



Position of religious interactions in the paradigm of juridical social work: an assessment attempt¹

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Waldemar Woźniak^a

^a Associate Professor Rev. Waldemar Woźniak, PhD, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1560-6489>,
Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Cristian Philosophy, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

Abstract: Correctional and psychocorrectional work with different categories of socially maladjusted people, especially prisoners and juveniles in specific resocialization facilities, can be performed using different approaches or models. Working with these people is extremely difficult, because in their axiological functioning, they often follow anti-values, have difficulty complying with social, moral, and legal norms, and are often characterized by demanding attitudes. In Poland, the term resocialization is commonly used to refer to working with prisoners or wards of youth detention centers. The present paper discusses in detail three paradigms of interventions towards people who have come into conflict with the law, or in general towards people who are not adapted to social functioning, that is, living by the moral, social, and legal norms that are used and generally accepted by society. These are classical resocialization, juridical social work, and social rehabilitation paradigms. In a given paradigm, certain forms of work will be preferred. Methodology of working with socially maladjusted, or resocialization methodology, involves the functions, principles, and methods of this work. Methods of correctional work (methods of resocialization) have a psychotechnical (individual, and at the same time psychological or psychotherapeutic), sociotechnical (working with a group or using interactions through a group), or culture-technical character (learning, e.g., at school, work, contact with culture as a recipient or creator). Various religious interactions should also be considered a culture-technical method. Not all inmates or wards of youth detention centers have a negative attitude toward religion or specialized (penitentiary, facility) prison ministry. Many of them see the value in religious interactions as helpful. Religious practices help them function socially, although to obtain given benefits, the inmates or wards may manipulate their religious commitment, which may turn out to be a sham commitment. The professional work of the author of the present paper has allowed him to conduct many years of observation among inmates in penitentiary units or among those placed in juvenile institutions of the justice department. The results of this observation provided a basis for placing religious interventions not in the paradigm of classical resocialization but in juridical social work.

Keywords: socially maladjusted persons, offenders, classical resocialization, juridical social work, social resocialization, religious interactions

Introduction

Religion has various positive effects on human life. Since the dawn of time, humans have related to what is immaterial, and therefore spiritual, thus entering the area of religion, regardless of how they conceived this area. The approach to religion, one way or another, determines its functions.

In the *Pedagogical Dictionary*, customs are defined as “[...] ways of thinking and acting established in society that constitute the distinctiveness of a given social group or a cultural or geographical area” (Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, 2018, p. 202). Customs can be created by specific communi-

ties, including nations, social groups, and religions. Various customs, including religious customs, affect a person’s activity, functioning in society, and direction of actions.

A. Bałandynowicz (2021, p. 52) wrote that “as an essential element of tradition, faith develops man’s awareness that the natural universe cannot be a primordial reality but was created by a purely spiritual entity. This entity was defined as the Creator-God, who has always existed, and is the progenitor of all creation, intervening in the course of events by performing impossible things,

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understood as miracles and revelations, and holds the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect strangeness”.

Religion is a platform for the realization of faith in God, and at the same time helps form certain values, attitudes, and ways of behavior that can determine the positive direction of life not only of man in general but of a particular person living in a particular territory at a particular time.

Religion performs a number of functions. For the Christian, the primary function of religion is its salvific function. Religion helps a person find and understand God, and at the same time can be a help in his or her daily life, such as bringing encouragement or giving strength to cope with the difficulties of life. Undoubtedly, religion also performs a broad peace-keeping function. Peace can be shattered through tyranny, the drive to subjugate nations, and also through crime or maladaptive lifestyles. A. Balandynowicz (2022) shows peace as the foundation of humanity.

The positive impact of religion and faith can be used in various areas, for example, in working with socially maladjusted people, including those with criminal records. In the present paper, an attempt was made to consider religious interactions within the given paradigm of correctional work with inmates and juvenile wards of youth detention centers. The content of the paper is set in Polish reality and the Catholic religion.

1. Terminological issues

An optimal model/paradigm should be sought in correctional work with inmates or wards of youth detention centers. *The Pedagogical Dictionary* defines paradigm as “(pattern, model) colloquially: a typical example or model to be used; in the philosophical sense: a universally recognized scientific achievement that provides model solutions in a particular field of science and related fields. The term was introduced to the philosophy of science in 1962 by Th. Kuhn” (after: Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, 2018, p. 131-132).

