

**VALUES, STANDARDS, SET OF VALUES**  
**Quality- and ethical expectations towards**  
**Christian educators and their codification**  
**problems**

**(Summary in English language)**



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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.

First, we analyze the professional/quality expectation that are set towards educators. While we **review** the domestic and international theory and practice of the issue and look for **geography-induced differences**, we place special emphasis on competences expected in the field of Christian education. With regards to this, 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.

**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).**

In our research, we put special emphasis on the Christian (Protestant) dimensions of educators' profession and professional ethics. We are analyzing these professional-ethical

expectations through codes of conduct applied in international and domestic practice by **surveying** educators' willingness to follow rules and their ethical judgments. Amongst others, we used Paul Ricoeur's theory as a starting point for our research. The theory says that conflicts arising from applying norms to an exact situation suggest abandoning moral norms and resorting to ethical objectives. In other words: in ethical conflict situations it's not the codified moral norms but the internalized transcendent ethical objectives that prevail.

**Our second hypothesis is that in the case of black-letter rules of educators' professional ethics the pedagogues are stricter when it comes to creating rules, but more lenient when they deliver case-by-case ethical judgments of practical issues.**

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 third 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 writing examines the eight pedagogues' competences in terms of the extent they can be applied to the appraisal of Christian educators basing their activities on the Bible, and whether each competence could be matched up with biblical teachings.

Our detailed 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 Ottó 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.

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.

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.

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.

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« (vocations). (...) 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.”

## **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. In the meantime, codification of professional ethics – as seen above, all ethical standards – is posing problems.

Peter Koslowski 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.

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.

The main characteristic of public service is that its practitioners do their jobs strongly embedded in society, in the focus of public attention, and as such, while they practice their profession, they are not only representing themselves, their profession or working community, but also need to be widely accepted and respected by the society, not to mention people’s cooperation. This latter justifies the detailed regulation of confidentiality, ruling out corruption and conflicts of interest for all surveyed professions.

## **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. Precisely this is why, the actual descriptions of pedagogues' professional ethics can only be located in professional discourses depicting the characteristics of the ideal educator, as opposed to hard law. In our writing, we are attempting to review the chronology of emergence of ethical expectations in legal standards, starting from the first Hungarian public education law.

Subsequently, we will compare a few pedagogues' codes of conduct implemented in countries very far from each other, both geographically and in terms of education policy. During this, we examine whether general characteristics exist among them that are valid for all, regardless of social, political and educational traditions. Bearing the internal coherence of our writing in mind, we have chosen examples from Australia, the United States, Finland and Italy.

Our survey introduced later in this writing in detail covered several domestic codes of conduct with various dates of issue and professional communities issuing them. Our comparison reveals that 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. Results of the Analysis of The Educators' Survey**

Though creators of ethical sets of rules (codes) put forth every effort to cover desirable conducts for every situation that may arise while practicing the profession, experience shows that these rules are very difficult, if not impossible to follow in practice. Ethical values may be promulgated, published, and may be coherently and explicitly integrated in a hierarchically structured system; however, there is a second, implicit transmission channel, which becomes apparent in the actual conduct, in modeling exemplary practices: in the profession of educators, both tools must be used. Obviously, a value pedagogy cannot act solely as an intermediary of these values. These values have to be applied as well. Based on our presumption, violation of written codes of conduct is not about a simple violation issue, much rather about necessity: pedagogues can identify better with general and individual expectations phrased in legalese, separated from their practical experiences by language use alone, than they would condemn those prohibited practices in reality. In other words: they are more lenient when judging the real conduct of their colleagues than when they read (or even draft) the code.

We backed our research by a survey, in which educators filled out two questionnaires. In the first one, in addition to sharing their basic sociological data, we asked participants to rate excerpts from various codes of conduct for pedagogues from 1 to 10, based on how much they consider those provisions necessary or acceptable for pedagogues. In the second one, participants were given various ethical situations arising in practice, and they were asked to rate them from 1 to 10, based on how much the described conducts they consider as a violation of ethics. The second questionnaire's situations corresponded to the situations described in the codes of conduct. Evaluation of the survey is done by comparison of the judgments of the excerpts of the codes of conducts and the corresponding situations.

