Special Questions of Inmates’ Reintegration: the Role of NGO’s and Churches

Marta Miklosi

Abstract

In my article I deal with the question of NGOs’ and church’s role in prison. The question of non-state-controlled actors’ gaining ground primarily focused on market actors entering penitentiary systems but this part of inmates’ reintegration has not yet been properly described. While researching the professional literature related to this subject matter I went through several primary sources and original documents. I digested the topic from an international and European point of view as well. After researching the international and European documents I paid a great deal of attention to studying the sources of Hungarian prison reintegration and issues about the role of church. Church programs and opportunities in prison provide great help for inmates who are receptive to those. They contribute to the inmates’ coping with the environment of the penitentiary institution, pastoral activity can help prisoners to accommodate to prison life. This is a crucial question to deal with because social involvement in critical issues such as criminality, prisons, criminals is rather low. Deep prejudice and intolerance may increase after release, and it is difficult for society to accept those having done their time.

Keywords: prison education, correctional education, NGO’s in prison, church in prison, prison chaplain

1 University of Debrecen, Debrecen (Hungary), Email address: miksosimarta@unideb.hu, ORCID: 0000-0001-8088-1116

Introduction

The penitentiary system is a hermetically sealed world in many senses, which is reflected in the organizations’ mechanisms designed for management, operation, and control, as well as their organizational culture. This is why it is practical to examine the appearance of external, non-state-controlled actors within the prison walls. The impact of these organizations on the given penitentiary organization is interesting, and, in relation to that, it is beneficial to investigate the development of penitentiary policy.

In the professional debates of the past decades the question of non-state-controlled actors’ gaining ground primarily focused on market actors entering penitentiary systems. This is why the problem is so severely linked to political theory and ideology, raising the question of the monopoly of violence, a revaluation of the role of the state, and financial ramifications. The intensive gaining ground of market players (private prisons) is primarily characteristic of English-speaking countries, but this operational form also exists in Hungary.

The other focus on non-state-related actors has to do with social organizations active in the penitentiary system. The role and activity of social organizations encompass a much wider range than those of market players, and they have several hundreds of years of history. In the past decades, however, there has been a serious change in the financial background of organizations and in the significance of roles filled by the different types of organizations (Somogyvari 2014, 203).

The positive impact on inmates of organizations related to the penitentiary system

To ensure the reintegration of inmates, penitentiary organizations perform several activities that go beyond the framework of classic jurisdiction. In the background of this there is the provision of Act No. CCXL of 2013 which provides: “during the implementation of imprisonment it must be ensured that the convicts’ self-esteem, personality, sense of responsibility are developed, and thus they can prepare for an individual life after their release meeting the requirements of society” (§83 (7) of Act No. CCXL of 2013). To reach these objectives the penitentiary system must “map” outside reality and organize imprisonment so that by carrying out tasks the system may get closer to the declared objectives: the fair and humane treatment of the inmates and via this the promotion of reintegration (Garami 1997, 74).

“Social organizations” is an umbrella term including NGOs (also an umbrella term in its own right), meaning classic civil organizations, private foundations, associations, various federations such as trade unions, professional employers’ organizations, as well as public foundations and non-profit business entities. But in a broader sense the term social organizations also includes churches, prison missions, church and legal entities, subsidizers and political parties. From the perspective of their role in penitentiary
activity, the most relevant are the organizations of social control, churches, trade unions, and classic NGOs (Somogyvari 2014, 203).

These organizations play an important part in operating the system in spite of the fact that penitentiary institutions as state-owned organizations have the staff, infrastructure, and budget to meet their own legal responsibilities. This has two reasons. Firstly, the staff is insufficient, and often professionals with the necessary qualifications and experience are in short supply, therefore, cooperating organizations provide supplementary resources. The other reason is that even in the case of an ideal situation there are some tasks that organizations not bound by administrative obligations and professional routine can do better (Garami 1997, 74).

Civil organizations can serve a social function that builds a bridge between political decision-makers and social groups of professional policies. Social organizations are able to counterbalance administrative dysfunctions, in many cases acting more effectively, because they can profit from their social capital and experience. A further benefit is that these organizations are not bound by limits related to scope and jurisdiction, which are characteristic of the public sector. In addition, they are more efficient and flexible than bureaucratic state organizations with regard to time management, professional matters, as well as being able to provide alternatives to state policy (Somogyvari 2014, 67). We may establish that the state expects non-state-related actors to assume roles that the network of professional institutions cannot expend appropriately upon or cost-efficiently intervene in.