A completely different understanding of the paradigm was presented by B. Proctor (2023, p. 9-10), who wrote that “a paradigm change requires a con-

scious and deliberate decision because it opposes almost everything we have been taught. The default learning system is to read books, ask questions, and move on, but this makes us unable to understand the content of what we have read. Reading something once is not enough.

The paradigm is created through repetition: performing certain actions again and again, at certain intervals. This is the way it can also be changed. However, we usually think that it is pointless, because we refer to what we were taught in the past, and we were not really taught at all; we just gathered information”. Further in his book, B. Proctor (2023, p. 11) explains that “[...] a paradigm is a multitude of concepts established in our subconscious. These concepts are so-called *habits*. Therefore, a paradigm is a set of habits, and a habit is a concept that manifests itself without the participation of consciousness – just automatically”.

Analysis of the above two approaches to the paradigm reveals that they are quite different. The former approach is primarily theoretical in nature as one begins to explore and learn about a particular model or construct, although later, particular principles or elements of that model can be implemented in social, professional, and family functioning. This second approach to paradigm points directly to its individual behavioral value. Therefore, in this view, the paradigm has rather no theoretical meaning but has a practical value since the *paradigm* so viewed generates our behavior, conduct, professional action, etc.

These two definitions of the paradigm can be used in correctional, resocialization, and readaptation work with adult inmates, former inmates, and juvenile wards and former wards of youth detention centers. In this first sense of paradigm, a penitentiary educator or a juvenile facility educator, if they want to improve their working skills and better understand the environment in which they have to work, should explore theoretical models relating to this area of work. With the second paradigm view, a penitentiary educator, or resocialization educator in general, should be characterized by a given behavioral pattern that is habitual in nature to guide their communication with inmates in the penitentiary facilities or with juveniles placed in youth detention centers or juvenile shelters. It is possible to imagine a penitentiary educator who

habitually treats prisoners as a necessary evil and only labels and brands them, which in principle can derail correctional effectiveness. It is also possible to imagine an educator who, somehow habitually and spontaneously, advises inmates what action to take in prison, so that after leaving it, and therefore in conditions of freedom, they can function in society, or at least function in such a way as not to threaten the established social order.

Three paradigms of correctional work with inmates or wards of youth detention centers which are present in this work in Polish realities will now be presented. The first of them is the paradigm of classical resocialization. In Poland, the term commonly used is resocialization (*resocjalizacja*), and in other countries it is known but rather not often used, so in the case of these countries, it refers more to classic corrective work with inmates. In the *Pedagogical Dictionary*, “resocialization” is defined as “[...] the pedagogical and psychological interventions in general, consisting in the application of various forms and methods of education, including psychological, social, and cultural techniques, school education, and work towards individuals who are maladapted to the social environment, the manifestation of which is their violation of the social, moral, and legal norms” (after: Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, 2018, p. 155). This definition of resocialization indicates a kind of evolution of interventions towards offenders and towards socially maladjusted people in general, because it assumes the use of different methods, whether of a psychological nature, or interactions through the group or through culture in the broadest sense. Nevertheless, the definition should be considered within the model of classical resocialization.

Analysis of the history of prisons (cf. Christianson, 2006) starting from ancient prisons or prisons in the Middle Ages, reveals that they often served not so much to improve the behavior of prisoners but to exclude or even eliminate them, so they are unlikely to be placed in the paradigm of classical resocialization.

The first penitentiary cell systems (cf. Ciosek, 2001, p. 183-192), i.e. Ghent (established in 1775) and Auburn systems (established in 1816), introduced methods based on labor and silence. It can be

considered that along with these systems, the classical model of resocialization began to be developed. The Geneva system, which was established in 1833, was the first progressive system, and it introduced the classification of prisoners, at least with regard to their moral state.

The model of working with prisoners or juvenile offenders has been constantly changing and expanding, whereas methods and techniques of influence have been developed, based on such principles as – re-education, personality development, care, acceptance, and individual approach (cf. Marzec, Sarzała, Woźniak, 2018, p. 61-128). The model of classical resocialization has undergone transformations in individual countries. This model, from the first phase of its development, is actually diametrically opposed to the current development phase, as it can be considered that there are countries where it is still used but modified many times.

