



The role of Christian faith in the reintegration of female prisoners

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Abstract

Aim: This study delves into the correlation between religious faith and the process of reintegration among women in incarceration. In Hungary, this subject is relatively understudied; however, international insights underscore the prominent role of religious convictions in shaping an individual's predisposition towards criminality and their influence on prosocial conduct. Yet, the extent and contentious nature of its role in reintegration persist due to a lack of emphasis by societal institutions associated with detainees, disregarding the intricate sociological prospects embedded within religion and faith. These prospects, meticulously scrutinised by sociologists, encompass the maintenance and fortification of social order, the regulation of human activities, and more. An additional challenge arises post-release, where organisations and religious institutions involved in the spiritual rehabilitation of detainees lose contact with these individuals, impeding subsequent investigative efforts.

Methodology: The data for our pilot study were gathered among residents of Kalocsa Prison in 2024. Employing the Shortened Aspiration Index, augmented by interviews, our research methodology sought to enrich descriptive statistical analyses through the nuanced exploration of interview content. Sample selection followed a randomised and voluntary basis (N: 46 individuals). Importantly, the outcomes derived from our study are not intended for generalisation but rather apply specifically to our sampled cohort.

Findings: Our discernments indicate that, for the female detainees under scrutiny, faith and religious practices wield a positive influence on delineating life

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objectives. They also play a pivotal role in sustaining mental equilibrium, with noteworthy psychoeducational ramifications. During catechesis, knowledge enrichment extends beyond cultural dimensions to encompass moral teachings, fostering an understanding of the ethical values and frameworks essential for normative living.

Value: Determining the criteria for the success of post-release reintegration proves elusive, given the nuanced and idiosyncratic nature of success for everyone. Factors influencing an individual's psychological dynamics and behavioural patterns intricately interweave within a complex socioeconomic system. Thus, it is reasonable to assert that the precepts of Christian teachings, faith, and the spiritual and organisational scaffolding of religious practices can form integral components of a supportive framework. Acknowledging the reinforcing role of Christian faith, particularly among women, aligns with the 2022 census data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), which underscores a prevailing proclivity towards religiosity among women in contemporary Hungary.

Keywords: Female Inmates, Reintegration, Faith and Religion, Mental Health Support

Introduction

In a globalised and secular world, individuals are exposed to a multi-factorial, economic-social-psychological security risk in their daily lives. It is particularly difficult to examine the context of reintegration, because even the definition of the terms used is not a simple task. In this context, the situation of women in general can be described as precarious, as they are significantly affected by the difficulties of organising family life, the modern challenges of parenting, psychological vulnerability, economic and social vulnerability, the possibility and extent of criminalisation, and the cultural transmission of a toxic family model (Di Blasio & Kiss, 2022). It is therefore an important question to what extent the prison system contributes to their successful reintegration into society after release. For this reason, the theological, psychological, mental health and quality-of-life effects of Christian faith and their relation to reintegration were examined in this theoretical review. In our pilot research, we used a questionnaire and structured interview technique with female prisoners to investigate the above-mentioned problem of faith and reintegration in a basic way and to design future research.

The choice of the topic is also justified by the fact that 43.4% of the population in the 2022 Hungarian census of the KSH identified themselves as Christians. Within Christianity, Catholics are in the majority. In terms of gender, 28.3% of men and 31.7% of women identified themselves as Catholic, 9.2% and 10.4% as Reformed. There was a higher proportion of non-respondents among men (men: 41%, women: 39.3%) and a higher proportion of non-religious (men: 17.8%, women: 14.6%). Examining the male-female proportions within a given religion, there were more significant differences in favour of women than the male-female ratio for the total Hungarian population (48–52%) among those who identify as Catholic (women: 54.7%, men: 45.3%) and Reformed (women: 55%, men: 45%), which are the two most widespread religions in Hungary. However, the proportion of men was higher in the non-religious category (53%). This suggests that women are more religious than men in Hungary ([URL1](#)). Therefore, it seems legitimate to consider the impact of Christianity in the re-integration success criteria.

The diversity of religious experiences

Research on the diversity of religious experience is based primarily on the pragmatic and humanistic American tradition, with the beginnings of European research going back to Wundtian and Freudian essentialist interpretations of religion. The pragmatist psychologist William James, in his 1902 work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, defined religion as ‘*the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to what-ever they may consider divine.*’ (James, 2002; Benkő, 2003). William James distinguished between two types of religiosity: that of the so-called ‘once-born’ or healthy-minded and that of the ‘twice-born’ or sick-minded (James, 2002; Kézdy, Urbán & Martos, 2018). The ‘once-born’ were characterised by a relatively trauma-free personality development and emotional stability and balance as adults. The ‘twice-born’ often reported traumatic experiences in childhood and adolescence, and were emotionally unstable, anxious, and neurotic. These are the people who, according to James, have been psychologically reborn because of religious conversion, have entered a healthier developmental path with their God, and many of them report that their psychological disorders have ceased (James, 2002).

