

The Religiosity Behind Bars: Forms of Inmate's Religiosity in the Czech Prison System¹

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The Religiosity Behind Bars: Forms of Inmate's Religiosity in the Czech Prison System. The text focuses on the multiple forms of religiosity (based on different types of motivation) of inmates in Czech prisons from the perspective of three groups of respondents: prison inmates, prison guards and representatives of a number of churches. The study is based on an ethnographic study of prisons in the Czech Republic. The data corpus includes qualitative interviews with selected actors in the prison world, material gathered through observations inside prisons and an analysis of the documentation on the Czech penitentiary system. Through this research, we found that the key respondents feel that there is some ambivalence around the religiosity of inmates and that the pragmatic approach many inmates take to faith is becoming a controversial issue. Our research demonstrated that the presence of religiosity of inmates in prison is not really accepted in a clearly positive manner as it may seem at first glance. On the contrary, the presence of it in prisons has become the subject of controversy among its main actors.

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Introduction

Discussions of prison systems are accompanied by conflict, at the heart of which are the recurring questions of how a sentence should be served and what is its actual purpose. The fact remains, however, that the prison system is still a rather unknown social field, judging by the presumptions and myths circulating through society. It is difficult to penetrate and research the prison system in any country (comp. Liebling 1999; Mahon 1997; Waldram 2009), and the Czech Republic is no exception. (Dirga 2016)

Even though prison systems and prison environments have long been studied on the international level – see the classic studies by D. Clemmer (1958), E. Goffman (1961) and G. Sykes (1966), the work of M. Foucault (1995), D. Garland (2001), or contemporary writings by D. Drake (2012), I. Becci (2012), K. Drenkhahn, M. Dudeck, F. Dünkel (2014), Ch. Innes (2015) – there has been little research on this topic when taken the number of persons incarcerated in western countries into consideration. (Wacquant 2002) In the

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Czech Republic, this is even more pronounced: there are only a handful of studies on issues that have to do with the penitentiary system. (cf. Šmausová 1992; Smaus 2003; Nedbálková 2006; Dirga – Hasmanová Marhánková 2014; Dirga et al. 2015)

Studying religion in prisons is an even more specific issue. (Beckford – Gilliat 1998; Furseth 2001; Beckford et al. 2005) Ultimately, in relation to penal issues the question about religion (on the general level) is what role it plays in prisons in late modern societies and what forms of religiosity may be identified with the actors of the prison world. (Comp. Becci 2012, 2015; Fabretti 2015)

This kind of question has not yet been studied in the Czech Republic and we wanted at least partially to fill in this gap. This article thus explores the role and significance of religiosity of inmates in the Czech prison system. The assumption behind our research is that religiosity functions in prisons as a type of social lens through which it is possible to look at, analyze, and understand the wider context of how prisons as such function. For this reason we defined the following research question: what are the forms of religiosity of inmates in Czech prisons and what is the way the key actors of the Czech prison world perceive the religiosity of inmates.

Our reasoning is based on ethnographic research carried out in Czech prisons, selected actors in the prison world were interviewed and information was gathered through observation inside prisons. The following chapters focus on the history of prison system strategies in the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia before and after 1989 and in particular on what place religion³ occupies in a particular prison system.

The transformation of religion and religiosity in the history of the Czech prison system

The study of religion in post-communist countries represents a complex field of research. (Borowik 2007; Pickel – Sammet 2012; Pollack et al. 2012; Tomka 2011) Let's look briefly at the role religion played within the prison system in the past. It was in the middle of the 19th century that religion acquired an important role in the correctional process because it is around this time that the prison theory began leaning toward the idea that people in prison should be given an education and that prisons should be made more humane. Religious

³ We are indeed aware of the fact that the following chapter targets mainly the transformations of religion as an institution, which might, at the very first sight, seem as a deflection from the research question, targeting the forms of religiosity of inmates. We believe, nevertheless, that describing (at least into the extent relevant to this text) the status of religion within the penitentiary system will help to better frame issues related to the very religiosity of inmates: our reasoning is based on the assumption that the status of religion within the penitentiary system influences religiosity of inmates since it creates structural conditions governing the behavior of the actors. (Comp. Caldwell 1956; Becci 2012)

education was therefore made compulsory and inmates had the right to read religious texts and participate in religious services. (Synek 2013)

On October 28, 1918, Czechoslovakia was founded as an independent state. It adopted the existing prison model established under the Austrian Monarchy, but also began to transform it. Religious services and education were still provided in prisons on a regular basis but attendance was made optional. This development changed during World War II when the prison system primarily served the purposes of the German secret police. (Kýr 2012) Even during this period, however, religious services, including regular mass, continued to be provided.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany another attempt to alter and establish a new prison system emerged, this time based on democratic principles. This effort, however, was interrupted in 1948, when a new penal system was set up that reflected the Soviet model, the primary function of which was to serve as a repressive tool of the totalitarian state apparatus, maintain order, and carry out mass terror. (Kornai 1992; Hanuš 2005) The authorities consequently sought systematically to destroy religion and religious services were slowly pushed out of prisons. (Synek 2013)

