

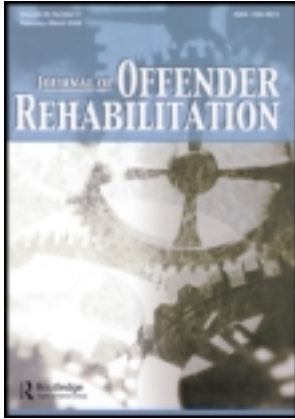
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Public Support for Faith-Based Correctional Programs: Should Sacred Places Serve Civic Purposes?

Francis T. Cullen ^a, Jennifer A. Pealer ^b, Shannon A. Santana ^c, Bonnie S. Fisher ^d, Brandon K. Applegate ^e & Kristie R. Blevins ^f

^a criminal justice and sociology, University of Cincinnati, USA

^b Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice, Northern Kentucky University, USA

^c Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, USA

^d Criminal Justice and Senior Research Fellow of the Criminal Justice Research Center, University of Cincinnati, USA

^e Criminal Justice, University of Central Florida, USA

^f Department of Criminal Justice, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

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FRANCIS T. CULLEN
JENNIFER A. PEALER
SHANNON A. SANTANA
BONNIE S. FISHER
BRANDON K. APPLIGATE
KRISTIE R. BLEVINS

ABSTRACT In light of President Bush's enthusiastic support and numerous initiatives, there is a growing call to fund "faith-based" social service programs, including those focused on juvenile and adult offenders. These programs are controversial because they seek to reconfigure the line separating church and state. Based on a national 2001 survey of 327 respondents, we assessed public support for this policy initiative. The major findings were: (1) the respondents were divided evenly on whether the government should fund faith-based correctional programs; (2) a clear majority opposed having a religious content to the programs; (3) most opposed discrimination on religious grounds in the hiring of program staff; (4) a clear majority favored funding all religious groups as opposed to only "Christian churches"; and (5) the respondents did not view faith-based programs as more, or less, effective than traditional correctional rehabilitation programs. The study also explored the policy implications of these findings. doi:10.1300/J076v45n03_02 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS Faith-based programs, religion and crime, rehabilitation, correctional policy, public opinion

In the 1990s, faith-based programs emerged as a potential complement to, if not replacement for, state-based social welfare and criminal justice programs (De Vita & Wilson, 2001; Dionne & Chen, 2001a; Farkas, Johnson, Foleno, Duffett, & Foley, 2001; Kaminer, 2002; McGarrell, Brinker, & Etindi, 1999; Wuthnow, 2004). These interventions—which covered areas as diverse as education, child care, housing for the homeless, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and inmate reform (Dionne & Chen, 2001a)—sought to allocate government funds to churches and religious organizations to provide human services. The programs were based on the assumption that “sacred places” could serve “civic purposes” (Dionne & Chen, 2001a; see also Wuthnow, 2004). More broadly, they sought to weaken, if not to dismantle, the wall between church and state whose foundation had heretofore been in the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

The emergence and political popularity of faith-based programs are rooted in the coalescence of several factors. First, the legitimacy of traditional human services approaches to social problems, including crime, diminished with the broad-scale attack on the welfare state (Murray, 1984; Olasky, 1992; see also Garland, 1990). With numerous ostensible examples of failures—including, for instance, criminologists asserting that “nothing works” in correctional rehabilitation (Cullen, 2002; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000, 2001)—it became increasingly difficult to claim that secular programs had a monopoly on how best to “save” the disreputable and the disadvantaged. With public solutions under scrutiny if not deep suspicion, calls were made to privatize government services. In this context, policy advocates of religious organizations argued that they should not be unfairly excluded from competition for privatized funds merely because of the *faith content* of their interventions. These programs, moreover, were held to be part of a broader movement of “compassionate conservatism” which, of course, was trumpeted by then Governor and later President George W. Bush (see also Olasky, 1992).

Second, why should the public believe that religion should be a particularly effective alternative to traditional social welfare programs? Olasky (1992) furnishes a persuasive rationale—one that runs through other commentary. The social welfare approach to social problems is inflicted with two interrelated difficulties: (1) it is based on the assumption that government resources are an entitlement or a right, and thus there is no obligation that, in return for resources, recipients manifest responsible conduct; and (2) it provides no clear guidance for what a responsible life might entail. In contrast, says Olasky, faith-based programs condition services on the promise of change and then use religion to guide that

change. The added bonus is that faith-based interventions have God on their side, literally; His power is believed to be real and not epiphenomenal.

