only contact with the other guys that come along?

Nick: Yeah, no there is nothing.

Q. Why's that? Is it because people are in and out (of the open prison) all the time?

Nick: I don't know. If there was more, I would use it. I try to drag a few of the blokes down on a Sunday morning. There are people here who go to church back home but not here. Just because the chaplain sits in a room doesn't make it a church... Yeah, there are quite a few guys out there (who would attend), if it wasn't the building that it was.

Q. And if there was more, they would become more involved?

Nick: Yes, God yes, if there was somewhere else where they could meet and pray. It's not because they don't believe. But because of the place, what it is, and what they don't get when they walk in. I walk into the church at home and you can almost feel the world lift from your shoulders. That's what I feel. Kind of “time out”. I come across on the Sunday to support the chaplain... otherwise nothing would happen.

Another prisoner, Bryan,¹⁵ spoke of security matters at his previous prison:

In my first prison, to get to the chapel we always had to be escorted. We had to be “sterile” — that mainstream prisoners did not mix with us because we were sex offenders. We had to be protected from other prisoners. It was like us against them.

14. Nick, interviewed in the prison's chapel 17/3/06.

15. Bryan interviewed in the prison's chapel 27/3/06.

So, there was limited access. We did have a room on the wing but it was a bit constricting. The chaplain was not easy to access.

Lee,¹⁶ describing himself as an “aspiring Buddhist”, reported:

There’s a shrine outside but you can’t get to it.

Q. You can’t get to it at all?

Lee: You can. You can ask to be escorted out there and ask to come back in if it’s convenient and not raining. It’s the practicalities and the prison service is worried that everyone suddenly becomes a Buddhist and wants to go out to the shrine. It’s a security matter which I can understand.

Q: How often have you visited the shrine?

Lee: I’ve been here a year and a bit. About five or six times, and that was after some six months of negotiation to get to the shrine. To get a supply of incense in here took months and months and months. Some people feel frustrated.

Moaz¹⁷ a Muslim explained during an interview that.

We are able to pray five times a day. Yes. In prison that is very, very easy. But we don’t have all facilities.

Q. What facilities don’t you have?

Moaz: We have to wash the pollution before praying. We pray but we are still dirty because we can’t wash. We are not able to have showers, do ablutions. But the staff do their best for us. It is impossible to practice all your religion in here. It’s much better than other jails. I’ve been in another jail.

Q. What was it like there for you?

Moaz: You cannot practice your religion in (names prison). The staff disturbed you when you are at prayer on purpose. It’s a private prison and they don’t care.

Q. How else did they disturb you?

Moaz: They did a roll call. They slammed the door in my face. I complained to the governor (...) nothing happened.

b) Do you think that you have enough contact with prisoners of the same faith as yourself? The view of respondents were divided, as evidence by the 14 who replied “Yes” and the 11 who responded “No”. However, those who disagreed tended to have strong views on the matter.

Andrew,¹⁸ at a discussion group, spoke of his experiences at his previous prison:

There you only got an hour on a Thursday evening for a meeting, then it was straight back to your cell. Sunday in the chapel and then it was straight back to your cell. You were pushed into a corner.

Peter¹⁹ spoke of other practicalities:

Q. You think that you have enough opportunity for fellowship?

16. Lee, interviewed in the chaplain’s office 18/4/06.

17. Moaz, interviewed in the chaplain’s office 18/4/06.

18. Andrew, interviewed after a Friday night’s discussion group held by the Roman Catholic chaplain, 13/5/06.

19. Peter, interviewed in the prison’s chapel 18/4/06.

Peter: That's one good thing. But we have lock downs' when there's a shortage of staff and things.

He also mentioned restrictions of communication with Christian staff:

In fact, I know a few (staff) that would like to be involved in fellowship with us but they're restricted by the fact that there are boundaries. One's actually a lay preacher. They've got their work to do. There is a strict line between the two.

The Hierarchical Control of Religiosity

Research Question # 3—systematically addressed improved opportunities for spiritual well-being and growth of prison inmates in relation to their background in one or other of the faith communities. There are two key considerations here. First, the top-down nature of the chaplaincy in terms of supplying religious “needs”. Second, and relatedly, the practical elements necessary for spiritual well-being and development of prison inmates of religious conviction.