With the political changes ushered in 1989 there emerged an effort to restore the prison system in a manner suited to the needs of a democratic state. The main objective was to eliminate the consequences of the previous regime's actions and to introduce a new system. The new concept was largely based on the European prison rules, which define religion as an institutionalized actor in the prison system. (The Czech Prison Service 2005, 2006)

From a legal perspective, the right of all persons serving a prison sentence while incarcerated (i.e. to attend religious services) was established in 1990. Various church organizations and associations began to get involved in the re-education of inmates. In 2008 the Prison Service of the Czech Republic entered into an agreement on spiritual services with the Czech Bishops' Conference and with the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic. This agreement governs the way religious subjects act in Czech prisons. (The Czech Prison Service 2008) Taking the aforementioned into consideration, it may seem that religion, from legislative point of view, does play an important role in the current Czech Republic's prison system and that it is given the space to do so.

The penitentiary system in the post-communist Czech Republic differs from the former political regime by declaration. We were also interested in what forms the religiosity⁴ of inmates assumes during imprisonment in current

⁴ For us the term „religiosity“ signs a readiness to take account of religious matters in all their dimensions – feelings, beliefs and practices. (Bréchon 2007)

Czech penitentiary system. Furthermore, we wanted to know how these forms of religiosity are looked at by prison guards and by representatives of the chaplain service⁵, both of whom form an integral part of the religious interaction.

Theory, research area and used methods

We have based our study on two key concepts. Talking about the prison environment, we have worked with the deprivation theory concept. Prison inmates, no doubt, do suffer feelings of deprivation (“pains of imprisonment”): due to their imprisonment, they are not able to fulfill a whole range of needs related to freedom, autonomy of decision-making, freedom of communication, etc. and they are looking for alternative ways that would allow them to do this. (Sykes 1966) According to the basic stipulations of the deprivation theory, an individual suffering some kind of deprivation is trying to compensate and religiosity represents one of the standard forms of compensation. (Dix-Richardson – Close 2002: 101) Religiosity may serve as a goal but it can also represent a tool to reduce the suffered deficiency. (O'Connor – Pallone 2002) In other words, the deprivation theory assumes that religion represents a plausible framework because prison is the place of experience of crises in larger context and religiosity is a way to escape prison a way to connect with a protective community. (Comp. f. e. Becci 2012)

The second theoretical framework we have worked with is based on the work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger. Like her, we see religion as an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which an individual and collective sense of belonging to a line of believers is produced, developed and controlled. (Hervieu-Léger 1987: 24) Having opted to work in frame of this theory, we use one of the three basic models used in the sociology of religion. In order to explain the transformation of religion, the sociology of religion uses in most cases one of the following three models: (a) secularization theory (Bruce, Dobbelaere), (b) the economic market model (Finke, Iannaccone, Stark,), or (c) individualization theory (Luckmann, Davie, Hervieu-Léger). And advocates of the individualization theory primarily strive to conceptualize religion as a specific form of conviction influenced by the kind of bonds that tie individuals to their communities, which, in turn, is formed, for example, by the intergenerational (non) transfer of tradition, i.e. collective memory. (cf. Hervieu-Léger 2000) In other words, the individualization theory assumes that

⁵ The perspectives of both the prison guards and the Prison Service representatives are introduced in order to be able to triangulate the view of the prison inmates' religiosity, the inmates' perspective being, of course of primary importance.

the process of modernization will not lead to a decline in the social significance of religion, but will change its social forms.

Hervieu-Léger, in relation to Thomas Luckmann work, assumes that individualized religiosity is often expressed by the means of a phenomenon called bricolage. Bricolage is not only an expression of individual's personality, it is also a result of the structural environment. In other words, self-validation of one's opinions in particular difficult situations occurring during the life cycle has to be accompanied by an institutional form of validation, or, in yet other words, the impact of structures on individual acts and decisions is mediated by social interaction, which creates significance. We thus believe that in extreme situations (such as imprisonment), significance can be generated only in frame of the Durkheimian presumption according to which individual beliefs appeal to social forces. (Durkheim 2002) The prisoners we have worked with having been raised in an environment primarily hostile or indifferent to religion, they need to, in order to achieve their religious formation, be granted some validation: without this validation, it is improbable that the religious community protects them.

As for the methodology, we decided to apply the ethnographic method to our research subject as it offers us the chance to explore in detail the perspective of actors in a terrain that it is difficult to penetrate. (cf. Sykes 1966; Clemmer 1958; Drake 2012; Becci 2012; Dirga et al. 2015)

We collected the data in the period between January 2014 and August 2014 in C-type prisons⁶. We contacted men in four C-type prison establishments in the Czech Republic. The main reason for doing the research in C-type prisons was that in our opinion they best reflect the most characteristic features of the Czech penitentiary system: C-type prisons are widespread within the prison system and they are where the largest proportion of sentences are served⁷.

We carried out 14 qualitative in-depth interviews with prison guards working in four selected C-type prisons in the Czech Republic. These respondents differed by age (ranging from 21 to 48 years) and by the number of years they had been working as prison guards (ranging from 3 to 18). We implemented a total of five interviews with prison management representatives and four interviews with representatives of the Ecumenical Prison Service (EPS). Each of the interviews was about 90 minutes long⁸.