Third, such thinking might fall on deaf ears in other advanced industrial nations where modernization and economic development ostensibly have fostered secularization (Wald, 1992). In the United States, however, religious belief has resisted secularization, with the “durability” of America’s faith being termed “remarkable” (Gallup, 1996, p. 8). Some commentators suggest that religiosity in the nation’s populace is wider than it is deep. Even so, evidence of the embrace of religion is ubiquitous. Thus, all but 4% of Americans believe in God or a universal spirit—the same percentage as in 1944—and more than 8 in 10 state that Jesus Christ is God or the Son of God; high percentages of the public also believe in Heaven (90%), Hell (73%), the Devil (65%), Miracles (79%), and Angels (72%); about 6 in 10 Americans attend church at least monthly, with 4 in 10 going weekly or “almost weekly” (Gallup, 1996). Further, a high proportion of the public—8 in 10—state that “religious beliefs help them to respect and assist other people” (Gallup, 1996, p. 7; see also Chavis, 2002).

In this context, it is not surprising that many Americans, especially those who believe in a forgiving and loving God, are persuaded of the transformative powers of religion, including the ability of faith to reform offenders (Applegate, Cullen, Fisher, & Vander Ven, 2000; see also Unnever, Cullen, & Applegate, 2005; Unnever, Cullen, & Bartkowski, 2006). “For most Americans,” observe Farkas et al. (2001, p. 10), “a pre-eminent belief of faith is its capacity to improve individual behavior and personal conduct.” Thus, in a 2000 national poll of 1,507 adults, Farkas et al. (2001, p. 12) found that 79% of the respondents believed that it is “likely” that “crime would decrease . . . if many more Americans were to become deeply religious.”

Fourth, there has been a growing criminological literature indicating that religion may insulate against criminal involvement and that faith-based programming can have positive effects in inmate adjustment and offender recidivism (see, for example, Baier & Wright, 2001; Clear & Sumter, 2002; DiIulio, 2001a; Johnson, 2004; Johnson, Jang, Larson, & De Li, 2001; Johnson, Larson, & Pitts, 1997; O’Connor & Perreyclear, 2002; Zimmer, 2004-2005). This research also suggests that the effects of religious participation and programming might be especially strong in inner-city neighborhoods where the church stands as an institutional bulwark against criminogenic influences by delivering faith and social services (Jang & Johnson, 2001; Johnson, Larson, De Li, & Jang, 2000;

Johnson, Jang, De Li, & Larson, 2000; Kamnick & Moore, 1997). This is important because faith-based programs as a conduit for assisting the truly disadvantaged might be one place where political conservatives and progressives can find common ground (Cnaan, 2000).

Still, optimism about the religions' interventions is tempered by three considerations. First, although religion is a protective factor against crime, its effects are moderate and tend to be weak when included in models that control for a full range of risk factors for offending (Baier & Wright, 2001; Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, & Burton, 1995). Second, studies showing positive effects for religious-based programs are plagued by selection bias: because religious participation cannot be coerced, those involved in these interventions are invariably volunteers and thus may be more amenable to reform than members of control groups. It remains to be demonstrated that faith-based programs are effective and, in particular, are more effective than alternative intervention strategies (De Vita & Wilson, 2001; see also Cullen & Gendreau, 2000). Third, there are concerns that beyond traditional religions organizations (e.g., Catholic Charities, Salvation Army), most churches or religious congregations (e.g., synagogues, mosques) are ill-equipped to undertake the delivery of social services to the sizable population in need of intervention (Chavis, 2001; Press, 2001; Soskis, 2001; see also Wuthnow, 2004). As Press (2001, p. 25) cautions, it would be risky to dismantle the existing welfare "safety net in the name of God."