On the first count Beckford (1999b; 2009) has pulled attention to how the character of religion and spirituality in prison owes much to the work of prison chaplains themselves. A common theme in sermons and pastoral guidance is the need for chaplains to develop simple but forceful ways encouraging prisoners to think and feel about their place in the world and in relation to others. Intellectual inquiry for its own sake or for forging an infallible answer to all moral questions is discouraged. This emphasis on the simple and practical aspects of faith reflects a form of spirituality that is far removed from concerns of the subjective self and personal growth. Conformity to sacred laws and ritual regulations lay at the core of envisaged spirituality in prison, while spiritual growth is largely measured by the capacity to conform to them. Sacred texts are therefore presented as indispensable sources of rules for prisoners to follow: not as writings for sophisticated analysis or deconstruction. The result is the emergence of a “generic” or “one-size-fits-all” type of spirituality that is also found in health care chaplaincies: a “dumbing down” or “intellectual Polyfilla” (Pattison, 2001).

The top-down application of religiosity is also played out in religious services, the nature of which may be dictated by the chaplain's preference for all things “traditional” and certainly constitutes a “monopoly” rather than encouraging innovation that reflects the prisoner of faith's choice of format and which may plausibly enhance their spirituality. In an interview John²⁰ typically detailed the matter of the Sunday Christian service, the main event of the week:

To be honest it doesn't do much for me you know. I'm not an Anglican or anything like that. I'm not anything really. I just call myself a Christian. I'm not into all this ritual and liturgy. It's a bit too ordered and structured for me. It's not what I was

20. John interviewed in the prison's chapel 4/6/06.

used to. A bit dry really. It does liven up a bit sometimes when people come in (a local Pentecostal church) (...) And, another thing. I used to watch a lot meetings on satellite TV (facilities unavailable in prison) (...) those American ministries. They were more up-to-date, and they preached the gospel. Sort of born again Christianity.

Ian²¹ spoke of the same service provision:

The Salvation Army (yawns) comes in sometimes. Some don't like the old hymns they play or the music. Some don't like the bell when it's rung at communion. They don't like tradition. They like more contemporary worship.

The second matter related to improved opportunities for spiritual well-being and growth of prison inmates concerns the more practical considerations: the access to religious representatives, and the freedom to practice rituals (partially discussed above) and possession of religious text and other paraphernalia. For those claiming a religious faith before entering prison there may be the removal of what Goffman terms one's "identity kit" (1961: 29), including that pertaining to expressions of religiosity.

For those already converted or those converted in prison the impossibility of procuring the relevant artefacts may be conspicuously. The attempt to do so (in the case of one Buddhist smuggling incense sticks into the prison) is, in Goffman's (1961: 56) understanding, a "secondary adjustments" namely, practices that allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions and gratifications not afforded by the institution, often by forbidden means. Such activity can help the individual withstand the psychological stress usually engendered by assaults upon the self (*ibid.*: 68). Collectively they may become part of the "underlife" of an institution (*ibid.*: 180) and often another expression of "make-do's"—the use of objects in a manner not officially sanctioned (*ibid.*: 186) and frequently focus on one particular aspect of life to facilitate the presentation of self to others (*ibid.*: 188-9), plausibly including the "spiritual self".

Two questions put to inmates addressed research question # 3:

a) Would you say that your religious/spiritual needs are being adequately catered for in prison? The majority of respondents did not agree with this statement with fifteen forwarding a "Yes" response, eight "No" and a further two "Unsure". Inmates frequently interpreted the question in terms of what they were or not permitted. Lee,²² one of the two Buddhists, commented:

We are allowed to have Home Office approved malas and things like that in our cells, and bowls. The Muslims are quite proactive getting what they need. They have a whole range of things because there's more of them, while we have to get the chaplain to look on the internet to find a supply. So we're not so forceful, we're very much a minority.

