

Chaplaincy and the Prison Situation in Madagascar the Case of Ambatondrazaka Prison Women's Section

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Abstract

The present discourse emerges as the fruit, or rather the positive repercussions, of the evangelical mission preached by the Protestant Church within the confines of a carceral environment in Madagascar (Case study: Ambatondrazaka prison) – facilitated through the FJKM (Fiangonan'I Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara or Jesus Christ Church in Madagascar) Chaplaincy. Throughout the visitation sessions, the enhancement of the well-being of detainees and convicts alike was deemed paramount, encompassing provisions of sustenance, vocational training, hygienic and dietetic diet (HDD) and rehabilitation programs. On the spiritual front, counseling sessions and worship gatherings served as pathways towards peace and the assurance of eternal life in Jesus Christ, even amidst the confines of incarceration. Furthermore, it stands as a clarion call to those in positions of authority to revisit, without exception, the tenets of social justice concerning both the incarcerated and the free individual. The visitations undertaken by the Chaplaincy and faithful Christians within carceral settings transcend the physical barriers of the church's four walls, eloquently echoing the injunction of Matthew 25:36, "I was in prison, and you came to visit me."

Keywords

Chaplaincy; Church; prison; female prisoner; mass grave; reinsertion; resurrection



I. Introduction

Concerning the anticipations held by adherents of the FJKM (Fiangonan'I Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara or Jesus Christ Church in Madagascar), a pivotal expectancy vital for the comprehensive dissemination of evangelization across the island, it becomes evident that each ecclesiastical community has formulated its distinctive project tailored to its particular context. This diversity in approach underscores a disparity in vision aimed at achieving fruitful outcomes.

In the year 2016, the FJKM articulated its aspiration to establish a Protestant presence in every commune within Madagascar. Succinctly put, this ambitious endeavor aimed at attaining a notable milestone, with an approximate realization rate of 60% (equating to 240 out of 407 Communes) across the entirety of the island. Such an endeavor necessitates a concerted effort and unwavering commitment from all quarters, engaging the collective essence of Christianity and its manifold facets (Christianity as a whole, etc.).

One cannot help but ponder why a significant number of churches abstain from addressing the urgent needs of those incarcerated within their vicinity. It appears that the Church, rather than actively engaging with the plight of prisoners, often delegates this

responsibility to auxiliary organizations within its structure, such as the Association of Christian Women Sampana Dorkasy, among others.

This is precisely why the circumstances prevailing within Ambatondrazaka prison have been highlighted – to illustrate, from an ecclesiastical perspective, that within the confines of the prison walls reside men and women who cry out in distress, yearning for salvation.

Thus, the queries that naturally arise beckon us to address the manifold "whys":

- Does the prison serve as a metaphorical mass grave, where its inhabitants languish indefinitely, awaiting redemption?
- For those ensnared within its confines, the pursuit of a tranquil existence – characterized by the enjoyment of their fundamental rights as delineated by extant laws and regulations, and indeed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1973 – remains an elusive aspiration.
- Is evangelization within the prison milieu conducted in a sporadic and haphazard manner, contingent upon the availability of resources and personnel?

These inquiries compel us to critically evaluate the efficacy and consistency of our approach to prison ministry, urging us to confront the profound theological and ethical implications inherent in our response to the plight of the incarcerated.

II. Review of Literature

From all of the above, the FJKM Protestant Chaplaincy of the Synod of Ambatondrazaka under the aegis of its Synodal President and active member have implemented methods of approach consistent with the goal set and applicable without too much difficulty.

It is therefore superfluous to demonstrate the imperative need to safeguard physical and moral life through humanitarian aid: observant participation, such as, among others, the FJKM Protestant Chaplaincy.

Here, we would like to highlight the cases we have seen first-hand in the Ambatondrazaka prison. There is also a women's section.

A sociometric study was carried out in the areas from which the incarcerated women come, based on facts observed or gathered from good sources (customs and traditions):

- Analysis of results obtained through interviews or surveys;
- Analysis of documents and statistical data combined to highlight the innovative nature and commendable attitude.

As for the material or living offered to incarcerated women:

- The most destitute benefit in principle;
- And on the other hand, the world of the city in the background.

Here the distribution is conditioned by the quantity offered or brought by the delegation and the visiting chaplains. (Mt 25: 36-41)

A quick analysis of the environment in which most of the women in prison live leads us to believe that their intellectual levels are below average and that their attendance at prayer is more or less very low.

It should also be pointed out that most of the accused and convicted women are virtually destitute.

We expect to find within the community a free man, clothed in Christianity, with a sense of responsibility and finally the courage to face up to the life of ordinary mortals. (Bryant, 2001)

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Observation

Incarcerated is a difficult word to understand in terms of Malagasy mores and customs. In a sense, incarcerated is equivalent to an accused person (detention order) and a convicted person. This is one reason why many Malagasy people keep their distance from women in prison.

