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Prayers in Prisons? The Politics and Performance of Christian Faith-Based Initiatives in the US

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Prayers in Prisons? The Politics and Performance of Christian Faith-Based Initiatives in the US

I found myself increasingly drawn to the idea that God had put me in prison for a purpose and that I should do something for those I had left behind

Charles Colson, Founder of the Prison Fellowship, 1976

Charles Colson was a security advisor for President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal and pled guilty to charges of obstruction of justice. After he served his time, seven months in prison, Colson returned to society with a religiously inspired perspective on crime and prisons. This personal revelation and change guided him to create the Prison Fellowship in 1976. The Prison Fellowship, the world's largest Christian faith-based initiative, was founded to give the church a place to advocate for justice reform in the prison system. Christian faith-based initiatives began to gain political power when, in 1990, Charles Colson pushed for InnerChange Freedom Initiative programs and advertised the programs' capability to reduce recidivism (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 167-168). In the political sphere, Christian faith-based initiatives expanded throughout the United States beginning in the mid-1990s, and were considered, under the ever-growing prison umbrella, to have rehabilitative practices that eased prisoners' reentry into society and decreased recidivism. In 1996, the Charitable Choice provision, contained in Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act, passed but went publicly unnoticed until the Bush administration (Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski 2011, 369). During the Bush administration, the hasty expansion of such programs led to the beginning of funding through budget appropriations. The continued growth also gave programs more official political and

funding pathways, such as the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (OFBNP), which had been renamed in 2009 by President Barack Obama.

This essay will address the politics and performance of Christian faith-based initiatives (CFBIs) and how their mission attempts to reform the prison system in the United States. I will identify positive reform through evaluating the increase in rehabilitation programs, the decrease in recidivism rates, and a neutral or positive personal reflection on reentry. I consider all-inclusive programs that serve men and women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds between the ages of 18 and 65 in this evaluation of the effectiveness of CFBIs. Drawing on scholarship, as well as promotional materials of CFBIs, I assess how effective progressive CFBIs are based on the four “R’s”: increased rehabilitation, decreased recidivism, positive reform, and gradual, well-ordered reentry into contemporary society. I also consider comparative political approval and sustainable funding of faith-based programs. I argue that CFBIs are innately political, due to constitutional questions about the church and state relationship. This church and state relationship, referred to in the Establishment Clause of the US Constitution aims to separate the church and state. Through this evaluation, I will advocate that Christian faith-based initiatives deserve legitimacy in the US prison system and allow for an effective alternative to the four “R’s” regardless of the political and socioeconomic controversies. CFBIs are one alternative to accomplishing the four “R’s”, but another alternative is state funding. For example, based on personal narrative, the Washington State Women’s Prison in Gig Harbor has more state-funded programs, along with grants, that make possible wages for jobs like horticulture, dog grooming, and more (Friederich 2017). CFBIs integrate aspects of faith and religious beliefs into

the goal of the four “R’s”, which incorporates another facet of support for incarcerated individuals.

I first explore the political controversy over the establishment of Charitable Choice during the Clinton administration, and how President Bush expanded these faith-based programs throughout the entire government. While the Bush administration expanded these programs, the programs have been run as borderline cost-efficient businesses. In addition, I examine the governance of faith-based initiatives, the politics of their funding, and how many of these programs are perceived. An immense amount of tension and controversy was prompted by the connection of federal funding and the Establishment Clause, which affected the precedent these programs left. Organizations and political leaders also opposed these programs, and several groups filed lawsuits against the leaders of faith-based organizations.

Next, I will take a more micro-level view of four states that administered the InnerChange Freedom program—Texas, Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota—by analyzing the effectiveness of the processes that each case took, and their effects. I will look at these cases through a neoliberal lens to further analyze the labor of incarcerated peoples. This lens represents a social approach that favors prosperous communities by redistributing healthier opportunities and social resources through targeting techniques that at the same time marginalize the most disadvantaged people in a community. I will explore the implementation of a prison industrial complex through considering how the programs were geared to “compete” with other programs for additional federal funding. Then, I will take an even more micro-level view and look at select cases, specifically the “Reclaim Campaign” in Illinois, and the Ridge House Residential Program in Nevada. I

will compare these cases to how the Prison Fellowship accomplishes its goals of reducing recidivism through increased rehabilitative practices. I also consider the role of human agents in these analyses and identify how counselors interact with patients based on their secular or religious programs and the belief in their respective systems. Finally, I will look at two specific cases of converted faith-based programs: Newton Correctional Facility in Iowa, and Lawtey Correction Institute in Florida.

The Dawn of CFBIs

The political beginnings of faith-based initiatives in prisons can be traced to the mid-1990s, coming about through legislation and executive order implementation; they have since been popularized and gained mainstream awareness. In the mid-1990s , U.S. Senator John Ashcroft became a lead advocate for welfare reform and persuaded the Senate majority leader, Robert Dole, to pass legislation supporting faith-based programs. This piece of legislation was drafted by Carl Esbeck, a professor of law at the University of Missouri, and was intended to create federal guidelines that allowed faith-based programs to compete in the public sector. This included areas such as federal funding and grants and public influence (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 172). When President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act—also known as the Welfare-to-Work program—Charitable Choice was added into Section 104 of the bill. Officially, this provision had three goals: (1) to encourage growth of faith-based programs nationally, (2) to protect the reputation and integrity of these religious groups who receive federal support and (3) to protect religious freedom (Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski 2011, 368-369). These three goals sought to make positive change in a faith-oriented realm of American society, but the

method of implementing these goals became increasingly public and political during their establishment.

