

Faith and religious practices as a form of human longing for the permanence

Keywords: psychology, pedagogy, rehabilitation, faith, religion, vanishing, to elapse, deprivation of liberty, freedom

The article is based on the author's book "Skazani, ale nie potępieni" ["Convicted but not condemned"].¹ The research has been conducted in four penitentiaries like in: Grudziadz, Lubliniec, Warsaw-Grochow, Warsaw-Sluzewiec. In 2003 prisoners were enquired with two questionnaires discussed, and in 2004 prisoners from the custody Warsaw-Sluzewiec – were asked to fill the "**Questionnaire of an imprisoned person**". The preparation and application of this new enquiry tool issued from the necessity for a more detailed research of addiction problems (alcohol and drugs) and of paying more attention to the addictions. Researcher have been done in small groups, which was imposed by the specific character of the penitentiaries (necessity of keeping safe conditions, and, in the case of the temporarily arrested it was dictated by the division into, so called, isolation groups, which are connected with prisoners' isolation on this stage of penal proceedings).²

The research included three questionnaires: "Values preference", "Personal questionnaire", and "Questionnaire of an imprisoned person".³

THE TOPIC DEVELOPMENT

In "**Values preference**"⁴ – the section concerning which social-cultural group a respondent belongs includes questions about a respondent's: age, sex, education and social descent. Because of the fact that the respondents were imprisoned people, staying in custodies and penitentiaries, this part of the data was supplemented with information about the prisoner's status – person temporarily arrested or person already convicted. The questionnaire consists of two sections; each of them has 18 values put in alphabetical order. The respondents were to classify them, within each of these sections separately, by attributing different ordinal numbers (from 1 to 8) to every value, starting from the most to the least important one for the enquired.

¹ K. Pierzchała, *Skazani, ale nie potępieni* [Convicted but not condemned], Oficyna Wydawniczo-Poligraficzna „Adam”, Warsaw 2004.

² Ibidem, p. 71.

³ Ibidem, p. 65.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 66.

“**The personal questionnaire**” was the next research tool. This extensive questionnaire consists of 68 questions, open and closed ones, which often have many sub-points. These questions can be divided in two thematic sections.

First, chronologically: division

- a. general personal data, sex, faith, age, social descent, education (1-5)
- b. home: childhood and youth (6-13,21,22)
- c. family: marriage or concubine, children (14-20, 21, 23)
- d. prison: prison past, present imprisonment, religious life in prison, personal perspective of leaving the prison (24-50)
- e. future: plans for the future and respondent’s evaluation of the opportunities to fulfill these plans (48, 51-68).⁵

Second, thematic : division

- a. general personal data: sex, faith, age, social descent, education (2-5)
- b. family and intimates: in the past, present and future (6-8, 14, 15, 17-20, 39, 40, 54, 55-61)
- c. beliefs: respondent’s attitude, home atmosphere, aspects of religious life, religious life in prison (1, 9-13, 16,21-23,29-38,41-46)
- d. imprisonment: prison past, present imprisonment, personal perspective of leaving the prison (6, 24-28, 40,47, 49, 50)
- e. future: commitments and plans for the future and respondent’s evaluation of the chances to fulfill these plans (48, 51-53, 54, 55-61, 63-68).⁶

“**Questionnaire of an imprisoned person**” was the third tool practiced in the researches. It is based on the “Questionnaire of character”, which had been used in researches of secondary school students. The fact that mostly adult people were enquired in this research determined the changes and expansion of the personal-data-part. That is why the questions about: education, job, gaining independence and setting up a family, civil status, children – were included in the questionnaire. Questions about the relationships with the family were also expanded with the following aspects: contacts with one’s parents and siblings; financial relations (financial help or supporting) between a respondent and his parents, siblings, partners; providing for children. Questions concerning religious practices and receiving sacraments were also expanded and differentiated in the time aspect: the situation, before detention and the present situation in the imprisonment conditions. Moreover, there were added some questions about staying in prison. The most important part of a questionnaire, from the point of view of a researcher who studies addictions, are the questions concerning addiction problem (addiction to nicotine, alcohol and drugs). In order to lead a successful therapy, one has to make spiritual and religious values again

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 66.

