

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE HISTORY OF THE REFORMED COLLEGE OF DEBRECEN BETWEEN 1850 AND 1950

Ágota FEHÉR¹

ABSTRAKT

The Reformed College of Debrecen played a special role in our school system as "the school of the country" [Bölcskei, In: 8: 7]: the institution functioned without interruption even during the vicissitudes of history, and the academic results of the students in the High School were among the best in the country for years. In the course of my work, I pay special attention to the main milestones in the school history of the period between the Austrian education reform (Entwurf) and nationalization, and in the light of these, I summarize the role and characteristics of religious education. Faith education provided spiritual support for the students of the High School, and played a significant role both in the spirit of the institution and in developing the best abilities of the students. "The older students were able to lead the younger ones by making progress in faith and knowledge important to them at the same time." [13: 326] In the course of my work, I build the connections between religious and moral education and talent management on the institution's bulletins, city and church district minutes, as well as on other historical sources of education.²

KEYWORDS

Reformed College of Debrecen, school history, faith education, talent development, Entwurf

INTRODUCTION

In the modern history of our domestic school culture, the colleges that were organized and maintained by the protestant churches from the middle of the 16th century played a prominent role for centuries. The scientific activities of the institution were combined with the educational role of the college. The school colleges provided quality training, meanwhile, they strengthened the value of the community even in the vicissitudes of history [1].

The role of Reformed College of Debrecen stands out among these institutions: the academic performance of the students studying here was the best in the country for years between the two world wars, it was considered the most successful high school in Hungary [Bölcskei, In: 7: 7]. Sándor Csikesz, professor of theology and college archivist, praised the institution's merits in his 1935 submission in connection with the 400-year anniversary (1938): thanks to it, "talented sons of the oldest but poorest stratum of Hungarians could rise to become the leading strata of the nation" [In: 9: 29]. This was greatly contributed by the fact

¹ Fehér Ágota: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Pedagógiai Kar, e-mail: feher.agota@kre.hu

² A kutatást a Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Pedagógiai Karának *Hitéleti képzések és a tehetséggondozás fejlesztése* című pályázata támogatja.

that "in the country's schools ... a biblical pedagogical value system that focuses on talent and diligence" [Bölcskei, In: 8: 7] developed.

In my study, I focus on the main stages of school history between 1850 and 1950, and I summarize the role and characteristics of religious education in the light of these. Religious education provided spiritual support to the students of the High School, and played a significant role both in the spirit of the institution and in developing the best abilities of the students. "The older students were able to lead the younger ones by making progress in faith and knowledge important to them at the same time." [13: 326] In the course of my present work, I review the main characteristics of religious and moral education in the period between the Austrian educational reform (Entwurf) and nationalization, based on the institution's notices, city and church district minutes, and other educational historical sources.

The roots of faith education in the institution

The institution of the Reformed College of Debrecen is an outstanding example of the Hungarian reformed school system, where the purpose of education was not only to prepare for ministerial service, but also to prepare those preparing for civilian careers, including teaching. Until 1948, College of Debrecen, based on a well-organized network of elementary, middle and high schools, played a role in Hungarian education far exceeding the proportion of Hungarian reformed schools [9: 53].

One of the most important documents of the Reformed churches from the 16th century, the Heidelberg Catechism, affirms: "let us maintain the preaching and the schools" [10: 53]. The transmission of the word of the Bible, religious education, and attending religious services are therefore an essential part of college life, since "neither teaching nor the pursuit of education will achieve their goal if they cannot be put to the service of preaching." [5: 437] According to Melancthon, "the school is the vegetable garden of the church" [7: 307]. These thoughts also confirm that faith education was a close part of the institution's life, provided support for both the individual and the community, and contributed to the development of abilities.

The educational principles of the institution, which has been operating without interruption even amid the significant vicissitudes of history, were based on Calvin's teachings: they were strictly based on the Bible, they emphasized the personal relationship between God and man – without an intermediary – and advocated a diligent and puritan way of life [9: 7]. Discipline is therefore essential in the life of the institution, and it largely determines its effectiveness.

In connection with talent management, all of this can also be considered an essential value, since the ability to persevere also helps with in-depth work, and thus makes it possible to solve more difficult tasks and even find new, creative results. It strengthens the sense of responsibility and thereby supports the power of commitment, even finding new solutions. And the Bible's guidelines strengthen a bond that also emphasizes the value of roots. The spirit of the College supports preservation and conservation, and gives it to the next generations [13: 307].