It is important that faith-based programs received a huge impetus from President Bush's advocacy and his creation of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. This office funds programs and provides guidance on how to secure federal support for religious-based initiatives (DiIulio, 2001b). In fiscal year 2005, it is estimated that the federal government allocated \$70 million to justice-related, faith-based programs (Henriques & Lehren, 2006). State governments also have taken steps to support religious organizations, including faith-based prison programs (Associated Press, 2003; Cullen, Sundt, & Wozniak, 2000; Henriques & Lehren, 2006; Zimmer, 2004-2005). Nonetheless, the continued vitality of this movement remains in question as the Bush presidency is winding to a close. More and more attention is given to his administration's domestic and foreign policy failures as opposed to the once-fresh theme of using compassionate conservatism to direct social welfare in the United States. A key consideration is thus the extent to which faith-based programs, especially in the criminal justice arena, have the kind of broad-based popular support to make them a permanent, as opposed to a transitory, feature of the correctional enterprise.

The current project attempts to address this and related issues through a survey aimed at assessing public support for religious-oriented correctional initiatives. The study focuses not only on overall support for faith-based programs but also on key policy considerations, such as the religious content of programs, who should be hired as program staff, what religious faiths should be funded, the perceived effectiveness of such interventions, and whether government funds should be specially targeted to support programs in the inner city. Taken together, the responses to these inquiries help to illuminate the complex ideological context in which faith-based programs will likely operate in the time ahead. This context will shape the extent to which “sacred places” will be seen as appropriate means to serve traditionally “civic purposes.”

Previous research in this area is sparse. Some insights, however, can be drawn from the one major survey on public support for faith-based initiatives, which was sponsored by The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (2001; see also Wuthnow, 2004). Princeton Research Associates directed the March 2001 national telephone survey of over 1,000 Americans 18 years of age or older. Three main conclusions are relevant.

First, a large majority of Americans (about three-fourths) generally favored “allowing churches and other houses of worship to apply, along with other organizations, for government funding to provide social services such as job training or drug treatment counseling to people who need them” (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2001, p. 5 of the Questionnaire). Reasons given for supporting faith-based programs were that it increased service options, providers would be “more efficient” as well as “more caring and compassionate,” and the “power of religion can change people’s lives” (2001, Section I, p. 12). Second, across a range of “problem areas” (e.g., feeding the homeless, teen pregnancy, literacy), only a minority of the respondents stated that religious organizations “would do the best job” compared to “non-religious organizations” and “the government.” The survey was not designed to focus on crime-related issues, but the problem areas did include prison counseling and addiction. The percentage of those favoring religious organizations as a service provider in these two areas were 40 and 27%, respectively (2001, p. Section I, p. 5). Third, the sample members manifested concerns about the line between church and state. In particular, they were concerned that faith-based initiatives would “force” people “into religious practices,” and they opposed allowing organizations to hire employees on the basis “of their religious beliefs” (2001,

Section I, pp. 13-14). As we will see, this general pattern of results is found in the current survey.

NATIONAL CRIME POLICY SURVEY

The data for this project were drawn from the National Crime Policy Survey. This survey, conducted in 2001, included questions on a range of policy issues, including offender rehabilitation and punishment, the goals of adult and juvenile imprisonment, early intervention programs, capital punishment, and faith-based prisons.

In 2001, Survey Sampling, Inc. provided a simple random sample of 1,000 households across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Following Dillman's (1978) "Total Design Method," the study was designed to include three waves of questionnaires and a follow-up reminder letter to respondents after the first wave of surveys was mailed (see also Dillman, 2000). The sample members also received a pre-contact letter to inform them that the survey would be forthcoming. A token (a pen) was included in the first mailing. Finally, after the second wave, an effort was made to contact all respondents by telephone. Of the initial sample, 123 surveys were returned due to addresses that were no longer valid. In all, 349 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 40% of eligible sample members. Of these, 329 were usable.

The modest response rate raises the issue of the generalizability of the opinions recorded through the questionnaire. The sample appears disproportionately older (mean age 54.7), male (66.4%), white (83.3%), and Republican (38.1% vs. 26.9% Independent and 34.9% Democrat). Religious belief seemed more evenly distributed, with 25.0% saying that they were "very religious," 13.8% reporting that they were "not religious," and 61.3% defining themselves as "somewhat religious."