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 66–67.

most important. Demotion and, as a result, decline of these values sometimes make people feel the meaninglessness of life, which then results in addictions, especially to alcohol and drugs.⁷

Therefore, the questionnaire includes six questions about the way the respondents judge mutual relations between faith, freeing oneself of addictions and imprisonment.⁸

The research involved imprisoned people, i.e. people, who has broken the law and had already been convicted of it, or against whom there was a probably supposition of impeding penal proceedings.

Table 1. Total number of respondents

Questionnaire	Sex	Temporarily arrested	Convicted	No information	Total
Preference of values	Women	38	141	1	180
	Men	103	114		217
	Total	141	255	1	397
Personal questionnaire	Women	42	147	1	190
	Men	90	112		202
	Total	132	259	1	392
Questionnaire of an imprisoned person	Women	0	0	0	0
	Men	76	68	0	144
	Total	76	68	0	144

Origin: K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 73.

Almos 97% of respondents declared Roman Catholic faith, which clearly renders the situation of faith in our country. The table below shows a detailed list of answers to the questions about faith.

Table 2. Table 2. Faith of imprisoned people

Questionnaire	Personal questionnaire		Questionnaire of an imprisoned person	
	N	%	N	%
Roman Catholic	380	96,9	139	96,5
Greek	3	0,8	2	1,4
Pentecost	1	0,3	0	0,0
Jehovah's witnesses	3	0,8	0	0,0
Non-believers	3	0,8	3	2,1
No answer	2	0,5	0	0,0

Origin: K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 74.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 67; J. Ziemniak, *Rola Kościoła i wartości religijnych w profilaktyce uzależnień* [The role of the Church and of religious values in the prevention of addiction], [w:] *Profilaktyka uzależnień drogą do wolności człowieka* [Addiction Prevention way to human freedom], Eds. Cz. Czekiera, I. Niewiadomska, TOWARZYSTWO NAUKOWE KUL, Lublin 2001.

⁸ K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 67.

The respondents were also asked how they mark their belief in the following way: believing and practicing; believing and practicing irregularly; believing but not practicing and non-believers. Table no 3 shows the responses. Apparently, one might think that the percentage of believers is very high – since only two respondents (1,4%) declared themselves as non-believers. However, it should be taken into consideration that people who say they are believers but not practicing ones are, in fact, non-believers. And in this context the percentage of believers insignificantly exceeds half of the respondents: 42,4% of people believing and practicing, 13,6% of believing and practicing irregularly. If one verified these answers, by asking about particular frequency of religious practice, it could turn out that the above percentages resulting from prisoners' declaration should be exchanged.⁹

Table 3. Belief and practice of imprisoned people

Belief and practice	Questionnaire of an imprisoned person	
	N	%
believing and practicing	59	42,4
irregularly	19	13,6
believing but not practicing	59	42,4
non-believers	2	1,4

Origin: K. Pierzchała, *Skazani...*, [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 75.

The questionnaire included more detailed questions, as well, such as those concerning religious practice in the times before and after imprisonment. The respondents were to answer: how often they say individual prayers (alone), take part in collective prayers (with other people, e.g. prayer meetings), attend masses, do self-examination and receive Holy Communion. Many respondents did not give definite answers, just Yes or No. Such attitude towards filling in a questionnaire discredits the sense of responsibility of imprisoned people. Nevertheless, the results have been compared in Table 4.¹⁰

⁹ Ibidem, p. 74.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 74–75.

Table 4. The frequency of religious practices of imprisoned people

Frequency	Individual prayer		Prayer with other people (prayer meetings)		Attending Masses		Going to confession		Receiving Holy Communion	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Never	48	50	120	97	53	80	67	110	64	111
Rarely	10	3	7	3	19	6	27	4	27	4
Sometimes	9	10	1	3	20	2	13	0	14	0
Often	11	15	2	2	4	4	0	1	1	1
No frequency given	66	66	14	39	48	52	37	28	38	28

Origin: K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 76.