21. Ian, interviewed in the prison's library 19/4/06.

22. Lee interviewed in the chaplain's office 18/4/06.

I asked Malkiat,²³ a Sikh, about whether he was able to practice the necessary rituals, celebrate holy days and had all he needed to practice his faith:

Malkiat: Obviously there's no temple here. I try to celebrate holy days the best I can. I have the bracelet of pure gold, so I don't wear it here. I have a necklace too with the symbol on it and all that. Obviously it's worth a bit, so cannot wear it. It's bound to get nicked.

Q. Do you have Sikh religious writings in your cell?

Malkiat: No. The chaplain gave me a Bible.

Q: A Christian Bible?

Malkiat: No. A Hare Krishna one. I can't remember what it is called. It's a different religion altogether like. He said that it was the closest thing he could get.

Q. You are happy with that?

Malkiat: Well, it's something for me to read in my cell.

Q. And you could get music too?

Malkiat: Yes, CDs and things. But we have to go through the governor first and takes ages.

b) Do you think that you have sufficient contact with a leader of your faith such as a clergyman, priest or Imam? Those prisoners surveyed tended to be divided in their opinions, with thirteen replying "Yes" and twelve "No". Once again, however, strong views were expressed. "Brian"²⁴ complained of his Mormon representative who did not like coming into the prison environment: *"Doesn't bother to come now. Did do for a while but stopped"*.

Ryan,²⁵ a Pagan, complained that he had no representative and was left with picking and choosing from what *was* offered:

Yeah, I have been coming to Father Edward's (the Roman Catholic chaplain) discussion group on a Friday. I gave it a try, but it's so laden with heavy Christian viewpoints, so I don't feel the need to do the middle-of-the-road thing. I don't bother (...) I've given up on it, it's too dogmatic. I've seen people get tearful if they can't choose the hymns for Sunday. They should try being a Pagan.

George²⁶ claimed in an impromptu interview that he did not see enough of the Buddhist representative and added:

I find it here very Christocentric. It's laden with different types of Christian stuff. (...) My experience of my last prison was worse. It was all about young people coming in with guitars and inherent in their speech was that "sing for Jesus". It's a huge cliché, happy-clappers (...) Laying on the guilt.

23. Malkiat, interviewed in the chaplain's office 23/4/06.

24. Bryan, interviewed in the prison's chapel 9/3/06.

25. Ryan, interviewed in the chaplain's office 18/4/06.

26. George, interviewed in the chaplain's office 4/5/06.

Institutional Relationships

In respect of Research Question # 4—In which ways does current institutional arrangement in the broader prison context mitigate against the spiritual development?—I was keen to examine aspects of discrimination and relationship of prisoners of faith with other (non-religious) inmates and the prison staff and, more broadly, engage with Goffman's insistence (1961, 18) that staff and inmates are groupings who conceive each other in terms of narrow hostile stereotypes.

a) Do you believe that there are particular circumstances related to prison life that make your spiritual life more difficult? The majority agreed with this statement, with thirteen answering in the affirmative, eight responding "No" and a further four "Unsure". Once again, however, those who disagreed still expressed firm views. Many prisoners reiterated the matter of bureaucratic encumbrances, but also persecution. Alan²⁷ wrote on his questionnaire:

I wasn't converted in prison, I was a true believer long before. Many prisoners test me because I don't argue with them. They insult my faith in the kitchen where I work or on certain things. As believers we always have those who make fun of us and make fun of my faith.

Another interviewee²⁸ retorted:

I get slandered and attacked in the prison. I look at it in two ways. It's a prison and second, they don't understand. You see me smiling, I keep going, I keep going. I am a different person to what I have been and when I get out there. I have found my true self (begins to weep). I have seen people get religion when they get in, not me.

b) Do you think that you face particular difficulties in your relationship with prison staff or other prisoners because of your faith? Again views were divided. Thirteen inmates responses "Yes" to the question, eight "No" and 4 stated that they were "Unsure". On asking those who replied "Yes" why they felt that way, typical responses were as follows:

Ahmed,²⁹ a Muslim, reported that:

The other day they (prisoners) were complaining about the Muslims. There was a news report on TV about religion and the Muslims were first, then the Jews, then Christians. And this guy complained about it. And we're supposed to be a Christian nation. He said "look at that, they're bowing down to the Muslims again".