⁶ The Czech penitentiary system comprises (21. 1. 2016) four main types of prisons for adult persons: Type A (minimum security), type B (medium security), type C (high security), type D (maximum security).

⁷ Source: Prison Service of the Czech Republic, quoted as of August 30, 2014, <http://vscr.cz/generalni-reditelstvi-19/informacni-servis/rychla-fakta/>.

⁸ The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

The most problematic aspect of the research was obtaining a permit to enter the prisons in order to contact prison inmates. In order to do this, we used our social networks and managed to obtain permits to enter two above-mentioned prisons. We spent a total of 7 days, 10 hours per day, inside the two prisons carrying out the interviews and making observations⁹.

We were also given permission to carry out interviews with 20 inmates. The sentences of the inmates we interviewed ranged from three years to life imprisonment. A room was reserved where the staff (special educationalists or psychologists) escorted the selected respondents so we could talk to them¹⁰. All the participants in the research agreed to take part on the condition that we guarantee both the respondents and the prison establishments absolute anonymity¹¹. We believe that, having overcome the initial bureaucratic and methodological difficulties associated with obtaining permission to enter the prison establishments and contact the appropriate respondents, we were able to gather data that are quite unique in the Czech context. We completed the data gathered through interviews and observation with an analysis of documents (development plans, the Contract on Spiritual Services, European prison rules, etc.) on the penitentiary system in the Czech Republic. The data we gathered were analyzed according to the principles of thematic analysis (Ezzy 2002) and grounded theory. (Alasuutari 1995; Charmaz 2006)

Conducting research in prison is also very demanding from an ethical point of view and there are a number of risks associated with such research, which we tried to avoid by adopting the contextual approach based on reflective assessment of research steps. (Guillemin – Gillam 2004)

In the following part of the study, we will focus on the views of key prison actors and present the opinions of prison guards, chaplains and representatives of churches on the general issue of religiosity of inmates in the Czech penitentiary system. We shall also discuss how inmates themselves regard religiosity while in prison.

⁹ We obtained a special permit to visit all the sectors of the above-mentioned prisons and carry out observations inside prison cells, on premises reserved for prison staff, in the dining halls, in the workplaces, and in areas set aside for sports activities or hobbies. We also participated, after being given consent by all the participating inmates, in a religious service and in group therapeutic sessions.

¹⁰ Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and we talked with our respondents alone, no one else was present in the room. We were not able to record the interviews with the prison inmates for security reasons. So instead we made notes and then elaborated on these notes at the end of each interview. Because we were granted just a limited amount of time in which to conduct each interview, we drew up a topic guide and referred to it in the course of the semi-structured interviews. We adjusted the order of the questions and themes to the concrete situation and interview.

¹¹ Everyone who agreed to participate in the research gave us their informed consent.

Results: Atheist, sceptical prison guards

During the communist regime, prison guards could, in fact, be seen as the personification of violence directed at religiously-oriented inmates. After 1989, many prison guards lost their jobs for having treated prisoners inappropriately. (Schwartz – Schwartz 1989) Many, however, retained their positions and are still working as prison guards, though the numbers of guards has decreased. Although, on the general level, the position of religion and its role may have changed on a formal level in society as a whole, but little of significance has altered in how prison guards view religiosity of inmates.

Prisons remain a specific universe, one in which religiosity of inmates is now accepted because the prison management says it must be, but it is still not seen as something that has a natural role there. When we asked the prison guards participating in our research about their own religiosity, they expressed indifference to our question. Although spiritual services in prisons are potentially open also to prison staff (The Czech Prison Service 2011: 9), pastoral services in prisons are evidently provided mainly to inmates.

'I am definitely not interested in religion and I have no relationship to it. I'd say that guards in general are not religious and that religion means nothing to them. In fact, I don't think I know anyone, I mean, I don't know any guards who are religious.' (Pavel, prison guard)

Chaplains state that prisons guards do not take advantage of these services. The most common explanation for this is the guards' lack of interest, which they associate with what they assume to be the attitude of majority society to religion.

I think that, in this country, religion is on the decline. For a lot of people, religion doesn't mean anything. The Czech people are not very religious and religion has no great significance here in general. When I compare this to Germany or Poland, it's very different. In this country, no one really guides us towards religion. I'm not religious either and I don't know many religious people and that's why I'm not interested in these things. (František, prison guard)

The main explanation for the lack of interest among prison staff in religiosity seems to have to do with the indifferent or even hostile view that majority

society has of religion. This outlook is also reflected in how churches usually rank among the least trusted institutions in surveys on trust in institutions¹².

It quickly became evident that none of the guards interviewed was religious or able to name a colleague who is, or was. The guards know that correctional facilities offer pastoral care and employ prison chaplains, but they do not use these services. The reason is that they conceive pastoral care as a service intended primarily for inmates. The guards not only declared that they asserted their own total lack of interest in religiosity, they were also skeptical about the religiosity of inmates and its benefit to them.

I think that it (religiosity) has no ability to make someone good. I think instead that they get into it/take it up because they want to get early parole. They're just acting, they're just pretending that they're good now and want to go home. Maybe that's not true of everyone, but for most that's how it works. (Petr, prison guard)

The guards not only expressed doubt about the positive effect of religiosity on the life of inmates, they also repeatedly questioned the genuineness of the inmates' faith and interest in spiritual matters and in the service offered by the EPS.

