

The material conception of religion among inmates in the Ankaful maximum security prison, Ghana

Konsepsi material agama di antara narapidana di penjara keamanan maksimum Ankaful, Ghana

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Abstract

In the field of penology, very few studies have paid attention to the role of religion in prison. The sparse scholarly studies are largely focused on the advanced countries, and rarely on prisons in Africa. In addition, the findings on the impact of religion on inmates have yielded mixed results. This study examined the role of religion as a facet of inmates' social relationships. It is argued that the decision of inmates to participate in religious activities is not necessarily for redemption but for materialism. The study settled on a mixed-method approach to data collection. The data revealed that inmates who participated in religious activities did so purposely for the material benefits associated with the practice of religion. Religion provided inmates the context for contemplating their lives and mortality. The study concludes that religious beliefs and practices; regardless of how it comes to be experienced within the confines of the prison, are powerful forces that influence the conduct of prisoners, prison officials and civil society organisations.

Keywords: de-socialisation; materialism; prison inmates; religious practices; self-socialisation

Abstrak

Di bidang penologi, sangat sedikit penelitian yang memperhatikan peran agama di penjara. Studi ilmiah yang jarang sebagian besar terfokus pada negara-negara maju, dan jarang pada penjara di Afrika. Selain itu, temuan tentang dampak agama pada narapidana memberikan hasil yang beragam. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran agama sebagai salah satu aspek dalam hubungan sosial narapidana. Dikatakan bahwa keputusan narapidana untuk berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan keagamaan tidak selalu untuk penebusan tetapi untuk materialisme. Studi ini menetapkan pendekatan metode campuran untuk pengumpulan data. Dari data tersebut terungkap bahwa narapidana yang mengikuti kegiatan keagamaan memang sengaja melakukan hal tersebut untuk kepentingan materi yang terkait dengan pengamalan agama. Agama memberi narapidana konteks untuk merenungkan kehidupan dan kematian mereka. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keyakinan dan praktik keagamaan; terlepas dari bagaimana hal itu dialami dalam batas-batas penjara, adalah kekuatan kuat yang mempengaruhi perilaku narapidana, petugas penjara dan organisasi masyarakat sipil.

Kata kunci: de-sosialisasi; materialisme; narapidana; praktek keagamaan; sosialisasi diri

Introduction

The objective to study the religious lives of inmates in prison is neither to affirm nor to contest the veracity of their claims of conversion, or to promote religion as a panacea to reforming inmates. It must also be stated that this paper is in no way claiming to prove the transformative power of religion based on the testimonials of inmates, prison officials, or the outside clergy. The focus of this paper is to explain inmates' embrace of religion as a facet of meaningful social relationships and self-rediscovery. It is argued that the decision of inmates to participate in religious activities is not necessarily for redemption but for materialism.

The literature on the origin and development of prison reveals that the prison reform movement was deeply influenced by two conflicting ideas. The first was linked to the enlightenment ideas of rationalism and utilitarianism. These ideas stipulated that prisons should serve as a replacement for community

physical punishments such as hanging, and whipping. The significance of this idea was to deter people from committing similar crimes. The second philosophy equated crime to sin. It was based on Christian religious principles and beliefs with the aim of reformation so that prisoners could become obedient to social norms. Those who believed in this latter philosophy held that prisons should be fashioned as civilised institutions of religious and moral instruction so that when prisoners are released, they could be model members of society (Lewis 2009).

The history and literature of religion in prison suggest that religion functioned as a tool to transform (a) the prison system itself, and (b) inmates' "unacceptable" practices to practices that were considered acceptable by the larger society or as determined by social norms (Yin 2018). In general, it is important to note that the history of incarceration has drawn on cultural traditions, political ideologies, popular sensibilities, legal trends, academic theories (Kurian 2006), and religious dogmas. Elam Lynds expressed the role of religion as thus:

We must understand each other; I do not believe in a complete reform, except with young delinquents. Nothing, in my opinion, is rarer than to see a convict of mature age become a religious and virtuous man. I do not put great faith in the sanctity of those who leave the prison. I do not believe that the counsels of the chaplain, or the meditations of the prisoner, make a good Christian of him. But my opinion is, that a great number of old convicts do not commit new crimes, and that they even become useful art, and contracted habits of constant labour. This is the only reform I ever have expected to produce, and I believe it is the only one which society has the right to expect. (Elam Lynds, in De Beaumont & De Tocqueville 1979:163-164).

