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## **THE EFFICIENCY OF FAITH BASED PRISON IN HUNGARY**

*The purpose of this paper is to introduce the effects and results of religious education in the correctional facilities in Hungary. The operation of the Prison Chaplaincy as well as the changes in the inmates' value systems are the two key topics this research focuses on. The author carried out on-site observations and conducted interviews with prison chaplains in four facilities. Additionally, he compiled data by using questionnaires – Shalom Schwartz's value scale – to assess nearly 100 inmates participating in religious education activities and other nearly 100 non-participating inmates. In addition to these two groups, the author used the same questionnaire to assess a nearly 100-member civilian congregation as a control group. It can be concluded that religious education may have an impact on their value systems and it is also capable of shifting them from the world of crime towards that of religion. Values emphasizing individual responsibility and community interest can become underlined and more accentuated. These effects show no correlation with the crimes committed. At the same time, the intensity of religious education is of relevant and decisive nature.<sup>1</sup>*

**Key words: faith based prison, value system, religion, religion education**

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1 This paper is the English-language excerpt from my essay „Bűn- Hit – Szabadulás” (Sin-Belief-Salvation) published in Hungary

## 1. Premise

According to the Fundamental Law of Hungary „everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include the freedom to choose or change one's religion or other belief, and the freedom of everyone to manifest, abstain from manifesting, practice of teach his or her religion or other belief through religious acts, rites or otherwise, either individually or jointly with others, either in public or in private life.”<sup>2</sup> The Act on the Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and the Legal Status of Churches, Denominations, and Religious Communities pays a particular attention to the situation of the inmates, when it stipulates that: „The exercise of the freedom of conscience and religion shall also be made possible for those (...) detained in prison, both at individual and community level.”<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The object and the purpose of the research

Religious observance carried out in prisons can be examined from two aspects. According to the first approach, the main characteristics of the inmates' freedom of religion can be examined carefully from a constitutional legal point of view. The features must be ignored within this paper because it would be beyond the purposes of research. The other approach seeks to find an answer what role religious observance can play in the process of reintegration. The results of religious observance in prisons will be further examined below. In this context the concept and the definition of religious observance is not entirely accurate. This definition is a legal one, therefore it is primarily open to legal interpretation. It can be poorly interpreted in the language of either penology or theology. Since the research, the results of which are discussed in this paper primarily belong to the area of penology, the term religious education has been used within its scope. It needs to be explained what is meant by the concept. Within the framework of this research, the narrower meaning of the term 'religious education' refers to the availability of the religious occasions to the extent necessary to achieve the goals of the church and of reintegration, as well as the regular, active, and motivated participation in these occasions (Tihanyi, 2018: 210). Religious education is definitely different

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2 The Fundamental Law of Hungary, Section VII, Paragraph (1) 11. Apr. 2011. Hungarian Gazette No. 2011/43

3 Act on the Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and the Legal Status of Churches, Denominations, and Religious Communities. Section 3, Paragraph (1) 31. Dec. 2011. Hungarian Gazette No. 2011/160

from other reintegration programs to the extent that while educators, psychologists, and mediators have religiously neutral goals and methods assigned to achieve such goals, the churches and their priests/pastors/clerics are, naturally, religiously committed. The basic research questions is whether in which way, and to what extent religious education can contribute to the social integration of the inmates.

The most important question as regards the measuring the effectiveness of religious education is *what are the outcomes that can be considered effective*. Answering this question can be done from several aspects. According to preliminary research, the definitions of 'outcome' can be visualized along a straight line. At one end of the straight line is the theological concept of 'repentance/conversion', which means the acceptance of the religious tenets accepted by a given church (Burnside, 2007). The other end of the straight line the outcome is the entirely secular concept of 'avoidance of recidivism' (Ellis, Ellis-Nee, Lewis, 2016). In between, as some kind of synthesis, is the concept according to which the outcome of religious education is preventing recidivism by accepting and following religious values. *Correspondingly, it is necessary to examine during the research to which direction and to what extent the value system of those participating in religious education change compared to the value systems held by the other members of the inmate population.*

