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0521021537 - Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society

James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat

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## Religion in Prison

*Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society*

This is the first in-depth examination of relations between the Church of England and other faiths in the Prison Service Chaplaincy. It shows how the struggle for equal opportunities in a multi-faith society is politicising relations between the Church, the state and religious minorities. Drawing on a wealth of new data, it considers the increasingly controversial role of Anglican chaplains in facilitating the religious and pastoral care of prisoners from non-Christian backgrounds, whose numbers among the prison population have been growing. Comparison with the United States underlines the closeness of the tie between the state and Christian churches in English prisons, and this book argues that it is time to reconsider the practice of keeping ethnic and religious minorities dependent on Anglican 'brokering' of their access to prison chaplaincy.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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To Bryan R. Wilson and to the memory  
of Deirdre Green in gratitude for their  
exemplary scholarship

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

---

<i>List of figures</i>	viii
<i>List of tables</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Equal opportunities and multiculturalism in prisons	1
2 Chaplaincy, chaplains, chapels and other faiths	25
3 Church of England prison chaplains	56
4 Visiting Ministers of other faiths	89
5 'Facilitation' or 'dependence'?	116
6 Inclusion and exclusion	142
7 Prison chaplaincy in the United States	171
8 Conclusions: state, church and diversity	201
<i>Notes</i>	220
<i>Appendix</i>	224
<i>References</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	230

## Figures

---

3.1 How far was the study of faiths other than the Christian part of your preparation for ministry in general?	<i>page 59</i>
3.2 How far was the study of faiths other than the Christian part of your preparation for prison ministry in particular?	60
3.3 How might your training in the area of other faiths have been improved?	62
4.1 Visiting Ministers, by type of prior experience or training	101

## Tables

---

1.1	Response rates to questionnaires	<i>page</i> 20
1.2	Types of prisons visited	23
2.1	Prison chaplains, England and Wales, 1997	36
2.2	Annual census of religious registrations in England and Wales, 1991–1997	48
2.3	Religious registrations, 1975–1997, HM Prisons, England and Wales	52
4.1	Responses to the questionnaire survey of Visiting Ministers to prisons in England and Wales	91
4.2	Visiting Ministers, by age and faith community	94
4.3	Number of Visiting Ministers, by faith community and tradition or ‘school’	96
5.1	Frequency of chaplains’ informal meetings with Visiting Ministers	122
5.2	Frequency of chaplains’ formal meetings with Visiting Ministers	124
6.1	Chaplains’ assessments of the extent to which their prisons met the needs of other faith inmates	156

## Abbreviations

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ACA	American Correctional Association
ACCA	American Correctional Chaplains Association
ACG	Assistant Chaplain General
CCJ	Council of Christians and Jews
CG	Chaplain General
CPE	Clinical Pastoral Education
HIA	Head of Inmate Activities
PSC	Prison Service Chaplaincy
RFRA	Religious Freedom Restoration Act
RRLO	Race Relations Liaison Officer



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Frontmatter  
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## Preface

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One of the reasons why prisons are such daunting places is that they are complicated and closed social systems. Another difficulty for researchers is that even within the highly centralised prison system of England and Wales the variety of prison establishments is so wide that it almost defies any attempt to make general statements about them. The pace of change in prison policies and practices is also so rapid that descriptions of prison life run the risk of being out of date before they are published. Nevertheless, our book argues that at least one structural feature of prisons in England and Wales is relatively unaffected by the differences between establishments and by the hectic pace of change. This is the chaplaincy service which is responsible for providing religious and pastoral care to inmates and staff alike.

More than 500 religious professionals, lay workers and volunteers from various religious traditions deliver religious and pastoral care on a daily basis in every one of the more than 130 prisons in England and Wales. And, although these chaplaincy workers have undoubtedly been buffeted by the winds of change in prisons, their structural position in the social system of prisons has not changed drastically since the mid-1980s. On the other hand, significant changes have taken place in the inmate population. For example, while the size of the prison population has increased dramatically since the early 1980s, the proportion of prisoners registering as members of the main Christian churches has declined sharply. There has been an even sharper increase in the number of prisoners declining to register any kind of religious affiliation; and the proportion of prisoners reporting membership of faith communities other than the Christian has grown steadily since the mid-1970s.

In this book we have tried to make sociological sense of the ways in which the Church of England chaplains, who are widely regarded as the dominant force in the Prison Service Chaplaincy and who represent nearly 80 per cent of all full-time chaplains in the prisons of England and Wales, have responded to these changing circumstances. More precisely, our analysis is focused on the Anglican chaplains' performance of their

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0521021537 - Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society

James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## xii Preface

traditional role as ‘facilitators’ and ‘brokers’ for Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs. Our aim is to explain how and why prison chaplains from the ‘national church’ continue to perform this role at a time when leading representatives of some other faith communities would prefer to be less dependent on Anglican brokerage. The resulting tensions reflect broader concerns about the power and privilege of an Established Church in a society which not only shows considerable indifference towards organised Christianity but which also contains ethnic and religious minorities growing in size and capacity to mobilise their members in pursuit of, among other things, the right to participate in public life on the same basis as Christians.

