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Editorial

InterFilm Hungary held a conference on “The Eucharist and Visual Culture” on 1-3 October, 2021. The venue, host and main sponsor of the event was the Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy. It was a special honour that the conference was also supported by the Lutheran Church of Hungary and the Cistibiscan Reformed Church District.

InterFilm Hungary, founded in 2020, is a member of InterFilm International. Behind the decision of the founders was the conviction that the Church could not ignore the artistic, spiritual, and social significance of the motion picture, while it must also see how the Church, religious phenomena and theological concepts affect the motion picture medium.

With the October conference, the organisers wanted to raise awareness of the potential of visual culture, which is fundamentally defining our age, and to help believers recognize the Christian messages that are being conveyed through the present “flood of images”. They hope that this conference was only the first step in building a long-term relationship between films and Christian values.

The conference included four main presentations in English, three workshops, two film screenings and related discussions. The personalities and expertise of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed speakers guaranteed that the original idea of the conference fell in good hands: the key-note addresses by Finnish theologian Sofia Sjö, Polish film aesthete Mariola Marczak, Hungarian theologian and director Lajos Kovács, theologian and anthropologist Károly Zsolt Nagy provided the backbone of the conference. In the workshops, theologian and cartoonist Sándor Békési, theologian and church leader Tamás Fabiny, art historian Márton Orosz and theologian Gabriella Rácsok were the dialogue partners.

The diversity of the themes presented at the conference served to illustrate the many threads that connect our visual environment with the idea and imagery of the Eucharist. The first, thematic part of this volume gives a taste of this. Although the subject of the Eucharist and visual culture cannot be reduced to the relationship between theology and film, the majority of the keynote lectures focused on this topic, given the research fields of the speakers. In establishing the relationship between theology and film, there is an understandable demand that film can be an illustrative aid for theology. This can mean not only the movie adaptation of biblical stories but also the illustration of theological propositions, subjectively experienced religious truths or ethical dilemmas. In this case, theological film criticism is looking for “cinematic analogies”.¹ This also typically includes theological film criticism that focuses on the director’s intentions or biography as a religious background. The speakers at

¹ NOLAN, Steve: Towards a New Religious Film Criticism: Using Film to Understand Religious Identity Rather Than Locate Cinematic Analogue, in MITCHELL, Jolyon P. – MARRIAGE, Sophia (eds.): *Mediating Religion, Studies in Media, Religion and Culture*, London – New York, Continuum, 2003, 169–178.

the conference sought to distance themselves from this approach that emphasizes the illustrative function and classifies cinematography as a maidservant, in which we encounter a rather static conception of theology.² The evaluation criteria for the relationship between theology and film cannot be determined by theology alone, for it is then tempted to see connections between film and other texts that exist only in the mind of the interpreter.³

Lajos Kovács's presentation distinguishes between the cinematic representations of Jesus and Christ. In the more than century-long history of Jesus films, there have been many adaptations: there has been almost no film genre or technique that has not been tried out to tell the story of Jesus. The various adaptations have brought along various images of Jesus. We must always be aware that, in the case of Jesus films, the Scriptures do not provide complete script materials for filming the biography of Jesus. The Gospels themselves are interpretations and interpreters, with their implicit Christologies, and consequently, every Jesus film is also an interpretation of interpretations. The Jesus of the films is not the canonized or dogmatized Jesus of the Church's faith. Lesslie Newbigin considers it true of both the literary Jesus stories of Western culture, which were created to facilitate the understanding of the Gospel, and of the pictorial representations of Jesus that they are more self-portraits than portraits of Jesus: "They told you more about the writer than about Jesus. [...] one can see in successive self-portraits of Jesus the self-portrait of the age..."⁴ The same can be said of the artistic or cultural framework of representation that was prevailing at the time. William R. Telford makes a similar point about the representation of Jesus on film: "... the Jesus depicted in cinema, has been influenced by the tradition of the evangelist, the imagination of the filmmaker and the social context of the audience. [...] The screen image of Jesus has varied with the shifts and currents of society itself, in line with its changing social, political and religious perspectives and values."⁵ Newbigin asks the question: "what does this gallery of portraits have to do with the real Jesus? How can the gospel 'come alive' in all these different cultural contexts, and still be the same authentic gospel? That is the problem of contextualization."⁶

One of the difficulties of Jesus' portrayal is the depiction of the dual nature of Jesus – in Chalcedon's phrase: "*vere deus, vere homo*". This Christological aspect brings us to the question of the filmic portrayal of Christ. The literature pertaining to the subject uniformly identifies a film as a Christ film in which the characters, plot or other details remind us of the story of Jesus in the Gospels, even though they do

² JOHNSTON, Robert K.: *Reel Spirituality. Theology and Film in Dialogue*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2006, 70–73.

³ WRIGHT, Melanie J.: *Religion and Film, An Introduction*, London – New York, I. B. Tauris, 2007, 20.

⁴ NEWBIGIN, Lesslie: *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids – Geneva, Eerdmans – WCC Publications, 1989, 141.

⁵ TELFORD, William R.: Jesus Christ Movie Star, The Depiction of Jesus in the Cinema, in MARSH, Clive – ORTIZ, Gaye (eds.): *Explorations in Theology and Film*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 138.

⁶ NEWBIGIN: *op. cit.*, 142.

not tell it. Instead of biographical treatment, i.e., historical fidelity, the focus is on Christhood, i.e., the articulation of Jesus' messianic mission in a historically unlimited context. We are thus dealing with a kind of contemporary cultural interpretation of the incarnation. The literature on Christ films has developed a variety of criteria to help the viewer recognise the implicit or hidden Christ figure in a film, understand when a character can be identified with Christ, and indeed what the purpose of this identification is. These lists of criteria are already extremely different in their extent, ranging from two to twenty-five.⁷ However, identifying the hidden Christ-figures in film can lead to a dead end when seeking a source for Christology since the imperfect cannot represent the perfect. All cinematic Christ-figures have flaws, disabilities and sins that stem from the frailty of being human, and this can be an obstacle for the viewer in finding analogies. Rather, these imperfections allow the viewer to identify with these characters; an identification that does not help to understand Christhood but rather the following of Christ.⁸ Taking this thought further, Christ-films can be seen as attempts to answer Dietrich Bonhoeffer's question, "who is Christ for us?" On the one hand, contemporary cinematic art or popular film works can help us understand what contemporary people think about Christ and salvation, and on the other hand, as Bonhoeffer's questioning is more directed towards this, they can open up the question of the specific Christian ethos of *imitatio Christi* or discipleship.

Sofia Sjö introduced the audience to Scandinavian films that can help to learn about the religiosity, beliefs, religious convictions and experiences of people today. Cinema is a special medium for expressing things that (post)modern persons are concerned about. Film as a social (communal) medium expresses the experiences and insights of a whole crew, and thus may serve as a barometer for the human condition. Film tells us what is happening in the world, not in the external (political or social), but in the internal world of human beings. This approach makes film the source of theology, from which theology can get information and turn its own reflections in the direction of urgent questions, thereby helping the church participating in God's mission get to know the context of the audience receiving the Gospel better: what do the people of our time think about religion, faith, God, sin, grace, redemption, heaven and hell? What terms do they use at all for these biblical and theological concepts, or what content do they fill these with?

Mariola Marczak's aesthetic approach also sees films as sources of theology (*loci theologici*). Film has become the main storyteller by the beginning of the 21st century. Film tells stories by presenting such human conditions and events which by means of

⁷ REINHARTZ, Adele: Jesus and Christ-Figures, in LYDEN, John (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, London – New York, Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2009, 431.; KOZLOVIC, Anton, Karl: How to Create a Hollywood Christ-Figure, Sacred Story Telling as Applied Theology, *Australian eJournal of Theology*, Volume 13, 2009/1, URL: http://aejt.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/158538/Kozlovik_Film.pdf Last Accessed: 2022. 03. 23.; BRINKMAN, Martien E.: *Jesus Incognito, The Hidden Christ in Western Art Since 1960*, Amsterdam – New York, Rodopi, 2013, 37–42.

⁸ POPE, Robert: *Salvation in Celluloid, Theology, Imagination and Film*, London – New York, T&T Clark – Continuum, 2007, 104–108.

aesthetic experience (the viewer's being drawn into the story) may become possible alternatives for the viewer: (s)he may bring his/her own story into the film or may set it side by side or opposite to it. The mission task of the church in this situation is to help today's individual find the biblical creation-fall-redemption narrative as a framework for meaning-making, that is, to help connect the subjective side of religion to the objective one. In other words, the mission task of the church is to point to the God-story in which human life can find meaning, that is, to point to the question of what the real story is in which our life stories are also included. This also means that although theology can rightly claim that in its formulations it understood this biblical narrative, it must give up its claim that it has fully understood or exposed this truth. All reality is interpreted reality. In view of this, we must be able to accept that interpreting the biblical narrative solely in confessional dogmatic frameworks also has its limitations. The contemporary cultural and cinematic interpretations of the biblical narrative are not, by all means, empty relativism, but may help better understanding and thus enrich the biblical text and our contexts with their fresh insights. To do this we need the ability to hear and listen to the stories of others, either that of the filmmaker or the viewer. Theology thus becomes a talk of God by its reflection on the Word of God (special revelation), while reflecting on the motives of the religious quest of humans (anthropology) and those metaphors or analogies of redemption/salvation that seem to be the most useful in understanding the biblical narrative, and which are suitably presented and communicated by films.

Károly Zsolt Nagy's lecture invites us from the world of films to enter the walls of the church: he defines the church as "theology one can walk around in", and uses visual illustrations to present the principles and practices of Hungarian Reformed church architecture, their art-historical implications, and the temple-related characteristics of Reformed religious practice.

In the second half of the present volume, full-time and visiting lecturers of the Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy present current slices of their research fields.

According to Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman, whose *Winter Light* was a recurring theme of the conference, "a film is made to create reaction."⁹ Interactivity is an absolute requirement of our time, and dialogue must be a feature of the Church's mission, which cannot be a one-way communication of content. "Theological discourse connects ages, people, places and relationships."¹⁰ Theology, then, *happens* where interaction takes place. Through the writings in the present volume, we invite our Readers to this *happening*, to this encounter.

Gabriella Rácsok

⁹ BERGMAN, Ingmar: Why I Make Movies, *Horizon*, Volume 3, 1960/1, 8–9.

¹⁰ KUHLMANN, Helga: A jó teológia mint az igazság és az eredményes élet gyakorlatának keresése, in HUBER, Wolfgang (ed.): *Milyen a jó teológia?*, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 2006, 91.

TEACH ME THAT I MAY LIVE!

VIKTOR KÓKAI-NAGY



Cluj-Napoca, Reformed church on Farkas Street, from the former sanctuary, with the Lord's Table.
The church was originally built for the Franciscans in the 15th century, then used by the Jesuits,
and finally given to the Reformed by the prince in 1622.

Viktor Kókai-Nagy

MAKING THE VISIBLE VISIBLE

A person reading the Bible has quite a lot of problems with visibility. On the one hand, perhaps we read with a little envy the accounts where the chosen ones, the prophets and the seers, gain insight into the mystery of God. Then they try to put this vision into words, to interpret what they have seen. Or we might think it would be easier to believe and convince others if Jesus appeared to us just as he had appeared to some of His chosen ones. On the other hand – and this is perhaps much more decisive – we also read that sight is a source of temptation, of desire. At other times, our eyes deceive us; we see not the reality, only a copy of it, as if “we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Moreover, seeing seems to affect the quality of faith: “because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Or rather, faith itself is depicted precisely as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Based on this, we should not be surprised if visibility finds it rather difficult to find its place in the lives of believers.

However, as believers, we do not expect a film to make the invisible visible or to convince us of the “evidence of things not seen.” Films make the visible visible. And a good movie shows it in a way we have never seen before. And this starts a process in us, opens up new possibilities for interpretation, and gives room for wonder and discovery.

Theologians have expressed a number of differing views on what exactly happens in the Eucharist. The reason for this is obvious: words cannot reflect mystical reality. But everyone agrees that the sacrament is a visible sign and seal. So when we organized the conference “The Eucharist and Visual Culture,” we did not try to bring together completely

incompatible worlds by force. What they both have in common, even if in completely different ways, is that they use the visual beyond itself to touch a person. It is also common in both that it is not the visual itself that is of real value, but what it awakens in us, what we experience through it.

Therefore faith and seeing are not irreconcilably opposed to each other; only we must not forget that the former does not arise from the latter while seeing in faith opens up completely unexpected perspectives in visibility. And this is worth talking about. This is made possible whenever there is a genuine, interested and open exchange of views on this subject. Unfortunately, presentations in print are not able to reproduce the true experience, just as the text is not able to reproduce the image. Nevertheless, they invite the reader to participate in this discourse.

THE EUCHARIST AND VISUAL CULTURE

LAJOS KOVÁCS
SOFIA SJÖ
MARIOLA MARCZAK
KÁROLY ZSOLT NAGY
TÍMEA KÓKAI-NAGY



Cluj Napoca, the triumphal arch of St Michael's Church. The construction of the church began in the mid-14th century. It was used by Lutherans and Reformed for a short time from 1556, and by Unitarians for 150 years from 1559, before being returned to Roman Catholics by a Habsburg decision in 1716.

Lajos Kovács

**CORPUS CHRISTI –
JESUS AND CHRIST
REPRESENTATIONS
IN CINEMA.
A CATHOLIC
INTERPRETATION**

The International Eucharistic Congress organized in Budapest in 2021 inspired Catholics and other Christian denominations to rethink their faith in the Eucharist and give a new interpretation starting from early Christian tradition for today's believers.

Apart from the epistemological and theological interpretation of the Eucharist in the last two thousand years, here we just would like to emphasize that this interpretation also altered in the Catholic tradition during the centuries, even if not in essentials but in what has been accentuated. The understanding of the Eucharist had significantly changed with the appearance of the Reformed churches in the 16th century when different church models came into being and when the “meal character” of the Eucharist was mostly emphasized. Catholics thought its sacrificial character might disappear and therefore, as a counterbalance, they stressed it to the extreme.

Consequently, of that attitude, Catholic priests until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) celebrated mass even by themselves, without a believers' community because they thought the ritual reenactment of Jesus' sacrificial suffering and death conveys grace even in itself. Only by the spirit of the Synod was the Catholic Church capable of correcting this distortion and balanced once again the meal and the sacrificial character of the Eucharist.

The sacrificial character of Jesus' dramatic crucifixion has always been one of the most important aspects of theology; therefore, its representation has also been part of any kind of artistic expression, such as painting, theater, and literature as well as film-art in the last hundred and thirty years. In this essay, we would like to explore these essential elements in this new art form.

Jesus and Christ representations during the first millennia

Artists and believers from early in the Christian era have sought to create representations of Jesus the Christ. The earliest of these representations was the graffiti on the walls of catacombs and tombs: the *ichtus*, the fish or the *chi-ro* (sign for Christ). There are also examples when Roman mosaics were converted into Christian use: the face of Jesus being superimposed over that of the sun god Helios. The cross as a sign or the crucifixion of Jesus came into use relatively late as it was first considered – even for Christians – to be a shame and a scandal.

However, the representations of Jesus the Christ in early icons created by monks (in the sixth century) became so popular in the spiritual and liturgical use that it led to a serious conflict in the church in the seventh century. One side represented by the image-breakers, who insisted that the veneration of icons was in fact adoration and thus idolatry, the opposite side argued that the incarnation, that Jesus is fully divine and fully human (determined by the Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D), allows the representation of Jesus the Christ in art. The controversy was settled in 787 during the Second Council of Nicaea. This decision clearly encouraged artists to continue to represent Jesus Christ in icons and mosaics, etc. In the East, the artist of Byzantium represented Christ as the *Pantocrator*, a transcendent figure (e.g., Monréale, Cefalú, Ravenna); in the West, Jesus was presented as more divine than human, transfigured or in judgement and all these in stone-statues, stained-glass or wood.

Beginning with the Renaissance, there was a radical and dramatic shift in the way visual arts represented Jesus Christ. The two-dimensional, larger than life-figure of Jesus seen against an abstract background, a figure more transcendental than immanent gave way to a more this-worldly incarnated figure, a “softer” Jesus often surrounded by people. His human nature emphasized as if he were “one like us”. In those representations, Jesus is often pictured in a historically and culturally specific setting, though not always first-century Palestine.

While Renaissance art made Jesus more of a human being, the Baroque period made him strong and passionate, the Romantic period made him extremely sentimental. This last development paved the way for the widespread growth of popular devotional images, still dominant today (often seen on the walls of our grandparents: Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, etc.), and a large part of it shows a “bad taste”. In reaction against this development towards the sentimental, many modern and contemporary artists have experimented with a rich variety of styles for the portrait of Jesus. Dalí made him surreal and cosmic, Roualt liberated him by making him a clown and Chagall, both on canvas and in stained-glass, expressed Jesus as rooted in the messianic figures of the Old Testament.

If the representation of Jesus Christ has been a constant theme in the six traditional arts, it was expected to be the theme of the seventh art, the cinema, an art form that is little more than a hundred years old. Already in the first five years of its existence, this new art form produced at least six films, all brief, as were all films in those days (one to five minutes long), whose subject was the life and passion of Jesus

the Christ. In the first hundred years, the cinema produced more than one hundred fifteen films that treated, in one way or another, some with greater, some with lesser success, the story of Jesus (quasi biographies).

They are films in various styles, with a wide variety of approaches to the portrait of Jesus, and consequently with an astonishing variety of Christology. Some are quite orthodox, some further to the left, some are fascinating challenges to theology and the faith, others are so banal as to be completely uninteresting, and some are unacceptable, erroneous, or downright heretical.

The history of cinema also demonstrates another approach to the person of Jesus the Christ: the figurative or metaphorical approach, a most valid way, which has always had the privileged place in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Old Testament used metaphors – the gentle breeze, the mother hen, the Suffering Servant – to represent aspects of God's self-revelation. In the New Testament, Jesus repeatedly used metaphors and parables to speak of God and himself as the revelation of God. From the very beginning, the art of the Christian community created and developed visual metaphors to represent Jesus the Christ, as mentioned above: the fish, the pelican, the phoenix, etc. From early in the development of cinema, filmmakers have told stories in which the central figures are foils of Jesus and in which the plot is parallel to the story of the life, death, and sometimes the Resurrection of Jesus, stories in which the "presence" of Jesus or Christ is rather sensed and discerned in the person and struggle of the protagonist.

It all tells that the Jesus-film project is a much more complex reality than one might think at first, and this complexity is directly due to the subject. The filmmaker, who chooses to explore the Jesus-theme, has to face a series of decisions, choices and difficulties that are quite unprecedented in the history of cinema. It might seem a truism to say that Jesus-film is based on the entire New Testament (for example, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*) or one of the gospels (Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*).

However, we have to admit that the New Testament, the gospels were neither biographical nor historical documents, at least as we conceived scientific history and biography in the 20th century, but rather they were faith proclamations therefore the biographical details in them are limited.

Clearly, for instance, the gospels provide no physical description of Jesus. On the one hand, the individual Gospels are not always in agreement among themselves. At times, in fact, they seem to contradict one another. On the other, the style of the Gospels is characterised by ellipses. Details connecting separate episodes are lacking, time is telescoped, the stress is often on the spoken words of Jesus and often the concrete circumstances of his preaching, and his miracles are not described in detail.

Besides, only Luke has the infancy narrative, an account which is extremely mythical, and the Gospels reveal little or nothing of the first 30 years of Jesus' life.

Another element in this delicate balance regarding the Jesus-film is the filmmaker's point of view toward the biblical material that Jesus concerns. Is the artist a

Christian believer or not? If yes, then what is the quality of that belief? Is it the faith of the fundamentalist who holds in the literal truths of every word of the Gospels, or is it a more enlightened belief which recognises the complexity of literary genres and forms within the gospels?

A further difficulty for the Jesus-film has to do with the undeniable fact that any film about Jesus Christ is preceded by the dense heritage of nineteenth century's visual art on the Jesus theme. This complex tradition is an issue or a stumbling block for the film artist who, inevitably, has to take a position in its regard. Some reject the tradition, some imitate it slavishly, and some limit their contact to inspiration. At the same time, the maker of the Jesus film has to bear in mind that the Jesus tradition in the visual arts is also a stumbling block for the audience. Most spectators come to any film about Jesus with a whole series of preconceived notions and feelings about him, based on their religious and intellectual upbringing: how Jesus looks and sounds, how he moves and acts, how he relates to people and situations. This consideration is even more critical in the case of the spectator who is the believing and practising Christian, and his or her worldview and life choices are radically tied up with a personal spiritual existential experience of Jesus the Christ. Therefore, it is doubtful that any filmic image of Jesus will be in full harmony with such radically personal experience.

The greatest difficulty, however, is in the person of Jesus Christ. As his name suggests, Jesus is a historical person, the man of Nazareth, and he is also the risen Christ, recognised and discovered in faith by the disciples and the early Christian community. These two aspects create difficulties not only for the artist, but it has accompanied the church history, the dogmatic formulations of Synods, the self-understanding of the Church, the sacraments, the roles in the Church, last, but not least also the mode of the imitation of Christ.

The visual art of the first millennia has been much more faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition when representing Jesus Christ in a two-dimensional way on icons and mosaics, compared to the later development at the end of the Middle Ages when his three-dimensional representation made him look like the "guy next door", creating a Jesus image far from the original Christian tradition. The same ambiguity applies to any film made about the life of Jesus in a biographical sense. When Jesus is represented by a well-known actor, that representation is far from the Christian tradition; however, when the Christ-figure or -event is presented in a real drama close to any human experience, it is closer and more faithful to the Christian tradition's representation of the first millennia.

In this essay, I would like to present three films that are very different from each other in form, style and the way they approach the person of Jesus. First, a film that uses one Gospel's narrative to tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the second, a film that is biblical and at the same time the Christ-event becomes a reality in the protagonist's life, the third, a Christ-figure represented in the life and struggles of the main character, who, in this case, is a woman.

***The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* by Pier Paolo Pasolini**

In the minds of the most serious film critics, Pasolini's film *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* is the best, the most authentic, and the most religious film on Jesus ever made. It was premiered at the International Film Festival of Venice on 4 September 1964.

Pasolini's Jesus project began two years earlier when he visited Assisi as an invitee of the *Pro Civitate Christiana*, a Catholic cultural organisation, to convince him to make a film about the life of Jesus.

Pasolini, as he described later, found a copy of the New Testament on his bedside table and he turned to the Gospels and in his own words "that day ... I read them from beginning to end like a novel". The experience was like a bolt of lightning for Pasolini, and he felt an immediate need "to do something" – a terrible almost physical energy in himself, as he later admitted.

When *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* came out, Pasolini was 42 years of age. A prolific writer, a man of culture. He had already published some twenty-eight books of poetry and essays, fifteen film scripts, and had himself made five movies.

Pasolini was also active politically. He had been a member of the Italian Communist Party, from which he was expelled in 1952 because of the scandal caused by his publicly admitted homosexuality and some run-ins with the law in this regard. His short film *La ricotta* (from 1963) got him in trouble once again because the film was judged blasphemous and insulting to the Catholic faith, the religion of the state. Pasolini was arrested, tried, and given a four-month suspended sentence. He has always confessed to be an atheist.

It is from this rich and troubled background that Pasolini, a kind of national Italian *enfant terrible* came to the project of making the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, and there is no doubt that this background left its mark on the film and on the portrait of Jesus which it presents. For example, Pasolini's past can be sensed in his preference for Matthew's Jesus. He was attracted by the revolutionary character and quality of his social diversity, his non-violence, and the power of moral thought. He insists that Mathew is the most worldly of the evangelists and the most revolutionary.

Pasolini was fascinated, inspired by the strong, aggressive Jesus of Matthew's Gospel. He himself confesses that the words of Jesus struck him and drove him to make the film were: "*I have not come to bring peace on the Earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to bring division, a man against his father, a daughter against her mother.*" Pasolini wanted to represent Christ as an intellectual in the world of poor people ready for revolution. Clearly, he had in mind something quite different from a biography of Jesus. His film is simply the visualisation of one particular Gospel, that of St. Matthew, and it is not a life of Christ as if it was a biography. If Zeffirelli or Rossellini created a very free adaptation of all four Gospels, in the end, they were producing a work more of fiction than close to the Gospels. Pasolini, inspired by the raw power of Matthew's text, was determined to be utterly faithful to it. He wanted to translate its story faithfully into images, following with-

out any omissions or additions. Regarding the dialogue of his film, he insists that the spoken words should be rigorously those of Saint Matthew, without even a sentence of explanation or bridging because no image or word added can ever reach the high poetic level of the text. (The Gospel of Matthew served as a script for the movie.)

In keeping with his political ideology and consistent with his aesthetic preferences announced in *Sopraluoghi in Palestina* and in *La ricotta*, Pasolini made two other crucial decisions regarding his Gospel. Having decided that making the film in the Holy Land was out of the question, Pasolini was determined to make it in Italy, and in doing so, he opted for an analogical approach to the biblical realities. He searched in Italy for landscapes and faces that would be close to the historical counterparts of the Gospel. These authentic, timeless settings and the equally authentic and timeless peasants faces of most of Pasolini's actors marked by centuries of abandonment, poverty and suffering give an unmistakable political valence to his Gospel. Pasolini was making an unmistakable ideological statement critical of the central government in Rome and of its Christian Democratic leadership. Thus the Jesus of Pasolini's film, in his strong criticism already present in Matthew's Gospel of the religious and social institutions of his time, is by analogy making a parallel critique of contemporary Italian institutions. The authentic settings, the simple stylised customs, and all the choice of actors all submit to this new logic, as does the style of acting. Given the words from the gospel of Matthew, Pasolini's actors repeat them as they are, without interpreting them with the dialectical inflection of the simple people, with the usual age-old gestures of the poor. It is easy for these simple, non-professionals to avoid the pitfalls of the method actor. Pasolini has them perform without imposing their own personal interior logical and psychological modulation. The result in *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* is quite unique in the Jesus-film tradition, a rigorous yet harmonious blend of words and images into a unified whole. In spite of his apparently atheistic stance, Pasolini was quite sincerely convinced that at the deepest level, Marxism and Christianity had profound affinities, and in part, his decision to make *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* was motivated by the hope that it might serve to bring about a reconciliatory dialogue between Marxism and Christianity, a radically unconventional alliance.

A problematic dimension of Pasolini's Gospel is its autobiographical content and themes, which at times interfere with what he himself wanted to be a faithful translation into images of the gospel text and spirit. Pasolini's already quoted definition of the kind of Christ he wanted to represent: "an intellectual in a world of poor people ripe for revolution" is also quite obviously a definition of himself and of the role he wished to assume in Italian culture. There is also a personal subtext in the film, that is, Pasolini quite consciously creates a parallel between himself angry intellectual, cultural and the moral prophet rejected by his own people, and the angry prophetic Jesus he represents in the gospel.

Nowhere is this autobiographical element more striking and perhaps more distracting than in the fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus played by Susanna Pasolini,

the director's mother, is present at the crucifixion. Here Pasolini is, in an open and unashamed manner violating his own rule of absolute faithfulness to Matthew's text. In Matthew, Mary is not present at the Calvary. Further, there is the unequivocal suggestion that Mary (Susanna Pasolini), collapsing in an agony of grief at the foot of the cross, is crying not only for Jesus crucified but also for her son Pier Paolo "crucified" by the cultural, political and moral Pharisees of his generation.

In Pasolini's Gospel, beauty and visual dominance go to man unquestioningly. Christ himself and some of the apostles are indeed beautiful young men, and so are the Roman soldiers, the rich young man and many of the peasants.

On the other hand, Pasolini's Jesus is sure of himself, with never a hint of the self-conscious hesitation, not to say confusion of Scorsese's Jesus. Pasolini makes it clear that his power and decisiveness find their source not in himself a self-made, self-sufficient prophet-preacher in the manner, but in his mysterious contact-identification with the Father. In one quite beautiful shot understated in its simple austerity, Pasolini shows Jesus in early morning prayer, kneeling with his arms uplifted in the *orante* position, absolutely still, while his disciples do the early morning ablutions in the background. At one point, Judas begins to walk toward Jesus but then he stops, not daring to interrupt the sacred space of Jesus' communion with God.

The Jesus of Pasolini's gospel is prophetic, in the sense of seeing profoundly and critically into the present situation and from the analysis confronting authority and making serious demands on his followers. In his words and actions, he is rough, direct, at times undiplomatic, an "uninspired peasant". Jesus' words are often spoken brusquely as if blows with a stone. His "Get behind me, Satan!" correction of Peter, for example, is shocking in its vehemence, both for Peter, who is clearly taken aback and for the viewers of the film.

Jesus' prophetic role is largely that of a defender of the poor and the oppressed and correspondingly that of criticising the oppressors, the cultural and religious establishment of his time. He is a Christ proud and eager to fight, who puts into play all his powers and his very life for the good of his oppressed people.

On the other hand, Pasolini repeatedly shows Jesus responding with mercy, gentleness and kindness to his disciples, the people, children and especially to those who come to him for healing. One of the mistaken impressions many people have of Pasolini's Jesus is that he never, or hardly ever, smiles. Pasolini's Jesus is a man with an "intense love of life", often smiles: when he meets John the Baptist and when he calls James and John to follow him, when he speaks of the lilies of the field and when he is about to do the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, when Jesus heals the leper there is a marvellous warm exchange of smiles between him and the man. During his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus is anything but solemn. He is clearly enjoying himself participating in this popular manifestation. Again during the Last Supper, he smiles and speaks with kindness to the apostles; he is also capable of sadness as suggested in his reaction to the departure of the rich young man and clearly manifested when he hears of

the beheading of John the Baptist. In a very similar reaction, he cries and almost seems discouraged on that occasion.

Certainly, Pasolini's Jesus is problematic and not a full and coherent reflection of the Jesus of Matthew's narrative. Because Matthew wrote his gospel to the community of Jews who converted to Christianity. In it, over and over Jesus is presented as the Son of God, the Messiah, the new Adam who came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. So much of this Jesus is lacking in Pasolini's film. Pasolini's Jesus is not well integrated into his world. He is even less integrated into human society. Solitary, aloof, he is a kind of biblical intellectual who, despite an intense desire to be closely linked to the people, cannot bridge the immeasurable gap between them. Perhaps the most evident is in the Sermon on the Mount sequence but also in many other moments of the film when Jesus seems separated from the people and even from his disciples. He does have encounters, conversations with people and even, as we have seen, moments of human tenderness but these are usually very brief and evanescent. There is little evidence of profound understanding or communion. The Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, for example, shut in close-up, talking and talking, where not one listener is to be seen, is a powerful image of eloquence solitude. The repeated wide-angle compositions in which Jesus is to one side of the frame in close-up, with the crowd far in the background, emphasises his distance from the people as does the oft-repeated image of Jesus from behind while talking as if to himself. The severity of the Jesus of Matthew's written text is forcefully augmented. Jesus, seen often in close-up, speaking violent words in violent tones with violent gestures, moving incessantly, almost always separated from the people around him, a separation augmented by the silence and passivity of Jesus' followers, an indistinguishable sign, almost too much.

It is something of a truism to say that the final image or scene of a film has a particular valence or power, and that it can thus confirm the meaning proposed throughout the film or substantially shifts that meaning. The Resurrection scene with which Pasolini concludes *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* is a good example of this. The episode is so powerful, so positive, so faithful to Matthew's Gospel that, as a film experience, it effectively counters the problematical aspects of the person of Jesus noted above. The sequence is complicated and dense, but the point can be made by noting a few of its elements. A "Gloria" heard quietly in the background from the time Jesus is taken down from the cross till the "explosive" opening of the tomb at the "Amen" of the hymn clearly prepares for the glorious victory over death. The arrival of the women, the opening of the tomb (found empty), the angel of the resurrection and its words of hope all happening very fast suggest the power and urgency of this in new life. The explosion of the unusual *Gloria* of the Congolese *Missa Luba*, with its pounding drums and joyful voices, as a tomb opens and continuing till the end of the film, recalls the divine intervention of God in the Annunciation seen in the opening of the film when we first hear this music, and it suggests a similar divine intervention in this conclusion. The closing shot of the film shows the disciples and others running to greet the risen Lord on a hillside, as he commissions them

to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... remember I am with you always”. The power of the forward movement of the whole scene is most persuasive. It resounds with the mystery of the Resurrection-victory of Jesus the Christ over death. But Pasolini is most convincing and unambiguous about his Jesus, as he represents the disciples running joyously towards the risen Christ in a burst of visual energy that sweeps the emotions of even the most sceptical spectator along with it.

***Jésus de Montréal* by Denys Arcand**

Most of the film-critics would say that the biographical films about Jesus are unsatisfying and theologically problematic. In contrast, the analogy to the Christ-figure is more adequate. They are from various periods of film history and belong to various genres and styles, but they all have two elements in common. They submit to two levels of interpretation: the direct and the analogical, the literal and figurative or metaphorical level. They are not unlike the parables of Jesus, which, when read on a literal level, remain brief narratives of human experience, but when interpreted metaphorically, fairly explode with theological or Christological significance. Christianity is a storytelling religion, religion of the Bible, which in large part is narrative: God is telling God’s story and human story. It is a religion that finds its identity in the narratives of the creation, the fall, the promise and in the story of salvation fulfilled in the Christ-event. However, the Christ-figure is neither Jesus nor the Christ, but rather a shadow, a faint glimmer or reflection of him. As a fully human being, the Christ figure maybe weak, uncertain, even a sinner that this may have all the limits of any human being in the situation at hand. The Christ-figure is a foil to Jesus Christ, and between the two figures, there is a reciprocal relationship. On the one hand, the reference to Christ clarifies the situation of the Christ-figure and adds depth to the significance of his actions; on the other hand, the person and situation of the Christ-figure can provide a new understanding of who and how Christ is: Jesus himself is revealed anew in the Christ-figure.

Denys Arcand’s film *Jesus of Montreal* is set in modern Canada and tells the story of Daniel Coulomb, a young unemployed actor who is hired by the priest-director of the Catholic shrine *Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal* to update the text of a passion presented each summer in the gardens of the shrine, and then to produce the new version. The young man bright, creative, charismatic forms a collective with a group of four actors whom he calls from various activities: Constance is an unemployed actress working in a soup kitchen, Martin has been dubbing foreign porn movies, Mireille, young and very pretty, has been acting in television commercials that accentuate her body, and Renée has been dubbing a documentary about the origins of the universe.

Daniel does the library research into the question of the historical Jesus, he speaks with a biblical scholar, consults his companions, and together they produce a new script. The result is a demythologising text, radically different from the previous one. Among other things, it casts doubt on the divine origin of Jesus and therefore

on his divinity, by making him the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier, shifts around events from the Gospel tradition and, in the end, seems to skirt the question of the reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

The opening night performance reveals a very involving show that is original, full of action movement and colour, and elicits a favourable reaction from the audience. Not so enthusiastic is P re Leclerc, director of the shrine. Shocked by this all too human portrait of Jesus and especially afraid of the reaction of his religious superiors and the board of directors of the shrine, he threatens Daniel.

Thanks to coverage by the mass media, Daniel's career seems ready to take off, but then almost immediately, he begins getting in trouble reacting in holy wrath to the abuse of Mireille during auditions for a beer commercial, when he destroys some television equipment and at the end of the second performance of the passion he is arrested and put on trial. Refusing the offer of help from a lawyer, he pleads guilty. The clever and corrupt lawyer, Richard Cardinal, who specialises in managing media personalities, tries to persuade Daniel to become his client, promising him a career plan and a brilliant future.

Here, unfortunately, we cannot get too much into the rich details of the film, but the real drama of the film starts when gradually we see similarities to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Especially when during a performance, the cross on which Daniel is "hanging" is knocked down. He is rushed to the hospital emergency room, which is too crowded to care for him. Daniel seems to recover and accompanied by Mireille and Constance, he wanders through a subway station preaching apocalyptically. In the end, he collapses and rushed again to the second hospital, where he dies. The two women donate his organs for transplant, and while two sick people recover, one with Daniel's heart, the other with his eyes, the lawyer Cardinal tries to enlist the cooperation of the disciples to form a theatre in Daniel's memory. Only Mireille, the youngest (whom Daniel-Jesus loved), resists the temptation and walks alone on the mountain of the crucifixion.

The context of *Jesus de Montreal* both of the creation of the film and of its setting is the postmodern, post-traditional, post-catholic society of French Canada in the late 80s. Until the 60s, Qu bec was a traditional catholic society and culture. It put a premium on such values as a classical and Catholic education, large families characterised by fidelity, care, loyalty, church-centred Catholic faith, and worldview, with the institutional church considered as important as government, the virtues of hard work, honesty, respect for others, hospitality.