The choice of values sets out, or at least influences, the individuals' relation to the phenomena of reality. Through these choices, the individuals' responses and actions are similarly influenced. Essentially, the individuals' conscious actions reflect their attitudes for values – or at least its pivotal elements (Ádám, 2015: 184). This latter statement has its limitations. Sometimes, individual interests may supersede individual values. The situations where they may occur can be emergencies, when livelihoods and safety are endangered. To a not so strong and solid value system, a conflicting yet very profitable activity may pose an enormous challenge. Not all values are equally represented in an individual's value system. In decision-making processes, particularly in conflict situations, the dominant elements of the value system hold considerable sway (Váriné, 1987: 253). At the same time, it is uncontested in the relevant literature that the individuals' choices of values are reflected in their actions. This statement is not valid in each specific action, but it is as regards the direction of the entirety of the interrelated actions. For instance, one would hardly imagine that a person whose own prosperity has a considerable value for the person would not at least now and then have a generous spirit, despite the fact that their generous act at that given moment would run counter their prosperity. At the same time, it is definitely true for this person that they more frequently refuse donation requests compared with those for whom

others' prosperity is also of critical value. It is not always the case for this latter ones either, those for whom others' prosperity is also of critical value, as they are not always willing to have their own interests overshadowed for the benefit of others. Still, it is true that comparing two persons with two different perceptions of value, considering the entirety of the interrelated actions, there are marked differences between their value perceptions (Schwartz, 2000).

Therefore, based on former references, it seems that based on the changes in the inmates' value systems, the orientation of their subsequent actions can be forecast. This prediction, considering the nature of conflict between values and interests, does not guarantee to avoid recidivism, but it has a potential to increase the individuals' odds to become repeat offenders.

### **3. The methodology of the research**

In the framework of this present research, I rely on the value theory of Shalom Schwartz (Schwartz, 2000). Schwartz uses a pie chart to introduce us to the entire patterns of conflicts and harmonies between the values. The circular arrangement of the values illustrates and demonstrates motivational continuum. The closer the two values appear to each other, the more they have in common as regards their underlying motivations. The larger the distance between the two values, the greater the conflict is between their underlying motivations. The conflicts and harmonies between the ten universal values constitute an integrated value system. This value system can be summarized in a two-dimensional reference grid. One axis shows us the values of self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence. In this segment, hedonism, power, and achievement face universalism and benevolence. The first ones emphasize following the self-interest, while the other ones pay attention to others' prosperity and interests. The other axis illustrates the values of openness to changes vs. conservation. In this part the values of self-direction and stimulation face conformity, security, and tradition. The first one emphasize independent thoughts and actions, the openness to new experience. The latter ones put emphasis on restraint on actions, as well as order, and the resistance to changes. Hedonism has an exceptional position by being located between openness and individualism – that is both universal values can claim this fundamental core value.

Based on the relevant literature, Schwartz defines values as desirable goals crossing situations, which goals serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Schwartz, 2000: 24).

Schwartz's 21-question value survey measures the relevance of values that are universal and independent from either society or culture. By using the survey,

the extent to which the inmates participating in religious education followed religious value systems cannot be measured, but it can be measured whether or not their value systems showed similarities or differences in comparison with those of other inmates' and those of the members of the civilian congregations. From the findings, it cannot be inferred to what extent they had become religious. At the same time, we can infer, however, that what kind of correlation is shown between the value systems of those incarcerated inmates having criminogenic value systems, who participate in religious education compared to those of other inmates' not participating in religious education and those of the members of the civilian congregations. This answers how religious education impacts the individuals' value systems.

Based on the above, the value systems of three groups were compared. The test group included those inmates who regularly participated in religious occasions in prisons. Additionally, I set up two control groups as well. One control group included inmates not participating in religious occasions at all, whereas the other one consisted of members of civilian congregations outside prisons. As the majority of the inmate population consists of men, and the value system may differ according to the sexes, therefore the members of all groups were exclusively men (Prazsák, 2015: 8). The established groups were almost of identical group sizes. In order to ensure that the data obtained have countrywide validity, the sampling was carried out in four different penal institutions. Those institutions were designated where, in accordance with my preliminary collection of data, high quality religious education is carried out. In case of civil congregations, religious affiliation seemed irrelevant, as it is also irrelevant in prisons; consequently in order to seek diversity, the samples were taken from four congregations of Christian churches.

#### **4. The findings**

In order to ensure that the formative influence of religious education be demonstrable, I chose the solution as follows: The 10 elements of Schwartz's value system were interpreted individually in a scale, whose one end presented those inmates not participating in any religious education at all, while the other end presented the members of the civilian congregations. The calculated values were based upon the calculation weighted as defined by Schwartz. The scale cannot be interpreted as being closed-end, as it could be expected that in cases of one or another value elements, the data from the tested population would not fall between those of the two control groups, but they would rather 'extend beyond' them in any direction. The subject of the examination was as to which direction

and to what extent would changes be observed in test group values compared to the weighted averages of the control groups' values. To carry out the examination of the elements of the groups value systems, two criteria were used. On the one hand, it was necessary to examine the value systems characteristics of various groups on the basis of the value ranks, and on the other hand, their weighting was in the focus. The value ranks themselves reveal only that which values a given group consider important, and which they consider less important. But the fact how important these values are, or how unimportant they are, can only be interpreted based on the weighted scores of the different value groups.