The educational work of the Reformed College of Debrecen was defined by both city superiors and pastors. In Debrecen, at first the city council decided on the financial matters of the school, and it also had the right to choose textbooks. Mária Theresia's decree of January 8, 1752 forbids the city to financially support the Reformed Church and its school until it provides similar support to the officials of the Roman Church. They oversee the affairs of dormi-

tory education, check the moral life of teachers and students, enforce the strict principles of teaching, and censor textbooks. A significant change only became possible on April 28, 1792, when the synod named the Church District as the College's supervisory body [city minutes 1752. 7–10. based on, In: 13: 307].

Among religious and moral expectations, discipline has always been fundamental, and students are punished for their transgressions if necessary. The regulations of 1792 "give a more detailed description of religious and moral education" [13: 308]. Strictness is necessary to maintain discipline, e.g. based on church district protocol, if necessary, "strict action must be taken against students" [13: 308] if they commit indiscipline. In the case of minor indiscretions, humane guidance is necessary, but in the case of intentional, scandalous transgressions, strictness is required. Among the basic principles of religious education, discipline has always been a central issue, "the dormitory and religious life are inseparable" [13: 308]. The following thoughts of Ferenc Kerekes were included in the 1845 laws of the institution [13: 308]:

- problematic children are a danger to the school, but their removal may result in them dying, so their education must be carried out by a separate institute, which will be established by the public church;
- instead of punishing crimes and transgressions, school laws should focus on prevention;
- students can only rent accommodation from reliable accommodation providers, out-of-towners are supervised by "senatus academicus";
- students should spend their free time with constructive activities, drawing, painting, singing, physical exercise should play a greater role;
- education must strive for positive morality and a firm foundation.

Overall, the guidelines of Ferenc Kerekes also confirm: the good word and the students' emotional commitment to the Christian faith are more important than punishment, and if they experience what is good and noble, love for them develops in them [13: 312]. We can also help the development of abilities with this, so all these are important messages from the point of view of talent management.

In order to avoid indiscipline, the students' daily schedule was strict and full: get up at 3 in the morning, start classes at 6 in the morning, end the daily activities at 7 in the evening, play ball in the little free time, and practice music from the 18th century in the framework of the *musica collegium*. There was no way he could be left behind and reading the Bible, commentaries, singing psalms and praises, and supplication were the basis of the dormitory order. The prayers included, among other things, thanksgiving for the educational work of parents and teachers, for physical and spiritual nourishment, for the city and the patrons of the school, they confessed their unworthiness to God's goodness and asked for their progress in the sciences, and finally they asked for faith and love so that the Mother Church could be built [13: 309]. All this attachment and the feeling that they belong to Providence, to whom they can turn with their thoughts, also help them develop their abilities and achieve their best results.

Going to church is an important part of religious life. In the 16-17th century, the students listened attentively to the teachings of the services, took notes and recited them to the praepceptor. The school laws defined the attendance of religious services in different ways in different stages of the school's history, since there were also cases of escapes, and then e.g. In 1848, students also requested the optional nature of attending the service.

László Ravasz sees the unity of Christianity and humanism as an important factor in the spirit of the College, and he also discusses the "value-preserving significance" of the puritan and conservative outlook on life [13: 310]. The basis of moral education in the dormitory is a

community where "strict religiosity, simple morality, discipline and education rooted in solid traditions" prevails [12: 33].

Discipline can be best established if the students themselves implement it and thus provide an example for each other, that is, if "the direct influence of the older students who profess their faith on the younger ones" prevails in a positive direction [13: 311]. Community-creating roles are, for example, shared prayers, daily contact with God's word, humble living before God, "and the sown seed produced good fruits according to the law" [13: 311].

There were no syllabi related to the curriculum until the 18th century, because the selection of the curriculum and the method of teaching were based on the ideas of the given professor. Regarding the content of religious teaching, however, the Holy Scriptures, the creeds accepted by the reformed church, and the previous history of the church could not be missing.

However, the order of religious teaching and faith education was also determined by the circumstance of the students' choice of institution: more and more people arrived who did not want to become pastors. Religious education could not only be imparting knowledge, based on the thoughts of István Hatvani (1760): "children should not cultivate their minds as much as their hearts" [13: 312]. The power of the good word, positive reinforcement, joint discussion with the students and updates are therefore playing an increasingly important role, based on the Parish Minutes of May 19, 1795: "A person's entire life and condition largely depends on his childhood education and teaching... bad education and because of bad teaching ... people also fall from eternal happiness" [13: 313].