Lynds' position, to a large extent, suggests how difficult it is to find inmates as religious persons after prison discharge. Most often, in Ghana, it is common to hear speculations about how some hardened criminals have turned into religious beings while serving their prison sentences. However, it is difficult to justify if these inmates will display good behaviour outside the prison in case of discharge. To Lynds, religion plays a less significant role in the rehabilitation and reformation of adult prisoners. This position is not different from what is stated by Skotnicki (2000), that religious thought and movement cannot be considered as factors that contributed to prisoners' rehabilitation and reformation but rather it created a new prison system that had rehabilitation as its goal and the penal system as its method. More so, the works of Johnson (1987), Johnson et al. (1997), and Pass (1999) have all shown a negative relationship between rehabilitation in prison and religious programming.

Despite this belief and position above, Bedi (1998), in the study of the Tihar Jail, argued that religion acted as an important tool for the reformation of offenders. This finding resonates with Gaur (2011) who propounded the view that religion played a vital role in the lives of inmates by way of transforming their violent behaviours to peaceful behaviours, as well as helped prisoners to rise above their selfish interests to that of societal interests. The empirical writings of other scholars such as Clear et al. (1992), Young et al. (1995), O'Connor et al. (1997), Sumter (2000), Baier and Wright (2001), Johnson and Larson (2003), La Vigne et al. (2009), Armstrong (2014), and Stansfield et al. (2017) have all found a positive relationship between religious programming and rehabilitation of offenders.

These findings have made it difficult for academics and policy makers to conclude on the role of religion in prison. In addition, these non-coherent positions by these scholars suggest that, as stated by O'Connor and Duncan (2008), there are a complex set of factors that have propelled the growth of the religion-penology debate. Perhaps it is plausible to assume that these contradictory findings may be attributable to the fact that in contemporary liberal democracies, religion in prison is encouraged and facilitated by the government in fulfilment of the Constitutional rights of all persons. Inmates are not mandated to participate in any religion against their will (Yin et al. 2021). Thus, it is not uncommon for inmates to subscribe to religion in pursuit of their own varying strategic interests as the situation may warrant.

The Ankaful Maximum Security Prison (AMSP), as the study setting, is a total institution expected to radically alter a person's personality through a predetermined set of administrative practices (Goffman 1961). Like any other prison in Ghana, AMSP operates in line with the Ghana Prisons Service mandates of safe custody, welfare of inmates, and rehabilitation and reformation of inmates. However, investigations at AMSP suggest that the facility is a total institution without structured rehabilitation facilities such as

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trade learning centres. It is in effect out of the rehabilitation business. As a result, most inmates utilise their time to engage in religious pursuits, hence making religion the most important organising principle in the lives of inmates. Similarly, the pervasive engagement of religious Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the operations of AMSP is in response to the agency's inefficiencies and lack of resources to fulfil its mandates. Despite the pervasiveness of religion in this rational-legal bureaucracy, the issues of the role of religion, as to how, why, and what inmates have to say their religious beliefs and practices do for them have received little attention in scholarly writings in Ghana. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the role of religion in the lives of inmates as a facet of meaningful social relationships. It is argued that the participation of inmates in religious activities is for materialistic purposes. The selection of AMSP as the study setting was due to convenience and its uniqueness as the only Maximum Security Prison in Ghana.

Research Method

The philosophy that informed data gathering for this study was the pragmatist approach of mixed-method – quantitative and qualitative. The source of data was primary. The unit of analysis included inmates, ex-convicts, prison officers, and clergy of CSOs. For the quantitative aspect, Yamane's (1967) mathematical method ($n = N / [1 + N (\alpha)^2]$) was used to determine the sample size. With 379 Christian inmates and 74 Muslim inmates, the sample size was 112 for Christians and 49 for Muslims. Due to the small number of indigenous faith persons, only 8 participated in the semi-structured questionnaire. The total sample size was 169 at a 0.08 margin of error. However, after perusing the administered semi-structured questionnaires, 147 were analysed due to some gaps in 22 of the instruments. The systematic sampling approach was used in selecting the respondents. This gave each inmate an equal opportunity to participate in the study (Jackson & Verberg 2007).