Those who did not participate in religious education submitted 98, and those who participated in religious education submitted 85 measurable questionnaires. This latter group, however, seemed that it could be broken down further from the aspect of the intensity of the religious education they participated in. Based on the previous, there were 34 inmates, who were outstandingly regular participants in religious occasions compared to the remaining 51 inmates. In total, 94 measurable questionnaires were obtained from the civilian control group.

As this paper is an excerpt of the entire research findings, the introduction and the explanation of how the weighted calculations of the different value groups were done must be dispensed. The conclusions that can be drawn from the findings are briefly presented hereby.

Comparing the order of the values, and the scores given to the various value groups, it can be inferred that the weighting of the values both in the congregation in the penal institutions, and in the civilian control group cover a far wider and more varied range than those of the control group in the penal institutions. That is, the group value systems are not as differentiated as those of the two other groups. In case of the control group in the penal institutions, another interesting point is that the values located on the opposite poles of the different value axes can exist side by side quite well in the value systems. It is conspicuous that the most supported value is self-direction, whereas the most rejected one is conformity. This clearly demonstrates that the value systems of the inmates are characterized by strong self-centeredness and, parallel to this, the rejection of the expectations of their environment. It is difficult to adjudge whether the rejection of conformity is due to the rejection of the institutionalized detention system or it is against the other members of the prison population – or both. At the same time, the place of benevolence and security in the hierarchy of values are surprising. It may indeed be that the findings are but the reflections of desires and expectations stemming and resulting from their lack.

The civilian control group's positively assessed and clearly rejected values are also outlined precisely. It is also observable that some parts of the values on the

same value axis are located next to each other. These values are the most-widely accepted benevolence and universalism on the self-transcendence axis, and security, tradition conformity on the conservation axis. At the same time, the values on the openness to change axis are divided. While self-direction is reputed to have relative acceptance, stimulation, on the other hand, is among the strongly rejected values. It is quite telling that the value most rejected by the group is power. This is located on the totally opposite end of those values most supported by the group. Consequently, their values located along the self-enhancement vs self-transcendence axis are sufficiently differentiated. The big difference between the two extreme values shows us that the well-being, interest and prosperity of their fellow humans is more important for the Christian community than the desire that they should exercise power. These findings are not that surprising – it is quite natural. The same can be said about the rejection stimulation, achievement and hedonism. The lack of the prevalence of self-direction could have demonstrated that in the Christian group's value system, the consideration of traditions, community, and others' interests completely overrides and supersedes the individuals' interests. Thus the value of self-direction established a balance between individuals' and others' interests.

During the first measurement, the findings were interpreted as regards the group of inmates participating in religious education as related to a homogenous group, namely no difference was made between those regularly and quite intensely participating in religious education, and those in case of whom religious education is limited to ad hoc occasions. The findings obtained here show some correlation with the value systems of the civilian control group, but these findings fall significantly below my prior expectation and hypothesis.

Investigating the reasons for the findings, the measurement was repeated, but at that time the group of inmates participating in high intensity religious education were separated from those ones who participated in an ad hoc basis. Concerning the value systems of the first group, the following statements could be made. The value systems of the congregation in the penal institution is organized in a highly differentiated way along the axis of self-enhancement – self-transcendence. From the findings it shows clearly that they definitely consider the values of self-transcendence to be sought and followed, and in a similar way they strongly reject the values of self-enhancement. Taking into account other persons' or the entire community's interests is very characteristic of their value systems. The huge disparities shown between the weights of the values indicate that the community values definitely override the individuals' self-centered values.

The comparative analysis of the statistically adjusted value elements of the congregation in the penal institution and the civilian control group allows the

following main conclusions to be drawn. The prominent spot and weight of benevolence, universalism, self-direction is equivalent to those of the civilian control group. The value of conformity is the only one that is rejected from the values in the conservation group. Of the rejected values by the test group, power and achievement equals, concerning their spot and weight, with those of the civilian control group. So, the acceptance of values associated with self-transcendence, and the rejection of the values associated with self-enhancement follow a similar pattern in both groups. The values associated with self-enhancement were ranked even further back in the hierarchy, since the value of achievement came immediately before power. Therefore, the explicit choice between the two opposite poles of the axis of values is even more significant. Tradition and security, though changing places with each other, occupy the same spot in the hierarchy of values, similarly to the case of the civilian control group. Conformity is strongly rejected by the test group. Its weighting is comparable to that by the civilian control group, but it is a less rejected value in their case. The spot for the value stimulations can be interesting, as this is the only exception that shows significant differences in the value systems of the two groups. What seems like the most reasonable explanation is that seeking thrills and living a varied life may be associated with the monotony of prison life.

