

Bognárné dr. Kocsis Judit: Reformed education and teaching practice with equal chances

Abstract

The Hungarian Reformed Church was a so-called „church of schools” for hundreds of years. It means that even in the time between WW. I and WW. II it owned more schools than churches. The number of reformed schools is significant even today.

According to the Educational Act of the Hungarian Reformed Church, the aims and tasks of reformed schools are clear and among them appears the function of giving equal chances. This function has two main tasks: in one hand it admits socially disadvantaged children and on the other hand it provides those in need with financial aid and support. Several foundations give regular social aid in forms of scholarships and support of higher education and trips, the money is donated by alumni.

Sándor Karácsony claims that only reformed people and communities are able to maintain reformed schools; people who „are ready to serve and sacrifice”¹ He considers donation to be the only solution as it is written in the Bible. He expects not only adults to do so but reformed students too. He would like to bring alive an old tradition when every student gave a little amount of their pocket money to other children. This tradition teaches children what *caritas* is, which is necessary for the Reformed to survive.

The so-called „*particula*”-system should also be mentioned among reformed historical traditions. It helped in supporting talented students by financing their education.

Reformed educational traditions evolved in a social environment based on religious moral values. The main task of reformed pedagogy

is to continuously activate divine notions in this continuously changing world. Protestant teachers must do their daily work according to the Gospel of Christ.

1. Introduction

The Hungarian Reformed Church was a so-called „church of schools” for hundreds of years. It means that even in the time between the two world wars it owned more schools than churches. The number of teachers was significantly higher than that of priests and more money was spent on culture than on spiritual work or spiritual care. Thus reformed education and culture were in a tight relationship.

The concepts of education, teaching and reformed spirituality applied in schools underwent in a developmental process for centuries. The basic principles of reformed pedagogy were defined by Jean Calvin and his notions. He highlighted the role of school in education

Since four out of five of the reformed lived in the countryside, the Reformed Church targeted villages. In the then reformed press several articles dealt with services and work in the congregations as well as difficulties in the peasants’ everyday life and education. Talented but poor children were financially supported and given help in order to get into higher education. This initiation started out in Sárospatak but soon a lot of colleges followed, e.g. Pápa, Nagykőrös, Hódmezővásárhely, Miskolc and Szeghalom.

These days when traditional Christian ideas are surpassed, schools and the church have to make the traditions of reformed education understandable and acceptable for modern people.

2. Historical heritage in the practice of reformed teaching / education

Helping in the formation of the personality, shaping the student’s general view of life, transmission of values of the community, and transferring knowledge based on solid moral base are essential features of reformed pedagogy.

¹ Karácsony S.: A magyarok Istene. 2004, 92. p.

Reformed pedagogy has to be modern and at the same time traditional so we have to apply the results by our reformed ancestors in our days. We should not look ahead but upwards, should not go ahead but return to something, should not develop but perfect what the ancestors found real and exemplary².

Looking back to the past we can find special features that characterise reformed pedagogy:

- a) Demand on general intelligence and the idea of the scientist teacher. They are reformed educators who are outstanding on their research area, hold a doctoral degree so their knowledge is extremely deep and thorough. The reformed educational system plants the desire for knowledge as well as diligent, active and responsible behaviour in students at an early age, in the school as it is shown in the followings. Sándor Karácsony, professor of educational sciences, claims that a teacher has to be a well-prepared thinker, who strives to make the students and himself do their best. He emphasizes the correct transmission of the teaching material, however, opposes the word „education”. In his opinion this word presupposes a one-way act directing downwards that expresses that the student is uneducated thus needs education. Karácsony rejects the dictatorial nature of education emphasizing its democratic and tolerant nature because only this leads to development (Bognárné Kocsis, 2010, 67.).
- b) Particula-system. The elementary and secondary schools centered around big, historical colleges thus building up a so-called particula-system. There was a tight relationship between the central school and the particulas. Colleges supported the institutes belonging to them by curricula and books and also taught teachers and pastors of the congregations maintaining the schools. Pastors and teachers felt responsibility for sending the most talented children to the college. The most outstanding students of the college took jobs in the pariculas as praeceptors (senior teachers) in order to earn a little money. Besides teaching they studied under the guidance of

a pastor or a rector. After spending 2-3 years in the particula they returned to the central college to complete their studies (the senior student is called redux). Then reformed youngs could return to teaching as rectors. They spent only a few years teaching while they were collecting money or looking for partons to support their studies abroad. There were rectors who did not want to go abroad, they got a domi doctus degree and could work as pastors, lawyers or notaries. We can say that the particula-system will develop again since most reformed elementary school students continue their studies in reformed colleges.