The quiet revolution, "*la revolution tranquille*" of the 60s and 70s changed all that rather drastically. The uncontested benefits of the "*la revolution tranquille*" were many: a growth of pride in the French language and culture, the widespread democratisation of political and social institutions, much good social legislation, the growth of the entrepreneurial class, which corresponding economic benefits for all, a greater openness to North American culture in general, a just shift in the monolithic political and economic power of the Roman Catholic Church. However, these

changes were accompanied by a wide range of negative changes in French Canada with rather devastating effects on the society and on individuals in it. Materialistic economic interests came to dominate many aspects of life which became vitiated by rampant consumerism, savage competition, and status- and success-seeking at all costs. Culture, now mass mediated, commercialised, became a commodity and industry. Social relations governed by economic rather than moral considerations became manipulative, abusive, and inhuman. The traditional family structure began to break down, the victim of economic stress, the normalisation of short-term “no strings” relationships, divorce, and a smorgasbord approach to sex. The catholic religion, both as personal faith and social, cultural structure, was replaced by new gods and rituals, those of psychology, science, technology, astrology and sex.

Denys Arcand entered this fray as an *enfant terrible* of French-Canadian cinema and culture, a *Savonarola*. In his 1985 film, *The Decline of the American Empire*, he issued a stinging criticism of Québec society, which he accused of having sold out the worst aspects of the dominant American culture, of having surrendered in its distinctiveness and become a colony of the American Empire. In *The Decline*, by focusing his attention on the dynamic of four couples, Arcand represents them in their narcissistic attitudes and activities, in their casual infidelities and cruelties and especially in the utterly mediocre quality of the pseudo-intellectual discussion, a microcosm of a tired, navel-gazing, materialistic, hedonistic and obsessed with sexual behavior.

Four years later, Arcand, having lost none of his prophetic anger, continued his cinematic criticism of Québec society by turning his attention this time to the mass media, the culture industry, the world of advertising and the Catholic Church.

But, while in *The Decline* his criticism is bitter, cynical, without hope, in *Jesus of Montreal* – and notwithstanding the tough, hard-hitting quality of the film –, Arcand does make a strong statement of hope both in what he says, the content of the film and how he says it, its style. If *The decline* pictures French Canadian society as a human and spiritual wasteland, desperately in need of salvation, then *Jesus of Montreal* announces the good news of that salvation, a hope embedded in the life and death of the young actor-director Daniel Coulomb and in his identity and function as a Christ-figure.

As already suggested, *Jesus of Montreal* is a transition film and this transitional quality is also an essential dimension of the salvific process carried forward by the protagonist of the film. The film has a Christ-figure, the actor-director of Daniel Coulomb, who, with his companion actors represent in their day-to-day lives and work in a variety of precise evangelical elements and situations. At the same time, the film also presents a series of explicit portrays of Jesus Christ, which become foils or contrasting backgrounds to the Christ-figuring of Daniel.

In fact, Daniel becomes a Christ-figure precisely because he is the writer-director-actor of the passion play and because, as such, he has chosen to create the Jesus he does, both in the text of the play and in his performance. There is no doubt that the most powerful, most fascinating dimension of the film is precisely the ongoing

tension of distinction-identification between Daniel-actor and Daniel-Jesus from the opening scene of the film when Daniel-actor is “proclaimed” as Daniel-Jesus by another actor and John the Baptist figure “the forerunner” till the end of the film when both Daniel-actor and Daniel-Jesus “die” on the cross.

An explicit image of Christ encountered in the film is the larger-than-life stone statue of Jesus condemned to death, the first station of the cross in the garden of the shrine, which Daniel approaches and contemplates in silence as he begins his work on the new play, and then seen on several occasions both before and during the performances of the play. Imposing, monumental, static, impassive, it serves as a stage setting, a background rather than as a model of Jesus in the same way as the smaller liturgical stations of the cross seen later in the interior of the church, when the final passion of Daniel is about to begin.

Early in the film, in the library where Daniel has begun his research for the historical Jesus, a strange librarian reassures him in an almost breathless whisper, “It is he who will find you”. There are some main contours of Daniel as a Christ-figure: many aspects of Daniel’s origins, his family, his past life, remain a mystery, though there is the suspicion of his having been on a spiritual quest, which, in a general way, reflects the divine mystery of Jesus origins and of his hidden life as he prepares for his mission. When Daniel begins his activity of preparing the passion play, the first thing he does is to search for his disciples. He accepts them as they are and calls them out of their activities by offering them something more valid. That is precisely what Jesus did. Then Daniel is without a home, he creates a community with his disciples by breaking bread (pizza) with them and in him, the disciples experience new meaning and significance, spiritual freedom in their lives. Daniel reveals himself to be a perceptive and courageous critic of both secular and religious institutions: on the one hand, he attacks the mass media advertising industry to which he reacts violently; on the other as Daniel he attacks the inconsistency, cowardice, hypocrisy of Père Leclerc, then as Daniel-Jesus, he attacks the arrogant priests with their titles, privileges, and power.

Like Jesus, Daniel has a privileged relationship with women: they are among his first followers and they and not the male disciples accompany him in his passion and death, and they visit his grave, where the two young women in the conclusion of the film sing the *Stabat Mater* where he died. Daniel submits to being washed by Mireille, whom he has saved from “prostitution” in the advertising industry, clearly a reference to Mary Magdalene, who washes Jesus’ feet. Daniel lives in the apartment of Constance along with Mireille, suggesting the relationship of Jesus with Martha and Mary, and insofar as it is these two women who sign the documents for the organ transplants at the end of the film, they might be said to be present at his “resurrection”. Beyond allegorical parallels, it is precisely in the quality of Daniel’s relationship with the two women that Arcand has him reflect Jesus. Daniel is celibate, celibacy which he lives in a mature and fully integrated manner, a way of being with others which, like that of Jesus, is open, welcoming and freeing.

An interesting scene is when Daniel goes to lunch with the lawyer, Richard Cardinal. They meet on the top floor of a skyscraper. The lawyer explains Daniel all the fame, riches and power that can be his if Daniel chooses him to be his lawyer. “This city is Yours if you want it” he whispers into Daniel’s ears, similarly as Satan has done to Jesus in the desert.

Finally, there is the question of the Resurrection: the transplant of his organs is like a sacrifice of his body and blood on the cross-shaped table, which gives life, sight, hope to others, is a positive, grace-filled analogy of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is not by chance that the doctor, commenting on Daniel’s type “0” blood, says, “That’s a godsend”. Regarding the organ transplants, Arcand gives a universal quality to this salvific resurrection gesture in making the one recipient English and the other Italian. Arcand represents the Resurrection of Christ analogically. It is sufficient to highlight – besides his life-giving and saving organ transplant in others – when we see at the end of the movie a two hundred and seventy-second long, uninterrupted shot that begins in the subway station. At the very spot where Daniel has collapsed and died, analogically the tomb of Jesus, two young women are singing the conclusion of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* in a slow and highly dramatic way. They are the same two women who, in the prologue of the film, were singing in the choir of the shrine where they saw Daniel for the first time and who later auditioned for the beer commercial, where they witnessed Daniel-Christ-figure at his most prophetic. After a slow zoom away from the singers, Arcand shifts his camera to observe them from far, quasi from the point of view of the “risen” Daniel. At this point, he begins the *plan-sequence* with a slow, very steady movement of the camera to the left. The two singers disappear, and the camera moves into what seems to be an abstract image of the interior of the Earth and the cosmos. The movement continues upwards out of the subway to the city’s skyline at dawn, and finally, to the mountain top, where, in the final seconds, the camera rests on the empty cross. In this remarkable concluding shot, Arcand is saying directly to us, the viewers of his film – we are the only witnesses to this extradiegetic resurrection – that in the death of Daniel, Christ-figure, a new morning dawns.

***Babette’s Feast* by Gabriel Axel**

The cinematic Christ-figure is to be found in films of every *genre*: dramatic films, westerns, science-fiction films, comedies and satires, adventure films, films of social and psychological analysis and, as one might expect, religious films.

The Christ-figure has been an element in film from the beginning of the seventh art, in D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* till the present-day Jan Komasa’s *Corpus Christi* (Boze Cialo, 2019). A critical dimension of the work of great film authors such as Tarkovsky, Bresson, Dreyer, Ford, Bunuel and Pasolini, etc. At times, the Christ-figure is an overall dominant presence in the film and the Christological action its governing theme. At other times, the Christ-figure is a *leitmotiv* parallel to the major theme. Sometimes the Christ-figure is a metaphor repeated several times in the film,

e.g., in a character whose identification with Christ emerges only for brief moments. Finally, the reference to Christ can be a single image of shot, occurring only once in the film, at which point the term “Christ-figure” has a rather limited significance, in that it does not in any way refer to the dynamic of the protagonist in the entire film.

As we have already noted, a further distinction has to do with the difference between the faith-inspired representation of Christ and the more humanist, even atheistic, projections of the Jesus persona. The historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, has a dual identity: for the believing Christian, he is Jesus who is Risen, the Christ of faith, dynamic and active in our world; for a non-believer, he remains a historical figure, who lived and died and who now belongs to human culture, and as such is available to that culture as a secular icon, just as the Christ of the faith is for the Christian a sacred icon.

Gabriel Axel’s *Babette’s Feast* is most certainly one of the most beautiful fiction movies ever made, which in 1987 also won the Oscar award for best foreign movie. And since it turned out that it is also Pope Francis’ favourite movie there are hardly any Catholics who has not seen it.

The plot of the film narrates the mysterious experience of conversion lived by the members of a small fundamentalist Lutheran community living in isolation on the Jutland coast of Denmark in 1883. The conversion was occasioned by the presence and activity in the midst of a French woman refugee, Babette.

The movie starts with two flashbacks; the first goes back twenty-nine years, where we see a stern Lutheran brotherhood united, devout, well-disciplined community, thanks to its founder and pastor, who is aided in his work by his two daughters Philippa and Martina. The community prospers and does much good, even though being puritan, ascetic, and exclusive. During this period, two visitors from the outside world, a young army officer and a French *opera divo* fall in love with the daughters, but the moral authority of the father prevails, the visitors leave, and life goes on undisturbed.

In the second flashback, set twelve years in the past, the pastor has died, and the daughters carry out his mission. One stormy night they give shelter to madame Babette, an unfortunate refugee from the tragic events of the Paris commune. She remains with them as their cook, a profession she exercised in Paris, and in a short time, her presence begins to have surprisingly positive results.

In the present time of the film, the situation of the community has changed, the brothers and sisters of the minister’s little sect have “fallen out of grace” with one another. Some have died in resentment, fear and guilt, and “unspoken jealousies and bridled passions” threatened to destroy the remaining community. On the centenary of the founder’s birth, Babette, who has won the lottery in France, prepares a meal, “*un vrai diner francaise*” – as she says for the community.

During Babette’s feast, the members of the community, at first terrified of spiritual tragedy and determined to resist, miraculously rediscover forgiveness, peace and hope. Through Babette, salvation comes to the people of God.

If the religious dimension of *Babette's Feast* is not incontrovertible and explicit, the Christological identity and function of the protagonist are not so immediately clear.

The first part of the film, which represents the golden years of the Lutheran sect, corresponds to the Old Testament, the first covenant between God and humanity, the old Law. Under the guidance of the founder – referred to with the Old Testament terminology – of “priest and prophet”, this community of chosen people live at peace; they are good people, believers, God-fearing. But like the people of Israel, they live isolated from the world, strictly disciplined in how they pray, what they eat, in a world-denying asceticism, surrounded by alien people against whose corrupt influence they struggle to protect themselves. They totally trust in the decisive theocratic leadership of the pastor, who is a just man, well respected, but also a “little feared” by his people. He repels all attempts to break the integrity of the community and inspired by him, his followers focus their attention on the other world.

In the second part of the film, the salvation history of the community shifts forward with the arrival of Babette, whose coming by night is announced with signs in the heavens: a strong wind, violent rain and a mysterious shaft of white light from above. Her arrival is characterised by some quite clear correspondences to Christological *kenosis*: a foreigner who cannot speak the language, a refugee, who has lost everything, she puts herself at the mercy of Martina and Philippa and asks only “to work for no wages...let me serve you”. As Babette settles in her hidden existence, she acquires aspects of Christological incarnation. She remains a servant: Martina and Philippa eat in the dining room while she is alone in the kitchen. She dresses as they do, learns the language, and relates well to the people in the village. Though Babette was a famous chef in Paris (*Café Anglaise*), she is now “poor among the poor”, humbly disciplines herself into patience and submits to learning the unsophisticated method of cooking cod and ale-bread soup.

In the third part of the film, Axel dramatically proclaims Babette's role as a Christ-figure who brings salvation to her people. Axel sets the stage by showing the puritan community four years after Babette's advent still very much in need of salvation: its members are reduced to ten and they are all old. Its spirituality sapped by age-old grudges and guilts and riven by ancient feuds and jealousies, resentment, fear and little schisms threaten the group with disintegration. Evidently, the memory of the founder is not enough. There is a need for a more definite salvific act. Axel suggests that Babette's feast is more than a simple meal when he places twelve people at the table, like the apostles at the Last Supper.

Axel proposes Babette's Christological identity not only in what she does but also in her manner, her way of being and acting, which gives evidence of a Christological dimension. Babette is open, discreet and respectful of all, she comes to the people as an invitation, and no one fears her as they did the pastor. Every contact with her is life-giving and liberating. Babette's offer of salvation is anything but conditional or exclusive: welcome at the feast are two outsiders to the community: Mrs. Löwenhielm and her nephew, the General, the latter arriving at the last minute. The feast is even

more universal, for it includes the lowly coachman and the kitchen boy, perhaps representing the poor, whose conscious joy and appreciation for sharing in the meal is one of the most profound touches of the film. In a natural and spontaneous manner, they seem to have a privileged experience of the wonder of the event. Being in the presence of Babette, they see her grace and artistry better than do the guests.

Also contrasting throughout the film are two models of priesthood: that exercised by the pastor, an eminently masculine model, is based on power, control, the exercise of fear.

The priesthood of Babette, a more feminine model, continues the ministry of the pastor but transforms it, as Christ transformed the Old Testament ministry into ministry of the praise of God and humans, salvation through joy, charity, healing, creativity and beauty, a ministry which imposes no demands from God but rather awakens a desire for peace and reconciliation. Babette's priesthood, in the sign of Christ, fulfills and transcends that of the pastor and succeeds, where he fails, in creating a new covenant between the people and God.

If Babette is a Christ-figure and if the film treats the Christian experience of salvation, then at some point, the story should represent the sacrificial cross. It does, indeed. There are two crosses, and in this most Christian of symbols, Axel suggests how Babette, Christ-figure, is the fulfillment of a promise. The first cross, a life-sized, polychromed wood crucifix, is seen twice in the Pastor's church, pictured dramatically behind him during a sermon and to which he makes no reference; it is a formal, institutional cross. The other tiny gold crucifix is worn by Babette, but Axel does not put it on her when she first arrives: her mission has not yet begun. Only in the present time, the film does he have her wear it, as a sign of the salvific mission she has, at that point, undertaken and which reaches its fulfillment in her *agape* sacrifice. Axel seems to be saying that Babette symbolically carries the cross on and in her person, that she is, in essence, offering herself, and it is this more than all else that makes her an efficacious Christ-figure.

What Axel suggests within the content of his film he also underscores extradigetically with a number of formal and stylistic elements, out of which perhaps the most evident is the use of colour. In the first part of the film and in other scenes where Babette is not present, the dominant colours in exterior shots are grey and brown, giving very sombre tone to the already hostile coast of Jutland. Interior designs are dominated by grey and brown, tending towards darker tones and shadows, and the illumination is limited either to the cold tones of filtering through the windows or the weak light of the occasional candle. Into this dark world comes Babette, to whom the director associates very different colours: when she is outside, the grass is a rich green, the water blue, the sky either bright blue or the warm orange and red of sunrise or sunsets. It is especially during the festive meal that Babette's presence evokes of rich, deep and varied colours of the food, the wine, the candles, the crystal, and the striking red and gold colours of the dress-uniform of Löwenhielm. Babette, Christ-figure, is light and colour in the darkness.

At the very end of the film, it snows. The snow is barely glimpsed through a window in the dining room when the two sisters come to understand the extent of Babette's salvific sacrifice. Here Axel perhaps creates, in the snow falling from the heavens, a metaphor of the grace that has come from above in the salvific event of Babette. Most certainly, the Christological and soteriological sacrifice of Babette is transparent. However, much less the motif of resurrection, insofar as it signifies a final victory of life over death, peace over conflict, hope over hopelessness, of wholeness over disintegration. There are two indirect but rather New Testament references to the resurrection in the film. On the one hand, in the scene when Babette is in the kitchen during the feast "absorbed and transformed" and observed with fascination and devotion by the two disciples, the coachman, and the servant, suggests something of the transfiguration of Christ at Mount Tabor, a prefiguration of the resurrection.

On the other hand, the epilogue reflects the conversation of the disciples with the post-resurrection Jesus at Emmaus. Axel has Babette move with the two sisters from the kitchen to the dining-room table and there has her interpret for them the significance of the meal they have just eaten, the meaning of her sacrificial action, the sense of the sacredness of self-sacrifice. Salvation has come. Revelation is complete.

In sum, we can say the movies presented above are authentic representations of Jesus of Nazareth and of the Christ-figure. A film does not become religious just by showing church buildings, priests or other religious artefacts but rather by exposing the Christ-event in the life of everyday people as they live, struggle, and make sacrifices for others.

As the two-dimensional, abstract representations of Christ from the first millennia (icons and mosaics) are more authentic representations than the three-dimensional humanlike figures, the same is valid in the cinema: the more it is interpreted and acted as a biographical of Jesus of Nazareth and performed by a certain well-known actor, the less authentic it is. And the more the film presents the Christ event or figure in the life of everyday people, the more authentic representations of the transcendent reality.

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Abstract

From early in the Christian era, artists and believers have sought to create representations of Jesus the Christ. Those representations of the first millennia were mostly two-dimensional, seen against an abstract background such as mosaics and icons, and only in the late Middle Ages came the three-dimensional representations of Jesus, his human nature emphasized, often pictured in a historically and culturally specific setting.

If the representation of Jesus Christ has been a constant theme in the six traditional arts, it was expected to be the theme of the seventh art, the cinema.

In this essay, we would like to present three films, very different from each other in form, style, and the way they approach the person of Jesus, and we are looking for the validity of His transcendent representation.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, transcendence, cinema, artistic representations, literal, metaphorical, storytelling

Sofia Sjö

LOSS, DOUBT, AND RECONCILIATION: THE CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST IN NORDIC FILMS*

Introduction

For many, the words “religion in Nordic films” still primarily seem to bring one director, Ingmar Bergman to mind. Though several contemporary Nordic filmmakers have dealt with religious themes in their films,¹ Bergman’s influence is still strong. A lot of filmmakers have been inspired by Bergman’s oeuvre, and even if they have not, they do tend to be compared to him if they choose to deal with religious themes or questions.

I must confess that I am not a big fan of Bergman. I can appreciate that he was a talented filmmaker, but I am not an admirer of his films in general nor his way of exploring religious themes. Though I have been writing on religion and film for close to twenty years, I have avoided Bergman, and my first publication to deal with some of his films did not come out until this year.² I do admit that my issues with Bergman can be tied to the fact that his images sometimes cut too deep, but I also find them problematic in other ways.

Despite this critical attitude to Bergman, in this paper, I want to start by reflecting on some of his productions and particularly a couple of themes related to religion in his films. Because, even though I do not find Bergman’s viewpoints compelling, some of the themes he brought up in his productions still prevail in Nordic films today. However, we can also see changes and alternative perspectives shining through in contemporary Nordic films. I find

* This paper was presented at the conference The Eucharist and Visual Culture in Sárospatak in Hungary October 1-3, 2021. I want to thank the organizers and participants for their comments and thoughts that have helped me develop the text.

¹ Sjö, Sofia – DANIELSSON, Árni Svanur: Detraditionalization, Diversity, and Mediatization: Explorations of Religion in Nordic Films, *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, Volume 26, 2013/1, 45–62.

² Sjö, Sofia: Konstnären, barnet och himmelriket, in WIGORTS YNGVESSON, Susanne – WELLS, Charlotta (eds.): *Trolösa: Speglingar av Luther i Bergman och Bergman i Luther*, Stockholm, Enskilda Hogskolan Stockholm, *Studia Theologica Holmiensia* 33, 2021, 37–49.

both the prevailing themes and the new perspectives important and informative and of particular interest when exploring the Eucharist in Nordic films and what films can tell us about attitudes to the Nordic national Lutheran churches more broadly.

Films are of course, not a direct reflection of society, but I and others do argue that film and other forms of popular culture can capture discourses and essential questions in a society.³ As Andrew Nestingen puts it, “popular texts continually mediate socially significant conflicts through narration, music, and image”.⁴ Thus I argue that Nordic films can tell us something quite fundamental about attitudes to and the position of, among other things, the national Lutheran churches in Nordic society. The mirror is, of course, not perfectly clear, as Adam Possamai has put it,⁵ but through films, we can still get at or illuminate prevailing debates. I thus go into dialogue with film mostly from a study of religions and sociology of religion perspective, trying to highlight the ways of relating to the church that films bring to the fore.

The Nordic countries have a similar religious history with the Lutheran national churches holding an essential position. Today the countries are becoming more and more diverse and different, though, as illustrated among other things in the NOREL-project, which looked at religion in the public sphere in the Nordic countries and where films were also a part of the discussion.⁶ The diversity or diversification of religion is illustrated in films as well.⁷ Today we have more and more films in not least Sweden, Denmark and Norway, reflecting on the position of religious minorities, and films clearly highlight certain struggles around religious diversity, hierarchies, and traditions. This, of course, partly reflects what is going on in society in general as well.⁸

Interestingly, one of the main findings of explorations of religion in Nordic films is that the way the Lutheran church and its representatives and members are portrayed is still rather similar in all the Nordic countries.⁹ Mostly the church – and from

³ See for example FORBES, Bruce David: Introduction: Finding Religion in Unexpected Places, in ID. – MAHAN, Jeffrey H. (eds.): *Religion and Popular Culture in America, Revised Edition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005, 1–20.

⁴ NESTINGEN, Andrew: *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film and Social Change*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2008, 9.

⁵ POSSAMAI, Adam: *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper Real Testament*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2005, 22.

⁶ For more on the project, see the main findings publication: FURSETH, Inger (ed.): *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries*, Cham, Springer Nature, 2018.

⁷ Sjö – DANÍELSSON: op. cit.; Sjö, Sofia: Go with Peace Jamil: Affirmation and Challenge of the Image of the Muslim Man, *Journal of Religion and Film*, Volume 17, 2013/2, URL: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1136&context=jrf> Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 11.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion on religion in Nordic media and current debates, see LUNDBY, Knut – REINTOFT, Henrik Christensen – GRESAKER, Ann Kristin – LÖVHEIM, Mia – NIEMELÄ, Kati – Sjö, Sofia – MOBERG, Marcus – DANÍELSSON, Árni Svanur: Religion and the Media: Continuity, Complexity, and Mediatization, in FURSETH: op. cit., 193–249.

⁹ DANÍELSSON, Árni Svanur: From State Officials to Teddy Bears: A Study of the Image of Pastors in Selected Nordic Films, *Studies in World Christianity*, Volume 15, 2009/2, 162–75. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/E1354990109000471> Last Access: 2022. 01. 11.; Sjö, Sofia: Bad Religion / Good Spirituality? Explorations of Religion in Contemporary Scandinavian Films, *Journal of Scan-*

now on, when I write the church, I mean the Nordic national Lutheran churches – is just a part of the background, some scenes might take place there – such as weddings and funerals, but in general there is not that much focus on the church. The fact that it is sort of a natural background is interesting, though. It says something about the taken-for-grantedness of this institution in a Nordic context.

However, every now and then – and perhaps more often than one would think considering the often pointed to secular nature of the Nordic countries¹⁰ – the focus in Nordic films is on the church and people in and around the church. The narratives, of course, differ, but there is one encounter that returns again and again: the meeting of a pastor and a convict or former convict in a church. I have focused on this encounter earlier as well but then primarily with the view on the role and function of religious spaces in films.¹¹ I want to return to this encounter today because it is an encounter where the Eucharist also often plays a part – directly or more figuratively. The five clearest examples of this encounter that I have found are *Italian for Beginners*,¹² a Danish Dogma comedy, *In Your Hands*,¹³ a Danish Dogma drama, *Adam's Apples*,¹⁴ a Danish dark comedy, *Letters to Father Jacob*,¹⁵ a Finnish drama and *Troubled Water*,¹⁶ a Norwegian drama. I will focus particularly on the last film, *Troubled Water*, but also highlight features from the other films.

Four Bergmanesque aspects

I will get back to these films soon, but as already mentioned, I want to start with Bergman and highlight certain features in his films that we both see supported and challenged in contemporary Nordic films. I will focus on *Winter Light*¹⁷ – directly translated the Swedish title is “The Communicants”,¹⁸ consequently this is also a film many may think about when asked to reflect on the Eucharist in Nordic films. I want to highlight four aspects that others have also brought out in more or less detail in discussing Bergman. I particularly build on an article by Lars Johansson.¹⁹

dinavian Cinema, Volume 2, 2012/1, 33–46. URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jsc.2.1.33_1 Last Access: 2022. 01. 11.; Sjö – DANIELSSON: op. cit.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the current state of religion in the Nordic countries see for example FURSETH, Inger: Secularization, Deprivatization, or Religious Complexity, in EAD.: op. cit., 291–312.

¹¹ Sjö, Sofia: Filmic Constructions of Religious Spaces: Churches as Settings for Trauma, Change and Redemption, *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Volume 27, 2015/2, 105–116.

¹² Directed by Lone Scherfig, 2001.

¹³ Directed by Annette K. Olesen, 2004.

¹⁴ Directed by Anders Thomas Jensen, 2005.

¹⁵ Directed by Klaus Härö, 2009.

¹⁶ Directed by Erik Poppe, 2008.

¹⁷ Directed by Ingmar Bergman, 1963.

¹⁸ WOODS, Lebbeus: Black and White Equals Gray, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Volume 54, 2013/1, 95–97.

¹⁹ JOHANSSON, Lars: Tomma kyrkor och tvivlande präster? Från Nattvardsgästerna till Så som i himmelen, in AXELSON, Tomas – SIGURDSON, Ola (eds.): *Film och religion: Livstolkning på vita duken*, Örebro, Cordia, 2005, 175–95.

The first aspect I want to highlight is the rather empty church. *Winter Light* takes place one winter Sunday in the Swedish countryside; it begins with a service and ends with a service. The audience encounters two church spaces. Both spaces are very sparsely inhabited and in accordance with the Lutheran tradition not overtly decorated, but rather simple church spaces with the pews, an altar, a pulpit and an organ as the main features. There are so few visitors in the second church that there is even risk there will not be a service – in Swedish a *mässfall*. In short, the film does suggest that going to church is not a very popular or attractive activity. Not even in the countryside that even or still in Bergman's days was considered somewhat more religious. Or not an attractive activity for most – because there are, of course, those who visit the church.

The second aspect is the nature of the visitors, those that actually go to church on an ordinary winter Sunday. Most of the visitors seem to be in some sense lost. We have the man who has been struggling with unemployment and checks if the pastor has any more tasks for him, the woman in a very unhappy relationship with the pastor who is desperate to get an emotional response from the pastor, the man who has lost a sense of meaning in his life and is contemplating suicide and his wife who is struggling to take care of her children and her husband. None of the main visitors seems to have their life really in order and they come seeking advice, support and maybe even hope.

The third aspect is the doubting pastor, a character made famous by Bergman.²⁰ What the visitors or seekers encounter in the church is a representative of the church who is struggling with his own faith and who is so caught up in his own struggles that it seems he can be of no help to anyone else. The pastor Thomas, as in doubting Thomas, has lost his wife and also his faith. He is unable to accept a new love in his life, unable to support those who struggle and very aware and, it would seem, afraid of what others will think of him. He thus seems focused on preserving his own status and image in the midst of all the doubt and instead of listening to those in need, he keeps talking about his own suffering and struggles – with dire consequences.

The fourth aspect is the lack of answers and support that the church provides its visitors. Those who come to the church to find answers are given no solutions. They meet the same loss that they are struggling with and are left to fend for themselves. Those that doubt seem to do so rightly. There is no god answering prayers, no heavenly father that sees your needs, no hope for redemption or reconciliation. Or is there?

I will get back to Bergman, but let me now turn to contemporary Nordic films and the recurring encounter I presented earlier. What happens in these films?

Contemporary Nordic perspectives

I should point out that though we find the same encounter in many contemporary Nordic films and also many other similar features, these are of course all still unique

²⁰ This character is brought up and mentioned as a recurring Bergman character in a number of works. See for example COHEN, Hubert I.: *Ingmar Bergman: The Art of Confession*, New York, Twayne, 1993, 262.

films and narratives worth watching. However, I do find it interesting that we, first of all find the encounter between a pastor and a convict or former convict recurring and second that we find three of the aspects that we recognize from Bergman's films, the first three, in most of these films and many other Nordic films that focus on the church as well. But we also find an important difference regarding the fourth aspect and some essential variations regarding the third.

In general, churches in Nordic films are quite empty spaces – this has not changed since Bergman's days. Lars Johansson illustrates this well regarding newer Swedish films, and I have highlighted the same regarding other Nordic productions.²¹ The exceptions are perhaps at Christmas or at weddings or funerals or other rites of passage. Overall though, the church does not draw a lot of crowds either in films or in real life. In *Letters to Father Jacob* the church is in fact completely empty with the exception of pastor Jacob and the former prisoner Leila. Some films also reflect directly on this emptiness. In the Swedish comedy *Miffo*,²² two pastors look down towards the mosque in the city and wonder what they are doing right in the mosque when so many people attend their gatherings, and no one shows up to church, despite the hard work the pastors are doing to get people in the door.

A simple and recurring way of explaining this emptiness is, of course, secularization. The church is not seen as important, except maybe at certain points in life. But even these points, such as weddings, are more and more often celebrated outside of the church. The Nordic countries are, of course, considered to be some of the most secular countries in the world, so the empty churches are not very surprising in this sense. However, large numbers of the population in the Nordic countries, between approximately 60 and 80 percent, still belong to the national Lutheran churches.²³ This means that putting it all down to secularization might not provide all the answers. I will get back to this later. But, in any case, it must be noted that the churches are rather empty spaces both in *Winter Light* and in contemporary Nordic films.

Just as in *Winter Light*, many of those who still congregate or search refuge in the churches of contemporary Nordic films are also in some way lost or positioned at the outskirts of society. We have the convict or former convicts that in the films I am focusing on are at the center of the stories. However, there are other characters too. In *Adam's Apples*, the small congregation is made up of a former drug addict, a kleptomaniac, a refugee and an old man that no one seems to care about and who is said to have helped the Nazis during the occupation of Denmark. They all gather in the church, looking for something. *In Your Hands* takes place in a prison, and we meet an array of women with troubled pasts who come to the church for different reasons. In *Italian for Beginners*, the pastor encounters a number of lost

²¹ JOHANSSON: op. cit.; Sjö: Bad Religion / Good Spirituality?.

²² Directed by Daniel Lind Lagerlöf, 2003.

²³ FURSETH, Inger – AHLIN, Lars – KETOLA, Kimmo – LEIS-PETERS, Annette – SIGURVINSSON, Bjarni Randver: Changing Religious Landscape in the Nordic Countries, in FURSETH (ed.): *Religious Complexity*, 31–80.

individuals: the angry Hal-Finn, the clumsy Olympia who is bullied by her sickly father, the uncertain Jørgen who does not dare to tell the woman he loves about his feelings, just to mention some.

The doubting pastor is also alive and well in contemporary Nordic films. He, and in this case, it is often a he, female pastors tend not to doubt as much, at least not in films. The exception is *In Your Hands*, where we also find a doubting female pastor. However, in most films, it is a male pastor who has come to a point in his life where he doubts his previous choices, doubts that what he has held to be true is actually true, doubts his calling, and so on.²⁴ This is the case with pastor Ivan in *Adam's Apples*, Jacob in *Letters to Father Jacob*, the old pastor Wredmann in *Italian for Beginners* and also with pastor Stig in the often discussed Swedish film *As It Is in Heaven*.²⁵ However, in contrast to Bergman's doubting pastor, the contemporary film stories usually do not end with doubt – with a few exceptions. Doubt is essential though. It changes things. It also brings a real depth to characters and helps in character and narrative development. In *Adam's Apples*, for example, Ivan goes from blind faith to a paralyzing doubt that challenges others and forces them to act. However, there is usually a way out of the doubt, a way that often leads to a change – and often what I would argue is a positive change – not just for the pastor, but the people around him or her as well.

Consequently, those who come to a church to seek help in contemporary Nordic films usually do not leave empty-handed. They might enter as outcasts or persons on the borders of society, but through the church they often find a way back into society, or the films at least suggest towards the end that this is possible. In this process, the Eucharist also sometimes plays a key role. Let me exemplify all of this with a more detailed analysis of one film: *Troubled Water*.

Change through Communion – Action before Belief?

Troubled Water is directed by Erik Poppe, a Norwegian filmmaker known for exploring existential issues and religious themes in his films, something *Troubled Water* is a good example of. This is a film where viewers have easily recognized themes such as guilt, redemption, forgiveness and atonement.²⁶

The film has two main characters Jan Thomas, a young man who has served a prison sentence for killing or causing the death of a young boy – a crime he has never

²⁴ For more on gender and pastors in Nordic films see Sjö, Sofia: The Gendering of Pastors in Contemporary Nordic Films: Norms, Conventions and Contemporary Views, *Religion & Gender*, Volume 5, 2015/1, 91–104.

²⁵ Directed by Kay Pollak, 2005.; For more on religious themes *As It Is in Heaven*, see for example JOHANSSON: op. cit.; HAMMER, Anita: *As It Is in Heaven*. Dionysian Ritual on the Big Screen, in SUMIALA-SEPPÄNEN, Johanna – LUNDBY, Knut – SALOKANGAS, Raimo (eds.): *Implications of the Sacred in the (Post) Modern Media*, Göteborg, Nordicom, 2006, 177–195.; Sjö, Sofia: Beyond Cinematic Stereotypes, Using Religion to Imagine Gender Differently, *Journal of Religion, Film and Media*, Volume 2, 2016/2, 123–140.

²⁶ Sjö, Sofia: The Internet Movie Database and Online Discussions of Religion, *Journal of Religion in Europe*, Volume 6, 2013/3, 358–384.

admitted – and Agnes, the mother of the deceased boy. When Jan Thomas is released from prison, he gets the job as a cantor in a church in Oslo. Here he meets the pastor, Anna, a young woman who has had a child out of wedlock. Anna, being a woman, is not the typical doubting pastor, though she does indicate that she has had her struggles, particularly due to being an unmarried mother and a pastor – something not all in the church support. In general, though, Anna is rather a typical female pastor or career woman on film.²⁷ That is to say there is more focus on her private life and sexuality than her professional life.²⁸ However, she does come off as a trusted pastor as well. This is, among other things, illustrated in a scene in which she helps out a drug addict that is struggling.

To begin with, everything seems to go well for Jan Thomas. People are impressed with his musical talents, and he starts dating Anna and also gets along well with her son Jens, though Jens' likeness to the boy who died first causes Jan Thomas a great deal of distress. However, in time it transpires that things are not quite as well as Jan Thomas thinks. Someone is watching him and talking to the people around him. Here the Norwegian title of the film *DeUsynlige*, directly translated 'The Invisible Ones', seems more fitting as the characters are in ways hidden from each other and perhaps from other aspects of life as well. The first part of the film is told from Jan Thomas' perspective. Halfway, the story begins again, but this time it is told from Agnes' perspective.

Agnes is shocked when she first visits the church together with her students and recognizes Jan Thomas. These, I think, are some of the strongest scenes in the film as the meaning of the first scene, seen from Jan's perspective, changes when what transpires is seen through Agnes' eyes. Observing Jan Thomas with Jens, Agnes gets even more upset. Agnes has two adopted daughters and, as it seems, a good relationship with her husband. The shock of losing her son and never getting any proper answers to why this happened from the boys accused and sentenced for the boy's death has however never subsided, and realizing that Jan Thomas is out of jail and that he has a little boy in his life brings everything back.

Through Agnes' story, we realize that some people active in the church and working with Jan Thomas know about his background. When Agnes wants to know how they could give him a job the answer she gets is simple. If Jan Thomas cannot get a second chance in a church, where is he supposed to get it? It is clear though that to find reconciliation, which according to Anna is often more important than forgiveness, Agnes and Jan Thomas need to meet. For Agnes to be able to move forward with her life, she needs to get an explanation from Jan Thomas, and Jan Thomas needs to face up to and admit to his role in the events that caused the death of Agnes' son. Will this happen? I do not want to give away the ending if you have not seen the film, so I will leave it up to you to find out.

²⁷ Sjö: The Gendering of Pastors in Contemporary Nordic Films.

²⁸ For more on professional women on film, see TASKER, Yvonne: *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, London, Routledge, 1998.

Where does the Eucharist come into all of this? The Eucharist plays a rather central role in *Troubled Water*. Jan Thomas is not a believer, but according to Anna and others in the church, this is not essential. It is not the belief that makes the ritual work, it is the act. In the middle of the film, just before events that towards the end force Jan Thomas and Agnes together and the turn in the films where the story starts again from Agnes' perspective, Jan Thomas takes part in the eucharist. Exactly what effect this has on him can be discussed, but perhaps it can be seen as a first step towards the change that needs to come. Here another aspect of the original title of the film can be highlighted. The director's choice to write the title as one word which spells out the word 'Deus' – god – at the beginning of the title.