Despite President Clinton signing the newly-developed legislation into law, he had expressed his constitutional concern and hesitated over signing the bill because the programs established a direct line between church and state. With the interaction between the government and the church, the Establishment Clause was a strong point in Clinton's wariness. This uncertainty was fueled by organizations opposing the bill, and Clinton postponed the planned January signing of the bill in August of 1996. Organizations such as Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, and others, vocalized their concerns about the bill, which they saw as blurring the lines between the public and private sectors (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 173). The programs started out small and on rocky ground but gained momentum over the following two decades.

During the Clinton and the Bush administrations, Christian faith-based programs underwent many revisions and compromises to become integrated into legislation. Bush had endorsed programs such as the InnerChange faith program as a governor in Texas. An article by Terry Neal in *The Washington Post*, noted that "Texas Gov. George W. Bush ...faced a quandary...[offering] the answer...[that] people of religious faith, not government are best equipped to change the world for the better" (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 174). Bush's background and experience with faith-based organizations as governor of Texas helped the expansion of the Welfare-to-Work program, which reached into several other aspects of everyday life, such as employment and mental health care. Bush's first executive order in 2001 created the Office of Faith-Based and

Community Initiatives (OFBCI) with the goal of creating a “more open and competitive federal grant-making process” (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 174). The creation of the new office had made the transaction process for funding easier, and Bush intended to take down more barriers that would have slowed down the process of establishing this program nationally. This involved seven federal agencies including the US Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Housing and Urban Development (Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski 2011, 369).

President Bush’s determination to implement CFBIs at the time was unprecedented and he continuously pushed for new and more expansive legislation. In 2007, President Bush passed the Second Chance Act, which allowed government agencies and other nonprofit organizations to provide aid to previously incarcerated people (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 662). Even though the number of initiatives continued to grow, there was apparent opposition to the legislative process. In 2001, the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Bill was designated to provide monetary incentives for donations, but the bill died later that year due to active opposition and public outcry over issues of civil rights and the Establishment Clause (McDaniel, Davis and Neff 2005, 174). Political opponents within the administration had been against the legislation because the Charitable Choice provision allowed the programs to use employee discrimination as a factor in the hiring process. The opponents claimed that the bill enforced federal discrimination and because the programs were federally funded, it put more federal employees who participated in the programs at risk for discrimination (Dodson, Cabage and Klenowski 2011, 370).

Reshaping CFBI through Increased Controversies

Along with the burgeoning numbers of faith-based initiatives came controversy over the rapid cooperation between state and church by various organizations and government players. Several key lawsuits were filed in response to the InnerChange Initiatives, especially in prominent states, like Texas, Minnesota, Kansas, and Iowa. In 1997, when religious practices and beliefs began to grow in prominence in Texas, the state established a rehabilitative tier of their standards to evaluate CFBI in prisons (Sumter 2006, 523). However, the Texas Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that the Tarrant County Jail had unconstitutionally and directly endorsed religion by designating a section of the prison towards studying the Bible and various faith-based practices and assignments. This facility was not limited simply to practices and assignments but blatantly rejected other faiths and indoctrinated participants in the program to strictly orthodox Christianity. Participants also included born again Christians, and they “had to accept the Bible as infallible truth” (Clarke 2002). This section, named the “God Pod”, was ruled by the Supreme Court to have violated the Establishment Clause (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 176). The Texas Supreme Court decided that even though the program was voluntary, it disapproved of other faiths and “endorsed one religion over other religions...impermissible message that the County preferred the personal religious views of the sheriff and chaplain over other views” thus ruling the direct endorsement violating the Establishment Clause (Clarke 2002). The Prison Fellowship Ministries’ InnerChange initiatives were administered by then-Governor Bush with the instruction of adding “life transforming power of Jesus Christ” (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 169). While Texas holds a rich history with religious salience in prisons, some organizations

began to see problems with the penetration of the church into state and federal governments.

One example that illustrates how reentry can become an easier path to success and financial stability are community organizations, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations, and others. These organizations advocated for and influenced the legislative process at the local, state, and federal levels. However, this also illustrates how impactful faith-based organizations are in the federal and state governments. This influence addressed a vast number of issues, such as healthcare, immigration, and reentry. Pacific Institute of Community Organizations (PICO) implemented “Ban the Box”, which removed the question of felony status on employment applications and interviews (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 663). The “Ban the Box” implementation is in effect in about 34 states but does not have solid and structured procedures. In addition, this aspect is optional, which highlights the uncertainty of the program’s relationship between state and church. This uncertainty also affects the private sector, such as previously incarcerated individuals working for companies and corporations.

While some programs had flourished, like many in Texas, other organizations, such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) saw the implementation of faith-based organizations as unconstitutional. In 2007, the FFRF sued the head of OFBCI, Jay F. Hein, in response to Bush’s executive order that ensured collaboration between OFBCI and executive agencies to promote CFBIs. FFRF had believed that the executive order directly favored religious practices over non-religious practices. However, the US Supreme Court deemed that the foundation did not have standing

because there was no direct link of “harm” between the executive order and the foundation itself (Oyez, 2006). This case also reaffirmed that “taxpayer status” does not grant the right to sue the government in certain cases; a taxpayer must sue the “congressional expenditure” as well as challenging the Establishment Clause (Oyez, 2006). A previous case that addressed this dispute was *Flast v. Cohen* (1968). Different responses arose across the nation with the expansion of faith-based initiatives, causing irreconcilable reactions and rifts between organizations.