Other (questionnaire) responses included:

They think that I'm a Bible-basher. One bloke spat at me once and said that "JC is an FC". It was very up-setting.³⁰

27. Alan, interviewed in the chaplain's office 18/4/06.

28. Phillip, interviewed in the prison's library 19/4/06.

29. Ahmed, interviewed in the chaplain's office 23/4/06.

30. Peter, interviewed in the prison's chapel 18/4/06.

Yeah, from other prisoners. Some say “Look, there’s the God squad on the way to church”. You’re stereotyped, and what I mean by that is that we are accused of using Christianity as a crutch.³¹

In some respects the Sunday service constitutes what Goffman (1961, 206) calls a “free place”. Sometimes however “free places seemed to be employed for no purpose other than allowing inmates to obtain time away from the long arm of the staff and from the crowded, noisy wards”. My survey revealed that some prisoner attended services for non-religious reasons. In this context Alan³² addressed the matter of disruption at services:

Yeah, you used (at previous prison) to have officers in the services. Officers had to be there and the number who misbehaved was unbelievable. They just wanted time to get out of their cell. Just something different to do.

Responses indicated that staff were largely respectful of the religious conviction of inmates but it was not a wholesale sentiment. Alan continued:

Yeah, definitely staff: “Oh, your just weak”. I say “Well hello, why don’t you try living a Christian life, then you will know how difficult it is in prison. You should try a prison sentence and then tell me that it’s easy to be a Christian in here”. People just have this weird perception of being a Christian — that you need it to get through. That you can’t cope, that it’s an easy way out (...) You try walking around when all eyes are on you, waiting for you to slip up, so they can say “I thought that you were supposed to be a Christian”.

Another inmate remarked:

Yes, prisoners and staff. They say “I thought that you were supposed to be perfect”. “Choir boy” they usually call me. Just because you go to church doesn’t make you perfect. This place should be about rehabilitation. It is about helping sick people.³³

Several respondents mentioned the psychiatric and rehabilitation services—a topic which Goffman addressed in some detail. Findings of my survey raised the significant issue of the link between spirituality and rehabilitation. Retreat into the world of religiosity may be judged as a failure to come to terms with prison life and in psychiatric terms a negative personal trait. For Goffman (1961: 186), from the point of view of psychiatric doctrine, everything that a patient does on his own and is not part of custodial management is defined as systematic of their disorder. These are “ideal means” for denying the inmates rationalisations (*ibid.*: 143) and their deviant behaviour as a mental disorder: something with deep roots, difficult to cure, and manifesting itself throughout life. When claims for discharge are heard, this may be countered by recalling misdemeanours of the past (*ibid.*: 149). In psychiatry there is a formal effort to act as if the issue is treatment, not a moral judgement (*ibid.*: 316). One action that is

31. Peter, interviewed in the prison’s chapel 18/4/06.

32. Alan, interviewed in the chaplain’s office 18/4/06.

33. Phillip, interviewed in the prison’s library 19/4/06.

rationalised in terms of the medical model is that of sudden alteration in propriety of conduct whether regression or improvement (plausibly religious conversion or enquiry) becomes part of the “sick” condition (*ibid.*: 330).

There are profound implications in Goffman’s observations for the link between spirituality and rehabilitation. Kerley (2009) suggests that is not uncommon for prison inmates to experience religious conversions in prison. These conversions allow inmates to portray themselves in a pro-social light and help them to establish a sense of control in their current lives, regardless of their past. Despite the value of these conversions, maintaining a new outlook of one’s self is remarkably difficult. To be sure, a certain dilemma faces the psychiatric services: are claims to conversion genuine? (Thomas, Zaitzow, 2006), a dilemma noted by a number of prisoners of faith interviewed:

The staff often think, and the psychiatric services too, that you want to be in church circles because when you get outside you have access to children. It’s difficult to convince them otherwise.³⁴

Certain inmates and perhaps also members of staff tend to view Christians, practicing regularly their faith through organised activities, with suspicion; this applies particularly to prisoners who have converted during their time in prison. It is felt that they are choosing an “easy option” for convenience, when in fact the opposite is true.³⁵