The placement of the Eucharist in *Troubled Water* and the role of the scene can be compared to the set-up in *Letters to Father Jacob*. In this film, we find the Eucharist playing a somewhat similar role. Here, at a central turning point in the film, the doubting Father Jacob celebrates the Eucharist on his own in the empty church and then lays down to die. But things do not go quite as planned. Death does not come to him, instead water dripping from the ceiling wakes him up and forces him up from the floor and back to his home, where tasks still await him. Thus water in a sense brings life and suggests that something or someone is watching and acting.

At this point, I want to turn back to *Winter Light* and the Eucharist and other rituals in this film. One way of reading these scenes is as being empty of meaning. They are pointless rituals that not even the pastor believes in. But is belief important? The actions of some of the other characters in the film suggest that this is perhaps not always key. Prayers, the film suggests, can be answered even when the one is praying doubts. The woman Märta, who is in love with the pastor, tells of how her prayers were answered even though she prayed without believing. In a sense, the door is thus left open to the fact that doubt is not the end and belief the beginning, but that behind it all there is still the possibility that there is someone that listens, even when one doubts.²⁹ This can also be argued to be a part of the message in *Troubled Water* and, I would argue, other contemporary Nordic films as well.

Contemporary Nordic films do focus on doubt, but as we have also seen on the way out of doubt. The Eucharist plays a different role in the different films and is in some of them more symbolically represented in joyfully shared meals, a theme that Bergman is also known for.³⁰ In *I* find an interesting way, there is a focus on action in many of these films too, not on a passive believing – or perhaps rather a questioning of the idea that faith is just something passive. In *Adam's Apples*, the skeptical Adam, a criminal and neo-Nazi, is given a task to bake an apple cake, and through accomplishing this task, which is easier said than done, he finds a new goal with his

²⁹ For more on this possible reading of Bergman, see JOHANSSON: *op. cit.*; For more indebt explorations of Ingmar Bergman, doubt and belief see for example COHEN: *op. cit.*; KROOK, Caroline: *Rastlös sökare och troende tvivlare: existentiella frågor i filmer av Ingmar Bergman*, Stockholm, Verbum, 2017.

³⁰ See for example Irving Singer's discussion of the Seventh Seal in SINGER, Irving: *Ingmar Bergman, Cinematic Philosopher: Reflections on His Creativity*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2007, 114.

life. When the cake is finally done, he brings it to Ivan, and they share it sitting together in a garden – a communion of a kind. In *Letters to Father Jacob*, the bitter and skeptical former convict Leila's way back starts when she truly takes on the task of helping Father Jacob answer his letters. In *Italian for Beginners*, problems are solved when people engage with each other and dare to step out of their shells, not when they stay behind closed doors. The pastor's task is to listen, not to preach. Finally, in *Troubled Water*, the act of taking part in the Eucharist, with or without belief, is a possible first step towards change.

Is this a challenge of a protestant focus on belief or the medium of film telling stories the best it can?

Secularization, cultural and vicarious religion

What do these films suggest about attitudes to the Luther church and religion more broadly in Nordic society? The church is in these films very clearly given a role to play. It becomes a space for those who are lost, providing a way back into society. There is hope here, more hope than I think Bergman ever provided. That films focus on action rather than internal contemplation is perhaps not that surprising. First of all, this is how the medium works. It is often easier to present action rather than internal contemplation in a film – though certainly there are films that manage with the contemplation part as well.

However, and second, I do think the focus on doing rather than preaching also says something about what many want from the church today. In a world that is becoming more and more divided, a church that does not preach but rather actively takes a stand for those who cannot stand for themselves is appreciated, perhaps not by all but by many. Still, the perspective undoubtedly also reflects the fact that many today find religious teachings problematic. It seems easier to relate to rituals that one can interpret as one likes – or refuse to interpret – than to relate to certain religious views and norms. One way of understanding this is to see it as a sign of individualization of religion, of religion being something personal that everyone shapes according to their desires.³¹ In the Nordic context, though, this individualization has often been argued to have some communal elements – there is talk of collectively oriented individualism,³² and the focus on individuals coming together in many films can be argued to point to this. In his study of Scandinavian popular culture, Andrew Nestingen has also highlighted how, while individual values are essential, the collective also clearly plays a role.³³

Secularization, as mentioned before, can be brought in as a perspective with which we can interpret these films, together with individualism. What other perspectives

³¹ For more on individualization, see for example WOODHEAD, Linda – HEELAS, Paul: *Religion in Modern Times. An Interpretive Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2000.

³² GUNDELACH, Peter – IVERSEN, Hans Raun – WARBURG, Margit: *I hjertet av Danmark: Institutioner og mentaliteter*, København, Hans Reitzel, 2008.

³³ NESTINGEN: *op. cit.*

could be useful when we try to comprehend the representations of the church and rituals such as the Eucharist in contemporary Nordic films? The fact that so many in the Nordic countries belong to the national Lutheran churches without being active in them has sometimes been referred to as believing in belonging – building on Grace Davies’ theories regarding believing without belonging.³⁴ You are a member of the church because it is tradition, but also perhaps because being a member provides some frames to your life. The taken for granted place of the church in many Nordic films can perhaps be related to this view – though it is a view that younger generations do not share to the same extent as older generations do.³⁵

The concept ‘cultural religion’ has also been used to explain the way that many individuals in the Nordic countries understand their connection to the church. The concept highlights how religious institutions can provide some kind of frameworks, rituals and loose identifications, but not the final answers to questions about, for example, the meaning of life (and death) or what constitutes a meaningful life.³⁶ Religious institutions thus continue to play a role also in Nordic secular settings, but for many members, it is a largely loose role that does not require a great deal of commitment. Still, the films shortly introduced here, among others, do suggest that this role is still meaningful. It might not be a role that touches everyone, but it is argued to be able to touch those who need it the most, and perhaps this too can be argued to be a part of cultural religion.

Finally, I find the concept of vicarious religion works well here too. This is the idea, presented again by Grace Davie, that a minority is religious on behalf of the silent majority who however appreciates the minority’s religiosity.³⁷ If we incorporate seeing to those that others ignore in vicarious religion, the church has a role to play and the church and those active in the church can perhaps be argued to fill this role for others as well. Not surprisingly, studies show that many appreciate the work that the church does for those in need, for example, in several Finnish studies, the work with helping people in need has often been stated as one of the key reasons for belonging to the church.³⁸ This is certainly not the church’s only

³⁴ DAVIE, Grace: *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

³⁵ NIEMELÄ, Kati: ‘No longer believing in belonging’: A longitudinal study of Finnish Generation Y from confirmation experience to Church-leaving, *Social Compass*, Volume 62, 2015/2, 172–186.

³⁶ KASSELSTRAND, Isabella: Nonbelievers in the Church: A Study of Cultural Religion in Sweden, *Sociology of Religion*, Volume 76, 2015/3, 275–294.

³⁷ DAVIE, Grace: Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge, in AMMERMAN, Nancy (ed.): *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, 21–37.

³⁸ The most recent study of membership in the Lutheran church in Finland shows a decline in these figures, but this might be due to the question being posted differently, highlighting personal involvement rather than general appreciation of the work that the church does. For more on this, see SALOMÄKI, Hanna – HYTÖNEN, Maarit–

K^cTOLA, Kimmo – SALMINEN, Veli-Matti – SOHLBERG, Jussi: Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa: Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko vuosina 2016–2019, *Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 134*, 2020.

role, but it is a role well worth taking seriously. And perhaps there is a challenge here, a challenge to do more.

A Nordic narrative?

The image provided of the church and what it can do is quite positive if we look at this particular narrative – the narrative focusing on the meeting between a convict or former convict and a pastor. At least if you follow my reading, but films can be understood and interpreted in different ways and I am open to different readings and interpretations. And there are other film narratives as well – those that focus on power-hungry pastors and bishops, conflicts between tradition and change, between youth and older generations, both inside and outside the church. Films that challenge the idea that the church can help and provide a community for those in need, or any community at all. But they are a part of another paper.

I want to conclude this paper with a final question: how Nordic is the narrative of a pastor meeting a convict or former convict in a church? I have discussed this tale from a Nordic perspective; however, if we look at films more broadly, this story structure does not seem that unusual. Just a brief look at Hollywood productions brings up a number of possible hits. Particularly in comedies, convicts or individuals on the outskirts of the law tend to get entangled with representatives of religion or they take on this role themselves – pretending to be priests or nuns. Examples of this are *We're No Angels*,³⁹ *Sister Act*⁴⁰ and *Leap of Faith*.⁴¹ But there are also more serious encounters, such as the one between a nun and a man on death row in *Dead Man Walking*.⁴² In the recent Polish production *Corpus Christi*⁴³ – a film where the Eucharist is an interesting feature⁴⁴ – we also encounter a former prisoner who interacts with a priest and takes on this role himself. Are all of these films telling the same story?

There is no space here to delve into this question, I rather hope that the question can inspire more reflections on the role of pastors, churches and rituals such as the Eucharist in films. A quick answer would be yes and no – often, the church does become a space where things change and some issues are solved – but the role of both pastors and convicts are complex, reflecting different historical and cultural settings and discourses. Whether we will see this story structure in future films as well is hard to predict, but it does seem likely. Whether the films will give the church, the pastor and the convict the same roles is more uncertain, but I, for one, am looking forward to seeing what future filmmakers will come up with. These will no doubt always be

³⁹ Directed by Neil Jordan, 1989.

⁴⁰ Directed by Emile Ardolino, 1992.

⁴¹ Directed by Richard Pearce, 1992.

⁴² Directed by Tim Robbins, 1995.

⁴³ Directed by Jan Komasa, 2019.

⁴⁴ *Corpus Christi* was screened at the conference The Eucharist and Visual Culture in Sárospatak in Hungary October 1-3, 2021. The post-screening discussion brought up many noteworthy aspects highlighting both the different ways in which the Eucharist can be interpreted and how the pastor/convict story can play out in different settings.

stories worthy of engaging with as they can highlight noteworthy discourses in contemporary society. Let's keep watching.

Abstract

In Nordic films, a recurring narrative structure includes the encounter between a pastor and a convict in a church. In these stories the eucharist also often plays a central role. This article explores this story line by comparing contemporary Nordic films to Ingmar Bergman's classic *Winter Light*. It illustrates themes that are present in both *Winter Light* and contemporary films – empty churches, lost visitors and doubting pastors – but also some important differences. The films are argued to throw light on attitudes to the Nordic Lutheran Churches today and the concepts cultural religion and vicarious religion are used to comprehend the filmic representations.

Keywords: Lutheran Church, Nordic Films, Eucharist, cultural religion, vicarious religion

Mariola Marczak

SCREEN IMAGES OF THE EUCHARIST: BETWEEN A CULTURAL EMBLEM AND A MYSTIC FEAST

The crucial problem of representing God and generally the transcendent reality on screen is a kind of paradox due to the clash between the visual nature of the film itself and the spiritual character of the divine. Artists sometimes have and used to have (e.g., in religious paintings) the kind of childish intuition that permits them to enclose the essence of the transcendent (understood as the transcendent reality) and the Transcendent (God as the Wholly Other¹) using some specifically artistic devices. On the other hand, their representations indeed resemble the childish drawing when compared to the divine reality, about which we do not know much. The few things we do know come from God's self-revelation and the Scriptures. Hence visual, artistic representation of the transcendent reality must be schematic, simplified and even awkward, similar to childish drawing when confronted with God's reality. But nevertheless, this may be the only way to represent such issues visually because we cannot portray the invisible nor touch the spiritual. So, in my opinion, a child's intuition not to search for resemblance to God but to present something of their own, from one's imagination as an analogy² to whom is the First and the Only, is the best way to picture Him on screen or to describe Him using visual storytelling.

Analogical way of representing the transcendent

The aforementioned topic should be discussed, taking under consideration at least two levels. First is the aesthetical question of how the spiritual dimension of reality can be visualized on the screen. Second is the question of

¹ OTTO, Rudolf: *The Idea of the Holy*, transl. HARVEY, John W., London, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1936 [reprint], 25–30, 65–66.

² See Ibid.

film theology, I mean the problem of whether, if so, to what extent and how film can be a *locus theologicus*,³ a place or space where God reveals Himself. As a result, film art and culture in general, including contemporary culture, may be perceived as a tool of cognition of God within human reality, mirrored on screen.⁴ Similar to the childish picture where in the scheme there is a grain of truth (and a sackful of faith as well), we can acknowledge images of God and God's reality in film. I recognize the rule of analogy as the most productive and effective tool as screen representations of transcendent issues.⁵ It means that something visible and/or material refers to the invisible, spiritual, metaphysical. There are used two-leveled structures used to suggest the other reality, and the point is to imply the bridge between the visible surface on the screen and the invisible reality which is to be suggested. The upcoming structure is a symbol and a parable, as narrative interpreted on two levels: one literally and the other symbolically.

In Christian theology, the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus as God-Man must be understood analogically as well. Jesus as a man is a perfect icon of God, which means that the human part of His being is the image of His divine nature. When it comes to the theme of the Eucharist, we have a similar mechanism of representation because a piece of bread, i.e., a particle of physical matter represents the crucified and resurrected Christ. However, through the blessing and transfiguration, it becomes Him or He appears through this, which is the greatest mystery of Christianity and the most difficult issue to understand and accept for many people. Similar to this question seems to be the source of the holiness of the eastern orthodox Icons, which represent the Holy, but they themselves are not what they refer to. "The difference between a Holy Icon and the Holy Eucharist could be explicated by showing the fact that Icons are signs, but the Holy Eucharist is the transfigured body of Christ Himself."⁶ Therefore the Eucharist on screen may be perceived as the image of the present Christ, crucified and resurrected, as well as it may refer to some aspects of His mission or to some aspects of the theological meaning of this sacrament, for example to Christ's martyrdom, to His perfect obedience and love for God the Father or to

³ This topic was vastly developed by the Polish theologians of Culture from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, especially in the book KAWECKI, Witold et al.: *Miejsca teologiczne w kulturze wizualnej [Theological places in the visual culture]*, Kraków – Warszawa, Instytut Dialogu Kultury i Religii UKSW, 2013.

⁴ Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev argue that the factor which transcends the reality towards the invisible is montage, see SUHR, Christian – WILLERSLEV, Rane: Can Film Show the Invisible? The Work of Montage in Ethnographic Filmmaking, *Current Anthropology*, Volume 53, 2012/3, 282–301.

⁵ See MARCZAK, Mariola: *Poetyka filmu religijnego [Poetics of the Religious Films]*, Kraków, ARKANA, 2000.; EAD.: Screening religiosity in contemporary Polish films. The Role of Religious Motifs in Visual Communication, *Journal of Religion & Film*, Volume 22, 2018/3, URL: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/10> Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 13.; EAD.: Focus on the Invisible: The Poetics of Contemporary Religious Films, in LELEŃ, Halszka (ed.): *Sanctity as a Story. Narrative (In)Variants of the Saint*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2020, 99–114.

⁶ DEMETER, Márton: Prolegomena to an Analytic Theology of Holy Images. The visual aspects of faith and philosophical analysis, *Kultura – Media – Teologia [Culture-Media-Theology]* 22, 2015, 91.

God's solidarity with suffering humanity or to His closeness to believers or, eventually, to His love for His creation and so forth.

Theological sense of the Eucharist to be suggested on screen

Beyond the theological sense of the Eucharist,⁷ to which we should dedicate a separate paper, we can discuss a few rudimentary meanings of it, which also, or even, first of all, comprise religious ones which serve as grounding but furthermore deal with a cultural and an aesthetic point of view. Thus, I'm going to focus on how the Eucharist is presented on screen and on what this results in, especially when it comes to the function of the currently discussed visual representations of the Eucharist.

Let us highlight three⁸ levels of the religious meaning of the Eucharist, which correspond to the three kinds of its representations on screen. First, we have the Eucharist as a feast, a special banquet, which gathers people around the table and first of all around Jesus Christ as the Savior, teacher, preacher, doctor, the one who heals pains and diseases, gives bread, word and hope for eternal life. Feast as a communion, which unites people and creates a community of those who break bread together around one table and one central person symbolizing values shared by everyone, is quite a frequent and productive invariant of representing the Eucharist on screen (e.g., *Vozvrashchaniye [The Return]*, 2002, by Andrei Zvyagintsev, *Requiem*, by Witold Leszczyński, *Stacja Warszawa [Warsaw Station]*, 2003, directed collectively by a group of young Polish filmmakers). This kind of visual motif in film also appears in blasphemous form (*Viridiana*, by Luis Bunuel, 1961, for example).

This case is often connected with the cultural meaning of the Eucharist and mediated by visual art through various references, associations, or straight quotations, especially from religious paintings.

Second is the Eucharist as Christ's sacrifice for the Church understood as the whole society of confessors and sinners or – as it is said in the Eastern Orthodox Church as well as in the Catholic Church – “the community of holy sinners”,⁹ who

⁷ MUDD, Joseph C.: *Eucharist as Meaning: Critical Metaphysics and Contemporary Sacramental Theology*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2014, 181–217.; CHAUVET, Louis-Marie: *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, transl. MADIGAN, Patrick – BEAUMONT, Madeleine, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1995.

⁸ The classification is not complete; I have chosen only three levels which are most frequently referred to in the film art when it comes to the representation of the Eucharist on screen.

⁹ See EVDOKIMOV, Paul: *Wielki życia duchowego, od ojców pustyni do naszych czasów*, transl. TARNOWSKA, Maria, Kraków, PIW, 1996, 121, 192.; See esp. *Lumen gentium*, an official document of *Vaticanum Secundum* as interpreted by Rev. TUROWSKI, W.: Dialog zbawienia w kontekście Roku Wiary [The Dialogue of Salvation in the Context of the Year of the Faith], *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej*, Volume 11, 2012/2, 85, URL: https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/1232/1/RTK_11.2_2012_Turowski.pdf Last Accessed: 2021. 11. 04.; Turowski writes: “The perfection is not present in the Church, since the Catholic Church is a community of holy sinners who endeavour to attain the unity and perfection in Jesus Christ”; another Catholic theologian says that “The Church is a community of the repenting sinners” – KRÓLAK, W.: Nawrócenie we wspólnocie [Repenting in a community], *Pastores 44*, 2009/3, 136–137.; See also Acts 2, 14–41 where Saint Paul claims (in

had been saved by Christ's martyrdom and resurrection. This group of screen representations also comprises metaphorical versions of this motif, which can be realized as a visual one or as a narrative or as a special shape of a film character which in this case means a Christ figure. By a Christ figure,¹⁰ I mean a film character in which the resemblance or analogy to Christ is clearly noticed. That means it is possible to identify Jesus Christ's teaching, personal characteristics and traits or events in which he participated – everything written in the Gospels and associated with His salvific mission. These analogies allow a film protagonist to be identified (in some aspects) with Jesus of Faith, and as a result, he or she could be called "Christ personage". Yet the meaning of the Eucharist as the salvific sacrifice of Christ – the Savior might be realized by mirroring people who follow Him in His mission and imitate Him in crucial characteristics (which is a short definition of a Christ figure in art). Sacrifice as the core of the Eucharist sometimes is visualized or suggested in films by symbols of various kinds, including parables.

Eventually, the third meaning concerns the sacramental identity of the Eucharist, which comprises all the previous ones, but crucially it should be perceived and understood as God's presence in person at the altar as well as in each piece of wafer taken by each active participant of the Holy Mass in the holy communion. It also means the bond with Christ.

Through the blessing of God, who uses the priest performing the Mass, as His medium, Jesus appears repeatedly in the Holy Communion in the souls of believers. In this item, we should focus on the word *presence* itself. We should realize that it

his first kerygmic sermon) that the confession of sins and awareness of them enable a confessor to receive gifts of the Holy Spirit. We can find this thought in the protestant theologies as well.

¹⁰ There is vast research on this question in the books of LIS, M.: *Figury Chrystusa w "Dekalogu" Krzysztofa Kieslowskiego*, [The Christ Figures in "Dekalog" by Krzysztof Kieslowski], Opole, Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2007.; ID.: *To nie jest Jezus. Filmowe apokryfy XXI wieku*, [This is not Jesus. Filmic Apocrypha in the 21st Century], Opole, Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2019.; See e.g., DETWEILER, Robert: Christ and the Christ Figure in American Fiction, *The Christian Scholar*, Volume 47, 1964/2, 111–124.; DOWNING, Christine: Typology and the Literary Christ-Figure: A Critique, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 36, 1968/1, 13–27.; ZIOLKOVSKI, Theodore: *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972.; HURLEY, Neil P.: Cinematic Transfigurations of Jesus, in MAY, John R. – BIRD, Michael (eds.): *Religion in Film*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1982, 61–78.; BAUGH, L.: *Imaging the Divine. Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film*, Kansas City, Sheed and Ward, 1997.; ID.: La rappresentazione di Gesù nel cinema: problemi teologici, problemi estetici, *Gregorianum*, Volume 82, 2001/2, 199–240.; ID.: La rappresentazione metaforica di Gesù nel cinema. La figura cristica, *Gregorianum*, Volume 82, 2001/4, 719–760.; MALONE, P.: *Movie Christs and Antichrists*, New York, Crossroad, 1990.; For female figures of Christ see SEVER, Irena: *La rappresentazione metaforica di Gesù Cristo nel cinema. Le figure cristiche femminili*, Roma, Edizioni Università Gregoriana, 2011.; EAD.: Cinematographic Christ Figures, in LIS, Marek (ed.): *Cinematic Transformations of the Gospel*, Opole, Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2013, 99–113.; FROST, Mike: Stealth Messiahs: Christ figures in film, *mikefrost.net*, 2019. 08. 12. URL: <https://mikefrost.net/stealth-messiahs-christ-figures-in-film/> Last Accessed: 2021. 10. 28.; KOZLOVIC, Anton Karl: The Christ-figure in Popular Films, *Kinema, A Journal for Film and Audiovisual Media*, 2005, URL: <https://openjournals.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/kinema/article/download/1090/1270?inline=1> Last Accessed: 2021. 10. 29.

is about God alive, present in the peace of consecrated bread. Not only a memory of Jesus as God-Man but a living presence of the crucified and resurrected Christ. And obviously, it is the deepest religious meaning, concerning the Mystery of God – *Misterium Fascinans* and *Misterium Tremendum* as Rudolf Otto claims¹¹ — and of His love for the human creature. Therefore, this aspect is rarely represented on screens since it is the most difficult task to do it thoroughly in an adequate way. It is possible to visualize this aspect of the Eucharist only through suggestions or symbols, including parables understood as symbols amplified and broadened into a narrative, structured into two levels: one literal and the other symbolical.

In film art, it is possible that the Eucharist itself is not demonstrated literally, but we can observe God's presence in love, people's communion and through the result of God's activity, e.g., through the impact of God on the lives of film characters, while the Eucharist itself can be suggested by some other visual symbolic representations as feasts, for example (this is the case of *Babette's Feast*, 1987, by Gabriel Axel – the sequence of the banquet as well as the whole narrative, *Edi*, 2002, dir. Paweł Trzaskalski, pol. – the main storyline with the sacrifice of the title protagonist and visual symbol of wine).

The Eucharist as a banquet that unites people – cultural and religious contexts of the Eucharist

The Eucharist as a banquet is a frequent motif in visual art. The most famous is the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, which was also an inspiration for visual communication in quite a few films. The most obvious ones seem direct adaptations of the Gospels, which stress the biography of Jesus as the Son of Man, the Savior. But it happens, not rarely, that they have illustrative, superficial character or they stress the aspect of the last meeting of Jesus with his disciples. But the mystic aspect of the institution of the Eucharist appears as well. These classic movies are for example, *The King of Kings*, 1961, USA, dir. Nicholas Ray, *Il Vangelo secondo il Matteo (Gospel According to Saint Matthew)*, 1964, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Jesus of Nazareth* by Franco Zeffirelli, 1977, *The Passion of Christ*, 2004, USA, dir. Mel Gibson. It is more interesting that, from the point of view of aesthetical elaboration, there are less direct and less obvious references to the Last Supper pictured as a banquet. It is a frequent visual motif in Polish films dealing with religious issues. It is so in the case of *Stacja Warszawa (Warsaw Station)*, 2013, collective dir. Maciej Cuske, Kacper Lisowski, Nenad Mikovic, Mateusz Rakowicz, Tymon Wyciszkievicz, where all the main characters, inhabitants of contemporary Warsaw, meet in the final scene at the breaking of bread and sharing it as Jesus and His disciples did in the Gospels. The protagonists from different societies and environments: a physical worker, a corporation woman, a guardian and eventually ex-inmate compassionate for all of them – modern “Polish Christ” – they all meet at the table in the center of Warsaw and share bread in peace despite a lot of disagreement before.

¹¹ OTTO: *op. cit.*, 12–41, 144–145.

Another example of a quotation from European traditional visual art appeared in a film, which was vividly discussed in Poland and was creating divisions among both critics and ordinary viewers, because of the fact that a lot of images from *Wszyscy jesteśmy Chrystusami* (*We're all Christs*, 2006, dir. Marek Koterski) were thought to be blasphemous. In this film, we have a reference to the iconography of the Last Supper, but in the place of the Apostles, we can see buddies of an alcohol addict, called Adaś Miauczyński, who once more continues to drink in a bar arranged on board of a river ship. Noticeably, the countertop is covered with a white tablecloth, which is atypical but this solution evokes the art representation of the Last Supper, especially Leonardo's, where the main protagonist is placed in the center behind the table, facing the viewers and his companions sit on both his sides and stare at him. The Eucharist is present neither in the shape of ordinary bread nor as a wafer because the hero does not resemble Jesus in any crucial characteristic. His sufferings of an alcoholic do not save anybody, they are all deserved, and the community of alcohol is false. One should mark, however, that the name of the hero is meaningful and can refer blasphemously to the salvific mission because "Adaś" means "little Adam", therefore the one who committed the general sin (transposed to his son, who is also an addict), but and in fact, he suffers because of the "general sin" of his father who was an alcoholic as well. This is the reason why the imaginary scenes in which Adaś is shown on the cross in the crown of thorns had been arranged to persuade viewers that this is a kind of salvific martyrdom because of the "original sin", having been borne by the character to break the chain of generations of alcoholics.

Another example of the visual motif of the Eucharist as a banquet, also mediated through art, is a strict quotation from Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper in the film by Witold Leszczyński, titled *Requiem* (2001, pol). Simultaneously, it makes interesting cultural use of a religious motif in contemporary cinema. This is a story about a funeral speaker Bartłomiej (a magnificent role of Franciszek Pieczka), who provides a bridge between the earthly lives of villagers and their future in heaven. They believe that it depends on what he says about them over their graves during funeral ceremonies. Bartłomiej's speeches, therefore, introduce the mystery of death into the mundane order. *Requiem* demonstrates a typical Polish village, remote from great cities. In this place, both traditional elements of countryside society and components of modern society mix. The specificity of the Polish village has been exposed in a realistic manner but some shots are stylized in their visual aspect to recall some scenes from the Gospels or to associate them in the viewers' minds with the eternal perspective. The images of the Polish countryside are both realistic and picturesque. Moreover, at times the director inserts superficial, apparent visual references to religious paintings, especially those representing Jesus and his apostles. Spectacular is the take of the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci, shot using the technique of animated pictures. It has been arranged in the open air, in the characteristic Polish landscape of meadows and fields with some bushes. In the center but over the figure of a man who must be recognized as Jesus, there stands the main protagonist – the funeral speaker.

This technique combining schematic folk religious paintings (very often kitsch copies of well-known masterpieces) with natural rural scenery of the Polish countryside implies a genuine character of the so-called folk Catholicism – this may mean that real, intrinsic faith is hidden behind rituals, ceremonies and stereotyped emblems. Thus, the stereotyped picture becomes an emblem of the real faith of simple people and of the ultimate Truth of religious sources. This also means the faith in miracles that can happen not opposite to nature but opposite to our knowledge of nature, as the children-characters state in a chat in that film. Witold Leszczyński's *Requiem* elucidates what the so-called Polish folk Catholicism is in a vast and deepened way. Through the prism of this notion, elaborated by this director, religion appears to be a natural ambiance, conventional and ritualistic but simultaneously integrated and deepened. And the relation of the film characters, Polish villagers, to the Eucharist imaged on the screen through the quotation from the most recognizable piece of religious art – the Last Supper by Leonardo plays the main role as the vehicle of mediating the exact idea of this film.

There is an attempt to recreate a community out of a family destroyed by the departure of the father in the film *The Return* (2003), by Andrei Zvyagintsev. Here we have the next example of using the quotation from traditional religious art. The reunited family had been depicted on screen in the form of a visual quotation from the Last Supper once more, but it was arranged in a way that is more distant from the original painting. The visual, onscreen representation tends towards visual abstraction, concerning the regular composition of shots, monochromatic visual code which transforms film into film icons (meaningful blue — in the scene of family dinner before a fatal trip to the island, and it repeats in the scene of the sleeping father resembling Andrea Mantegna's picture "The Lamentation over the Dead Christ", which recalls the context of the sacrifice of the father by preventing the death of one of his sons at the cost of his own life, which will happen later, on the island). The next device, which serves to transform the film image into visual abstraction in the scene of a family dinner is soft light and a selection of elements placed on the screen. Human figures are few; they are not equal to the number of apostles, but the set of the table and the point of view of the camera shooting resembles the point of view of Leonardo da Vinci's famous picture. This serves to evoke associations to the transcendence, all the more that the meal eaten by the family becomes the tool to reunite the family, to recreate family bonds and take up the rebuilding of lost feelings, among which respect for the authority of the father and love for each other are most important. Therefore, the less thorough the outlook seems, the more the genuine religious background is evoked thanks to the associations to the religious paintings and to Christ's salvific mission. There is also an association with the Eucharist in the scene on the island when the father shares bread and drink with his sons by the fire.

The Eucharist as Christ's sacrifice

In this item, we should also include visual references to the *Last Supper* and to Holy Thursday as the moment of the institution of the Eucharist and to the Last Supper as the moment when Jesus gives His body as a gift for whom he loves. However, the very act of sacrifice, His martyrdom, will take place later. We can find an adequate example of such a case in a Polish film titled *Edi* (2002, dir. P. Trzaskalski). When Edi, the main protagonist, poor homeless man, discovers that the "Brothers," dangerous bandits, are looking for him to punish him cruelly for the guilt of another man, he is sitting at the bar lost in thoughts and then dark red wine is pouring over the glass. The scene strictly relates to Christ's Last Supper, whipping and crucifixion. The face of the hero at that moment is an icon of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane: full of fear and ready to suffer. He is lonely despite the people at other tables, and the wine is the clear symbol of blood. Thus the themes of the Last Supper and therefore the institution of the Eucharist and Gethsemane combine.

From this film comes another visual symbolic association to Christ's martyrdom, especially to the representation of Christ called *Ecce Homo* in religious paintings, which is the quotation from Pilatus, who said these words having seen Christ after his whipping. It deals with the moment in the storytelling when Edi comes back from the hospital after being rescued from death by his friend. He was injured as a result of a ferocious attack of city bandits who castrated him because they thought him to be responsible for their sister's pregnancy. In fact, he was not. In spite of this, he accepted undeserved punishment in the name of love for the pregnant girl, who was unfriendly to him and accused him falsely to protect her real lover. After all of that Edi sits naked in the shower, in total darkness. It is a scene which refers both to the *Ecce Homo* paintings and to the Gospels' scene as well as to the moment of Christ's descent to hell, after His death and before His resurrection. Since, we also have this connection of martyrdom and resurrection in the Eucharist, this film image makes a deep association with it. There is another reason for such interpretation because, during this moment, Edi faces what has happened to Him and tries to cope with it. In this scene, he mourns his symbolic death as a man in a carnal sense and accepts his new male identity, deprived of sexual potency. Thus, this is his rebirth as a soulful man. So, we have here a certain concept of how to symbolically present resurrection in human life through torment, pain and burdens.

The above-mentioned shades of meaning of the Eucharist on film screens blend and appear together, all of them or some of them, especially in such films in which deep religious meaning is being discussed in any way. This is the case of Martin Scorsese's film *Silence* (2016), (based on Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*) one of the most obvious examples of the Eucharist in film art. We observe a Jesuit monk, Father Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield), searching for his master, Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson), who denounced God in public in Japan in times of strong persecutions of Christians. Father Rodrigues follows his steps and performs the Holy Mass in secret so that the viewers can observe his respect, love and devotion to Corpus Christi and

his massive influence on poor Japanese peasants. In this particular case, the perfect harmony between the real presence of God in the external sign (the white circle of Corpus Christi), the religious sense of the ritual and the man's genuine devotion have been combined. The moment of the transubstantiation (which means transfiguration of the wafer into Christ's body) is coherent with storytelling. The Eucharist during a mass performed clandestinely by him has two different meanings in the logic of the film narration: one for Father Rodrigues and the other for the Japanese participants of the Mass. In the development of the character of the young Jesuit, it expresses his deep love for God and therefore his true faith. For the peasant-confessors, the Eucharist becomes the gate to a better world, a piece of spiritual evidence for their future happiness. The Japanese Christians live nearly as slaves, their lives are full of suffering, and they are completely dependent on their landlords. So the Christian message gives them not only hope for a happy future but also makes them endure the burdens of their lives including physical torments. For both: the priest and the believers, the Eucharist reveals God's presence among them, the real presence of the Transcendent.

The story of an apostate monk lies at the center of the film narrative and it, first of all, focuses viewers' attention. Moreover, in the context of presenting the Eucharist on the screen in this movie, the protagonist's decision of rejecting Christian faith can be interpreted as an act of most sacrificial love and even as the ultimate act of identification with Christ, the ultimate sacrifice of the monk in the name of Jesus Christ out of love for Japanese believers. This occurs because the priest decides to apostatize after a long process of being psychologically tortured, and he does it in order to save five physically tortured Japanese Christians. His suffering because of that is a step onto Christ's anguish path,¹² on the Way of the Cross, hence his sacrifice and humiliation as well as the beginning of a very intimate relationship with God, who seemed to be silent in the face of torments and martyrdoms of Japanese Christians until that moment. The main protagonist of Martin Scorsese's *Silence* preserved his love for Christ in the deepest part of his soul, although for the rest of his life he opposed the Christian values and helped to persecute Christians in Japan. The visual proof for this is exposed during the ending of the film when the camera dives into Rodrigues' grave and his squeezed palm in which he holds a small cross. We can treat this image as a metaphorical visual study on the Eucharist in which a tight bond to Christ is being emphasized, some original communion with Him although hidden in a human soul and deprived of any outer signs of it. Such interpretation has its justification in the context of the main plot thread, overwhelmed by the spiritual and emotional torment of Father Rodrigues. Therefore, the act of apostasy can be perceived as the greatest gift offered out of love to these people in the name of Father

¹² DEWEESE-BOYD, Ian: Scorsese's *Silence*: Film as Practical Theodicy, *Journal of Religion and Film*, Volume 21, 2017/2, URL: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol21/iss2/18> Last Accessed: 2018. 02. 10.; Deweese-Boyd notices that there is an analogy between the attitude and the inner consideration of father Rodrigues and "The Exercises" of saint Ignatius Loyola.

Rodrigues' personal great love for God, which was the most precious thing in his life. Thus the act of apostasy and his further life without God becomes Rodrigues' sacrifice in the name of love for people as his neighbors. And the small cross in his palm seen only by the viewer and God Himself means there that the Eucharist is the expression of love, a strong bond to Christ's martyrdom and real communion with Him. Therefore, in this film, the meaning of the Eucharist as sacrifice mixes with the next one – the Eucharist as a sacrament and communion with God.