In addition to *Hein v. FFRF*, one of the largest lawsuits over faith-based initiatives was against the Prison Fellowship Ministry (PFM). Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AUSCS) filed suit against PFM in 2003 over a new “God Pod” in one Iowa facility. The Newton Correctional Facility initially established Unit E to house prisoners with good behavior and disciplinary records (Sullivan 2009, 21). The Newton facility had been built in 1997, only 14 years after the establishment of the Department of Corrections (DoC). The InnerChange initiative was signed in 1999, two years after construction ended, and ran until 2008 when it was ended due to the *AUSCS v. PFM* lawsuit (Sullivan 2009, 19). However, before 2008, the Iowa DoC signed a contract with PFM and transformed Unit E into an individual InnerChange housing unit. Many prisoners testified about the change, and so did the director of Iowa’s DoC, Walter Kautzky. The biggest questions in this case were whether this initiative was a violation of the Establishment Clause and whether the granular aspects of this specific program were unconstitutional. In December of 2007, the final decision favored AUSCS on the grounds that the PFM program was indoctrinating the prisoners; the program was

ended promptly in January 2008 (AUSCS 2011). This case will be expanded upon, and many of the testimonies from various witnesses will be addressed, later in this paper.

The implementation of various faith-based initiatives fluctuated in how those initiatives functioned individually, maneuvered the hurdles of controversy, and formed ideas of how to exercise the programs. In 2002, a few years after Charles Colson introduced InnerChange initiatives into the prison system, the Federal Bureau of Prisons began to develop the Life Connections Plan to test the waters of faith-based programs. The Life Connections program was to aid reentry into society through an 18-month residential program, but participants were required to meet a list of specific criteria. These criteria were that they must be releasable in two to five years, working toward or obtaining a GED, meet financial responsibilities, and fulfilling ESL (English Second Language) requirements (Camp et al. 2006, 530). In Chicago, Community Renewal Society (CRS), an interfaith group, partnered with Fighting to Overcome Records and Create Equality (FORCE) to influence the legislative processes in Illinois. These two groups, which did not belong to PFM, were faith-based organizations but adopted different practices (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 665).

The largest driving force for CRS and FORCE was the desire to assure steady reintegration into society, which was useful to many previously incarcerated people in FORCE. Religion is “a resource for drug users and gang members attempting to reform” and the organization was a solid, structured sounding board for many who had hope for a better future (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 665). The Community Renewal Society (CRS) was founded by a Congregational Church in 1882, which previously helped many enslaved communities and populations become independent while simultaneously

fighting racism and poverty. FORCE is the only nonreligious group affiliated with CRS, and they provided services to FORCE members, such as occasional one-on-one meetings, worship assemblies, and more. In 2013, Community Renewal Society launched the still ongoing “Reclaim Campaign” in order to attempt redistributing taxes toward low-income areas and decrease the wait time for a court date. This campaign also sought to shut down part of a local correctional facility: Cook County Jail (666).

Funding for CFBIs and the Industrial Complex

The history of funding faith-based programs was controversial due to the level of government intervention and control. When CFBIs gained federal recognition, Clinton was uncertain about the constitutional repercussions of these programs and the logistics of funding. However, during the Bush administration, the expanded faith-based organizations broadened their eligibility for federal grants when the Children’s Health Act passed in 2000. This made federal grants available for antipoverty and employment opportunity work, as well as mental health and substance abuse services. Bush also appropriated \$143 million in the 2003 fiscal year to Community Correction Centers, which are privately owned faith-based groups (McDaniel et al. 2005, 175, 178). When Bush continued to push his faith-based agenda, several questions were raised about funding for the programs through Charitable Choice (CC) and whether it was unconstitutional.

Some CC supporters defended the programs and built an argument based on a 2000 Supreme Court Case *Mitchell v. Helms*, which held that government funding can go to parochial schools in a 6-3 decision. Charitable Choice was originally funded to cover state-level expenses under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

(TANF), including food stamps, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI); but as the legislation continued to grow, so did the costs. Alongside the Children's Health Act services, TANF services entailed work programs, food programs, maternity homes, and adult health services. One piece of legislation that was passed but failed to further the agenda of the programs was the 2002 CARE act (Charity Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment Act) which advocated for direct funding by providing tax incentives in exchange for donations to charities. (Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski 2011, 370).

President Bush was a strong advocate for many of the program developments and growth of CFBIs, but at the same time, the programs of other political and religious organizations, such as the Nation of Islam, were not completely funded. During his 2000 campaign, Bush had agreed that the Nation of Islam would receive funding for faith-based programs, but he backed out during his presidency and claimed he had misunderstood the question. This backpedaling occurred after the trauma from the Twin Towers falling in 2001—an inconsistency that illustrated discrimination against other religions, allowing Christian programs to dominate funding and attention (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 177). This also reiterated the neoliberal approach of marginalizing groups in society and redistributing funds elsewhere. With the exclusion of other religions, the total amount of \$143 million was funding only Christian-based programs and demonstrated the limited rights of many minorities.