Gordon Allport, in his book *The Individual and His Religion* published in 1950, emphasises – like James –, that just as no two personalities are the same, no two religions are the same. He considers religiosity as a sentiment that can

be regarded as a specific affective-cognitive system; it is neither rational nor irrational and is influenced by the physiological characteristics of the personality, its mental abilities, its interests and values, its search for meaning and purpose, and its responses to the world around it (Allport, 1950; Kézdy, Urbán & Martos, 2018). While Allport's conception of religiosity is explicitly broad, he underlines that religious feeling can only truly manifest itself in its mature form. Mature religiosity is characterised by a more warmly saturated faith, as opposed to the beliefs of immature religiosity. At the core of a mature religiosity is a will and commitment to the good as an end, and an activity using the means to achieve it. Immature religiosity is linked to a person's sense of security and physical and mental well-being. Allport then distinguishes between religiousness with an extrinsic and intrinsic motivational base. The instrumental religious sentiment is extrinsic. As Allport writes, '*extrinsically motivated person uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion*'. (Allport & Ross, 1967; Kézdy, Urbán & Martos, 2018, Vergote, 2003).

Reintegration

Defining successful reintegration is a difficult issue, as each case is different and success depends on both external circumstances and internal psychological resources. Conceptually, reintegration presupposes that women who have served their prison sentence and then been released have successfully participated in society during their previous life stage. Conversely, a large proportion of them were members of marginalised groups, who had already faced a number of economic and cultural disadvantages, which will be further compounded by the stigma of imprisonment (Tóth, Krizsán & Zentai, 2005; Csáki, Kovács, Mészáros & Sponga, 2006; Miklósi & Tihanyi, 2023). It can be observed that in the international literature, the concept of re-entry is gaining ground alongside that of reintegration (Burke, 2008; Myers & Olson, 2013). The reintegration process includes the housing, earning an income and building a network of social connections. In Maruna and colleagues' definition, reintegration is both a process and a one-off event, which in any case presupposes some level of community acceptance of the released prisoner (Maruna, Immerigeon & LeBel, 2004). Reintegration may take longer time after release (Albert & Biró, 2015). Judit Szabó's (2012) study draws attention to the conceptual confusion in Hungary, which also points out that the use of psychological tools of tertiary prevention is not common practice in the Hungarian prison system. Tertiary prevention aims exactly at preventing re-offending. However, the repressive nature

of criminal policy and the scarcity of opportunities in the potential supportive environment also override the goals of re-socialisation, and public opinion also influences the acceptance of re-socialisation efforts. In particular, psychological approaches to reintegration are poorly supported, as prison psychologists are also mainly interested in reducing prison harm.

Particularly in the case of women prisoners, there is little data on the effectiveness of programmes specifically designed for them, and this is also true for international practice. In Hungary, this may be due to the perception that there is no multidimensional differentiation in the prison system and that the prison population is not sizeable.

Given the paucity of data on women in the literature and the lack of effectiveness studies specifically on women prisoners, I am referring to programmes in the prison sector in general.

Since the 1970s, research into the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes and schemes has evolved methodologically, with more sophisticated analyses (Borbíró, 2010). Research is constantly looking for answers to the question of which methods and programmes are effective in terms of recidivism, under which circumstances and for which groups of criminals (Szabó, 2012). Since the 1990s, based on comparative analyses, some programmes have gained prominence for their effectiveness, for example the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Anglo-Saxon model (Borbíró, 2010; Szabó, 2012). As the name suggests, the risk principle determines who should be treated, the needs principle emphasises what, and the responsiveness principle emphasises how. The programme is pragmatic and is based on sound theoretical foundations. It considers methods based on a cognitive behavioural approach to behaviour change to be the most appropriate. It uses psychological measures to assess risk and needs, and then a professional develops a treatment plan based on the principles of the model (White & Graham, 2010; Szabó, 2012). The effectiveness of the programme lies in its focus on answering structured, complex questions, developing skills, and using cognitive behavioural techniques (MacKenzie, 2000). It is also characterised by its voluntary nature, its focus on the offender's criminality-related capacity to influence, and its implementation based on the integrity of the process and the activities of the participants. Judit Szabó (2012), based on Hollin (1999), describes the treatment effectiveness criteria found in the international literature:

For medium and high-risk offenders, structured and multimodal programmes are more effective, attitudinal, and cognitive components should be focused on, high levels of responsiveness should be achieved in prisoners, programmes in community settings are more effective, and professionals running the programme have a high level of integrity.

Cognitive behavioural methods are the most effective in preventing re-offending. Based on developed theories, cognition, communication, and model learning are used to explain behaviour and modify behaviour. These methods assume that behaviour is determined by cognitive functions, i.e., by acting on cognition, we can induce significant behavioural change (Perczel-Forintos & Mórotz, 2019). There is a strong correlation between criminal behaviour and the level of perceptions, values, reasoning, and problem-solving skills (Cann, Falshaw & Friendship, 2005). Methods are used to develop pro-social attitudes, social skills, interpersonal problem solving, cognitive skills development, anger management, and recidivism prevention (Robinson & Crow, 2009). Programmes developed from methods are successful when focused on high and medium risk offenders over long periods of time and incorporate cooperative prescriptions (Gideon & Sung, 2011; Szabó, 2012).

Adrienn Ács-Bíró (2022) provides a gap-filling and comprehensive presentation of the training needs of women prisoners in the context of reintegration of female prisoners in Hungary, describing their cognitive profile. With regard to reintegration, targeted employment tailored to needs and wants is of paramount importance, taking into account, for example, the cognitive profile (Di Blasio & Ács-Bíró, 2022).