It is difficult to assess how the sample's socio-demographic profile would affect the level of support for faith-based programs. In the Pew Research Center study, support for faith-based programs was higher among African Americans, Christian conservatives, and younger respondents (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2001, p. 4; Wuthnow, 2004, p. 295). In any event, it seems unlikely that the views expressed by the sample members are highly slanted or idiosyncratic. First, the results of our survey are in line with those reported in the Pew Research Center study. Second and related, the sample's responses to other questions on this survey (e.g., about rehabilitation, capital punishment,

early intervention) are quite consistent with the existing public opinion research. For example, while a majority of the sample supported the death penalty and making courts harsher, the respondents also strongly endorsed rehabilitation programs for offenders and early interventions for at-risk youths (Cullen, Pealer, Fisher, Applegate, & Santana, 2002; Cullen, Vose, Jonson, & Unnever, 2007; see also Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000). This ideological complexity—embracing both punitive and progressive views on crime control—is found in virtually every public opinion study that measures both sides of the policy spectrum simultaneously (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Unnever, Cullen, & Jones, in press).

The National Crime Policy Survey contained a series of questions that assessed public views toward various policy issues surrounding faith-based correctional programming. To ensure that the members of the sample would focus their attitudes on faith-based correctional programs (as opposed to programs in general), the survey instrument contained the following directions:

Recently, some officials have proposed that the government should give churches and other religious groups money to run programs that would try to reform juvenile delinquents and adult criminals. These are called “faith-based” programs, because they rely on religion to try to change offenders for the better. Other elected officials have questioned whether churches should be given public funds to run their programs. We want to know your opinion about these faith-based programs.

We will not review the specific items because they are listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. In general, however, the intention was to probe two attitudinal domains. First, we wished to discover the extent to which the public supported the religious content of the faith-based programs. In particular, the items measured whether the respondents privileged religion over more secular or civic considerations. Second, we wished to determine whether the public believed that faith-based programs were effective absolutely and, in particular, relative to more traditional correctional interventions. Taken together, these considerations help to illuminate the extent to which Americans embrace faith-based programs enthusiastically or with reservations. In turn, these results allow us to prognosticate about the likely future of faith-based correctional programming.

<input type="checkbox"/> Table 1: Public Support for Faith-Based Correctional Programs	
Item	% Choosing Answer
1. Do you think that the government should use public monies (e.g., such as that from taxes) to fund faith-based programs run by churches?	
A. Yes—the government should fund such programs.	50.8
B. No—due to the separation of church and state, churches that want to run programs should get their funds from private donations, not from the government.	49.2
2. If churches and religious groups are funded, what kind of program do you think they should be allowed to give?	
A. They should be allowed to give programs that try to change the offenders through religion, such as through bible classes and going to church.	30.0
B. While churches should be able to give programs to offenders, they should be non-religious and like any other treatment program—because churches should not be able to use public money to force anyone to believe a particular religion.	70.0
3. In running a faith-based program, who should churches be able to hire as the counselors who deliver the programs to the offenders?	
A. They should be allowed to hire only people who agree with their religion—otherwise the program would not work.	20.9
B. Since they are using public money, they should have to hire anyone who is qualified who applies—otherwise they could discriminate against people of other religions.	79.1
4. Who should the government fund to run faith-based programs?	
A. Christian churches only.	18.1
B. Churches of any faith, including Muslim groups, Jewish groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindu groups (and so on).	81.9
5. Since money is limited, which of the following options would you favor?	
A. The government should mainly fund faith-based programs by churches in the inner city, because that is where the most serious crimes are committed.	16.7
B. The government should spread the money out equally and fund faith-based programs in as many communities as possible (including the suburbs).	83.3

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR RELIGION WITHIN FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS

Religious organizations have long functioned as major providers of social services (Wuthnow, 2004). The key issue with *faith-based* programs,

<input type="checkbox"/> Table 2: Public Views on the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Programs	
Item	% Choosing Answer
1. To what extent do you think that a lack of religion is a cause of crime?	
A. The lack of religion is the main cause of crime in the U.S.	9.3
B. The lack of religion is one of many factors that cause crime.	50.9
C. The main causes of crime are things like poverty, bad families, and lenient punishments by the courts—not religion.	39.9
2. In general, how effective do you think that faith-based programs will be in reforming offenders?	
A. Very effective	10.8
B. Effective	35.1
C. A little effective	44.9
D. Ineffective—they won't work	9.2
3. Compared with traditional rehabilitation programs—like education, job training, and counseling—how effective do you think that faith-based programs will be?	
A. Faith-based programs will be much more effective.	8.6
B. Faith-based programs will be more effective.	16.9
C. Faith-based programs and traditional programs will be equally effective.	44.3
D. Traditional rehabilitation programs will be more effective.	23.2
E. Traditional rehabilitation programs will be much more effective.	7.0
4. If you were a judge and could sentence someone who had committed a burglary or a robbery, which of the following sentences would you be most likely to choose?	
A. Give the offender a prison term.	36.2
B. Place the offender in a faith-based program in the community run by a church.	25.9
C. Place the offender in a correctional program in the community run by the courts.	37.9
Note: Due to rounding errors, totals for individual questions may not total to 100%.	

