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Religious Education for Prisoners in Romania

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Abstract

UNO's Resolution of May 14, 1990 recommends that prisoners have access to education, i.e. to basic education, creative activities, cultural activities, higher education, library facilities, literacy programmes, physical education and sports, religious education/instruction and training (through activities such as Bible studies, church attendance, holy day observances, religious counselling, religious/theological education classes, retreats, scriptural study groups, worship and prayer services, etc. carried out by chaplains, ministers, or religious volunteers), social education, and vocational training. Religious practice, no matter the form, can help prisoners adapt/adjust (i.e. coping or avoiding trouble) to prison life, lowers recidivism rates and ensures post-release success (prisoner re-entry or social reinsertion) – given that religion can change cognitive approaches to conflict, emphasize accountability and responsibility, provide social support and social skills through interaction with religious people and communities, and target antisocial values. In this context, religious education/guidance/teaching is, together with cultural activities, discussion groups, leisure activities, literacy classes, and sports activities, part of any social rehabilitation plan. Based on field work experience – counselling prisoners (both teenagers and adults) in Romanian penitentiaries – the authors propose a religious education "syllabus" based on the principles of ethics: the *principle of respect for autonomy* or *of human dignity* (respecting the decisions made by other people concerning their own lives), the *principle of beneficence* (bringing about good in all our actions), the *principle of non-maleficence* (not harming others), and the *principle of justice* (providing others with whatever they are owed or deserve).

Keywords: Religious education "syllabus", principles of ethics, prisoners, Romania.

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Résumé

La résolution de l'ONU du 14 mai 1990 recommande aux détenus d'avoir accès à l'éducation, à savoir l'éducation de base, les activités créatives, les activités culturelles, l'enseignement supérieur, les bibliothèques, les programmes d'alphabétisation, l'éducation physique et sportive, l'éducation/instruction religieuse et la formation (par le biais d'activités telles qu'études bibliques, fréquentation de l'église, célébrations des jours saints, conseils religieux, cours d'éducation religieuse/théologique, groupes d'étude de l'écriture biblique, services de prières, etc., assurés par des aumôniers, des ministres ou des volontaires religieux), éducation sociale et formation professionnelle. La pratique religieuse, quelle que soit sa forme, peut aider les détenus à s'adapter à la vie carcérale, à faire baisser les taux de récidive et à assurer le succès après la libération (réintégration du prisonnier ou réinsertion sociale), dans la mesure où la religion peut modifier l'approche cognitive du conflit, mettant l'accent sur la responsabilité et la responsabilité, apportant un soutien social et des compétences sociales par le biais d'une interaction avec les personnes et les communautés religieuses et ciblant les valeurs antisociales. Dans ce contexte, l'éducation/orientation/enseignement religieux fait partie, avec les activités culturelles, les groupes de discussion, les loisirs, les cours d'alphabétisation et les activités sportives, de tout plan de réadaptation sociale. Sur la base de leur expérience du travail sur le terrain - conseillers des prisonniers (adolescents et adultes) dans des pénitenciers roumains - les auteurs proposent un « programme » d'éducation religieuse fondé sur les principes de déontologie: principe de respect de l'autonomie ou de la dignité humaine (respectant les décisions prises par autres personnes concernant leur propre vie), le principe de bienfaisance (amener le bien dans toutes nos actions), le principe de non-malfaisance (ne pas nuire à autrui) et le principe de justice (fournir à autrui tout ce qui leur est dû ou mérité).

Mots-clés: "syllabus" d'éducation religieuse, principes d'éthique, détenus, Roumanie.

Rezumat

Rezoluția ONU din 14 mai 1990 recomandă ca deținuții să aibă acces la educație, adică la educație de bază, activități creative, activități culturale, învățământ superior, facilități de bibliotecă, programe de alfabetizare, educație fizică și sport, educație/formare religioasă cum ar fi studiile biblice, prezența la biserică, slujbele de zi sfântă, consilierea religioasă, orele de educație religioasă/teologică, grupurile de studiu biblice, serviciile de închinare și rugăciune etc. efectuate de către capelani, preoți sau voluntari religioși), educație socială și formare vocațională. Practica religioasă, indiferent de formă, îi poate ajuta pe deținuți să se adapteze la viața în închisori, să reducă rata recidivei și să asigure succesul ulterior eliberării (reintrarea în societate sau reinserția socială) – având în vedere că religia poate schimba abordarea cognitivă a conflictelor, accentuarea responsabilității, asigurarea suportului social și a aptitudinilor sociale prin interacțiunea cu oamenii și comunitățile religioase și prin vizarea țintelor anti-sociale. În acest context, educația religioasă reprezintă, împreună cu activitățile culturale, grupurile de discuții, activitățile de agrement, cursurile de alfabetizare și activitățile sportive, parte a oricărui plan de reabilitare socială. Pe baza experienței în domeniu, autorii, care au fost consilieri ai prizonierilor (adolescenți și adulți) în penitenciarele din România, propun un „syllabus" al educației religioase bazat pe principiile eticii:

principiul respectării autonomiei sau a demnității umane (respectă deciziile luate de alții pentru propria lor viață), principiul bunăstării (fă bine în toate acțiunile tale), principiul non-malefic (nu-i prejudicia pe alții) și principiul justiției (oferă-le celorlalți ceea ce merită).

Cuvinte-cheie: „curriculum" de educație religioasă, principii de etică, prizonieri, România.

Introduction

1.1. Religion and Adjustment to Prison

There is a complex, interactive relationship between degree of institutional adjustment, inmate, prison, religious programming, and type of institutional adjustment (Clear *et al.* 1992; Montgomery & Turner 2013). According to these authors, religious programs can help inmates adjust to prison in two ways: in younger inmates who lack experience coping with prison, "religious participation can help an inmate overcome depression, guilt, and self-contempt"; in older inmates who have experience coping with prison, religious participation is a way to avoid the constant threats faced in prison (it reinforces attitudes and behaviours circumventing the traditional hustles of prison life): in this case, religion is a "social cocoon" (Clear *et al.* 1992, 7). Both types of inmates manage to adjust to prison by observing an "inmate code" of values centred on absence of arguments between prisoners, avoidance of exploitation, distrust of prison staff, loyalty towards other prisoners, and maintenance of self (Philips 2007) and, above all, compliance with prison rules and regulations (Louchs 2000).

According to (Clear *et al.* 1992) and to (Randall & Bishop 2012), there are intrinsic reasons for religious involvement (dealing with guilt, dealing with the loss – especially of freedom, and finding a new way of life), and extrinsic reasons for religious involvement (access to outsiders, inmate relations, material comfort, safety).

1.2. Religion and Recidivism Rate

Until the end of the 20th century, religion was not portrayed as a promising form of correctional treatment (Clear *et al.* 1992; Clear *et al.* 2000). Nowadays, it is considered "a moralising tool that should have a beneficial effect on the prevention of recidivism" (Rostaing *et al.* 2015, 8).

Recidivism is influenced by education, labour market conditions, and social environment (U.N.O & U.N.E.S.C.O. 1995).

1.3. Religion and Post-release/Prisoner Re-entry Success

Religion is also considered to be "a moralising tool that can have a beneficial effect on reintegration" (Rostaing *et al.* 2015, 8).

Art therapy, educational programs, learning by assimilation of behavioural models, moral-**religious education**, professionalization, and profit-productive activities need to be taken into consideration "to contribute to and support

personal effort to socially reintegrate the persons deprived of liberty" (Dragomir 2014, 294). Education plays an important, though not decisive role on successful reintegration (U.N.O & U.N.E.S.C.O. 1995).

Social Rehabilitation Plan/Programme/Scheme

"The main challenges facing chaplaincy in rehabilitating prisoners are spiritual, political and human." (Wambugu 2014, xvi), because "prisoners need job training, substance abuse treatment, education and other assistance before and after their release" (Lugo *et al.* 2012, 7).

Such plans should encourage, model, and promote the development of spiritually towards a redemptive and rehabilitative end, focusing on (O'Connor, Brook & Sprauer 1999, 33): awakening and/or deepening "the spiritual well-being of the inmates from intake through re-entry into the community" by developing the particular skills and attitudes the inmates need to be successful upon release: this could include a spiritual and religious component; "creating a stronger community of believers among the staff of religious services", thus making them more courageous, honest, open, and supportive with each other; enhancing the administration of religious services by administering a "time mastery profile" to all chaplains involved; fostering a recognised and respected "volunteer community of appropriate size and quality, capable of ministering to the spiritual, redemptive, and rehabilitative needs of the inmates", by training the volunteers and by measuring the quality of their counselling and ministry skills; helping "make relationships and procedures more **ethical** and compassionate, by seeking to increase the specific moral and spiritual role of the chaplains as the schooled voice of conscience".

According to (Johnson *et al.* 1997) and to (Buck Willison, Brazzel & Kim 2007, 133), religious programmes for inmates "are among the oldest and most common forms of rehabilitative programs in correctional facilities". They include Bible studies, in prison seminars, and life plan seminars.