The school's relationship with the congregations was also nurtured: on major holidays, students preached the word as delegates and legates of the school, which was both church practice for young people preparing to become pastors and an opportunity for the congregation to help the school from which its pastors leave [13:313]. Chanting served to help poorer students: during special occasions (weddings, birthdays and other holidays), they graced the celebrants with songs of praise and psalms, raising the mood of the celebration with spiritual songs, and were therefore rewarded.

By the middle of the 19th century, some previous teaching methods disappeared – e.g. there are no discussions (disputes) and study groups (collations), which also meant the students' activation, community work and the possibility of academic control, since they also expressed the progress of individual students [3: 570; 8: 100]. Also, as a significant change, on March 22, 1848, the 8 points of the college youth edited by Imre Révész were adopted by the document of church district [6], in this e.g. they also ask for the abolition of the compulsion to go to church. In the end, this could not be implemented in practice, and after the defeat of the freedom struggle, a new situation arose: the division of the College into departments became inevitable.

Religious teaching and religious moral education between 1850 and 1920

To Debrecen in 1848/1849. because of its role in the independence struggle in 1850, there was stronger pressure from Vienna, and on September 7, 1850, the Minister of Culture Leo Thun ordered: "secondary schools should be transformed on the model of the eight-class secondary schools introduced in Austria in 1849" [2: 193].

The Austrian educational reform, the Organizations Entwurf, required an 8-grade gymnasium with an independent faculty, which threatened to disintegrate the traditional dormitory school structure, since the two years of the liberal arts faculty formed the last two years of the

eight-grade gymnasium. Due to the use of qualified teaching staff, the praeceptor practice of learning by teaching also ceased [9: 24; 8: 58]. The private school system broke down, as rural small schools were also forced to employ independent teaching staff.

A decree also prescribed the organization of law academies into independent colleges and their separation from theology. The Entwurf also made matriculation exams mandatory, but the Reformed College of Debrecen lost its right to publicity because of the violation of ecclesiastical autonomy [8: 58], therefore the students were forced to take matriculation exams for 3 years before the Premontre Fathers of Nagyvárad to do. Their results were excellent, they graduated with honors and distinction [13: 314]. (In the end, the Church District reorganized the High School and on August 10, 1853, it regained its right to be public.)

"The Entwurf fundamentally changed the College's centuries-old educational practice." [8: 58] The College's elementary school remained 4 classes, but the 6-class high school became 8 classes, and the 2-year academic section gradually became a 3-faculty college (theology, law, humanities). The types of schools operating within the College are more sharply separated from each other than before. After the initial uncertainty, the Debrecen College quickly found itself, and based on the results of its institutions, they were once again at the forefront of domestic education in the last third of the century [8: 58].

Student associations were reorganized, "the former democratic student traditions of the College lived on in them" [8: 58]. At the end of the century, education became more and more high-quality and new forms of self-education developed as uniform high school self-education circles [9: 26], e.g. Academic Students' Reading Association, Hungarian Literary Self-Education Society, Cantus.

In the first decades of the 20th century, further changes took place in the structure of college education: in 1912, the Hungarian Parliament decided to establish a state university in Debrecen, and upon the decision of the maintaining church district, the College offered the faculty of theology, law and humanities with its teachers and students for the purpose of establishing a university [8: 60]. With the establishment of the state university, it became necessary to establish two new residential dormitory higher education institutes: Pastoral Training Institute (1914-1952), which provides practical theological training, and Teacher Training Institute (1925-1952), which provides additional ecclesiastical training for liberal arts students [8].

Despite these historical changes, the main basis and purpose of education in the Reformed College of Debrecen remained: "the preservation and transmission of lasting values" [13: 313], "everyone recognized the authority of the church doctrines presented in the creeds" [3: 566]. They tried to resist new intellectual trends, but during the peregrination the students experienced them and brought them with them, strengthening patriotic feelings.

After the Entwurf, his school ideal: state and national school. Minister of Culture József Báró Eötvös was also a supporter of a unified state school, and although he did not wish to encroach on the autonomy of church schools, he insisted on the right of state supervision.

Religious teaching was apparently less affected, according to the lesson plan of 1852, it continued undisturbed in all grades for 2 hours a week. However, the spiritual life of the College was accompanied by liberal ideas in addition to the puritanical and orthodox outlook. The students who visited abroad got to know the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and his students at German and Dutch universities, according to which the essence of religion is religious feeling and spiritual elevation [13: 315].