Despite the fact that other religious affiliations were put on the backburner, states were still barreling forward in the funding of CFBIs and initiatives such as InnerChange Freedom. Several states enacted different versions of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative which obtained various forms of private and public funding, increasing

tensions. A few states had prominent InnerChange programs, but different models were adopted in each of them. In Texas, the state attempted to shield the direct money flow to PFM and redistribute it indirectly to continuously assist the programs. The state funding in Texas was spent among a plethora of facilities, but a sizable portion of funding went to the Carol S Vance Unit for “administration and security services” for operational expenses. In 2002, Minnesota built the Lino Lakes Correctional Facility, for which the state budgeted \$200,000 for nonreligious costs, and \$500,000 for PFM programs, and similarly to Texas, attempted an indirect approach for funding. Kansas and Iowa, in contrast to Texas and Minnesota, allowed state funding to go directly to PFM. Kansas paid PFM a total of \$266,666 over the span of 2 years, and Iowa signed a contract with PFM for a similar sum of money for general funding (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 171).

One of the biggest concerns in this industry, as government money was so evidently directed toward these programs, was the constitutionality of the funding, and the scrutiny which motivated the states to rationalize its reasons and purposes. However, many of the programs depended heavily on the state for reliable and continuous funding versus private funding and donations. Because the state sought to continue the programs, it created a sense of obligation to continue funding a variety of activities, programs, and expenses (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 171). Despite the risk of state funding, many programs managed to remain intact and active and rationalized the continuation through “success stories” which will be discussed later.

The Bush administration ballooned funding for CFBIs, but put economic pressure on the organizations and programs, giving the industry a neoliberal touch. Many faith-

based programs were viewed by the government through a cost-benefit analysis which prioritized “results” in a secular light. When Bush appropriated the \$143 million to Correction Centers, he also delivered expectations of the “best service, achieving the lowest rates of recidivism and simultaneously requiring the fewest number of employees” (McDaniel, Davis, and Neff 2005, 178). PFM’s goal, articulated in 1990 by Charles Colson, was that prisons that effectively participated in these religious programs and practices would lower the recidivism rate of incarcerated peoples (167). This inevitably put financial pressures on the programs and limitations on the use of such a great sum of money. Connecting PFM’s goal of lower recidivism to its funding by the core aspect of results: the “best service and *achieving*... [lower recidivism with the] fewest number of employees” (178), fueling the goal of better results with lower funding. In Chicago, Attorney General Janet Reno stressed that these programs were a less-costly alternative to directly funding prisons by allowing nonprofits and government agencies to assist (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 662). In 2003, Bush did not simply appropriate \$143 million for Correction Centers, but also announced legislation that made \$2.3 billion available for faith-based organizations. This caused many organizations to compete for funding by decreasing both expenses and recidivism, simultaneously fighting against poverty and homelessness, and providing aid in reentry (Sumter 2006, 523).

This action began to develop a whole different industry and a “competitive marketplace” complex (McDaniel, Davis and Neff 2005, 184). These kinds of environments can be stressful and hinder the experiences of staff, volunteers, and prisoners because of the difficulty in meeting too-high and interconnected expectations.

These expectations helped rehabilitate prisoners, lower recidivism, and aid in reentry, but also led to competition for funding as organizations sought to continuously meet the four “R’s” goal. To lower the expenses of faith-based programs, volunteers were urged to donate their time and money, rather than fully staffing them. Staff members were mainly managers and office members who were paid for their “field work,” but the titles and identities of volunteers were much murkier, which raised a variety of questions (179). Were volunteers government employees because they interacted with prisoners, or were they independent of the government because they lacked compensation? Were these volunteers part of the marketplace complex because they participated in programs and organizations and contributed to the mission? Was there an opportunity to be promoted, to become paid employees? Or were volunteers participating due to a goal of spreading their beliefs about God and the Bible? With these questions and competition, a neoliberal dimension was added to faith-based organizations. Such organizations were not only industrialized, but by employing volunteers and treating prisoners as units of success, it socialized “formerly incarcerated persons to a contingent labor market” (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 663). The financial and social pressures and expectations from the federal and state governments caused the programs to be conducted like a company or corporation seeking to compete with other companies to satisfy the four “R’s” faster, easier, and cheaper, than just a mere organization.

The 4 “R’s”: Rehabilitation, Reform, Recidivism, and Reentry

The aim of Christian faith-based initiatives was to help the increasing number of participants in several different programs such as the Community Renewal Society and

the coalition that was created with FORCE. To reflect previously on these two Illinois-based organizations, the religiosity is very evident with practices such as “redemption scripts”. Religion is a very intimate part of everyday life, and for some, provides a level of self-reflection and awareness of one’s actions and interactions. FORCE members practice redemption scripts as a way of “making good” and finding forgiveness for their crimes and sins, to become fully rehabilitated and reformed (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 667). Redemption scripts contain three parts: generativity, articulation of a “real me”, and a “compensatory model” (664). The generativity component gives the formerly incarcerated person a new perspective by helping others who were once in that same position. The second part is the articulation of a “real me,” which allowed many to compare and contrast the current identity of the individual to their previous crimes. The third portion, the “compensatory model,” focuses on self-reflection and “not blaming one’s self” but looking at crimes and sentences as guiding individuals to where they are and a necessary step through the process (664). This three-part approach helps FORCE members to avoid falling back into old habits and continuing to offend by limiting the amount of their guilt and emotional distress.