**The penitentiary institution, the convict, and the social organization**

The three parties of the cooperation, the penitentiary institution, the convict, and the social organization, work by different interests and rules, thus it is important to harmonize their activities. The prison provides the conditions, the organization attempts to meet its goals set in its articles of association, and the inmate utilizes the opportunities according to their own decisions (Garami 1997, 75).

Concerning organizing activities there are several differences between penitentiary organizations and NGOs. Civil organizations carry out the objectives set in their own articles, of which only one specifies the management of inmates; if, however, they wish to deal with inmates, then the scope of activities is predefined. In contrast, the responsibilities of penitentiary institutions are prescribed by laws, and they are not limited to partial tasks. The penitentiary system has tasks with all inmates, and it cannot choose between persons. The organizations’ articles of association in general provide that they intend to deal with inmates and not assist the prison, even if that indirectly influences the penitentiary work, too (Garami 1997, 75).
Apart from the religious needs of inmates, the organizations also meet cultural and learning demands, as well as carrying out charitable activities, not to mention the activities of some organizations defending human rights.

The process of developing cognitive social competence contributes to the resocialization of persons serving their custodial sentence (Ruzsonyi 2006, 29). Some activities are essential for the reintegration of inmates, facilitating the utilization of skills in the job market. In the framework of education and training in penitentiary institutions these fields must be addressed specially (Novák 2004, Simándi 2017).

It is crucial to ensure for the inmates culture, religious practice, and work, as well as health care and social political care. But the list includes law enforcement activities, too, related to the guarding of inmates, protecting the internal order of the institute and the safety of its environment, the public order (Lorincz and Nagy 1997, 253). The organization may develop special educational programs for their inmates, for instance, to develop key competences or provide self-help trainings for aggression and conflict management, job search, communication, problem solving, assisting life skills, drug prevention, controlling conduct. For the sake of reintegration after discharge it is also important to cooperate with the counselor network and, in the case of homeless inmates, to subsidize the persons released at their own request by contacting organizations which provide housing (cf. Novák 2004, 56).

The community activities operating in the penitentiary system include all those that are omitted from the range of classically “mandatory” in-house activities (education, vocational training, work). These activities have a similarly great impact on the development of inmates, and laws and international requirements and guidelines also demand the performance of these (Czenczer 2008, 312).

Cooperating social, church, and charitable organizations and private entities are prominent in penitentiary activity. There are three groups of contributors: those supporting institutional activity are first and foremost involved in training the inmates and organizing their recreational programs. The second group includes those which provide personal support and help for inmates and those on release. The third category consists of those providing help, financial and moral support to the relatives of inmates (Lorincz and Nagy 1997, 254). In the next chapters I will elaborate the importance of churches and Prison Chaplain Service in penitentiary institutions.

The role of churches and pastors

Domestic and international sources agree that church programs and opportunities in prison provide great help for inmates who are receptive to those. They contribute to the inmates’ coping with the harsh and sometimes inhumane environment of the penitentiary institution, and give them strength (Dammer 2002; Sundt 1997; Szegal 2007; Thomas and Zaitzow 2006, 242).
To understand the central role of the church played in reintegration, we must highlight the contrast between religion and the prison. The latter is always associated with bad and unpleasant events, such as crime and punishment. Religion, on the other hand, is related to good and pleasant things such as the concept of sanctity and self-sacrifice. Inmates are like exiles who have been cast out of society. The instance of understanding carries the promise that with the help of it inmates will be characterized by the adjective “free” instead of “captured, arrested, devoid of freedom” (Clear et al. 1992, 1).

It is a well-known fact that churches cared for criminals for centuries, and made significant attempts to rehabilitate individuals having served prison time as early as the 19th century. The leaders of churches and different denominations, as well as members of missionary or charitable organizations may enter Hungarian penitentiary facilities since the autumn of 1989 (Teleki 2010, 35).

At the start the representatives of denominations took over from one another in the institutions. When, however, they saw the difficulty of the task they shied away from the service because new ministers were not prepared for the new circumstances, and were not familiar with the specificities of the institutions, the population, and how to deal with them (Estok 2002, 5).

It is important to distinguish between prison chaplains’ service and broader religious-based civil organizations. These civil organizations independent from churches are bodies whose members have a religious motivation (Somogyvari 2014, 68). There are four missionary organizations specialized for the support of prisons and inmates: the Hungarian Evangelical Prison Mission, the Hungarian Prison Pastoral Society, the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, and the Hungarian Prison Fellowship (Lorincz and Nagy 1997, 254).

