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Summary

My doctoral dissertation deals with the issue of lection-reading in the Hungarian Reformed worship, especially focused on the Sunday service. The independent reading of the Bible has been a prescribed component of our Sunday and holiday (main) services only since the 20th century, when liturgical books introduced it in Transylvania in 1929 and in Hungary in 1931. In the period since the introduction of lection-reading, the Hungarian Reformed practical theological literature has not dealt with the issue in its completeness and depth. In my thesis I intend to deal with the historical, theoretical and practical issues of lection-reading during the Reformed worship.

Bible reading with a cultic background appears in the Old Testament, both in Deuteronomy (Deut 31:9-13) and in the post-exile historical narrative (Neh 8). Initially, the Torah was read primarily, but in the intertestamental period, during the Maccabees, they started to read the prophetic books in the worship as well.

The reading of the Holy Scriptures was part of the Christian worship from the very beginning (e.g. 1 Tim 4:13; Rev 1:3). The Bible reading of the first Christians in the worship was certainly influenced by the Bible reading of the synagogue, but recent literature shows that this was not the exclusive source and pattern. For, on the one hand, we have few contemporary records of the reading habits and practices in the synagogues in the 1st century, and, on the other hand, while for the Jews the reading of the Torah was more important, Christians initially read prophetic literature for its Christological implications and interpretation.

In the first centuries, we can see the development of different Bible reading methods and traditions. First of all, *lectio continua* and *lectio continua selecta* (the latter is often called *Bahnlesung* in German theological literature), i.e. the continuous reading of the Biblical books, and then the *pericopes*, the readings assigned to festive cycles and feasts, appeared and became fixed. From these fixed readings came the fixed sermon texts, which were handed down in a collected form, the so-called *pericope-order*. Different *pericope-orders* were developed for each liturgical region.

Following the liturgical reform of Charlemagne, a Gospel and an Epistle-reading were merged, made binding and edited in a collection of sermons, which was published under the title *Homiliarium*. The *Homiliarium* was essentially a pastoral aid, as Charlemagne decreed,

offering sermons for the Sunday and feast-day passages from ancient and early-medieval authors. This Homiliarium was the first so-called postil book, which is a genre of a sermon-compilation on the lectionary.

At the beginning of the Reformation, Martin Luther retained the early church pericopes, while others, such as Zwingli and Calvin, rejected it, returning instead to the ancient practice of *lectio continua* or *lectio continua selecta*. The reason for following two different Bible reading traditions is, on the one hand, the different worship backgrounds and contexts of the two main directions of the Reformation. It is important to add that Luther also practised *lectio continua*, and Calvin also used festive texts for feast times and feast days when he interrupted the continuous reading. It is important to mention Luther's postils, through which he was able to disseminate the doctrines of the Reformation and which he intended as a pastoral aid.

Our sources indicate that in the Hungarian Reformed worship from the 16th century until the 18th century the normal and established way of preaching was preaching from pericopes, which in many cases was connected with the use of a postil-volume on the pulpit.

The use of postils and pericope-order was related to the order of worship and the liturgical hymnbooks (Graduals) in use. The disappearance of the Graduals in the 18th century meant that the use of the pericope-order slowly faded out and disappeared from the Reformed practice. The „battle” between pericopes and *lectio continua* was finally decided in favour of a third party: the free choice of the sermon text.

The Hungarian Reformed liturgical and homiletical literature on the subject in the period after the introduction of the lection reading shows some inaccuracy in the historical issues concerning the origins of the lection reading. The theoretical basis is incomplete, while the practical guidance is chaotic. There is no consensus on several issues. What is the role and function of lection reading? On what basis should we choose a lection? Do we even need an independent lection?

The 1968 liturgical survey in the Reformed Church in Hungary took place 37 years after the introduction of the lectionary. Ágnes Fekete previously dealt with the survey in her doctoral thesis (Ágnes Fekete: *Liturgy and Time*, Doctoral thesis, 2013), mainly in the field of

statistical indicators of the responses received, but a detailed evaluation of the survey has not yet been carried out.

In this chapter I tried to explore the church-historical antecedents and reasons for the survey as far as possible. Furthermore, I dealt in more details with the survey question on lection (Question No. 4) and the pastoral responses to it.

While several of the responses received were truly illuminating, I pointed out that the circumstances of the survey resulted in a very large number of schematic, not valuable responses. Since no official evaluation of the survey has been carried out, it may serve as an interesting source of church and liturgical history, but it did not produce any tangible results then or since.

Lection and text, as I have shown in the previous chapters, are inseparable, both historically and theoretically. I dealt with the relationship between preaching and text. There seems to be a general tendency for Churches of the Word 'to function and be seen as churches of preaching', which is a misunderstanding of our ministry. In this chapter, I also discussed the text selection methods, which also have an impact on the choice of the lection. I identified the textual choices discussed in the chapter on the basis of the literature: pericope-order; lectio continua; pastor-determined series (preaching plan); Bible reading guide; free choice of texts. I considered it important to make national and international ecumenical connections, since most of the world's Christian Churches use reading orders, lectionaries. Thus, I briefly described the internal logic and structure of the most common lectionaries (OLM, RCL, German Lutheran reading orders). The liturgical year determines the readings, but the reverse is also true: the readings determine the liturgical year, its course, themes, theological focal points and highlights.

In this chapter, I primarily evaluated the lectionary proposals published in the pastoral journal 'Igazság és Élet' ('Truth and Life'). First, I examined the frequency of the main lectionary choices, and then I looked for examples of lection-choice methods. I compared the results with a study of the Liturgical Committee of the General Convention published in the *Confessio* journal in 2008. I was curious to see how close the theoretical statement to the pastoral practice was. I came to the conclusion that the practice of lectionary selection confirmed the statements of the Liturgical Committee on several points (e.g., the relationship between exegesis and lectionary, the balance between the Old and the New Testament in the selection of text and lectionary, the relationship between liturgical year and lectionary, etc.).

Theses:

- 1) There is no worship without Bible-reading. From the very beginning, the public reading of the Bible/Holy Scriptures has been a very important part of Christian worship.
- 2) With its introduction in 1931, the lectionary returned to a specific liturgical context. Alongside the free choice of texts, the free choice of lection arrived again. Independent Bible-reading returned as a form, but the original content (the framework and meaning provided by the reading order) was lost.
- 3) As early as 1916, László Ravasz formulated the theological basis and justification for the introduction of lectionary, but this formulation and meaning faded away and was forgotten over the years. In fact, it was not even referred to in the official Liturgical Book of the Reformed Church in Hungary published in 1930, introduced in 1931, so it was impossible for the majority of the pastors to know its background.
- 4) Not a single mandatory reading order can or should be imposed on the current Reformed practice, but a variety of directives should be offered based on the practice observed in the Reformed churches in the West. Some sort of order would still be necessary.
- 5) The selection and the application of the lection is a matter of liturgical and homiletical studies. The lection has to be related to the liturgy as a whole, and can or should influence the message of the sermon.