Faith and human dimensions

Faith is the acceptance of God's revelation, which also raises questions about the content and intent of faith. Conscious faith is thinking about oneself and one's relationship to the present, one's future life, history, the world, society, and culture. This critical, methodological, and systematic reflection on faith evaluates the following problems: 1) The meaning and value of faith (hermeneutical question); 2) Its relation to the human condition and the world (ethical and orthopraxis question). The theology of faith examines the foundations of faith, human conditions, and rational approaches within the framework of philosophy and other scientific disciplines. In thinking about the human condition, a person experiences the finite nature of himself and his actions, which causes existential anxiety, and so asks himself the constant question. What should I do? What can I hope for? What fate awaits me?

These essential questions relate to origin, purpose, the passage of time in the life of the individual, humanity, and the whole universe, that is, the problem of the meaning of existence is a continuous ontological structure present in existence itself, and cannot be ignored. Human beings use nature, humanise

it, and as human beings they also increase and develop themselves. In the process, therefore, they come to know themselves, not just the world. The individual, as the subject, represents the enduring essence of their existence, molded by their actions while consistently retaining its core identity (Kránitz, 2019). Transcendent reality offers the individual the experience of freedom, responsibility, and community. The biblical reality of faith takes place in the inseparable unity of knowledge and choice, by which one relies on God. In this covenant, human beings also assume the demands of love. The Christian faith is justified by the unity of authentic doctrine (orthodoxy) and authentic practice (orthopraxy) (Kránitz, 2019). From a moral theological perspective, the Christian faith offers the individual a framework that prepares them to live a successful social life.

Sociologists have identified various social functions in religion, such as maintaining and reinforcing social order, regulating activities, preserving cultural traditions, and organising networks of social relations. Interpretations of religion vary considerably from discipline to discipline, with sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, and psychologists having different meanings of the term.

After the literature review, we can conclude that the relationship between faith and crime is a barely researched topic. However, a small body of research suggests that religious practice and belief reduce the likelihood of deviant behaviour, particularly in adolescent populations. Research among adults has found that religion had a positive impact on prisoners' prison lives, but this did not necessarily require a prior religious background (Tihanyi, 2019). Stansfield and colleagues (2017) suggest that in religion, the notion of 'present reward' that an individual derives from a religious or spiritual interpretation of their life may be important. Some prior experience of religion or spirituality may facilitate the lives of individuals who were previously practitioners of religion, then moved away from it, and later rediscovered religion as a way of interpreting existence during or after imprisonment (Várkonyi, Rutkai & Szabó, 2021; Tihanyi, 2021).

Religiosity and quality of life

'Religion can also be seen as a socio-psychological system which is a culture that ensures the satisfaction of religious needs, the acquisition of religious experiences, and the promotion of development in this [...] and which also seeks to establish and maintain a moral order that organises the conception of life in accordance with its principles and the resulting way of life and the relations

between people.'¹ (Süle, 1997). From a psychological perspective, religious life has an intrapersonal and an external, interpersonal dimension. The one is spiritual-mental work, the other is expressed in communal activity. The components of the religious life are religious experience, religious spirituality, religious cult, religious practice, religious worldview, and religious community life (Süle, 1997). In general, it can be said that the psychological essence of religion is the essence of human beings' real-world view and value system (Süle, 1997), a universal human phenomenon. From a cultural anthropological and Christian point of view, homo religiosus is a basic endowment, i.e. humans are inherently open, seeking, and receptive beings. Religion is a specific cultural activity, a specific use of language and at the same time a behaviour directed towards the supernatural (Di Blasio, 2022). It is also a system of symbols that makes the supernatural tangible through signs. In the Judeo-Christian religious context, the revelation of the Bible takes place in the historical time of a people, and God comes close to man. The Judeo-Christian religion is based on faith, it requires faith and a corresponding attitude. Adult faith presupposes a free choice and resolution, which is also an attitude based on discernment (Benkő & Szentmártoni, 2002).

In terms of quality of life, the WHO definition of quality of life emphasises that a person should be seen in their cultural and spiritual wholeness (Kopp & Pikó, 2006). The spiritual dimension, belonging to a religious community, is also an important health protective factor (Tózsér, 2019). Psychological or mental health is closely related to socio-economic factors, educational attainment, ethnicity, religion, cultural, gender, and occupational identity (Kopp & Pikó, 2006). Faith and positive forms of religious community affiliation based on personal commitment are also important health protective factors. Religious-cultural resources that are essential for strengthening coping skills of individuals and communities can also be highlighted. Mária Kopp and her colleagues investigated the level of religious attitudes and spirituality in Hungarian society between 1988 and 2002 in the *Hungarostudy* longitudinal survey (Rózsa et al., 2003). The results of the study showed that religious practice was a health protective factor for all variables measuring the health and mental health of the population. Among the general health indicators, the religious population showed a much smaller reduction in work capacity, but also a lower number of working days lost due to illness. The results of the study show that there is an inverse relationship between the importance of religious practice and religion and the prevalence of self-harm behaviours (alcohol consumption, smoking,

1 Translation by the author.

etc.). In contrast to the global consumer culture, faith in God, religion, community and individual existence offer opportunities for positive goals (Kopp & Martos, 2011), and regular religious practitioners are also protected from a health perspective (Székely & Lázár, 2013).