The Hungarian Prison Pastoral Society was established in September 1991. They coordinate and control the work of Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, Methodist, Adventist and other pastors. They protect the rights of spiritual counselors and pastors, teach and distribute Christian culture and a humanist value system and morals in the penitentiary system, as well as create a person-centered perspective in the penitentiary institutions which includes respecting human rights. Their activities focus on two venues. In prison they carry out prison missionary work, caring work based on a humanist value system, reinforcing relationships between the inmates, charitable activity, spiritual care, and the training of correctional staff for pastoral work. Outside the prison they coordinate the entire activity of the prison pastoral activity, organize joint retreats, operate a methodological periodical, and organize trainings (Herczeg 1997, 64).

Pastoral activity can contribute to accommodating to prison life, according to Clear et al. One possibility is to support coping with the emotional distress caused by incarceration, the other is to mitigate the stress of privation experienced in the prison environs. In connection to mitigating emotional burdens caused by incarceration it must be stressed
that although religion is not the only tool assisting the inmate in understanding and processing the causes of their wrongdoings and criminal acts, it is the only tool which can provide a solution (Clear et al. 1992, 4).

Clear et al. emphasize two ways to mitigate the pain of incarceration. The first is to manage the problem of guilt. Apart from the taking away of one's freedom, the most important message of incarceration is to emphasize guilt. Inmates can turn to religion with their desire for relief, as if doing penance for committing the crime. Many convicts do not forgive themselves for doing their crime. The second way is the promise of a new life. Inmates stress that religion has changed them, and they have started a new life as a result. The really deeply religious inmates take the prescriptions of religion seriously, the certainty and calculability of church doctrines is really attractive to them when changing their own uncertain lives, submitting their old lives to the new completely, gaining strength from the change. They sense an active role of God in their lives, which helps them cope with the pain of incarceration (Clear et al. 1992, 5).

Prison pastoral activity has a lot of beneficial impacts on inmates: firstly, in contrast to consultations with psychologists ("mentally ill," "crazy") and counselors ("snitch") it does not result in the disapproval of other inmates, as there is a basic respect towards religion in all convicts without exception. Secondly, consultations with a chaplain mean the offer of an unprejudiced relationship, as the pastor encourages inmates to face their own lives and does not chide them because of their errors, there is no punishment there (Czenczer 2008, 325).

A really interesting and iconic effort for inmates is the prison Cursillo². Prison Cursillo is the same as the Cursillo outside prison, with a few basic differences due to the obvious location and time limitations. Cursillo is a movement recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, it's original full name is "Cursillo de Cristiandad". The word has Spanish origin, meaning a crash course on Christianity. With its help believers, people living far from belief and the church, as well as special believers can consider and experience the Christian perspectives and answers provided to today's questions. It is not a theoretical course nor a traditional retreat and it is best described as an experience. An experience that leads to discover and better live what is fundamental in Christianity. Prison cursillos intend to provide for this with a short, intensive experience within the prison walls for three and half days with collective occasions, presentations, and spiritual retreat. A cursillo is not only for the religious. Cursillos are organized by the Catholic

² Between 26-28 November 2014 the Satoraljaujhely Prison and Correctional Facility was the venue of the first Hungarian prison cursillo, with the participation of 15 inmates and 7 presenters. A cursillo is a spiritual experience, a kind of shock, to participants rather than the gaining of some knowledge, even though there is knowledge involved. The inmate explores a new world. This meeting is nothing else than a personal religious experience. According to some accounts, a cursillo provides joy, makes a person active, and inspires action to better ourselves and our environment. A cursillo may present friendships and new communities, and due to its impacts it may ensure that after release the inmate can reintegrate in society more successfully.
church, but it is mostly presented by secular persons. According to some experiences it is valid without respect to participants’ sex, family situation, denomination, age, qualification, social status, or even their religious belief, and most often than not it generates enthusiasm.

**Prison Chaplain Service**

Decree No. 13/2000 (VII. 14.) of the Minister of Justice gave birth to the Prison Chaplain Service (Baran 1997, 79; Hajdu 2006, 33). The renewed establishment of the service was a significant event in Hungarian correctional institutions. Both churches and the penitentiary system paid attention to creating the conditions ensuring the operation of the prison chaplain service so that the practice of religion would not only remain a constitutional principle but those that used religion as a day-to-day support and guidance could exercise their right to religious practice on a daily basis (Vari 2008, 48). By setting up the prison chaplain service, spiritual care provided to inmates and spiritual life became more organized than before. In 20008 Catholic, 6 Protestant and 1 Judaic chaplains and deacons were employed full-time in some of the penitentiary institutions. In the regional institutions part-time pastors carry out this activity, including 10 Catholic and 5 Protestant ones (Estok 2002, 6).