A paradigm different from classical resocialization is the paradigm of juridical social work. These two models differ in details and emphasis on individual elements. In the paradigm of classical resocialization, it can be assumed that the inmate or ward must take advantage of the opportunity given to him or her to become a socialized individual again (as an effect of resocialization), and thus, at the very least, not threaten the social order. Inmates often perceive resocialization interventions as imposed, and consequently, they respond negatively to them. The paradigm of juridical social work emphasizes assistance and counseling, without which the inmate or ward cannot change, if only because of depleted personal resources. The ward usually decides to seek help on his or her own, because they recognize their situation as difficult, and in this case, giving them help can cause a positive change.

In practice, social work focuses primarily on offering a variety of assistance and providing it. Social work is provided to people in need, such as the homeless or unemployed. The paradigm of juridical social work presupposes conducting this work among current or former inmates or wards of youth detention centers and thus it is performed in the field of law. Dialogue is of great importance in social work. According to H. Kaszyński (2019, p. 25-26), “in conversation-ori-

ented social work, it is crucial to understand dialogue as a communicative practice that enables the optimal flow of meaning between relationship partners. Dialogue leads to new understanding, and a new context, which is the basis for future thoughts, agreements, and actions. It is the art of thinking in relation, in an interaction-based space that can be conventionally called a «border strip». It is an «in-between» territory that cannot be occupied, colonized, or appropriated by either partner if the dialogue is supposed to continue and not turn into a monologue. In this space, the specificity of which lies in extraterritoriality, neutrality, the possibility of feeling the equivalence of «Me–You», a multiplicity of meanings relating to the past experience of harm coexist”. Social work, if it is to be effective, should be based on the appropriate competence of the helper and on his or her empathetic approach (cf. Grudziewska, 2021; Stanek, 2021). Academic social work is important, learning about its theories, but the true meaning of social work is told by its mature practice based on thoughtfulness (cf. Krasiejko, 2023). Social work is based on various principles, the most important of which seems to be the principle of assistance (which can also be described as the principle of social support), but the principle of individualization is also of high importance as each social problem of a person is complex, and at the same time, a similar social problem occurring in another person may be characterized by a different course (cf. Woźniak, 2020, p. 49-58). In this paper, it should be further emphasized that providing social support often has a religious motivation, since mature faith in God is linked to doing mercy (cf. Kamiński, 2019).

The third paradigm, which will now be presented, refers to the current state in Poland of dealing with people incarcerated in penitentiary units or placed in youth detention centers. P. Stępnik (1999) put forward a postulate to change the model of work with inmates by describing the direction of change as from resocialization to social work. Knowing the Polish reality, including the common use of the term resocialization (*resocjalizacja*) and at the same time to reconcile what is ideal with what is real, P. Stępnik (2008) proposed a mixed model called *social resocialization* (cf. Woźniak, 2015).

The paradigm of *social resocialization* should be examined as a kind of consensus between the paradigm of classical resocialization and the paradigm of social work while including both elements from the field of resocialization and elements from the field of social work. The paradigm of social resocialization should include the assumptions of social work and the resocialization concepts as well as principles and methods from the field of resocialization which assume the provision of social support rather than just diagnosis or assessment (cf. Woźniak, 2015).

Forensic psychology primarily develops forensic diagnosis and expertise (cf. Majchrzyk, 2018, 2020), but this is just the beginning of the corrective process. By offenders, both adults and juveniles, diagnosis is often perceived as a social stigma, and these individuals may not often adopt an attitude of openness only if they experience assistance, especially spontaneous.

Socially maladjusted people often engage in manipulation against specific individuals or the social environment in general (cf. Hadnagy, 2021). An educator or psychologist working in a prison or youth detention center, showing a willingness to help another person, can make that person abandon manipulative techniques.

The goal of corrective and resocialization work is to bring about a wide-ranging change in the wards (cf. Grzesiak, 2023). In view of the mental crises experienced by socially maladjusted people, it even seems necessary to use methods beyond classical resocialization, with these methods including psychotherapy and sociotherapy, which are often recommended in social work (cf. Jankowiak, Soroko, 2021; Kowalski, 2021).

In order to examine paradigms for working with prisoners and with wards of youth detention centers, legal acts should also be analyzed. The introduction of two systems of imprisonment, that is, programmed and therapeutic interventions (Executive Penal Code, Article 81), should be considered a departure from classical resocialization, as these systems offer various assistance, including specialized assistance. The third, ordinary system of executing punishment (Executive Penal Code, Article 81), can be placed in the classical resocialization paradigm.