Religious education/guidance/teaching is, together with cultural activities, discussion groups, leisure activities, literacy classes, and sports activities, part of any social rehabilitation plan/scheme. Such a plan should include the following specific tasks (U.N.O & U.N.E.S.C.O. 1995): detecting "any pathological conditions, provision of treatment and practice of preventive medicine"; detecting the causes of individual delinquency by applying individual or group therapy; developing a group spirit through sports and general services to others; developing communication skills (see also Iosim, 2019); developing talents through organized leisure activities; developing the capability to deal with everyday situations in prison and outside; enhancing "the trust among inmates and between them and the administration and social workers; maintaining close family ties"; preventing the "development of psychoses, especially those related to isolation, feelings of guilt and perceived inadequacies, and of intellectual atrophy"; providing "appropriate basic education, vocational training and productive activities"; providing "civic education and **moral, religious** and social

guidance"; providing personal assistance in solving problems and resolving conflicts; training in organisation of money, personal relationships and time (U.N.O & U.N.E.S.C.O 1995, 142).

Wambugu (2014) claims that Biblical teachings regarding rehabilitation of prisoners should circumscribe one or more topics such as *Bible and morality* (e.g. despite him being imprisoned, Joseph became an active participant and productive to his society and nation, *Genesis 50:20*); *Bible and relationship* (e.g. God grants Samson pardon when he seeks forgiveness, *Judges, 16:28*); *Bible as a provider of new life to prisoners* (e.g. prisoners as people created in the image and likeness of God deserve to be treated with utmost respect and dignity, *Genesis 1:27*); *Bible as a source of theology*; *Biblical accounts of prisoners* (e.g., Christians shut up in prison by Saul, *Acts 26:10*; Jeremiah imprisoned for unpopular preaching and treason accusations, *Jeremiah 32:37*; Joseph falsely accused of sexual abuse, *Genesis 39:20*); *Biblical restoration* (e.g. despite sinning, Adam and Eve are clothed by God, *Genesis 3:21*; God offered Cain a protection mark, *Genesis 4:16*); *forgiveness as a Biblical concept* (e.g. Mary, the alleged prostitute, *Luke, 7:38*; Matthew, the tax collector, *Matthew, 9:9*; Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, *Matthew 19:1*); *freedom of worship*; and *proper Biblical exposition* (e.g. "I was in prison and you came to visit me", *Matthew, 25:36*) (Holy Bible 2011)**.**

3. Religious Education and the Principles of Ethics

According to (Becci 2011, 6) prison chaplaincy rely on both pastoral care, that puts the individual in relation to a community and is defined as "one realm of Christian church action for salvation", "activity through which the Christian church reaches out to the secular world and in particular to its suffering and less privileged part to provide moral and spiritual guidance", ("*a moral action aiming at keeping the individual integrated in a particular social context*") and spiritual care, that is based on an inter-individual relation and is defined as "*an ethical action addressing the individual's values and worldviews*", "religious care of individuals, or the offer of individual religious consolation when someone is in need emotionally or externally, materially"). The former "is in line with the joint aim of State and church", while the latter "refers primarily to the individual's needs in the spiritual realm and not to the institution". Catholic countries seem to pass from pastoral care to spiritual care.

3.1. Theories Explaining Refraining from Criminal Behaviour

The theories below show the theoretical basis for someone to refrain from criminal behaviour (Thirumalai 2004): the *Arousal Theory*: people for whom religious activities are unsatisfying and who tend to undertake riskier behaviour commit crimes because they are neurologically stimulated; the *Hellfire Hypothesis*: religion discourages criminal behaviour through the threat of supernatural sanctions (see *Matthew 5:22, 18:9*; *Mark 9:43*; *James 3:6*); the *Moral Reasoning Theory*: people (bored individuals, sensation seekers) commit crimes because of their developmental immaturity in moral character; the *Rational*

Choice Theory: people believe in eternal punishment after death for the offenses committed (*Leviticus 19:20, 20:1, 26:14*; *Job 21:19*; *Proverbs 16:22*; *Jeremiah 4:18, 23:2, 32:18*; *Lamentations 5:7*); the *Reference Group Theory*: people tend to share similar (religious but not only) beliefs and backgrounds with people who, they believe, have an effect on their attitudes and behaviours; the *Social Control Theory*: education and religion establish social bond, commitment, and involvement, and instil normative beliefs and values; therefore, religious institutions discourage crime by increasing attachment between people and society.