This approach gave validation to many members—to be relieved of distress, to learn how to forgive themselves, and come to terms with their faults rather than psychologically struggle and eventually relapse (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 664). With assistance in reentry, many members offered their testimonies and experiences. Reymundo, a FORCE member, acknowledged that society was very stuck on labels and felt like “there’s no ‘look out for your neighbor’” (666). Camron, another FORCE member, gave some background information on his childhood: his mom was an

alcoholic, and his uncles and other relatives had glorified and glamorized drugs. This was difficult for Camron when he was 12 years old and very impressionable, especially when these acts and experiences became the “norm” for him. Trisha, who was formerly incarcerated, said that when she attempted to apply for a job at Walgreens, she explained to a clerk that she resided in a halfway house. The clerk had responded, saying, ““Oh no, we don’t hire formerly incarcerated peoples,”” which led Trisha to feel rejected and discriminated against because of her background (670).

These responses from society and the lack of employment opportunities cause many formerly incarcerated individuals to feel guilty, upset, and like they are not good enough. This causes them cyclical feelings of pointlessness in reforming and truly harms their reentry into society. It can become difficult for reentry to progress without employment or some form of financial stability. Another FORCE member, Olivia, had not been incarcerated but had a gang member background. Olivia was getting an education within the field of social work; at an internship, she knew a young man who wasn’t able to get off the streets due to employment discrimination, similar to Trisha herself. She said that, despite his efforts at bringing in resumes and continuously trying to reform, he was ““denied, denied, denied”” (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 670).

CRS and FORCE gave these individuals and others like them a resource for feeling a sense of safety and security. Many were “afforded...precious space to demonstrate being reformed” (Flores and Cossyleon 2016, 674), and many of the formerly incarcerated in these groups were able to let their guard down and safely experience emotional vulnerability. These feelings were unfamiliar to many FORCE members because of the “toughness” that was fostered during their time in prison.

Some members, such as Olivia with her previous gang experience, were allowed to drop that “toughness.” CRS, like other faith-based organizations, provided sacred space for self-growth and simple things, such as vocabulary adjustments for FORCE members. According to Flores and Cossyleon (2016), members were redirected toward positive perspectives, such as “individualistic and private...life-affirming, collective and public”, to articulate things, instead of negative words and outlooks like “power...self-interest...[and] relationships” (665). These simple techniques toward self-growth allowed FORCE members to “rearticulate the notion of self-interest” and selfishness to truly reach full potential (665). The ability to change within oneself was a large step toward rehabilitation and reform. Reform was connected to the second component of the “redemption scrips” – helping others avoid the same mistakes – and allowed members to acknowledge the dangers and problems in their own community and neighborhoods. Many said that since they were able to reform, they wanted to make a change in areas such as violence, social isolation, and judgement (669). CRS provided a myriad of rehabilitation services for emotional and psychological reform and gave FORCE members political protection by limiting the role of the state in their respective affairs (673).

Other programs sought to produce more viable social welfare programs and bring adequate reentry to prisoners. For example, the Ridge House Residential Program is a three-month-long “faith-based residential program” that assists in housing and provides services to all offenders, excluding sex offenders and serial violent offenders. Ridge House is colloquially known as a halfway house, which one of the FORCE members, Trisha, lived in. Ridge House also requires prisoners to apply four

months in advance of their release to be enrolled in the system and is inclusive of other religions and beliefs. Ridge House uses a 12-step model to focus on emotional and psychological repair, such as “learning forgiveness, acceptance, and letting go of resentments”, and developing the capability to prioritize one’s needs.

The largest goal of a vast majority of programs, like Ridge House, is to lower recidivism and help the formerly incarcerated individual reintegrate back into society. In a study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, it was found that health problems and drug or alcohol abuse are the leading causes for recidivism. During a three-year study, 300,000 formerly incarcerated individuals were followed and their rates of recidivism were high: “67.5% were rearrested and 51.8% were incarcerated”¹ (Roman et al. 2007, 200).

Ridge House uses Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to educate about the priorities of higher needs to lesser needs and helps many of these formerly incarcerated people learn what they hadn’t before (Roman et al. 2007, 202). The program also pushes residents to work toward self-actualization and used many religious and spiritual tactics to establish a “general ethos” of the program. According to a study conducted by Stansfield et al. (2017)², the impacts of these types of programs lean more toward institutionalized support to help individuals mend and build relationships, but also reenter society with new employment opportunities (Stansfield, O’Connor, and Duncan 2019, 339). Another large finding from this study was its psychological benefits, such as

¹ Original source: Langan Patrick, and David Levin. 2002. “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.” Washington DC: Department of Justice.

² Original source: Stansfield, Richard, Thomas J. Mowen, Thomas O’Connor, and John H. Bowman. 2016. “The Role of Religious Support in Reentry: Evidence from the SVORI Data” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 54, no 1 (July): 111-145.

reduced anxiety, increased emotional strength, and an increased sense of meaning and purpose (349). Residents were also held to an accountability standard through certain obligations and expectations to stay in the program, with items such as: obtaining employment, meeting with a counselor for individual therapy sessions, maintaining sobriety, and performing chores (Roman et al. 2007, 202). In a study conducted by Roman et al. (2007), three research questions were developed pertaining to the religiosity or spirituality of the program, whether the environment of the program causes dropouts, and whether the environment affects residents with positive self-actualization and progress. They found that religious identity had the strongest and most significant correlation to self-rated progress and satisfaction (Roman et al. 2007, 205), illustrating the deep impact religiosity has on reform and rehabilitation.