We have detected that prison guards take an ambivalent or even skeptical view of the faith of prison inmates. On the one hand, they acknowledge that service offered by the EPS has a place in and is an integral part of the prison system. On the other hand, however, they see religiosity as a pragmatic tool that inmates make use of to gain various advantages. The guards often described participation in religious activities as an 'image management' tool used by inmates when applying for early parole. Prison chaplains adamantly rejected the idea that inmates are only using religiosity for strategic purposes.

The guards also mentioned another reason why inmates participate in religious services, which is the need to get away from the monotony of everyday life in prison. Some of the prison guards identified religious events as opportunities for inmates to meet each other to get together for the purpose of transferring information and goods to inmates located in other wards of the prison building. They suggested that religious events offer inmates an occasion to receive small treats, such as coffee and sweets, provided by the chaplains. The chaplains, however, strictly reject this claim.

To sum up, prison guards today no longer see religion as the enemy of the people the way they did in the communist period, they tolerate the presence of

¹² The Czech population, compared to other Euro-Atlantic countries, seems to be a less trusting nation when it comes to trust in churches. Only one-third of the Czech population today trust churches. (Hamplová 2013)

religiosity in the prison environment as they are required to do so by management, but they regard it as insignificant and are skeptical of its purpose. This surprised us in a way because the other groups of respondents (prison chaplains, prison inmates) take a much more textured and less clear-cut view of the inmates' religiosity. This led us to ask whether the ethos of the penitentiary system is still influenced by the ethos that was introduced during communist rule.

Results: Prison chaplains and their attitudes

The Ecumenical Prison Chaplaincy (EPC) has worked in prisons and detention facilities for over twenty years, having become an integral part of the penitentiary system quite soon after the 1989 revolution. However, its formal integration was only recently finalized; therefore, its significance role remains largely misunderstood. The statements chaplains made in our interviews indicate that they have encountered a whole range of difficulties that, on a general level, can be summarized as follows: (a) the work is very demanding and the number of prison chaplains is limited, (b) the 'return on investment' is very low and inmates rarely stick to their faith after they are released, (c) no long-term integration programs are offered to former prison inmates, whether they are religious or not, and (d) the guards try to make their work more difficult.

We noted above that prison chaplains reject the idea that prison inmates only participate in religious services or activities organized by the EPS for pragmatic purposes. The chaplains repeatedly stated their view that inmates turn to faith in an effort to find a new way of life or in the hope that their faith will later help them avoid recidivism.

The chaplains refuted the claim that inmates participate in religious services for pragmatic reasons by pointing out that participation in religious services and other activities organized by the EPS has no influence on parole decisions.

'I can say that I am, to put it lightly, allergic to the word "pragmatic". (...) Prison inmates, of course, do many things to achieve certain goals. For instance, they wash the floor and in doing so they make a terrible waste of water because they want to get a positive evaluation. But they don't get any positive evaluation from us, it is not an advantage for them that would help them to be released early.' (Šimon, prison chaplain)

The chaplains also rejected the claim that inmates participate in religious activities to overcome their boredom or to exchange information and material goods to or from other inmates or even from the chaplain.

Gradually, however, we found that prison chaplains we interviewed are aware of the issues relating to the doubts surrounding inmates' participation in

religious services and that they themselves are also somewhat skeptical of what inmates do and say in relation to religiosity. We would like to illustrate this by describing events that took place during one of the religious services we participated in. This service was attended by 8 inmates and a chaplain. As soon as the chaplain entered the chapel, the inmates rose from the spots they had been assigned to by the prison guard and crowded around the chaplain, asking him for things that he had allegedly promised to bring them during the last service. He rebuffed these attempts and started the mass. He opened by saying: "... for those of you who have not been here before or who are here again after a long absence..." These words tell us that prisoners tend to attend services irregularly but do not tell us anything about the nature of their religiosity. We get a more nuanced picture of this from what we observed during the service. The inmates barely participated in the ceremony (the singing, responses, the various actions performed during the mass). Out of 8 participants, only one uttered the responses and sang and was mocked by the others for doing so. This led the chaplain to repeatedly interrupt the ceremony and call for quiet. Those seated at the back of the room browsed through and exchanged erotic pictures and magazines. One of the inmates was tearing pages out of a Bible and crumpling them up. Everything culminated when the chaplain asked everyone to stand and called on everyone to reflect saying: "Let's think about why we have gathered here today..." One of the convicts immediately stood up and said: "Let's not play around, we're here so you can give us coffee, cigarettes and biscuits."

It is of course impossible to formulate any general conclusions from what we observed in just one service or to assume that something like this happens at every religious service or event in every prison. Chaplains, however, did not see the (possibly) pragmatic nature of inmates' faith as the most serious problem; for them there were two far more serious issues. The first is that, after their release, inmates de facto stop living a religious life.