The relationship between religiosity and crime

Religiousness helps to connect to prosocial networks, participation in group life offers structured activities, provides a framework for everyday life, which also acts as a deterrent to crime, protecting the individual from possible recidivism. Religion can also be seen as an institutional support network that helps individuals to rebuild relationships, find employment and reintegrate into society after release. The practice of religion can reshape an individual's goals and aspirations, which is an important factor for rehabilitation (Adamczyk, Freilich & Kim, 2017; Jang, 2007; Jang & Franzen, 2013; Jang, Johnson, Hays, Hallett & Duw, 2017; Johnson, 2011; O'Connor, 2006; Stansfield, Mowen, O'Connor & Boman, 2017). In the international literature, the family is emphasised as a crucial factor in the context of recidivism.

Unfortunately, based on international experience and research, there are no well-developed techniques to show the correlation between religious beliefs and post-release social behaviour. Research is fraught with methodological problems and the results are not generalisable. All these difficulties hamper the understanding of the process and the phenomena. We do not know what role religion may play in the post-release period (Mowen, Stansfield & Boman, 2018). Observations suggest that religious life in prison, the manifestations of faith, remain dominant as long as the individual needs the supportive aspects of religion during the difficult, stressful period after release. What is not known, however, is the extent to which individuals find meaning in their lives through their faith, and the extent to which they are able to maintain a disciplined lifestyle, set goals and persevere in achieving them.

Mowen and colleagues (2018) summarised the results of previous research, finding that the interaction between pre-prison, prison and post-release religious practice has not been examined in combination or in effect. Thus, we also do not know how early religious beliefs are transformed in prison, where faith also has a mental health retaining effect, or how they impact on successful psychological rehabilitation and subsequent social reintegration after release. Many posit that prisoners are drawn to humanizing, spiritual, and religious services as they seek to discover meaning in their existence amidst challenging

circumstances (O'Connor & Duncan, 2011). Extrinsic motivation is also often a feature, which is not linked to cognitive and later social transformation. Most researchers consider religious education and practice to be effective mainly in counteracting the dehumanising effects of imprisonment (Maruna et al., 2004; O'Connor & Duncan, 2011).

Most prison chaplains and voluntary helpers believe that faith and religion make a significant contribution to the spiritual rehabilitation of prisoners, but that this support should continue for a long time after release. However, studies in this area have focused on community programmes and catechesis. They are convinced that the development of faith supports durable reintegration, and that extrinsic motivation leads to only temporary results. There is a paucity of research on conversion, faith formation, the methodological culture of prison chaplains, or the impact of community life after release (Jang et al., 2017; Johnson, 2004; O'Connor, Duncan & Quillard, 2006; Young, Gartner, O'Connor, Larson & Wright, 1995). National and international research has shown that the risk of recidivism is higher for people who live in disadvantaged areas or environments after release. The social structures to which they return are crucial for access to employment opportunities, opportunities to manage addictions or other supports (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Tillyer & Vose, 2011; Ács-Bíró, 2022). Demand for support services was higher among lower income groups (Hipp, Petersilia & Turner, 2010).

Among the critical transitions in human existence is the period of release from prison, which can lead to a transformation of prison religiosity. Tension theories (Agnew, 2001) suggest that the geo-economic-social conditions of housing influence the change in religiosity and the likelihood of recidivism. The lack of resources, the effectiveness of collective support, and the availability of services also affect an individual's choices, even religious beliefs (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). On the one hand, trust in religion can be reduced, leading to poor problem-solving, and on the other hand, the limited availability of opportunities can make religion and faith play an even greater role in the life of the individual (Duwe & Clark, 2013; O'Connor & Duncan, 2011). Prison pastoral care uses its own methods to awaken hope and improve the self-esteem of the individual, thus increasing the chances that after release the psychologically supported person will not choose the previous ways of coping with stress but will be able to resist the temptation of drugs and alcohol.

In the light of the above, religion can be seen as coping, but it is not just a way of coping, but a framework to help us cope with everyday life (Geertz, 1994; Szenes, 2008). Religious coping can provide solace, stimulate personal development, facilitate cooperation with others, develop intimacy with the

transcendent sphere or give meaning to life (Pargament & Brant, 1998; Szenes, 2008). Religious coping can be passive, active, personal, interpersonal, problem- and emotion-focused. Use of religion in coping is more frequently found among the elderly, the poor, the low-educated, widows and women (Pargament, 1997). What these groups have in common is that they have less access to secular resources (Szenes, 2008). Pargament (1997) sees the importance of religious coping in the way religion re-evaluates critical events to reduce internal tension. The behaviours that come to the fore during religious coping (avoidance, appeasement, obedience, reconciliation) can be classified into three typical coping models according to the locus of responsibility and control. The self-controlling person relies on himself rather than God during coping, the procrastinator passively places the responsibility on God. The cooperative coping strategy, on the other hand, assumes an active relationship between God and man in which both parties do their best.

However, a negative correlation between religious practices and health can exist. For instance, if the tenets of a religious denomination are incongruent with social health principles, such as rejecting blood transfusions, it may pose challenges (Pikó, 2002).

More emotionally vulnerable people are more likely to feel the importance of religion in their lives. Research has shown that religiosity acts as a protective factor against mental illness and depression, especially by building social support and relational capital. Religious practitioners have lower rates of anomie and impairment (Kopp, Székely & Skrabski, 2001).

Religion seems to offer an answer to human, often for hopeless problems, showing that we are finite and limited in the world, our vulnerability is obvious. The solution can come in spiritual form when other sources of support are lacking, in the form of explanations through the church, in the form of a sense of control when life seems out of our control, or in the form of new objects of meaning when the old ones are no longer adequate. Religion complements non-religious forms of coping by enhancing our personal power (Szenes, 2008). Spiritual support is also reflected in physical health and well-being.