The Law on the Support and Resocialization of Juveniles as of June 9, 2022, introduced district educational centers (Articles 186-211), which should be considered as intermediate centers between the already existing youth educational facilities and youth detention centers. The introduction of these centers should be considered a search for new forms of assistance provided to socially maladjusted youth. The above law states that three systems of education can be implemented in youth detention centers: resocialization, resocialization-revalidating, rehabilitation-therapeutic systems (Article 244). Based on the analysis of these three systems, it can be considered that even the resocialization system goes beyond the paradigm of classical rehabilitation, and therefore it can be considered within the paradigm of social resocialization. The analysis of these systems, that is, the analysis of the assistance provided, makes it possible to include the other two systems in the paradigm of juridical social work. Although the name of the law contains the term *resocialization*, which is still frequently used in Poland, it also directs attention to the process of intensive assistance, which should be regarded as going beyond classical resocialization.

There is undoubtedly a place for religious interactions in the social resocialization paradigm. There are people in Poland who, because of their faith and religion, visit inmates in prisons and young people placed in youth detention centers and educational centers.

2. Method

Since 1997, the author of the present paper has been associated, in professional and volunteer forms, with the community of wards of youth detention centers but also with the community of adult inmates (or former inmates). This activity allowed the author to use the following qualitative research methods in these communities for many years: observation, free-form interview, and active listening; in this way, the author acquired the material that will be presented in the present paper in the “Results and discussion” section.

D. Maison (2023, p. 73) wrote that “although observation is rarely an independent and sole research method, in many qualitative studies it is a very im-

portant tool used to better understand the problems studied. In the case of focus groups, the moderator should observe respondents, especially for consistency between verbal and non-verbal levels of communication, and watch for any signals that might indicate their discomfort”.

According to D. Maison (2023, p. 185), “the free and less structured way of conducting an interview has an additional advantage of giving the respondent the opportunity to talk about what is important to him or her and helps understand the way they see the world. Consequently, the moderator’s perspective of the world’s perception is not imposed on the structure of the interview. It is important to remember that qualitative research is there to understand how the respondent sees the world rather than how he or she responds to a vision of the world created by the researcher. Therefore, an overly structured qualitative study sometimes limits getting to the truth”.

A very important and often even necessary method (although only additional) in qualitative research is *active listening*. D. Maison (2023, p. 216-217) argues that “the basis of moderation is active listening, that is, listening that stimulates the statements of the participants. In moderation, it is important to maintain an asymmetry of roles between the moderator, who primarily listens, and the participants, who are supposed to speak. However, the moderator should not listen passively but actively. He or she must constantly stimulate the statements of the respondents so as to obtain as much of the information sought as possible and direct the discussion so as to balance the participation of the less and more active individuals in the discussion.

The moderator must also have good contact with the respondent throughout the interview. This is definitely easier in a one-on-one interview than in a focus group with several participants at the same time. The various verbal and non-verbal signals of acceptance, interest, and understanding from the moderator are used to maintain contact with the respondent”.

The primary research method used in the present study was a long-term observation conducted by the author in the community of wards of youth detention centers and juvenile shelters, as well as in the environment of adult inmates in penitentiaries or

detention centers for adults. During the observation, spontaneous conversation (which can be regarded as a casual interview) combined with active listening often took place.

3. Results and discussion

Due to the specificity of their collection, the results presented here are only in the form of conclusions, as determined by ethical standards. Professional and volunteer work has allowed the author of this paper to collect extensive observational material, or derived from spontaneous conversations with young people in rehabilitation centers, as well as with convicts and detainees. The collected material (in the form of memory or written records) relates to many areas of human functioning, and this study will present the material only relating to the Roman Catholic religion and the problems studied. Such research material requires the researcher to be responsible and objective in presenting the results.

In psychological quantitative research, there is a model for presenting research results, whereby a separate section presents the results in the form of statistical analysis, and another contains a discussion of the results. In this paper, the research results, due to the nature of the research methods used, will be presented in a different way: a finding from observation or a piece of information from a spontaneous conversation (during which the active listening technique was also used) will be presented, with a simultaneous discussion (explanation).