According to Bizik, prison chaplains carry out 4-8 hours of discreet ecumenical pastoral activity daily, in contrast to which small churches would like to get the inmates to join their own congregation, spending 1-2 hours of spiritual activity in prisons, performing direct and assertive missionary activity. In his opinion, prison chaplains wish to help, know prison circumstances better, while the objective of missions is rather proselytism and they are rather naïve when it comes to the circumstances in the prison. He claims, however, that both structures have positive and negative sides; nonetheless, the way of “missionaries” is not the way of penitentiary chaplains; the right thing is to let both freely perform their activities, supplementing each other (Bizik 2002, 98).

The educational, instructive role of the prison chaplain supplements the traditional educational activities carried out in penitentiary institutions. A prison chaplain has to have psychological stamina well above average. Dealing with inmates requires much more patience, more generosity, and empathy. Psychological stamina rests on the following three pillars: the expertise of the prison chaplain, the potentials of their personality and their personal faith and devotedness, and commitment towards their service. Having these skills and features the prison chaplain may become the educator, the caretaker, and the pastor of their congregation within the penitentiary facility (Vari 2008, 52).

Colleagues of missionary organizations and chaplains carry out versatile activities among the inmates. Prison chaplains are responsible for ensuring that inmates have access to spiritual teaching, counseling and guidance, regardless of the incarcerated people's particular religion, practice or spiritual belief. This person provides spiritual
growth and education programs for incarcerated people. The major tasks of the prison chaplain service are the following: ensuring the practice of religious worship and piety; performing masses, church services, Bible lessons and prayer meetings; spiritual counseling of the individuals and the community; life management and moral education. Moreover, they provide assistance on how to take care of inmates and former inmates after their release as well as their families, how to strengthen their faith, how to build communities, and how to settle the inmates’ family relations, how to solve their personal and social issues. Chaplains counsels them preparing for release, coordinates special programs, such as seminars and family programs and trains volunteers.

Inmates may ask for one-to-one chaplain audience; however, group meetings are much more common, such as spiritual practices, church services with music, preparations before church celebrations, and Bible sessions. As a result of prison chaplain visits the inmates’ psychological well-being, discipline, and self-esteem undergo a positive change due to the meetings and sessions, which may contribute to their subsequent reintegration into society with as little mental and spiritual damage as possible (Lorincz and Nagy 1997, 254; Teleki 2010, 33). A prison chaplain tends to lead the religious congregations of a prison and provide religious counseling to the inmates which is often a high stress job because there may be concerns about health safety.

The chaplain’s activity can be carried out in individual and collective form as well. The inmate may request individual consultation with the chaplain, but collective group consultations such as retreats, musical services, preparations for church holidays, and Bible classes are more popular (Czenczer 2008, 327).

Prison chaplains provide an opportunity for inmates to shape themselves through this activity. According to Bizik, the goal is not to “resolve tensions,” make them “more manageable,” or to ensure “a safety valve”; these are only lucky outcomes but not objectives (Bizik 2002, 97).

It is important to stress that Decree No. 13/2000. (VII. 14.) does not prescribe visiting cells for chaplains, but this is the primary venue of individual and communal spiritual care. The main goal of visiting cells is to announce the occasions of religious practice, and to make personal contact with the inmates (Vari 2008, 53). It is a rule that in penitentiary institutions the inmate can keep contact with the church personality without supervision, which contact may be initiated by each of the parties (§110 (2) of Decree No. 16/2014).

According to Szegal, the direct objective of pastoral activity is to organize the religious life of convicts and manage moral conflicts, thus improving the atmosphere of the prison (Szegal 2007, 32).

As a result of prison chaplains’ visits the positive experiences of inmates can be felt in the psychological air, conduct, and self-esteem of inmates, which ensure that they can
reintegrate in society with as few spiritual injuries as possible (Baran 1997, 80). The main tasks—according to Estok—include “rebuilding the inmates’ moral standing, creating and shaping a real view of humanity based on everlasting rules, that is, influencing morals and ethics positively” (Estok 2002, 7). The presence of a chaplain means the reinforcement of an inner bearing for the inmate, and discussing problems, jointly facing sources of anxiety can help reduce the distress (Bekeffy 2005, 85). Aggression is a frequent problem in prisons: the quenching or significant mitigation of aggressive drives is possible by verbal and Biblical means, singing, and the therapeutic effect of shared spiritual experiences. It is practical, furthermore, to have constructive discussions about the conflicts which have led the inmate to aggression. During this the inmate can experience the cooperative and facilitating attitude of the chaplain and the service community, which may provide help in processing it (Bekeffy 2005, 89).