Description of the survey

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between faith, religion, and reintegration among female prisoners. We employ primarily qualitative methods, including descriptive statistical analysis, to explore the protective function of religion in women's reentry preparation and recidivism rates. Voluntary female

prisoners are serving a higher proportion of their sentence in prison. Time and place of the research: January 2024, Kalocsa Prison and Penitentiary. We collaborated with a randomly selected sample of women who volunteered to participate, constituting a total sample size of 46 (N: 46). The average age was 42 years, the youngest person was 23 and the oldest 77.

Our selection process did not exclusively target individuals engaged in prison pastoral care. We included participants who live their faith but may choose not to be part of the community for various reasons. The individuals interviewed encompassed a diverse range of religious affiliations, including members of historic churches and modern sects. One of the measures employed in our study was the Shortened Aspiration Index. Six participants participated in the focus group interview, all engaged in denominational faith formation, with ages ranging from 29 to 58 years. Among them, two were incarcerated, four had experienced some degree of imprisonment, and four were currently enrolled in a drug prevention unit. Our research questions encompassed the following inquiries: 1) What form of support do women in detention derive in religious practice? 2) To what extent does prison catechesis contribute to the achievement of quality-of-life goals? 3) How does religion and faith function as a tool for aiding reintegration?

Characterisation of the measuring instrument

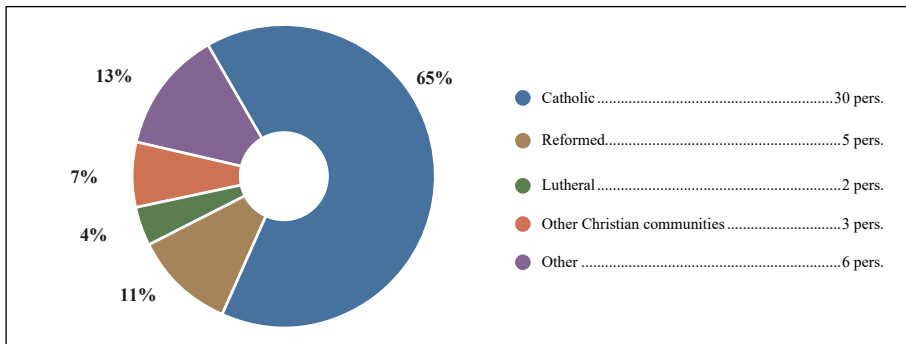
The Shortened Aspiration Index categorises life goals based on internal and external motivational needs. Extrinsic motivation (E) focuses on external rewards such as fame, material possessions, good appearance, etc. For those who focus on external rewards, meaningful human relationships, community cooperation and personal growth can be problematic. Intrinsic motivation (I) enables a more fulfilled and meaningful life. The formulation of the questionnaire consists of easy-to-understand statements and the completion time is not burdensome (14 statements). It also indicates the degree of religiosity of the respondent on a Likert scale of 1–7. The difference between the means of the intrinsic and extrinsic subscales is the so-called aspirational index (AI), which provides information on the relative preference for extrinsic goals in the person's goal system (Martos, Szabó & Rózsa, 2006). The results of the survey are expected to provide insights into the motivational needs of female prisoners and to identify their motivation for personal growth. The practice of religion and conversion (faith) is certainly supportive if we think only of the development of literacy and its impact on the community, as it targets the individual's cognitive behavioural competences. Referring to Allport's conception of religion, whether we speak of extrinsic or intrinsic religiosity, it exerts a form of psychoeducational positive

impact on personal functioning and mental balance of the individual. Considerable research with the Aspiration Index indicates that a relative preference for extrinsic goals is negatively related to several indicators of mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety), whereas a relative preference for intrinsic goals is positively correlated with measures of well-being (happiness, satisfaction) and mental health (Kasser & Ryan, 2001). In a German sample, Schmuck (2001) found that the correlation of extrinsic and intrinsic goals with indicators of well-being was pronounced in older age groups and weak in younger age groups.

Results

Figure 1

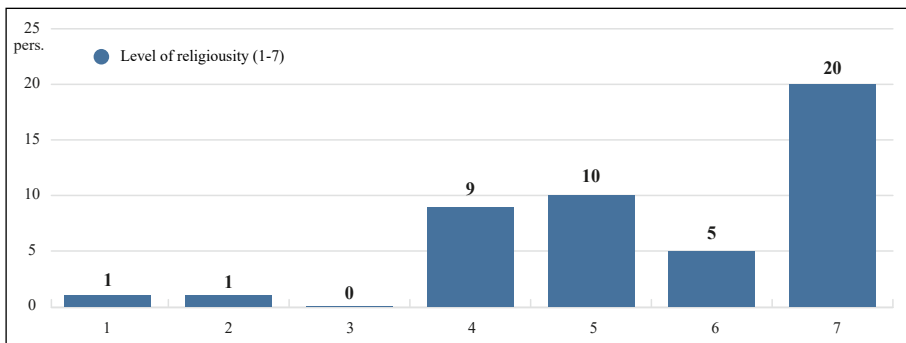
Distribution by religion (persons/%)



Note. Figure created by the author.