For the qualitative aspect, a purposive approach was used to select some participants for the study. The purposive technique was used to select the official prison Chaplain, Imam, and two officers with over 15 years of experience. The same technique was used to select one visiting Pastor and one visiting Imam (leaders of religious CSOs). Two inmates' religious leaders (one Pastor and one Imam), two indigenous faith inmates, and two inmates without any religious affiliation were also sampled purposively. In addition, six ex-convicts (four Christians and two Muslims) were interviewed. The inmates without religious affiliation and ex-convicts were selected for validation purposes. All the participants were chosen due to their strategic positions in the prison facility and their willingness to participate in the study.

The quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 while the transcripts of the qualitative interviews were analysed based on themes and patterns. Pseudo names were used to represent participants (Yin et al. 2022). Based on the results and discussion, some conclusions were drawn. As the data gathered formed part of a larger project, not all data collected were used in this write-up. All the necessary ethical issues were adhered to.

Results and Discussion

Listening and examining the accounts of inmates on their crimes and moral failings in the context of their religious testimonies, one can surmise that the religious encounters of inmates had provided them a forum for critical self-reflection of their criminality and lives. This was manifested in how inmates were charting new paths and identities for themselves through the renewal of mind and closeness to their respective deities. The belief in the divine had inspired inmates a quest to live a life in pursuit of their divine purpose.

When inmates were asked how religion had contributed to their spiritual lives behind bars, 44.9% said religion had induced in them calmness and a clear conscience, 25.9% said the practice of religion had given them the spirit of compassion, 16.3% said it brought them closer to God, whilst 12.9% said it helped them to remain faithful to God and man. The data imply that the practice of religion awakened the spiritual consciousness of inmates by inducing calmness, compassion, faithfulness, and a clear conscience. This was highlighted by some inmates during the in-depth interviews. According to KWA: "I was really a bad person. If not for God, it would have been very difficult for prison officers to control me. I have come to know Jesus through my incarceration. I am now a calm person". (Informant KWA).

MUS added:

“When I was outside I hardly reflected on my life. I did very bad things but now things are different. I have seen the need to prepare my path well so that even if I die in prison I will have a place with God. I have asked God to grant me His mercies and favours so that I can live a good life”. (Informant MUS).

HAM and SAL reiterated respectively:

“Apart from the renewal of my mind, I feel a sense of freedom even though I am in prison”. (Informant HAM).

“Every human being must understand that whatever we do, God will judge us according to our deeds. I did whatever I liked whilst a free person. I used to fight, drink hard liquor, smoke marijuana, womanize, etc. I was a quick-tempered person. I have engaged in all forms of criminal activities before. These acts worried my parents but that was my understanding of life. I have come back to my senses. Allah has touched me. And this time ...I want to go to heaven. This has informed my behaviour in prison”. (Informant SAL).

This religious awakening soothes inmates' fear of damnation (their soul going to hell). In that negative emotions were removed from the lives of inmates and replaced with a new religious consciousness – salvation agenda. The process permitted inmates to live their best lives and to embrace elements of positivity through the encounter of divine power. This positivity was exhibited in the assurance of a place in the hereafter, heaven, or paradise. This finding explains Turner's (2003) position that no matter a person's tradition, or culture, the supernatural experiences cannot be ignored. These experiences, whether spiritual or transcendental give the individual some kind of a feeling of complete satisfaction, be it physical, biological, or psychological. For inmates, imprisonment awakened these transcendental experiences. One can conclude from the data that an unexamined life was not worth living for some inmates. Religion, therefore, provided many inmates a context for reflecting on the adverse consequences of their criminality. This finding also corroborates with the works of Ross (2021) and O'Connor and Duncan (2011) that the practice of religion in prison improved the faith of inmates as well as provided the context for self-reflection. It is this (re)awakening that they attribute their de-socialisation.

In this paper, desocialisation means a person departing from immoral behaviours due to one's conversion experience. Inmates said they had shunned the following attitudes and behaviours: fraudulent activities, fighting, smoking and use of hard drugs (such as marijuana, cocaine, etc.), unforgiving attitude, quick temperedness, the habit of retaliation, violence, and stealing tendencies. Most of the inmates confessed to being of such dispositions, and engaged in combinations of these violations before their arrests and incarcerations. Their encounter with religion had given them a new reality and identity. This new identity emanates from inmates spiritual awakening, necessitating desocialisation:

“The worship of God puts some fear in us. If you want to commit a crime you are unable to do it. So you have no option other than to move away from sin. Using myself as an example, in the past I used to smoke marijuana and cigarette a lot but since I started worshipping God I have stopped all those things”. (Informant KWA).