In most cases, human beings abandon their loved ones or friends who are struggling with social problems. (Rish, 1999)

God alone kept and keeps his words, recorded among others in verse one of Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and our support, a help that never fails in trouble"; Isaiah 49.15: "Does a woman forget her infant? Does she not have compassion on the son of her womb? Though she forgets him, I will not forget you. (Bosch, 1995; Ramambason, 1999)

Given the circumstances in Madagascar's prisons, especially in Ambatondrazaka, we have just outlined the problems faced by women in prison, such as:

- The lack of proportionality between inmates and those in charge (40 staff / 800 inmates for the men's section; 2 or 3 prison officers each day for 66 women inmates);
- Lack of food: 100g of manioc / day / person;
- Lack of health care: housing has been found to be in an advanced state of disrepair, and many inmates are suffering from a number of dangerous diseases.
- The dilapidated prison;
- Insufficient social and professional reintegration.

Non-compliance with the law: 21 sentenced and 45 given detention orders (66 prisoners) (According to information from the authority on 11 December 2023, Collange, 1989).

- Non-compliance with the law: 21 convicted prisoners and 45 with detention orders (66 female prisoners), according to information received from the authorities on 11 December 2023. Judicial delays in processing cases, corruption by all means.
- Overcrowding: more than 1,000 prisoners instead of 450 (capacity).
- ...

The particular situation of women in prison is highlighted by the fact that 95% of them are mothers of between 3 and 6 children, offspring who cannot normally enjoy the rights laid down by the texts in force, in particular the Universal Rights of 1973. It should also be noted that the age group of these incarcerated women is between 20 and 50, or in their village of origin constituted a unit of human work generating income for the family.

Once they have served their sentences, they are not nearly up to the task of coping adequately with the daily needs of everyday life.

This is the logical consequence of human stress, where the intervention of the Chaplaincy, which is of paramount importance from a humanitarian and Christian point of view, is felt.

The women in question are content with the way things are, yet they're in a bind with the approach of Christmas and New Year's, when they can't give their offspring toys or copious meals as usual.

The appropriate solution to these problems remains elusive to this day, and the FJKM Ambatondrazaka Protestant Chaplaincy is sparing no effort to meet expectations with a fighting spirit. (Hoff, 1994)

An attitude of good neighbourliness is clearly noticeable among the women in prison, which is quite the opposite among the stronger sexes who receive the new prisoners with a sort of baptism like in the big schools.

3.2 Discernment et Intervention

Chaplaincy is of inestimable value and even of great importance to humanity: physically, morally and spiritually:

- Food for prisoners in all wards. The chaplain in charge and the members of the SP chaplaincy should communicate the prison situation to all the FJKM parishes.
- Give raw materials to craftswomen for women prisoners: fabric, rope, sewing machines, etc.
- Distribution of Bibles and quantum compendiums, small books such as "Mofonaina, Tompoko sy Andriamanitra, ..." ("Bread of life, My Lord and my God, ...", FFPM (Fiombonan'ny Fiangonana Protestanta eto Madagasikara song or Union of Protestant Churches in Madagascar song) to those who have already attended worship, especially catechumens. (Bosch, 1995)
- Vocational training: culinary arts, HDD (Hygienic and Dietetic Diet), cutting and sewing, braiding mats, embroidery, etc.
- Training in civic education, communication and helping others (Pojoule, 1996)

Table 1. The importance of Aumonerie intervention for the humanity of detainees

Reports Accused - convicted	Recorded offenses	Actions carried out by the FJKM chaplaincy	Résultats of interventions
Physically	Food ration Living in shabby conditions	1/week rice donation for the vulnerable (SPAV- Synodamparitany Ambatondrazaka vaovao or New Ambatondrazaka Synod)	Improved
Morally	Stress Fatigue Unemployment	Games Empathy Vocational training	Courage Communicating well Having money to live better
Feelings	Depression Negative self- esteem	Affection Active listening Empathy	Hope Peace Positive self-esteem
Spiritually	Grief Abandonment Revenge Low spirits	Worship Preaching Sacrament Counseling (Ion et al., 2001)	Joy and praise Avoir et savoir Having and knowing how forgive Eternal life

Source: Author

All parishes in the Ambatondrazaka region, SPAV (Synodamparitany Ambatondrazaka vaovao or New Ambatondrazaka Synod) 05 in turn once every 3-4 months for the vulnerable. (Barth, 1962)

From these interventions carried out by the chaplaincy, it appears that the intervention is off to a good start.