Sacramental meaning of the Eucharist mirrored on screens – The Eucharist as God's presence and bond to Christ

A case, similar to a certain extent to that from the previous paragraph, comes from the most representative example of a religious film in the whole history of world cinema — *The Diary of a Country Priest* (*Journal d'un curé de campagne*, 1951, dir. Robert Bresson, adaptation of a novel by Georges Bernanos, the eminent French Catholic writer). For the main protagonist, a young parish priest, treated inhospitably by his parishioners, the Eucharist as a part of the Holy Mass is also a part of his everyday routine. Nevertheless, it still remains the tool for deepening his personal relationship with Jesus Christ since the priest of Ambricourt parish follows Christ's path, especially when it comes to Jesus' suffering. He cares first of all for the people's souls and supports them on their way back to God. Despite frequent painful experiences, he keeps endeavoring to help people around him in their repentance, including those who are unfriendly to him. The resemblance to Christ is emphasized not only by the personal traits of the priest but also by visual motifs. Among the most crucial ones is bread soaked in red wine, which is a basic meal of the poor humble priest who often suffers from hunger. The image of dried bread soaked in red wine by a clergyman (in Catholicism, a person anointed, which means entirely devoted to God and blessed by Him to be His disciple and successor) is a direct reference to the Last Supper. It refers to the moment of the institution of the Eucharist repeated in each Mass. The soaked bread in the priest's hands alludes to the emerging of the Eucharist as a religious sign, which makes real the transubstantiation of bread into Christ's body during each Mass. In the storytelling of Robert Bresson, the outer sign – the film image of bread and wine — creates a bond between the suffering of the young priest and the suffering of Christ. Thus the village priest of Ambricourt parish becomes the Christ Figure on the screen because he accepts his everyday pains and burdens and becomes connected spiritually with the suffering of the crucified Christ. What's more, the priest's torments are of three types at least: physical (pain of stomach because of cancer), social as well as psychological (unfriendly relationship with his parishioners) and spiritual (the priest suffers because of the sins of his parishioners; he struggles for lost, sinful souls of his parishioners whose interiors he seems to see clearly). The stronger the rejection of the village society, the more persevering the priest is in enduring pains and offences and the stronger he fights to save the souls of those who hurt him. Similar to Christ's mission in which His Way of the Cross was connected with the resurrection, in the

French film, the martyrdom of the young priest is connected with the resurrection of the souls whom the priest was able to save in spite of their resistance. The reference to the Eucharist through the image of bread and wine eaten by the priest as well as through the Holy Mass becomes the tool of connecting the hero with Christ's sacrifice in the viewers' minds. Although you should notice that in the film, the image of the Eucharist itself is pushed outside the frame of the screen since we see only the priest leaving the altar just after the Mass has finished. It is because the suffering priest identifies with Christ's Passion represented by the Eucharist. Therefore in the logic of film narration, the priest of Ambricourt's sacrifice for his parishioners is a stand-in for the Eucharist perceived as the image of Christ's martyrdom due to the young clergyman's entire identification with Jesus as his master. Thus the protagonist's endurance and painfulness gain their religious, salvific function.

The religious aspect of presenting the Eucharist on screen is often connected with a personal alliance between a man and God alive inhabiting the Eucharist, as it was demonstrated in the *Diary of a Country Priest*. While in the movie of Nanni Moretti *La messa è finita* (*The Mass Is Ended*), 1984, It., an Italian priest from the '80s, who tried to enter the lives of his friends and family to help them, fails in that task in spite of warm acceptance from his environment. In time he is more and more frustrated because of that. The line from the title: "La messa è finita" which means "The Mass is finished" refers to the last ritual words of a mass, which also means "You have completed your duty", comprises the last words of the film, when the priest leaves the altar. It seems to be his retiring from his service in the sense that he gives up on his mission to create order in the lives of people around him. The words also comprise a shade of irony which can be explained as follows: "You've done what you were obliged to do and there is no positive result to your service"! Nevertheless, the ending of the film offers consolation. Afterwards, a surrealistic scene takes place, when participants of the wedding mass, performed by Guido, start dancing and the priest comes back to the altar smiling joyfully. Life comes back to harmony, everybody is happy, everything goes right when it is left to its own devices. Or may it be a delayed effect of the priest's activity or is it his dream? It is a nearly perfect illustration for the popular song "Don't worry, be happy" since it mirrors pop-cultural perspective: "Let it be as it is, it will be all right". Happiness is perceived as something external and the Mass is demonstrated as a ritual, a part of the cultural custom. Although the priest seems to be engaged in his service there is neither transcendent perspective nor personal attachment to God seen on the screen. Only a kind approach to others and a good will to solve their problems. The protagonist's approach clashes with that of the priest of Ambricourt since the former one lacked endurance and bonds to Christ, which was pictured by the lack of participants during the Holy Mass, which resulted in the lack of deep religious meaning of the priest's service. It was pictured on the screen like friendly support or social work rather than spiritual vocation.

Similar in a way, is the conclusion of the famous classical item of religious film *Winter Light* (1963), dir. Ingmar Bergman. At the ending of the Swedish film, a pastor

starts performing the Holy Mass in a totally empty church. At first sight, this ending seems to be much more pessimistic, the more that the film exhibits the image of the lack of God or — as the director and critics used to say — the silence of God. But this closing scene in the context of the story of the priest who loses faith but still serves at the altar, emphasizes the endurance of the priest and some deep bond to God which holds him tight to the church even when he thinks he is not a believer anymore and he has to watch his parishioners losing faith one after another. In this film, there are present images of Eucharist but people's approach to God and to the church are egotistic and demanding, deprived of love and of belief in God's presence. Nevertheless, their demands are addressed to God whom they do not believe in or whom they accuse of their unsuccessful lives and whom they deny, eventually. Bergman managed to expose the hollow ritual but, he implied that it used to be vivid and full of meaning once. Now it is not obvious whether God has retired from this world or people have abandoned God. The empty church and the empty ritual deprived of love, sacrifice, God's presence and communion between Him and the people belonging to the community of believers/ex-believers reveal what is crucial in the Eucharist. Bergman does it through negation, through the lack of the necessary components, among which the presence of God and the communion to Him built up through love, faith and trust are constitutive.

In my opinion, one of the most profound and elaborate examples of film representation of the Eucharist is delivered by Gabriel Axel's film titled *Babette's Feast* (*Babettes gæstebud*, 1987), based upon the story of Karen Blixen. The Eucharist is featured there in an analogical way. It is about a fugitive woman, Babette from France escaping to Denmark, after the revolution of 1870-1871. She becomes a servant and a cook for two modest sisters, a deceased pastor's daughters, who stayed unmarried to serve the poor, in line with the teachings of their father, who demanded sacrifices of his daughters. Therefore both of them resigned from marrying men they loved; the younger sister in addition, resigned her passion and talent for opera singing. When unexpectedly Babette wins an enormous sum of money in a lottery, she decides to spend all of it to prepare a marvelous banquet for her employers and the protestant community whom the women took care of. At the very end of the film, while expressing thanks to Babette, the sisters realize the great gift they received and they — as well as the viewers — find out that Babette was a chef of a famous restaurant in Paris. This is the moment when we also realize that her cooking is an art and that the feast appeared to be a piece of art which changed completely that small village of Lutheran community. Before that: sad, mournful, grumbling, joy deprived, quarrelling and lonely; after the feast: joyful, peacemaking, happy, kind-hearted, forgiving each other and truly close to each other and close to God. Every participant of the feast (including a general, who was previously one of Babette's guests in Paris and the beloved man of one of the two sisters), feels that it was an extraordinary experience, which resulted in excellent changes and transformations in their bodies, minds, feelings and souls. Precisely speaking the metamorphosis transpired through their bodies but it touched the deepest part of their being.

In the film, we have several possible levels of interpretation at least and a few to point out from the aesthetic point of view, but I'm going to concentrate on two main ones. First, the banquet is presented as a piece of art, which emerges from the need of an artist to create something worthy, something which comes from her heart (soul), since for an artist creation is a must and a source of happiness, though it requires sacrifice as well. This is why Babette claims that she did not do that for the sisters but for herself. Although she lost everything she possessed for the sake of preparing the banquet, she feels happy and fulfilled. Nevertheless, Babette is aware of the influence her art has on others, and she realizes the impact of her gift on the society that accepted her when she was a fugitive. Hence she enriched this community consciously through her art and sacrifice (spending all the money which could provide her a comfortable life).

Second, the piece of art that takes the shape of the banquet stands for visual and narrative (since it takes the whole long sequence) metaphor for the Eucharist perceived as a feast and parallelly understood as a sacrifice of Christ comprised in it. The vehicle for the metaphorization is the similar function to Jesus' gift of life offered on the cross, which meant He, as a man, deprived of everything, gave His life to save His neighbors, including those who were His enemies. Babette gave everything she possessed, in a way analogous to Christ, to those who were her friends as well as to those who behaved unfriendly to the sisters and Babette who served them through their charity work. The feast transformed completely every single person — participant of the feast as well as the whole community. Thus its effect becomes the image of the Eucharist, which changes everything in an invisible way through the communion of Christ's material body and heart (that in theology means soul) of a confessor who accepts the sacrificial gift of Jesus and adds his or her own suffering and experiences to it. There are much more nuances and particulars of this analogy but these presented above are crucial and unfortunately, there is not enough space here to enter deeper into this topic. I would like to note this is a marvelous example of subtle mirroring of the Eucharist on screen, elaborated from both aesthetical and theological perspectives.

These two examples (*The Diary of a Country Priest* and *Babette's Feast*) form a strict religious sense of the Eucharist both in film stories (plot threads) and as visual representations. In the third one, *Des Hommes et des dieux (Of Gods and Men)*, 2010, dir. Xavier Beauvois, there is a perfect harmony between the liturgy presented on screen and people's activities, between characters' beliefs and their deeds. What is important, the Christian rituals, including particular parts of the Holy Mass, some other prayers, and Christian feasts have been exhibited in the narrative not only as a pure ritual, but first of all as a religious sign,¹³ a bridge between humans' and God's realities and simultaneously as a tool of expression of a human's bond with God.

There is no discrepancy between their ideas and acts in the monks' lives. They live in peace with the Muslim society around them, respect each other, support them

¹³ OTTO: *op. cit.*, 151.

through medical services, charity and advice. They help their friendly villagers but also heal wounded terrorists who endanger their lives and eventually kidnap them and kill them. The film is precisely composed so that there are multiple devices proving the coherence between what the monks believe in and how they act. We should accentuate how the motif of the Eucharist works in this movie. It has been unfolded in two ways. The first is connected with the liturgy itself. Since the liturgy is a crucial part of the monks' lives, a core of their vocation. The second deals with the understanding of the Eucharist as a communion, which means the mechanism of making strong and close bond with Christ through love. The monks truly believe in Christ's appearance in the Holy Communion and they truly love Jesus and this love is present in their community of brothers in God's love. This is the main reason why they joined the monastery. There is one scene in which this is demonstrated in an intimate way. When brother Christoph (Olivier Rabourdin), a monk who was frightened most because of the approaching danger of the terrorists, hugs Jesus on a painting, hanging on the wall in his monastic cell. It happens during his personal prayer, which was a close heart-to-heart talk with Christ. After that he gets rid of his great fear and is ready to sacrifice his life in the name of this love. The monk, who seemed to be a coward and had to struggle with his fear all the time, gains his peace and strength and becomes a follower of Christ, and wants to walk in his footsteps. This is an atypical way of revealing a communion of man and God the Savior, which in the everyday life of the monks was signed by the Eucharist, as their spiritual food and everyday routine at the same time.

Eventually, there is a beautiful sequence of a banquet as a mundane part of celebrating Easter when the monks express their happiness because of Christ's resurrection and because of being together. They drink French wine, a wine from their home country, brought by one of them who came back to the monastery in spite of his previous fear in the face of the danger to life. The sequence is unfolding with its inner dramatical tension: from pure joy, throughout ongoing sadness, until the mournful expectation of death. This is expressed mainly in the changing air of the characters' eyes and through the music (the suite from the *Swan Lake* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky). The sequence as a whole is a straight yet deep reference to the Last Supper, although it is not mediated through the traditional painting. Only the situation of celebrating, the banquet, the symbolic meaning of wine in the context of premonited death and the readiness for sacrifice refer to Holy Thursday.

In *Corpus Christi* (2020), dir. Jan Komasa, there is a problem of truthfulness of the service of a priest as well as the question of what "true faith" and a "true believer" mean, how a person who follows Jesus Christ should behave regardless of whether they are secular or clergy persons. The narrative guides viewers along two routes. One is connected with the results of the actions of a false priest, a young inmate, who by chance starts to serve as a replacement for an old country priest. He manages to bring people relief of the pain caused by their mourning after their relatives' death in an accident. He is also responsible for deepening their relationship with God thanks to his

unconventional approach, resulting from his own rough experiences and his dream of being a priest, which is unavailable to him. He makes the parishioners aware that there is a discrepancy between their faith and their cruelty towards a widow of a man they consider guilty of the accident.

Simultaneously the viewer follows the attitude of the protagonist and must notice that there is a strong clash between his will to be a priest, his supporting service during the Holy Mass in prison, and his support in persecuting the weakest boy at the juvenile correctional facility, taking drugs and having sex with random partners. Nevertheless, it is obvious that his presence in the village as a fake priest results in many benefits for the small community of Catholics. In the context of this story the Eucharist becomes a test for what is true and what is not. Viewers do not see the act of the transubstantiation during the holy Mass performed by the false priest, Tomasz, although it is obvious that he does it. We see it only once and it is clear that it is a struggle for the young man to hold the Holy Host blasphemously. The circle of the wafer of the Host is big in the closeup and strongly lit in order for the viewer to realize the fact of abuse and the power of God, which fake Tomasz opposes through his deeds. It becomes clear that the transubstantiation does not occur through his hands and God does not appear in the Host, although He is a witness to fake priest Tomasz's sin of blasphemy. The other scene concerning the very act of Eucharistic transubstantiation takes place when the actual priest, the real priest Tomasz, arrives from the reformatory to take Daniel (fake Tomasz) back to prison. He is angry with him because he treats seriously what had happened concerning his "replacement". He reminds him that it was not some dress-up or a play and he prevents Daniel from performing false masses anymore, although Daniel wants to do it once more in order to say goodbye to the parishioners. The holy Eucharist makes real and true the transcendent reality. The motivations and reasons of the real priest, who was the master and spiritual guide of fake Tomasz persuades not only him but also the viewers that the Mass is not a kind of theater, or a mere ritual, or a sign, but it is a constitutive act, in which a man participates but only when he follows strict rules established by Jesus Christ in his Church as the community of believers. Thus the film about a fake sinful priest and superficial sinful Christians reveals the essence of the Eucharist. As it happens in religious films very often, where the hidden religiosity is more persuading and clearer than direct statements. The absence of God in the false Eucharist reveals the truth about its Mystery Presence in the most understandable and spectacular way but it also reveals His presence in the community of believers perceived as holy sinners, which means sinners on their path to heaven.

Conclusion

Looking through the variety of film representations of the Eucharist, one can observe that there are some "privileged" ones because of their frequency. Film artists quite often choose solutions mediated through the traditional religious visual art to feature the Eucharist on screen. We should mention the Eucharist represented as a

feast, a kind of banquet that unites people. In film works, it is a productive motif which absorbs both religious and cultural contexts. In the films from various countries the Eucharist is often perceived as tightly connected with Christ's sacrifice. It is also recognized in metaphorical representations, both visual and narrative, especially those associated with Christ Figures. Film representations of the Eucharist also serve as ways of theological cognition since they can hold vast religious meaning with different shades of it and as such they can inspire viewers' search for deeper cognition of God's presence in the Eucharist as well as of God's revealing Himself through contemporary visual culture understood as *locus theologicus*.

Abstract

The topic of representing the Eucharist on film screen is discussed in the paper. The author states that the analogical way of representing the transcendent visually is the best solution when it comes to visualizing the invisible. Then the question of various meanings of the Eucharist is briefly considered. The main part of the paper focuses on highlighting particular examples of how the Eucharist is understood and shown on the screen in Polish contemporary film works as well as in the films from a few other European countries, including both some classical religious films and the latest ones. Among the major and most frequent devices of screen representations of the Eucharist mentioned in this article, there is the Eucharist perceived as a banquet mediated through the traditional religious visual art or originally demonstrated and implemented in film narratives; the Eucharist as sacrifice (very often conveyed through the tool of Christ figure); and eventually the Eucharist as God's presence and bond to Christ exposed through the relationship between a film character and God Himself which results in the tight communion with Christ. Summing up, the Eucharist on the screen can be recognized in films both in direct and metaphorical representations, visual and narrative ones. The essay concludes with the statement that film representations of the Eucharist can serve in some cases as ways of theological cognition.

Keywords: the Eucharist, screen representations, transcendence, film theology, Christ figure, sacrifice, communion

Károly Zsolt Nagy

THE PLACE OF HIEROPHANY – THE LORD’S TABLE IN THE VISUAL CULTURE OF HUNGARIAN REFORMED COMMUNITIES

The church: a theology you can walk around in. This is true for Christianity regardless of denomination. (This is also why the relationship between postmodern church architecture and theology is interesting - but we will not go into that now.) This statement builds on the more general proposition that depending on how each religion views the manifestation of transcendence or the role of community and the specialist in religious ritual, they will construct their spaces for religious practice differently.

The changes between the different theological constructions can be clearly seen in the impact of the Reformation on the use of church space. But this approach can be taken further and extended. We can also analyze how the use of space in the Reformed church changed in the centuries following the Reformation and draw conclusions for theological thinking. However, the concept of theological thinking in this context can mean more than the official theology of the church, and can provide insights into how the communities that built and used churches constructed their own religious and denominational identities.

In my lecture, I will try to trace how the organization and use of space in the church evolves in Reformed communities, with special attention to the place of the Lord’s table - both in the topographical and spiritual sense of the word. Although my research is based on a lot of historical data, it is visual anthropology by nature and focuses on the visual culture of Hungarian Reformed communities.

This may seem contradictory since Reformed visual culture in the ordinary sense of the word is rather poor. But visual culture is not just the product of a social group’s visual self-expression. It is not only about visible images. Images are born out of images, says Gombrich somewhere, and “the visible - here too - is produced out of the invisible”, in other words,

there are invisible images, for example, mental images behind the visible images. And these mental images are often manifested not in visible images but in the structured environment of society. These environments are “walk-in images”, meaningful sights because society shapes its environment, its living space, in its own image and likeness. And vice versa, of course. The corpus of a social group’s ideas about itself and its world is thus part of its visual culture, as is the way it constructs its own spaces and environments from these. Such constructions will be analysed in the following.

The theology of space

According to the eminent Hungarian church historian Katalin Péter, one of the most radical consequences of the Reformation was that the church became the church of the congregation instead of the church of the priest.¹ In theological terms, this change means that the temple building is sacred not because it was founded on the relic of a saint and thus the transcendent is “tangibly” present in it, but because the body of Christ, the local community of the Church, uses it to worship God. In the Reformed view, no church object is considered holy unless the congregation uses it for liturgical purposes.

Religious practice shows a similar pattern since the Roman Catholic priest could celebrate mass alone without the participation of the congregation. In contrast, in Reformed practice, no service is celebrated without the participation of the congregation. A building may be perfectly suitable for worship, but it is not a temple without a congregation.



Pict 1. Imprints of the presence of the congregation in the church of Magyargyerőmonostor (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg region).

¹ PÉTER, Katalin: *A reformáció: kényszer vagy választás?*, Budapest, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2004, 78.

That is why Calvinists could have a barn as a holy place, a temple, and they could drink the blood of Christ – the communion wine – from a tin, earthenware, or even a wooden cup. These principles also had a significant influence on the design and use of Calvinist church spaces. This can be clearly seen in the decrees of the various synods, in the records of church visits, and even in the inscriptions in the temples. The Catholic visitors of the 16th century write about churches already furnished in the ‘Calvinist manner’, which means that the specific organisation of the space also functioned as a marker of identity for outsiders.

If we approach the question from the perspective of Reformed theological thinking, Katalin Péter is undoubtedly right, but church life does not follow theological thinking closely, and so the actual situation is somewhat more complex. The Reformed believers also call the ceremonial start of the use of the temple a “church consecration”, and they often speak of the consecration of bells, organs and all other things used in the church. The church is generally spoken of as ‘the house of God,’ as if it were indeed a building which is the permanent dwelling-place of the Holy One, whereas it is well known that ‘the Most High dwells in temples not made with hands.’²

However, in times of need, especially in war, the temple is also a shelter in a profane sense since it is where the members of the congregation hide their belongings. However, once the danger has passed, the church’s character must be restored.³ It is not that the bacon or wheat carried into the temple has desecrated the holy place, but that the food and drink piled up there - and the stench of the mice that walk on it - make it unfit for the congregation to worship God.

Although, according to Calvinist theological thinking, the temple would only be a holy place if the congregation gathered there for worship, these examples show that the temple has a special, sacred character in itself among Hungarian Reformed people. For the goods carried into the church were not only stolen by mice but also by thieves. It is mainly because of them that the church elders exhort the members of the congregation to take their chests out of the church so that the house of God does not become a den of robbers.⁴

² Acts 7,48. The Jerusalem temple and what King Solomon said in his prayer at its consecration are of particular importance in Reformed thinking about the church: “But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built!” (2Chronicles 6,18.)

³ In his visitation to Alsóberecki in November 1660, Pál Tarcali, the senior minister of the Zemplén sub-district writes: “Because the inhabitants of the village stored their goods in the church during this time of war, theft occurred among them. It pleases the visitors that whoever is caught stealing should be excommunicated for it, and his belongings vomited out. The pastor shall publish this before the auditor.” The data is provided by DIENES, Dénes: *Zempléni vizitációk, Miskolci Csulyak István zempléni esperes és hivatali utódainak feljegyzései*, Sárospatak, Sárospataki Református Kollégium Tudományos Gyűjteményei, 2008, 288.

⁴ István Csulyak, the senior minister of Zemplén sub-district, during his visit to the ecclesia of Nagygyéres in 1629, writes: “Until now it is allowed to carry their goods to the church in times of war, but as soon as the war is over, they should carry everything out, not ex templo Dei fiat spelun-

In these cases, therefore, the “presence” of the believers is also realised through the profane use of the building. In addition, although it is certainly not obligatory, in many places, it is customary – almost required – to keep the clerical vessels used for the celebration of Holy Communion and Baptism, the two sacraments recognised by the Reformed in the cabinet of the Lord’s Table in the church.

Is it too bold a conclusion to see somehow a parallel or remnant of the Catholic practice of the transubstantiated wafer held in the altar in this? In any case, it is also thought-provoking that this practice is discontinued at some point in many places, or by definition, it is prescribed that the communion vessels are to be kept in the chief elder’s house or the ecclesiastical chest.

What is also peculiar is that the donators of these objects often try to protect them with curse formulas, asking God to punish the one who steals or sells them severely, and these curse formulas are also often inscribed on the object itself.⁵ Therefore, it would seem that these objects - and, as the preceding examples show, the temple building itself - do indeed bear some sacred character.



Pict 2. Wine jug from Kecskemét. 1642. The jug bears the name of the maker and the date of its production, along with biblical quotations relating to the Eucharist. In the circular box at the top of the picture, you can see the following caption: “Bless, Lord God, those who live in the honour of your Name. And curse those who tear away this vessel from your honour.”

One possible explanation for the problem may be that the process of joining the Reformation was generally not a sudden event in the life of communities but a slow process. For a long time, those who shared in the Eucharist in the Catholic way and only took the wafer, and those who did the same in the Protestant way, albeit in separate ceremonies, used the temple together. Thus, the ‘purification’ of churches – the removal of relics, altars, images and statues – was then only a gradual process.

The Synod held in Beregszász in December 1552, for example, still – certainly in Luther’s spirit – takes a permissive attitude towards retaining the externals of Catholic religious

ca latronum.” (Latin: Let not the temple of God be a den of robbers. Reference to Mark 11:17.) DIENES: *op. cit.*, 52.

⁵ In 1758, in the inventory of the property of the mother church of Tornalja and daughter church of Sztarnya (Gömör County), we read for example: “There is a silver plate with a gold plate on the top and a star in the middle, with the inscription on the circumference: Hoc opus fieri fecit Generosus Dominus Martinus Tornali, Filius quondam Generosi D. Georgii Tornali in honorem Dei et Ecclesiae Tornallyensi. Aō D. 1639. Anatema esto qui profanaverit.” (Lat.: “This thing was made by the noble Mr. Martin Tornali, son of the late noble Mr. George Tornali, in honour of God and the Church of Tornallya, in the year 1639. Cursed be he who profanes it.” Source: DIENES, Dénes: *Református egyház-látogatási jegyzőkönyvek, 16-17. század*, Budapest, Osiris, 2001, 180.

practice. The Synod “decided that where, because of the progress of the Reformation, the altars had been destroyed and removed from the churches, they need not be restored, but where the altars remained in the church, they could be used (for a time) by the pastors instead of a table, in order to keep intact the more pure teaching on the Lord’s Supper, which was contrary to the papal Mass.”⁶

Almost a century later, there were still some Reformed parishes where the altar - or a part of it - was in the church. In 1629, the Reformed dean István Csulyak of Miskolc, who visited the congregations of Zemplén, noted in the affairs of the congregation of Radvány that “Mrs. Vitányi had a controversy with the pastor about the rest of the altar”.⁷ And he records that in Szécskeresztúr, “there are altarpieces in the church, they have to be taken out of there. The members of the congregation promised to do so.”⁸ Although we do not see such comments elsewhere, the dean, unlike in other cases, is not particularly shocked to reconcile the disputing woman or to order the parishioners to remove the altarpieces from the church.

The structure and use of space in Hungarian Reformed churches – in a social-historical context

These complex situations also point to the fact that the Reformedness [specific features] of the Reformed temple is not so much to be sought at the level of the “surface” but rather at the level of the “structure”. The Reformed temple is most characterised by its spatial structure and its use of space, and behind these, we can discover the specific emphases of the Reformed liturgy as one of the determining factors.

At the time of the Reformation, the Catholic priest celebrated mass with his back to the congregation, facing the altar. The Reformation put the preaching of the Word at the centre of the service, rather than the sacrifice, so the pulpit became the most important point of the liturgy, and the basic principle of the organisation of the space was to ensure that the minister preaching the Word could be heard and seen as well as possible. Believers who became Protestants left the pulpit in their churches, in most cases in its place, fixed to a pillar at the triumphal arch in front of the sanctuary or around the centre of the nave. Over time, the altars were removed from the church and the sanctuary lost its original function and status as a special space.

The altar table, where it was suitable, continued to be used as the Lord’s table and was moved to the area around the pulpit. This signified the essential unity and interdependence of the Word preached: the preaching and the visible Word, that is, the sacrament of Holy Communion, the bread and the wine.

The pews in the church were turned towards the pulpit. Around the centre of the space thus created, they left as wide a space as was possible - in many places called the ‘marketplace’ of the church - where the congregation could stand or pass unhindered

⁶ KISS, Áron (ed.): *A XVI. században tartott magyar református zsinatok végzései*, Budapest, [Without Publisher], 1881, 24.

⁷ DIENES: *Zempléni vizitációk*, 22.

⁸ Idem., 27.

during communion, baptism or other occasions. In many places, the lack of space caused by the growth of the congregation was eased by adding pews to the former sanctuary and later building a gallery into it. The final form of the spaces thus created is very similar to a basic type of Protestant church in Western Europe, named after its first example, the Charenton type.



Pict 3. Temple de Charenton, 1648. A contemporary drawing of the interior of the church.



Pict 4. Reformed church of Kalotaszeg (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg region). It was built in the 13th century; its present form shows the marks of several rebuildings. The church's structure, however, illustrates how the former Catholic church was converted into a Reformed church.



Pict 5. Reformed church of Kalotaszeg (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg region).
The “marketplace” of the temple.



Pict 6. Reformed church of Kalotaszeg (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg region).
The interior of the church from the former sanctuary.

So, in the end, the temple really became – in more ways than one – the temple of the congregation. This definition does not only mean that no building can be considered a church without the sacral presence of the congregation, but that the temple becomes part of the locality, of local systems of objects and meanings. It becomes embedded in the complex system “constituted by a series of links, between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts.”⁹ It becomes one of the catalysts for the agency, sociality, and strategies for the reproduction of locality. Moreover, its sacred character seems to be defined most of all by this deep embeddedness.

This embeddedness manifests itself in many ways. The temple is usually maintained by the community that uses it.¹⁰ However, while the Catholic Church has had the means to influence the local community that cares for its church along with a central vision, the leaders and governing councils of the Reformed Church have long lacked such means and such a central vision.

The canons of the Reformed synods are guidelines for the churches rather than concrete rules, and their implementation depends on local conditions. It is clear from the church visitation records that the senior minister of a sub-district may quarrel with the locals over a long period of time about certain moral or disciplinary issues or even threaten them, but a priest is paid, asked to stay or dismissed by the ecclesia, and for the most part, the church is also maintained, built and repaired by them. This practice is also indicated by the fact that, according to the Zemplén church visitation records already cited, the parishioners “committed themselves” to the senior minister of a sub-district to repair the defects in the church, school or parochial buildings. They also make, order and donate most of the items for the church equipment.¹¹

In the literature, these objects are called confessional or preaching objects.¹² They often bear not only the name of the donor and the date of donation but also a biblical quotation through which the object speaks. And not only does it speak of the donor’s social status, but it also ‘testifies’ to his or her faith, his or her religious

⁹ APPADURAI, Arjun: *Modernity at Large, Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 178.

¹⁰ King Laszlo I, echoing St. Stephen, decreed that “chalices and vestments should be given at the king’s expense for churches destroyed in pagan rebellions. Books shall be provided by the bishop.” (MAROSI, Ernő: *Magyar falusi templomok*, Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1979, 26.) However, the care of the priest and the maintenance of the buildings were essentially the responsibility of the community.

¹¹ Many congregations keep clerical vessels from noble patrons, but these usually make up only a small part of their holdings.

¹² See SZACSVAY, Éva: “...Isten ditsősegere adta...” Református egyházművészet – népművészet, in SELMECZI KOVÁCS Attila (ed.): *Lélek és élet, Ünnepi kötet S. Laczkovits Emőke tiszteletére*, Veszprém, Veszprém Megyei Múzeumi Igazgatóság, 2006, 73–82.; NAGY, Károly Zsolt: A “cserép krigli”, Az újrahaznosítás problémája a református szakrális tárgykészlet esetében, in BERTA, Péter (ed.): *Használtkik-kultúrák, Ideológiák, gyakorlatok és értelmezői közösségek* Budapest, MTA BTK Néprajztudományi Intézet, 2012, 9–65.

beliefs, and his or her commitment to his denomination.¹³ The act of donation is public. The objects were then placed on the Lord’s Table, and members of the congregation could view them. Later on, several ‘sets’ of textiles were created, which were used alternately on different feasts. However, the tablecloths are also found stacked on top of each other on the communion table in many places. Thus, although the newest is on top, underneath are the offerings of previous generations, indicating the continuity of the community.

It often happens that a clerical vessel is almost a family history: successive generations add to the object, correct it, gild it or even have it remade. The memory carried by objects often survives their passing. Recasting, selling, donating, etc., is preserved in some form, for example, in records, in the memory of the community.



Pict 7. The Lord’s Table of the Reformed Church in Sztána (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg region). It clearly shows the tablecloths stacked in several layers.

The objects donated for church use and the furnishings of the temple are closely related to the system of objects used by the community in profane settings, such as their own homes. There are many examples of clay jugs and cups being donated for the communion table in villages close to a pottery centre. These were masterpieces or replicas of master potters’ wares in many cases. Church benches are the same kind of

¹³ In the inventory of the property of the settlement of Jánosi (Gömör County) in 1758, for example, there is this entry: ‘There is a golden plate on top, made by Margit Jánosi in 1644, on which there is a lamb crest with the inscription: the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on me!’ (DIENES: *Református egyház-látogatási jegyzőkönyvek*, 201.)

benches used at home. Temple furnishings were painted with the same flowers by the same master carpenters as chests and cupboards for profane use. Typically, the Lord's Table is often closely related to the tables found in the homes of a particular community.¹⁴ A particular example is the so-called 'table with cabinet'. This is a four-legged table with a small cabinet formed between the legs under the top. In profane use, bread was kept in this cabinet.

In church use, as was mentioned, the communion vessels were kept in this cabinet. There are other semiotic connections between the two uses of the table, profane and sacred. The meal always had a sacred character in peasant society, and bread was particularly revered. The bread was made from various grains, but wheat bread, baked only for holidays, was highly valued in poorer families. Wheat was otherwise called 'life'. The place where food was eaten in the home was not entirely free of sacrality. The dining table stood in the corner of the house, called the 'holy corner', because it was here, in a small cabinet hung in the corner, that the Bible, prayer books and other objects related to religious practice, as well as medicines, were kept.

Such local patterns can also be found in the construction of the church building. The roots of these patterns can be found in Hungarian peasant architecture, and within it in the "simple village house", to which Reformed church architecture may have come close due to the social structure of the denomination. In his study on the subject, the distinguished Reformed art historian István Bibó Jr. quotes historical documents in which some temples are mentioned as having been built in the form of a house.¹⁵ By comparing the structure of Hungarian wooden churches in Transylvania with the so-called 'beam houses' typical of the region, he concludes that the similarity between the two structures is essentially due to two factors. The first

¹⁴ More on this in NAGY: op. cit.

¹⁵ BIBÓ, István Jr.: 1967 *Az Alföld későbarokk és klasszicista építészetének néhány kérdése*, *Építés- és Közlekedéstudományi Közlemények*, Volume IX, 1967/3-4, 525–564. Bibó mentions two documents: one from the end of the 17th century mentions the church in Munkács, "a church in the shape of a large house was built." The other is a document from 1733 on the church in the village of Gecse in Bereg county: "...synagoga lignea reformatorem ad formam unius domus rusticanae extracta". (Lat.: the Reformed built a simple wooden church on the model of the farmhouse.) Bibó does not discuss how these descriptions and the meaning of 'house-form' relate to the 18th century decrees restricting church building. According to these, permission was granted "only 'ad formam domus ordinariae', i.e. for a building of the ordinary residential type" (GÁBORJÁNI SZABÓ, Botond: *A magyar református templomok építészeti sajátosságai a múltban és a jelenben*, in LAKNER, Lajos (ed.): *Élet és Világ, Írások Keresztesné Várhelyi Ilona tiszteletére*, Debrecen, Debreceni Irodalmi Múzeum, 2007, 31–46, 32.) Zoltán LŐRINCZ (A 16. és 17. század a református templomépítészetben, *Építés – Építészettudomány*, Volume XXXVI, 2021/1-2, 67–78.) quotes a building permit from 1713 with similar restrictions, in which the authority does not permit the erection of a "church-form" but a "house-form" building. At this point, therefore, Bibó's interpretation is questionable, while it is also questionable what the 'church-form' meant: did it refer to the proportions of the plan and structure, or to the fact that the main facade of the building - as the prohibition is repeatedly specified, for example in the permit for the construction of the church in Sárospatak (SZINYEI, Gerzson: *A sárospataki ev. ref. egyház templomairól*, Sárospatak, 1896.) - must not face the street, and there must be no tower.

is that the ‘long-house’ spatial structure characteristic of both types of the building linked the Transylvanian wooden churches to the predominant church type of Western European Christianity (as opposed to the circular or Greek cross-based churches of Eastern Christianity). Another reason is the construction technique. Those who built these churches knew and used this construction method.

He notes, however, that his research has led to similar results for villages in the Great Plain where houses were built using different techniques. From the 16th century onwards, historical and social factors (Reformation, Turkish wars, impoverishment, persecution of Protestants, including the forbidding of Protestants from building with permanent materials) combined to make Protestant church architecture and folk architecture almost identical. In the construction of church buildings, the practice acquired on farmhouses prevailed, and the church and the farmhouse became identical in form and structure.”¹⁶

In each community, these factors form a system, which is complemented or rather permeated by a religious-theological formulation of the church’s attachment to a particular place and community. The 1562 Debrecen-Egervölgy Confession of Faith, the founding document of the Helvetic direction of the Hungarian Reformation, describes the church in its chapter on the ‘churches of the devout’ in a specific context. According to the text, the temple must be free from all idols, “for just as the elect are the temples of the Lord and have no connection with idols, so likewise the temples, which are places of public assembly, must not contain idols or paintings that can be considered idols. (...) For the house of God is the church, and the places of assembly of the church are places of prayer, worship, preaching and the administration of the sacraments.”¹⁷ The church, then, is the house of God in the sense that it becomes the house of God manifested in us and through us. It follows that the life of the temple and the community are closely intertwined.

The close relationship between church and community implies that changes in the community can lead to changes in the church building. And this does not only apply to the transformation of the size. The Reformed temple in Sárospatak, for example, has needed renovation on several occasions, and this has usually meant changes of differing kinds. During the renovation of 1895-96, a new element was added to the church: an iron fence was added around the Lord’s Table, donated by Eszter Réthi.¹⁸ (Gulyás, 1942, 12.) Fences around the communion table appeared in Reformed temples in the first third of the 19th century. It also became common practice to lift the communion table from the church floor by placing it on a podium. Such fences can be found throughout the Hungarian Reformed Church, but their spread is not uniform. They are mainly found in the southern part of the Great Plain, in the sub-districts of Bács-Kiskunság, Csongrád, Békés, Nagyunság, Bihar, Debrecen and Hajdúvidék, in more than 80% of the temples, and, although not

¹⁶ BIBÓ: op.cit., 542.

¹⁷ KISS: op. cit., 188.

¹⁸ GULYÁS, József: *A sárospataki református templom*, Sárospatak, [Without Publisher], 1942, 12.

as widespread but also in Partium. By contrast, in the sub-district of Nyírség, Szabolcs-Bereg and Szatmár in the Transibiscan Church District and in the Cistibiscan Church District, fences are found in less than 20% of temples. It is not common in Transylvania, although it does occur there. They are also relatively less frequent in Transcarpathia (Ukraine), the northern Highland (Slovakia) and the Transdanubian Church District.¹⁹



Pict 8. The interior of the Reformed Church of Sárospatak.