Figure 2

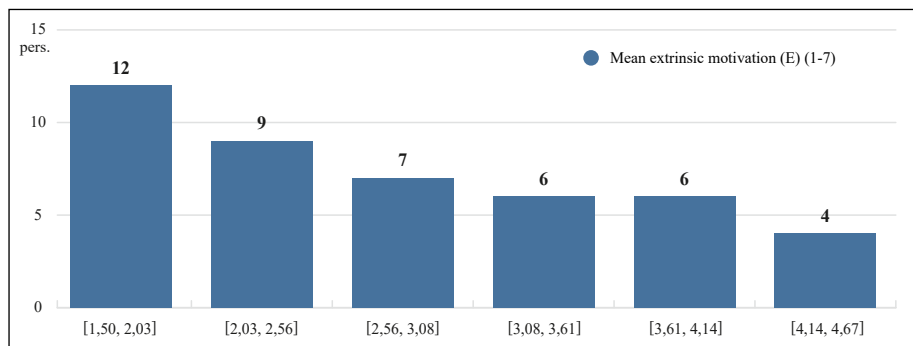
Level of religiosity



Note. Figure created by the author.

Figure 1 shows the religious distribution of respondents, revealing a notably high number of Catholics. The proportion of Protestants is 11% and the proportion of respondents from other Christian denominations is comparable. It is well known that in Kalocsa Penitentiary and Prison, the prison pastoral activities are continuous and of a relatively differentiated nature. However, the spread of other religious groups and sects is also noteworthy. In Figure 2 we see that only two of the respondents opted for no or minimal religiosity, suggesting a prevailing positive attitude towards religion as a motivating factor for the voluntary nature of the activity..

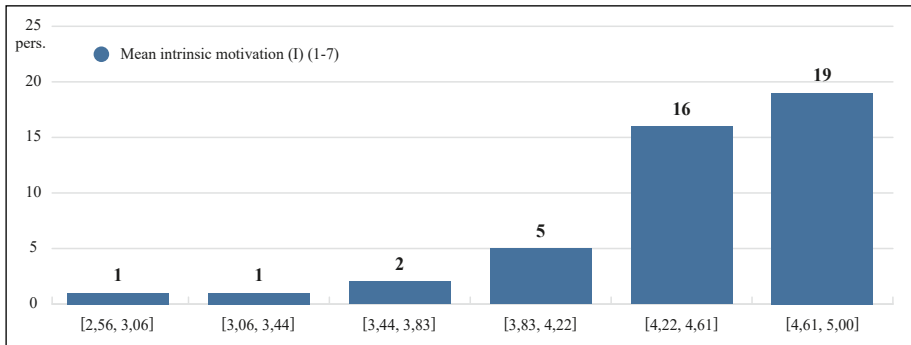
Figure 3
Extrinsic motivation



Note. Figure created by the author.

In Figure 3, the pattern in respondents' extrinsic motivation indicated that nearly half of them exhibit low extrinsic motivational characteristics, possibly representing individuals still uncertain about embracing constructive life goals. For the remaining fraction, occupations that equip them for meaningful life choices and alleviate psychological and emotional decline appear to be particularly beneficial.

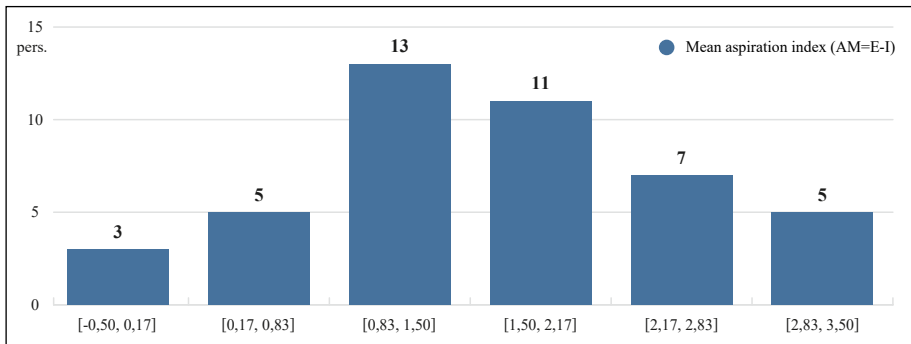
Figure 4
Intrinsic motivation



Note. Figure created by the author.

In Figure 4, it is evident that intrinsic motivational goals are significant and characteristic for 35 of the respondents, indicating their openness to personal and relational development as well as the pursuit of social goals.

Figure 5
Aspiration index



Note. Figure created by the author.

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are independent in our sample ($r = 0,038$), consistent with findings in the literature (Martos, Szabó, Rózsa, 2006).

Table 1
Correlations between age, religiosity, and motivation

	Age	Religiosity
Extrinsic motivation	0,188	0,211
Intrinsic motivation	0,331	0,302
Aspiration index	-0,002	-0,037

Note. Table created by the author.

There is a positive, medium strength relationship between age and intrinsic motivation ($r = 0,331$), and between religiosity and intrinsic motivation ($r = 0,302$). There is also a positive but weak relationship between age and extrinsic motivation ($r = 0,188$), and between religiosity and extrinsic motivation ($r = 0,211$). In our sample, the aspiration index is independent of both age and religiosity (Table 1).

The trend in our sample appears to indicate that women may not be notably motivated concerning life goals and mental health objectives. Only 12 out of the 46 respondents exhibit an aspiration index above the average. Hence, a limited number of individuals seem capable of developing effective life skills and establishing prosocial relationships, which are essential building blocks for successful reintegration.