The long-term observation conducted by the author of this paper among the wards of youth detention centers and adult inmates often took the form of participant observation, with the author (researcher) and the subjects of observation united by a common activity, such as participation in liturgy, prayer, or a pilgrimage to places of worship. In such situations, the behavior of the respondents appears to have been authentic, and consequently, the results of such research largely reflected the actual state of affairs.

Persons placed in youth detention centers and penitentiary units for adults seem to be characterized by a rather shallow and superficial religiosity. At the

same time, such a state does not exclude the participation of these people in religious practice, since this activity stimulates reflection, allows forgetting the omnipresent factors of evil, and provides an opportunity to confide and be heard and understood.

Participation in religious practices in a prison or youth detention center allows communication with people outside the facility, such as chaplains or volunteers, which can be a protective (helping) factor against the likely prisonization, which should be considered a negative phenomenon, meaning a process of becoming a typical (in the negative sense) prisoner or ward of youth detention centers, by adopting maladaptive behavior and the facility dialect.

The methods of resocialization are psychotechnical (psychological, psychotherapeutic), sociotechnical (group and through-group interventions), and culturotechnical. Culture techniques of rehabilitation include teaching (school, course, vocational), work (paid, unpaid), sports and recreation, and contact with culture in a broad sense by the recipient or creator (cf. Ptak, Woźniak, 2009).

Religious interventions can also be considered as a resocialization method, especially culturotechnical. Although not all, the respondents were open to religious culture, including religious art, reasoning that they wanted to broaden their horizons.

A form of cultural interaction is the technique of cultural models. Religion shows such models by promoting social behavior and also shows personal role models by presenting, for example, people who act on behalf of other people, including people in need, out of religious motives. Striving for change, both adult prisoners and wards of youth detention centers often look for models of behavior, and are often impressed by people who do works of mercy.

Religious interventions can be psychotechnical in given cases. Cases have been recorded in which the wards, after prayer, regained peace of mind and hoped for effective social readaptation, and some of them considered prayer as a kind of self-psychotherapy.

In the communities discussed, prayer can often be considered magical in nature, meaning that words of prayer are said just in case, in order to receive help, but it is difficult to see genuine faith in such behavior.

Religious interventions with inmates, detainees, and wards of youth detention centers should be considered within the pastoral-soteriological model since the primary goal of pastoral activity is to help the faithful in their pursuit of salvation. For these people, *salvation* is often a state that is too abstract, while they accept pastoral interventions because they see the possibility of receiving wide-ranging help. The motives for their participation in pastoral care are therefore often non-religious, such as emotions or atmosphere.

Prisoners or wards of youth detention centers often show openness to chaplains, but they may do so based on the mechanism of manipulation, for a particular chaplain to be more willing to provide certain assistance or give a positive opinion.

Many years of observation (including participant observation), combined with spontaneous conversations and active listening led the author of the present paper to consider religious interventions in the paradigm of juridical social work, that is, provided in the field of law. The essence of social work is to provide assistance in the broadest sense, with resocialized people often joining pastoral interactions, as they see the possibility of receiving a variety of assistance: spiritual, moral, social, and even financial.

Conclusion

Both adult inmates and wards of youth detention centers do not exclude religious interactions at once, and those who participate in them often do so for

non-religious reasons. Pastoral activities go beyond the paradigm of classical resocialization. As members of various religious groups, both priests and volunteers who work at prisons or youth detention centers do not force anyone to participate in the activities offered, as the principle of voluntariness applies. The goal of pastoral work is to lead believers to *salvation*, which for prisoners or wards of youth detention centers seems to be a state/goal that is too abstract. They often join the facility's pastoral activities because they want to experience a variety of social assistance, which does not preclude some of them from considering *salvation* as a state of high value in a given time frame. There is no need to incorporate religious interventions into the *paradigm of social resocialization*, which is provided in Poland, albeit only informally. Religious interventions can be directly placed in the paradigm of juridical social work since they include a broad range of assistance. A *paradigm* can be viewed in two ways: as a theoretical construct or as a behavioral model, i.e. as a multitude of concepts/collection of habits. If the behavioral model is formed as the will (habit) to provide assistance, then regardless of the theoretical model, this assistance will be provided by a person, and this means the activation of the behavioral paradigm of social work. In the case of providing assistance to wards of youth detention centers, it is necessary to emphasize the social work paradigm, regardless of whether the assistance is provided formally or informally, for example, in the form of voluntary work.

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