According to László Kósa, an eminent ethnographer who summarized the findings of the very limited literature on the subject, the communion table “is surrounded by a low fence, mainly in the large churches of the Great Plain, which is probably intended to regulate the order of the moving communion, but it may be a purely decorative element.”²⁰ In contrast, it seems that in the Great Plain, which is considered to be the primary area of occurrence, whether or not the congregation erected a fence was practically independent of the size of the church. We find it in the Debrecen Great Church, with its 3,000 members, as well as in the 200-seat temple of the

¹⁹ We do not have comprehensive statistics on the occurrence of the lattice surrounding the communion table. The data are based on József Váradi's books on Reformed churches (VÁRADY, József: *Tiszáninnen református templomai*, Debrecen, Borsodi Református Egyházmegye kiadása, 1989; and ID.: *Tiszántúl református templomai 1-2*, Debrecen, Borsodi Református Egyházmegye kiadása, 1991.) and on my own research.

²⁰ KÓSA, László: A vallásos élet színterei és gyakorlata, in PALÁDI-KOVÁCS, Attila (ed.): *Magyar néprajz nyolc kötetben*, Volume VII, *Folklór 3. Népszokás, néphit, népi vallásság*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988, 463–476, 465.

Hódmezővásárhely-csúcs congregation, built in 1951 from a family house. The same diversity applies to the Cistibiscan Church District. The church in Szikszó, which seats 1000 people, has a fence around the Lord’s Table, as does the church in Pere, which seats 80 people. However, in the Cistibiscan Church District, it is mainly found in the churches of urban or old town parishes.

Similarly, the function of the fence is also in question. In many areas, especially in the Cistibiscan Church District, the believers do not practice the moving communion form but go out in “circles” (first presbyters, then men, then women) to the communion table, they stand around it, and the pastor passes the bread and wine around them.²¹ In many places, moreover, the ‘market’ of the church is so narrow that the fence is a disturbing rather than a regulatory factor in either form of taking communion.

The design of the fences is also very varied. Partly in accordance with the shape of the communion table, there are circular or rectangular fences, but mainly in the Cistibiscan Church District we can find hexagonal fences similar to the one in Sárospatak and in the Transtibiscan Church District rectangular fences similar to the one in Debrecen, which surrounds the communion table, and which is supplemented by a railing on the side of the church facing the “marketplace”, so that the congregation passes between this railing and the fence during communion.²²

There are also a number of open forms. These do not completely surround the Lord’s Table but generally enclose it in a “U” shape from the congregation. In many cases, there is simply a single grid along a straight line in front of the communion table, which is then freely accessible from the other sides.

In my opinion, this latter example is the one that sheds the clearest light on the true function of these fences. Their role is to establish a hierarchy in the originally - theologically speaking - homogeneous space of the Reformed temple, clearly marking the place where transcendence is manifested. However, this is not the first step in the process of hierarchizing the Reformed temple space. Another important hierarchy in the church was created by the practice - far from being in accordance with the Gospel, and therefore often criticised by pastors - of seating and even buying or having chairs in the church according to social status.²³

²¹ In many congregations, such as Karcsa, the custom of men and women, young men and girls, coming to the Lord’s Table in separate circles is still practiced. In other places, the two methods are mixed, e.g., in Sárospatak, the church elders take communion first in a circle, followed by a moving communion of the whole congregation.

²² In the case of the great church in Debrecen, there is clear evidence of a model building function, but in the case of Sárospatak, further research is needed to confirm this.

²³ FAGGYAS, István: *Lakosság és templomi ülésrend 1-2*, Debrecen, Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, 1990-1991.; It should be noted, however, that the obligations attached to the right to the seats, as well as the monetary redemption of the seat and the participation in the burden of the church in proportion to the prestige of the seat held, were also an important basis for the maintenance and self-government of the parish. If the Church, specifically the ‘Church present here’, that is to say the ecclesia, is the body of Christ, participation in its maintenance may also acquire a certain sacral character.

This is a specifically Reformed cultural phenomenon. The arrangements of seating in the temple and the rights attached to the chairs were very varied, and this kind of indication of social status in the temple was not always clearly accepted, or at least gave rise to much controversy.²⁴ Where it did exist, the “marketplace” of the temple was at the centre of the hierarchy defined by the seating arrangements. It follows logically from this that the two types of the hierarchy of spatial organisation - sacral and social - should be linked, and the centre should be clearly separated from the temple space as a whole.

This process probably started in the second decade of the 19th century²⁵ and was completed by the second half of the century. Although traditional religiosity was still strong in this period, the weakening of the church’s power to determine the way of life and thinking was already noticeable in Hungary. The period is generally defined as the ‘age of religious revival’,²⁶ but it can also be described as a period of laicisation. This duality is most evident in the fact that the revival of religious life is moving away from the institutional framework of the church as well as from the confessional religiosity that the church considers of primary importance. In fact, especially towards the end of the century, the main focus of the religious revival is on lay communities and religious associations. Church discipline is increasingly weakened as the century passes. As a form of public shaming was abolished by secular authorities, the exercise of public repentance became a voluntary act, the result of an internal, conscientious rather than an external compulsion. These factors, together with the spread of irreligion and the possibility of ‘extra-denominational’ status made possible by secular law, favoured the emergence of new forms of religious practice independent of ecclesiastical religiosity and traditional forms of piety.

Liberal theological thinking dominating the 19th century also contributed to the weakening of confessional knowledge and commitment. One consequence of

²⁴ A good example of this is the controversy in the church of Tolcsva in 1659: “Gáspár Győri dismantled the seats in the church and had them made in a different form, which both the nobility and the citizens were outraged at. They did not even want to suffer for it, because he did it without consensus. For this reason, it was popularly desired that Gáspár Győri should have the whole chair made anew, and that the old chair should be taken out, because it was unfit. And this he was to have done by Pentecost.” (DIENES: *Zempléni vizitációk*, 267.) We do not know exactly what the problem was with Gáspár Győri’s chair. Presumably it was more conspicuous, out of keeping with his status, out of keeping with custom, and most importantly, it was made without the approval of the community. The importance of community consensus can be seen in the following cases recorded in Bodrogkeresztúr in 1669: “The preachers report from their hearers that István Gyulai does not go to church, because the chair he had been in was taken away, because it belonged to someone else, although he was shown a decent chair. He must be admonished to go to church (...) Újszászi was accused of not going to church. He was examined about this. The reason he gives is that Mr. Miskolczi has instructed him not to go to the chair he was in, but to go to his own chair. But it is not right, because it is not his chair, and it was done of public will that Mr Gyulai should sit in that chair. He was admonished to walk in the church.” (DIENES: *Zempléni vizitációk*, 363.)

²⁵ To be more precise, I could not find any earlier data for a grid claim.

²⁶ Kósa, László: A magánélet vallásossága a biedermeier idején, in Id.: *Művelődés, egyház, társadalom, Tanulmányok*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011, 34–48, 34.

this was that, in parallel with the development of the school system, teaching catechism was considered too difficult and no longer appropriate for children, and the religious socialisation of young people was weakened. The situation is well characterised by a statement made by Bishop György Bartók in 1907, who was considered the central figure of Transylvanian liberal theology: ‘I think that the true Bible of the people is a good hymnal, and I prefer the faithful to read the hymnal rather than to leaf through the Bible, because the Bible teaches Nazarenism, while a good hymnal saves us from Nazarenism.’²⁷

The critical attitude of liberal theology towards the creeds and confessions was also closely linked to the transformation of inter-denominational relations. According to László Kósa, “the interest of different religions in each other can be traced back to the Enlightenment’s attacks on the church, which led to a blurring of inter-confessional differences and the emergence of previously unthinkable ideas of rapprochement.”²⁸ The idea of a union between the Reformed and Catholic Churches was also discussed, although it did not prove to be very popular in the end.

In the end, this period was not a period of inter-denominational harmony but of inter-denominational strife. First, the 1781 decree of toleration issued by Joseph II, and then the so-called Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the settlement of relations between Austria and Hungary, brought the golden age of full equality of rights for Protestants that had been awaited for centuries. This equality of rights turned into rivalry in no time at all, which was also reflected in church architecture. The modest village Reformed temples of the previous centuries could not compete with the large and decorative Catholic temples, but the new temples, especially in the cities and the capital, were built in the spirit of this struggle for representation. The slogan was something like: we can do it too. This rivalry had two significant consequences. These are what I want to discuss in the following.

One is that the Reformed temples began to resemble the Catholic temples with which they were rivaling. Thus, for example, the longitudinal layout was replaced by a central layout of churches. Objects such as the baptismal font reappeared again, and the fence in front of the Lord’s Table can be interpreted as a parallel to the sanctuary grid. The dominant style of the Reformed temples built during the middle of the period became the neo-Gothic style, which was also the dominant style of national romanticism. In the eyes of national romanticism, the 15th century was the golden age of the Catholic Christian Hungarian kingdom in the Hunyadi era. This is what it sought to evoke in the formation of the modern Hungarian nation.

The meaning and the function of the fences around the communion table are thus closely linked to the social context that allowed and legitimised their appearance

²⁷ Cited in BÍRÓ, Sándor – SZILÁGYI, István (eds.): *A Magyar Református Egyház története*, Budapest, 1949, 398.; The Nazarene movement started in the southern part of Hungary in the second half of the 19th century, and in many fields it carried on the legacy of Puritanism, which had returned to the Reformed tradition, and the tradition of intensive individual piety and private devotions.

²⁸ KÓSA: A magánélet vallásossága, 37

and their very rapid spread. I would like to illustrate this with a concrete example, the Calvin Square Reformed Church in Budapest.

The Calvin Square Reformed Church in Budapest – a short case study

The 19th century was a period of unity in the Reformed Church between separate church districts with different traditions. An important milestone in this process was the 1881 Debrecen Synod held after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, which for the first time created and regulated the organisational unity of the Hungarian Reformed Church and established the principle of synodal presbyteral church government by harmonising the previous practices of church districts.²⁹ The processes leading to the establishment of the united church were initiated at this time, and in the spirit of these processes, not only the legal basis, the organisational framework and the ritual order of the united church but also its symbolic dimensions had to be created. The building of the Reformed temple in Pest (now Kálvin Square) fits into this framework.

All four church districts in Hungary donated to the construction of the church that was of central importance in the country.³⁰ This was the first Reformed temple in Pest, as Reformed people had not been allowed to settle in the city before. The circumstances of the establishment of the Pest congregation using the church are unusual in the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church. It was established as a consequence of the incipient modern urban development and the internal population migration in the country. Its members came from distant parts of the country to work in industry, in the service sectors of urban life or take up office. The immigrants left their former way of life and brought their own traditions with them, and the life of the new congregation was organised by combining these to form its own tradition.

The church, inaugurated in 1830 and built according to the plans of Vince Hild, is symbolic not only in the sense that it is (one of) the central churches of the Hungarian Reformed Church, and its construction can be seen as a symbolic occupation of space by the Calvinists,³¹ but also in the sense that its spatial organisation condenses everything I have written about the hierarchisation of the Reformed temple space.

The church, built in neoclassical style, has a nave with an elliptical dome in the middle of its tunnel vault. The space is longitudinal and divided into two parts. The two-thirds of the nave is occupied by the church pews, the organ gallery, and the two-storey side gallery from the entrance. As a “liturgical space”, the last third is sep-

²⁹ BARÁTH, Béla Levente: “...e jó szándék nem volt haszontalan, a fáradtság nem volt eredménytelen” Az 1881/82. évi debreceni alkotmányozó zsinat és egyházpolitikai jelentősége, *Mediárium*, Volume III, 2009/1-2, 5–22.

³⁰ MILLISITS, Máté: A budapesti református egyházközségek, in KÓSA, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*, Volume 1, Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK Művelődéstörténeti Tanszék, 2006, 303–466, 346.

³¹ After the expulsion of the Turks from Buda in 1686, Lipót I issued a charter of privilege for Buda and Pest, according to which only Catholics were allowed to become citizens of the two cities, and this provision remained in force until the decree of toleration.

arated by a fence of the same height as the pews. In this space, opposite the entrance, on a platform, stands the Lord’s Table, and behind it, against the wall of the temple, the pulpit. The pulpit is supported by Corinthian columns and framed by a semi-circular enclosure. In the same part of the nave, on both sides of the pulpit, parallel to the sidewalls of the church, are some pews, which are the presbyters’ chairs. In many aspects, the church resembles the Lutheran church on Deák Square, built somewhat earlier, although the influence of the Vienna Reformed church was revealed behind the designs of Hild, who was a fresh immigrant from abroad and had no regard for Hungarian traditions.³²

Hild draws from various Protestant traditions of church building, but the architecture as a whole gives the impression of a Catholic rather than a Reformed church. The double gallery system is clearly a Protestant feature, but the pulpit design is similar to the pulpit and altar design used in Lutheran churches. The chairs for the presbyters are reminiscent of the stalls in Catholic churches and reinterpreted, since while there they are chairs for the clergy, here they are seats for the elders of the congregation. The overall effect is architectural-ly unified but rather chaotic in terms of tradition. However, it can also be interpreted as an imprint of the search for a community’s identity without tradition,³³ and in this aspect, it is emblematic of the whole period.



Pict 9. The Calvin Square Reformed Church in Budapest. The interior of the church from the entrance to the pulpit.

³² BIBÓ, István Jr.: (Buda)Pest, Kálvin téri református templom, in FARBAKY, Péter – KISS, Réka (eds.): *Kálvin hagyománya, Református kulturális örökség a Duna mentén, Kiállítási katalógus*, Budapest, Budapesti Történelmi Múzeum – Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület, 2009, 277–278, 277.

³³ We must add, however, that the tendency described by Ernő Marosi in relation to the village churches was also present here, *mutatis mutandis*. According to Marosi, during the 19th century, the building community and the building craftsman grew apart. It is now urban craftsmen who build churches in villages, and so it is not village churches that are built, but churches with urban characteristics built in villages (MAROSI: *op. cit.*, 70). The community that built the church obviously had a say in what it would look like, but the church was still built according to Hild’s plans. This is the formula for churches built in 1945 and especially after 1989.



Pict 10. The Calvin Square Reformed Church in Budapest. The interior of the church from the pulpit to the entrance.

Developing theological principles of church architecture

Another important consequence of the rivalry of the Calvinists with the Catholics was the recognition of the shortcomings in the theological foundation of the building of temples and the formulation of these theological principles. From this not very large but rather complex discourse, I will now highlight two narratives. One tends to legalise the status quo as tradition, while the other reinterprets tradition.

The first significant response to the lack of a theological foundation for church architecture came from Sándor Csikesz, a theology professor in Debrecen, in 1935, and the second from bishop László Ravasz in 1942. The Synod commissioned Csikesz to write a comprehensive theoretical work,



Pict 11. The Calvin Square Reformed Church in Budapest. The interior of the church, with the pulpit, the Lord's Table and the fence.

which was never completed, but Csikesz summarised his main ideas in a lecture.³⁴ According to Csikesz, it is of the utmost importance to deal with the basic principles of the architecture of temples, as new temples are being built, and “it is urgently necessary to show the way for the development of this building fever, harmonized with the liturgical principles of the Reformed Church, from both a theoretical and a practical point of view.” The path of this healthy development is closely connected with the extensive discourses of the search for a Reformed identity of the period, first and foremost the rethinking of the program of Calvinism.

Consequently, Csikesz’s text begins with a detailed biblical foundation but continues with a thorough examination of the history, psychology and sociology of religion in the spirit of Calvinist rationalism. In the concluding part of the study, he writes about the guiding ideas of Reformed worship, which he traces back to the key concepts of Reformed theology, but in such a way that they can be clearly deduced from the biblical, Reformed, and religious ideas previously explained. On the one hand, the key concepts he highlights confirm the basic structure of Reformed identity. Thus, for example, he considers the kingdom of God to be the most important principle, which follows from the absolute sovereignty of God emphasized by Calvin.

However, he immediately translates this into the principle of the organization of space: “the leaders of His army, the soldiers, will flock before the invisible but present King, (...) It follows that the symbolic place of the Invisible King and the Scriptures symbolizing His power should be raised up in a royal way, before and above the subjects. (...) The army must be paraded before the King by group, platoon, year and service. This idea is still reflected in the worship arrangement of Reformed congregations (...) Hence the Reformed principle that the first, the exemplar of each class should sit before the others, and after them the multitude of followers should line up.” And with this idea, Csikesz legitimizes the elevation of the Lord’s Table to a podium, as well as the hierarchization of space. The key concepts that he highlights also reinforce denominational identity by clarifying denominational boundaries, especially in relation to Catholicism. Thus, for example, he writes of the ‘fake’ techniques much used in Catholic temples – and, of course, in Reformed ones: “The Reformed temple should tell the truth with every fiber of its being. Let not wood lie to be iron, let not mortar give the illusion of stone and carved marble. The softwood, veined and painted on hardwood, remains the Pharisee of furniture.”

The other narrative³⁵ was articulated by László Ravasz, a prominent theologian and leading church leader of the period. For Ravasz, the church is the house of the congregation, the place of preaching, and thus he approaches the problem of the structure of space from the point of view of the homeliness of the congregation on the one hand,

³⁴ CSIKESZ, Sándor: *A református istentiszteleti hely fogalma és megépítésének irányelvei*, Különnyomat a Debreceni Magyar Királyi Tisza István Tudományegyetem 1933-34. évi évkönyvéből, Debrecen, [Without Publisher], 1935.

³⁵ RAVASZ, László: A református templom, in Kovárs, J. István (ed.): *Magyar református templomok*, Budapest, Athenaeum, 1942, 1–4.

and the characteristics of Reformed preaching on the other. In contrast to Csikesz, he does not seek to reinforce established traditions and traditional identities but subordinates them to the renewal of the church, which he considers very important. At the heart of this are an active, participatory religious life and clear, unambiguous preaching. It follows that what he considers essential in the location of the believers in the church is not the 'parade' referred to by Csikesz, but the ease with which members of the congregation can participate in the liturgy without congestion or discomfort.

Comparing the two concepts, we can perhaps identify behind Csikesz's idea the approach of the majority Reformed Church of the Trans-Tibiscan region, which is based on the people's church and lives in a block, for which the representative mass experience of worship, not free of any demonstrative content, is important. In contrast, Ravasz takes as his starting point the already mentioned realities of the Danube region, whose dominant type of congregation is "the Calvinist congregation of immigrants or diaspora, which seeps into large seas of foreign denominations and begins its own life of faith. They are overnight congregations, where believers arriving suddenly, perhaps moving suddenly, form congregations that often grow with extraordinary rapidity, and sometimes fall back unexpectedly."

These are the ones that cause the most problems but also hold the greatest promise. In a great Catholic sea, like fine veins here and there, the Reformed diasporas are woven, exposed to the great dangers of assimilation, but they are in fact the very capillaries of life through which the pulsating blood of our mother church flows."³⁶ These congregations are "thirsty, willing to make sacrifices, receptive to all good. It is to this point, to this terrain, that we must pay particular attention in Hungarian Calvinism, for it is here that the penetrating power of our faith is decided. The great sweep of history, as it passes through them and breaks up the black soil of the Hungarian fallow land, opens up a thousand opportunities for the Hungarians to conquer new territories and social strata instead of lost ones."³⁷

Ravasz wants to make these congregations dynamic, and this is at the heart of his episcopal work. That is why he writes that the church, as a dwelling place, "can only embrace people who are all involved in worship. (...) Since God speaks to his people in his word, only as many people can be gathered for worship as can be gathered and bound together by word of mouth."³⁸ For us, however, what is more important now is the way in which he redefines the problem of the altar or the Lord's Table in contrast to Csikesz's demonstrative approach. In the Reformed church, as he writes, there is "no visible altar. The altar itself is invisible because the sacrifice in it is invisible. We sacrifice our old self in order to win back our new self, so the actual invisible altar is the congregation itself. This great sacrifice takes place through the preaching of the Word, in the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. Therefore, at the centre of the Reformed temple is the pulpit from which the Word of God is

³⁶ RAVASZ, László: *VI. püspöki jelentése*, Budapest, [Without Publisher], 1927, 22.

³⁷ RAVASZ, László: *II. püspöki jelentése*, Budapest, [Without Publisher], 1923, 12.

³⁸ RAVASZ: *A református templom*, 2.

spoken. In Greek, it is called the cathedra, or pulpit in Hungarian: the image of the present power and glory of God who reveals Godself. The pulpit should not be too high because the preacher cannot be separated from the congregation. It is right that it should be as high in the centre as is necessary for clarity, visibility and familiarity. Beyond that, it should be spacious enough for free movement.”³⁹

Conclusions

The Reformed temple is, therefore, a representation of denominational identity not only in its structure and use, but also in the way it is spoken about. In fact, maybe in its “purest” form, it is, since, as we have seen in the case of Ravasz, speaking about the ideal Reformed temple is ultimately speaking about the identity of the Reformed community. This is why it is symptomatic that after 1989, although new churches have been built one after the other, there have been no new developments in the theoretical foundations of Reformed church architecture.

Abstract

The church: a theology you can walk around in. This is the central claim of my study. This statement builds on the more general proposition that depending on how each religion views the manifestation of transcendence or the role of community and the specialist in religious ritual, they will construct their spaces for religious practice differently. In my lecture, I will try to trace how the organization and use of space in the church evolve in Reformed communities, with particular attention to the place of the Lord's table - both in the topographical and spiritual sense of the word. Although my research is based on a lot of historical data, it is visual anthropology by nature and focuses on the visual culture of Hungarian Reformed communities.

I will examine the question from three perspectives: 1. the relevant teachings of Hungarian Reformed theology and church law; 2. the principles and practice of Reformed church architecture and their art historical implications; 3. the temple-related characteristics of Reformed religious practice. I will consider these three aspects as an interconnected system and, analysing specific examples, I will review their changes from the 16th century to the mid-20th century. In this paper, I will argue that the Reformed church building represents denominational identity not only in its structure and use but also in the way it is spoken about.

Keywords: Reformed church, use of space, history of piety, visual anthropology

³⁹ Idem., 3.



Zsobok (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg), the interior of the reformed church from the Lord's Table.
The embroidered tablecloth bears the text: Blessed is the one who eats bread in the kingdom of God
Lk 14,15 Gál J. Lászlóné 2014.

How far do the effects of a bad event spread, and for how long? Can someone pay his debts and move on just as nothing has happened, or do the consequences of crime persist over a lifetime? What is the difference between forgiveness by a supreme being? And forgiveness by the victims? Is it always possible to forgive someone, no matter how serious the crime was?

DeUsynlige / Troubled Water (directed by a Norwegian director, Erik Poppe) and *Corpus Christi* (an Oscar-nominated Polish film from 2019 by Jan Komasa) are films around these not so easily answerable questions. And above all about repentance, forgiveness, and redemption.

It is no coincidence that the choice for these two films was made when we prepared for the conference on the relationship between the Eucharist and visual culture. For we know the Eucharist is the place of repentance and forgiveness in the Christian religion.

“By this sacred rite the Lord wishes to keep in fresh remembrance that greatest benefit which he showed to mortal men, namely, that by having given his body and shed his blood he has pardoned all our sins, and redeemed us from eternal death and the power of the devil, and now feeds us with his flesh, and gives us his blood to drink, which, being received spiritually by true faith, nourish us to eternal life.” (The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XXI.)

Troubled Water is the story of a young man, Jan Thomas (Pal Sverre Hagen), who made a horrible mistake, and – like so many bad decisions – this act directed his life since then. Now (at the beginning of the film, 8 years after his mistake), we find him in his early 20s, as he completes his sentence in a juvenile jail: he did his time for kidnapping and killing a small boy who was briefly left unattended by his mother. Jan (who starts to use his second name, Thomas) is released on condition and

Tímea Kókai-Nagy

**“IF HE CAN’T
GET A SECOND
CHANCE HERE,
THEN WHERE?”**

trying to hold on to a job as a church organist (we learn that he is a sensible, talented guy, who got familiar with music and this instrument during his stay in prison). Thomas develops a relationship with a woman (the pastor of the church, Anna) and her child, Jens (who bears an uncomfortable resemblance to Isak, the killed boy). Thomas struggles with ambivalent feelings: at the same time, he tries to keep his past hidden and carefully show it to those around him. He is filled with guilt (he still has flashbacks of THAT day) but would like to start over.

Thomas's every move is being watched soon after his arrival: his victim's mother, Agnes (Trine Dyrholm) accidentally spots him in the church, and since then, she has constantly been forcing his secret into the open. The grieving of Agnes is palpable, and it is hard to blame her. The theme of forgiveness has been here all along. How often have we heard that failure to forgive can poison us? That is at work here and it is handled impressively. Agnes is resolute in destroying Thomas's new relationships completely, making him feel the loss he made her feel. She becomes determined to get the young man to confess the murder of her boy and keep him away from Jens as she fears his life will end in the same tragic way as her son's.

Looking at the storyline, we notice that it is like watching two stories in a row that are very similar in many of their elements: the story is told both ways, which is not very usual on the big screen but works great. The protagonist of the first, slowly building part is Jan Thomas; from his point of view, we see everything that happened and that is happening – from the abduction of Isak to the disappearance of Jens. The second, much faster part is framed by two encounters: the first is an unexpected (is it coincidental or is it fate?), the second is a very intentional encounter. Between the two, we learn the story of Agnes, the mother.

When Agnes is put into the movie, we wait for the confrontation to come. While watching both sides of the story, and moving towards the inevitable end, we recognize that something important and unexpected is happening with us: as we get to know them, we start to sympathize with both Thomas and Agnes. At the end of the film, the two ways are not only cross each other but also merge into a symbolic scene: the two protagonists now have a common, beautifully structured path to close the past and move forward. And just as the whole story begins with a release (Jan Thomas is released from prison), at the end of the story, we witness the release, or better saying, the delivery of the two protagonists. Thomas's final confession of what eventually happened is the moment of redemption for both, and in addition, a coming-of-age situation for the young man, who finally takes responsibility for his mistake.

Music, the sound of the organ has a key role, or better saying, an integral part of the story. In the quieter first section, Thomas uses mainly body language and facial expressions, and what he is going through, his deepest thoughts and emotions, and his search for atonement are expressed through music. Agnes is more demonstrative in expressing her anger, and so in her part, the music almost completely disappears, except their first meeting, which is very symbolic: when the woman visits the church with her class, Thomas performs a stirring version of Simon and Garfunkel's famous

"If he can't get a second chance here, then where?"

song, *Bridge Over Troubled Water* – he is not only playing it for the kids, but also for Agnes, asking for her forgiveness by the language of music.

Interestingly, the original Norwegian title is completely different from the English translation, yet both perfectly reflect the deepest meaning of the film – just from a different perspective.

The Norwegian title is *deUsynlige* (*The Invisibles* – mirror-translated into English, intentionally written as one word!), which refers obviously to the fact that a man with such a background, with such a burden, tries to remain invisible for society because he is afraid of people seeing his past on him, but at the same time the wordplay suggests that he cannot and does not have to hide from God (Deus). He is the ONE who sees everyone, everywhere, every time. The English title (*Troubled Water*) summarizes the film from a different approach and refers to many roles of water: it represents cleansing, danger, the past that can pull us back, the new beginning and even baptism.

Flashbacks in both stories are in connection with the water during the film, and more strongly in the final scene: the waves push them down again and again like the past pulls them back, until their common story. The final scene shows every nuance of human reaction from both sides: anger, denial, emptiness, vengeance, fear and then peace. We witness Thomas' "rebirth" in the water and Agnes finding peace. Surprisingly, she accepts Thomas' explanation, she returns to his husband and their adopted daughters, and she can finally move on – both literally and figuratively.

This film confronts us with many moral questions. How much would we be able to accept someone like Jan Thomas once we knew about his past? Could we forgive him? Will Jan Thomas be saved, and is it possible for him to start a new life? The director cleverly places Thomas in a church: in this place, it is seen more obviously, how difficult it is to live up to the stated principles. We can experience it by the pastor, Anna, whose naive faith has not been tested by evil things before. Meanwhile, the church warden sees all, knows all, and it seems that he forgives all. We never know exactly, what is happening finally with Thomas, as the director leaves the question unanswered, but, as the warden says at one point in the church: "if he can't get a second chance here, then where?"

The question is the same in *Corpus Christi*, although the film itself – beyond the story of the protagonist – focuses on more general topics. It is about social exclusion, the nature of faith and power, the sometimes-cruel dogmatics of institutionalized religion. And after the film, it is us who must decide: is a man who builds on a lie but speaks the truth deserves punishment?

The 20-year-old Daniel has been released from the juvenile jail on condition that he starts working in a sawmill. He would already be at work when he takes a last walk around the idyllic landscape and will be attentive to the church bell ringing. Daniel realizes the sound coming from a distant village as a divine sign. He was drawn from the Catholic faith in a rigorous institution, and Father Tomasz, who treated him particularly humanly, was a real role model for him. Daniel, who is searching for himself, realizes that he can accomplish the most by hiding in a priestly reverend.

His tragedy is that despite all his desire to become a priest, he has no chance due to his criminal background because of his past, the society does not allow him to do so.

The film brings contradictory questions which are difficult to resolve. Here is a charismatic guy who, while building his new identity on a lie, spectacularly benefits the village community with his vigorous sermons and visceral sincerity. He shakes up the village and, in parallel, finds his own voice, evolving from mass to mass.

However, this idyll proves to be only temporary. Getting to know the inner life of the community, it becomes clear that while far less violent than the jail, villagers live according to equally cruel rules that expel some. The village groans with the trauma of a terrible road accident that has claimed several lives, and as usual, it is easy to find someone to blame.

The film raises the question of what it means to be a Christian today. We can go to church, we can throw money into the money box, but if we are unable to forgive, we only follow the teachings of the church on the outside.

The film *Corpus Christi* articulates church criticism in a way that not only does not question religious foundations but also reinforces them. It helps to confront the pretence, to take on the real feelings instead because often we get close to God at the cost of sins, mistakes, for which the protagonist of *Corpus Christi* (and *Troubled Water!*) is the strongest example for whom Christian faith would not have meant anything without being in jail.

Jesus accepted sinners and murderers as his disciples insofar as they repented of their sins and broke with their past. He would probably have accepted Daniel, too. But is it possible for Daniel to leave his juvenile sins behind? Is it possible to be punished for past mistakes and, after compensating them, move on, starting with a clean slate? We may soon realize that the real question is not whether God forgives us or not, but whether we forgive others who have sinned against us. Hence the greatest dilemma and the most difficult situations: at least in forgiveness, we can imitate Christ if we are unable to live without sin.

The Eucharist is the place of repentance and forgiveness in the Christian religion, in which we live in everything that the protagonists of these two stories want to experience on the part of society and of people. The main characters' desired purpose is the same as that of the faithful when they take the body and blood of the Lord. These movies are mirrors keep us in mind: are we people able to confess and repent of our sins, or do we just expect this from others? And are we capable of forgiveness, or do we just expect it from God?

ARTICLES

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GYULA HOMOKI
ERIK KORMOS
GABRIELLA RÁCSOK



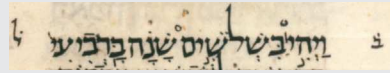
Communion table set. Cluj Napoca, Reformed Church on Farkas Street.

Sándor Enghy

WHY IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND EZEKIEL WITHOUT THE MASORAH?

1. The book of Ezekiel immediately marks the first Masorah as a sub loco.¹ The reason for this is that two Masorahs belong to the first line of Ez 1,1 in the Leningrad Code:

ב ויהיו בשלשים שנה ברביעי ל . Consequently, the letters ב and ל . Instead of the two Masorahs, the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia mentions only one, the letter ל , since the text details ויהיו בשלשים שנה occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible. The two circelli indicates this in the text: ויהיו בשלשים שנה



² The reason for the sub loco in the Hebrew Bible, according to the literature, is that based on the sign ב written on the right side of the codex, there are no two such passages, and only the ל on the left side of the column is confirmed by the only place here.³ Recent research no longer deals with this, and it does not exist anymore at Ez 1,1 such a Masorah.⁴ The one-off occurrence of the passage is also clear in The Cairo and Aleppo Codex.⁵ However, in defense of

¹ ELLIGER, K. – RUDOLPH, W. (eds.): *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997, 896. [Henceforth: BHS-T]

² FREEDMAN, D. N. (ed.): *The Leningrad Codex*, Facsimile Edition, Grand Rapids – Cambridge – Leiden – New York – Köln, W. B. Eerdmans – Brill Academic Publishers, 1998, 564. [Henceforth: *Leningrad Codex*]

³ כתובה מימין לשור , ולא נמצאה כל דרך להלום אותה... כתובה משמאל לו , והיא המכוונת לצירוף הזה DOTAN, Aron (ed.): *Masora Thesaurus Masora of Codex Leningrad (B19a)*, Tel Aviv University Copyright, 2014. Accordance edition hypertexted and formatted by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 5.0 Paragraph 50755 of 188 358.

⁴ א א פרק א , *mgketer.org*, URL: <https://www.mgketer.org/mikra/1/1/1/mg/70> Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 18.

⁵ ל MP – PEREZ CASTRO, F.: *El Codice de Profetas de El Cairo*, Tomo VI, *Ezequiel*, Madrid, Instituto de Filología Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas – Departamento de Filología Bíblica y de Oriente Antiguo, 1988, 15.; GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN, M.

the Masorettes, we must say that the text **שְׁנָה בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וַיְהִי** is sub loco in the Hebrew Bible, but in the Leningrad Codex, there can be logic in the **ב** on the right side of the column too, namely the text **שְׁנָה בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וַיְהִי** may occur only once in the Hebrew Bible, but the phrase **בְּשָׁלְשִׁים** also twice besides this, and moreover the text

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים as well:⁶

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (2Kings 25,27)

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (Jer 52,31)

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים שָׁנָה (Ez 1,1)

At these places, the term never means merely thirty, but thirty-seven, and both places are related to Jehoiachin. This differs from Ez 1,1, but at the same time the text links the significance of the name of Jehoiachin to Ezekiel:

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (2Kings 25,27)

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (Jer 52,31)

וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים שָׁנָה (Ez 1,1).⁷

In both cases, the passages are about a turn. About the happening, what came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, that Awel-Marduk the king of Babylon in the year, when he began to reign, he had mercy on the king of Judah, Jehoiachin, and released him from the prison.⁸ Ezekiel refers in the first words of his book to the turn in the life of God's people. There will be destruction, but destruction is not the last word of YHWH. This is proclaimed by the liberation of Jehoiachin thanks to Awel-Marduk.⁹ The Babylonian captivity proclaims in the life of God's people that the people cannot ignore the lessons of history through which they could have understood their responsibility for YHWH's word, but they could also know that YHWH's aim in the process of history is not the final destruction. As a sign of this, Jehoiachin's figure hints at the very beginning of the book in Ez 1,1. We do not question the issue of sub loco; there is indeed something different in The Leningrad Codex and the Hebrew Bible. But while the one-time occurrence of **שְׁנָה בְּשָׁלְשִׁים וַיְהִי** is unambiguous, the reference to Jehoiachin is also clear in two cases. The change for the better of the king's fate, however, could also carry in itself as a sign of the future that actually YHWH formed for his people instead of destruction, by means of obedience, since Jehoiachin gave himself up to the Babylonian army

H. (ed.): *The Aleppo Codex*, Provided With Massoretic Notes and Pointed by Aaron ben Asher, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University Bible Project, Magnes Press, 1976, יחזקאל א שכד.

⁶ BHS-T: **וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים שָׁנָה** , **וַיְהִי בְּשָׁלְשִׁים** , **בְּשָׁלְשִׁים**

⁷ BHS-T: 673, 895, 896.

⁸ 2Kings 25; Jer 52.

⁹ "... demonstrate that YHWH is G-d, so Israel must be prepared to recognize impending world events as evidence that YHWH is G-d of all creation. Ezekiel's appointment as watchman for Israel entails that he bears responsibility for preparing the people for what is to come, not only the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah, but the restoration of Jerusalem and Israel as well." – SWEENEY, M. A.: *Reading Ezekiel, A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Macon, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2013, 161.

(2Kings 24,12) during the siege of Jerusalem, and the promise of Jeremiah was fulfilled in his fate: he truly received his life as a gift (Jer 21, 9).¹⁰

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (2Kir 25,27)

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (Jer 52,31)

If we examine the grammatical formulation of Ezekiel's vision even further, we come to a shocking conclusion. The וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה also really occurs in this way only twice in the Hebrew Bible, and in both cases referring exclusively to Jehoiachin :

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (2Kings 25,27)

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (Jer 52,31)¹¹

Twenty-six years after the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar dies. If this happens on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month, his successor disposes very quickly of the liberation of Jehoiachin - even on the day of his death (בַּעֲשָׂרִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה לַחֹדֶשׁ - Jer 52,31), or on the day after his burial (בַּעֲשָׂרִים וְשֶׁבַע לַחֹדֶשׁ - Kings 25,27). With the liberation of Jehoiachin, Awel-Marduk demonstrates very quickly that compared to his cruel predecessor, the wind has turned, and the restoration of the kingdom of David was beginning with his reign.¹²

It cannot be accidental that while the thirty-seventh year is related only to Jehoiachin, the thirtieth year only to Ezekiel, in this form:

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (2Kings 25,27)

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה (Jer 52,31)

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה (Ez 1,1).¹³

The perspective of the future in YHWH's plan given through Jehoiachin and the captivity was proclaimed by Ezekiel. The phrase נִתְּנָה (2 Kings 25,30), which the Septuagint translates with a passive verbal form: ἐδόθη - aor. pass, can refer

¹⁰ "Jehoiachin had given himself up to Nebuchadnezzar before the end of the siege (see 2 Kings 24:10-12). According to Isho'dad, he did that in obedience to the order of Jeremiah. There is no explicit reference to an order in the biblical text, but the Syriac author is probably referring to Jeremiah 21:9: 'Those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live'." – CONTI, M. (ed.): *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Downer Grove, IVP Academic, 2008, 240.; "a portent to the Jews of better days to come." – GINGRICH, R. E.: *The Book of 2nd Kings*, Memphis, Riverside Revised Edition Printing, 2005, 44.; See Jer 21.

