

7-1-1939

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Recommended Citation

Duemling, E. A. (1939) "The Institutional Missionary and the Spiritual Rehabilitation of the Prisoner," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 10 , Article 52.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol10/iss1/52>

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The Institutional Missionary and the Spiritual Rehabilitation of the Prisoner

It is one of the ordinary incidents of our daily life to pick up the morning or evening paper and read in glaring head-lines of the commission of some atrocious crime. The offender, in most cases a young man, is a desperate character, and the authorities are glad to have him safely in hand. For several weeks we follow with eager interest the detailed accounts of the crime and of the trial, and when at last the offender is sentenced to five, ten, twenty years, or even to life imprisonment, we sink back in our chairs with a sigh of relief, even of satisfaction, and exclaim: "Good! He deserves it!" A few days later, when we have already forgotten his existence, a shackled young man stands before the gray, grim walls of the large prison-house; the great steel gates swing open slowly and lock with a jarring clang behind him, and another member is added to the Gray Brotherhood. The man is now a convict. He is rushed through the "dressing in" procedure, for a brief time put in quarantine, and then assigned to work.

Yet this dejected and rejected man is not forgotten by the Church. Whatever we may think of prisoners and their crimes, the fact nevertheless remains that each and every one has an immortal soul, for which the Savior also bled and died on Calvary's cross. It is God's will that the wicked should turn from his ways and live. Cognizant of the fact that the Lord enjoins the Church to preach the Gospel to every creature, a missionary chaplain is sent to the abode of convicted men. It is the Gospel that will save them from eternal condemnation. We have abundant evidence that the Word of God sown into the hearts of these imprisoned men does not return unto Him void. To stand before a large gathering of prisoners, oftentimes hundreds in numbers, and to preach to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a privilege any Christian minister might well covet. The Law of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, sin and grace, must ever be kept in the foreground. There should be no room in a prison service for the spectacular, sentimental, and highly emotional sermon. A prison congregation is different from an ordinary congregation. Its members are of various colors and races, learned and illiterate men, some religiously trained, others, again, without the benefit of thorough religious instruction and proper indoctrination. It is not an easy task, therefore, to preach to such a congregation and be understood. If the chief Christian fundamentals, sin and grace, the glorious work of redemption, are preached and taught in plain, simple language, illustrations used and human interest stories told, preferably the personal experiences of the chaplain, with proper

applications, the preacher will not fail to hold the attention of the congregation. The best preachers are those who choose simple words for their sermons and who remember that most people came to church to hear the great truths of Christianity rather than appeals to the intellect. Jesus Himself spoke plainly in His sermons to the people while on earth. He told parables in order to bring out great spiritual truths. Sickly sentimentality is the worst possible thing to offer men already too eager to justify their evil deeds. The chaplain needs to be a man of large heart, aided by an abundance of sound common sense. He needs to bear in mind constantly, in the difficult and delicate work he is called upon to perform, that the prison discipline must be upheld and enforced. He must never lose sight of the majesty of the law and of the prison rules and regulations, if he would be a power for good and hold the respect and confidence of the warden, so essential in successful prison work! The chaplain and the warden should work hand in hand, the one sustaining the other. They need to have a perfect understanding, neither mistrusting the other. The chaplain should be a man of great sincerity with an intense passion for the souls of men.

No matter how long one has been in actual prison work, a prison never fails to impress. The perfect attention, strange environments, the large number of youthful offenders, the hardened features of habitual criminals, the sadness of it all, make a profound impression, especially on the minds of those who for the first time attend a prison service. It is the personal contact and the individual work with the inmate that counts in a prison. The chaplain's work should be thought out beforehand, be methodical, premeditated, intentional, systematic, and thorough. Hand-picked fruit always lasts the longest.

Some people hold that religion cannot possibly be a deterrent from crime because members of virtually every religious affiliation are represented in all penitentiaries. They have come to the conclusion that religion is no help at all in keeping men out of prison.

A certain judge, before ascending the bench, was a public defender for many years. Thousands of men and women, charged with every conceivable crime, came before him. And he found that only 2 per cent. of them were active members of any church at the time of their arrest. The other 98 per cent. either had no religion or had fallen away from their religion, whatever it was. The average time that had elapsed since they were communicants of any church was five years. The real truth of the matter is this: Men and women who are active church-members are not the criminals. The criminals are persons who have rejected the com-

mandments of God. It was not their religion that brought them into serious trouble, but the abandonment of religion. It is not Christianity that has failed. Rather its opponents and the flagrant offenders against the Word of God have failed.

How do prison authorities regard religious work in penal institutions? The First National Prison Congress, conducted in the year 1870, has gone on record that "of all the reformatory agencies, religion is the first in importance, because most potent in its action upon the human heart and life." This principle was reaffirmed as late as 1930. Sanford Bates, well known as the former Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, has written a book entitled *Prisons and Beyond*. "There is no trace of the fanatical zeal of the reformer or of the hysteria of the well-meaning but unintelligent humanitarian to be found in this book. Mr. Bates' attitude towards religion and the part religion ought to play in the task of reforming the criminal is of special interest to church-workers. He believes that in the end only the religious appeal can be relied upon to effect a thorough reformation in the heart and life of a prisoner. Thus he assigns to the prison chaplain a position of great importance in the modern prison, stressing the point at the same time that an effective prison ministry calls for men especially trained for this service."