József Zákány's (1785-1857) textbook, for example, says: "Religion requires mind, heart and faith. The mind investigates the causes of nature, the heart accepts the moral feeling, and faith rests on the acceptance of biblical truths." [12: 65] An essential part of education is the

development of spiritual talents, and the task of education is to increase knowledge. Humans are born with certain abilities, and direct experiences and the support of a teacher who loves children and takes their individual abilities into account are essential in their development [4: 436]. Man is a unified whole, he develops his abilities consciously, and these include the development of physical abilities and the cultivation of the soul [14: 1103]. József Zákány clarifies the different "talents" of man in a complex approach: among the manifestations of talent, he highlights the role of reason, judgment, memory, imagination, heart feeling, moral and religious feeling.

These thoughts therefore confirmed the importance of the completeness of the personality and emotional commitment, and underpinned it: increasing knowledge alone is not enough, internal involvement is also necessary during academic progress. All these also expressed the development of abilities and the process of talent management becoming more complete.

After the Entwurf, the number of students at the school continued to grow, and more and more people entered non-ministerial careers. The students brought the zeitgeist with them, and personal involvement became even more important in the spiritual life of the College instead of observing the mandatory rules. The moral life built on the Reformed faith can be experienced in school life throughout the day, in addition to the lessons, the students also served in the churches of Debrecen [13: 316].

All students studied religion, despite their large number of students, they were taught by teachers who deeply felt the importance of religious teaching and were committed Reformed teachers [13: 317]. Their personalities provided a valuable example and strengthened the cohesion of the community.

József S. Szabó headed the religious studies department from 1894. His students were happy to learn from him and commented on him: "we felt better because of him", "he created order with the word of love" [Id: 13: 318]. The College supported the spiritual life and religious development of the students with several innovations, e.g. for the first 4 grades, children's services are introduced, the purpose of which is not education, but guidance to faith [16: 59]. The sermons were also published in writing as a series of booklets under the title "About love". Before major holidays, religious exercises were held to prepare for the holidays [13: 318].

In 1902, he organizes a Youth Church to unite confirmed classes. The community is self-organizing, led by 8th grade students, and the members of the management board are elected by grade level. "The church started its operation in a modest way. On Sunday mornings, he gathered for worship, which consisted of singing, praying, reading the Bible, possibly explaining the Bible, reading original religious works and reciting religious poems." [17: 95] "At the meeting of the congregation, everyone voiced as a guiding principle that their members should only have Jesus as their role model in their affairs, and that they should try to develop faith in God according to his teachings. Meanwhile, they meditated on the correct way of worship, singing and praying." [17:96]

The community of the Youth Church created significant value, and its work was surrounded by respect and appreciation. József S. Szabó considered the involvement of more mature students in the faith to be essential, he counted on them as an example for the younger ones, as enhancers of the community. The purpose of their meetings is to "build up each other's faith" [13: 320], and this also played a role in the reduction of disciplinary problems at school. The Youth Church's "spirituality and love had a positive effect on the other students as well... This situation was not shaken even by the years of war" [13: 321], the Youth Church became an important helper in faith education.

It was a significant change in the history of the theology department that it became a part of the university in 1912 by law and then in 1914." [3: 572] They tried to strengthen the unity of the independent sections by, among other things, attending religious services together, and the Christian spirit was an additional spiritual strength during the wars and beyond. Between the two world wars, the opportunities for peregrination expanded, the scientific organization work gained momentum again, and with this new valuable results became available at the institution.

Religious education and religious moral education between 1920 and 1950

The school's management and teaching staff "tried to use every opportunity during and outside of class to develop the students' Reformed Christian view of life and the world, to consolidate their religious and patriotic feeling and moral spirit" [18: 9].

For the spiritual development of the students, they held a "student Sunday" [13: 323], they read national faith-building publications, e.g. the Force c. paper and the Sunday Book [18: 9].

After Trianon, the national mourning intensified, the students prayed the "national creed" together every day [13: 323]. The teaching staff viewed the events organized by the students with criticism, seeing them as haste: "Serious religiosity and patriotism do not expect demonstrations from schools" [19: 18], "this will not cause the borders of Trianon to collapse." [20:35]

In 1921, under the leadership of teacher Ferenc Debreczeni, scout troop No. 172 "Force" was founded, its aim after the war was to educate and lead the students to a reformed self-awareness, Christian morals, standing in faith, and leading a disciplined life [13: 323].

Sándor Nagy, a teacher at the Department of Religion, considers the value-preserving and value-creating task of the College to be important, and in connection with educating young people receptive to the Gospel to faith, he believes that prevention is the most important thing, and that punishment should only be used in the case of significantly problematic students [13: 324]. Confidence in the expression of good intentions was strengthened, and with this, perseverance and academic results could also be supported in a calmer atmosphere.