however, is that a core feature of the service being rendered is its explicitly *religious content*. Thus, it is one thing for a church to distribute free meals; it is quite another for this same congregation to administer a program for delinquent youths whose “treatment” is Bible study and worship (Saperstein, 2001). These issues take on special salience in the

□ **Table 3: Public Views on the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Programs, by Type of Offender**

Type of Offender	% Ineffective	% A Little Effective	% Effective	% Very Effective
1. Juveniles (under 16) who commit crimes	7.6	35.4	40.8	16.2
2. Adults who commit crimes	18.2	47.9	28.8	5.1
3. People who commit drug offenses	24.4	42.4	24.9	8.4
4. People who commit domestic violence, like hitting their spouse	22.5	39.7	26.7	11.1
5. People who commit property crimes like burglary	18.3	48.7	26.6	6.4
6. People who commit violent crimes that injure people	43.9	37.7	12.9	5.5
7. People who molest children	53.4	26.5	12.8	7.3

Question: How effective do you think faith-based programs run by churches will be in reforming these types of offenders?

United States precisely because of the nation's contradictory character: Americans are religiously faithful but also believe in a clear barrier between church and state. As Dionne and Chen (2001b) note, this is why the use of "sacred places" for "civic purposes"—in our case, the use of faith-based programs to reduce crime—can raise sticky policy questions. Americans often see the benefits and dangers of bringing faith into the civil domain. "It is not as simple as the country being split into hostile camps," observe Dionne and Chen (2001b, p. 1); "Americans, as individuals, are often divided within *themselves*" (emphasis in the original).

Again, in the National Crime Policy Survey, we designed questions to probe these issues in some detail. As can be seen in Table 1, the sample was evenly divided over whether public monies should be used to fund faith-based programs for offenders. Note that in contrast to the Pew Research Center study, the directions sensitized the respondents that the programs would have a faith or religious component (as opposed to a religious group providing a service such as job training). This specificity to the question thus may have depressed overall levels of support, an interpretation that takes on credence from the responses to Item 2 in Table 1. Here, 7 in 10 respondents showed a preference for religious groups to be an option for providing traditional treatment programs as opposed to

faith-based programs. Further, 8 in 10 sample members stated that faith-based programs should have to hire as counselors any qualified individual, regardless of his or her faith. This raises the issue of how faith-based programs can be delivered if the counselors are not members of the religious group and do not have an abiding fidelity to its specific beliefs.

We should note that legal restrictions, based on the Supreme Court's interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, do exist on how government funds can be used in faith-based programs. It appears that, unless preempted by a local regulatory statute, religious groups are free under Federal law to hire members of their own denomination. By contrast, government funds cannot be used to pay for specific religious activities (e.g., worship, Bible study). Faith-based groups are able to receive funds to support their other service delivery activities, but they must use private funds to pay for religious practice; in fact, these expenditures must be kept separate (White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, n.d.; see also Kamnick & Moore, 1997; Press, 2001). Still, government finances can be employed to establish the organizational platform onto which explicitly faith-based activities are added. As a result, state support for faith-based initiatives can be instrumental in allowing groups to create a conduit through which opportunities to evangelize and deliver religious instruction are created (Kamnck & Moore, 1997; Press, 2001).

Table 1 also suggests that the respondents favored a more universalistic approach to funding. Thus, over 8 in 10 supported government funding for "churches of any faith" (Item 4) and for programs across communities as opposed to those located in the inner city (Item 5).

Taken together, these responses indicate that the American public is cautiously open to the notion of faith-based initiatives. It is possible that we would have detected more support if we had used more finely calibrated questions. For example, we suspect that more respondents would have endorsed faith-based programs if offender participation were depicted as completely voluntary (not "forced") and if more details were given about what the intervention might involve (e.g., a combination of worship, skills training, and community support). At the same time, the respondents evidenced ambivalence about how much they wished religion to drive the delivery of the program. They shied away from giving churches the discretion to hire only members of their own faith, and they were not willing to privilege Christian churches over those of other faiths. In America, the respondents seem to be saying, all people and all denominations should share equally in government-funded faith-based initiatives. These results are largely in line with those reported on public

views toward faith-based programs generally (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2001).