- c) Peregrinatio – international connections, studies abroad. International connections played central role in forming the attitude of the school. Peregrination as a protestant tradition had an important role in the 16th and 17th centuries. Protestant students visited mainly protestant universities under the support of their colleges and there they could deepen their knowledge, write scientific works and observed the given country's characteristics. The studies abroad resulted in changes in their attitudes. Returning home they taught in the college for some years using what they learnt abroad thus exhilarating the world of Hungarian science and culture.
- d) College, boarding school system. Reformed colleges have determined reformed education for centuries. Their efficiency has been/is based on the strong ties between the school and the dormitory and the closed and family-like atmosphere. The strict system of the college required the appointment of responsible persons and programs student participated together. Traditional posts are: apparitors (superintendent for a week), vigils (watch guards at the gate), praeceptors (the oldest students who are teachers too). Praeceptors' task was, for example, to comprehend moral rules on certain days of the week, to explain them to the students and to make them obey these rules. The sedes is the body of student self-government, the presces (collective devotion at weekends) is part of college life. As far as education is concerned, room intendants have important role too. One or two older student is responsible for the order in the room, they organize and direct the life of the little community.

² Győri I. J.: Magyar reformátusként Európában – a pedagógus szemével., 2008, 30. p.

Another considerable one among the student societies is the choir (Kántus). The college is a society in which young people educate young people and teach them the reformed values and puritanity with the help of the power of community.

- e) Reformed willingness to argument and critical thinking. The spread of protestantism opened a possibility to the spread of critical thinking and arguments. Questioning dogmas is the basis of academic thinking. Reformed schooling is based on these principles and one of its characteristics is attempting to provide students with a total view of the world so it offers options instead of a ready-made view of the world. It is a fact that the reformed attitude is clearly expressed but students have the option whether to follow it or not. During the history of reformed education, students had the possibility to share and discuss their opinion. Open discussion (*disputa*) has been a significant element of reformed life since the reformation. In the pedagogical program of today's reformed schools you can discover the demand for open discussions with openness to each other's opinion.
- f) Financial support, equal treatment. Besides strictness and soldierly discipline, a great emphasis is put on supporting children in need. Poor students got some from the allowance of wealthier students. They received financial aid, a certain amount for clothes every year, so-called loaf-aid (2 small loaves of bread a day), which meant sometimes 4 loaves daily. In addition they received scholarships both national and international, in dependence of the school results. Sándor Karácsony, professor of educational sciences, who had the greatest effect on reformed pedagogy claims that only reformed people and communities are able to maintain reformed schools, people who „are ready to serve and sacrifice”³. „When I was a student, the printed year book of the reformed college was very thick, much thicker than that of any other schools. Listing hundreds of foundations made it so thick”⁴

³ Karácsony S.: *A magyarok Istene*. 2004, 172. p.

⁴ Karácsony S.: *A magyarok Istene*. 2004, 171. p.

The key to survival of reformed schools is donation, as it reads in the Bible. In order to build the future reformed people have to unite adults and children alike according to what they learned in the college. Sándor Karácsony suggests the revival of the „two-fillér” tradition. According to this tradition every student gave two fillérs from their pocket money to help others in need. This gives a good basis of developing charity into a habit.

To be able to help others, the donators have to have good financial background which is a result of a hard-working and active life. Karácsony emphasizes the importance of work and a continuous desire to act for the glory of God. He provides the example of some young Swiss millionaires, who want to support their community by covering the costs of a reformed homeless shelter. To fulfill their promise they have to work hard. This attitude makes them different from other, average rich people. According to Karácsony they are people of the soul⁵. Reformed teachers felt responsibility for poor students, Sándor Bak-say, for example, often bought them bakery products from his own salary.⁶

The unique reformed schooling system made it possible to poor students of hard times to belong to the forefront of Europe as far as quality and spirituality is concerned.

3. The characteristics of the former teaching practice of Reformed Church schools

The first semester of school lasted from 19 March (the name day for the name József) to 9 October (the name day for the name Dénes). The second semester lasted from 9 October to 19 March. There was teaching both in the morning, three lessons, and in the afternoon, also three lessons, except for Wednesdays and Saturdays, when there were only two lessons in the morning and two lessons in the afternoon. The

⁵ Bognárné Kocsis J.: *Karácsony Sándor pedagógiai modellje és recepciója a református felsőoktatásban*, 2010 42. p.

⁶ Szabó Sándor: Bak-say Sándor pedagógiai hitvallása 2008, 136. p.

summer holiday lasted for a month, but even then, there was one lesson of practice and teaching on weekdays. The autumn holiday, with consideration to the grape harvest, lasted for two weeks. In addition, there were two, one-week long vacations for the students. On major holidays, students only had to go to church, but on the next school day, they were asked to give a report on the content of the sermon. The basic method of education was practice.