The hardest part of being a Christian in here is with the psychiatric services and rehabilitation programmes. There is a common-sense view that, since we have a Christian faith, it does not mean that you have truly been reformed. It’s not that criteria. That has no credit to it. That you no longer feel bad about the things you have done. They take up other issues. There is something in their thinking that you still have some form of behaviour pattern that won’t go away whatever you say—that you have come to terms with what you have done and that God has forgiven you and that you have forgiven yourself. You need to prove you are genuine. There is always a doubt in their minds. It’s the secular culture in which they operate. These days when you try to engage they always take into account things like your background. In that way, being a Christian gets in the way. If you try to talk to them about the differences and the challenges being a Christian has made for us, then they tend to discount it. You are living a Christian lifestyle but they think that you are being naïve and think that they can see through it. Having a Christian faith seems to get in the way of what they want to do and how they see the world. Because, when you try to share with them your conviction, they are not interested: the differences it makes for us and the responsibilities we now have. You can’t convince them that you now have a particular lifestyle and attitude towards other people (...) that you no longer want to hurt them.³⁶

Rehabilitation and Stigmatisation

Research Question # 5—How do prisoners anticipate their spiritual lives developing after release?—addressed the inmate’s plans and thoughts by way of

34. Nick, interviewed in the prison’s chapel 17/3/06.

35. George, interviewed in the prison’s chapel 9/3/06.

36. Phillip, interviewed in the prison’s library 19/4/06.

spiritual development and how this might aid rehabilitation and re-integration into the community, especially their religious collectives. Goffman, of course, detailed matters of stigma in his further seminal work, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). He recognised that the inmate's tenure in prisons, like mental institutions, is often long, and that being labelled an ex-prisoner impacts the level of stigmatisation (Goffman, 1961: 310). In the period leading up to release there may be an anticipation of stigmatisation, adding to a list of anxieties. For non-Christian prisoners of faith, according to my survey, it was also a matter of re-integrating into a distinct ethnic community. Here were particular difficulties. A Muslim inmate confided in me that he was already disowned and feared retribution when released. The Sikh interviewee³⁷ acknowledged that he was already ex-communicated from both his faith and ethnic community: "If you have done the kind of thing I have you're out, that's it. I'm hoping to move to another part of the country where no one knows me".

An open-ended question on the questionnaire enquired: "How do you see your faith developing when you leave prison?" Typical Christian responses included:

I had been part of a small "house church" No. I guess that they want to distance themselves from me now. So, I will not see them again.³⁸

I have given the matter a great deal of thought. Finding a church will be difficult. I think that the attitude of most churches is a no-no. They stigmatise you like everybody else. To some extent I can understand it. Just because someone says that they are rehabilitated is not necessarily so. The stories in the media. The natural assumption is that you are guilty. The natural assumption is that they have the responsibility to protect people. I have spoken to some of the Christian visitors who came in. I spoke to one from the (named) Church. She was a bit dumb. It was clear in her attitude that there could be no possibility that I was innocent. It was same with the Quaker lady. She said that if I went to her fellowship that she would have to tell everyone what I was in for. How can I go to those churches when everyone has pre-conceived ideas about me? These are future trials and tribulations.³⁹

I will not necessarily go back to my roots. The churches take a lot of notice of the guidelines and work with that. Even the Alpha (course)⁴⁰ people who claim to have these things set up are very careful. I don't find them very helpful. I spoke to one. She had this thing about sex offenders. They were a special category in her mind. Particularly that they are never rehabilitated. She came out with all this PC thing (...) "Don't get me wrong, but (...)".⁴¹

37. Malkiat, interviewed in the chaplain's office, 23/4/06.

38. Alan, interviewed in the chaplain's office 18/4/06/

39. Phillip, interviewed in the prison's library 19/4/06.

40. A widely used evangelising programme adapted to the prison environment (Hunt, 2004).

41. Clive, interviewed in the chaplain's office 22/2/06.

A View From the Chaplaincy

One aspect of chaplaincy reforms in England and Wales not yet addressed are the views of the chaplaincy itself. Clearly, there are tensions regarding the changing role, structure and functions of the office that have been previously identified by researchers (Furseth, 2003; Hall, 2004). The two interviews⁴² that I conducted with the chaplain of the two prisons covered several related areas, complimenting the views of prisoners, and this included the impact of reforms generally on his work experience before and after the reforms were instigated, working as part of a more integrated multi-faith “team”, and the link between rehabilitation and spirituality. Other team members declined to comment apart from the Roman Catholic team member who requested that his direct comments were not reported. However, he did indicate a general dissatisfaction with the reforms along the lines of those of the Anglican chaplain. The sample then remains rather small and unrepresentative.