The comparative analysis of the values by the congregation in the penal institution and the control group in the penal institution showed several significant differences. These differences were most noticeable and visible as regards the values 'power', 'conformity', 'tradition', and 'benevolence.' Power is among the strongly rejected values in both groups, but while in the case of the congregation in the penal institution power is the most strongly rejected value, in case of the control group in the penal institution, it ranks in the penultimate place 'only.' At first sight, this does not seem to be a significant difference. However, it is more meaningful to observe that the difference between the weightings calculated from the scores given by the two compared groups is huge – 2.81 times higher. And it is different in such a manner that the congregation in the penal institution reject the value of power to the utmost. A tremendously similar phenomenon can be observed in case of the value benevolence found on the other endpoint of the axis of self-enhancement – self-transcendence. In spite of the similarities in ranking, the difference between the scores indicates the significant differences between the rankings of the two groups. According to this, the value benevolence, that is others' prosperity and interests, is substantially more significant for the congregation in the penal institution. These two differences definitely point towards the fact that, along the axis of self-enhancement – self-transcendence, the value systems of the congregation in the penal institution is much closer to those of the civilian

control group than to those of the control group in the penal institution. A similar phenomenon, although not as strong as the above, can be observed between the values universalism and achievement, the two other values of this axis. From the aspect of peaceful existence in a society, this value axis is probably the most essential, because it expresses the extent to which an individual cares about his/her self-interests, or to what extent this individual takes into consideration the interests of others or the community, and thus our society, instead. The two other values showing significant differences (conformity and tradition) are found in the universal value conservation. Tradition shows significant differences not only in its scale, but also in its position in the hierarchy. The religious values considered more traditional are substantially more significant for the test group. There are no significant differences found in the values self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism located in the universal value openness to change that is opposite conservation.

As expected, the comparison between the control group in the penal institution control group and the civilian control group indicated the maximum variation and divergence possible. The weighting of the following values showed significant differences: Power, universalism, achievement, stimulation, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and hedonism. In essence, it was only the weighting of the values self-direction and security that showed no significant differences.

## **5. The evaluation of the research**

The members of the statistically adjusted test group regularly and actively participated in the religious education in the prison. As indicated by the questionnaires, none of them had ever had any previous presence of religious observance in their lives. The value systems of this group, in respect of both the ranking of values and their strength, show slight differences compared to the value systems of the civilian control group, but shares with them, at the same time, identical features in certain crucial points. Parallel to this, there are several significant differences are observable in comparison with the value systems of the control group in the penal institution. With the exception of the value stimulation, it can be said that the value systems of the control group in the penal institution definitely and considerably closer to the value systems of the civilian control group than those of the control group in the penal institution.

*It has been demonstrated that religious education has a fundamental impact on the value systems of the inmates. This impact unequivocally converges their value systems to those of the congregations in the civilian world.* Based on the differences of the first and second measurement, the following conclusions could

be drawn: 1. *The changes in the value systems and the intensity of the religious education are statistically significantly associated.* Only sufficiently intense and regular religious education is capable of impacting the value systems of the inmates. 2. *The findings are influenced by the fact whether the inmates are housed in a separate unit,* where they are the least exposed to the effects of prisonization, but most exposed to the inculturation by the prison missionary activities. 3. *It is essential to properly select the inmates participating in the religious education carried out in the separate unit, in order to ensure that those who end up here should consider this opportunity of religious education an escape from the world of crime and from being a career criminal rather than a favorable treatment.* When selecting the participants, neither the crime committed, nor its punishment – in particular the time remaining to be served – can be a matter of consideration. At the same time, the individual’s motivational basis, and his/her family support could be a decisive element.

If we accept the precept that the individuals’ value systems could affect their actions, then the consequence inevitably follows that the social activities and actions – or at least their dominant elements – of those participating in the religious education will reflect a value system, which is more acceptable and useful to society rather than a value system of criminality, which is dangerous and deservedly rejected.

*In order to ensure that the achievement are reflected in the social actions in the long term, it is necessary to provide the recently released ex-inmates will receive „continued religious education.“* These can be programs that facilitate integration into congregations. A religious person’s life can be problematic alone. That is why it is important to ensure that he participants in the religious programs, upon their release from the penal institution, be integrated into the church communities. This is indicated by the fact that those who attend the religious occasions only, but do not participate in at least separate programs will be more heavily influenced by life in prison than by the religious occasions. It requires no further comment that these programs should not be state-initiated, but church-initiated, instead.

Finally, it must also be mentioned that religious education does not mean a general solution applied in and addressing all situations. Namely, it cannot be said that similar progress and outcome could be achieved by it in case of any and all groups of inmates. Similarly to the selection processes used in the APAC model originated from Brazil, such a model must also be applied in the domestic religious education. This should not and must not mean arbitrariness or discrimination. This can only mean that the opportunities must be open to those volunteers only, who are open to changes and are willing to change – and could find religion as a tool for it.

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