“I see many of the inmates engage in fraudulent activities but I cannot do the same because of my faith and position in the church. How will the members of the church respect me if I am involved in such criminal activities?” (Informant HAM).

“I used to fight ... and hardly forgave those who offended me because I was intolerant, but knowing Christ has helped me to tolerate and forgive other inmates. I have a peaceful relationship with everyone, whether you are a Muslim or a worldly person”. (Informant KON).

The inference drawn from the data suggests inmates' efforts to purge themselves of criminal values and to conform to societal norms. These claims were typical of inmates who believed their religious conversion

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had altered their dispositions and attitudes. Through their religion, they had unlearned their anti-social behaviours. Evidence of their changed selves was the virtues of forgiveness, peace, love, forbearance, humility, and integrity. This finding supports the works of Banks et al. (1975), Jensen (1981), Evans et al. (1996), Baier and Wright (2001), Thirumalai (2004), Stansfield et al. (2019), Ross (2021), that participation in religious activities made people either abstain from crime or reduce the risks for people to be associated with both minor and serious forms of criminal behaviours. Religion, per the testimonies shared by inmates, helped de-internalise their criminal values as well as aided inmates to internalise new norms and values based on the precepts of their religious faith. Hence, inmates adopted a new socialisation self.

Self-socialisation is the conscious undertaking by an inmate to reflect and account for the transformation of his/her self-concept. Unwittingly, religion had become the medium of inmates' self-socialisation in the prison. The analysed survey data show that 78.2% of inmates said they were able to build relationships through religious experience whilst 21.8% disagreed. In respect of whether religion helped inmates to develop mutual trust, 85.7% agreed whilst 14.3% disagreed. For whether religion played a motivational role, 78.2% agreed whilst 21.8% disagreed. The other manifestations of religion in terms of inmates' self-socialisation came in the form of tolerance, compassion, sacrifice, love, humility, unity, self-control, recreation, welfare, social solidarity, self-confidence, and forgiveness. All these traits received a huge affirmative endorsement from inmates as shown in Table 1. According to the inmates, the practice of religion in prison made them internalise these values.

Table 1.
Religion and inmates' self-socialisation

ISSUE	Agree	Disagree
I am able to build relationships through religious experience	78.2%	21.8%
My religion has helped me develop mutual trust	85.7%	14.3%
My religion motivates me	78.2%	21.8%
Religion has taught me how to sacrifice for others/ community	74.8%	25.2%
Religion has made me tolerant	85.7%	14.3%
I have compassion for others because of religion	82.3%	17.7%
I have developed the love for others through religion	71.4%	28.6%
Religion has made me humble	85.7%	14.3%
I have seen the importance of unity through religion	93.2%	6.8%
Religion has developed my sense of justice	50.3%	49.7%
I have self-control because of religion	65.3%	34.7%
Religion has made me develop that sense of social solidarity/ Togetherness/ Brotherhood	64.6%	35.4%
I have mental peace because of religion	82.3%	17.7%
Religion promotes my welfare	74.8%	25.2%
Religion is a source of recreation to me – Festivals	64.6%	35.4%
Religion has given me self-confidence	50.3%	49.7%
I have learnt to forgive others through my involvement in religious activities	93.2%	6.8%
I have developed the habit of self-analysis through my involvement in religious activities	65.3%	34.7%
Religion has taught me to work hard to achieve in life	50.3%	49.7%

Source: Field data (2017)

The virtues of trust, tolerance, love, compassion, humility, unity and forgiveness revealed in Table 1 were not character traits one expected of incorrigibles. Drawing from the data, it was clear inmates felt that their ability to practice their religion had had a transformative impact on their lives. The virtues revealed in the

survey research were not poles apart from the values expressed by inmates during the in-depth interview. Some inmates unlearned their criminal practices to learn new values that were reinforced by their religious precepts. There was a new sense of self that was socially constructed based on inmates' religious reality construction (Berger & Luckmann 1991, Dammer 2002, Burr 2003, Schwandt 2003, Santos 2015, Allen 2017, Yin 2018, Nicholson 2019, Yin & Kofie 2021).