These concerns are political in the sense that they touch on the differential distribution of power between faith communities and on the capacity of the Church of England to facilitate other faith communities’ access to resources and power in the public sphere. There are also political questions about the claims of some individuals and organisations to represent their faith communities in negotiations with the Church of England, the Prison Service Chaplaincy and the Prison Service. In short, the provision of religious and pastoral care in prisons has become a site of controversy in which wider issues about the establishment of the Church of England, the Church’s relations with other faith communities and the latter’s empowerment all play a part.

Prison chaplaincy is more than a site of controversy, however. We have collected evidence of the impressive care and commitment with which chaplains and Visiting Ministers of other faiths foster religious interests among individuals and groups in prison. Levels of co-operation and mutual respect between Christians and members of other faith communities are also high in some establishments despite the difficult conditions in which many of them have to work. The dedication and goodwill of individuals are rarely in doubt. It is important to emphasise this point and to make it as clear as possible that our analysis is not primarily about individuals but is focused on the *structural* constraints within which prison chaplaincy takes place. In order to reinforce the importance of social structures we have included a chapter on prison chaplaincy in the United States. Our hope is that the comparison will underline the strong differences between what chaplains can achieve in systems regulated by different frameworks of law, rules, resources, authority and inter-faith relations.

The fact that prison chaplaincy in a religiously diverse society raises many questions about power, privilege, equal opportunities and the brokerage exercised by the Established Church means that our analysis will inevitably arouse strong feelings in some quarters. We have tried to take an objective and dispassionate view of our evidence but we also know

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James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

that our interpretations of that evidence will not be shared by all readers. Our hope is that this book will at least stimulate and inform public debate about the increasingly complex and sensitive relations between the state, the Christian churches and other faith communities. We believe that prison chaplaincy should be considered as merely one, albeit important, part of this wider and long overdue debate.

The research for this book and for a broader discussion of ‘The Church of England and Other Faiths in a Multi-Faith Society’ was funded for two years by the General Synod of the Church of England and by the Leverhulme Trust. We are most grateful for their generous support. In addition, numerous individuals provided valuable help at various stages of the project. The original idea for research on the Church of England’s relations with other faiths emerged from conversations between the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, and Professor David Dabydeen of the Centre for Caribbean Studies at the University of Warwick. Neither of them necessarily shares our ideas, but we have benefited enormously from their personal support and encouragement. Other people who went to great lengths to assist us include Cllr J. S. Birdi, Dr Harriet Crabtree, Mr Harish Dhokia, Rabbi Dr Julian Jacobs, Professor Robert Jackson, The Venerable Ajahn Khemadhammo, The Revd Canon Dr Christopher Lamb, Professor Jørgen Nielsen and Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid.

The scope of our project was so wide and multi-faceted that we could not possibly have completed it if we had not also been able to draw on the expertise and personal qualities of a large group of consultants whose names appear in the Appendix. We are grateful to all of them for their support, advice and guidance.

Mr Bashir Ebrahim-Khan, the Venerable Ajahn Khemadhammo and Mr Indarjit Singh help to co-ordinate the provision of religious and pastoral care to, respectively, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs in English prisons. They were not only generous with valuable information and ‘contacts’ but also patient with our questions and misunderstandings. The Venerable David Fleming, Chaplain General of the Prison Service Chaplaincy, the Rt Rev Monsignor Joseph Branson, Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain, the Revd William Davies, Superintendent Methodist Chaplain, and the Revd Thomas Johns, Assistant Chaplain General, were no less helpful. So too was the Revd John Hargreaves, now retired Assistant Chaplain General of the Prison Service Chaplaincy. He was a mine of helpful information and a patient respondent to our awkward questions. Thanks should also go to Mrs Alanah Grundy of the Prison Service Chaplaincy office in Stafford. We are grateful to all of these individuals who have helped us conduct research on prison chaplaincy.

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0521021537 - Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society

James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xiv *Preface*

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A number of institutions and organisations provided various forms of assistance at different times. It is our pleasure to acknowledge the help of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick, the Church of England Record Centre, the Library staff of HM Prison Service College at Newbold Revel, the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom and the Library staff of the University of Warwick. Thanks should also go to our colleagues in the Department of Sociology and to the Study Leave Committee at the University of Warwick.

Finally, it is a pleasure to record our sincere thanks to the hundreds of other people who completed our questionnaires, answered our interview questions, welcomed us into their places of work, took us on tours of their premises, offered us hospitality, spoke to us on the telephone or sent us information. We cannot name them because we wish to preserve the confidentiality of our communications with them, but we would like them to know that we are deeply appreciative of their willingness to help our project. We alone take responsibility for any shortcomings.