Limitations of research

Given the overall cognitive profile of the prisoners, characterized by significant challenges in reading and reading comprehension, we can only hope that completing the test did not pose undue difficulties for them. In the realm of honest responses, we can only be hopeful, too; there were no consequences associated with voluntary participation in the measurement. Another significant limitation lies in the fact that a majority of respondents endure lengthy prison sentences, leading to a loss of life aspirations. Moreover, prisonization exerts a severe toll on their mental health. Since our results are in several points in line with studies in other populations, we can hope that the completions are based on their own convictions.

Overview of interview content

Questions of topic 1

Who introduced the audience to the world of faith and religion? Who started them on the path of faith, where did they see an example?

Questions of topic 2

How do they think about their own release? How can religion and belief be related to successful reintegration?

Respondent 1 (29 years old, dropped out of university, unmarried, no children, maximum security prison sentence).

'Me my ex. His whole family goes to church, he still does to this day. I'm Catholic, he was an example to me. My family baptised me when I was little, my mother and my father. My mum and dad are believers, but they were never churchgoers, they don't practice their religion. I went to religious education at school. Religion has always been a part of my life, but I didn't bother with it. After I got into prison, I started to practice religion intensively, we just went to a Cursillo, it was a three-day intensive session, otherwise I am constantly attending prison pastoral sessions, holy mass.

I learned stealing from my mother, I liked that life, the quick money. I had this example before me, I had everything, I can't complain. My partner's now gone, it's better this way. I was also a drug addict; the temptation is still there.

The priest can help me a lot, faith strengthens me and gives me a handhold. The problem is that we always want to please someone, we don't dare to be ourselves, and then the problems come.'

Respondent 2 (49 years old, with one adult child, little mention of her private life, maximum security prison sentence).

'I am Catholic, I was baptised when I was very young. Religion was always in my life, but I didn't always follow the normal path, so I thought it was better to put religion aside. I used to be a heroin addict, then I moved on to cocaine and synthetic drugs, I lived in Germany for a while. When I stopped doing what I was doing, bad things, I would go back to issues of faith. I thought, if I'm going to steal, then it wouldn't be right to go to church and go to mass. I felt that I had gone down the wrong path, so I moved away from religion instead. In Germany I turned to my faith on my own, maybe it was God's will. And here I also attended the Cursillo. It was very illuminating, very, very good and showed me that this is the direction to go. I also had problems with confession, I confessed to the priest that I didn't feel true repentance for my actions many times,

I explained to myself that I didn't steal from a person, but from the state, it's not such a sin. Whatever is not related to my crime I repent of, and then I might go to confession regularly. My mother has always worked, 2-3 jobs at a time, my brother is an athlete, I am really the one who went wrong. My mum and I used to go to mass sometimes when I was little, but my mum is not a very believer.

I was working as a waiter in Germany, from where I came to prison. Here in Hungary, it is very difficult to start again after my release because I have a criminal record. We would have to work in a place where the salary would not be enough for anything, even though my family is by my side. I have five years left to do in prison, but I will not stay here, I will move back to Germany.

And our Christian faith has to be taken care of, because there are places in Europe where there is already Christian persecution. I am tolerant of religions, but there are certainly places where I would be retaliated against because of my religion.

Love is what we lack most in the world, and it is the source of many troubles.'

Respondent 3 (37 years old, dropped out of university, mother of one child, 7 years in maximum security prison sentence).

'80% of Gypsy families are believers in some way. Our family has been believers for generations, it's quite strong in the Gypsy culture. When I was a little child, we used to go to Szentkút (Petőfiszállás) on pilgrimages, lighting candles and so on. I was baptised when I was a little girl, but as an adult I managed to get mixed up with a bad crowd and ended up in jail from university, dragging my parents into trouble. I was a junior in law school at the time. When I was alone in the cell, that's when I realised that this was how God had saved me, because I was a very drug addict, I wasn't going to live long. It happened to a lot of us here in prison that we heard the call, much worse things would have happened to us on the outside. I can thank God, it's okay that I went to prison, but I didn't die. I was even re-baptised on the outside in a charismatic church similar to Faith Church. There is a Faith Church in here too, I go there every Saturday. They also have a praise record at the preaching that we can listen to if we need it, the House supports that. The opportunities we have at the prison make us stronger. It has given me a new lease on life. We have a pastor, and I will be an active church member after my release. I am thinking of studying theology when I am released, possibly at St. Paul's Academy in Budapest. I might even come back here to the prison to witness. My conversion to »the Faith Community« was influenced by my mother.

For me, faith is also hope. We often feel that what we have is given to us by the Lord. But the devil also comes to accuse or discourage us. I think of my child sadly, I have the material things, but I don't have the motherly love for her. This

hurts me very much. Prison life has taught me how to spend quality time with my family. Money is not the most important thing in life, love and support of other people is more important. In the cell this year, we had a very good Christmas gift-giving, we made presents for the others from almost nothing.

Faith helps us to avoid sins and gives us a good framework for life. God sent his son for everyone; we must embrace that.'

Respondent 4 (58 years old, educated, family woman, 9 years maximum security prison sentence).

