

## Seven Hot Topics Concerning North Carolina's Prison System

### Religion: The Inmates Disguise

My experience concerning this topic is authentic and genuine, and as a Christian myself, I've been involved (faithfully) in the cooperative setting of Christianity within every prison where I've served my prison term.

In the central region of North Carolina at a prison named Odom Correctional Inst. located in Jackson, North Carolina, my job assignment was a chaplain clerk. It was my job to set up the services for every religion under the chaplain so inmates could practice the religion of their choice. I did this for three years.

At another prison in the central region named Warren Correctional Inst

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- located in Manson, North Carolina

I was also a chaplain clerk for almost two years fulfilling the same duties

I had at Odom Correctional Inst. (which is now a minimum custody facility) I've

witnessed with my own eyes an inmates devotion towards their religious preference.

whether, it be Islam, Wiccan, Catholic;

Buddhist, Jehovah Witness, Native American,

Christianity. I've seen it all for years.

In the Christianity I've played the drums

for 54 prison choirs and I've taught

and preached the bible now for almost

fifteen years, so I have experienced a lot

concerning religion within these prison

walls. I don't mean to be pessimistic in

my writings, but I can only bear -

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— witness to what I have experienced  
I want to say that presently (2016) every  
month I correspond and talk on the phone  
with seven ex-inmates, that are my  
brothers from a spiritual perspective  
that served prison time with me and are  
now out in society. These men are now  
law abiding citizens, leaders in their  
households, and neighborhoods, honest  
business men, loving fathers and husbands.  
However behind prison walls, they were  
devoted to Christ and Christianity. (Note:  
True devotion to anything or anyone will  
compel a person to examine themselves to  
ensure that devotion remains pure free from  
anthro-centric contaminates!) It's not that  
religion is wrong, but like a lot of things —

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— That were created good, humanity has either perverted it or destroyed it. Religion is about a relationship, not some type of formal worship service or liturgy. These seven ex-inmates came to understand that.

Any crime committed by an inmate has its root in selfishness. Perhaps these inmates were involved in many relationships upon entering the prison system, but lacked true devotion to those relationships. These men never took the time to examine themselves, thus the relationships hurt, (some destroyed) because they followed themselves. A lot of inmates that enter the prison system have come to the end of themselves, when that happens an inmates natural response is to embrace some type of religion, while still misunderstanding what Religion —

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→ Really is about, it's about a relationship.

If it's about a relationship then it means

another person is involved, and if you care

and for love that person, you will not

deliberately live a life, or do anything to offend

them, but you learn what pleases that person,

even if it means completely changing who you

are! In fact a lot of marriages don't last

because a man may spend a lot of money on

buying his wife gifts and that's expected

but if the marriage is going to last he must

be the gift, and give himself to his wife daily!

A man can give and never give himself!

Concerning religion inmates do it all the time

they go through the rituals, liturgy, a bunch

of prayers, fastings, they give a lot, but

never give themselves.

→ On the Western region of North Carolina  
at a prison called Marion Correctional Inst.  
located in Marion, North Carolina, I served  
my prison term from 2001 to 2005. It was  
at this prison that I was faithfully involved  
in the Christian faith. I was playing the  
drums for the choir, and in 2003 our volunteer  
Sunday School teacher Dan Lavender, became ill  
and could not return, so the chaplain asked  
me if I would teach the class and after  
responding by saying no, I finally said yes.  
On Sunday mornings I could shine and put on  
a show, on Wednesday evenings I could play  
the drums and preach, and in my disguise  
(religion) people thought I had it all together.  
The truth was that I was falling apart  
but my disguise (religion) said I was fine!

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→ However when I returned to my dorm and entered my prison cell, and laid my head on the pillow the tears would flow from my eyes so bad that my face would swell up, I can remember crying until I could cry no more. I had bitterness in my heart, anger and unforgiveness towards someone I felt had a role in me being convicted. In my mind there was still the residue of the physical and psychological abuse I suffered as a child along with my siblings, and on top of that the pain I suffered from the battle with not having female intimacy and images of pornographic scenes from the past, it became unbearable. However I used my religion to hide the true me, it was my disguise.

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→ If I had entered society in that condition, I would have either returned to prison with another prison term or I would've ended up dead. The truth is that inmates use religion, for many different reasons, in fact some religions have different privileges, and inmates manipulate the administration to receive those privileges food, tobacco, ect. For a while I was caught up in the cooperate form of religion until in the year 2011 I was enrolled in school (Electrial wiring and quality food service) at a prison called Eastern Correctional Institution on the Eastern region of North Carolina in Maury, North Carolina. Together both schools lasted one year and six months. I spent the entire —

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- Time (one year and six months) going to school and back to my cell. For the first time ever I was not involved in any type of christian gathering. I attended no christian services (not saying that the services were not genuine) but for the first time during my prison term it was time to face some inward(s) issues, and put them to rest! For so long I used religion as a way to escape from the real truth, I needed to be alone face to face with myself and Jesus. A true relationship requires alone time it's called "intimacy" I had been running back and forth, trying to counsel others and help them, when I needed help and counseling. The help and love (support) I received during this time did not come from within the —

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→ christian community within the  
prison walls. (for they were like me) but  
the help and love (support) came from men  
and women who had experienced the  
same thing I was going through. They  
had been face to face with themselves and  
God, and understood that religion is all  
about a relationship, yes a relationship  
that not only changes an inmate, but  
allows an inmate to change themselves from  
the person they were upon entering the  
prison system. which brings us to  
the purpose of true religion. (please remember  
that I am writing in regard to my experience  
concerning this topic.) its (religion) purpose  
is designed to not only change a man (inmate)  
but to teach him how to live.

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→ Throughout the years I've served in prison, I have witnessed religion change a lot of inmates, however those same inmates never developed something called virtue (moral excellence). If religion is going to be effective in the lives of inmates there must be a balance (equality). A inmate must be fully devoted to understanding and receiving analytically, and the other / and/or part of the balance devoted fully to application spiritually (personally). Around the same time that north carolina prison's changed from department of corrections to the department of public safety, a lot of chaplains were laid off around the prison's in north carolina, because the state was trying to save money. I believe (subjectively speaking) that was a terrible mistake.

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→ The chaplains that I met throughout my prison term were seasoned (experienced) and cared about the inmates from a moral and spiritual perspective. Now that ninety-eight percent of them are gone religious matters along with the hearts of inmates has been left in the hands of inexperienced cold hearted inmates and administrative officials. Religion within North Carolina's prison system has undergone a lot of changes, however true religion is not bound and will always prevail!

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