'And there are these cases where a person is baptized and starts from scratch after being released, and it doesn't help him at all, he doesn't hurry to church to keep company with religious people, instead he sticks with the same company he was in before and that's it. And he can only continue his religion in prison again. So I don't want to overestimate the strength of inmates' religious motivation.' (Hynek, prison chaplain)

The chaplains cited several reasons why prisoners no longer practice their religiosity after release. One is that there are no long-term integration programmes targeting ex-prisoners; in other words, post-penitentiary care is unsatisfactory. Cases of successful integration are almost always somehow

connected to the charisma and efforts of a specific person, and there are no systematic solutions in place.

The second, and persistent, problem is the relationship between prison guards and prison chaplains. According to our respondents' statements, it is clear that the guards accept the presence of chaplains only because they have to. The chaplains, on the other hand, repeatedly indicated that working in prisons they are often put in a position where they are fearful for their safety and an awareness of the difficulty involved in trying to cooperate with both guards and inmates.

Chaplains admit that their position within the prison system has improved. They related this improvement to the increase in the education level of prison guards and to the fact that the guards and managers who worked in prisons in the communist era are now beginning to retire. All the same, they point out that religious inmates are still stigmatized, even though the guards do not harass them like they did in the communist era.

'They search them quite thoroughly, sometimes you could call it a battle, I'd be waiting at the gate for two hours to be let in and then the inmates had to undress and squat if they wanted to participate in an event, and when they were leaving, undress again and squat, and they grew sick of that and didn't come back. This has stopped now; we don't go through such things anymore.' (Šimon, prison chaplain)

If there has been an improvement in the way the guards treat religious inmates, it is more likely to be found on a personal level or to have been initiated by management. The quality of the relationship between guards and prisoners also contaminates the relationship between chaplains and guards. The guards' statements show us why they oppose religiosity within prisons. The chaplains stated that the guards choose not to cooperate with them not because they are atheists or because they are suspicious that the inmates have just pragmatic motives for practicing religion, but simply because it makes their jobs easier.

'One volunteer who is now working as a chaplain is a former guard and he said that the entire problem is very prosaic (...) it is far easier not to do anything than to do something... he said, for instance, that when someone wanted to participate in an activity that we organized and the guards didn't feel like escorting him, they checked him once, checked him twice, checked him a third time, and the fourth time he didn't apply.' (Patrik, prison chaplain)

Currently, prison guards also to some degree mistrust chaplains. This level of mistrust has allegedly diminished since the formal introduction of chaplain

services (1998), whereby chaplains were in fact accorded the same rights as other employees of the Prisons Services. But the distrust has not disappeared altogether and the chaplains mentioned that they are still harassed by both guards and prison inmates, although not as severely as before.

The position of EPS/EPC in the post-communist Czech prison system has gradually become more stable, but it is not yet clear whether it has beneficial effects. There are prisons where the influence and benefits of pastoral care have been made demonstrably apparent. For example, one prison turned one entire floor of its space into a ward for religious inmates and for inmates interested in spiritual matters, but this is a unique project in the Czech prison system.

On the other hand, it must be said that matters related to the prison system are not a priority for the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy. They represent just one of many issues it has to deal with. The reason is the long-term drop in the level of declared religiosity in the Czech Republic and the intergenerational transfer of this (Hamplová 2013), which is a phenomenon that has repercussions in a lack of staff to provide pastoral care in prisons and other institutions. At the same time, there appear to be conflicts amongst prison chaplains themselves over responsibilities and personnel policies.

And now, what's happened is that all of a sudden it's become evident that Mr. XY, who is responsible for prison care in the Czech Bishops' Conference, in an official way, is not able to reach an agreement on anything with Mr. XY, who is responsible for the prison care in a particular diocese. And I'm standing there in between them, and I'm supposed to settle it. One of them is completely opposed to the head prison chaplain and the other is absolutely on her side. And I find that it's impossible. They just stick to their opinions and it's just impossible. So I said, well, okay, but it's not worth it to get involved too much and I quit the prison council because in the area of prison care, oh my, there are other issues. People just want to be somewhere and they want to have their existence ensured. And now this Válková (the Czech ex-Minister of Justice who recalled the Head Director of Prisons) with the new Head Director. It's incredible and they can't come to an agreement. So I wrote an email to them that in these conditions I really, I'm sorry, but I really cannot continue to be a member of the council. (...) Let the brothers deal with it as they can, because this evangelical keeps arguing, and it's not just money that's the problem, because he won't step aside, he won't budge. It's a long story and it's not one worth telling. (Hynek, a chaplain)

To sum up the position of the prison chaplains that we interviewed and the role that (in their view) religiosity plays in the prison system: from the point of view of the chaplains, there has been a significant improvement in the situation in relation to the prison management and to the guards. What is lacking,

however, according to the chaplains, is wise and conscious moral leadership to lend the appropriate support to prison chaplain services.

Results: Religiosity among Czech prison inmates

After speaking to a number of prison guards and prison chaplains, we found that the main issue, in fact, is the question of whether the religiosity of prisoners is or is not driven by pragmatic or utilitarian motives¹³. We therefore made this issue a key theme in our interviews with the inmates.