I learned to pray from my family, from my grandmother, I am Catholic. There was a duality in our family. My great-grandmother and grandmother were very religious, but my parents were party members. There was a crucifix in one room and a red star in the other. I grew up in that. I was baptised, but my age group of all people didn't go to religious school anymore, we were more like pioneers. I am from Fejér County. My grandparents and I always went to church, and my parents rarely went to church, for example on Christmas Eve. I didn't really go to church when I was growing up, I didn't like going to church. I always felt the tension around religion, I didn't like it. I used to travel a lot in the country, so I used to go to Szentkút (Mátraverebély), not for a farewell, of course, just by myself. I would spend an hour there, visit the statue of St. Mary or go up to the Hermit's Cave (Remete barlang). From there, from that place, I always came away in peace. there are places like that, where you can recharge, where it is possible to live faith. I went to church in a foreign place. My children are baptised, my grandson goes to a religious school.

In Hungary, reintegration is very difficult because the social perception is also backward in this respect. In my own environment, I have also experienced people's perceptions of convicts. My situation is very difficult because when I am released, I will be of retirement age. If you look at the history, after the regime change, this whole country went through a lot. Many people were in crisis, everything was liquidated in the country. We were always learning something, trying to fit in with the constant change, drifting along. There are no stable and predictable jobs anymore, the world of work is constantly changing. The whole country is sliding backwards towards the Balkans. The human perception makes it difficult to start again. If I can find the true faith I am looking for, I will have the peace of mind to shut out the malicious comments. If we get out of here, we will be confronted that we are prison inmates. It doesn't matter why we got here, but we must face public opinion. Faith must help some because our perceptions change as we go deeper. I loved listening to the priest, I wanted to exclude myself from the prison atmosphere. Now I don't go to chapel for that anymore, I

look for a handhold to take with me. Following Albert Wass' book, »Give Me Back My Mountains«, which is something you must think about in here, when you go out, you have to forget everything, because God forgives everything, you have to stand up for yourself, you have to stand up for yourself.'

Respondent 5 (54-years old, mother of four adults and one young child, 4 years in maximum security prison).

'I am from Baranya County, I lived in a religious environment, I was baptised two months ago, I am Catholic. My mother was very religious. I was a regular churchgoer also outside. I immediately joined the religious education here inside, but I attend prayer meetings of all the denominations inside, it can't hurt. Before I got in, I was working all the time.

I have no plans for reintegration, a job will be the most important thing. I have asked the prison staff to help me with this.

Faith gives you confidence and strength. Faith gives you many good things, like love, friends, not falling apart in times of trouble, having a handhold in starting over.'

Respondent 6 (11-year maximum security prison sentence, already served 5 years).

'I am of Gypsy origin from Borsod, I lived in Miskolc. My family is very religious, but not converted. In our tradition, children are baptised shortly after birth. We are Catholics. I studied religion at school, but we didn't study it in the upper school. I was married early, I was 15. My marriage was a nightmare, but I didn't know what life was. We were only divorced after my grandmother died. It was an obligation in our culture. I have two children, I lived with my husband for six years, with whom I was married by family, not a priest. I am the only black sheep in the family, my brothers and sisters were not in prison. I was a drug addict, but despite prevention I can't give up drugs for the time being. My kids go to Catholic school in Austria, and my mum educates them.

It is faith that I will need most in the outside world. I am striving to forgive myself, but I have not yet succeeded. However, every day I apologise in my mind to my children, to my family, that I came here, that I caused this to them. I'm waiting for my faith to develop; I'm looking for the opportunity. I have been in 3 prisons in 6 years, I have also been to Faith Church. That's where I learned in prison what Christmas means. On the outside, I was always running around, rushing around. Realising that the paper is free, what we colour for each other, sitting down at the table together, living on what we get from our families. I'm talking about me. I wonder why I don't need many of the things I used to have at home.

We have cakes without baking, there is inventiveness, there is devotion. Slowing down, learning to appreciate the little, because it's enough to live on. »Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven«. It means I've thought back to when I was a failure. I wasn't happy, I didn't know what peace of mind was in my family circle. Christmas with my children was always a rush, my will prevail. But it could have been different. I rebuilt myself from that sentence after the fall. I could not give my children my motherly love, and I regret that very much. I am waiting for a strengthening of my faith to which I can turn after my release. Every minute in life counts and is important, especially with my family.'

Summary

The outcomes of the pilot study lack generalizability and are specifically relevant to our sample. Nevertheless, they can serve as a valuable reference point for subsequent discussions. While there is a dearth of internationally applicable research findings, it is undeniable that a deliberate and well-planned enhancement of the affective and cognitive systems among prisoners is highly desirable. Catechesis and religious practice align seamlessly within this framework. Indeed, beyond literacy, reading, catechesis, and personal relationships, prayers and supplications contribute to the inner development of a person, broaden their emotional range, and foster self-awareness through reflection. Simultaneously, transcendence can elevate the quality of one's life aspirations, instilling moral standards in the individual. The experience of communal love, the sense of individual worth, and the positive experience of belonging to a group also serve as remedies for psychological difficulties and stigmas. Faith empowers to the convert, consistent religious practice deepens the personal connection with God, and Christian teachings convey moral norms to the seeker. Drawing from my personal experiences, I firmly believe that a fundamental element of prison pastoral care involves guiding and empowering individuals to listen to themselves, to understand and accept who they are. This, indeed, marks the initial stride toward transformative change. Then comes the symbolic construction, which also works against prisonization, and then paves the path back to society. These are the foundational principles embedded in the teachings of the Bible.

The Gospel According to Saint Mark:

'Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?' [...] So he said to the man, »I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home!« He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone [...].' (Mk 2,1–12)

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Data will be made available on request.

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