In my interview much was evident of Beckford’s assertion (1999b) that paradoxically the emergence of multi-faith chaplaincy in prisons and hospitals has aggravated competition between the representatives of religious traditions in that head chaplains are now expected to show equal respect for all recognised faiths. Thus there are strong incentives for every faith group to claim the resources to which it feels entitled. It was these demands that the chaplain found particularly difficult to balance. In addition, it was evident that the chaplain’s work load had increased significantly with little by way of positive results identified by him:

I find myself having to do more, increasingly bogged down with administration and endless training days. There are times when I am just exhausted. Now I have to know something of all the faiths. I get the Holy Days mixed up.

I pressed him on the matter of working with the newly constituted multi-faith “teams”. He smiled sardonically and muttered “teams?” He continued:

It’s not that we all meet up and talk regularly. We have team meetings but few turn up. I get on with the assistant chaplain but he’s an Evangelical and doesn’t think I should be here because I’m gay. The RC priest is ok but a bit conservative. I’d say pre-Vatican II. The Buddhist lives in a caravan in a forest, so don’t see much of him, nor anyone else for that matter. The Imam won’t speak to me. I do see the Quaker lady, but she tries to run everything.

In respect of rehabilitation and spirituality he replied openly that he saw little connection between the two:

There is no straightforward correlation. Some with a faith re-offend, some without do not. I have the feeling that when they leave here, many who come to the Sunday service gravitate towards evangelical churches who are glad to have them so they can stand him up and say “I used to be a prisoner” and “I used to do this and that but now” (...) I think that the established churches, especially the C of E and Catholic Church have gone the other way and are too politically correct in the present climate with paedophiles and all the rest of it.

42. Conducted on the 7/4/06 and 19/5/06.

Summary and Discussion

Buntman (2009) has recently addressed the view of many earlier scholars researching into the internal dynamics of prison life, arriving at to similar conclusions regarding the instigation of reforms. Institutional arrangements and the everyday life experiences of prisons have the tendency to expose social realities, often hidden, particularly disparities and gaps between policy and practice. These are lessons rarely learned in attempts to reform prison structures. The experiences of prisoners of faith are clearly pertinent in this context. As Goffman notes, institutional life is highly structured. It thus sets parameters to the practice of religion, whatever its expression, and the pursuit of spirituality by prisoners of faith in their own “life-world” within the institutional confines. Every total institution, as Goffman saw it, captures much of the time and interest of its members and provides a new sphere for them that is far removed from the religious community in the outside world. Those coming to faith in the religious context may experience their spirituality constrained by the same institutional context.

The chaplaincy reforms since 2001 have not breached these limitations and boundaries in any meaningful sense, at least according to my small-scale survey. Prison life is still conducted in terms of tightly scheduled activities within the environment of a different social and cultural sphere and where, within the world of the inmates, a further division occurs between a beleaguered minority of those of faith and the majority without. Matters of dress, manners, social intercourse are also heavily regulated and thus mitigate against the practice of religiosity. Regulatory rules are abundant, inclusive, and closely enforced. Immediately associated with this system are standard social processes important in the life of the institution. Cultural aspects of prison life tend to instil a feeling among inmates that they are totally exiled from living in the outside world and wider engagements. All such observations of internal restrictions and relevant responses would appear to be especially highlighted for prisoners of faith. In turn, they attempt to innovate and compromise by way of the practicalities of their religiosity. Reforms have to do more in respect of instilling an ethos in linking religion with public spiritedness given that the connection between the two remains ambiguous in the relevant documentation. They have to breakthrough existing bureaucratic encumbrances which automatically curtail the very reform and structural re-arrangement anticipated. There is also Goffman’s notion of “front-stage”-“back-stage” that seems so pertinent to chaplaincy reforms. Attempted reforms and accompanying documentation display high aspirations which would seem not to be forthcoming. Much goes on the same way. In sum, reforms become so much window-dressing which constitutes the front-stage whereas, in the back-stage, a great deal remains unchanged, unregulated, even chaotic.

