

Babeş-Bolyai University
Faculty of Reformed Theology

THE PEDAGOGICAL WORK OF LAJOS IMRE

Ph.D. Dissertation

-Summary-

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I. Introduction

“Remember your leaders. They taught God’s message to you. Remember how they lived and died, and copy their faith.” (Heb. 13:7)

A vocational teacher endeavours his best to convey all his knowledge and experience to his students, preparing them to hold on in life in any circumstances.

As a university student I already noticed the work of the priest and renowned scholar-pedagogue, Lajos Imre. As I got acquainted with his walk of life more profoundly I became more and more fascinated by his consistency on humbleness and simplicity, by his perseverance and high degree of professionalism, by the manner as he succeeded to redirect “the light” like a prism to the Supreme Teacher, the service of whom he undertook for a lifetime. As a religious teacher I regard Lajos Imre as my role model, and find it symbolic that I was born one day after he passed away. In the course of my work I aspire to realize his principles on pedagogy that I got acquainted with through his writings founding our functional theology and through the testimonies of his contemporaries.

A number of people before me had been involved in appreciating his pedagogical, theological and society building work; pursuing them I would also like to commemorate him, who created something permanent even until today by modernizing the catechetical practice of Transylvanian reformed religious teachers.

Dr. Lajos Imre was a man of small built with a small moustache but he was a powerful person, he did not belong to those who would catch one’s eyes at first glance. He was characterized by his contemporaries as a fast-moving person who would rather sit humbly in the back. He had a fantastic memory grasping everything in his mind, even the characters of the novels he read. He acquired a nationwide reputation in his discipline, in functional theology and pedagogy. What was incomprehensible for his fellows was when he was reading so much as he was always active organising something.

Lajos Imre’s personality exuded contentment, although he was never pleased with himself. He knew that he was just small and unfit in front of God. But it was actually by this that he could become God’s outstanding and qualified asset. If he found himself inapt for something, he would not undertake that service. In 1915 he would have had the opportunity to take on the Department of New Testament at the Faculty of Theology in Kolozsvár. He declined the offer

made to him because he did not consider it appropriate to take on a professorship, for which he did not have a thorough professional preparedness. Nevertheless, he became involved with a will in the review launched by László Ravasz and Sándor Makkai entitled “The Way”, aiming to develop ministerial work professionally.

II. The life and work of Lajos Imre

In this chapter I presented the life and work of Lajos Imre.

Lajos Imre was born on 4th November 1888, in Hódmezővásárhely, Hungary. Ministerial and pedagogical professions were traditional in his family. As his father and his grandfather on his father side were both reputed teachers, and all his four great-grandfathers were pastors, he was not able to decide between ministration and teaching for a long time. However, he was always inclined to the ministerial profession. As he spent lots of summers at his grandparents in Kolozsvár, he got used to the town; hence he decided to continue his education at the Theology in Kolozsvár. He started his studies in theology in the fall of 1906 where he had as professors Dr. Béla Kennessey, Dr. Károly Nagy, Domokos Szász, József Pokoly, István Kecskeméthy, György Boros, István Imre, László Ravasz and György Bartók, Jr. During this period the Theology in Kolozsvár aligned to the so-called modern theology of the time. In line with his theological studies he would also attend lectures at the Faculty of Arts of the Hungarian University in Kolozsvár for 10 classes per week where he had as professors Dr. István Schneller, Károly Böhm and Sándor Imre as well.

As a theologian he was the chairman of the “Gábor Bethlen Circle” between 1911-1912, that aimed to unite the Hungarian protestant youth in the patriotic, religious and academic spirit of Gábor Bethlen and to propagate and cultivate this spirit in all layers of the society. This association joined university students; Bible study nights, academic debates, concerts and balls were organised. It was owing to Imre Révész that this cultural circle was renewed. As a theologian Lajos Imre got acquainted with Károly Mott who was regarded as the champion of functional theology by his contemporaries. Lajos Imre encountered protestant orthodoxy – that came through enlightenment and rationalism from the 17th century – during his years at the Theology in Kolozsvár, but he also encountered the pietism represented by professor Béla Kennessey that arrived here from the liberal Theology of Nagyenyed.