The extent of inmates' self-socialisation was apparent in the statements made by interviewees. According to informant FRE; "My faith in God has made me bold and has improved my relationship with others". According to informant MOS; "I share my encounter and experience with God anytime my family members visit me. I make them know the need for intercession prayer". The Muslim inmate SUL added; "I know that someone else's property is not mine. Unfortunately for me, this recognition came at a time I am in prison. But it is better late than never". MUS shared that; "We are each other's keepers".

An official prison Imam testified to some behavioural changes he witnessed in the typical inmate. The Imam, as informant DUL, said; "When an inmate is angry, at times I hear some of them say if not for God they would have fought back. The words of God calm the inmates and we are able to live with them peacefully"

The data revealed that inmates attributed their reformed selves and acquired personalities to their religious practices and beliefs. Through their embrace and practice of their ideologically conservative religions, inmates in effect contributed to their subjugation. To the extent that the result of religious practice was the docility of the inmates. It was also implied by the data that inmates underwent self-socialisation via their voluntary individual volition within AMSP, but not through the planned and designed programmes of AMSP. So the preachers were facilitation agents; not necessarily by their exemplary life but by virtue of their status within the prison walls.

Religion and materialism are less separable in the context of African religious beliefs and practices. Materialism in this context implies the pursuits of inmates for scarce resources such as food, clothes, money, friendship (and other intangibles – spiritual benefits), knowledge acquisition, and other donations from religious bodies or persons to supplement their needs in the austere or deprived prison setting. Religious adherents aim to benefit from the material resources that their deity offers them on earth and the eternal life hereafter. This manifests in terms of how religious persons go to church or Mosque to put before a deity their various material needs and wants. As Larbi (2001) and Davies and Thate (2017) put it, the goal of such religious adherents is to gain favours from the supernatural.

Blessings of this divine power are at times measured in terms of the material possessions of those who hold such beliefs. It is therefore not surprising that inmates expressed their material needs in the context of their religious beliefs and practices through their encounters with outside clergy. The survey data revealed how religion contributes to the material or economic behaviour of inmates. The majority of inmates (41.5%) were of the view that they received gifts like food and money from outside clergy, 32.6% said religion taught them to be kind and generous towards other inmates, whilst 25.9% said religion taught them the culture of savings. Drawing on the interviews, inmates depended on their religion through outside clergy to satisfy some basic needs such as toiletries, food, soft drinks, slippers, clothes, and musical instruments and chairs to further promote religion in prison. Not only did inmates depend on outside clergy for their material needs, but they also depended on the church offerings of their religious groups to meet some necessities. During the in-depth interviews, inmates and prison officers expressed as follows:

"At times when members of the church complain about not having certain toiletries, we come into agreement and order soap from our contributions. We share the soap among the members". (Informant FRE).

"They (CSOs) supply us with plastic chairs and benches, speakers, microphones, maracas, etc. Some of these preachers even facilitate the court processes for some of our friends". (Informant HAM).

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The Prison Chaplain explained;

"The visiting clergy don't come to visit the yard empty-handed. They come with cooked and uncooked foods, slippers, detergent and used clothes. These items help the prison a lot. We are unable to supply these items to the inmates as expected so the items we receive reduce pressure on prison administration". (Informant ASA).

This was validated by prison officers;

"Donations from the faith communities ease the pressure on the prison administration. Some churches provide wheelchairs for physically challenged inmates who are going on discharge. The churches, in addition pay the transportation cost of officers who accompany these challenged inmates to their homes". (Informant BUA).

"The needs may not necessarily be religious but social or material. Some of these visiting pastors do contact relatives of these inmates for them. Some do help retrieve the court records of inmates. Some even go to the extent of filing appeals for the inmates". (Informant WIS).

The data suggest that religion has become a means to material and administrative ends. In effect, the materialism inmates derive from active participation in religion makes it the most important organising principle in the majority of inmates' prison life. Dammer (2002) and Benyah (2021) shared that religion helps inmates to obtain resources such as food, musical instruments, books, and greeting cards. Even so, the study of religiosity in prison reveals some of the failures of the prison bureaucracy, as the presence and functions of CSOs at AMSP suggest the usurpation of the prison bureaucracy by these CSOs. Administratively, the unacknowledged but evident in the data is that there is a tacit relationship between religious CSOs and prison officials in the management of inmate's material and spiritual life within AMSP (Yin 2018).