3.2. Principles of Ethics

"[Ethical] commandments are provided to govern ones' behaviour." (Sessomes 2014, 60). The principles of ethics on which should rely religious education in prison are (Gracyk 2016, 1):

- the ***principle of respect for autonomy*** or ***of human dignity*** (respecting the decisions of other people on their own lives) "involves both a negative (not to interfere with the decisions of competent adults) and a positive duty (to empower those for whom we are responsible); its corollary principles are: we need to be honest in our dealings with others, and to keep promises";
- the ***principle of beneficence*** (bringing about good in all our actions); its corollary principle is: "we need to take positive steps to prevent harm (which places the individual in direct conflict with respecting the autonomy of other persons)";
- the ***principle of non-maleficence*** (not harming others) has three corollary principles: we need to minimise the harm we do where harm cannot be avoided, not to increase the risk of harm to others, and not to waste resources that could be used for good;
- the ***principle of justice*** (providing others with whatever they are owed or deserve and treating all people equally, fairly, and impartially); its corollary principle: "we need to impose no unfair burdens".

Combining ***beneficence*** and ***non-maleficence*** means that "each action must produce more good than harm", while combining ***beneficence*** and ***justice*** means that "we need to work for the benefit of those who are unfairly treated".

Spiritual care professionals uphold the **standards of professional ethics** in their relationships with inmates. Thus, they (http://ethics.iit.edu/ecodes/ node/3710): "are mindful of the imbalance of power in the professional/client relationship and refrain from exploitation of that imbalance; avoid or correct any conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicting interest(s); demonstrate respect for the cultural and religious values of those they serve and refrain from imposing their our own values and beliefs on those served; maintain relationships with clients on a professional basis only; provide care that is intended to promote the best interest of the client and to foster strength, integrity and healing; refrain from any form of harassment, coercion, intimidation or otherwise abusive words or actions in relationships with clients; refrain from any form of sexual

misconduct, sexual harassment or sexual assault in relationships with clients; respect the confidentiality of information entrusted to them by clients when communicating with family members or significant others except when disclosure is required for necessary treatment, granted by client permission, for the safety of any person or when required by law; safeguard the confidentiality of clients when using materials for educational purposes or written publication; speak and act in ways that honour the dignity and value of every individual; understand the limits of their individual expertise and make referrals to other professionals when appropriate".

Brown, 2013 suggests four elements of *narrative agency* to be embraced by theological education: aiding in the creation of moral agency and virtues, thus navigating the tension between the desires of theology and the needs of the prison; allowing people to voice their own experiences, thus helping them to take responsibility for their own reflection and practices and guarding against an ethos of victimisation and blame; allowing the reconstruction of tradition (fighting with tradition and searching for new symbols and images with meaning), thus leading to ongoing transformation and flourishing; privileging contextuality and difference, thus helping to counter the dehumanising characteristics of forced conformity.

Dialogue is equally important in theological education because it is affirming, liberative and transformative.

Conclusions

Religious activities are "persistent and non-contingent inhibiters of adult crime" (Jahnson 1997, 145), unless they lead to radicalisation (Mulcahy *et al.* 2013).

Theological education in the prison offers liberation through affirmed personhood, thus countering the dehumanising pedagogy of the prison system. It helps inmates adjust to prison life, it lowers recidivism rate, and it helps ex-inmates post-release. To reach these goals, prison wards and chaplains need social rehabilitation plans for the inmates based on religious education and on ethical principles and aiming at making the inmates refrain from criminal behaviour.

However, In his long-term (8 years) follow-up studies, (Johnson 2004, 2012) found "no difference in median time to re-arrest or re-incarceration between PF and non-PF groups"; that "participants with higher levels of participation in Bible studies were less likely to be re-arrested at 2 and 3 years after release, though the effect diminished over time"; that "statistical differences across groups only border significance at 2 and 3 years for re-incarceration"; and that "high participation in Bible studies significantly reduces the hazard of re-arrest at years 2 and 3" (Jahnson 2004, 329). However, other authors question the beneficial effect of religious education on recidivism rate.

In this context, volunteers – such as the authors of this article who worked in penitentiaries in the Timis County, Romania – can play a major role in

Romanian prisons by performing one or several of the following: leading prayer groups or meditation, leading religious education classes, leading worship services or religious rituals, mentoring inmates, mentoring the children of inmates, and providing clothing, food, or holiday gifts for inmates' families. The conclusion of the conclusions is that of Francis (2010): society should better invest more in early intervention programmes, before people are incarcerated; thus, there would be lower crime rates, lower recidivism rate, and less people in prison.

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