PUBLIC VIEWS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS

Although religious belief is widespread in the United States and outstrips that in other advanced industrial nations, it is not clear that Americans view the lack of religion as the cause of most social problems—including crime—or view the presence of religion as the panacea for all that ill society. Indeed, as seen in Item 1 in Table 2, fewer than 1 in 10 respondents asserted that “the lack of religion is the main cause of crime in the U.S.” Instead, the bulk of the sample (50.9%) defined the lack of religion as “one of many factors that cause crime.” This stance on crime causation is relevant because of the logical link between criminogenic risk factors and interventions. Thus, for an intervention to be effective, it must be targeting a factor that is a source of offending. The very fact that most sample members attribute criminal conduct to multiple causes should, in turn, lead them to define faith-based programs, which focus primarily on spiritual failings, as offering only a partial solution to the crime problem. This appears to be the case.

In general, the respondents believed that faith-based programs were effective in reforming offenders; thus, fewer than 1 in 10 said that such initiatives were “ineffective—they don’t work” (Item 2 in Table 2). At the same time, the sample members did not see religious interventions as uniquely efficacious. In fact, they tended to rate traditional rehabilitation programs as either more effective (30.2%) or as equally effective (44.3%) (Item 3 in Table 2). When asked how to sentence a burglar or robber—the prototypical “street offenders”—only 1 in 4 respondents preferred the option of a “faith-based program in the community run by a church” whereas a somewhat larger proportion chose a prison term (36.2%) or a community program “run by the courts” (37.9%) (Item 4 in Table 2).

Similar attitudes are expressed in Table 3, which reports the extent to which the respondents believed that faith-based programs would be effective with specific types of offenders. Across all offender types, there was a general assessment that religious interventions could be an effective rehabilitation strategy. However, few respondents felt that faith-based programs were powerful enough to be “very effective,” and their confidence that these programs would save the wayward decreased, when

violent and sex offenders were involved (Items 6 and 7 in Table 3). It is instructive that these responses—an overall belief in treatment effectiveness that diminishes for more predatory offenders—parallel those found in surveys about traditional rehabilitation programs (Sundt, Cullen, Applegate, & Turner, 1998, p. 437).

**CONCLUSION:
WILL SACRED PLACES SERVE CIVIC PURPOSES?**

In a society in which most people are faithful and in which public officials regularly express their spiritual beliefs, it is not surprising to find public support for faith-based programs. This embrace of religion as a possible correctional intervention, however, is neither unconditional nor fervent. The public recognizes that faith-based initiatives must respect the boundaries between church and state. When operating a program, no one denomination should be privileged and no job applicant should experience religious discrimination. In line with Constitutional mandates, citizens manifest ambivalence about using state funds to support the explicitly religious portion of an intervention. Finally, the public seems to see faith-based correctional programs as effective. However, they do not believe that they have special transformative powers or that they are more effective than traditional rehabilitation interventions.

This ideological portrait suggests that the public is open to the continued use of faith-based correctional programs. There is no abiding allegiance to religious programming that would lead to a fervent movement to replace secular with sacred treatment interventions. Rather, it appears that the public sees faith-based approaches as one of a menu of rehabilitation strategies that might be used with offenders. In a sense, it is as though the public is saying that these programs are “worth a try” and that, as potential service providers, religious groups “should have their chance too.”

In the absence of strong public advocacy, the continued vitality of and funding for faith-based correctional programs may depend on their symbolic value to elected officials. In part, faith-based initiatives received their impetus from the “compassionate conservative” movement of President George Bush and others. Appealing to Christian conservatives, these politicians portrayed faith-based initiatives as being uniquely effective in solving problem behaviors due to the spiritual transformation they promised. Religious groups were also depicted as victims of discrimination who had not been given an equal opportunity by the government to provide social services (thus the call for “charitable choice”). Underlying

these messages was a broader ideological critique of the welfare state, of secular approaches to solving social problems, and of a worldview that explained crime and other ills as a manifestation of structural inequality as opposed to personal, moral failings (Dionne & Chen, 2001a; Wuthnow, 2004).