The health of inmates is a critical component of incarceration, as revealed in the mandates of the Ghana Prisons Service. It is the responsibility of AMSP to promote the health of inmates, however, AMSP was unable to perform such mandates as expected due to underfunding and lack of resources. Inmates had to improvise their own means of dealing with their health situation. In that, inmates resorted to their regular contributions given during church programmes and outside clergy for the functions of transporting sick inmates to hospitals and settling medical bills. The survey data revealed that 44.3% of inmates shared religion had contributed to their healing process during ill health, 46.9% said when they were sick and had no money for medical treatment they depended on other church members (inmates) and church offerings for the purpose of paying medical bills, and buying of recommended pharmaceuticals, whilst 8.8% said they have had mental peace as a result of their religious practices. The data above imply the use of both physical and spiritual means by inmates to deal with their health problems whilst at the same time revealed the proactive nature of inmates towards sustaining their religious community through meeting the health needs of members.

Inmates' health-seeking behaviour is demonstrated through their belief in a higher power for healing. It is easy for one to say that religion fosters the formation of mutual aid society of sort through which inmates pull financial resources to aid the infirm. The in-depth interviews reveal below as explained by inmates, warders, and outside clergy:

"Sometimes when I wake up in the morning I feel in my body that I am not well. When this happens I get a cup of water and pray over it. I drink it as health to my body. Because of the faith I have, I get healing upon drinking the water". (Informant FRE).

"Initially, my body used to smell bad because of body fluid dripping from my anus. This worried me because it prevented me from going very close to other inmates. I prayed to God for healing. In my dream, I saw Jesus performing surgery on me. I told the prison chaplain about it so he took me to the infirmary for examination. The nurse advised that I go for surgery. I had no money so the church decided to pay for the cost of the surgery from the offerings of members. I was taken for the surgery and by the grace of God, it was successful". (Informant HAM).

The visiting Imam stated:

“Some give offering so that when an inmate is sick and has no money ...they can call for their savings to buy medicine to help the sick inmate as first aid. Sometimes the prison does not have the logistics to take the inmates to the hospital. When this happens, the said inmate is left to his fate. But if you have money in the coffers of the church, you can withdraw some of the money to support the transportation need of the inmate. If there is the need to buy more pharmaceuticals and at that juncture there is no money, what do you do if not from the little savings of the religious group?” (Informant MAL).

Likewise the prison chaplain:

“There was also a time administration had no money and the human resource to perform surgery on an inmate suffering from hernia. The administration called on religious bodies and persons to support. The extension of such support to the administration helped financially for the surgery. Our infirmary is surviving on the mercy of these religious bodies or faith persons”. (Informant ASA).

The positions of these interviewees were validated by an ex-convict who stated that:

“I usually do not want to recount my experience at Maximum Security Prison. It was very bitter. I nearly died if not for the intervention of my elders in the church at Maximum prison. They used the church offering to aid my treatment at the Ankaful General Hospital. God used the church to save me. After I gained back my health I became more attached to the church. I am very grateful to the members, especially the chaplain”. (Informant SAM).

Some inmates attributed their healing to their deity. Lutjen et al. (2012), and Schwadel and Falci (2012) found that inmates linked their reduction in stress, anxiety, and lower depression to their religious practices. The data revealed a strong link between religious CSOs and AMSP. The practical reason for the intertwining of the religious CSOs and the government agency speaks volumes about the deficiencies of the government agency. The CSOs take advantage of it to raise their profile in the prison community and the free society. Far from being a purposive collaborative project, the prison officials in effect have relegated the function of proselytising, welfare, and religious rehabilitation or resocialisation of the inmates to the religious CSOs and the inmates themselves.

Evidently, maintaining order within the confines of the prison cannot be attained without the assistance of the religious CSOs. In that, AMSP lacks resources and is experiencing an overcapacity of inmates. This overcapacity is seen in the light of the available resources for inmates. Although unintended, the contributions of inmates during religious meetings have become a sort of *de facto* prison health insurance. Regardless of their religious persuasion, inmates in dire need of medical attention are largely funded by pooled resources of other inmates.