¹¹ BHS-T: וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה

¹² "Twenty-six years after the fall of Jerusalem, about 560 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar died. Jewish commentators explain that the Babylonian king died on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month and was buried on the twenty-sixth. Then, the next day, on the order of his successor, Evil-Merodach, his body was exhumed and dragged through the streets of the capital...It was on this same day that Evil-Merodach issued the decree that released Jehoiachin, king of Judah, from prison (v. 27). We are not told why the Babylonian monarch extended this generous gesture to his Jewish prisoner, but perhaps he did it to dramatize his own noble character in contrast to that of the cruel Nebuchadnezzar. The Book of Kings, in its last four verses, ends on a bright note. The last surviving sovereign of Judah is set free from the rigors and humiliation of Babylonian prison. He is shown honor and good will. Here is a hopeful sign that a better future is in store for God's people. Someday the exile will end, and ultimately the Davidic monarchy will be restored." – DILDAY, R. OGILVIE, L. J. (ed.): *1, 2 Kings*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, *The Preacher's Commentary Series 9*, 1987, 479.

¹³ BHS-T: בַּשְּׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה , בַּשְּׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה

to YHWH's participation in history.¹⁴ It looks as if the wording sees the person of YHWH in the act of Awel-Marduk, when the king gave the allowance of Jehoiachin as a permanent supply (נְתִיחָה) according to his daily needs throughout his life (2 Kings 25,30).¹⁵ It looks as if the Septuagint also reinforces this conception with the passive verb form¹⁶ to emphasize the decisive role of YHWH in the process of history, who has the power that the future unfolds through the work of his hands in spite of the misery of captivity. This is the message expressed by the first Masorah in this book, even if in Ez 1,1 the thirtieth year has no clear¹⁷ explanation in the literature and the thirtieth year is considered as the thirtieth year of captivity, in line with its beginning, or the year is even associated with Ezekiel's calling, counting from the reformation of Josiah, 621, thus placing the calling of the prophet at 591. In the calculation of the thirtieth year, some go back to the fall of Samaria, until 721, or until the beginning of the reign of Manasseh, claiming that here it is about the thirtieth year of his reign. Some see Ezekiel's age in the year, but for some the year may indicate the time of Jehoiachin's captivity when Ezekiel compiled and made his visions regarding the future public. Those who reckon with the correction of the text take the beginning of the captivity as a starting point (597/6), from which the date of the rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar and the captivity of Jehoiachin in the same year, with its third year, 595/4 can be calculated. Only the same text correction solves the third year of Zedekiah, with its beginning 596/5. This calculation collates the third year of Zedekiah's kingdom with the fifth year of Jehoiachin, and thus we get the year 593/2. It is included in the text as a result of other such corrections in Ez 1,1, as the time of the visions is the third year instead of the thirtieth year, namely the הַשְּׁלִישִׁית בַּשָּׁנָה, or the הַשְּׁלִישִׁי שָׁנָה instead of בַּשְּׁלִישִׁים שָׁנָה. These arguments are nicely summarized in Whitley's aforementioned study.

Of course, in addition to the thirty or the three years, there is an explanation for the thirty-seven years too in 2 Kings 25,27 and Jer 52,31. We read about this in Albright's study, where we find several results. The one is 561/560, which is even exactly the first year of the reign of Awel-Marduk (taking up office in 562) and at

¹⁴ RAHLFS, A. – HANHART, R. (hrsg.): *LXX – Septuagint*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006, Rahlfs Tagged Greek Septuagint (LXX1) Kraft/Taylor/Wheeler Septuagint Morphology Database v. 4.7, Verse 10098 of 28971, ἐδόθη.; Murray calls the mediopassive Niphal passivum – MURRAY, D. F.: Of All the Years the Hopes: Or Fears? Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-30), *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 120, 2001/2, 245–265, 251–252.; KUSTÁR, P.: *Az Ószövevény megértése*, Debrecen, Debreceni Ref. Theol. Ak., 1988, 17, 31.

¹⁵ “Schon im AT gibt es das ‘Passivum divinum’, die Passivkonstruktion zur Vermeidung der Nennung Gottes.” – MACHOLZ, C.: Das ‘Passivum divinum’, seine Anfänge im Alten Testament und der ‘Hofstil’, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, Volume 81, 1990/3-4, 247–253, 249.

¹⁶ “wurde... gegeben” – KRAUS, W. KARRER, M. (hrsg.): *Septuaginta Deutsch, Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009, 489.

¹⁷ “scholars regard the problem of the ‘thirtieth’ year as inscrutable” – WHITLEY, C. F.: The ‘Thirtieth’ Year in Ezekiel 1,1, *Vetus Testamentum*, Volume 9, 1959/3, 326–330, 327.

the same time also the year of the liberation of Jehoiachin, who was at this time in captivity for thirty-seventh years.¹⁸ For Albright, the first year of Ezekiel's prophetic mission is namely 593/2, and this is the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity because the beginning of his captivity was 597/6. The end of Ezekiel's mission is 568/7, and it may be the thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin. A logical explanation is from 597/6 the thirty, 568/7, and from that seven more years, namely 561/560. So are connected in 2Kings 25,27 and in Jer 52,31 the thirty-seven years and in Ez 1,1 the thirty years. According to this calculation, the prophet's prophecy became public at the end of Ezekiel's mission since the beginning of Ezekiel's prophetic mission (593/2), and the beginning of Josiah's captivity (597/6) almost coincide. Albright rearranges and corrects the text by this calculation.

This calculation attempts to clarify a chronological datum, and chronology is not part of Masorah research, but it bears a remarkable correlation regarding what the Masorah indicates in the case of וַיְהִי בַּשְּׁלִשִּׁים שָׁנָה (Ez 1,1). Suppose in the different views, the thirtieth year connects the liberation of Jehoiachin and Ezekiel on the basis of the Masorah. In that case, the message of Ezekiel must be taken truly seriously, for he speaks as a mature messenger of the Lord, who has already entered the service,¹⁹ in the catastrophic situation, so his audience has no excuse, for they hear the servant of the Lord, who sees the distant future, and the way to it is marked by historical events for those who are informed based on the word of YHWH.

This chronology also has its basis in the provisions for the ordination of priests.²⁰ Therefore the Masoretes, at this point, also drew attention to Jehoiachin, whose release indicated that Ezekiel's message could be taken seriously for YHWH's valid plans.

¹⁸ ALBRIGHT W. F.: The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preexilic History of Judah, With Some Observations on Ezekiel, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 51, 1932/2, 77–106, 86, 97, 101.

¹⁹ “thirtieth year.” Interpreters have debated the significance of this date. The most obvious assumption seems to be that the prophet was referring to his age at the time he received his prophetic call. As Ernst Vogt, among others, has argued, it would be altogether natural to expect from Ezekiel, a man born to the privileged priestly class, a reminder that it was in the time of his full adulthood (cf. Luke 3:23)...” – VAWTER, B. – HOPPE, L. J.: *A New Heart, A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, Grand Rapids – Edinburgh, Eerdmans – Handsel Press, 1991, 25.; “He was thirty years old at the time of his call (Ezek. 1:1), the normal age for a priest to begin his ministry (Num. 4:1–3, 23)... Numbers 8:23 states that the priests began their work at age twenty-five, but during the first five years, they were ‘learning the ropes’ in preparation for their twenty years of ministry (thirty to fifty). According to our calendar, Ezekiel was called on July 31, 593 B.C. He had spent his first five years as an exile in Babylon and was now ready for service.” – WIERSBE, W. W.: *Be reverent*, Colorado Springs, Cook Communications Ministries, 2005, 11.

²⁰ “the age of ordination in Num 4; 1 Chr 23:3” – ALLEN, L. C.: *Ezekiel 1-19*, Dallas, Word Books, *Word Biblical Commentary* 28, 1994, 21.

However, it is not a problem to compare the definition of the thirty years²¹ to the date of the Josiahic Reform because Ezekiel wants nothing more than YHWH's will to be the starting point in the life of the people, and then he reforms his own life accordingly. The essence of his calling is not to proclaim YHWH's destructive judgment but to announce His deliverance, which He can accomplish against the power of Babylon as well. The release of Jehoiachin from prison indicates this way.

Since YHWH's power is unlimited in the given political situation, his intention is unchanged in the life of his people, and his purpose is liberation, taking his will seriously makes sense because only in this way can his liberation be completed in the people's life reformed according to His word.

Suppose the liberation of Jehoiachin is indeed a milestone in the salvation of YHWH. In that case, its fulfillment in the people's life guided by His will is also proclaimed by the Masorah, for thirty years after finding the code, it could remind the people of captivity not only of his unfaithfulness but of YHWH's fulfilled salvation in which fulfillment Josiah's liberation served only as a signpost, claiming the accomplishing of the liberation of YHWH, and awakening in it the responsibility of man in the unfolding of the processes.

Whoever in any case fastens the thirty years mentioned in Ez 1,1 to the great festival associated with the jubilee year also ends up at Jehoiachin, according to the sign of Masorah because the 25th year (Ez 40, 1) is the half of the fifty-year cycle, to which we add the five years of Ezekiel's calling.²² This is interesting because the idea of jubilee is the paradigm of the entire Old Testament thinking, since it is about the essence of YHW's delivery. He is the Creator, who can deliver his people, even against Babylon by his power. History proves that Israel is His property, who can only accept the gift of deliverance from His hand as from His Lord (Lev 25,55).²³

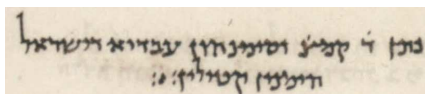
²¹ "The most likely possibility is that it refers to the date of the discovery of the law in the temple and the beginning of the reforms of Josiah (ca. 622–621 B.C.). Ezekiel was called to his ministry in the fifth year of the exile (v. 2), which would have been 593/592 B.C., thirty years after the discovery of the law and the reforms of Josiah. This explanation seems to fit best the context of the message and the chronology of the entire book." – COOPER, L. E.: *Ezekiel*, Nashville, Broadman & Holman Publishers, *The New American Commentary* 17, 1994, 59.

²² "Another hypothesis links the thirtieth year with the apparent reference to jubilee year chronology in 40:1. The deportation under Jehoiachin is identified as the halfway point in a fifty-year cycle, five years after which Ezekiel received his call (25 + 5 = 30...)" – ALLEN: *op. cit.*, 21.

²³ „ergibt sich aus dem Kontext von V.55, daß sich der Anspruch auf das Volk aus dem Exodus herleitet. Die theologische Grundstruktur von Lev 25 kann man durchaus paradigmatisch für das Alte Testament nennen. In der Mitte dieser Theologie steht JHWH, der Gott Israels, der als Schöpfer und Eigentümer Herr des Landes und als Befreier Herr der Israeliten ist. Als Schöpfer und als Herr ist er zugleich der Stifter der Beziehung zwischen Gott, Volk und Land. Denn er ist es, der durch die Befreiung des Volkes das Wohnen Israels im Land und damit die Beziehung zwischen Land und Volk erst ermöglicht. Der Exodus mündet nämlich nicht in die Landnahme der Israeliten, sondern in die Gabe des Landes an das Volk. Gott ist ganz der Gebende, Israel ist ganz das Empfangende." GRÜNWARDT, K.: *Das Heiligkeitgesetz Leviticus 1 -26 Ursprüngliche Gestalt*, Berlin – New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1999, 345.

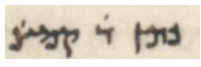
One of the gifts of this deliverance after the liberation from Egypt is Jehoiachin's release from prison, to whom the Masorah refers.

2. A peculiar Masorah can be read in connection with Ezekiel in The Leningrad Codex:



²⁴ The Masoretes sometimes constructed such sentences in order to summarize for the readers of the text the subject of their notes, which indicated concrete coherences, referring to given Bible passages.²⁵ The comment is not at a Bible verse in the book of Ezekiel, but at 2Chron 28,5 and means: The faithful servants of Israel were killed - עבדיא דישראל הימנין קטילין. Interestingly, the Cairo Codex also mentions it in Ezekiel, opposite to the text of The Leningrad Codex, which does not make this remark at Ez 32,25. ²⁶ The analysis of this sentence formulated by the Masoretes can be found in the literature,²⁷ but not its interpretation. We know that the remark brings the occurrences of נחון, and Weil also makes known the mnemonic words of the texts:²⁸ Ex 5,16 עבדייא; Isa 33,16 ניין הימ; Ez 32,25 קטילין; 2Chr 28,5 דישראל, and practically the sentence is composed of words, read in the order of the named books as follows: Ex 5,16; 2 Chron 28,5, Isa 33,16, Ez 32:25: עבדיא דישראל הימנין קטילין.

In addition to the four forms with Qamets (נחון), Weil also lists all forms with Patach spelling of the word (נחן).²⁹ It is not accidental that the four forms with Qamets

came into view for the Masoretes: ³⁰ They also display this, as we can see: נחן ו קמץ. Because it must have been important to them, and later sources only went back to this source too, which can be read in The Leningrad Codex, and this is reported.³¹ The question, of course, is why is the context that draws attention to the killing of Israel's faithful servants so important, and why can this only be read at 2Chron 28,5 and not at Ez 32,25 in The Leningrad Co-

²⁴ *The Leningrad Codex*, 729.

²⁵ "The Masoretes would sometimes construct artificial sentences as a means of remembering the location of the occurrences constituting the topic of a Masoretic note." – KELLEY, P. H. – MYNATT, D. S. – CRAWFORD, T. G.: *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, Introduction and Annotated Glossary Page*, Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans, 1998, 159.

²⁶ PEREZ CASTRO: *op. cit.*, 155.

²⁷ MARCUS, D.: *Scribal Wit, Aramaic Mnemonics in the Leningrad Codex*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2013, 32.

²⁸ WEIL, G. E.: *Massorah gedolah: iuxta codicem Leningradensem B 19a.*, Volumen I, Roma, Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 2001, 49.

²⁹ WEIL: *op. cit.*, 316.

³⁰ *The Leningrad Codex*, 729.

³¹ GINSBURG, C. D.: *The Masorah: Compiled from Manuscripts, Alphabetically and Lexically Arranged*, Volume II, *Caph – Tav*, London, Carl Fomme, 1883, 295.

dex. It is certain that the content of the section in the book of Ezekiel is a judgment over Egypt.³² Egypt's ally was Assyria, the power that ruled a major part of the world, yet suffered a defeat against Babylon and came to the homeland of the dead as did its ally, Egypt, which faces the same fate. Egypt is proud of its power, but its pride does not save him, just as in the case of Assyria, because YHWH humiliates the haughty, arrogant world empires.³³ Interestingly, the Masoretes apply the killed people of the foreign powers - הַלְלִים הַלְלֵי חָרָב - with another word - קטילין - to the faithful servants of Israel. As if this change of word would express that the understanding of the text gets a particular coherence because of the four words - נָתַן - written in the same way, in the light of the events marked by the word. The judgment on Egypt among the world empires is already understandable because this alternative was also given to the people of the Babylonian captivity by YHWH, at the lowest point in the history of the people. For the present, besides Assyria, it is only Egypt that demonstrates YHWH's power, but the way of the future is already marked by these events: the world empires are in YHWH's hands. The destruction of Israel by his enemies has occurred many times in history, but just as YHWH pays attention to the superpowers and they do not slip out of His hands, in the same way, the lot of his people does not remain hidden from Him when it falls victim to bloodthirsty hands. It is possible that the original meaning³⁴ of קטל in the remark of the Masoretes serves to express exactly this role of sacrifice; moreover, they hardly had to deviate from such a meaning of הלל, with its similar content,³⁵ which occurs elsewhere besides Ezekiel too. Regarding the content in this respect, it includes Psalm 44,23, which Paul cites³⁶ in connection with those murdered for His sake, as a faultless lamb sacrificed in the sanctuary, suffering innocently as a martyr, paying the price of faithfulness in the world that fights a battle against God.

³² “Verses 21-30 give an accounting of the various nations that Egypt will join in the depths of Sheol. First among them is Assyria, Egypt's erstwhile ally before it was destroyed by the Babylonian Empire in 609 BCE. Assyria had once ruled the world, but now it lies among the dead — as Egypt will lie.” — SWEENEY: *op. cit.*, 162.

³³ “The downfall of Egypt is here told by the allegory of a great cedar that was chopped down. The king of Egypt thinks himself the equal of God, and yet he is much less than the king of Assyria, whose power, dignity and greatness far exceeded him. And yet, the king of Assyria was utterly destroyed because of his pride and arrogance. In this chapter, we see that God humbles proud kings and destroys their kingdoms.” — BECKWITH, CARL L. (ed.): *Ezekiel, Daniel*, Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2012, 155.

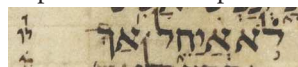
³⁴ “to kill a sacrificial animal, symbolic act accompanying a treaty ceremony... the same in Heb., as an Arm.” — KOEHLER, Ludwig — BAUMGARTNER, Walter: *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, transl. RICHARDSON, M. E. J., Leiden, Brill, 1994, Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 3.6. 1092. 1969. (Henceforth: *HALOT*)

³⁵ הלל — *HALOT*, 319–320.

³⁶ ALAND, B. — ALAND, K. — KARAVIDOPOULOS, J. — MARTINI, C. M. — METZGER, B. M. — STRUTWOLF, H. (hrsg.): *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece 28.*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013, 852.

In remembering the faithfulness of those who lived in the age of the psalmist, Paul encouraged those who suffered for Christ (Rom 8,36).³⁷ In the psalm, the term sheep to be slaughtered – צֹאן טְבֹחָהּ – is in contact with the text of Isa 53, at several points where the text depicts the defining feeling of Israel in the form of a sheep gone astray: כִּצְאֵן חָעִינוּ - Isa 53,6. One verse later, the suffering servant of the Lord is a lamb led to the slaughterhouse: בְּשֹׁהַ לְטֹבַח - Isa 53,7. In the same context, however, we hear about the true servant of the Lord (צְדִיק עֲבָדִי - Isa 53,11), and even about His woundedness: מַחֲלָל - Isa 53,5. The root of this wounding is the same³⁸ as can be found in the text marked by the Masoretes regarding the killing of Israel's faithful servants. Yes. Whatever the reason is for the Masoretes to find it essential to remark the killing of Israel's faithful servants, they obviously understood the connections marked by the words, but they wanted to keep the phrases in their original contexts as they appear in the texts. However, they also knew that although their role is not the same as that of the authors of the texts, they have the responsibility for the correct interpretation. The slain of Egypt (הַלְלִים - Ez 32,25) therefore die under judgment, in profane circumstances, and YHWH has shown His power as Lord of a world empire over those who made the lot of their servants difficult (לְעִבְדֶיךָ - Ex 5, 16) when they had to make bricks without straw. In the Book of Job, the expression of killing is קָטַלְנִי: - Job 13, 15. In the case of Job's words, those who interpret the text must make a choice because the text expresses either hopelessness or hope, and

this depends on the interpretation of the Ketiv - Qere:



³⁹ There is a denial in the written form of Job's text (לֹא), and the form read is the statement (לִי).⁴⁰ Weil lists similar cases in the Hebrew Bible.⁴¹ He who decides on Job's hope⁴² knows that Job believed in the Lord of life, in the throat of death. Finally, it will turn out that this belief is right. Maybe this is why the Masoretes chose the

³⁷ "... they were being killed for his sake, that they were counted... as sheep for the slaughter. The comparison ... is made with sheep set aside to be sacrificed in the sanctuary. The animal set aside to be killed had to be flawless; similarly, they were innocent, but like sheep they were being killed for his sake. It is as if they were signed to suffer as martyrs, what Kidner calls the 'price of loyalty in a world which is at war with God.' ... The verse is quoted by Paul to encourage people in his day that they might have to suffer persecution and death for Christ's sake (Rom. 8:36). His use of the psalm no doubt also reminded Christians of the faithfulness of these people." – ROSS, A. P.: *A Commentary on the Psalms*, Volume 2, 42-89, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2013, 52.

³⁸ "Malachi 1:12 also claims that the condition of the altar 'profanes' (מְחַלְלִים) the name of the Lord, which is the same word that is used to describe the servant in 53:5" – SCHIPPER, J.: Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 132, 2013/2, 315–325, 323.; BHS-T: הָלַל.

³⁹ *The Leningrad Codex*, 812.; "Choosing Between 'What is Written' and 'What is Read'" – BALENTINE, S. E.: *Job*, Macon, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006, 212.

⁴⁰ BHS-T: 1240.

⁴¹ WEIL: *op. cit.*, 316, 210, 1795 – לֹא לִי.

⁴² "Job knew that if he had taken away his life, the same one who is the Lord of Abraham, would have given it back to him. He believed that God was able to make alive those who had died." – SIMONET-

expression for the killing of the faithful servants of Israel (קטילין)? We do not know. However, we see that the misery of Pharaoh's servants (לְעַבְדֵיךָ - Ex 5,16) has become graver in the later history of Israel, and suffering has become determining in the life of YHWH's servants. This is also seen in the suffering of the servant whom Isaiah portrays as a dumb sheep (וּבְרֹחֶל - Isa 53: 7). But Rachel's bitter weeping also indicated in Ramah the extent of the suffering in Israel's life: רָחֵל (Jer 31,15). Obviously, the Masoretes did not want to read anything into the text, but they could understand the role of Judah in relation to Israel. For example, why an unfaithful Ahaz could fall into the hands of Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל - 2 Chron 28, 5) and why the Israelites could capture two hundred thousand women, boys and girls from among their compatriots (2 Chron 28, 8). Here, too, the text is interpreted, and during their interpretation, they incorporate the word (דִּישְׂרָאֵל) into their remark about the killing of the faithful servants of Israel. 2 Chron 28,5 still makes Israel victorious over Judah because of the infidelity of Ahaz. However, the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity is approaching in the description, and then the deliverance from captivity at the end of the book. Would it be accidental that the remark of the Masoretes about the killing of the faithful servants of Israel with the name of Israel

(עַבְדֵי דִישְׂרָאֵל הַיְמִנִין קְטִילִין) came during the editing of the Canon to the end⁴³ of the Hebrew canon in our hands? The question is justified even if this book was not always at the end of the Canon, as it is in The Leningrad Codex. It is at the beginning of Ketuvim, and according to the plans, it will be placed there in the latest edition of the Hebrew Bible. If we take the edition currently in our hands as a basis, which was undoubtedly made based on a definite theological concept, we must discover unconditionally in it the faith of the editors of the Canon.⁴⁴ If the Canon is eschatological, the Masoretes were also thinking in messianic perspectives of it. Even the Book of Chronicles itself may have motivated them to note the killing of Israel's faithful servants (עַבְדֵי דִישְׂרָאֵל הַיְמִנִין קְטִילִין), where the processes reach only one stage in the history guided by YHWH, but Israel, in his sufferings, remains a servant of YHWH, in whom His glory is manifested in great perspectives: עַבְדֵי-אֱתָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל (Isa

TI, M. – CONTI, M. (eds.): *Job*, Downers Grove, IVP Academic, *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture Old Testament 6*, 2014, 76.

⁴³ “The Hebrew Bible ends with Chronicles, for now, anyway. So it is in the standard scholarly edition, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, and in many critical introductions to Hebrew scripture... So it has been in every major printed edition of the Hebrew Bible since the fifteenth century... However, this will not be the case for the next edition, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, which will place Chronicles at the head of the third section of the Hebrew Bible, the Ketuvim, rather than its end. In this way, BHQ will fully conform to the order of its base text, the Leningrad Codex B19a, which, along with many Masoretic manuscripts, presents a sequence of books different from what has become traditional for printed Hebrew Bibles.” – GALLAGHER, E. L.: *The End of the Bible? The Position Of Chronicles in the Canon?*, *Tyndale Tyndale Bulletin*, Volume 65, 2014/2, 181–199, 181–182.

⁴⁴ “The final text exists in a composed and theologically significant order... Chronicles as the end of the Hebrew Bible leaves the reader with an eschatological and messianic hope that is meant to strengthen their faith.” – SHIELDS, P. E.: *Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Hebrew Scriptures, Channels: Where Disciplines Meet*, Volume 3, 2019/2, 1–16, 13–14.

49, 3). But it is also true that the servant's task is to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring the saved Israel: לִי עֲבַד לְהִקְיִם אֶת-שְׁבֻטֵי יַעֲקֹב וּנְצִירֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁיֵב - Isa 49, 6) back. For YHWH thinks about Israel, cares for him, and does not forsake or abandon His people (Ps 94,14). It seems as if the Masoretes kept the entire history of Israel along with its sufferings in mind when, in a theological context, they did not get stuck in a state of dividedness and hostility. This may have been expressed in their remarks about the killing of Israel's faithful servants (עֲבָדֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַיְמִינִין קְטִילִין), beyond the momentary victory of Israel over Judah, in the context of the whole history, and they also saw that Israel paid a great price during the carrying out of his mission got from YHWH as His servant. If we stick to the theological viewpoint of the author of the Book of Chronicles that the book is a summary of the Old Testament canon,⁴⁵ we can rightly assume the Masoretes' awareness: they saw not only an event in Israel's victory over Judah but the entire history of Israel under YHWH's leadership along with its suffering and with its vulnerable state.

It is unambiguous to Ezekiel that the people can count on YHWH's power by which He defeats death when they cannot do anything for themselves in the state of death. He has to prophesy to the whole house of Israel (כָּל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל), to the dried bones (Ez 37,11), and YHWH brings His people out of their graves and brings them into the land of Israel, from the destruction of captivity: אֶל-אֶרֶץ מִתְּיָשָׁרָאֵל - Ez 37,12.

The preservation of the water in Isa 33,16 was important for the Masoretes probably because of the emphasis on YHWH's power since they associated it with the faithful servants of Israel: הַיְמִינִין - נְאֻמֵּיהֶם in their remark. For in Isaiah, YHWH judges Assyria as He declared it. The reason for the judgment of His anger's rod (Isa 10, 5) is the haughty heart of the Assyrian king and the boasting of his proud eyes (Isa 10,12). YHWH's own people may learn from the punishment (Isa 33,14) too, but His purpose is still not destruction but life. He offers the possibility of this, and he who closes his eyes because he does not even want to see evil, one of the rewards for him is that his water will be constant, that is, sure: מִיַּיִם נְאֻמֵּיהֶם: (Isa 33,16). Many formulations of the Old Testament prove that water is life. The reason for the judgment of God's people is that they have forsaken Him, the spring of the living water: מְקוֹר מַיִם חַיִּים - Jer 2,13. YHWH could not be characterized in this way if water were not related to life. This also follows the idea that identifies the spring of living water with YHWH: מְקוֹר מַיִם חַיִּים אֶת-יְהוָה: - Jer 17,13. Thus if water is life just as YHWH is the source of life, he who lives according to his will, depicts the source of life from which he feeds, and this possibility remains for him because YHWH assures it to be unfailing and lasting. From all this, the Masoretes might have rightly thought of the expression of trustworthiness concerning Israel, especially those who believed

⁴⁵ "... the Chronicler's primary intent was to summarize and abstract the message of the Old Testament in order to seal the collection of Holy Scriptures as the canon." – KOOREVAAR, H. J.: *Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Old Testament Canon*, in STEINBERG, J. – STONE, T. J. (eds.): *The Shape of the Writings*, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 2015, 207–235, 222.

in YHWH; in other words, they were faithful to Him.⁴⁶ Their life, however, remained not without suffering, and even death did not avoid them. Furthermore, such near-death conditions were, however, trials of faith, under whose weight it was easy to doubt YHWH's power and love. That is why Job's faith was so great: even in the jaws of death, he knew that he remains YHWH's, who is his Redeemer, Who lives, and finally will rise up on his dust: וַאֲנִי יְדַעְתִּי נְאֻלִי הוּא וְאַחֲרָיון עַל-עַפְרָר קָוָם: - Job 19,25. For Károli, the power of YHWH over death is more unambiguous; for that reason, he translates the verse: "I know as well properly that my Redeemer lives, and that the last man rises from the earth."⁴⁷ Thus if we take the place of the Book of Chronicles according to The Leningrad Codex as a basis, where it introduces the Ketuvim after the two parts of the Canon, the Masoretes can speak about the killing of Israel's faithful servants in connection with the verses (עבדיא דישׂראל הימנין קטילין) containing the verb נָתַן, exactly in the Book of Chronicles, because Israel's response⁴⁸ to YHWH's deeds is the man's behaviour. The Masoretes were probably able to orient themselves based on the canonical order of the Leningrad Codex, which ended at the time of their work,⁴⁹ and they were thinking from historical perspectives. It is understandable then that they have seen the misery of the servants of YHWH already in Egypt (נָתַן לְעַבְדֵיךָ - Ex 5,16 - עבדיא), but also that, how Israel itself causes the suffering of Judah (ישׂראל נָתַן - 2Chron 28,5 - דישראל). If they really had an insight into history, they could know about the killing of the prophets (וְאַחַר-נְבִיאֵיךָ הָרַגְנִי - 1Kings 19,14), about the lots of innocent blood shed (דָּם גָּלִי שָׁפַךְ - 2Kings 21,16), which filled Jerusalem. In this great historical context, however, the power of YHWH over everything was evident to the Masoretes: He triumphs over all hostile power (קטילין - Ez 32,25 - הגללים נָתַן), and those who understand this proclaim the reign of YHWH with their life, reacting with their behaviour to His deeds (הימנין - Isa 33,16 - נָתַן מִיַּמְיוֹ נְאֻמָּנִים:). The Masoretes discovered in the verb נָתַן this way and summarized the blessing of YHWH's omnipotence, in addition to the manifestations of his power, his ultimate victory over evil, and the roots of the theodicy, hidden in the problem of the death of the righteous. There was no question for them that the only way one can react correctly to the deeds of YHWH in history is with allegiance to Him, for which they also saw examples. As clarified above, the Cairo

⁴⁶ "הימן... to believe, trust... אמן ... הימנותא ... faith, trustworthiness ... הימן" – SOKOLOFF, M.: *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, Ramat-Gan – Baltimore, Bar-Ilan University Press – The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, 379, 380. "credit ... confide ... אמן" – JASTROW, M.: *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature*, London – Leipzig, G.P. Putnam's Sons – W. Drugulin, 1903, 347.

⁴⁷ *Szent Biblia, Az Az: Istenec Ő Es Wj Testamentvmanac Prophétác Es Apostoloc által meg iratott szzent könyvei*, Vizsoly, 1590, 523.

⁴⁸ "die Antwort Israels" – DE PURY, A.: *Der Kanon des Alten Testaments*, in RÖMER, T. (hrsg.): *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Zürich, Theologischer Verlag, 2013, 3–24, 14.

⁴⁹ "... mnemonics are part of a vast collection of notes written by scribes over the course of the early centuries of the Common Era (500–1000 CE)... Aramaic mnemonics that the author has assembled from the Leningrad Codex (ML), the oldest extant Hebrew manuscript of the entire Bible which is dated to 1008 CE." – MARCUS: *op. cit.*, ix.

Codex notes this connection by the Masoretes at Ez 32,25 too, confirming the fact that Ezekiel speaks of nothing else but of YHWH' dominion above all that will be seen in His victory over Babylon and his power will be not called into question by the killing of Israel's faithful servants. In the canonical order of The Leningrad Codex, the annotation of the Masoretes, in the Book of Chronicles, sees the authentic response of Israel to the history governing deeds of YHWH as a lesson of history (יִשְׂרָאֵל נִתְּן – 2Chron 28,5 - דִּישְׂרָאֵל) no longer as a cause of suffering, but as a source of blessing, which is attested by the killing of the faithful servants of Israel. The book of Ezekiel in the YHWH's history-shaping work is rather a station on the path of YHWH's victory towards the ultimate goal (קִטְלֵי־נֶפֶשׁ - Ez 32,25 - Ez 32,25), which will be evident despite the circumstances of the captivity which was equivalent to death.

Abstract

Although the remarks of the Masoretes may not belong to the text of the biblical Canon because of the age of their formation,⁵⁰ they contain information that is essential for the understanding of the biblical texts. This is evidenced by the first notation of the Masoretes in the book of Ezekiel in the reference to Jehoiachin and the killing of Israel's faithful servants.⁵¹

Keywords: Masorah, Ezekiel

⁵⁰ KUSTÁR, Z.: *A héber Ószövetség szövege*, Budapest, Kálvin János Kiadó, 2010, 89.

⁵¹ The text was corrected by Pálma Füst-Molnár.



Hand of John the Evangelist holding a vessel. 15th century wooden statue, Bartfa.

Gyula Homoki

THE “TROUBLED CONSCIENCE” AND THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE IN THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

Speaking of the Augsburg Confession (henceforth *AC*), Wedekind once compared it to one of those grandiose medieval cathedrals which seem rather cold and not particularly beautiful seen from without, but crossing its threshold can lead one to discover the wonders of its painted windows which reveal celestial truths.¹ One window in this “cathedral” seems to shine unusually bright to the eyes of the Protestant wanderer who has visited many other cathedrals and seen plenty of windows in them. We could call it the window of the human conscience. Whether speaking of repentance, ecclesiastical usages, good works, the marriage of the priests, Mass, the sacrament of confession or ecclesiastical power, reference to the human conscience is repeatedly made within the articles. According to my calculation, the *AC* mentions at least forty times the term “conscience” (*constientia*), which becomes an unexpectedly high number in light of the fact that, for example, the Second Helvetic Confession refers to the expression only three times out of which two are citations from Scripture.²

The question automatically arises, why does the *AC* keep repeating the term “conscience” and what role does it play in the doctrinal arguments. In this essay, I intend to look at the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone as presented in the *AC*, and investigate how the human conscience relates

¹ WEDEKIND, A. C.: Confession, in BROWN, J. A. (ed.): *Lectures on the Augsburg Confession, on the Holman Foundation: Delivered in the Theological Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Gettysburg, PA, First Series, 1866-1886*, Philadelphia, Lutheran Publication Society, 1888, 356–378, 356.

² The calculation is made on the basis of the text of The Augsburg Confession, in KOLB, Robert – WENGERT, Timothy J. (eds.): *The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000, 27–105.

to this particular doctrine. In order to provide a sufficient answer to this question, however, I believe that I first have to draw attention to the notion of the “troubled conscience” of the late medieval times, and then, secondly, to Luther’s own spiritual fights within his own conscience which led him to the “discovery” of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. I believe, only in light of these two contexts we can grasp fully the wonders of this “painted window”.

Uncertainty of the Middle Ages and the “troubled conscience”

It is common for historians to refer to the later Middle Ages as an age of peculiar crisis and uncertainty.³ The whole continent experienced challenges of various kinds during this period. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the consequent threat of invasion by the “heathen” Turks had shaken the confidence in the concept of a Christian Europe.⁴ The massive urbanization through which the traditional social structure had started to collapse, created a demographical crisis that became an ever-present basis for peasant rebellions and political and economic tensions.⁵ Furthermore, the great geographical discoveries and the Copernican revolution threw the previously long-held cosmological worldview into question.⁶ Most likely, however, the Black Death and other horrible epidemics, such as syphilis, influenced the *Zeitgeist* in the most radical way. The effects of the Plague cannot be underestimated. Starting in 1347, it swept over Europe relatively quickly, and as a consequence, at least thirty percent of the population fell victim to it.⁷ The sight of rotting human corpses on the streets was commonplace in the fourteenth century. There was no family which would not have been affected by the Black Death. This universal experience of the omnipresence of death – not surprisingly – had deeply formed and characterized the common morale by generating a certain kind of general uncertainty among the people on every level of society.⁸

Such a mentality of *memento mori* was dealt with in various ways by the common people. On the one hand, there was a widely popular attempt by the ordinary masses to control the threatening forces of death, illness, famine or drought by different kinds of spells, charms, amulets and rituals in order to secure “human survival in an age where all the essentials of life were beyond most people’s control or foresight”.⁹ However, it would be a serious error to consider the “Christian Middle Ages”

³ LINDBERG, Carter: *The European Reformations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, 23ff.

⁴ CUNNINGHAM, Andrew – GRELL, Ole Peter: *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 1.

⁵ LINDBERG: *op. cit.*, 38.

⁶ CUNNINGHAM – OLE: *op. cit.*, 2.

⁷ LINDBERG: *op. cit.*, 26.

⁸ BOUWSMA, William James: Anxiety and the Formation of Early Modern Culture, in Id.: *A Usable Past, Essays in European Cultural History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, 157–189, 162.