A consecrated chaplain does not seek the applause of the world, which is rarely given, nor material gain, but he glories in the fact that he is a humble servant of the Lord, assigned to labor among a people forgotten and forsaken, for which the Savior sacrificed his life in order to save them, and his reward is that he is permitted to serve.

The gravest offense committed by man against society is, no doubt, a flagrant transgression of the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." The taking of a life shortens and terminates for the victim his time of grace. This crime is called the capital crime and is punished either by life imprisonment or the execution of the criminal. The subject of death penalties for first-degree murder is one that has been much debated by prominent groups and individuals, among them being Warden Lewis E. Lawes of Sing Sing, the wardens of some of our other penitentiaries, Clarence Darrow, and the American League to Abolish Capital Punishment. These hold that the death penalty does not stop crime and that the condemned usually are too poor to afford good legal counsel. They point to the fact that the educated and well-to-do generally are able to escape the extreme punishment.

In the background of this long-standing debate are these facts. Eight States have definitely abandoned the death penalty—Michigan, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South

Dakota, Maine and Kansas. The remaining forty States have retained the death penalty, but only six of these make it mandatory. These are Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, and Vermont. In the other States either the judge or the jury is allowed to decide between death and life imprisonment. In nine States of the Union the death penalty is carried out by hanging. In twenty-two States and the District of Columbia, the electric chair is used. In nine States of the Union execution by lethal gas instead of electrocution or hanging has been adopted. Missouri is the latest State to turn to this form of inflicting the death penalty. The other States are North Carolina, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, and California. In Utah the condemned man may choose a firing squad or the noose. Delaware, with its two jails and one workhouse, without a State prison or adult reformatory for either men or women, inflicts capital punishment. In all capital-punishment States the death penalty may be inflicted for first-degree murder. In seventeen of these, rape also may bring the death penalty. In addition, in several others, arson, treason, robbery, burglary, and kidnapping are listed as punishable by death. So much as to punishment of first-degree murder in the various States of the Union.

What can and should be done for the spiritual rehabilitation of the prisoner? We all agree that there cannot be spiritual rehabilitation of the prisoner unless there is sincere repentance. Jesus said to the man healed at the pool of Bethesda: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee," and to the penitent woman taken in adultery: "Go, and sin no more." There is but one power to reform the prisoner: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The infidel sailor, while safely in the home port, may decry and mock Christianity; but drifting on a broken spar toward a cannibal island, he will earnestly hope that some Christian missionary may have preceded him there and proclaimed the Gospel to those man-eating savages. It is God's will that the wicked should turn from his ways and live. The Law of God must be preached to these men, to bring them to a knowledge of their transgressions and sins. The Gospel is proclaimed to them, to assure the penitent that "Jesus sinners doth receive." Experience tells us that the chapel service, enhanced by good music, is looked forward to by many of these men as the brightest and best hour during the week.

To the public service we must add the important work of the personal interview. In the personal interview the prison pastor has one of the grandest opportunities to deal with the conscience-stricken and sin-burdened soul. No request for an interview made by a prisoner seeking spiritual ministration should ever be denied by the pastor. It means the salvaging of a precious soul.

There comes a time in the life of many of these men when they simply must confide in some one in order not to be crushed under the burden of guilt and sin. This is the golden hour for the chaplain. If he is a well-trained, experienced pastor and knows how to deal with this particular class of men, he will prove a distinct blessing to his charge and be an instrument for good to any penal institution, helping the authorities of the prison in their discipline, so essential in the proper governance of a prison. In the personal interview with the inmate the initial approach is of the greatest importance. Much depends on the first interview. The prisoner should be put at ease during the interview; unnecessary questioning should be avoided; he must be made to feel that the pastor has a personal interest in his spiritual welfare. The interview should not be conducted in a stern official way. A kind word, a friendly attitude, will help the pastor in winning the confidence of the man who seeks spiritual advice. The prisoner should know that his requests for interviews are welcome, and he should be invited to repeat his requests. While preaching is the very center of all religious work in a prison, yet in the personal interview the pastor has the great advantage of dealing with the *individual* inmate. The results are far-reaching. The personal interview in numerous cases leads to the baptism and confirmation of the person. It changes the entire attitude of the man, corrects his misbeliefs and errors, and, with God's help, accomplishes his reformation.

Let us quote here the Hon. John C. Maher, chairman of the Parole Commission of New York, speaking of the influence of religion in the life of a criminal: "To me it stands preeminently above all the police forces and all the armies that the world has ever conceived. It has an influence on an individual that cannot be injected by a parole board, that cannot be injected by a prison, but can be injected by those who are experts in the art of reaching the inner man." This suggestion that the aid of religion be definitely enlisted to help solve the problem of crime was applauded by the assembly. To reach the inner man of a prisoner means to convict the sinner of his sin and then hold before his eyes the crucified Christ.