A – period of time before imprisonment

B – during imprisonment

Vast amount of answers, in which the respondents confirm their involving in certain forms of religious practice, without saying how often this practice is or was performed, makes it impossible to state real frequency of religious practicing.¹¹

However there are some differences in certain respondents' judgement of their own sense of responsibility and duty, the most frequent level is the same for the majority of the enquired prisoners, and the average is 0,7 on behalf of the sense of responsibility. The table given below shows the results. There is a strong correlation between declared sense of duty and sense of responsibility – Pearson's correlation ratio – 0,459.¹²

The following open questions were included in the questionnaire ("Questionnaire of an imprisoned person") in order to enable the respondents to express their opinions on the subject of their belief, its growth and development during the stay in prison, during the therapies and on the influence their faith had on their fight with addictions:¹³

26. Has faith and religious practicing helped me to fight with any of addictions – if so, how?
27. Has my stay in prison affected my attitude to religion and belief-if so, how?
28. What influence has the members of the prison ministry (prison chaplain, nuns, and members of prison fraternity) had on the change of my attitude to religion and faith?
29. Has my attitude to evil (especially to the crime I committed) changed under the influence of my participation in religious life during my stay in prison and the meetings with representatives of the prison ministry?
30. Has my belief and participation in religious life and the meetings with representatives of the prison ministry helped me to free myself of any addictions and how?

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 75.

¹² Ibidem, p. 129.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 141.

31. Has participation in the therapy affected my attitude to religion and faith – if so, how?¹⁴

Unfortunately, it should be clearly pointed out, that the enquired prisoners either did not give any answers to the above questions or answered with only one word (“Yes” or “No”), which, excluding question 26, makes it impossible to interpret the answers or evaluate the respondents’ intentions.¹⁵

However, there are some more extensive answers, which can claim for the fact, that these respondents have more intense, mature religious and inner life and that they developed the sense of duty and responsibility. Some of the prisoners’ answers are quoted below in several characteristic groups.¹⁶

All those statements are presented in the original form, thus some lexical-grammatical mistakes and unfinished thoughts may occur in the text. Only spelling was corrected. The first statements quoted are the answers that can be described as the most developed and religiously mature ones.

“While I was on therapy I converted myself, I pray a lot, I trust all my problems to God’s hands. My faith helps me very much and I know that if I endure in my belief and will not stand back from God I will not take drugs... I converted myself; I’m starting to learn how to live a life that was given to us by God, to be a “good person”. I pray a lot and this is the most important thing for me... I regret the things I did – I confessed my sins and I feel better... I pray and I believe for myself and I have found what I missed in my life to be happy, that is God.” (aged 25, when he was 18 he started taking drugs).¹⁷

“I believe in God and I prayed that He could help me to free myself of addiction, I think that it helped me somehow, too... I am more composed after each Mass and after receiving Holy Communion.” – (aged 43, has been drinking from the age of 17, has been taking drugs for 7 years now).

“Yes – alcohol – I realized that the lack of spiritual life and the lack of faith in God and religious practice was one of the reasons of my addiction. Break in my practice caused emptiness and depravation in myself. I realized that when I got to prison. Returning to practice helps mi to survive and get back to “normal” healthy life.... I can understand the values and benefits that faith gives. I have understood the need to be faithful. ... The chaplain – the only person, -whom I can confess to, he can talk with me like a human being. The nuns can make the prayer meetings nice with their behavior, faith, very good example and serenity. They managed to convert me and give me faith, ... I hope I will fight alcohol addiction – by being faithful

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

to God and by actively participating in (religious) practicing.” – (aged 52, lies been smoking from the age of 18, has been drinking from the age of 35).¹⁸

“My faith of God helps me in the therapy gives me hope and faith in success... it (stay in prison) strengthened my belief... I like the way the Mass is celebrated, a close contact with other members of the ministry.” (aged 53, has been smoking and drinking from the age of 20).¹⁹