With a myriad of programs attempting to ease reentry of the formerly incarcerated population into society and promote a rehabilitative method of reform, different types of methods by staff and volunteers are used to lower recidivism. Formerly viewed as lower-level crimes, drug use and addiction are becoming more socially acknowledged as psychological disorders (Chu and Sung 2003, 499), not issues that can be fought with another War on Drugs. Alcoholics and drug users may, however, be admitted into rehabilitation programs or groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, which are usually federal or secular programs.

A study conducted by Doris Chu and Hung-En Sung (2003) focused on evaluating perspectives on drug abuse through a “disease” model or a “religious” model, with guidance through either a faith-based program or a secular program. Participants were given statements about drug abuse and responded with what they felt would make

rational sense as a reason or explanation of drug abuse: religious statements or disease statements. A religious statement (Statement 1) would be “Drug abuse is caused by a consequence of separation from God”, and a secular statement (Statement 2 and 3 respectively) would be “Drug abuse is a brain disease’ or ‘People are genetically predisposed to drug abuse” (Chu and Sung 2003, 503; see Figure 1).

Table 3. Mean Comparison: Causation of Drug Abuse and Treatment Strategy.

	Total (N = 110)		Faith-based (n = 59)		Secular (n = 51)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Causation of drug abuse							
Brain disease	5.39	4.69	3.07	3.50	8.14	4.45	-6.65***
Separation from God	7.38	4.63	9.27	4.23	5.10	4.06	5.20***
Lack of parenting/bond	6.33	3.72	7.31	3.67	5.16	3.47	3.10**
Genetically predisposed	6.32	4.22	4.38	3.88	8.58	3.42	-5.92***
Treatment strategy							
Positive self-concept	9.30	3.08	8.71	3.45	9.98	2.46	-2.19*
Reduce stress	8.18	3.04	7.41	3.18	9.08	2.61	-2.98**
Address religious needs	9.52	3.41	10.32	3.45	8.59	3.14	2.74**
Medications	5.48	3.34	4.41	3.01	6.73	3.29	-3.86***

Note: Statements of causation of drug abuse and treatment strategy that were not significantly different between faith-based and secular programs were not listed.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001, two-tailed.

Figure 1: The study’s results of the Statement 1, 2, and 3 for the causes of substance abuse. Chu, Doris and Hung-En Sung. 2014. “Causation of Drug Abuse and Treatment Strategy: A Comparison of Counselors’ Perceptions of Faith-Based and Secular Drug Treatment Programs.” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 58, no. 4 (April): 496-515.

Counselors and staff were also factored into the study, and it was concluded that many counselors in faith-based programs believed that Statement 1 was the largest contributor to drug abuse. Counselors in the secular program with higher religiosity also tended to endorse the religious model versus the “disease” model, and even reinforce a client’s religious needs. However, most counselors in the secular program endorsed the “disease” model as an explanation, which indicates how impactful a staff or counselor’s beliefs are on implementation in various programs.

Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski (2011) also conducted a study to evaluate whether a faith-based program is “working,” using the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS). Working would be defined as maximizing the efficacy of lowering recidivism and to prevent/reduce crime (Dodson et al. 2011, 373). The scale is Level 1 – being least rigorous and working – and Level 5 – being most rigorous and working. The study observed seven previously evaluated programs and determined that “working” would require a level 3 to 5 to be “statistically significant” (374). This means that the evaluation is not related to the rigor of the program, but the value of the results for the programs. Statistically significant in this case indicates that the program is producing results that are favorable and effective to lowering recidivism compared to other programs. This study sought to validate that “individuals who participated in religious organizations are less likely to participate in deviant and criminal behavior” (374). See Figure 2.

TABLE 1 Faith-Based Programs

Study & author(s)	Sample size	Scientific methods score	Description of intervention & findings
<i>Prison Fellowship Ministry</i> Young, Gartner, O'Connor, Larson, and Wright (1995)	180/185	4 (T and matched C) Multiple sites 8- to 14-year follow-up	Training of volunteer prison ministers. PFM had higher survival rates.
<i>Prison Fellowship Ministry</i> Johnson, Larson, and Pitts (1997)	201/201	4 (T and matched C) Multiple sites 1-year follow-up	Participation in PFM programs (i.e., in-prison seminars, life plan seminars, and Bible studies). PFM inmates most active in Bible studies are less likely to recidivate
<i>Ten Point Coalition</i> Winship and Berrien (1999)	N/A	1 (exploratory study)	Describes a community faith-based outreach program of Boston.
<i>Teen Challenge</i> Hess (1976)	Not reported	2 (exploratory study) (T and nonmatched C)	Comparison of Teen Challenge participants with TC dropouts and noncompleters. TC group had lower recidivism and higher employment rates.
<i>Teen Challenge</i> Thompson (1994)	25	1 (exploratory study)	Examined recidivism in a a group of TC graduates. Significant long- term changes in behaviors and attitudes.
<i>Teen Challenge</i> Bicknese (1999)	59/59	3 (T and matched C)	Examined drug relapse in a a group of TC graduates and short-term inpatients. TC group less likely to need additional drug treatment, more likely to be drug-free and employed.
<i>Humaita Faith-Based Prison</i> Johnson (2002)	148/247	3 (T and matched C) 3-year follow-up	Comparison of a faith-based and industrial prison. Humaita high-risk and low-risk offenders less likely to recidivate.

Note. T = treatment group; C = control group.