Another important task of prison chaplains is the education of self-esteem, as it is a generally accepted view in the professional literature that only strong characters can cope with closed institutions and resist repeat delinquency, people who have appropriate self-esteem. The prison chaplain has an important role in balancing out the self-esteem of inmates, a tool of which is a permanent and unprejudiced attention to others (Bekeffy 2005, 90).

Prison pastoral activity is essential for coping with the injuries caused by incarceration and prisonization. Emptiness and existential vacuum are one of the biggest dangers. In this case inmates are overcome by indifference and depression. To evade this the penitentiary system offers several alternatives such as correspondence, telephoning, receiving visitors, short-term leaves, as well as cultural and sports clubs and religious occasions. The task of church events is to assist the inmates in leaving behind the crisis of values (Bekeffy 2005, 91).

The prison chaplain serves in an inculturated environment, existing in a permanently incultured process, that is, in contact with the local culture. As per Vari’s opinion, evangelization is necessary in all extremely incultured environments— including incultured persons themselves. Prison chaplains during evangelization have to face not only incultured persons and environments but also linguistic inculturation (Vari 2008, 52). During inculturation, forms, rules, and rituals of communication, and practical know-how are internalized (Pusztai 2010, 25).

Prison chaplains are in close contact with the supervisors, educators, and prison psychologists, and their cooperation with other prison staff is a priority task. Majzik claims there is some resistance by the staff to the activity of prison chaplains and missions, and suspects an anti-religious attitude behind this (cf. Majzik 1997). Garami, however, emphasizes that the personnel of prisons perform services with disregard to world views. Services must not be influenced either negatively or positively by religious
convictions (Garami 1997, 76). Estok stresses that dealing with the prison population is among high-priority jobs in the prison chaplain’s service (Estok 2002, 9).

The prison chaplains’ job is not possible without the cooperation of supervisors and guards. So that the prison chaplain may get in touch with the convicts this service cannot be neglected, as these officers carry out the majority of penitentiary tasks: guard, supervise, and control the inmates (Vari 2008, 55). It is evident, therefore, that the prison chaplain’s activities present a significant excess burden on the personnel.

In cases where the reintegration officer finds that the inmate needs consultation with a chaplain, they can notify the chaplain. In addition, prison chaplains may make recommendations to the reintegration officer to reward those inmates that regularly attend and actively contribute to the church practices (cf. Hajdu 2006, 36).

Continuous communication with psychologists assists in the pastoral activity of inmates, as the group whose philosophy and working style are closest to those of pastoral service is evidently that of psychologists. In some cases it happens that the prison chaplain has questions about the spiritual treatment of the same clients, which may be discussed without breaching the obligation of confidentiality (Vari 2008, 56).

The accommodation of inmates to the prison takes place in two well-distinguishable ways, on the one hand, coping with problems, on the other, avoiding problematic situations. We can say that a convict can cope with their penitentiary term if they feel they are able to live in captivity without feeling endangered, angry, exposed, or depressed. Avoiding problematic situations means the convict can serve their term not breaking the rules of prison life during the time spent in the institution (Dammer 2002; Clear et al. 2002, 2).

Closing thoughts

Social involvement in critical questions such as criminality, prisons, criminals is rather low. Deep prejudice and intolerance may increase after release, and it is difficult for society to accept those having done their time. Ex-convicts are renounced by the majority of society, they are difficult to welcome back. This prejudice is often so strong as to make it almost impossible, but at least very difficult, to realize the intention of social reintegration and the person discharged is ostracized.

The majority of society keeps their distance from felons, and this lack of trust derives primarily from the lack of information. Therefore, reintegration of those discharged is necessary, and their treatment must be reinforced through the state, church, civil social institutional network.

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3 This includes masses, Christening, weddings, funerary services, and suggestions, advice provided for problems arising during routine work with the population of the prison (Estok 2002, 9).
To reintegrate ex-convicts in society the penitentiary institution needs to broaden its network of relationships with all the state bodies, social, and church organizations and entities that on the basis of state or social entitlement or voluntarily provide assistance to inmates in leading them back to society.

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