As he soon committed himself to catechism and pastoral care, he expanded his knowledge in Aberdeen, Scotland (1910–1911) and in Heidelberg, Germany (1912–1913). Due to a successful application, from October 1910 to July 1911 he was a fellow student in Aberdeen at the Faculty of Theology of the orthodox-oriented Reformed Church of Scotland. Between 1912-1913 he pursued his studies at the Theology in Heidelberg, Germany, and owing to the knowledge gained here he earned the title of Doctor of Science in Philosophy and Pedagogy,

then he became a private teacher of functional theology. In Scotland, Lajos Imre had inevitably encountered both the rigid doctrine of orthodoxy and exalted pietism – these schools there were present in their extreme forms. Despite the primitive Scottish orthodoxy, he managed to get an insight into the theology of the Scottish church. He could experience the vivacity of the ecclesiastical life over there, the serious fervency of Scottish ministers, their love towards foreigners, and their even childlike naivety that manifested itself in many aspects. He regarded it as the blessing of his Scottish academic travel that he could master English language on a level that it enabled him to read lots of valuable English books, and he could make use of it even in his correspondences. By what he acquired in Great Britain enabled him to get closer to understanding English and Scottish literature, he was even fond of reading the English classics until the end of his life. The experience he gained in Scotland assisted him in connecting with world movements later on.

Between July and September of 1911 he was the curate of the congregation on Monostor Street in Kolozsvár. As he did not have much congregational engagement here, he translated Peabody's book entitled *Afternoons in the College Chapel* to Hungarian.

From September 1911 until September 1912 he was a catechist in Kolozsvár for one year. Emma Sámuel from the second grade at the finishing-school in Kolozsvár was among his students as well, the kind, blond, quiet girl with a diabolic hairstyle, of whom he did not yet think then that she would be his loyal companion for a lifetime.

Between 1914 and 1921 he was minister of the congregation at Kolozskara. During this time he was the teacher of the congregation for six years that gave this young minister the opportunity to place the curriculum and school discipline in the service of Christian character-building as well. He tried to move forward the villagers in their literacy by teaching, organising gatherings and reading.

As he was particularly interested in functional theology and pedagogical queries, he studied a lot during his years at Kolozskara as well. Besides this, he regularly read the works of Shakespeare and of other English and German writers in original. He dealt with the queries of functional theology in two ways: on the one hand, he received permission from the Theology at Kolozsvár for holding private lectures, the topics of which originated primarily from the scope of congregational work. On the other hand, he was editing the review entitled "The Way" that enabled his work.

He spent fifty years in the service of home mission within the church. He participated in the leadership and activities of the Association of Christian Youth, the Sunday School, Men's Alliance, Women's Alliance, Alliance of Girls and the diaconic institute. He cooperated with the Alliance of Vécs as well that provided a powerful support to ministers and their families.

Lajos Imre was a blessed asset of God in the life of the reformed church; he provided education and a personal example for an appropriate way of living with material goods. He spent tenth of his earnings on the service of the Gospels, for the material support of God's cause. He provided an example with his life even for presenting how Christ's church and its followers should cooperate with each other in unfavourable and difficult times. He maintained a close fraternal relationship with the reformed Christian churches of other languages.

After World War I the churches from abroad started showing interest in the Transylvanian Reformed Church. Until 1941 the delegates of these churches visited Transylvania on various occasions and the delegates of the Transylvanian Diocese went abroad to various conferences. Bishop Károly Nagy requested Lajos Imre frequently to interpret for the visitors of the church from abroad that he fulfilled on very high standards even. He welcomed renowned foreign guests, such as the Scottish Curtis, Adolf Keller from Geneva, professor Niebergall and professor Böhm, he was the student of whom on his academic travels abroad.

He represented the Transylvanian Reformed Diocese with count Arthúr Teleki on various occasions at the conferences of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; in 1923 in Zürich, in 1926 in Geneva, in 1927 in Budapest and in 1930 in Elberfeld, Germany. He participated in the conferences of the World Alliance of Reformed Schools in Oslo and Budapest.