Figure 2: Evaluation of the effectiveness of various programs, including sample size, and results (ranging 1 to 5). Dodson, Kimberly, Lean Cabage, and Paul M. Klenowski. 2011. “An Evidence-Based Assessment

of Faith-Based Programs: Do Faith-Based Programs ‘Work’ to Reduce Recidivism?” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 50, no. 6 (August): 367-383.

Among the seven programs studied, Ten Point Coalition focused on reducing youth violence (Winship and Berrien 1999, 52-68), and Teen Challenge focused on substance abuse and drug treatment (Thompson 1994). Collectively, all seven programs aimed to reduce recidivism, with the four “working” with PFM leading in effectiveness.

Two Cases of PFM Influence: Iowa and Florida

While PFM and various other organizations like FORCE and CRS were mostly effective and helpful to the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated population, PFM faced a large lawsuit. Americans United sued PFM for violating the Establishment Clause. One specific prison was used during the entirety of the case: the Newton Correctional Facility in Iowa was transformed, designating a specific living unit—unit E—to PFM. Unit E was used exclusively for the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) and became known as the “God Pod”. Unit E had previously been used for prisoners who *earned* the ability to reside in it based on their good behavior and disciplinary records. Based on several testimonies from the lawsuit’s trial, Unit E had better amenities and had given prisoners a more dignified and respectable living area. One prisoner, John Lyons, who was moved out of Unit E to Unit C, compared the two units: “In Unit C you got the sink right above the toilet...about a foot away from somebody’s bed...[toilet seats] are steel, and they’ve got cold water running through...” (Sullivan 2009, 36). Lyons also testified about security differences that had affected many of the prisoners who previously resided in Unit E: “...inmates are all issued a key for their particular room that they’re assigned to...it makes you feel better...sense of responsibility that you’ve earned some trust back” (Sullivan 2009, 37). The IFI recruited

prisoners after a six-week orientation and moved them to Unit E with the promises of more family time, help with the parole board, and continued assistance with reentry after being released (Sullivan 2009, 28).

With Unit E strictly occupied by the newly-evangelical incarcerated population at Newton, some prisoners dropped the program due to compromised beliefs or because they couldn't otherwise meet the specific criteria to be admitted. While the IFI was open to other religions, the program was increasingly focused on Christian-driven beliefs that painted a different picture of indoctrination and coercion. New recruits went through a six-week orientation to see if they would be successful in the program and help boost the goal of decreasing recidivism. PFM would be selective in choosing recruits and eliminate those who did not fit a certain profile and expectation. PFM would choose prisoners who were close to their release date, and "seemed [like] promising candidates for rehabilitation" (Sullivan 2009, 34). An additional obstacle to recruiting a larger number of prisoners was their previous beliefs and religious affiliations. In another testimony during the trial, Bryan Chandler explained that he and others who had aligned more closely with Catholicism than Evangelical Christianity were pushed to sublimate their primary beliefs to be admitted and participate in the program. Chandler, who, like Lyons, had lived in Unit E prior to the transformation, reflected after deciding not to join, "I thought it would conflict with my upbringing of being a Catholic" (Sullivan 2009, 36). The program was almost strictly Christian because prisoners were required to attend every class and component, including classes such as Spiritual Freedom, Experiencing God, Financial Management, Substance Abuse/Anger Management (Sullivan 2009, 40). The overcrowding of evangelical Christian religiosity was the largest contributor to the

lawsuit against PFM, especially with a requirement to attend all the classes and components. Another cause was that IFI would contact nearby churches for financial donations. However, in addition to future PFM funding, in 1999 there were separate negotiations for a contract with the State of Iowa designating \$300,000 of taxpayer money to “nonsectarian” purposes in the IFI program (Sullivan 2009, 22-24). The program remained well-funded with PFM earning \$50 million in annual income from 2006-2007.

The IFI painted a glorified and attractive picture of the program and selectively gave more amenities and rights to prisoners engaged in the program. Many of the prisoners who provided testimonies during the trial shared their reasons for enrolling, which were increasingly out of self-interest. IFI attempted to provide “restorative justice” and urged many of the prisoners to reform themselves and address their faults (Sullivan 2009, 26). Some of the recruits, like Russell Milligan, had asked to be transferred from other facilities for a variety of reasons. Milligan was previously in North Central Correctional Facility, serving 25 years, but his family was much closer to Newton, so moving him was practical, making it easier for him to reform and remain in contact with his family. John Hammers, the first witness during the trial, testified about the influence IFI would have on the Parole Board and how it would make him look “favorable” (Sullivan 2009, 27). Similar to Hammers, Michael Bauer sought to join with the hope of getting released on parole, but also to reform himself. During the trial, he gave two reasons for joining the program: “No. 1, it looked like it was going to be something different...give a little more meaning...[and] success to my life” but also because of IFI’s administrative influence in the Department of Corrections (DoC) (Sullivan 2009, 30).

Joel McKeag, like John Lyons, lived in Unit E prior to IFI's arrival and described the recruitment efforts and tactics the counselors and staff used: promises for better amenities such as "charcoal grills...music room... [and a] library", which attracted McKeag. Staff also explicitly endorsed favoritism from the parole board toward participants in the program, which McKeag brought to light during his testimony (Sullivan 2009, 31).