In prison, religion is very popular among the inmates. A lot of people are interested in it but there are only a few true believers. Yet there are those who truly believe, I myself am a religious person, for example, and I am really interested in the faith, but most of the inmates I know or I meet during services are acting purely on pragmatic motives and are not interested in the faith. They know nothing about it. (Bořivoj, an inmate)

This answer characterizes the perspective of most of the interviewees: inmates are interested in religious activities, but the general view is that they are interested for pragmatic reasons, not for the reasons of faith itself. The inmates themselves confirmed what the guards said about the pragmatic character of their religiosity. The testimonies we got from the inmates refer to the material advantages that can be obtained from participating in religious activities.

I know a lot of inmates who take part in services in order to get something from the chaplain because they know that the chaplain will bring them something in good faith and they are using him. Sometimes he brews some coffee or tea for them, he gives them communion wine to drink or this wafer that he has there. And I've him bring magazines for them or a book and so on. (Martin, an inmate)

The respondents' testimonies, however, might also be questioned. Some of the information they gave is mediated, hearsay, based on what 'someone said'.

¹³ It is not our aim here to determine the degree of authenticity and the quality of prisoners' faith. Even religious people outside prisons, of course, can in many situations be seen to be acting pragmatically, with religiosity perceived as a means to reach pragmatic goals. However, in order to be able to reach a conclusion in an academic perspective and to be able to assess the religiosity in prisons, we set the criterion of active participation in religious services, the participation being defined not just on the basis of pure attendance numbers at religious services but also on the basis of the statements of chaplains and inmates, who described to us whether they participate in religion services and to what extent. Furthermore, we monitored their basic knowledge of the church teachings. In other words, we define the pragmatic religiosity as a type of behavior, which, in frame of a collision of discourses, is governed by an instrumental calculation only, without aspiring to the salvation of one's soul (adopting the normative aspects, even though through the strongly individualized, "bricolage", form). In these cases, we qualified the behavior as purely purposive, which creates the division line between purpose and non-purpose oriented faith (that we use in our arguing).

It seems very unlikely, for instance, that inmates would have an opportunity to drink communion wine on any occasion other than during communion.

The material benefits that the inmates attempt to get from the chaplain are really just small things, such as small treats or things that make it easier to communicate with their family, such as paper, a pen, or a stamp. Besides material goods, however, inmates can obtain another kind of advantage by participating in religious activities, one that could be referred to as 'social benefits'. These primarily involve things like a change in the routine of prison life, the opportunity to be offered a specific platform for meetings, or the fact that participation in religious activities may become part of a positive impression management strategy.

Look, do you think that all the inmates who take part in the services are religious? Well, they definitely aren't. Most of them do it to meet other inmates who they need to talk to but have no way to meet normally. That's why they get escorted to the service and there they can meet. And then they don't listen to the chaplain at all, they just talk among themselves. That's where they pass information to each other, do business or exchange things that they need. Really, what it is, is a place where you can meet others. (Štěpán, an inmate).

In other words, the fact that the prison chaplains deny that some of the inmates may be taking part in religious services and other religious activities in order to get released early in no way alters the fact that some of the prisoners really see this as a possibility and act accordingly. And even in cases where participation in religious services and spiritual meetings is not used as a means to get early parole, the occasion is still viewed as an opportunity to exchange information or things that are not easy to obtain in prison.

The authors of this text had a personal experience with this. We had already described a particular religious service during which we noticed, except of what we had already said, the following: right after entering the chapel, the inmates began forming groups, talking to each other, and exchanging small objects such as glasses, magazines, cigarettes, etc. We had also said that some hurried over to the chaplain, asking him to give them things he had promised to bring. As mentioned above, we only participated in one service and when we asked the chaplains whether this was a typical behavior, they said that it was not.

Based on the testimonies of inmates and on our observation of the service, it appears that the perspective of the prison guards was the one that was confirmed: the inmates for the most part take a rather pragmatic view of religiosity, they primarily see it as a way to obtain certain types of material and social benefits. Their approach to religious activities is thus rather pragmatic.

The representatives of prison management share this view. When we interviewed them, they mentioned the phenomenon of pragmatic faith and said that it is a problem they have been trying to solve but without success so far.

We (the prison management) are aware of it, we know that most of the inmates participate in the services because the chaplain gives them something. That's common. We are trying to prevent this by telling the chaplains not to give the inmates anything, because, at any rate, they're not even allowed to do it, but we know that it's happening anyway. (Jaroslav, a prison management representative)

The phenomenon of pragmatic religiosity, however, does not reflect the attitude to religiosity of the entire prison inmate population during their time in prison. Some of those whom we spoke to insisted that their encounter with religiosity in prison had changed their life. The vast majority of religious inmates that we interviewed were not religious before they went to prison; it is there that they converted. Inmates who had converted while in prison see religiosity as something that can help them change their personality, to move away from the kind of life they led before going to prison. This phenomenon, on the other hand, confirms what we were told by the prison chaplains: faith in prison represents hope and a way of living a different kind of life. An important aspect of faith among those prisoners who converted or who were concentrating on religiously-oriented behavior was the fact that they accepted their guilt. What we have found interesting was the fact that it was mostly prisoners who were given long sentences who were inclined to convert.

I converted during the time I've been serving in prison. It was such a terrible shock for me to get a life sentence that, for a long time, I wasn't able to deal with it and was trying to find a way to do that, which I finally found in faith. Faith means everything to me now. (Milan, an inmate, life sentence)

Faith, according to what the converted inmates said, is the only way they have been able to get through the difficult process of accepting guilt. Those convicts who have accepted their guilt have been seeking a path to forgiveness.