Although he was sent into retirement by force in 1848, he remained very active henceforward as well, and always noticed where there was need for his help. He held Bible studies for women, worked as a presbyter in the congregation of Kolozsvár-Hídelve, he even fulfilled here a curate service for 10 years. He was a member of the Disciplinary Commission of the diocese and the Synod throughout his life. He supervised the catechetical and religious teaching tutorials of the students at the Theology. He prepared syllabi for religious classes and explanations of God's words. He prepared explanations for nine biblical books. He held speeches and lectures at various conferences and pastoral meetings.

He pursued extensive correspondences with Bishop László Ravasz amongst others and Károly Molter, the literary critic.

Lajos Imre passed away on 8th March 1974, and was buried at the Házsongárd cemetery in Kolozsvár on March 12th. He was escorted on his last road by his co-teachers, ex-students, and everyone who respected him. The obsequy was performed by Bishop Gyula Nagy.

The entire Transylvanian Reformed Diocese mourned the retired theology professor, the home mission lecturer, the presbyter and the countless function-holder "uncrowned Bishop" – as Bishop János Vásárhelyi named him. His name has not fallen into oblivion even after his death; his work has been appreciated in numerous commemorations as I gave an account of this in detail in my thesis.

III. The academic activity of Lajos Imre

In the course of his career, Lajos Imre acquired two academic degrees that established his theological and philosophical academic work later on – in functional theology and pedagogy. With these academic papers he contributed substantially to the development of catechetics and pedagogy, and their ecclesiastical appreciation. Owing to these two formal qualifications he could teach at the Faculty of Theology in Kolozsvár as the successor of László Ravasz, later on, he could become a professor at the Department of Pedagogy at the Bolyai University in Kolozsvár for two and a half years, and so he could be an asset in establishing the Bolyai University.

Lajos Imre acquired a theological private teacher degree on 18th June 1913 in functional theology with his thesis entitled *The Religion of the Child*, under the supervision of László Ravasz. The work presented to László Ravasz was based on modern theology entirely as he placed his method of religious education – catechetics – on the grounds of religious psychology. His separateness manifested itself in that contrary even to modern theology and Niebergall's teaching, he reclined on Böhm in his philosophical foundations.

He was collecting material to his paper for a long time during his catechist period in Kolozsvár between 1911-1912; he was very engaged in the literature of this topic.

He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation in pedagogy at the Faculty of Arts of the Hungarian University in Kolozsvár that was entitled *The Relation of Moral Education and Religion*. He wrote his paper under the supervision of the renowned professor of the university, István Schneller. In his paper Lajos Imre summarized the relation of religion and moral education that he analysed in the course of history. In his pedagogical dissertation he conferred the matter on the relation of religion and moral education.

On February 28th, 1945 Lajos Imre and Sándor Tavaszy received an invitation from the then Pro Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the Hungarian University in Kolozsvár to undertake philosophical and pedagogical lectures for two classes per week. At the lectures and seminars Lajos Imre held here he validated Christian aspects. He pointed out that the work of education can be completed only if one recognizes his own designation and will even undertake it.

In 1968 Lajos Imre was awarded an honorary doctorate degree by the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. This award was handed over to him in the assembly hall of Theology by Gyula Dávid, the Dean of Theology in Kolozsvár.

Lajos Imre pursued a versatile academic activity. He was the editor of the review "The Way" between 1915-1944. This review was published in Kolozsvár and was issued to support ministerial service. Later he continued the work he started in "The Way" in the issues of the

“Reformed Review” published between 1945-1974 in Kolozsvár. This is where he published his writings on the biblical foundations of ministerial service: he issued contemplations, studies and sermons.

Lajos Imre evolved an activity worthy to appreciate as a preacher also, at the core of which lies his belief. He speaks on the language of belief, proceeds from the real meaning of belief, and in knowledge acquisition, the essence of which is the cognition of God, he makes a distinction between belief and the receptiveness of reason. For Lajos Imre belief is the highest degree of cognition. The relation of belief and suffering shaped in Lajos Imre’s preaching his testimony of Jesus Christ. His personal preaching is not private but it is of communal nature. For him the main characteristic of belief was the incorporation of theory and practice. Lajos Imre saw the objective of ministerial service in soul shaping. The objective of this soul shaping is for believers to gain a Christian character with the help of ministerial guidance – it taught catechetics and pastoral care side by side.

