

# THE ETHICS OF CHRISTIAN PEDAGOGY SZONTAGH

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**Abstract:** *The subject matter of this writing is the quality- and ethical expectations towards Christian educators and the codification problems they pose. We believe that the set of expectations towards educators can only be examined to the merits by extending our research to the judicial, pedagogical and moral aspects of the issue, while taking the international context and historical dimensions of these set of expectations towards educators, of the certification system of educators and the pedagogue-ethics in consideration. In this writing, we are attempting to take a multi- directional approach to this ample topic, offering several ideological- and research crossroads. We believe that the relationship between law and ethics in (Christian) Europe can be divided in three main eras. The first one is the era of “submission”, which lasted until Enlightenment. In this era, God’s declarations set the rules of ethical conduct without any further written regulations. Following the age of Enlightenment and the emergence of civil states, “submission” was replaced by “obedience”. The framework of desirable civil conduct (including ethical conduct) was defined by states’ legal systems, administrations or police-state law enforcement agencies. By the late 20th-early 21st centuries, in the era of globalization, the role of the states and the trust vested in their judicial systems have been eroded. This resulted in the emergence of bottom-up community regulations of ethical conduct. Thus, with regards to ethical conduct, we can dub our era the era of “responsibility”. Precisely this is why, implementation and use of ethical sets of rules forced on society without their agreement represents a risk.*

**Keywords:** *Christian educators, relationship between law and ethics, Europe*

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## Introduction

The subject matter of this writing is the quality- and ethical expectations towards Christian educators and the codification problems they pose. We believe that the set of expectations towards educators can only be examined to the merits by extending our research to the judicial, pedagogical and moral aspects of the issue, while taking the international context and historical dimensions of these set of expectations towards educators, of the certification system of educators and the pedagogue-ethics in consideration. In this writing, we are attempting to take a multi-directional approach to this ample topic, offering several ideological- and research crossroads.

### 1. Hypotheses

From the point of view of our Christian identity, adherence to and experiencing theory and practice, written and unwritten ethical rules is extremely important. As of the expectations towards Christian educators, we placed special emphasis on the analysis of the accord of biblical teachings, the ethically expected conduct and how it looks like in practice.

Our multiple-dimension research covers several disciplines and regulation aspects of the professional ethics of educators. Therefore, we started our research by setting up hypotheses for each research field (Szontagh, 2018).

First, we analyze the professional/quality expectation that are set towards educators. We use the method of qualitative text analysis to examine the accord of educators' competences required by the biblical guidelines and secular, 21st century standards pertinent to educators, and the requirements of education and achievements, along with the regulation of educators' promotion system (Kotschy, 2011, Szontagh, 2016).

Our first hypothesis is that within the legal set of rules of Hungarian education management, quality expectations correspond to the moral teachings of the Bible (mainly the New Testament).

We review the relation system of legal- and ethical rules of the profession of pedagogues (and public services in general) by dissecting professional discourses in this topic and by the diachronic analysis of domestic legislation practice. As until recently, ethical issues have only been regulated by domestic public education law indirectly, we focus on the provisions governing the rights and responsibilities of educators.

Our basic presumption is that in an increasingly secularizing society, social ethical principles will be less and less supported by an underlying social agreement. Our second hypothesis is that legislators will increasingly offset this phenomenon by the inclusion of ethical expectations in black- letter law, making unethical behavior actionable.

## 2. Expectations towards Christian educators

In the examination of the relationship between Christianity and educational circumstances, we have to start with clarifying our starting definition, namely, what we mean by Christian pedagogy. Christian pedagogy is based on the biblical image of humankind. Human beings are God's (contorted) image, and to restore these contortions, God uses humans (educators) as a tool to accomplish his creative mission. Therefore, Christian pedagogy cannot be centered around humankind. It can only be centered around God, to convey values (Rottier et al., 2009).

Christian pedagogy cannot be perceived as a past theory, conceived in past centuries. Axioms, principles, objectives and responsibilities remain unchanged; however, it is necessary to respond to the needs and the social and human reality of the era by finding the tools, forms and methods that are suitable for the efficient realization of the objectives of Christian education in the actual time period and location (Fülöpné, 2013).

The process of becoming an educator is the series of interactions, where several psyches influence each other. Therefore, the expectations towards pedagogues may significantly differ, making it difficult to lay them down, and even more difficult to formally regulate them (Bugán, 1997).

The set of professional expectations towards educators can primarily be captured in the competence requirements for teachers applied in some countries. These sets of expectations are especially important from the point of view of the perception of pedagogy as a profession. The basic presumption of all professions is that practitioners of the given profession are in the possession of a specialized knowledge, therefore, laying down professional standards is an important step in making it a profession (Kimmel, 2011).

Though the expectations towards educators date back to the era when organized education emerged, the establishment of its complex rules by legislation didn't happen in Hungary until much later. Laying down the foundations of the domestic pedagogue's classification system - to which, the author of this writing also contributed as an expert - was preceded by an analysis of international experiences, based on which classification standards could be drafted that are suitable for the Hungarian public education and pedagogical culture.