A case that had similar goals and processes for accomplishing the four "Rs" in the Newton facility in Iowa was the Lawtey Correctional Facility in Florida. Located about an hour south of Jacksonville, it was strictly designated for faith and character-based institutions (FCBIs). These institutions are overwhelmingly Christian but remain inclusive of other denominations. Charles Colson, however, brought up his concerns about Muslim programs in a PFM newsletter, writing that prisons are "breeding grounds for future terrorists" and Colson believed that this attitude of hatred and revenge would be spread by some radical Islamists and "shade" Christ's message of love, forgiveness, and peace (Erzen 2017, 105). While Colson was against inclusive faith-based initiatives, under the governance of Jeb Bush (younger brother of George W. Bush) and with its success through religious volunteers, Lawtey became one of sixteen prisons that converted to a FCBI facility (84-85). Tanya Erzen's book, *God in Captivity*, provides an explanation as to why religion became so prominent in prisons by way of a comment from Jack Miles, a professor of religious studies. Miles gave a verse from Matthews 25:35-36 that read "I was naked and you clothed me...I was sick and you came to me...I was in prison and you visited me" (87). Both religious and symbolic, the last part of the verse illustrates the omnipresence of God, even in prison. After the *AUSCS v.*

PFM lawsuit, a precedent was established for prisons that the focus of money provided should shift toward non-secular funding of activities from state-funded activities. In May of 2011, the US Supreme Court case *Brown v. Plata* caught the attention of *PFM* because it was dealing with “abysmal medical conditions and overcrowding” in California state prisons (163). Pat Nolan from *PFM* issued a press release in response, and “stressed how organizations like Prison Fellowship must now ‘find ways to help...without putting the public at risk’” and follow up these remarks by marketing faith-based programs ““at no cost to the government”” (164). This was a pivotal point because it illustrated that CFBIs were beginning to lose their grip on state-based funding due to conflict.

Lawtey shares some stark similarities with Newton Correctional Facility. The Florida DoC guidelines explicitly state, ““Staff may not attempt to convert inmates...funds may not be expended on programs that further religious indoctrination, or on inherently religious activities”” (Erzen 2017, 87). The question of constitutionality was raised in Lawtey as it had been in Newton, especially with concern over government funding. In 2003, Lawtey became institutionalized, which eradicated a volunteer-driven program and moved toward an employee-driven program that allowed the Florida DoC to compensate the program managers. The amenities and services provided in both facilities demonstrated the level of importance and favoritism that was employed by *PFM*. Lawtey, like Newton, used a dormitory and unit approach to housing prisoners, with access to lockers, books, bookshelves, and televisions (89). Inside Lawtey, there were many programs used to deal with certain mental health and social health problems. One program used a 12-step approach to manage anger and

addiction, similar to that of the Ridge House residential house. At their core, many of these programs possessed the same basic intentions and goals, such as mental health care and support, evident favoritism and increased amenities, while participants were being surrounded by Christian values and morals.

Conclusion

Christian faith-based initiatives are deserving of recognition and legitimacy in the US prison system because they offer a pathway to more humane treatment for prisoners through the lessons of Christian values and an overarching goal of satisfying the four “R’s”. Despite the vast amount of controversy surrounding PFM and CFBIs, the benefits of satisfying the four “R’s” weigh more than the controversies surrounding secular funding, political support, and indoctrination. While not all CFBIs are structured the same way, they all reside under the same umbrella of treating the incarcerated population humanely and respectfully. One of the controversies over the Establishment Clause was brought into question through a very impactful and well-known lawsuit against Prison Fellowship Ministry by the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, despite early support from the Clinton and Bush administrations. The direct endorsement of these programs during these administrations illustrates that both sides of the political spectrum viewed the programs from the bird’s eye view of the four “R’s” and sought to get “results”. These results could be a viable showcase for a future campaign to show what was accomplished during previous presidencies. The political approach of “see what I accomplished” created the cost-benefit approach to churn out these results in order to justify and secure funding. To decrease the amount of funding

with maximum results, volunteers were encouraged to participate in the programs and donate time and money.

The narratives provided in the *PFM v. AUSCS* lawsuit painted a picture of InnerChange Freedom and exposed many prisoners who joined out of self-interest. Self-interest, however, is counterproductive to the core objectives of these programs, similarly validated by John Hammer's testimony, who enrolled in the program in Newton because of its connection to the parole board. Because of self-interest, the value can be diminished by disregarding the lessons taught in the programs and just focusing on the end goal of being released. Despite the motive of self-interest, there were still positive narratives of feeling mentally and emotionally supported, and being treated respectfully. I use the word "politics" in a broad sense to accompany the political, economic, and social effects of CFBIs, and recognize that these programs are underdeveloped in scholarly works. More research is required to accurately measure recidivism and make a definite case to thoroughly evaluate the performance of Prison Fellowship Ministry and other organizations.

In Norway, Halden Prison is a ten-year-old prison with one of the lowest rates of recidivism, resting at 20%. The facility takes great pride and strives to maintain the rehabilitation method of reforming the incarcerated population (Bereux 2015). While Halden is a state-funded prison, its amenities are similar to those of CFBIs. This illustrates that amenities and increased access to pathways for success are crucial to the growth and reentry of a prisoner. Funding for amenities is beneficial for more care; while amenities are not the only cause of success, better care appears to produce better results. This indicates that while controversy clouds the perspective on CFBIs,

humane treatment, with care and respect, was far preferred among the incarcerated population. CFBI's generally provide this humane care and respect through emotional support, increased amenities, and constant effort to accomplish the four "R's" with each individual.

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