From the findings explored above it would seem that there are only negative aspects to report. This should be balanced by more positive evidence that can be derived from a broader overview. By and large most of the prisoners surveyed were satisfied with the provisions or at least “made do”. Most realistically appraised by inmates were the implications of prison life and they adapt accordingly to matters of security, limited resources and an over-worked chaplaincy. Many saw room for improvement but had resigned themselves to the situation as it was. Thus they were left to carve out a place to practice their beliefs the best they could. In numerous cases, paradoxically, prisoners felt that their faith had been enhanced under the adverse circumstances of prison life where discrimination was rife in the everyday experiences of incarceration.

These were the findings of what constitutes merely a small proportion of the rich material solicited through questionnaires and interviews underpinning my survey. They address only a limited number of research questions. In turn, the findings generate additional questions that could encourage further research. Some of the key questions might include: Does the category of a prison, its level of security arrangements, challenge the implementation of chaplaincy reforms broadly defined? For example, Category B prisons compared to “open” prisons? Second, to what extent is change contingent upon the function, charisma and enthusiasm of the head chaplain? Third, does the social class of the inmate (sex offenders seem to be drawn from a spectrum of classes compared to other classifications) and level of education increase the demand for chaplaincy reform and spiritual “consumer” requirements? Fourth, is reform contingent upon the number of prisoners of a particular faith tradition? Is there a “critical mass” whose needs are more likely to be catered for? These and other issues have, as yet, not been seriously contemplated or addressed.

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Abstract

The broad aims of the Her Majesty Prison chaplaincy service in England and Wales emphasise both rehabilitation and enhancement of the spiritual life of prisoners. In order to accomplish such aspirations substantial reforms have taken place in chaplaincy provisions since 2001. Most of these reforms, now enshrined in formal HMP documentation, audits and guidelines, are aimed at improving services in the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic/faith society. This paper, based upon research conducted in two prisons in England and Wales, throws light on their impact, as well as reporting more generally on the spiritual life of prisoners of faith. The paper will explore the weaknesses and impracticability of some aspects of reform with reference to Goffman's influential work on total institutions.

Key words: prison chaplaincy, reforms, England, Wales, Goffman.

Résumé

Les objectifs des services d'aumônerie dans les prisons de Sa Majesté sont focalisés sur la réhabilitation et l'amélioration de la vie spirituelle des prisonniers. Pour réaliser de telles aspirations, des réformes substantielles de l'aumônerie ont été engagées depuis 2001. La plupart de ces réformes, consignées dans les textes, ont pour but d'améliorer les services dans le contexte d'un développement de la société multi-croyances. Basé sur une enquête conduite dans deux prisons, en Angleterre et au Pays de Galles, l'article met en lumière les effets des réformes sur la vie spirituelle des prisonniers. Il explore les faiblesses et les impasses du nouveau cours des réformes en se référant au travail de Goffman sur les institutions totales.

Mots-clés : aumônerie des prisons, réformes, Angleterre, Pays de Galles, Goffman.

Resumen

Los objetivos de los servicios de capellanía en las prisiones de Su Majestad se focalizan en la rehabilitación y el mejoramiento de la vida espiritual de los prisioneros. Para concretar tales aspiraciones, se iniciaron desde 2001 reformas substanciales en la capellanía. La mayoría de estas reformas, consignadas en los textos, tienen como fin mejorar los servicios en el contexto de un desarrollo de la sociedad multi-creencias. Basada en una investigación llevada a cabo en dos cárceles, en Inglaterra y en el País de Gales, el artículo ilumina los efectos de las reformas sobre la vida espiritual de los prisioneros. Explora asimismo las debilidades y los problemas del nuevo curso de las reformas refiriéndose al trabajo de Goffman sobre las instituciones totales.

Palabras clave: capellanía de las prisiones, reformas, Inglaterra, País de Gales, Goffman.