“In my opinion my faith and everyday practice “Prayer” helps me survive here, in prison, I am faithful to God and I know He cares for me and watches over me, he is my Heavenly Father... I pray and he helps me and watches over my safety... the chaplain, the nuns certainly had influence on my attitude to religion, it was surely a great progress in my belief that you let me have a rosary, holy pictures, a prayer book and that I had opportunity to go to confession and receive Holy Communion and get God’s blessing.” (aged 19, does not admit of any addictions).²⁰

Not all the answers are developed and give evidence of a great religious involvement, as, for example, the answer to question 27, concerning the influence of staying in prison on a respondent’s attitude to faith and religion: “it influenced me because I stay under closure and I have more time for praying” – (aged 19, has been drinking alcohol and taking drugs since he was 12 years old).²¹

However, in the statement quoted above, one can see honesty and truth.

Between those short answers included some statements quite pretty in their simplicity, such as e.g: “I started to believe” – (aged 29, has been smoking and taking drugs since he was 13 years old); “yes, during (he therapy / started to believe in God again” – (aged 35, has been smoking and drinking since he was 18 years old).” I understood that the crime I had committed would not have happened if I had been closer to God” – (aged 49, has been smoking since he was 18 years old, has been drinking – does not say how long).²²

Unfortunately, there were, critical statements, too:

“...at first I attended the therapy meetings, but prisoners are difficult listeners what made me give up, since I could not concentrate properly.” – (aged 45, only smokes).²³

“...they (members of the prison ministry) had no influence... I don’t attend the meetings” – (aged 25, smokes and drinks)²⁴

“...he made me realize that people who are excessive practitioners turn out to be cheaters and they use religion for their own purposes” – (aged 25, has been smoking since he was 17 years old)²⁵

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 142–143.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

Quite often the respondents declared their innocence, what clearly shows that they had not fully understood the aim of the questionnaire, as well as they needed to present themselves as victims, not as delinquents. It may also mean that they did not feel guilty.²⁶

“I am innocent I was wrongly accused of the crimes I had not committed” – (aged 20, been smoking since he was 15 years old, has been drinking since he was 17 years old).²⁷

“...my attitude to evil did not exist, and I did not committed any crime” – (aged 18, has been smoking since he was 15 years old, has been drinking since he was 17 years old).²⁸

“... in no way, because I was not guilty, the policemen who imprisoned me they once took me to a forest and robbed me, when I wanted to take the case into public I was set up by the police to have stolen 100 PLN.” – (aged 39, has been smoking since he was 15 years old, has been drinking since he was 17 years old).²⁹

“... if I did evil to other person it would, perhaps, but did not...” – (aged 25, has been smoking since he was 17 years old).³⁰

To sum up the answers to those questions was not an easy task, but, finally, I managed to collect all the results after classifying each answer into one of the following evaluation groups:

- positive evaluation,
- indifferent evaluation,
- negative evaluation,
- evaluation impossible.³¹

These results are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Evaluation of the answers to the open questions of total imprisoned respondents

Question number:	26.	27.	28.	29.	30.	31.
Positive evaluation	34	46	28	31	16	16
Indifferent evaluation	72	69	72	57	67	51
Negative evaluation	0	4	1	0	0	0
Evaluation impossible	38	25	43	56	61	77

Origin: K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 145.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 143.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 143.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 144.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 144.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 144.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 144.

In the one third of cases (average: 34,7%, from 11,1% to 51,9%, depending on the question) imprisoned respondents did not give answers that would allow any interpretation (terse or irrelevant answers) or did not give any answer at all; there were mostly indifferent evaluations, most often very short ones (average: 44,9%, from 35,4% to 50,0%, depending on the question). The least exhaustive answers were given to questions 30 and 31 (11,1% each) about the influence their faith had on the therapy and the influence the therapy had on their faith. It is a surprisingly small amount of answers, all the more so as in the case of question 29 and, almost identical, question 30, the respondents gave twice as many (23,6%) positive and exhaustive answers. In total, 5 answers had negative character (0,6%), of which 4 answers were given to question 27 about the influence that imprisonment had on faith; and 1 answer – to question 28 about the influence the representatives of the prison ministry had on the respondents' faith.³²