As of the Hungarian efforts, shaping a career model and laying down competency levels (standards) were intertwined, aiming to establish a longitudinal and coherent system that provides the basis for educators to self-development, for education institutes to draft their education's formal and contentual elements, and for the classification system to work properly.

Government Decree No. **326/2013 (VIII.30.)** on The Promotion System of Teachers and The Execution of Act XXXIII of 1992 in Public Educational Institutes lays down pedagogues' competences while taking requirements of education and that of the output in consideration.

Both international comparison and Hungarian legislation points towards the extension of pedagogues' engagement. While previous eras were dominated by a role interpretation very much restricted by external circumstances (curriculum, methods, tools, etc.), by today it became apparent that cooperation with the social and professional environment and taking individual ownership of professional development and commitment is just as an important part of being a pedagogue. This phenomenon makes formal control more difficult, while necessitates personal professional checks and constructive appraisals by default (Hoyle&Megarry, 1980).

Based on the research of professional discourse, we can establish that educators' competences and the associated indicators laid down in **Government Decree No. 326/2013 (VIII.30.)** are also valid for the rating and perception of Christian educators.

Our analysis shows that Christian education is not a separate pedagogue's competence, but the special characteristics of the Christian educator also appear within the generally accepted competence areas.

### 3. Relationship of Ethical Standards and The Legal System

Moral norms partially or entirely disparate from law conceived not too long ago. The main sets of standards shaping the life of society (religion, morals, law) didn't separate until the late 18th century. In previous eras, widely accepted moral standards were supported by voluntary obedience from the part of most people. However, following the Enlightenment, belief in law and the strictly hierarchic systems of religion declined.

In terms of goals, there has never been a significant difference between legal and ethical norms, and this holds true today, too. However, in a secularizing and globalizing world, neither religious, nor ethical values are considered self-evident or generally accepted. With the onset of losing socially accepted values, the role of formal law naturally gains significance in the regulation of social co-existence. Consequently, beliefs or personal motivation has vanished (or is in the final stages of the process of doing so) from behind ethical rules that become codified over time.

Mihály (2001) established the difference of the two sets of standards precisely in connection with the subject matter of our study, namely with regards to education. He contends that pluralism gives no room for education that is based on a unified ethics. The diversity of group ethics within the society precludes common ethical axioms that would integrate society. He argues that common ethical principles are replaced by legal standards. Our research discussed in this writing however is attempting to prove that legal regulation in itself is not able to solve ethical dilemmas arising during the practice of the profession of pedagogues. Law in itself is not able

to describe or set forth the sophisticated, unique set of rules that is considered as the basis of social co-existence. Law is only designed to lay down the boundaries within which individuals may exercise their freedom that remains after performing their codified responsibilities.

In the secularizing society of this world that lost its values, constitutions and laws are becoming more and more “ethical”, i.e., they increasingly require conducts that used to be self-evident, unwritten - or biblical - rules in past eras (Miskolczi Bodnár, 2015).

We agree that contemporary (professional) ethics call for written regulation. In our globalizing world, common ethical/moral agreements of smaller local or cultural communities no longer substitutes written ethical norms. However, a real underlying common agreement and acceptance by the majority of the community’s members with regards to these ethical standards or codes remains essential. Top-down ethical regulation (forced upon community members by legislators, professional associations or employers) is counterproductive: lack of common agreement leads to a mere formal adjustment of behavior and to a dichotomy of official- and private conduct.

## 4. Christian (Protestant) Professional Ethics

Can it be stated, that different ethical standards are valid to each profession? Can a separate, individual ethical system be built on each profession? Some theories question the justification for individual profession ethics. These theories proclaim that if professional ethical standards are different from general ethical standards, it would lead to a split in individuals’ ethical behavior: people will consider different standards as applicable in their professional and private life (Tomka, 2017).

Others contend that a profession becomes a profession precisely because it has a valid ethical set of rules.

*“We must obey God rather than human beings!”* (Acts 5:29) Based on this well-known biblical teaching, can we establish that Christian people, Christian employees should obey different ethical rules than non-believers? We believe it’s not the case. What differentiates Christian ethics from secular ethics is the motives behind it. It is much rather the grounds for individual morality than the actual content of the behavior itself (Rae, 2016).

In the works of reformers, professional ethics is interpreted in a way different from what people were used to. Medieval Catholics considered only pastoral-clerical professions as approved by God. They held that worldly, civil jobs were inferior. Luther, on the other hand, argued that before God, all professions are equal and desirable, which constituted to a very radical view in the European society of the 16th-17th century. He proclaimed that the only way to please God is to fulfill our worldly obligations. Individuals are acting correctly if they carry on with the profession God

allocated to them and they strive to achieve the best within this profession. This is how honest work becomes God's service (Molnár, 1994).

Calvin said that human beings are created to work: God allocated duties to every individual. And, to hinder people from trespassing their own barriers, he dubbed these life paths »vocations« (vocationes). In everything we do, the starting point and basis of correct conduct is the profession we got from God. (...) This is where the comfort comes from, that no task is so miserable or low - provided that we fulfill our profession with it - that wouldn't shine and wouldn't be precious to God (Kálvin, 1991. 150-151.).