In 1928, with the aim of strengthening unity, the directors of the college departments encouraged the alumni to form the Student Association of Reformed College of Debrecen. Among the former students, those who helped the renewal of the church were invited, thereby showing the students a valuable example, e.g. Sándor Karácsony. The support of the unit, the power inherent in it, helped to support poor students, and with this, the academic progress of the most talented students was made possible, regardless of their origin, also in connection with talent management.

For a long time, the historical part was in the foreground in the textbooks related to religious education, but from 1930, the teaching of apologetics and the defense of faith was included in the curriculum of the graduating year, which also has a religious psychology section. The life of faith, education and awakening to the faith continued to take place on the occasions of the Youth Church, worship services and Bible circles, the latter were highlighted in the strengthening of immersion in the faith, high-level education and training, lively religious life characterized the institution [13: 327]. "The older students were able to lead the younger ones by making progress in faith and knowledge important to them at the same time." [13: 326]

And the values of this spiritual support can also be confirmed in recent times of war: religious life, spiritual cohesion and, at the same time, the sharing of common thoughts all meant holding hands. Especially popular were the occasions on which the spoken word could be discussed together or questions could be asked of the speaker [13: 328]. From the point of view of talent management, this process, which gave space to individual thoughts and suggestions, was also a valuable opportunity to delve deeper into the given topic. Communal life can be compared to the life of a church, with the urging of the Universal Convention in 1940 [3: 577], so additional spiritual resources could be experienced.

The occupation of the country also interrupted the operation of the institution, but the students returned after the liberation, and the standard of study did not drop significantly even after the war. With joint efforts, reconstruction also became easier: "these were difficult but promising years, we had no reason to look to the future in despondency" [3: 578]. In connection with the life of faith, the number of Bible circles temporarily decreased, but later they were reorganized. Days of silence helped deepen the study, and on Pentecost 1946, a series of sermons on the Holy Spirit was also held.

The emphasis is still on the individual and community spiritual support of the students, and the goal of religious and moral education is still: "acquaint receptive young people with the gospel and lead them to faith, invite them to make a personal decision and conversion" [13: 329]. The church papers distributed among the students moved in this way of thinking, with national evangelistic tours they tried to reach and lead the generation left in the war on the path of the gospel.

The strong roots of the College's spirit also helped in the fact that the discipline of the students was good during and after the war, disciplinary matters were minimal, and this could be a consequence of the fact that "the best of the student body, who had an impact on the others, in faith and they were able to set an example in morality. As a result of many decades of work, the education in the institution finally became what they had long wanted to see, an institution that leads to a life of faith and educates in it. [13:330]

In 1948, Mátyás Rákosi and the Communist Party took over the religious school system in order to settle the relationship between church and state, and forced the handover of the primary institutions and high school of the Reformed Church. Initially, the handover would not have extended to the Debrecen Reformed College, but in the end, despite the promise, this did not happen. The church also insisted that religious education could remain compulsory in the transferred schools, but the new constitution overrode this with the wording of freedom of conscience, and from September 5, 1949, religious education remained optional in the institutions that remained in the hands of the church [11].

Due to state pressure, Imre Révész resigned from his position in 1949 and was replaced by János Péter, who did not insist on the gymnasiums remaining in church hands. In 1951, director Lajos Pósz's speech to the faculty: "the church schools did not fulfill their mission task, since they could not educate reformed intellectuals who walk in the faith through religious education. And the task of the church is the mission, and not to maintain high-quality schools, which the state is also capable of." [13:330]

From the fall of 1952, the Reformed College of Debrecen could continue to operate its high school as the only protestant high school that remained in church hands, and even in the difficulties of history, it strove for high-quality educational work: "it cannot offer less than any public school." [13: 331] The role of the institution is outstanding both in terms of the professional quality of the imparted knowledge and in supporting and increasing the students'

sense of belonging and spiritual strength. The commitment of the instructors and their attachment to the Reformed spirit was a model, and it continued to live on in the students' relationship with each other. Calvinist values and personal influences were helpful in persevering even in the midst of difficulties, in developing the best abilities, and thus also served as a valuable support in relation to talent management.

"On the creation of housing and learning conditions for the dormitories, the in addition to providing security and emotional protection, and teaching social roles, as important arenas for the care and education of the whole personality, they can provide an excellent opportunity to implement talent development work." [15:194]

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