⁹ CAMERON, Euan: *The European Reformation*, Oxford, University Press, 2012², 17.

only a myth, as some modern historians tend to believe¹⁰ since these superstitious phenomena were deeply linked to Christian religious (mostly sacramental) beliefs, thus formulating a certain form of complex "folklorized Christianity"¹¹. Although these tendencies were often condemned by the official theologians, the Church itself overlooked – in many cases even fed – such popular beliefs.¹² While the folkloristic Christian practices were directed to overcome the uncertainties of the present life, when it came to the matters of the after-life, they were useless. At this point the individual inevitably had to render himself to the authority of the Church and the already well-developed penitential circle which had to be followed strictly in order to get the assurance of heaven.

Although Baptism had been regarded as a point of departure from which one begins his road to eternal life, by the early thirteenth century, almost everybody could agree that it is the sacrament of Penance that made it possible for the believer to reach it.¹³ The penitential process became an extremely elaborated system: confessors were advised by a high number of manuals on how to interrogate the faithful; catalogues of sins were fabricated to "help" the penitent in precisely defining his committed act; the requirements for a proper feeling of guilt and sorrow were laid down together with the precise nature of contrition and that of a full confession.¹⁴ Despite the fact that this whole process was undoubtedly meant to console the terrified conscience of the individual and secure him about his eternal fate,¹⁵ in reality, it often caused even more anxiety, since the penitent could never have been sure of whether he had met sufficiently all the requirements for satisfaction and forgiveness.¹⁶ Even if the penitent could complete adequately all the essential obligations of the confessor and his sins were thought to be forgiven, it was only a temporary condition, since there still remained plenty of other sins which had to be suffered in the coming life in the fires of the purgatory, albeit potentially lessened by other meritorious acts of this life.¹⁷ This had led to an unprecedented upsurge in piety among all levels of society. It is recorded that Charles V paid for thirty thousand masses to be said for his soul in purgatory¹⁸ and by the fifteenth century everybody from the average middle class

¹⁰ For example, Delumeau. See OZMENT, Steven E.: *Protestants, The Birth of a Revolution*, London, Fontana, 1993, 35.

¹¹ CAMERON, Euan: *Enchanted Europe, Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 75.

¹² HUIZINGA, Johan: *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth, Penguin – Pelican Books, 1955, 156–158.

¹³ TENTLER, Thomas N.: *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977, 65.

¹⁴ Idem., 238ff.

¹⁵ DUGGAN, Lawrence G.: Fear and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 75, 1984, 153–175, 164.

¹⁶ BOUWSEMA: op. cit., 164.; TENTLER: op. cit., 347.

¹⁷ OZMENT, Steven E.: *The Age of Reform (1250-1550), An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980, 216–217.

¹⁸ BOUWSEMA: op. cit., 162.

could afford at least one mass annually to be said for his soul.¹⁹ People generally participated in numerous pilgrimages, partook in rites dedicated to the saints and relics, and purchased indulgences for reasonable prices which were specially designed and sold to remit the punishment in purgatory.²⁰

It is beyond question that it was the sincere desire of the penitent to secure his salvation that made him participate in the penitential system of the Church by all these different means. Nonetheless, to a large extent, what he found was a circle of mechanistic and external activities which failed to provide the necessary comfort both in this and the coming life.²¹ By the outbreak of the Reformation, as a consequence of this adopted “merchandizing” mentality in matters of salvation²² and the countless ongoing inner conflicts had alienated the Church from the common people.²³ It had become a “psychologically and financially oppressive”²⁴ institution that neither pastorally nor doctrinally could offer consolation to the faithful in the midst of the terrors of the late Middle Ages. Quite to the contrary, it rather increased the burdens of the “troubled conscience” by various prescribed penitential methods.

Luther and the *Anfechtungen*

Such was the religious-spiritual climate of the era in which Martin Luther stood up, offering a radically new way to the terrified souls of the masses. His road to the Reformation, however, must be understood as a “twofold story”, namely “one internal and one external”.²⁵ He himself related his inner conflicts to his discoveries within the realm of theology and doctrine: “I did not learn my theology all at once. I had to ponder over it ever more deeply, and my spiritual trials were of help to me in this”.²⁶ The earliest record of these spiritual trials – or as he named them *Anfechtungen* – dates back as early as 1505 during his university years in Erfurt when he mentions that already at that time he made scrupulous confessions to his pastor.²⁷

At least two main experiences might have influenced Luther in this turning inward. Firstly, in 1503 he suffered a major injury on his leg, which served as a reminder for him of the ever-present possibility of sudden death and of the fact that he would have to appear before the Judge. The consciousness of sin and the threat of judgment consequently drove him to the penitential circle of the church, just like

¹⁹ CAMERON: *European Reformation*, 23.

²⁰ OZMENT: *Protestants*, 13.; LINDBERG: *op. cit.*, 29–30.

²¹ OZMENT, Steven E.: *The Reformation in the Cities, The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-century Germany and Switzerland*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1975, 20ff.

²² CAMERON: *European Reformation*, 24.

²³ LINDBERG: *op. cit.*, 40.

²⁴ OZMENT: *Age of Reform*, 222.

²⁵ BRECHT, Martin: *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, 176.

²⁶ Idem., 82.

²⁷ Idem., 47.; Cf. BEGALKE, M. Vernon: Luther's *Anfechtungen*: An Important Clue to His Pastoral Theology, *Consensus*, Volume 8, 1982/3, 3–17.

so many others, as has been presented above. Secondly, the philosophical climate of the university in Erfurt "provided him with concepts that were to become essential to the Reformation".²⁸ Prior to Luther's enrolment, the university had already been dominated by the *via moderna* (also called nominalism) which – in contrast to the Aristotelian-scholastic *via antiqua* – emphasised the role of human experience and the authority of Scripture against the philosophical speculation around universal concepts.²⁹ It was also the *via moderna* that insisted on the notion of a "personal God" against the scholastic understanding of God as "the highest being".³⁰ In search of this personal God and peace for his intense *Anfechtungen*, Luther entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. However, his monastic life rather intensified than relieved his spiritual turmoil. In spite of his regular self-examination and scrupulous confessions, he could not find any assurance that God was actually forgiving his sins.³¹ In the portrait of this struggling monk, who, scrupulously confesses his sins sometimes for six hours, who climbs the steps of the Santa Scala in Rome while reciting the Our Father in the hope that it would save the soul of his grandfather, who constantly fears that at the moment of his sudden death, he would immediately be punished by Christ and sent to the purgatory, in this portrait, we can see the shared common practice of the multitude of people and the troubled conscience of the individual characteristic of the late Middle Ages.³²

It is only in this personal context that we can understand and trace Luther's gradual turning away from scholasticism to Augustine and to the Scriptures, from the medieval practice of penance and indulgences to the attack on them, from the terrific *Anfechtungen* to the consoling discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which according to his own testimony, opened the gates of Paradise to him.³³ By 1518 Luther certainly became sure that as long as the human conscience sees only the law of God and consequently the judgment which awaits for those who do not fulfil this law, but neglects the grace of Christ as it is presented in the comforting word of the gospel, it remains terrified and incapable of seeing God not only as a judge who punishes one according to His own righteousness but also as the Father who declares the believing sinner righteous in faith.³⁴ This was the personal breakthrough of Luther: the discovery that man cannot earn salvation by the works of the law, he cannot contribute to his righteousness by participating in

²⁸ OBERMAN, Heiko Augustinus: *Luther, Man between God and the Devil*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1989, 120.

²⁹ MCGRATH, Alister E.: *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, 109ff.

³⁰ OBERMAN: *op. cit.*, 123.

³¹ HENDRIX, Scott H.: *Martin Luther, Visionary Reformer*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 2015, 37.

³² BRECHT, *op. cit.*, 80ff.; OZMENT: *Age of Reform*, 223ff.

³³ OBERMAN: *op. cit.*, 153.

³⁴ ZACHMAN, Randall C.: *The Assurance of Faith, Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993, 2, 21ff.

the penitential circle of the church, since the righteousness by which one is declared righteous is the alien righteousness of Christ, thus man is and has to be completely passive in the reception of his justification.³⁵ In sum, “the reformatory discovery consisted formally in the discovery of the word of promise which forgives and makes certain”.³⁶ Justification by faith alone was “a doctrinal expression of a felt reality”³⁷ of assurance for Luther, and it became “the achievement of inner freedom and release... a universal religious attraction of the Reformation to both learned and illiterate laymen alike”.³⁸ I suggest that from very early on, Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone served as a comforting idea for the people of the late medieval times and provided a psychologically consoling means by which the “troubled conscience” of the individual could reach a state of certainty regarding his own salvation.

The Augsburg Confession and the human conscience

Turning now to the Augsburg Confession, first it should be noted that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is not only “the principal and most important Article of the whole Christian doctrine”, but is at the same time the chief motif of the *AC*.³⁹ Its occurrence is not limited to Article IV only but is present as a regulative and decisive power in every other article as well. Given this central role of the doctrine of justification, it comes as no surprise that reference to the human conscience is also made with few exceptions in every article of faith. The reason for this, I suggest, lies in the fact that the *AC* perfectly combines the two contexts I have just presented above.

Firstly, it is truly aware of the oppressive nature of the Roman Catholic teaching and practice of the penitential circle with its negative psychological impact on the human conscience. The numerous references to the human conscience, therefore, are chiefly presented in order to demonstrate this reality of the Middle Ages: consciences were burdened by the various traditions (XV,2), they were not set at rest through the works and could not hear the consolation of the Gospel (XX,19), celibacy caused “abominable, terrifying disturbance” to the conscience (XXIII,6), likewise the sacrament of confession could never give peace to the spiritual turmoil of the individual (XXV,9) and other new institutions greatly terrified and tormented the conscience (XXVI,14-15). Thus, the frequent allusions to the human conscience serve as a dark background before which the light of the doctrine of justification would be shown; they are important in order to demonstrate the negative aspect of the doctrine, the impossibility of any attempt at self-justification, “that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works” (IV,1).⁴⁰

³⁵ ALTHAUS, Paul: *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1966, 228.

³⁶ BRECHT: *op. cit.*, 236.

³⁷ RYRIE, Alec: The nature of spiritual experience, in RUBBLACK, Ulinka (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, 51.

³⁸ OZMENT: *Reformation in the Cities*, 77.

³⁹ VALENTINE, M.: Justification by Faith, in BROWN: *op. cit.*, 107–146, 108.

⁴⁰ *Idem.*, 109ff.

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God" is the essence of the doctrine of justification, as stated by the Confession, which immediately continues with the clarification that "This whole teaching must be referred to that struggle of the terrified conscience, and it cannot be understood apart from that struggle" (XX,17). It is apparent that according to the AC, there is a clear connection between the experiences of the "terrified conscience" and the comfort that the doctrine of the *sola fide* can bring to it.

Secondly, Luther's "doctrinal expression" of the consoling reality of his discovery is presented as the ultimate cure for the spiritual diseases of the human conscience that were caused by the vague attempts to achieve eternal salvation and peace in this life through human merits and works. Men are "justified as a gift on account of Christ's sake through faith" is therefore the positive aspect of the doctrine which only has to be believed by the sinners so that it can become true assurance for them (IV,2-3). The AC does not make mention of Luther and his discovery at any point, since it is not the personal matter of a "lowly German monk" any more, but a public battle for the cause of Christ and the very true message of the gospel, which is worth fighting for.⁴¹ Though Luther is not explicitly referred to within the Confession, one might detect his implicit presence throughout the articles in the frequent references to the *Anfechtungen* of the human conscience which now became a general expression of the human condition of the era.

In conclusion, the AC presents the doctrine of justification by faith alone as a ground-breaking rediscovery of the gospel which offers pastoral consolation for the disappointed human conscience which did not find such comfort in the manifold penitential practices of the Roman Church. Only by seeing the "emotional heft" that this doctrine carried to the common people in the sixteenth century we can understand why so many people perceived the Reformation so readily and thought this to be a cause that it is worth dying for.⁴² Nothing seems to be a better final word than the testimony of a contemporary layman, Lazarus Spengler the court clerk of Nürnberg, who, writing in defence of Luther in 1519 and naming first the erroneous practices of the Roman Church, concludes by saying:

"To my mind, and as I think any rational man will easily see, Luther has removed such scruples and errors with sound Christian evidence of holy, divine Scripture; and for this we owe him well-earned praise and thank."⁴³

⁴¹ PAULSON, Steven D.: What Kind of Confession is the Augsburg Confession?, *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie*, Volume 56, 2014/1, 12–34, 28ff.

⁴² OZMENT: *Reformation in the Cities*, 47ff.; RYRIE: op. cit., 56.

⁴³ Cited in OZMENT: *Reformation in the Cities*, 76.

Abstract

In this essay I consider the question of what role the human conscience plays in the *sola fide* (justification by faith alone) argument of the Augsburg Confession. Already the frequent reference to the term suggests that the “conscience-concept” is crucial to the formulation of the Lutheran doctrine. I argue that the context of the Middle Ages which led to Luther’s personal breakthrough in the field of theology already determines the way in which the teaching was brought to life. The Confession portrays the individual’s inner struggle in a vivid way and thus makes the claim that the *sola fide* teaching releases these tensions.

Keywords: Augsburg Confession, human conscience, justification by faith alone, *sola fide*

Erik Kormos

THE EUCHARIST AND THE POSSIBILITY OF COMMUNION SERVICE AT AN ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE: THE REALITY AND A PERSPECTIVE

Introduction: The Communion Service of an Imaginary Ecumenical Conference

I must admit that the idea that led me to write this article came from life. I have been to many biblical conferences where everything works without tension, where everyone shares the essence of their denominational affiliation and also their biblical vision. Nevertheless, this does not create a Babel of confusion, but I have experienced a growing openness towards one another. All this happens, of course, as long as we do not offend each other's denominational boundaries and issues such as adult baptism (in its baptismal form of immersion) and the taking of communion from each other's table as the realisation of real communion.¹

In practice, we can say that there are as many communion customs as there are theological orientations in history, from the historical churches to the denominations.² Obviously, it is not the externals that would cause tension, but the perception of what is *sign* and *signified One*, which is the essence of communion theology.³ Since this is an extremely delicate area, no one dares to venture into organising an ecumenical Communion Service because, so it is to speak, "peace is better." However, there may be occasions when

¹ In addition to this, the problem of ecumenical communion is a serious challenge for which no solution has yet been found. See VANDERWILT, Jeffrey: *A Church without Borders, The Eucharist and the Church in Ecumenical Perspective*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1998, 3–9.

² BARCLEY, William: *The Lord's Supper*, London – Leiden, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 1–11, 106–129.

³ On this point I used the terminology of Calvinist theology, although it is possible to formulate the distinction in other ways, see BIERMA, Lyle D.: *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism, A Reformation Synthesis*, Louisville – Kentucky, Columbia Theological Seminary – Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, 81–85.

we have to mutually renounce matters of principle, or even of practice, in order to become a communion of communion at all.

Many of us are familiar with the story of the communities that were forcibly created in the camps during the deportations. There came a major holiday when the prison camps were at rest, Christians came together, found bread and even water instead of wine. No one was concerned with the theological connection between the sign and the thing signified, no one was interested in the denominational affiliation of the other, nor was it necessarily the most important consideration whether or not the one who broke the perhaps mouldy bread even had the ordination to ministry. In Endre Gyökössy's (1913-1997) description of random house-ecclesia (ecclesiola),⁴ we also know of the "absolutely outrageous" practice whereby the faithful were not satisfied with the communion in church and therefore gathered in houses.⁵ What happened there? They read one of the Communion verses, broke bread, distributed it among themselves, and then spread the rest with fat and ate it. The emphasis was on fellowship as real communion, not on sacrality.⁶

Of course, we can all be flexible enough on the basis of the "necessity makes the law" principle, but would this work in peacetime, when there are no constraints? Could we put aside our prejudices, our status quo, and our theological stubbornness in order to experience as one community the possibility of a special union with the Lord?

In 19th-century America, a Protestant society based on Puritan principles emerged.⁷ In that culture, it was natural, virtually irrespective of denomination, that not only ordained ministers but also lay people should serve in the church. Baptisms and the distribution of Communion Service were also performed by lay people, who were ordained as deacons or elders. It was quite natural that virtually any member of the congregation could preach the Word.⁸ There are several legacies in Seventh-day Adventist theology that stem from this background.⁹ These include 1) open communion service, 2) thinking in terms of Zwinglian symbolism,

⁴ GYÖKÖSSY, Endre: *Életápolás, Vallás- és családlélektani esszék és tanulmányok*, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 1993, 108–121.

⁵ SCOTLAND, Nigel: *The New Passover, Rethinking the Lord's Supper for Today*, Oregon, Cascade Books, 2016, 76–92.

⁶ Here it should be noted that much depends on how we regard this "second sacrament" (see later this designation). The Lord's Supper tends to express sacrality, the Communion Service tends to emphasise communion. In this essay I want to emphasise communion. SUERTE Felipe, Virgilio T. J.: *The Lord's Supper, Eucharist, Mass... What's in A Name?, The Names of Eucharist in the 2002 GIRM*, Indiana, Author House, 2010, 25–30.

⁷ ZAFIROVSKI, Milan: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Authoritarianism, Puritanism, Democracy, and Society*, New York, Springer, 2007, 26–46.

⁸ WUTHONW, Robert: *The Restructuring of American Religion*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, 14–35.

⁹ Here I will necessarily stick to the custom of the denomination I know best. It would not be credible to omit the influence of my own denomination on my thinking.

and 3) the inseparability of the sign and the signified One.¹⁰ Most important of all, however, is that from the 1820s until 1863, when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially founded, members of twelve different denominations formed the community known as the Great Advent Movement.¹¹ According to Dutch theologian P. Gerard DAMSTEEGT (1944-), *it was the most ecumenical movement in the world ever*, and hence Adventist theology still carries this ecumenical openness, although it does not really live it in practice.¹²

In what follows, I do not wish to attack theology as a discipline within any field, as I am well aware that each discipline has its place. I would like to go into one thing in some detail: how the Lord's Supper, as Communion Service (emphasizing the word: communion)¹³ could be celebrated in a joint conference of a community of up to twelve denominations. How could the New Testament texts be interpreted in such a way as to encourage such an endeavour? Based on what I know so far, all the churches I know of might be able to act in accordance with this interpretation, though they would certainly have to give up one thing: the status quo. As part of communion introspection and repentance, I believe we can do that.

Sacred Order and the place of Holy Communion

Not everyone is familiar with the concept of sacral order.¹⁴ In Roman Catholic theology, seven sacraments were distinguished, derived from the word "sacramentum" in the Latin Vulgate.¹⁵ It is sometimes translated from the Greek *μυστήριον* when it does not use as *mysterium*. Martin Luther distinguished the two Latin terms (*mysterium* and *sacramentum*) and tried to restore the original meaning of the Greek *μυστήριον*.¹⁶ From this point of view, we Protestants no longer speak of seven sacraments in general, but mainly two: baptism and Lord's Supper (or Communion Service).

These two sacraments inadvertently and unintentionally suggest an order: since children are baptized into the church community and become "eligible" for Communion at confirmation, it is natural that in order, there should be baptism first, followed

¹⁰ MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION (ed.): *Seventh-day Adventist Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Washington D. C., General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2002, 211–219.

¹¹ KNIGHT, George R.: *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, Nampa – Oshawa, Pacific Press, 2010, 21–38, 277–291.

¹² The Religious Situation in the United States During the Early Part of the 19th Century, DAMSTEEGT, P. Gerard: *Foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1997, 3–10.

¹³ BRADSHAW, Paul F. (ed.): *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, London, SCM Press, 2013, 123–124.

¹⁴ BARCLEY: *op. cit.*, 98–106.

¹⁵ GRÜN, Anselm: *The Seven Sacraments*, transl. CUMMIG, John, London, Continuum, 2003.

¹⁶ Sacramental theology in Historical Perspective, MARTOS, Joseph: *Deconstructing Sacramental Theology and Reconstructing Catholic Ritual*, Oregon, Resource Publications, 2015, 42–44.

by Communion.¹⁷ We, as Seventh-day Adventists, practice adult baptism in our denominational community. However, our Church Order speaks of “open” Communion.¹⁸ This means that if someone comes to our congregation who is of another denomination, such as Reformed, and wants to join in our Communion Service, they are free to do so according to their own conscience. When this order was introduced into our church, the starting point was precisely what is known as a feature of the Great Advent Movement: people of all denominations were baptised. So, in practice, we accept the baptism of children in this respect, and if someone becomes an Adventist from, for example, Reformed, adult baptism is for him or her as if they were converted to Adventism.¹⁹ Thus, adult baptism for those who have already been baptized by infant baptism is an expression of belonging to another church (in case of us to Seventh-day Adventist Church), not of a relationship with the Lord that has already been sealed.

The situation is more complex in the case of children within our own denomination, so it is imperative to mention this situation because of the lessons to be learned from the method of addressing this situation. Since our children are not baptised, they should be able to take communion from the beginning. We do not encourage this but only help them to integrate into the communion community through careful education.²⁰ Usually, when they are already being taught in the faith and the time of their baptism is approaching, we offer them the opportunity to partake in communion. The essence of “careful education” is the “alternative” Communion. The unleavened bread for the occasion is homemade by us, and the chalices, or rather now small cups, are filled with unripe grape juice,²¹ which is provided by our deacons.²² On these occasions, two loaves of unleavened bread are made, and only one is put on the table to be blessed by the pastor. The other is for the children, the “unconsecrated”. A portion of the grape juice is also given to the children after the communion service, which is also *not* put on the table. With this practice, the children slowly become part of the sacramental community of the congregation, even before their baptism.²³

¹⁷ VANDER ZEE, Leonard J.: *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship*, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 2004, 135–247.

¹⁸ GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS (ed.): *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Nampa, Secretariat General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists – Review & Herald Publishing Association, 2016, 125–128, URL: https://www.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/seventh-day-adventist-church-manual_2015_updated.pdf Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 10. (Henceforth: *SACM*)

¹⁹ We make an exception for those who come from an adult baptism community. In their case, if they have lived their faith there and have been baptised by adult baptism by immersion, we accept this in full and only ask for a public confession of the Adventist fundamental beliefs. See *SACM*, 49–50.

²⁰ *SACM*, 124–126.

²¹ BACCHIOCCHI, Samuele: *Wine in the Bible, A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages*, Berrien Springs, Biblical Perspectives, 1989, 155–170.

²² We must definitely mention the habilitation work of Dr. Imre Tokics written in Hungarian. The English title is *Wine in Biblical Cultures*. See TOKICS Imre: *Bor a bibliai kultúrákban*, Pécel, Adventista Teológiai Főiskola, 2021, 155–162. (English abstract, 19–21.)

²³ *SACM*, 124–126.

The issue of child-rearing also points to the applicability of the “necessity is the law” principle in peacetime. It also raises the question of what biblical-theological approach underlies this?

The background to this is the canon-critical approach to the New Testament,²⁴ which takes the order of the Gospels as the actual order and does not subject it to historical criticism. This is based on the premise that the practice of baptism by John the Baptist is merely a precursor to baptism. From the point of view of the Christian religion as a covenant, we can only speak of baptism on the basis of Mt 28:19-20 – this is when Jesus calls his disciples to teach and baptise on behalf of the Trinity.²⁵ Since we also read of baptism between the penitential baptism of John the Baptist and the revelation of Jesus (John 4:2), they must also be regarded as baptismal precursors in the sense of the sacramental order. In this order of interpretation, the Last Supper occurred earlier than the call to baptism.²⁶ Thus, people can be integrated into a church community by the Communion occasion alone, without baptism. Although there is a debate in denominational theology about this, baptism by immersion in this way is thought of more as formally incorporating one into the covenant of the church, and therefore can even be repeated if one leaves the church by disciplinary means and then returns.²⁷

In addition to New Testament canon criticism, we can also use the approach of tendency criticism.²⁸ In the early church, we read about an agape meal in Acts 2. In this case, it is a rare opinion to claim that this is communion. It is more typical to emphasize the custom of the agape meal, but this points to the state of the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem: “*Every day they continued ... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*” (NIV Acts 2:46) On the contrary, in the Pauline Christianity, in Corinth, we read the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper from Paul, who was not present at the Last Supper.²⁹ Tendency critics separate the Jerusalem and Pauline Christian communities and suggest that Paul, as a theologian, introduced the Lord’s Supper by using the words of institution for this purpose. From this separation, in addition to the fact that we can see that there were already “denominations” (1 Cor 1:12), we can also observe that there

²⁴ A prominent representative of the canon-critical movement is Frank Thielman. It is worth noting how he treats the link between the Gospels and the communion verses in 1 Cor, see THIELMAN, Frank: *Theology of the New Testament, A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*, Michigan, Zondervan, 2005.

²⁵ CUNEO, Terence: *Ritualized Faith, Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, 169–177.

²⁶ VANDER ZEE: *op. cit.*, 37–45, 101–121, 161–187.

²⁷ The only New Testament text that knows of this practice is Acts 19:1-5. The “baptism of John” is repeated by the Apostle Paul with the “baptism of Jesus”. For the practical implementation of this see: *SACM*, 49–50.

²⁸ RICHES, John (ed.): *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, From 1750 to the Present*, Volume 4, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 203–209.

²⁹ HABLE, Gary R.: *Christ, Our Passover, A Practical Look at the Last Supper*, Hable, Private Publication, 2014, 118–125.

was a common arrangement. Both Acts 2 and 1 Cor 11 record an agape meal.³⁰ In NIV 1 Cor 11:21 we also read about abuses “for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk”, which may have been in Jerusalem. What is the solution? On the one hand, the sacralisation of the meal, and on the other, the symbolisation of the words of institution. The latter means taking only symbolic quantities of bread and wine to avoid the state of *getting drunk* (μεθύω) and *hungry* (πεινάω).³¹

The Gospel of John does not mention the words of institution but the story of the multiplication of the loaves in John 6 is symbolic of Jesus as the “bread of heaven”.³² This symbolism may be more important than the sacral order or the sacralisation of the Lord’s Supper. It is no longer possible to find out when the sacral Lord’s Supper was replaced by the communal meal in Christian practice. What can be seen, however, is that what we consider so important in church practice: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, etc., does not clearly follow from the Pauline ordinance. It is very likely that the Constantinian turn changed attitudes to the Lord’s Supper, when the concept of sacrality, which had its origins in pagan religions, changed.³³ Regrettably, this has also haunted us Protestants. The custom of pouring consecrated wine on the ground and destroying the remaining holy bread in a fire is well known. Although this may seem a ‘sacred custom’, it is a pagan rite from a religious phenomenological point of view: a continuation of the drinking of Mother Earth and the sacrifice to the god of Fire.³⁴

In the light of what we have seen so far, we must ask what we would put aside from our Communion dogmas in order to build community if we are at all willing to give up something that may not be so important. Sacralization is the point at which we part ways.³⁵ Not because we are better or worse, or even holier than others, but because our churches and denominations have been created for different reasons in history. This “reasons” means that there is a demonstrable connection to it in our theological tradition. This, so far as tradition can lead us to a better understanding, but when it becomes other traditionalism, it leads to distortion. My former professor Jenő SZIGETI

³⁰ HARRIS, R. Laird: *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures*, Oregon, Wipf and Stocks, 1995, 191–233.

³¹ The term μεθύω is typically used to refer to the sacrificial meal of the Dionysus cult. In contrast, the term πεινάω may be an expression of Neo-Platonist abstinence, here grotesque. Between these two extremes, the aim was not necessarily to sacralise, but to turn away from alien cults. It is questionable whether communion in this sense would have been a cultic act. BARTH, Markus: *Rediscovering the Lord’s Supper, Communion with Israel, with Christ, and Among the Guests*, Oregon, Wipf and Stocks, 1988, 71–76.

³² Idem., 77–100.

³³ VIOLA, Frank – BARNA, George: *Pagan Christianity?, Exploring the Roots of Church Practices*, Cambridge, Tyndale House, 2002, 24–27.

³⁴ LEEUW, van der Gerardus: *A vallás fenomenológiája*, transl. BENDL, Júlia – DANI, Tivadar – TAKÁCS, László, Budapest, Osiris, 2001, 30–36, 305–314.

³⁵ VANDERWILT: *op. cit.*, 69–108.

(1936-2020), often quoted what is very apt:³⁶ “*Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.*”³⁷ – Perhaps it is time to rethink this.

If community is more important than tradition, then a symbolic interpretation of communion may open the way to its realisation. Of course, it is only an option, not an exclusive one, just a way of giving up something that is not clearly important, but at the same time getting something on which the future of Christianity may depend.³⁸

A Specific Communal Practice of the Seventh-day Adventist and Roman Catholic Churches

Interestingly, I would like to touch here on a communal practice that we Seventh-day Adventists³⁹ and Roman Catholics practice,⁴⁰ and that is known only in a few Methodist congregations outside of our own.⁴¹ Surely everyone is familiar with the custom of the Roman Pope washing the feet of the cardinals. Pope Francis went further, washing and even kissing the feet of some migrants, which aroused strong feelings even among politicians.

We in the Seventh-day Adventist Church consider foot-washing to be an introductory part of the Lord’s Supper, and as such, we take the text of John chapter 13 and apply what is written there.⁴² After the sermon, the elder, who serves with the pastor, usually reads selected passages from Jn 13 and then calls the congregation to perform the foot-washing ritual “according to local custom.”⁴³ In a separate room, men and women actually wash and dry each other’s feet after prayer. The same is also recommended for spouses for pastoral care purposes. During the service, those who remain in the congregation sing, and then, when everyone has done the foot washing, after a common hymn, we read the verses of 1 Cor 11 and distribute the communion.

³⁶ Although the statement quoted here does not originate from him, after the communist regime change, he published several articles and studies in this spirit. In English see SZIGETI, Jenő: Eastern Europe – Which way?, in LEHRMANN, Richard – MAHON, Jack – SCHANTZ Børge (eds.): *Cast the Net on The Right Side... , Seventh-day Adventists face the “isms”*, Bracknell, European Institute of World Mission – Newbold College, 1993, 133–139.

³⁷ PELIKAN, Jaroslav: *The Vindication of Tradition*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1984, 65.

³⁸ Everything that Jenő SZIGETI understands in this article in 1993 has been exactly confirmed by the year 2000. Our churches did not change after that, they remained on the old path. In fact, in a sense, we have been turning back to tradition since about 2010. See SZIGETI: *op. cit.*

³⁹ SACM, 123–124.

⁴⁰ SENN, Frank C.: *The People’s Work, A Social History of the Liturgy*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2010, 158–161.

⁴¹ GARRIGAN, Siobhán – JOHNSON, Todd E.: *Common Worship in Theological Education*, Oregon, Pickwick, 2010, 53–59.

⁴² SACM, 123–124.

⁴³ The formula “according to local custom” is a phrase used in the Seventh-day Adventist liturgy. It is used to send the women and men off separately to perform the ritual of foot washing. However, there is no written liturgical form, there are congregations where you are specifically told which room to go to.

Some exegetes, e.g., János BOLYKI, call foot-washing the “effect of self-recognition”⁴⁴ and connects it to Homer’s *Odyssey*,⁴⁵ where we find a similar case, based on Hellenic literature.⁴⁶ While this theological reasoning is quite correct, I would like to look at the practical side of this beautiful, symbolic ritual, which tells us something about the importance of the inner meaning of Communion.⁴⁷

After a long, marathon evangelistic series, someone came to me and said that he was completely convinced by the teachings he had heard from me as a Seventh-day Adventist. In fact, he asked me to baptize him because he wanted to belong to our church. He is a city lawyer who is also, one might say, a public figure. He had one stipulation: let’s set up an ecumenical meeting with the city’s pastors where we can “debate” certain doctrines. He wondered if he would then be convinced. Needless to say, I wasn’t in the mood for such a debate, but I would have gone along with it out of curiosity because I had a hunch. As he offered to organise this event, I suggested the following: let us create a meeting where everyone washes each other’s feet. And if there is still a willingness to have a debate on this volume, I am ready to do it. For no other reason than to put what we read in John 13 into practice. And if there is still a willingness, I will be there to debate! My regarded readers can probably guess what the result of the organisation was.

With the possible creation of an ecumenical communion, we need to think seriously about where the status quo begins and ends. Today we hear more and more about our identity, which can, of course, be national and denominational, even simultaneously.⁴⁸ It is also certain that this identity includes all church rituals in the form in which we have learned and become accustomed to them. If BOLYKI’s opinion⁴⁹ is right that the foot-washing ritual is a beautiful way of turning inward

⁴⁴ BOLYKI, János: “*Igaz tanúvallomás*”, *Kommentár János evangéliumához*, Budapest, Osiris, 2001, 339–348.

⁴⁵ The motif of self-discovery is also familiar in the denominational theology of Free Will Baptists. The Seventh-day Adventist theology has taken several elements from this otherwise Arminian-minded small Protestant church practice. The celebration of the Sabbath, for example, derives from this. On the theology of foot-washing, see BEST, Jonathan L.: *A Postmodern Theology of Ritual Action, An Exploration of Foot Washing Among the Original Free Will Baptist Community*, Oregon, Pickwick, 2019, 13.

⁴⁶ Penelope orders the maids to bathe the beggar, wash his feet, give him a nice new dress, and from the next day he will eat with Telemachus in a special place. But Odysseus turns down the opportunity, at least to have the maids wash his feet, saying that they have already laughed at him and mocked him enough. If there is an old woman in the house, however, she will gladly accept a foot-washing. And that old woman will be the nurse, Eurucleia. Odysseus is exposed during the foot-washing, at least in front of the nurse. Odysseus has an old wound on his leg, which he sustained as a child when he was wounded by a wild boar. Since Eurucleia was his nurse, the old woman immediately recognizes the scar on the beggar’s leg. See HOMER: *Odyssey*, Act 19, The Conversation between Odysseus and Penelope - The Washing of the Feet.

⁴⁷ KAMER, Jeremy: *Washing the Feet of Saints, Theology, History and Practice*, Columbus, Kamer Family Ministers, 2014, 12–30.

⁴⁸ BORGHT, Eduardus Van der (ed.): *Christian Identity*, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2008, 1–32. (The introduction was written by the author on this topic.)

⁴⁹ BOLYKI: *op. cit.*

and knowing ourselves, then perhaps we should also wonder, is identity a bond or a partition? In my judgment, the more I emphasise the importance of my identity, the higher and thicker the partitions I erect around myself and my community. It is like “this is me” or “this is us,” and if you want to be like us, you have to get over the wall, think like us, act like us etc.⁵⁰ Ask today’s young people from 20 years upwards how much they think this is an acceptable vision of the future.

Whether we look at the Pope’s practice or the Adventist practice of Communion, all we need to see is that foot washing is simply an attempt to practice self-knowledge and self-denial. Self-critically speaking, however, it is a habit, so it too can become flattened and indifferent.⁵¹ If we want to seize the opportunity for community, we need to approach the status quo from a wider perspective.

A Dilemma: Community or Sacrality?

Here it is worth returning to the formation of a visioned ecumenical conference. Could Seventh-day Adventists, who lead an anti-alcoholic lifestyle, which is a matter of principle, afford to take communion with wine from anyone’s hand? And conversely, if Adventists were to persuade their Roman Catholic colleagues to take communion from them, under both kinds, with unleavened bread and grape juice, would they even consider it valid? Or could it be that it was just a symbolic representation of an agape meal even for protestants? It is not a simple request, especially if we are to respect everyone’s theological vision on the matter, which is expected and naturally incumbent on all of us.

Clinging to the status quo, we examine who is entitled to receive Communion, or rather the Eucharist. The answer is that an ordained person may administer the Eucharist. However, there are also great differences of interpretation around the meaning of ordination.⁵² From Roman Catholic celibacy onwards, we also find the concepts of ordained deacon and deaconess in denominational theology. Although Roman Catholics today have also extended the right to administer the Eucharist to ordained deacons, typically, the ordination of the clergy is the basis of the all-embracing ecclesiastical order.⁵³ By comparison, in denominational theology, anyone from the congregation can be ordained to serve the Eucharist, for example, to the sick in their homes, which has already been blessed by the congregation and consecrated

⁵⁰ At the dawn of Christianity, Judeo-Christians used the Torah as a marker of identity and as a wall of separation. Pauline theology freed those who joined Christianity from a Jewish background. See SLATER, O. P. Jennifer: *Christian Identity Characteristics in Paul’s Letter to the Members of the Jesus Movement in Galatians*, Bloomington, Author House, 2012, 48–54.

⁵¹ Some people think that foot-washing is not worth practicing because it is too symbolic, not comparable to when Jesus washed the disciples’ really dirty feet. It is a highly symbolic act today, just like the whole Lord’s Supper. Yet we do not find the flattening of the latter so problematic.

⁵² WILLIMON, William H.: *Pastor, The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2002.

⁵³ RATZINGER, Joseph Cardinal: *Called to Communion. Understanding the Church Today*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1996, (Without page number).

by the pastor. In this approach, whatever part of the spectrum you look at, the prevailing view is that the basis for serving communion is consecration. It is not at all impossible that it is from this thinking that we consider it appropriate to serve it to first of all the baptized, as we have discussed earlier.