As it can be noticed, indifferent evaluations, or cases when evaluation is impossible, preponderate. It results from very terse answers or even the lack of answers. However, where there was a possibility to evaluate the answers, those were mostly positive evaluations, that is, giving evidence that faith and religion practice were helpful in freeing oneself from addiction, in understanding the nature of evil and in changing of the attitude to the committed crime. Imprisonment and contacts with the representatives of the prison ministry, especially with the chaplain and the nuns (which was stressed by the respondents), had positive influence on their faith – both experiencing and practicing. Taking part in the therapies organized in disaccustoming sections also had positive influence on prisoners. It could be noticed in the respondents' answers, as well as in everyday contacts with prisoners. It has been also reflected in the answers to open questions, which is shown in Table 6.³³

Table 6. Evaluation of the answers to open questions of imprisoned respondents from therapeutic sections

Question number:	26.	27.	28.	29.	30.	31.
Positive evaluation	16	14	7	10	9	11
Indifferent evaluation	26	28	23	21	21	25
Negative evaluation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Evaluation impossible	11	11	23	22	23	17

Origin: K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 146.

Comparing with people imprisoned in total, the people undergoing therapy gave slightly more exhaustive answers (33,6%- no answers or answers which do not allow any

³² Ibidem, p. 144.

³³ Ibidem, pp. 144–146.

interpretation), but differences between particular questions were insignificant and there were no negative answers.³⁴

Table 7. Evaluation of the answers to open questions of imprisoned people from “ATLANTIS” section

Question number:	26.	27.	28.	29.	30.	31.
Positive evaluation	13	10	5	7	7	8
Indifferent evaluation	13	16	16	16	15	16
Negative evaluation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Evaluation impossible	4	4	9	7	8	6

Origin: K. Pierzchała, Skazani..., [Convicted ...], op.cit., p. 147.

The most exhaustive answers were given by the prisoners undergoing anti-alcoholic therapy in “ATLANTIS” section. There was 27% of positive answers and 21,1% of terse answers or answers which do not allow any interpretation. Unfortunately, most answers were evaluated as indifferent -51,1%, although they were extensive, they were often irrelevant.³⁵

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

In the prisoners’ statements we can find confirmation of the fundamental truth that without God and His principles there is no morality, law and order on the Earth. How significant do appear the words, quoted before, said by people who had broken the law: “I understood that the crime I committed would not have happened if I had been closer to God”, “the lack of spiritual life, of faith in God, the lack of religious practice were one of the reasons of my addiction”, “Break in practices created emptiness of myself and depravation”. It is the lack of values, which today’s “liberal” and “free”- from morality and principles – Europe does not want to know or have in its constitution (the values of which the greatest advocate is our Catholic Church) that leads the human race to decay, and people – through moral depravation, spiritual emptiness, addictions, and crimes – directly to prison. Nevertheless, prison chaplains fight for the imprisoned people’s morality. In the chaplains’ environment we mean not just rehabilitation, but, first of all, evangelism, therefore, the effort aiming at the contact with Christ, strengthening faith and, curing the moral spine. In this field there are more and more intense conversions, which result in a complete transformation of life, although that does not happen very often. People who managed, owing to Christ, to get a new look at their lives and discover their lost humanity, become really rehabilitated. On the other hand, we cannot give up rehabilitation processes in their most general concept. We live in a very crime-causing society and nobody tries to eliminate this pathology. Constant exposing of violence and pornography deprive people. If a person is psychically weak, then when coming to prison he is already

³⁴ Ibidem, pp. 146–147.

³⁵ Ibidem, pp. 147–148.

deprived. The main reasons are bad families, where there are no moral examples and no love³⁶ (Sikorski, 2004). That is why a great role of catholic educators, psychologists, therapists and priests is to care for the values and realize them in life.

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