

LITURGY AND TIME

in the light of the liturgical situation practiced by

the Reformed Church in Hungary

in 1968 and today

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2013

The diversified state of the liturgical customs of the service in the Hungarian Reformed Church is common knowledge and subject of varied public concern. The aim of the present study is to find an approach for an objective view of the present situation of the liturgy as practised by the Hungarian Reformed Church. Among the theological issues resolved by the founding fathers in the 16th century the liturgical aspects were of secondary importance considering the special primary task of establishing the reformation itself. The present-day practice goes even further, rating liturgy as a seemingly unimportant component of worship. In 2010 and 2012 we asked 250 pastors of the reformed congregations about their ceremonial practices. We wished to prepare a nation-wide representative survey on the liturgical practice of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The church community was considered to be the unit of our sampling methodology. The problem is that currently the notion of church community is

continuously changing i.e. it is not used as a legal term but as a liturgical term; it means a community where common worships are celebrated. In our survey we wanted to take the different types of settlements into account, we have established four categories: villages, smaller towns, larger towns and Budapest. The category with the lowest number of congregations is the one of larger towns, actually there are 23 settlements belonging to this category in Hungary. Having considered this number, we have selected 130 villages, 65 cities, 10 Budapest districts and 10 larger towns for the purpose of the survey.

We have reviewed each of the four church districts; from among the congregations the highest number of villages can be found in the Eastern district while the highest number of towns is located in the Western district.

The sample was created by random selection. The query was made by phone, 95 questions were asked about the order and elements of the liturgy. In the Central

Archives of the Reformed Church we found a survey of similar type done in 1968. Of course the idea of comparing the two surveys occurred to us immediately. It was possible to compare the two surveys only to a limited extent because the state influence behind the earlier survey is obvious. However, studying the two documents simultaneously might lead to interesting conclusions.

We had a hypothesis that urbanisation significantly affects the liturgical situation. In fact, this theory did not prove to be true. We have found that the biggest difference is between living in and out of a metropolis like Budapest. Even the largest country towns are far more traditional than Budapest in general.

The point of the pastors' age is also of interest; half of the respondents was below the age 40 what means that the pastors are much younger than the average age of employees of similar population in Hungary.

The replies received indicated that the majority of pastors were satisfied with their customs of liturgical practice. However, two small groups wished either to eliminate all regulations, or to have strictly confirmed order of ceremonies.

The liturgical order is mostly influenced by the social environment. Liturgically, the fundamental aim of village churches appears to conserve the heritage. In contrast, the congregations in Budapest wished to create new rites in a number of cases, with countless variations. In the larger towns the power of the traditions is present, but they are also eager to find new ways. The practice overrides in most instances the theological point of view. The emotional and social aspect characterizes the worship. Concurrently the pastors disregard the community in which the liturgy appears, in other words, for individual considerations there is no practical order of worship. An important factor is the emotional and social imprinting of the church service. In most instances only the church

regulations are discussed in the community. They invent their own liturgy. However, it has been found that there is a constant demand for a unified church service.

In general, there are two books of common worship in use. The first – usually called the Ravasz-book of common worship was prepared between 1908 and 1931, the second, linked to Tibor Bartha, between 1950 and 1985. The first is a deep-rooted theoretical work aimed to be accepted by all communities, with lots of theological compromises, while the second is a superficial, hastily made work which provoked controversy in the church, thereby creating division liturgically as well among the Hungarian reformed congregations, resulting in the legitimacy of multiple practices.

Upon completion of this survey we have found that the passing time is the term under the scope of which it is worth analysing this topic.

The passing time and its subjective aspects are basically the most important factors which determine and describe modern society. The numeric approach of time has been evolved and come into general use in Europe since the 13th century, leading to standardisation of the time which is a directive in the social life. However, there are cultures where the time is perceived rather functionally (e.g. period of boiling a cup of rice, period of praying the Lord's Prayer).

The time concept which originated from the protestant way of thinking in the 17th and 18th century England, deeply influenced the modern concept of time. In our study – for this time concept – we adopted the term: time of spectacle.

The church services cannot be the subjects of this spectacle. On the contrary, all liturgies of Christianity bind together two timelines. We can do this by binding them with memory, with a repetition of rites, or with eschatological foresight. All these are present in the church services. The feast of Paschal Lamb and the

Lords Supper are the best examples to demonstrate the presence of God, leading us to renew and conserve the ceremonies.

The deep understanding of the passing time together with the consciousness of irrefutable continuity is the real proof of memory. The understanding of the migration of the church services between these different timelines can help us celebrate the presence of God in the church services. At the present time to change the liturgically diverse practice of the Hungarian Reformed Church ought not to be ruled by an external regulation, but only after due consideration of these fundamental theological questions.