The first questionnaire was filled out by 502, the second by 382 individuals. 286 of the respondents of the second questionnaire filled out the first questionnaire as well, therefore, respondents of the second questionnaire are 75.1% identical to the respondents of the first questionnaire.

The difference between the average responses of the two questionnaires amounts to almost 4 points out of 10 (average acceptance of the rules of the first questionnaire: 9.30; average

negative judgement of the cases described in the second questionnaire: 5.33). While – apart from two extreme cases – the variation of the answers of the first questionnaire is between 0.75 and 1.61, variation of the responses of the second questionnaire – apart from one lower value – is above 2, even above 3 full points.

The comparison of the two questionnaires justifies our hypothesis, namely that for practical cases, respondents were more lenient than when reading/drafting the rules.

It can be established that rules that are accepted by respondents the most are all about preserving the dignity of the profession and about the protection of the pedagogue-ethos they try to relay to others. Judgment of the practical situations (that are violating the above rules) is far from being so uniform.

When analyzing the survey, we were also looking to establish the sociological background indicators that affected the answers the most.

If we compare the results analyzed by individual sub-populations, we can establish that we find the most variation among the theoretical responses of the first questionnaire if we break down the responses by type of institution. While nursery teachers can identify with the moral standards listed in questionnaires (9.53), middle school teachers are more sceptic in this matter (9.13, the difference is 0.4) At the same time, it is also true that there is no significant difference between answers given by educators living in the capital city/county seats or other cities/towns (average 9.28 or 9.31, the difference: 0.03).

As of the theoretical provisions, nursery teachers can identify with them the most of all respondent groups (9.53), while educators of state-owned institutions can do the same to the least amount (9.00). Obviously, this result may be influenced by the fact that creation of their codes of conduct (which they were mandated to do by law) stirred substantial (professional) political controversies in the last few weeks.

Judgment of real life situations were influenced by job title the most. The difference between answers given by supervisors (5.64) and subordinates (5.17) is 0.47. Geographical differences remain low (5.25 vs. 5.38, difference: 0.13).

With regards to the real-life examples, supervisors are the strictest: the listed cases were judged by them by an average 5.64 points, that is, their judgment bends slightly towards

ethical judgment. On the other side of the spectrum are educators of state-owned school teachers (supervisors and subordinates), whose average is 5.03, which is almost exactly the median.

Summarizing the results of the sub-populations, the profile of the educator with the strictest ethical expectations can be established as follows: A small town, female head of nursery of a reformed church, between the ages of 51-60. On the other end of the spectrum are subordinate male teachers of city (or capital city) middle schools, short before retirement.

The strictest judgment of an individual ethical case is expected from a female leader of a small-town arts school or special education institute, possibly of a professional service provider or specialized service institute, just before retirement, while the most lenient decision towards ethical violations would come from male, subordinate teachers of a city (capital city), state-owned middle school, who are under the age of 40.

## **8. Summary**

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.

The survey also **reinforced the second hypothesis of our research**. Though to a different extent for each breakdown, the fact that agreement with the rules phrased in legalese does not necessarily mean judgment of moral issues/acting in situations posing a moral challenge in accordance with the rules was reinforced in all respondent groups. The extent of the difference between individual rules and cases varies, but it was true for each case that educators took several external and internal circumstances in consideration when forming their judgment of cases describing violations of written standards. As our hypothesis, namely that pedagogues are stricter when it comes to creating rules, but more lenient when they deliver case-by-case ethical judgments of practical issues is reinforced by this study, we can

presume that this is actually caused by the codes being phrased in strict legalese, which creates a gap between the code and everyday practice.

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.

Also, our **third hypothesis was justified**, namely by studying professional discourse. Though we deny the Mihály Ottó's statement, namely that "in pluralism, ethic's society-integrating role is taken over by law", we have to concede that "in an era when religion-based and secularized ethic bonds are losing grip, constitutions and legal systems are increasingly involved in ethics."

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.

Our research had two further objectives in terms of the near future. On one hand, we continuously aim to integrate our research results in the curriculum of the subject “Morals and Ethics” of pedagogical programs in progress at the Faculty of Teachers’ Training College of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, to use the continuous publication of our results to support students’ work. On the other hand, bearing the focus of the education in mind, we are planning to repeat the above survey with the students of educators’ training institutions and to compare ethical judgments of future and practicing educators.