The testimony of our respondents shows that the inmates have their own hybrid and syncretic way of processing religious concepts and practices, even if this occurs in the area of opinions or practice. As we have already pointed out in the theoretical part of this paper, the sociology of religion calls this *bricolage* (Lyon 2000): inmates combine various elements of faith, practices and loyalty to various religious opinions and positions that very often contradict each other. Bricolage, however, is also somehow limited: elements that may be used to define/shape one's individual form of religiosity are rather scarce and depend,

to a large extent, on resources available in the particular setting (such as, for example, the denomination of chaplains, the frequency of their visits in the prison, type of religious literature or information available, etc.). The above goes in line with Daniele Hervieu-Léger according to whom bricolage is not only an expression of individual's personality but also a result of the structural environment. At this point, we need to emphasize that 'bricolage' is a strategy regularly applied not only by prison inmates but by entire populations that have become very individualized. (Hamplová 2013) In prison, however, there are very few opportunities to create a do-it-yourself religiosity: intellectual sources are scarce and the variety of practices limited. Inmates who employed a bricolage strategy expressed their intention and will to attend services provided by chaplains from various churches, although prisons only cooperate with Christian denominations. When talking to us, the inmates all confirmed that they did not feel a tie to a single church but believed in the faith as such, i.e. in the faith in general, and that it is not important to them what particular churches teach.

I believe in faith and religion as such, I do not belong to one faith and I visit all (the chaplains). I am tolerant in this. I don't mind any faith. I stick to whatever I like and I don't pay attention to whatever I don't agree with. (Kamil, an inmate, 11 years)

While we were observing the inmates and comparing their behavior with their statements, we discovered that their approach to religiosity could be succinctly summarized by the metaphor that Josef Schumpeter applied to mass unemployment (quoted according to Ulrich Beck 2004: 146)¹⁴: Mass unemployment is like a bus in which the long-term unemployed remain in their seats and those facing short-term unemployment take turns getting on and off. We suggest that the study of the religiosity of inmates reveals a similar situation. True believers are continuously interested in religious activities within the prison establishment and 'remain in their seats', while in the meantime those whose approach to religion appears more pragmatic experience short episodes of religiousness and then 'get off the bus' after riding it for some time and leave their seats for others to take. Those who take turns getting on and off see religiosity simply as a way of obtaining various social or material benefits (what we term 'pragmatic faith'). Inmates who see religiosity as an aid to help them find a path to a new life consider faith to be a key aspect of their

¹⁴ We use the bus metaphor just to illustrate the persisting attitude of prison inmates to the faith. We are not trying to compare unemployment and faith.

prison experience, without which, in their own words, they would be unable to find their way out of the vicious circle of their previous life.

And Josef Schumpeter's metaphor may be further elaborated, the bus representing institutionalized religion, drivers representing chaplains and driving the bus in shifts representing chaplains of different religions. The bus has only the front door (it can be used to get both on and off). According to what the actors told us, it works as follows: those who do not travel far stay close to the driver, talk to him and try to make him interested in what they have to say. They ask about the trip, how far it is and what they may see in the final destination (historical monuments, places to eat, etc.). Having gotten off the bus, however, they hardly ever use the information they were provided.

Those, however, who are condemned to a longer trip (provided that they do get on the bus) usually dwell further from the driver, helping themselves to information (various leaflets, information on follow-up connections, offered hot and cold drinks, etc.) provided during the trip (the length of it taken into consideration, they have enough time to read through). They are aware of the fact that they have the possibility to sit closer to the driver, which, however, they do not do because it's so busy around him (those who are getting on and off want to talk), preferring to remain seated on the back of the bus. These passengers organize their time according to offer available in the materials and according to their consideration and needs.

In other words (without metaphors): based on the interviews with our respondents, it is possible to create a typology of religiosity in Czech prisons, based on various approaches and motivations governing the interest to join activities related to religion. The prison inmates we interviewed (and the forms of their religiosity), may, in principle, be divided into two groups.

The group number one is comprised of inmates who see religiosity as a way to individually address the issue of guilt and as a means to change their life or re-orient it the hostile environment of prisons (see mainly those who are to serve very long or even life sentences). These people do not necessarily use the services offered by various Church organizations operating in the prison world. The second group comprises of people who use religiosity as a) a tool allowing to meet other inmates, b) pastime (in relation to points a) and b) see also the notion of "pragmatic faith"), c) a tool to protect themselves (see the mention about a floor in a prison house reserved to religious inmates).

The above strategies (and this concerns mainly the second group of inmates) may be explained through the deprivation theory. (Sykes 1966) Religiosity is used as a tool to compensate for various forms of deprivation. (Comp. Dix-Richardson – Close 2002; O'Connor – Pallone 2002) Prison represents, to a large extent but not totally, a closed system separated from the surrounding society (Goffman 1961), clearly defined by specific rules (Jones – Schmid

2000) and lacking resources (and, as such, featuring a specific culture of demand for these resources). (Skarbek 2010) Prison inmates are trying to find ways to saturate their needs and religiosity becomes one of the tools abundantly used to do so. The group number one, onto the contrary (if they do turn to religion), tend to form their religiosity in the way of bricolage, reflecting all three dimensions (feelings, beliefs and practices), which, however, acquire specific forms.