Students were seated at desks according to their performance; the better someone studied, the more towards the front they were seated. The teachers determined the order, and the students had to accept their decision.

There were two forms or working methods of nurturing student talents in Reformed Church schools:

1. *Provocatio* (challenge): it became a practice among better students that the one sitting more towards the back, that is, the student whose performance was weaker, challenged his or her classmate sitting in front of him or her to a competition to be able to get ahead. This practice was typical mainly in the subject of Latin.
2. *Supplicatio* (collection of crops and donations): the older students went to churches far from their boarding-school; they travelled all over the country and collected money. They gave 80% of the donations to the boarding-school, thus contributing to its operation. During their journey they gained a wealth of experience, obtained information regarding the situation in the country, and acquired some folk culture which they also shared with their classmates (e.g., folk songs, new poems).

4. The present-day practice of Reformed Church schools

Most of the Reformed Church schools were organized after 1989, mainly in reclaimed buildings (except for the Budapest and Debrecen Theological Seminaries and the Debrecen Grammar School and Student Hostel). The academic year 2012/2013 has brought significant changes in the Reformed Church public education; Reformed Church education began in another 23 places.

Changes in public education tasks in the Reformed Church public education compared to the previous academic year:⁷

The education department of the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary has stated in an announcement that 38,669 full-time, 348 part-time (evening training) and 206 correspondence students started their studies in Reformed Church schools in 2011. This number has increased by 9,400 and 900 in the full-time and part-time (evening) trainings respectively by 2012. In the examined year, the number of Reformed Church nursery schools increased from 47 to 53, the primary schools from 76 to 105, the secondary grammar schools from 28 to 33, the vocational secondary schools from 8 to 15, and the vocational schools from 3 to 9. The number of Reformed Church elementary art schools grew from 14 to 18, the special education institutions from 6 to 7, the student hostels from 21 to 22, the pedagogical specialized services from 2 to 3, while there is still only one pedagogical institute. The number of Reformed Church maintainers changed from 81 to 97. The number of teachers working at Reformed institutions in 2011-2012 was approximately 3,000, which has increased by approximately 650 this year.⁸

Type of institution	2011/2012	Change	2012/2013	2015/2016
Nursery School	47	6	53	68
Primary School	76	29	105	115
Secondary Grammar School	28	5	33	35
Vocational Secondary School	8	7	15	16
Vocational School	3	6	9	9
Special Education Institution	6	1	7	4
Student Hostel	21	1	22	22
All (not all data are included in the table)	206	60	266	291

Table 1.: Changes in the Reformed Church public education according to types of institutions⁹

⁷ <http://reformatus.hu/mutat/7231/>. Downloaded: 7 November 2014

⁸ http://belfold.ma.hu/tart/cikk/a/0/142410/1/belfold/Joval_tobb_gyerek_jar_egyhazi_iskolaba_ovodaba

⁹ Prepared based on the website www.reformatus.hu

Reformed Church educational institutions can be divided into two categories:

- the first group is made up of the so-called „schools of changed signboards,” i.e., schools where only the maintainer has changed, with a change of signboard, name, and the inclusion of two religious education lessons into the school timetable. So, the head teacher, the teaching staff, the other personnel, the inner world of the school, and the equipment remained the same. Naturally, the teaching-educational mentality could not change overnight in these schools, and so it is a source of many problems.
- the other group is the slower, but safer way, i.e., a teaching staff that accepted the teaching and educational concept in accordance with the church's norms has started teaching in an empty building. Thus, they built the system from the bottom up, and in these institutions, there are less problems.

According to the Public Education Law of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the objectives and functions of the Reformed Church public educational institutions maintained and operated by the Reformed Church in Hungary are:

- forming their students into cultured people of strong character; respecters of universal human values; and faithful, self-sacrificing and creative citizens of the Hungarian homeland and nation, who are always willing to absorb, enrich, convey and pass on the real values of the inherited and the contemporary culture;
- educating its Reformed Church students to become confessing members of our Church;
- and its non-Reformed Church students, while guaranteeing free practice of their religion, to honour the values of their own denomination and of the Reformed Church.¹⁰

In view of the objectives presented above, let us examine the possible functions of the Hungarian Reformed Church schools today:

¹⁰ http://www.reformatus.hu/data/documents/2012/03/14/1995_I_2005_II_tv.pdf

1. The teaching-educational function: this is the most important task, as with all other schools.
2. Education for Reformed Church identity and life: it is not exclusively the task of religious education classes but rather of the whole school; it can be achieved not by the power of words but rather by modelling.
3. Value transmission function: students receiving a Reformed Church education can get to know, at their school, a Christian moral value system that stands on solid foundations.
4. (Religious) Socialisation function: due to home training being pushed into the background, school socialisation, the process of religious socialisation and performing related activities, are more and more emphasized, e.g., learning behavioural norms, standard greetings, dress norms, customs.
5. Socio-political function: Reformed Church schools with their quality, high standard education, were a key factor in the scientific community. The continuation of the legacy, the work carried out at schools, is the pledge for future intellectuals.
6. Function of ensuring equal opportunity: this function appears in the supporting of socially disadvantaged students on the one hand, and enhancing students' sensitivity to the afflicted, and the education of students towards that end on the other hand.

The former is displayed primarily in the process of closing the gap and differentiated employment on the one hand, and in the form of specific financial assistance on the other hand. Many foundations provide regular social assistance to the needy, as well as scholarships and financial assistance from the donations of the alumni to those who need it for continued education and excursions.

Supporting the needy is our duty not only within our national borders but outside as well, thus education thereof will also be present in schools.¹¹

Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities is valid for Reformed Church schools as well. Reformed

¹¹ Győri I. J.: Magyar reformátusként Európában – a pedagógus szemével., 2008, 28–34. p.

Church educational institutions have developed an equal-opportunity program in which, after a situation analysis, they worked out and defined the objectives and tasks that ensure and help equal opportunities.

We can also see a good example of ensuring equal opportunities in the spirit of Christlike love in a Reformed Church kindergarten. Based on the decision of the staff, they declare that they shall educate, together with the other children, the physically handicapped children – those who use devices that help them move in the safest way possible, or disabled children who move around without any aid – as well as the visually impaired and mildly hearing impaired children among the sensory (visual/hearing) disabled. (Betlehem kindergarten program of the Reformed Church of Rákosszabá¹²)

Among the Reformed Church public educational institutions, I examined in more detail the current (valid from 2010 to 2016) equal opportunity plan of the Grammar School of the Reformed College of Pápa. The program defines its tasks in the spirit of Christian commitment with regard to full adherence to the principle of non-segregationist and equal treatment. They consider it important, for example, that disadvantaged students participate in extra-curricular activities in greater numbers, and also that the institution be in close cooperation with social and child welfare services. To be able to carry out all these tasks, the educational institution ensures the training and ongoing further training of teachers for the sake of effective inclusive education, the identification of social and family problems, and public educational equal opportunities. The program emphasizes the importance of taking part in methodology trainings relating to closing the gap among the students; state-of-the-art inclusive pedagogy; differentiating methodology; and procedures that develop key competences.¹³

5. Summary

Reformed Church pedagogy has a centuries old tradition of ensuring equal opportunities and equal treatment. Reformed Church teaching

¹² Source: <http://betlehemovoda.suliweb.net/>

¹³ Source: <http://refi-papa.hu/Dokumentumok/eselyegyenlosegi.pdf>

and education have proven themselves in the cases of a number of students who turned out to be key people of our Hungarian history: e.g., the talents of Sándor Petőfi, János Arany, Mór Jókai and Mihály Csokonai Vitéz were able to flourish within these frameworks.

The true personality of a Reformed man manifests itself in community, in relating to other people, in the behaviour shown to them. This behaviour is a challenge and task for a lifetime, since it takes service and often sacrifices to acquire it. The Reformed Church system of teaching and education is a system that rests on disciplined, diligent, active and biblical foundations. Its effectiveness has been proven throughout the centuries.

The teaching and educational traditions of the Reformed Church were strengthened in a social and spiritual context that was based on a Christian value system. It is the challenge of Reformed Church pedagogy to convey the Protestant thought and value system in an ever-changing world around us. The duty of Protestant teachers is to do their work in the spirit of the Bible in their daily educational activities.¹⁴

The following credo from 1982 strongly defines a Reformed Church consciousness:

„We believe that in a world in which injustice and hostility are widespread, (God) is the God in a special way of the suffering, the poor, and the disadvantaged, and He calls his Church to follow him in this, to administer justice to the oppressed, to give bread to the hungry, to free the prisoners and to make the blind see, to support the oppressed, to help the widow and the orphan, and to stand in the way of the ungodly [...] thus the Church has to stand by the suffering and defenseless people, which means among other things that the Church rejects all forms of injustice and fight against them.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Bognárné, Kocsis J.: Református történelmi hagyományok az informális tanulás és az esélyegyenlőség érdekében, 2014. 117–125. p.

¹⁵ Busch, Eberhard: Református. Egy felekezet arcúata, 2008. 169. p.

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