Lajos Imre was the professor of functional theology for 24 years; besides teaching he fulfilled pastoral care as well.

IV. The pedagogical activity of Lajos Imre

Lajos Imre recognized the essence of Motts’s message early – that the world needs to be evangelized and student evangelization has an invaluable significance in this. Its actuality lies in the fact that it stands firmly on the basis of God’s Word and by this it is Christ-, congregation- and church-centered. In the history of the Transylvanian Reformed Church he was preoccupied with the “catechist” service, the preparation and implementation of the catechetical reform. It was not the schools and associations that were important for him but the personal responsibility for children was in the centre of his work. Lajos Imre became a good pedagogue, religious teacher and a leader of the Transylvanian ecclesiastical life reformation owing to the features of Christ in him. He acquired with a profound study and diligence the traditions of the Scottish reformed congregation, the approach of the German protestant theological idealism and some impacts of dialectical theology; he studied Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism with a marked interest and the doctrines of the Holy Scripture above all.

He compared Knox and the discipline of the Scottish church with Calvin. He measured Hamilton’s Catechism to Calvin’s Catechism of Geneva. Owing to his Scottish travel, Lajos Imre’s knowledge of Calvin became even more profound and comprehensive. As per his experience from over there one cannot handle religious education without the cognition of the church’s teaching, organism and struggles. The home services he experienced at the Scottish families – in custom during his stay as well – were of great impact on Lajos Imre. Another Scottish influence was the cognition of Sunday school. At the Scottish Sunday school he got

acquainted with a material of religious education that he applied later on in his catechetical syllabi and textbooks.

Lajos Imre highlighted Niebergall's pedagogy in his work not primarily subjectively but objectively. The academic interest of Lajos Imre had two main directions: virtue theory and psychology. He was pre-eminently an educator and while being an educator he was a minister, a theologian and a professor. Lajos Imre saw the continuity of religious teaching in confirmation preparation. The reformation of religious teaching and confirmation happened between 1925-1930. This reform was prepared by him with a number of his writings issued primarily in "The Way". Lajos Imre taught pedagogy and its history as well at the Functional Department of Theology in Kolozsvár. He had writings issued in this domain as well for over sixty years. In virtue of this activity he was even named Comenius of Transylvanian Hungarian Protestantism.

V. The pedagogical views of Lajos Imre's mentors and contemporaries

In this chapter I present the pedagogical work of those who had a great influence on the development of Lajos Imre's character and the evolution of his pedagogical work, either as a mentor or as a contemporary.

He met Niebergall, who is famous all over the world, on his academic travel in Heidelberg, a professor of functional theology, and was even his student. He heard of Niebergall, who was referred to as the revolutionary reformatory of catechetics and poimenics, from László Ravasz and István Schneller. He emphasized the importance of the educator's and the child's personality in pedagogy. Niebergall's basic conviction was that one can educate people because God is himself the educator of people. Niebergall aimed to set up functional pedagogy on the basis of pedagogy but he sensed the profoundness of the Gospels as well. His indoctrination resembled István Schneller's. Schneller termed "me" as individuality, Niebergall named it "personality".

Lajos Imre wrote his doctoral thesis in educational science under István Schneller's supervision. Although their relationship was not unclouded, we can regard Schneller as Lajos Imre's mentor as even their pedagogical perceptions agreed. Since his theological professorship Schneller was keenly engaged in the queries of pedagogical training as well.

As a summary, we can report that István Schneller's personality pedagogy has a proper place in the history of Hungarian education.

Sándor Imre was a prominent person of the twentieth century Hungarian pedagogy. Sándor Imre's name was organically interwoven with the theory of nation education. Sándor Imre marks the ultimate objective of intellectual education – and of teaching within this – in creation. The objective of nation education in Sándor Imre's composition was as follows: help the evolution of the nation, elevate all members of the nation to national awareness through their

involvement in the work of the nation. The unity of the nation needs to be saved by education without changing the existing social frameworks. Thus, as per him there is primarily a need for a law in public education that tackles the severance of educational and religious affairs; the governmental, general and compulsory nature of public education; schooling free of charge within the frame of 4 years of elementary + 4 years of common secondary education. Another significant issue of Sándor Imre's pedagogical ideas was: personality.