All of these reveal the inmate's initiation of rehabilitation and resocialisation needs, at times through the religious CSOs. The relationship between the operations of the prison and the religious CSOs based on materialism, health, and self-socialisation can best be described as symbiotic: (a) The CSOs expand their religious outreach by getting scheduled access to the prison, inmates, and make-shift religious rooms to conduct religious services, (b) In so doing, the CSOs raise their profile of ministering to the depraved in the mainstream communities, and (c) CSOs raise their profile at the International level by drawing funding from overseas NGOs. The prison officials in turn gain in the following ways: (a) augment non-funded scheduled activities such as religious services, (b) infusion of funding and material resources, (c) complimentary counselling of the inmates by clergy, and (d) the religious self-socialisation of inmates to abide by the prison rules.

Reading the claims by inmates about their religious conversion, and the intensity with which some of the inmates approach their religion, one may be forgiven for thinking that AMSP is a haven of the penitent. This is hardly so based on the first-hand accounts of some inmates about the behaviours of their peers:

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"... Even in this prison, I hear there is a place called Hotel Vinkibamba where some inmates go to pay for anal sex. I am told some of our church members patronise the place. This tells me that not everyone who claims to be a Christian in this prison is a converted person". (Informant HAM).

"Some inmates also pretend to have changed and attend church services; meanwhile, after church services they smoke, drink alcohol, and engage in homosexual acts. Some come to church because they want to know God but others also come to church because they want to benefit from the items brought to us by outside preachers". (Informant MOS).

According to an inmate with indigenous faith:

"In this prison, some inmates are engaged in fraudulent activities but I don't do those things. It was sin that brought me here so if I continue to sin in prison then it means I haven't changed. The religious beliefs of inmates do not correspond with their practices in this prison. Especially, the inmates leading the churches. They worship God on Fridays and Sundays but leave God in the Church and Mosque before they enter their cells. They steal, defraud people, and engage in other illegal activities". (Informant JAT).

From the standpoint of the inmates without religious affiliation:

"Some of my colleague inmates go to church because they want fellow inmates and officers to see that they have changed. They do this just to win favours so that they could be appointed as office boys". (Informant SAH).

"If you take 100% of inmates who attend churches or mosques only about 5% are interested in knowing God. Some participate in religious activities to entertain themselves and share in the donations of CSOs. I blame the outside preachers who come to this prison to preach because they are working for their selfish gains. Joseph in the Bible did not go to prison because he is a thief but because of a prophecy concerning the children of God". (Informant WIN).

The inmates without religious affiliation attest to the fact that even behind the prison walls some inmates continue their lives of crime using the cover of being Christians:

"Even those (inmates) who defraud outsiders in this prison pray to God for a successful process. Some even thank God when it is successful. Let me tell you that even those who want to engage in any criminal act of any form in this prison ask God for success. Many of these so-called religious inmates have even higher criminal brains. This is not a strange thing here. Why do you think some of these inmates go to church? I tell you that some go to pray for impending successes of fraudulent activities whilst others also dance at church to celebrate great criminal successes. The inmates are not reforming. How can they reform if they don't understand what they read and practice? I interact with my friends about their religious practices and it is clear that they participate in such activities because of the food some CSOs donate. It sometimes appears to me that they have no idea of what they are doing". (Informant SAH).

It is one thing for some inmates to doubt the veracity of their fellow inmate's religious conversion and religiosity but quite another to hear the Prison Chaplain lament of external CSO pastors being defrauded by their inmate converts:

"We had an inmate who was very active in church activities. This inmate could easily give you a memory text from the Bible. It was like the Bible was in his head. This inmate went to defraud the members of the Pentecost Students Association at the University of Cape Coast. This ex-convict did not end there; he went to the homes of some inmates in Cape Coast to defraud their relatives. Unfortunately for him, one of the people he defrauded identified him and caused his arrest. He's currently in prison again with a sentence of 5 years imposed on him". (Informant ASA).

"An ex-convict who was assisted by a pastor ended up stealing his properties. These stories are very common..." (Informant ASA).