In this context, the politicization of faith-oriented initiatives—that is, their ability to provide elected officials with political capital by “appealing to their base”—may supply politicians with incentives to advocate for their continued funding. But the price of politicization is that in this instance, the “sacred” is likely to have a divisive effect on civil society. Despite the rhetoric of faith, religious initiatives may come to serve political interests rather than broader civic purposes. Thus, to the extent that faith-based programs are endorsed as a conservative social experiment used to appease a right-wing constituency, they risk losing their moral legitimacy. They can become a poster child for the ongoing left-versus-right “culture war” and an occasion for further ideological divide (Wuthnow, 2004; see also Hunter, 1991).

Still, the potential contribution of faith-based correctional programs to civil society should not be neglected. Perhaps most important, they enrich the conversation about crime policy. At the heart of religious interventions is the belief that offenders have value, have the potential to be saved, and should be restored to a caring community. These views contradict the sentiments, often espoused by right-wing politicians, that offenders are “scum,” are beyond redemption, and should be locked away indefinitely. The particular value of faith-based programs is that their staff, including many volunteers, are not only willing to espouse progressive sentiments about the wayward, but also to travel into prisons and inner-city communities to bring services and faith to offenders.

In the end, however, the critical issue surrounding faith-based correctional programs is whether they can, in fact, be shown to “work” (Cullen & Sundt, 2003). Corrections has long been burdened by a series of ill-conceived and poorly run programs—so much so that they rightfully earn the tag of “correctional quackery” (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002). Similar to other interventions, faith-based programs should not be embraced simply because of a compelling logic (religion can be transformative) or the presence of good intentions (among well-meaning staff). Effectiveness is not a matter of faith but of science. Whether sacred or secular, correctional programs that do not work ultimately serve little civic purpose. Instead, they rob offenders of the opportunity to change, and they are responsible for future victimizations of innocent citizens that could have been prevented.

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AUTHORS' NOTES

Francis T. Cullen is Distinguished Research Professor of criminal justice and sociology at the University of Cincinnati. His recent works include *Corporate Crime Under Attack: The Fight Against Business Violence*, *Taking Stock: The Status of Criminological Theory*, *Criminological Theory: Context and Consequences*, and *Criminological Theory: Past to Present—Essential Readings*. His current research focuses on the impact of social support on crime, the measurement of sexual victimization, public opinion about crime control, and rehabilitation as a correctional policy. He is a Past President of both the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

Jennifer A. Pealer is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at Northern Kentucky University. Her recent work has included examining the risk principle for supervision based programs. She is currently co-authoring a book entitled *Correctional Interventions: Changing Offender Behavior*. Her current research focuses on the principles of effective classification for juvenile offenders.

Shannon A. Santana is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Her work has appeared in *Violence and Victims*, the *Justice System Journal*, and the *Security Journal*. She has also coauthored book chapters that have appeared in *Violence at Work: Causes, Patterns, and Prevention* and *Changing Attitudes to Punishment: Public Opinion, Crime and Justice*. Her research interests include violence against women, the effectiveness of self-protective behaviors in violent victimizations, workplace violence, and rehabilitation.

Bonnie S. Fisher is Professor of Criminal Justice and Senior Research Fellow of the Criminal Justice Research Center at the University of Cincinnati. She is currently the coeditor of the *Security Journal*. Her current research focuses on examining the determinants of violent victimization of youth and college women, including sexual and repeat victimization, comparative victimology, and public opinion about crime control policies and corrections.

Brandon K. Applegate is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Central Florida. He has published more than thirty articles on public views of correctional policies, jail issues, correctional treatment, juvenile justice, and decision-making among criminal-justice professionals. His current research focuses on public attitudes, jail differences as a function of social context, and probationers' perceptions of their sentence. In 2006-2007, he served as President of the Southern Criminal Justice Association.

Kristie R. Blevins is Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She received her PhD from the University of Cincinnati in 2004. Her publications have focused on correctional rehabilitation, women in the correctional system, security on college campuses, and the work reactions of juvenile correctional officers. Recently, she co-edited *Taking Stock: The Status of Criminological Theory*. Her primary research interests include corrections, the occupational reactions of criminal justice employees, and crime prevention.

Address correspondence to Francis T. Cullen, Division of Criminal Justice, PO Box 210389, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221 (E-mail: cullenft@email.uc.edu).

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