## 5. Codes of Conduct

Codes of conduct are sets of rules encompassing behavioral standards of a profession, with a scope that in addition to public conduct, may also cover private issues (Koi, 2002). In the meantime, codification of professional ethics - as seen above, all ethical standards - is posing problems (Bencsik et al., 2012).

Peter Koslowski (2001) divides people in three large groups: people who are always ethical, people who are always unethical, and those who are ethical, if the others are also ethical. This latter group needs a written code of conduct.

Formally, codes of conduct can be created in two ways. Either based on social common agreement through coordination to protect everybody's interests, or by an act of the government, based on the authorization vested by a legislation. In the former case, voluntary obedience is more likely, while in the latter, obedience may be enforced by (employment) law. Based on the above, formally, they can be either mere guidelines or legal standards.

In comparison with general ethical ideologies, professional- or specialized ethics set moral expectations for a smaller community, for members of a specialization or a profession. In our increasingly professionalizing world, the ideal of the "State as a service provider" calls for laying down unified, enforceable set of ethical standards towards employees working in public services or customer service fields (public administration, education, health care, law, social sector, mass communication, etc.). Clarifying expectations is essential for professions that are centered around human beings.

Due to their role in society's everyday life, the professional ethics of public servants, public service ethics have gained special significance. In our discussion, we examine pedagogue's ethics, as a specific professional ethic of a group of public servants (Dávid&Lóczy, 2013).

As for the majority of the professions in public service, a written code of conduct exists. In a large percentage of the surveyed professions (physicians, psychologists, attorneys, judges, civil servants, social workers) some form of association membership is mandatory, thus, regulation is generally done by the coordination of these

associations. As of the vast majority of these professions, ethical regulation is accompanied by detailed procedures and sanctions. Public service codes of conduct expressly aim for laying down a relationship system and service order that is transparent for customers, and for establishing accountability.

## 6. Pedagogues' Ethics

The profession of an educator calls for individual accountability and for committed social conduct at the same time. Its institutional hierarchy is not segmented, because the structure lacks the actual middle manager level. The circle of stakeholders is extremely wide and at times hard to define: it comprises not only the children and colleagues, but also the families and acquaintances of students. Also, the relationship of the educator and the student is special: the student is subordinated to the teacher, but at the same time they are also placed on par. Moreover, the possibilities for communication are largely defined by the readiness level of students. Education is a service in both senses: it features the expectations of services' marketing and the compelling forces of law.

Until lately, public education law hasn't regulated ethical issues *per se*. Expectations of professional ethics towards pedagogues can be rather be identified through the provisions governing educators' rights and responsibilities. In the late 19th and early 20th century, these provisions were not too detailed. During this era, the definition of *good teacher* did not differ from the definition of *good man*: honest, hard-working, respectful and disciplined (Zrinszky, 2002).

In the last few years, several entities attempted to set up ethical sets of rules in several different ways, based on their (education) philosophy. Depending on the method of issue and scope, the results may significantly differ, but we don't have data on how each regulation was formally and informally implemented in the everyday practice of the institutions, much less on how they were integrated in educators' ethical conduct. Our survey attempts to fill this gap.

## 7. Conclusion

We believe that juxtaposition of biblical teachings with regards to the Christian practice of the profession of pedagogues and the pedagogues' competences used for the classification of educators **has** adequately **proven** that professional and ethical expectations set towards educators through competence requirements and competence indicators are in line with the moral teachings of the Bible (primarily of the New Testament). Thus, educators claiming to be Christian have no reason to fear the requirements of "worldly" classification or have biblical grounds to ignore this set of expectations by invoking their belief.

Based on our research, it can be established that legal-style, ethical regulations threatening with employment law consequences can only be used with caution, and ethical proceedings brought to judge violations of such regulations may not forgo the consideration of circumstances, local customary behavior, unwritten beliefs and views.

The results of our research also support the view emerging in professional discourses that codes of conduct in themselves are not adequate, if due to lack of internal convictions, individuals cannot internalize them and cannot appreciate their character-shaping significance (Homicskó, 2017). Now, that the hypotheses are proven, we have to point out that clarification of ethical connection systems and a wide-scale agreement with regards to the ethical basics of the profession is

essential to restore internal and external prestige of the profession of pedagogues.

We believe that the relationship between law and ethics in (Christian) Europe can be divided in three main eras. The first one is the era of “submission”, which lasted until Enlightenment. In this era, God’s declarations set the rules of ethical conduct without any further written regulations. Following the age of Enlightenment and the emergence of civil states, “submission” was replaced by “obedience”. The framework of desirable civil conduct (including ethical conduct) was defined by states’ legal systems, administrations or police-state law enforcement agencies. By the late 20th-early 21st centuries, in the era of globalization, the role of the states and the trust vested in their judicial systems have been eroded. This resulted in the emergence of bottom-up community regulations of ethical conduct. Thus, with regards to ethical conduct, we can dub our era the era of “responsibility”. Precisely this is why, implementation and use of ethical sets of rules forced on society without their agreement represents a risk.

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