Two ex-convicts who were interviewed also raised issues about the sincerity of some professed inmates Christians and Muslims:

“I attended church services with other inmates but it was clear that some were just faking for prison officers to believe that they are repented. It was shameful seeing some of them engaged in 419 (name phone scams) business. They make calls with illegal phones and deceive the ladies outside that they had just arrived from Europe or America and would want to marry them. Some ladies fall victim and then defraud them”. (Informant BAR).

“...not all the inmates who called themselves Muslims were true Muslims. Some were worse than the non-Muslims even though most of them joined the Friday prayers. I hope that they change their lives for the better”. (Informant BAS).

Not only did inmates doubt the sincerity of their fellow inmates, some inmates even doubted the sincerity of the CSOs:

“I hear some inmates say the outside preachers are using them for money. And that these CSOs do not give to them all the items they received from international donors”. (Informant SAH).

“The CSOs’ affiliation with us (inmates) is because of their link with donors outside Ghana. At times these outside preachers come to fool prisoners with food and used clothes. Some of the clothes are not even good for use. They come to tell us Joseph left prison and became a prime minister and so we will become prime ministers. This is not true. How can an illiterate become a prime minister? It is the CSOs pretending to be religious bodies who benefit. The CSOs do this to steal from what is given to us (prisoners) by benevolent individuals (donors). We all hide behind religion to do all kinds of things”. (Informant WIN).

All these show that whilst some inmates were using religion to improve their spoiled identity, others also used it as means to material ends. The materialism inmates derive from active participation in religion makes it the most important organising principle in the lives of the majority of the inmates. The most religious CSOs that are deeply entrenched in the prison ministry are those who provide considerable material resources such as food, medicine and clothes to support inmates in need. Even to the most sceptical inmates, signing up to participate in an array of religious services, not only relieves them of their sense of isolation, their affiliation enables them to access a share of the comparatively quality food that CSOs bring to them. This makes religious discourse the main medium of meaningful social interaction between inmates, prison guards, and religious CSOs. It is this materialism that forms the basis of the prison informal economy (Yin & Kofie 2021).

Conclusion

This study examined the role of religion in the lives of inmates. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data gathering and analysis, these conclusions were drawn from the data. Religion is a critical means by which inmates were restoring their spoiled identities. Even among inmates, those who assumed the status of clergy or Imam commanded respect and admiration for living what they preached. In effect, expressions of religiosity and spirituality are dis-identifier symbols that inmates utilise to normalise their spoiled identities.

Imprisonment de-individualises and subjects inmates to daily degradation ceremonies no matter what their social statuses have been in mainstream society. It is through religion that many inmates come to reclaim their dignity and self-worth. For some inmates, this is attained through caring for their ‘flocks’ and making financial contributions to pay for the medical expenses of other inmates in poor health. Repeatedly, many inmates pointed to religion as a shared and personal experience that enabled them to put things into perspective. Religion provided inmates contexts for contemplating their lives and mortality.

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Careful probing of inmates during the interviews revealed that religious beliefs and practices professed by inmates and ex-convicts cannot be taken to mean they are completely reformed. It is evident that religion provides some inmates the necessary cover to practice their crimes even behind bars. It is not surprising that various inmates have their covert reasons for subscribing to a religion. Of which the most feasible reason is materialism. To the extent that, some inmates fake being believers for the sake of material rewards - extrinsic motivation.

Shifting from inmates' religiosity to the bureaucracy, the prison lacks the sorely needed resources to care for the inmates. Although unintended, the contributions of inmates to the collection plates during religious meetings have become a sort of *de facto* prison health insurance. Regardless of their religious persuasion, inmates in dire need of medical attention are largely funded by pooled resources of other inmates. Inmates have provided funding to transport gravely ill inmates to hospital, and to buy sorely needed medication to restore them to health. Administratively, the undervalued but evident in the data is the inferred relationship between religious CSOs and Prison Officials in the management of inmates' material, health, and spiritual lives within the prison.

The exercise of religion masks the reality of the deficiencies of AMSP. The intensity with which many of the inmate clergy pursue religion can best be described as a vocation. It provides a context for their waking up, and going about their day in a maximum prison. Religious beliefs and practices; regardless of how it comes to be experienced within the confines of the prison, is a powerful force that influences the conduct of prisoners, prison officials, and the CSOs. The conclusion reflects the wide-ranging contributions this study has made to the religion-penology literature.

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