Not all inmates of a penitentiary are serving a life sentence. There comes a time when they leave the prison, either by the expiration of their sentence or by way of a parole, or even a full pardon. What then? Am I still my brother's keeper? Has the clergy and the Christian laity any obligations toward him as to his spiritual rehabilitation? Am I willing to be a friend to an ex-prisoner? It is a most critical time for a prisoner when he leaves the prison. It is the time when he must adjust himself

to a normal life. What he then needs is steady employment and work. "Idleness is the mother of vice" and, as a certain warden has said, "also the father." It may be his misfortune to meet on the outside with men who have served with him in the same prison. If he associates with them on intimate terms, he will be in constant danger of being tempted and misled, especially so if he is unemployed, without friends, and without money. This is the time when he needs a friend who will encourage and strengthen him to "go straight," to avoid evil associations, and to seek the companionship of God-fearing men. Let us hear what Victoria A. Larmons of the New York State Division of Parole has to say. "I think," says she, "that the experience we have in our day indicates that, while it is highly desirable that something be done on a religious basis, practical experience shows that not much can be done unless the religious groups actually will become interested in doing something for the criminal. Judging from my personal experience of five years in New York City, in which we have dealt with now some ten or twelve thousand cases, I believe that, generally speaking, the individual clergymen and the laity of all the different groups are definitely disinterested in the criminal." The person just quoted is not offering unjust criticism. It is true, not many are interested in the man who "has done time." It is not easy to interest the average pastor or congregation in a man who has vacated a prison-cell.

The charge was made against Jesus that He put up with criminals and sinners, that He even sat down to eat with them. He offered pardon to them. Jesus said He came "not to condemn but to save." In His dying moments on the cross He offered pardon and salvation to a dying criminal. Thus we must be eager bearers of forgiving love to hopeless sinners. Jesus knew no inferior among those with whom He came in contact, as He could not possibly know any equal. Jesus pitied the unfortunate. To men about to stone the sinful woman already referred to He said: "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone at her." And to the unhappy woman, after her guilty accusers had all gone, He said: "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." Jesus taught justice, kindness, mercy. God's Word teaches us that every man who is in bodily or spiritual need is our neighbor, whether he is just or unjust, honest or dishonest. Nor must we think that the sympathy for these outcasts will degrade us. What though the law has penalized these men and women by depriving them of their liberty for a certain period! Are we a whit better than they? Indeed not. It is only the unmerited grace of God that has kept us from falling. We need the same Savior, the same pardon, the same cleansing, the

same robe of righteousness, as these people to make us worthy of the Kingdom of Glory.

The average church-member is quick to condemn crime and criminals, especially after reading a front-page murder story; he deplores the growing flood of criminality within our borders, speaks about it as he reads about it, but "nobody does anything about it." It is true that trying to bring the offender back to the right way of thinking, to lead him in the right paths, to return him to the Church and Christian environment, to make him God-fearing and a law-abiding citizen, is a most difficult, trying, and often most disappointing effort. Yet it also is true, many have won over the power of sin, and many will win. Many have failed, and will fail, but most of them have tried. All of which recalls the small boy overheard thus in his prayer: "O Lord, make me a good boy; but if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Fortunately for humankind, the divine patience surpasses ours. The dying Christ said to a convicted, yet penitent prisoner: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The Gospel is the only means for the salvation of these souls also. Let us therefore faithfully attend to our God-given duties and at all times bear in mind that, "where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound," that, "as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ, our Lord," Rom. 5:20, 21.

E. A. DUEMLING

Anfechtung und Trost im Spätmittelalter

„Anfechtung und Trost im Spätmittelalter und bei Luther“, das ist der Titel einer kürzlich von Lizentiat Helmut Appel als eine der Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte veröffentlichten Broschüre, die wir allen Lesern unserer Zeitschrift aufs wärmste empfehlen möchten.*) In der Hoffnung, daß mancher dadurch bewogen werden möchte, sich das Büchlein anzuschaffen, geben wir hiermit einen kurzen Überblick über seinen reichen Inhalt.

In der Einleitung schreibt der Verfasser: „Das Wissen um die Anfechtung als Stück christlicher Lebenserfahrung, das Suchen nach ihrem Sinn und Wert, der Kampf um ihre Überwindung begleitet die Christenheit durch alle Jahrhunderte. In den Vordergrund aber rückt dieses Erleben der Anfechtung immer dann, wenn zu der alltäglichen Not des einzelnen die große Not einer verfolgten Kirche, eines zer-

*) Anfechtung und Trost im Spätmittelalter und bei Luther. Von Lic. Helmut Appel. 140 Seiten Text. 12 Seiten Illustrationen. 6X9, broschiert. Verlag: W. Heinsohn Nachfolger, Leipzig. Preis: RM. 4.50.