Sándor Imre demonstrated that it is in the concept of personality that the two different perceptions of education meet: the personal – that is the individual – and the communal – that is the social.

Sándor Makkai was Lajos Imre's fellow theologian, they became friends during their years at Theology, then later, in 1923 they re-launched the review entitled "The Way" together with Sándor Tavaszy. Makkai expected the reform of pedagogy not from psychology or the children's study movement that was strengthening more and more at the turn of the century, but from general virtue theory, axiology. As per Makkai, the guide of the pedagogue has to be the belief in ideals uplifting pedagogy not an experimental mechanical plan. He thus places the objective of education in its due world – into a world where the three most important self virtues prevail: the good, the true and the beautiful. His personality pedagogy lies on general virtue theory. According to him, school and society must have a mutually adequate relationship. School should be conducted with regard to society and vice versa, and governed so they would correspond to each other simultaneously and in respect to the future as well.

VI. Lajos Imre's catechetical view

The pedagogue and the theologian's encounter can be observed the most in his work published in 1942 entitled "Catechetics". He handles religious education – that is so close to his heart – in this book. Lajos Imre's academic and functional interest was primarily oriented towards education. Education as a general human task interested him in itself and in its every detail. Lajos Imre as a catechist wanted the ministers of the future to realize at the Department of Functional Theology that preaching is not only a church service but it is always an educational work and pastoral care. He regarded the church as the home and workshop of his research and educative work, not only from a legal point of view but in a spiritual sense as well.

Thus, catechism modulates not only religious teaching but the entire scope of religious education. The work, with which we lead children to the cognition of God's Word and its submissiveness is the work of religious education. Religious education that Lajos Imre sometimes also terms as spiritual education happens in three ways: by exemplifying, teaching and practice. These are in close connection with each other and cannot be separated from each other. The material of religious teaching, the curriculum, is deducted from the "material" of

religious education. The material is the same (the Bible, church history and the material on the belief and life of the church) but is more restricted as it is shaped and sorted based on children's power of conception.

The Bible, on which the textbook is built, has to be endeared and acquainted with children. Lajos Imre suggests that the New Testament can be used even from second grade whilst the entire Holy Scripture from fifth grade. He determines the Heidelberg Catechism as the manual of the seventh grade but since the catechism's questions and answers are assigned to the lessons it could also be the manual of all classes. We teach the catechism's questions and answers without a book but with explanations. He recommends the usage of the hymnal from even second grade as well. It is important to teach children how to orientate themselves in it. He even recommends the usage of the hymnal for home work as well. Another important condition of religious education is for children to take part in cult, in church service. Church services designed for children are appropriate for this and Sunday schools as well. It is, however, also important to urge children to take part on church services of big religious feasts at least with their parents.

Lajos Imre worded his opinion on the religious education of the youth in his book entitled *Epitome for the Attendance of the Youth*.

VII. The Christian pedagogue from the perspective of Lajos Imre

In his work entitled *Vocation and Morality* Lajos Imre draws up a comprehensive view of the Christian pedagogue's character. The religious pedagogue has to primarily undertake role modelling as s/he sets an example to Christian life with his/her own conduct.

Love towards the student has to be transmitted by the character and personality of the pedagogue.

Pedagogical authority has three principles: hierarchical authority, academic preparedness and personality. All three are necessary but the latter is the most important of all. The relationship of the pedagogue with his/her students has to be built on mutual respect instead of friendship and autonomy. Lajos Imre claims that God works in children through the activity of the religious teacher; as a matter of fact the pedagogue is merely an instrument of this work. The religious teacher has to show the way to God by his entire lifestyle, s/he knows that his/her work is futile without God's mercy. The source of his/her activity is a divine vocation. Education is not impersonal but it is an activity that engages one entirely, into which one needs to add all his/her strength, ability and his/her whole personality. This work is characterized by genuineness, rightfulness. S/he develops a good relationship with his/her co-workers and students, and between his/her own personality and work as well.