Following numerous interviews with the defendants, it was clear that there had been no attempt to escape. Many of them are ready to embark on a life of serenity, integrity and responsibility once they are released. (UNODOC, 2006) On the other hand, and particularly affecting the tortured and those who have suffered moral violence, they find it difficult to return to their villages and choose to live in the most remote areas. Finally, those who have served long sentences have no clear vision. (Thompson & Thompson, 1989)

Table 2. Vibe intention after imprisonment

KEEN INTEREST AFTER IMPRISONMENT		
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	OTHER
*Charitable work *Caring for orphans *Make a good future (get up from the future) *Return to study (Single)	Total separation from your spouse	Not recognised
*Preach the Gospel Witnessing, preparing to be a member of the Holy Communion *Continuing to pray and not changing churches	No longer returning to her family	Looking for her children or mother but does not want to go home
*Continuing to pray and not changing churches *Do not take revenge	Changing profession or place of work	Asking for early retirement or no longer working
*Return home, not ashamed of the change	Change of home	Ask the plaintiff for a refund
*Get married and take communion	No longer in contact with your former company	Looking for work outside Ambatondrazaka and Toamasina

Among the women prisoners, there are a few who have benefited during her imprisonment from learning vocational training, methods of the arts to improve their means of living. (Wurmbrand, 1994)

The geometric progression of relationships is clearly marked as a result of the actions carried out in the prison. The Protestant chaplaincy team has become a special adviser to former prisoners on day-to-day matters, particularly reconciliation.

3.2 Suggestions

The non-harmonisation of actions carried out by volunteers within the chaplaincy calls for a reorganisation with regard to the unexpected absence created by daily family duties. Sufficient training for chaplaincy volunteers needs to be designed in order to avoid feelings of being "left wanting" when they are reunited.

- The intermittent number of visits, compounded by the minimal amount of donations for the vulnerable, necessitates a major overhaul of the internal regulations and the multiple number of people involved.

- The lack of special training for chaplains throughout the island is also a gap that needs to be filled.
- An appeal to NGOs or humanitarian benefactors to meet the chaplaincy's expectations is greatly needed.
- The promotion of chaplaincy activities within each FJKM church calls for love and support for humanitarian actions.
- Call for eligible workers to carry out special training in prisons.
- Creation of an association of active members or chaplaincy supporters.

No one wants to be incarcerated except repeat offenders who have been rejected by their foster families. It's a bad choice, but one that should be remedied.

A well-known adage such as "prevention is better than cure" or "Aleo misoroka toy izay mitsabo" deserves to be highlighted:

- Let each and every one of us assume our duties as educators;
- That pastors behave as fully-fledged missionaries;
- That those in power transfer to the governed the legal rights laid down by the law and the texts in force (Universal Law, etc.) without dotting the i's and crossing the t's;
- Civic education should be included in the national education curriculum from primary school onwards. This would slowly reduce the number of criminal acts leading to incarceration.

It is superfluous to remind us Christians that preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a duty to be fulfilled by "acta non verba" (FDF: Foto-dalana sy fitsipika FJKM; Mat 25. 35-36, I John 3.18; Anderson & Baumchen, 2004; Pojoul & Pojoul, 1996). This will continue until the time of the end (or for an indeterminate period).

Also, it is imperative to set up Chaplaincies under the aegis of personnel (specialised Ministry) E.L.D. (Employment of Long Duration) remunerated in a permanent way so that the acts carried out are not under an operation of discontinuity.

The first aim is to help prisoners to become the sheep of Jesus Christ and to feel responsible that repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, are great values, just as they are deprived of the freedom to move around and communicate with the outside world. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". Mt 5.8. (Tarassenko, 1983; Ravaoarimanga, 2001)

Secondly, to kindly invite those in charge to live and carry out their duties in a Christian manner, and even in strict observance of the rights laid down by the texts in force (Code of Criminal Procedure Chap. III. De la Détention préventive et des peines privatives de la liberté), without going as far as freezing.

Here, resuscitation in a prison is not entirely synonymous with the resurrection of Jesus Christ in his tomb. Jesus Christ was resurrected by the power of the Lord God, but a prisoner is considered resurrected by the actions of God's disciples.

They frequently ask to live with serenity by virtue of the texts and laws in force, so that they feel they have duties or obligations towards their offspring (young children, etc.). The said offspring are located outside the detention center, or even among those not incarcerated.

Evangelism in a prison is a matter of voluntary work, which is why the process remains untimely to this day.

IV. Conclusion

The work carried out in prisons is progressing by visual observation rather than arithmetic. A large number of humanitarian and evangelization activities have yet to be carried out. However, these call on the national charity fund.

In most cases, people abandon their loved ones or friends who are facing social problems.

God alone kept and keeps his words, recorded among others in verse one of Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and our support, a help that never fails in times of trouble"; Isaiah 49.15: "Does a woman forget her infant? Does she not have compassion on the son of her womb? Though she forgets him, I will not forget you".

An appeal should be made to Christians and benefactors to support the work of the Protestant chaplaincy in Madagascar. This will provide support or a shoulder to help solve some of the chaplaincy's material problems.

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The unshakeable conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour remains inculcated in the souls of the condemned. This state of affairs is indeed the logical consequence of the assistance and anticipatory actions carried out by the Chaplaincy. This does not exclude the appeals addressed to Christians and benefactors will be good to resound unceasingly by the voice of the waves and by communications according to the rules of the art to support or support the actions of the Protestant chaplaincy in Madagascar. In addition, this will allow us to have a support or a shoulder which can partly solve the problems of necessary or adequate materials for the Chaplaincy.

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