Conclusion

Let us now sum up the results of our study. We have researched attitudes of key actors with respect to the topic of our paper, i.e. how these actors look at the religiosity of inmates. We were interested in three groups of actors: prison guards, prison chaplains, and prison inmates.

In the pre-communist era, EPS/EPC were seen as integral parts of the prison system and of the re-education of inmates in the prison system. Under the communist regime, religious activities were driven out of prisons. After the collapse of communism, space for religious activities in prisons opened up again, and participation in religious activities is considered voluntary. Religiosity in this context serves as a lens through which it is possible to focus on the latent debate over how prisoners (religious or not) should be treated. This debate is taking place not only within the walls of prison houses but in society as a whole, and religiosity is its litmus test. In our view, the outcome of the debate over the significance and presence of religious activities in the post-communist prison system is an indicator of how ex-prison inmates will be treated when they try to reintegrate into society.

As for the relationship between prison inmates and religiosity in prison, we can identify two types of behavior (leaving out those inmates who have no interest in religion whatsoever). On the one hand, there are inmates who make 'pragmatic' use of religiosity and either admit this or were observed exhibiting this kind of behavior by us during our research. On the other hand, there are inmates for whom faith is crucial to their rehabilitation and to their path to a new life. We found that the length of a prisoner's sentence is an interesting indicator. It seems that if inmates identify as religious, in most cases their belonging does not refer necessarily to the idea of religious affiliation. The information gathered in the interviews and in our observations leads us to conclude that the attitudes towards religiosity (among prisoners) in Czech prisons are prevalently pragmatic. We believe that this can be explained by the historically weak influence that churches have had in the Czech Republic.

This marks another important change from the situation in the past during the communist era. In communist prisons, religious activities were repressed, but for religious inmates it had a crucial importance and helped them to

maintain their individuality. (Synek 2013: 128) The inmates derived no material advantage from avowing their faith. On the contrary: by avowing their faith they exposed themselves to further repressions within the prison system.

When the political situation changed in 1989 and the prison system was transformed, the phenomenon of pragmatic religiosity became quite widespread. It was mentioned by almost everyone we interviewed. For some of the religious inmates, religion plays an important role in the process of changing their life while other inmates practice it for purely pragmatic reasons.

What we see as the most important contribution of religiosity in the prison system is the fact that it acts as a cognitive and emotional reserve of values that, in many cases, prisoners accept as they please (see the bricolage phenomenon), which, however, does not prevent it from being a resource that helps inmates to develop an understanding of themselves in the process of accepting their guilt.

The question remains as to why the concept of pragmatic faith prevails mostly among prisoners serving shorter sentences and why religiosity is not able to answer this adequately. We would like to point out, however, that in the European context, this development is not unique: see, for example, Irene Becci's study, concentrated on the transformations of the prison system in the former East Germany. (Becci 2012) It seems that prison inmates in today's Czech prisons have rather similar attitudes to religiosity as prisoners in the former East Germany, which can be explained by the similar position of religion in these two regions. In order to compare these two environments more thoroughly, however, we would need to carry out a deeper analysis of the transformations of the prison system in both post-communist countries and other non-communist countries.

To conclude the text, we shall present two hypotheses, to be tested in future, on the position religiosity plays in the prison system. The penitentiary system does not seem to be a priority for the church in the Czech Republic. Evidence of this is the lack of any systematic guidelines for those working in prisons on how to proceed in this field. We are not judging the motivations of the chaplains working in the prison system, because we talked to and got to know just a small number of them, but we found that those who actually succeed at helping prisoners do so not as a result of the efforts of their particular church to achieve its declared objectives but as a result of their own personal experiences.

So why don't the churches fulfill the role that is expected of them within the penitentiary system? The first reason may be capacity: it has been documented that there are few priests willing to do this job. This lack of priests/chaplains in general is one of the legacies of communist rule and it is a trend that has not changed even after the fall of the communism. Second, there are financial

constraints on the state and the church. Last but not least, chaplains see prison service as a low-status work because Czech society, including religious people, view prisoners in a negative light. We therefore think that it would be useful for further research to be conducted on what the declared and real intentions of churches and religious groups active within the prison system are.

Another hypothesis as to why religiosity has failed to successfully become involved in issues related to the prison system is the inability to influence any decisions owing to the prevailing 'communist ethos'¹⁵ in the prisons. This sense of the ineffectuality of such activities is documented in the words of the chaplains themselves and in the shared opinion of the guards that prisoners just use religiosity to achieve practical goals.

So the question remains whether the churches' willingness to withdraw from or become apathetic about their work in prisons can be attributed to anti-religious prejudices reproduced and nourished by the secular society and by the higher power status of the guards. These hypotheses will constitute the basis for our future research on the position of religiosity behind the walls of prisons in the Czech Republic.

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¹⁵ Communist ethos is defined as ways to think and act that were coined in relation to the communist set of ideas, mainly with respect to religion, an which are still reproduced in today's Czech prison system.

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