VIII. The written legacy of Lajos Imre

Most of the written legacy and correspondence of Lajos Imre is in the property of his granddaughter, Boróka Kristó who has systematized it regularly. A smaller portion of it can be found in several reformed archives in Hungary: in Hódmezővásárhely, Sárospatak and the Ráday Archive in Budapest. One can find his work on home mission in the archive of the reformed diocese in Kolozsvár. In Sárospatak I had the opportunity to work with the material of the family that has not yet been processed. This is where I found the typewritten version of his *Memoirs*, and part of his correspondence to his brother, László Imre and to his father Lajos Imre, Sr.

The Word of God and Discipline, Ecclesiology, and Catechetics belong to the most well-known writings of Lajos Imre. He wrote numerous religious and pedagogical books besides these. He also had various writings related to the Christian Youth Association and the Sunday school. He was engaged in the education and development of the youth and villagers. His following writings came to light with these topics: *Epitome for the Attendance of the Youth, How to Teach Religion, Crisis of the Youth, Christian Religious Teaching, Culture of the Village, Civilization of the Village, The Principles of Village Education*. He aimed to help the activity of the reformed minister as well so he wrote his following writings with this objective: *The Personality and Status of the Calvinist Minister* and *Diary of a Minister*. He dealt with the underlying principles of the church's system and legislature in his book entitled *New Requirements of Our Church Legislation*. With these writings he provided a service to his reformed church as well.

IX. Lajos Imre's high school curriculum of religious teaching

Lajos Imre prepared the religious curriculum of the Transylvanian Diocese with care as one can pursue an effective religious education only with a curriculum set up coherently. He also worked out a curriculum for the religious teaching of elementary and secondary schools respectively. This curriculum was built upon God's Word. However, he placed a significant emphasis on the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism as well that helps the confessional education of students.

X. The walk of life of Lajos Imre in numbers

I prepared a brief summary in this chapter on the walk of life of Lajos Imre presenting the most important stages of his life and work.

XI. Conclusion

We can rightly regard Lajos Imre as a scholar theologian as he enhanced ecclesiology to the discipline of functional theology with his book entitled *Ecclesiology*. The intellectual move

from theory to practice and from practice to theory is a fortunate parallelism by every scholar but it is an indispensable demand in theology and the church. The model of this we can see at Lajos Imre.

Lajos Imre was not only a functional but a practicing theologian as well. He even applied his academic achievements in the day-to-day life. As the home mission lecturer of the Transylvanian Reformed Diocese he was the marshal of catechism as well. His work schemes on religious teaching framed in the thirties were completed under his direction. His relation to material things was exemplary to many people.

We – who are in the service of religious teaching – can all regard him as the father of catechism as through his reformed Christian pedagogical work of over six decades provided the conditions for us presently here in Transylvania to make a direct connection between God and children with the practice of this beautiful profession. By comparing Lajos Imre's curriculum with the reformed curriculums in effect today it was proven that our curriculum of today is based on the guidelines he worked out as well.

Lajos Imre carried on manifold activities; he wanted to service God with all his deeds and went where God himself had sent him. He was characterized by having a quick mind, an effusive evangelical, occasionally snappy, sarcastic humour and a sharp sense of criticism that would convey the manifestation of constructive and educative love even in its sharpness. That is, because he could love everyone with a genuine fraternal love. He educated with a naturalness common to him even in everyday conversations, and he followed the Gospels in neutral topics as well. He refrained from validating self-truth. All his life he strived for the members of the reformed congregation – from children living in farms to university professors, from youth to struggling and tired people – to gain a living conviction in God, and by strengthening through this, to live a new victorious life. He worked unflaggingly for the small and large congregations to become convergent and warm nests for their followers.

With this work I endeavoured to commemorate worthily Transylvania's catechetical "lord", the uncrowned Bishop of our church, the pedagogue of many, the minister, the teaching-by-learning professor, the sainted Dr. h.c. Lajos Imre.

XII. Appendix

The Appendix contains an account of Lajos Imre's legacy that I found during my research. Besides the written legacy, I here photos, personal documents, copies of manuscripts as well, and those appreciations, necrologies and poems that were inspired by Lajos Imre. His written legacy also contains lectures, university notes, sermons, texts of festive speeches, translations and his highly valuable correspondences as well.

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