This tension can be resolved by addressing the question: who is the subject of Communion, and what is the object? And who is the subject, and what is the object of the Lord's Supper during the communion service?⁵⁴

The first Communion was the last supper. It is quite telling that Judas was the most enthusiastic participant on this occasion. Jesus knew what Judas was about to do, yet he did not exclude him from the communion, referring to it as a means of "grace and not discipline".⁵⁵ Although the ordinance says that a person in public sin excludes him- or herself from communion,⁵⁶ by analogy with the above, we must say that we have no right to exclude anyone from this communion. On the contrary, following Jesus' example, we must practice forgiveness and mercy: we may even invite the repentant sinner to this time to make peace with God. From this perspective, we see that the subject of the Lord's Supper is Jesus Christ, and the object is the sinner who desires to repent.⁵⁷ Which of us would claim to be worthy of communion with Christ?

In this respect, the ordained minister of the Lord is no more than any other participant in the occasion. Ordination is only a matter of eligibility, which may indeed be church- or denomination-dependent.⁵⁸

If we take the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as a basis, we have to be more careful there. First of all, we do not know when we can speak of a liturgical communion, given the New Testament texts. If we do not call the Jerusalem agape meal a liturgy, do we call the Corinthian one?⁵⁹ Just because the words of institution are Pauline, can we insist on a sacralised liturgical communion? The sacralised form of Communion as we know it today began to emerge after the Constantinople turn, and it is clear that the split between Eastern vs. Western traditions can be explained by the schism of 1054.⁶⁰ Likewise, Protestant diversity can be explained by the mindset of the Reformers and their followers.⁶¹ Therefore, it is in this ecclesiastical order that we

⁵⁴ KOFFEMAN, Leo J.: *In Order to Serve. An Ecumenical Introduction to Church Polity*, Wien, Lit Verlag, 2014, 83–88.

⁵⁵ In some cases, Calvin saw fit to use the prohibition of communion as a disciplinary instrument of the church. This was adopted by several Protestant denominations. See BASDEN, Paul: *The Worship Maze, Finding a Style to Fit Your Church*, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1999, 57–59.

⁵⁶ SACM, 126–127.

⁵⁷ MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION: *Seventh-day Adventist Believe*, 211–219.

⁵⁸ KWETRA, Michael: *The Ministry of Communion*, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2016³, 9–22.

⁵⁹ LIETZMANN, Hans: *Mass and Lord's Supper, A Study in the History of the Liturgy*, Leiden, Brill, 1979, 193–218.

⁶⁰ KEE, Alistair: *Constantine Versus Christ, The Triumph of Ideology*, Oregon, Wipf and Stocks, 1982, 166–170.

⁶¹ LEENHARDT, F. J.: This is my Body, in CULLMAN, Oscar – LEENHARDT, F. J. (eds.): *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, transl. DAVIS, J. G., Cambridge, James Clarke & Co. 2004, 39–87.

must look if we are to begin to think in terms of subject and object.

This raises the question of mediation and the role of the mediator. The Communion bread and wine are not the objects, let alone the subject, of the ritual, but merely a sign, which, according to everyone, points to the signified thing, or rather the signified person, Jesus Christ.⁶² If it is a signified “thing”, it is a symbol pointing to an object, not to Jesus Christ, but to His cross. This is the essence of the doctrine of Christ after the first Easter. The cross as a “thing” is a means of redemption that unites us to the risen Jesus Christ, according to Paul’s theology, e.g., Gal 2:20. Thus the “thing” signified points to the person signified, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the mediating consecrated person does not mediate the signified “thing” through the present but points to the signified person, Jesus Christ. In certain circumstances, the sign may be less important than the person signified, *but in a symbolic sense, the two are inseparable*.⁶³

Although this approach may already be theological, the essence of mediation is the threefold nature of the Word: 1) inspired and written Word, 2) proclaimed but inspired Word, 3) the Word received in the Lord’s Supper as Jesus Christ is the symbol of the Word made flesh.⁶⁴ So, from this point of view, we can say that we are the object of the Lord’s Supper and Jesus Christ the subject. In other words, it is not we who distribute the Lord’s Supper, but Christ who gives himself through the mediators, but the mediator is as much a subordinate person as any other member of the congregation who is not ordained.⁶⁵

Taking all this into account, the great dilemma of interdenominational communion is whether to hold on to our identity, which is manifested in our denominationalism, or to look at the interests of the community and “be content” with having a communal meal as a symbolic act. There too, we break bread and drink the contents of the cup, perhaps just as they did nearly 2,000 years ago. Do we need more than that?

Breaking Down the Partitions: “Alternative” Interpretation of the Words of Institution

So far, I have only referred to the symbolic interpretation and the symbolism of Communion. This understanding is partly familiar from ZWINGLI’s approach,⁶⁶ but I do not want to present a systematic theological perspective because that

⁶² STANLEY, Robert A.: *Meditations for the Lord’s Supper*, Ohio, CSS Publishing Company, 1998, 20–30.

⁶³ DYK, Leanne Van: *The Reformed View*, SMITH, Gordon T.: *The Lord’s Supper, Five Views: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal*, Illinois, IVP Academic, 2008, 67–90.

⁶⁴ In the same form in Calvinist theology, ARCHER, Kenneth J.: *A Theology of Word – and That’s Point*, in LAND, Steven J. – MOORE, Rickie D. – THOMAS, John Christopher (eds.): *Passover, Pentecost and Parousia, Studies in Celebration of the Life and Ministry of R. Hollis Gause*, Leiden, Brill, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 35*, 2010, 125–144, 133–135.

⁶⁵ BARCLEY: *op. cit.*, 106–129.

⁶⁶ STEPHENS, Peter: *Zwingli’s Sacramental Views*, in FURCHA, E. J. – PIPKIN, H. Wayne (eds.): *Prophet, Pastor, Protestant, The Work of Huldrych Zwingli After Five Hundred Years*, Oregon, Pickwick – Wipf & Stocks, 1984, 155–171.

would tie us to a theological movement. In what follows, I would rather point out things that are mostly left out of the theology of communion, whatever church or denomination's thinking. I would like to "take advantage" of this gap and bring these *three points* closer together.⁶⁷

1) The Eschatological Motif of New Life

Although we mainly use 1 Corinthians 11 as the words of institution, it is also worth focusing on the later edited and written versions found in the Gospels. Mk 14:25 (Mt 26:29; Lk 22:18) declares the eschatological essence of the covenant essence of the Lord's Supper: "*Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink new wine in the kingdom of God.*" (NIV Mk 14:25)

Most theologians fail to notice that we are not talking about the communion wine but the vine and its fruit.⁶⁸ And the grape has a symbolic meaning in the Old Testament prophecies. The vine is a symbol of prosperity and wealth (1 Kings 21), the vineyard is the goal to be achieved, and a Jewish man cannot want more than that.⁶⁹ And thus, the fruit of the vineyard is the promise⁷⁰ of common prosperity in eternity for all who enter into covenant with Jesus Christ.

The fact that the last supper was at the time of the Passover, or the feast of unleavened bread, which was practically intertwined, also plays an important role in this covenant promise.⁷¹ On this occasion, it played a special role that all forms of leaven, and presumably all forms of fungi that fermented the juice of the grapes, had to be removed from Jewish homes. It is doubtful that fermented wine is involved, especially since shortly after the lifting of the chalice and the saying of the covenant, Jesus is already talking about the eschatological symbol of the vine.⁷²

This covenant symbolism is expressed by several churches and denominations: the Copts, for example, use raisins soaked in grapes to avoid fermentation,⁷³ and likewise, the Christians of St Thomas⁷⁴ avoid wine. Less well known today, but in Roman Catholic theology,⁷⁵ communion wine was an unfermented grape juice for centuries, only reversing the trend when individualism and the understanding of holiness became

⁶⁷ There is certainly more common ground to be found. However, due to the length of the study and the nature of the thesis, I have grouped them here into three concise points.

⁶⁸ BACCHIOCCHI: *op. cit.*, 163–170.

⁶⁹ 'Grape', in DOUGLAS, J. D. – TENNEY, C. Merrey – SILVA, Moisés (eds.): *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987, 1145.

⁷⁰ 'Grape', in FREEDMAN, Noel David (ed.): *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000, 526.

⁷¹ BARCLEY: *op. cit.*, 11–34.

⁷² SENDER, Rav Yitchak: *The Commentators' Pesach Seder Haggadah*, Jerusalem, Feldheim Publ., 2003, 94–102.

⁷³ TUCKER, Karen B. Westerfield: *American Methodist Worship*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 150–155.

⁷⁴ COLLINS, Paul M.: *Christian Inculturation in India*, Burlington, Ashgate, 1988, 119–225.

⁷⁵ TOKICS: *op. cit.*, 163–165, 282–286.

mixed with pagan cults.⁷⁶ This is not yet a dogmatic question, but rather a biblical theology: communion is a renewal of the Passover celebration, which the apostle John expresses with the symbol of “Jesus as the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29; 1:36).

2) The Eschatological Community as a Motif of a United Heavenly People

At the mention of the vine and the cup of the covenant, it is worth a look at Luke’s version: “*For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.*’ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘*Take this and divide it among you.*” (NIV Luke 22:16-17). The part where this differs from the Mark and Matthew versions is very telling. The “*Take this and divide it among you*” part suggests that Jesus broke the bread, gave it to the person next to him, perhaps Judas Iscariot, to break and then pass on.⁷⁷

Luke, who writes the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles, reinforces this “one-people-one-community” approach by writing the story of the resurrected Jesus in the context of the disciples at Emmaus.⁷⁸ We do not know who they were; perhaps they were among the seventy disciples. The gist of the account is that they do not understand the whole story of Jesus’ case until Jesus breaks the bread and gives it to them. Then everything “makes sense” to them (Luke 24:33-35). After this, we read an epiphany account of the resurrected Jesus, but unlike the Gospel of John, it was not written to the Twelve, but the disciples from Emmaus, perhaps from a Gentile background. It is interesting that Luke gives voice to the idea of “divide among yourselves” and that it was not only the Twelve who had the privilege of sharing a meal with Jesus.⁷⁹ And the appearance of the risen Jesus suggests that the eschatological fulfillment of the Lord’s Supper also applies to the Gentiles, who became the people of the covenant through the cup of the covenant.⁸⁰ New covenant: one people.

3) Missionary Sending Out: Involve as Many People as Possible in the One-People-Covenant

It is highly debated to what extent the words of institution invoked by the apostle Paul includes 1 Cor 11:26 “*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*” (NIV) On this point, I do not wish to take a position.⁸¹

⁷⁶ BACCHIOCCHI: *op. cit.*, 136–178.

⁷⁷ The order of the Passover meal implies that Jesus probably did not drink from the cup, but gave it to be shared out. This was done on exceptional occasions and only special guests were given the cup in this way. This meant that the blessing pronounced on the cup would go to whoever drank from it. See PRÖHLE, Károly: *Lukács evangéliuma, Fordítás és magyarázat*, Budapest, Evangélikus Egyetemes Sajtóosztály, 1991, 323.

⁷⁸ *Idem.*, 359–362.

⁷⁹ SCHREINER, Thomas R. – CRAWFORD, Mathew R.: *The Lord’s Supper, Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, Nashville, B&H Publishing, 2010, 61–63.

⁸⁰ GRIMSRUD, Ted – HARDIN, Michael (eds.): *Compassionate Eschatology, The Future as Friend*, Oregon, Cascade, 2011, 104–110.

⁸¹ LAKEY, Michael: *The Ritual World of Paul the Apostle, Metaphysics, Community, and Symbol in 1 Corinthians 10-11*, London, T&T Clark, 2019, 23–36, 132–150.

Otherwise, it is important to note that if we take Mt 28:19-20 to be the missionary commandment of Jesus, then this is Paul's missionary commandment. This understanding can even be seen as a "new wave"⁸² imagination within New Testament theological thought.

Matthew's version is considered to be the text for the baptismal mission. The idea is that while they are going into the world (πορευθέντες – participle), they teach all peoples to follow Christ.⁸³ The consequence of this teaching is that they can be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is also the basis of catechesis, and it is certainly a practical and theoretical transmission of knowledge and the teaching of examples.

The essence of the Pauline version in 1 Cor 11 is that it does not give theoretical teaching but involves those present in the experience of the community of Christ.⁸⁴ Thus, if there is cognitive and experiential teaching, it is found in Matthew's baptismal missionary text, and if there is empirical transmission, it is found in the Pauline text.⁸⁵

What these two verses have in common is that they are sent out, that they are both doctrinal, and that they both belong to the sacramental order, even if the Church only later formulated it in this way. In today's sense, then, to include "everyone in the atmosphere of experience" can be understood as to include people of all denominations in the communion of the Lord and thereby to form a Communion with the risen and glorified Jesus Christ.⁸⁶

Concluding thoughts for further reflection

Are we even capable of thinking about a Christian unity that is not based on the status quo but on the unity of the community?

I studied in England in the academic year 2001-2002. We had a course there called Life Issues. The task was to reflect on some specific situations. In one such lesson, we discussed an illustrative and very instructive case:

⁸² I deliberately did not write a new perspective so as not to trigger an association with James Dunn's work of the same name. Dunn does not use the term for this phenomenon, see DUNN, James D. G.: *The New Perspective on Paul*, Cambridge, Will. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2005.

⁸³ Here it is important to note that Jesus' words are sometimes quoted in the imperative mode as a missionary command, but the imperative is only used in the sentence to make disciples (μαθητεύσατε). More recent translations of the Bible now interpret the exhortation as "go and make!" (NIV) – without exclamation mark. This may give rise to misunderstandings. See HORTON, Michael: *The Gospel Commission, Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples*, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2011, 189–210.

⁸⁴ SCHREINER – CRAWFORD: *op. cit.*, 92–100.

⁸⁵ Fiorenza writes about 1 Cor 11 as a missionary text, FIORENZA, Elisabeth Schüssel: The Rhetoricity of Historical Knowledge: Pauline Discourse and Its Contextualization, in BORMANN, Lukas – TREDICY, Kelly Del – STANDHARTINGER, Angela (eds.): *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World, Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, Leiden, Brill, 1994, 443–469, 464–468.

⁸⁶ In Baptist theology, we read a recommendation that Mt 26 and 1 Cor 11, as two related communion texts, should be missionary texts, NORMAN, R: Stanton (ed.): *The Mission Today's Church, Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues*, Nashville, B&H Academic, 2007, 40–43.

In London, the city's pastors were called to a charity conference to discuss what could be done about the homeless.⁸⁷ The ministers, priests, vicars, and church servants turned up in semi-sacerdotal dresses to demonstrate which church or denomination they represented. As they walked into a huge auditorium, homeless people were begging on the streets outside. One colleague at lunchtime felt it was rather dissonant to talk about the problem of the hungry so at least he skipped lunch, voluntarily fasting. During the lunch break, he went outside and sat down on a bench to enjoy the otherwise rarely good weather. Then a homeless man appeared there: he spread his tablecloth, unpacked his bread, then his wine, and had a snack. As our man watched, the homeless man soon offered him bread and wine. Our pastor immediately associated the text of the psalm, "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*" (NIV Ps 23:5) Well, science or no science, how would we have responded to this case?

If we believe in the theological *Sitz im Leben*, this not only worked in biblical times and then appeared in a recurring motif, but life today can produce it too. Are we ready to recognise it? Are we ready to become each other's servants and not masters? If Christianity has a problem, it is not in its institutionalisation, but in the influence, it can have on my fellow human being. What influence are we currently exerting? What will tomorrow bring when the epidemic is over?

These questions cry out for answers, and we must seek them together.

Abstract

Communion Service is the most fragile element of ecumenical relations. There are almost as many different approaches as there are denominations, which can be observed in the very name of the occasion: e.g., Communion Service, Holy Communion, communion, Lord's supper apart from the fact that the names suggest that everyone has a different emphasis, the common point is the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, the communion with Him through remembering it and take the holy signs, which unites us, as Christians. Do we know of a biblical-theological approach that will ever allow us to form a table fellowship regardless of denomination?

I am searching for the possibility of it and the biblical theology of this as part of a longer dissertation of habilitation that aims to approach the whole biblical theology in this way. It is my sincere conviction that biblical theology has too many traditions to be talked about as an interdenominational science, but none of them is so serious as to divide us as Christians.

Keywords: Communion, Last Supper, ecumenical, sacred order, status quo, symbolism, biblical theology

⁸⁷ I can't give you the reference for this story, but it doesn't matter: even if it were fiction, it could still be a lesson.



Banffyhunyard (Transylvania, Kalotaszeg), Lord's Table in the reformed church.

Gabriella Rácsok

THE CHURCH IS MISSION – A REFORMED PERSPECTIVE ON CHURCH AND MISSION*

* Draft paper presented at the fourth meeting of the Reformed-Pentecostal dialogue's third round, on the topic of church and mission, in Sydney, Australia (1-6 December 2017).

Introduction

The concept of mission seems to be still controversial and unclear at times in our ecclesiological and theological thinking. Various church planting, church growth or church development concepts, pastoral and *diakonial* tasks, evangelizing, the social-political role of the church, and the social-ethical normative function of the church, all claim the concept of mission for themselves – leading to (or emerging from) uncertainties concerning the concept of mission. On the one hand, mission still carries the grave and burdensome legacy of the memories of forced christenings of the Middle Ages, and the legacy of the intertwining of colonization and mission of the 19th and 20th centuries. On the other hand, besides the need for tolerance and harmony of the secularized societies and of the (post)modern humanity, the way church members view the church and Christianity is more and more determined by their need to understand and define the mission of the church.¹

As we have all experienced, “in international ecumenical dialogues, the Reformed tradition is a complicated discussion partner.”² Since the Reformed tradition embraces a diversity of ecclesiologies and missiologies, this

¹ I owe Professor Sándor Fazakas for these introductory thoughts as well as the structure of the first part of the paper: FAZAKAS, Sándor: *Misszió-teológia és ekklezológia – örökség és útkeresés [Theology of Mission and Ecclesiology – heritage and exploring the possibilities]*, edited version of a presentation at the conference of the Théma Egyesület, 3 April 2001, retrieved from www.egyhazszervezet.hu/adattar/files/pdf/t_fs_001.pdf Last Accessed: 2017. 11. 25., later published in GAÁL, Sándor (ed.): *En Christo – Tanulmányok a 85. éves Dr. Bütösi János tiszteletére [Essays of honor for Prof. J. Bütösi]*, Debrecen, DRHE, 2004, 75–94. (The page numbers refer to the 2001 edition.)

² BRINKMAN, Martien E.: Unity: A Reformed Contribution, in ID.: *A Reformed Voice in the Ecumenical Discussion*, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2016, 18.

paper cannot be more than a rather tentative attempt to describe how a Central-Eastern-European (Hungarian) Reformed theologian understands and gives expression to the theme of “church and mission” today. It is indeed no more than one possible Reformed perspective from a particular and limited viewpoint, and will thus need to be completed by other Reformed perspectives. We need one another and must complement one another’s thinking and practice, and thereby live out something of the reality of the body of Christ.³

1. Dominant 20th century theories on church and mission

The question of church and mission is a question of identity. The necessity of the formulation, “it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church,”⁴ is a reflection on (or reaction to) the identity confusion (or identity disruption) of church and mission. Therefore, here are some examples or models that I think have been influential or typical in the recent past in thinking about mission – at least in the Reformed Church in Hungary. I believe these approaches or models have emerged from our commitment to the principles of *ecclesia [reformata] semper formanda* and *ecclesia [reformata] semper reformanda*: in order to be faithful to its call, the church is always forming as it seeks to become contextual and the church is always reforming in responding to its heritage.⁵

1.1. Mission as the church living for others

The starting point for this approach is the basic conviction that the real purpose of mission is not the church but the Kingdom of God. This eschatological orientation dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and received new impulses after World War II due to the works of such theologians as, e.g., W. Freytag and J. C. Hoekendijk. Their intention, on the one hand, was to free the concept of the Kingdom of God from a kind of pietistic, spiritualizing, individualistic reduction and, on the other hand, from the side of social ethics, to offset the traditional conversion-oriented and church-oriented concepts of mission.⁶ The essence of this approach can be summarized as follows: the church does not have a mission but [God’s] mission has a church. Mission can only be understood as a part of *Missio Dei*⁷ – the real subject of mission is not the church, nor is its goal the planting, growing and expanding the

³ Here I sympathize with the expressions of HOLLANDER, Jet Den: Ecclesiology and Mission: A Reformed Perspective, *International Review of Mission* 358, Volume 90, 2001, 256.

⁴ *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, No. 58, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together_towards_Life.pdf Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 11.

⁵ VAN GELDER, Craig: *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2007, Chapter 2.

⁶ FAZAKAS: *op. cit.*, 1.

⁷ *Missio Dei* was understood as God’s action in the world independent of the church over against the church, pointing to God’s work through the witness of the church. GOHEEN, Michael W.: *‘As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You’*: J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology, Utrecht – Toronto, 2000, 70.

church because God is primarily interested in the redemption and the new creation of the world. The subject of mission is therefore the Messiah, Jesus Christ Himself.

Hoekendijk's ecclesiology is perhaps best understood through his views on the apostolicity of the church. He reverses the well-known and generally accepted argument that the mission of the church is based on the spiritual-theological continuity that goes back to the apostles. Against this static idea of apostolicity being the property of the church, Hoekendijk proposes a dynamic approach: the church is apostolic if it participates in the mission of 'the apostle Jesus' (Hebrews 3:1) and the apostles.⁸ This mission is a precondition for apostolicity. The church is only a church if it engages in mission.⁹

According to Hoekendijk, the mentioning of the sequence "Kingdom – apostolate [mission] – oikoumene [world] will immediately evoke a response that contains a passionate plea for the church."¹⁰ He also points out our fear of losing "ecclesiastical substance when the 'event' is not immediately accompanied by the 'institution.'"¹¹

Hoekendijk admits that "the context Kingdom – apostolate – oikoumene does not leave much room for the church", and ecclesiology does not fit in with this picture. When we speak about the relationship between God and the world, we can only mention the church in passing and without strong emphasis. "Ecclesiology cannot be more than just a single paragraph from Christology [...] and a few sentences from eschatology. The church is only the church to the extent that she lets herself be used as a part of God's dealings with the oikoumene [i.e., as a part God's mission]." Therefore the church can only be oriented toward the whole world, i.e., the church can only be 'ecumenical'.¹²

Hoekendijk sharply attacks the church-centric mission theology: it "is bound to go astray because it revolves around an illegitimate center." The church cannot be the starting point and the goal of the mission. The "church-centrism", which seems to be the only undisputed missiological dogma since Jerusalem (1928), has such a grasp on us that "our thinking unnoticeably has become completely 'ecclesiasticized'".¹³

⁸ The New CWW Affirmation on Evangelism and Mission also confirms this dynamic understanding: "apostolicity is not only safeguarding the faith of the church through the ages but also participating in the apostolate." *Together Towards Life*, No. 58.

⁹ MANECKE, Dieter: *Mission als Zeugedienst. Karl Barths theologische Begründung der Mission im Gegenüber zu den Entwürfen von Walter Holsten, Walter Freytag und Joh. Christiaan Hoekendijk*, Wuppertal, Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 1972, 128–130, cited in BATIZÁN, Attila: Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk rövid életrajza és teológiájának jellemző vonásai [A Short Biography of Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk and Characteristic Trends in His Theology], *Református Szemle*, Volume 106, 2013/3, 299.

¹⁰ HOEKENDIJK, Johannes C.: *The Church Inside Out*, transl. ROTTENBERG, Isaac C. London, SCM Press, 1967, 37.

¹¹ Hoekendijk refers to J. L. Leuba's *L'Institution et l'événement* (1950), HOEKENDIJK: *op. cit.*, 38.

¹² HOEKENDIJK: *op. cit.*, 38.; In our theological thinking, says Hoekendijk elsewhere, 'God, church and world' is not the correct order: but 'God, world, and church'. The world is the scene of God's acting – the church must know and respect this. HOEKENDIJK, Johannes C.: *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft*, München, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967, 344, cited in BATIZÁN: *op. cit.*, 302.

¹³ HOEKENDIJK: *The Church Inside Out*, 38.

For Hoekendijk the gospel and mission (apostolate) belong intrinsically together. Through mission, the gospel comes to ‘fulfillment’ (Romans 15:19; Colossians 1:24) and is brought to its destination. In mission, “God continues to struggle with the world for the sake of the world.”¹⁴ The realm of mission is the whole world, and the substance is the setting up of signs of the Kingdom,¹⁵ i.e., *shalom*, which is at once “peace, integrity, community, harmony and justice.”¹⁶ For Hoekendijk this Messianic *shalom* “and its abundant multiplicity” is described in Mt 11:2-5. Accordingly, three aspects should be integrated in mission:¹⁷

- this *shalom* is to be proclaimed – *kerygma*
- this *shalom* is to be lived – *koinonia*
- this *shalom* is to be demonstrated in humble service – *diakonia*

The church is there, where people are emptying themselves, where people serve, and where the solidarity with the fellow humans is not merely preached but is demonstrated.¹⁸

We can no longer regard mission as one among other tasks entrusted to the church. “A church that knows that she is a function of the apostolate and that her very ground of existence lies in the proclamation of the Kingdom to the world does not engage in missions, but she herself becomes mission, she becomes the living outreach of God to the world.” Therefore, a church without mission can only be an absurdity. If the church fails to become mission in its entirety, it proves that it has merely become a church building or an association that only cares for the personal religious life of some.¹⁹

The Church must prove its legitimacy and its ‘realness’ in a way that it is present for others. The church cannot exist in itself and for itself, just as the Messiah did not

¹⁴ Idem., 39.

¹⁵ The church must present the sign of the redemption of God’s Kingdom: communion, righteousness, unity, etc. However, the church cannot be more than a sign. It must point away from itself to God’s Kingdom, to let itself be used by God in the world for and through the Kingdom. There is nothing that the church can demand for itself or possess for itself. God has placed the church in a living relationship with the Kingdom and with this world. HOEKENDIJK: *The Church Inside Out*, 41.

¹⁶ Hoekendijk refers to Psalm 85. HOEKENDIJK, Johannes C.: The call to evangelism, *International Review of Mission* 154, Volume 39, 1950, 168.; The concept of *shalom* plays a central role in Hoekendijk’s theology. He argues that *shalom* is much more than peace: it encompasses the total integrity and harmony of the whole creation according to God’s plan as manifested in the humanity of Christ. *Shalom* is a concrete social reality and a sign of the real presence of the Kingdom of God. *Shalom* exists when social justice prevails, when human dignity is respected, when the poor and the weak are restored. The realization of *shalom* is often a result of revolutionary social changes. The process of the realization of *shalom* can be described as humanization. GONDA, László: *The Service of Evangelism, the Evangelism of Service*, Debrecen, DRHE, 2008, 145.

¹⁷ HOEKENDIJK: The call to evangelism, 171.

¹⁸ HOEKENDIJK: *The Church Inside Out*, 69.; The mission of God “does not consist in our taking part, but they who live in the obedience of faith are part of His action”. FREYTAG, Walter: Changes in the Patterns of Western Missions, *International Review of Mission* 186, Volume 47, 1958, 169.

¹⁹ HOEKENDIJK: *The Church Inside Out*, 41–42.

live in himself and for himself. The Church cannot live in *co-existence* with the world but must live in *pro-existence* for the world. But not just a little and not just when it is comfortable and convenient. The church must also give its life for others. The church is saved only if it is ready to lose itself completely. When it tries to save itself, it has already lost itself.²⁰

In Hoekendijk's ecclesiology, the church is reduced to an instrumental role in God's mission, or in the words of D. Bosch: "the church views itself [...] as an illustration—in word and deed—of God's involvement with the world".²¹ Mission is reduced to active political, social, and economic activity,²² "a contribution toward the humanization of society—a process in which the church may perhaps be involved in the role of consciousness raiser"²³ while witness in the life of the church or in evangelism is minimized. The goal of mission is not a community that bears witness to the coming kingdom of God in its life but the humanization or *shalom* of society through efforts of Christians in cooperation with other (non-Christian) social institutions that aim at the transformation of oppressive political, social, and economic structures.²⁴ The mode of mission is not a proclamation of the Gospel but the incarnational presence of God's people in healing ways in culture.²⁵

²⁰ Idem., 70.; We can see the continuation of this thesis in the legitimizing efforts of the churches living in socialism: e.g. "If the church understands that she is in the world to carry out Christ's *diakonia*, she will die of that, because she will not be needed anymore. For the church does not exist to assure her own existence to eternity but that by sacrificing herself, by sharing in Christ's suffering new creation will come, in which there will be no temple, but where God dwells in the universality of the people: in the city without temple. [...] Let us learn that such a world is made by his salvation where finally the Son himself will be submitted to the One who had cast all things under his feet and where God will be all in all." BÉKEFI, Benő: Diakóniánk, mint Jézus Krisztus diakóniájának része [Our diakonia as part of the diakonia of Jesus Christ], *Református Egyház*, Volume 3, 1951/18, 6.

²¹ BOSCH, David J.: *Transforming mission – Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary Edition [e-book], Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2011, 326.

²² In Hoekendijk's approach mission "became an umbrella term for health and welfare services, youth projects, activities of political interest groups, projects for economic and social development, the constructive application of violence, etc. [...] The distinction between church and world has, for all intents and purposes, been completely dropped." BOSCH: *op. cit.*, 328.

²³ BOSCH: *op. cit.*, 326.

²⁴ A typical wording of the theology of the servant church (the official theology of the church between 1948 and 1989) in the Reformed Church of Hungary: „Marxist humanism is first of all a political social praxis. [...] The way of humanizing is creating a world worthy of people, creating a classless society, and revolutionary praxis by means of class struggle. [...] The ground for Christian humanism is nothing else than God's act, His love for humans – or as Karl Barth has written: God's humanity. – The way of humanizing men, according to Christian conviction, cannot be anything else than putting on the real new man, that is, Jesus Christ. [...] The humanity of a Christian living from 'God's humanism' is his responsible co-existence with others. No one can be 'humane' by himself, isolated from others. Humanism is a common issue. [...] On the basis of structural likeness and the differences in content, the common question of Christian and Marxist humanism is: What can we do together for the human – for the sake of a complete real 'humanum'?" BARTHA, Tibor: Az egyház szociálétikai felelőssége korunkban, *Theológiai Szemle*, Volume 11, 1968/1-2, 329–331.

²⁵ GOHEEN: *op. cit.*, 67.

In conclusion, it can be said that the merit of the model of Hoekendijk and his fellow theologians was to show: mission is primarily God's mission, and only secondarily, the church's mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (Jn 20:21). One must not forget either that this ecclesiology should be viewed as an extreme reaction to "an ingrown, self-occupied, and inflexible church"²⁶ embodied by the *Volkskirche* of the time. Its weakness, however, is that it easily leads to the theological glorification of secularization and to the uncritical observation of the world, not to mention that it forgets a very important aspect: without the gathering of the church, it is not possible to send it, that is, its taking part in mission is impossible either. Without the "building up" of the church, there is no "church for others".²⁷

1.2. Mission as church growth

The growing politicization of the gospel forced a reaction from a number of evangelical advocates (e.g., Donald McGavran, John Stott, and Arthur Glasser) who emphasized evangelism, conversion, church growth, and the Christian community as God's agent in mission. The Church Growth school became an influential movement in missiology in the latter part of the 1960s and the 1970s.²⁸

McGavran, the pioneer of Church Growth theory and practice, emphatically states that "world evangelization is a chief and irreplaceable work of the church."²⁹ While underlining the necessity of social change in large parts of the world, McGavran believes that this is the inevitable result of true conversion: "the salvation granted to those who believe in Jesus Christ is still the supreme need of human beings, and all other human good flows from that prior reconciliation to God."³⁰ This goal of world evangelization must be achieved by the numerical increase of the church: "Today's supreme task is the effective multiplication of churches in the receptive societies of earth."³¹ This program of evangelism by church growth also draws heavily on social sciences (collecting statistical data concerning church growth and decrease,³² and searching for the social dynamics behind these numbers³³).

Although McGavran distinguishes evangelism and church growth to some extent, he sees no place for evangelism that does not lead to church growth. True evangelism cannot be defined as mere searching for lost souls – 'search theology'. They must be found, and finding people means that they will become members of a church – 'theology of harvest'.³⁴ The goal of mission "is to have a truly indigenous congregation in every community of every culture. When that occurs, and

²⁶ Idem., 71.

²⁷ FAZAKAS: *op. cit.*, 2.

²⁸ GOHEEN: *op. cit.*, 72, 92.

²⁹ MCGAVRAN, Donald A.: *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1990³, 65.

³⁰ Idem., 33.

³¹ Idem., 31.

³² Idem., 67–87.

³³ Idem., 91–106

³⁴ Idem., 23–30.

only when that occurs, we may be sure that the gospel has been preached to every creature. Patently, this goal requires enormous conversion growth.”³⁵

McGavran describes church growth as a “theological stance”, and not a method: it is based on God’s eternal purpose to save human beings from their sins.³⁶ According to S. Paas, for McGavran church growth either as theologically supreme “must become the ruling principle for ecclesiology” or as theologically neutral “can fit into any ecclesiology”.³⁷ In either case, this leads to relativizing ecclesiology, from where it is only one more step to ignoring ecclesiology altogether: the “church’ is completely swallowed up by ‘evangelism’; its only function is to be as efficient as possible as a recruitment agency.”³⁸

The unquestionable theological merit of this concept is that it places soteriology back in the centre of missional theology. For every mission will be powerless and meaningless if it fails to call to faith, if it fails to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ and God’s delivering grace to the world. Such a mission and such a church have lost not only its profile but its legitimacy as well.³⁹

But we must also make some reservations concerning this concept: do we not face the danger of an ecclesiological (or rather ecclesiastical) narrowing of *Missio Dei* and salvation here? The church becomes “the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly” and it “is seen as a partial realization of God’s reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life.”⁴⁰ Aren’t we dealing here with retaining the questionable thesis of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* over against the thesis of *extra Christum nulla salus*? Should we not rather see that God’s salvation surpasses our concepts of conversion and personal faith?⁴¹

³⁵ Idem., 72.

³⁶ Idem., 8.

³⁷ PAAS, Stefan: *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2016, 45.; According to Paas the first option may do more justice to McGavran’s own view. Paas quotes him: „Any truly evangelical theology of mission must set forth a high doctrine of the church, Christ’s body. For by its presence, witness, and growth, the church is a central component in God’s redemptive plan.” GLASSER, Arthur F. – MCGAVRAN, Donald A. (eds.): *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1983, 104.

³⁸ PAAS: *op. cit.*, 45.

³⁹ Why is it so difficult for us – especially for us Reformed theologians – to accept and declare the truth of Romans 1:16 (“I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith.”)? Or, especially in Hungary, do we still hope in a kind of people’s church, in our quasi state church latent monopoly situation, under which we think that the gospel should not be proclaimed in every case, since it is written on the face of our Christian rooted but secularized European civilization? Or, especially in Western and Northern Europe, are we to be so politically correct that we would not want to offend people of other faiths by proclaiming the Gospel? FAZAKAS: *op. cit.*, 2.

⁴⁰ BOSCH: *op. cit.*, 326.

⁴¹ According to Karl Barth the aim of mission work cannot be to ‘convert people,’ since conversion is alone God’s work. The sign that this conversion has happened is neither baptism nor church membership, but the readiness to carry the witness further. See a summary of Barth’s thoughts in ROSSEL,

Obedying our missionary mandate (Matt 28:18-20 and John 20:21) cannot be reduced to the verbal communication of the gospel. The sending out of the disciples must correspond to the original purpose of the incarnation, Jesus' identifying with what is human – in words, deeds and suffering. This means that in the mission of the church, proclaiming the gospel and *diakonia*, evangelization and social responsibility are inseparably tied together.

1.3. Mission as convivence – the church living with others

The recognition that the larger part of Christianity is no longer at home in the Christian-Western culture became a necessity to formulate a new missionary paradigm. According to Theo Sundermeier, the two concurring models of the ecumenical social ethical commitment and of the pietistic-evangelical approach due to their dominant spirituality of European – North-American hegemony were not capable of taking seriously the experiences and (existential) questions of people living in the Global South, and communicate the Gospel accordingly.⁴² The mission-theological thinking, which over the past centuries has assumed the triumphalist superiority of Western civilization, sees the other person, the alien and the alien culture simply as the object of mission. The missionary and church practice of the past has been defined by the hermeneutic rule that getting to know the other ultimately supports one's self-knowledge; and self-understanding, self-actualization, and self-realization require the behaviour of objectifying the other. Instead, Sundermeier offers a new hermeneutic "key": the Cartesian "*cogito ergo sum*" should be replaced by the African "*participio ergo sum*". The other person, the culturally, religiously and socially 'alien', can no longer be the object of mission, an anonymous object, but the 'neighbour' who fell into the hands of robbers (Luke 10), in whose face Christ's face should be discovered (Matthew 25:31-46) and who has been groaning for redemption (Romans 8:22).⁴³

The ecclesiological and missiological consequence of the new hermeneutical approach is no longer the church for others, but the 'church with others'. The former so-called ecclesiological key concept, *pro-existence*, must be replaced by another, convivence, or *co-existence*, says Sundermeier, and tries to affirm this point exegetically as well, from John 1:14, "The Word became a flesh and made his dwelling among us..." (cf. *skhnoō* to fix/have/spread one's tabernacle/tent, abide (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent)). The new missionary paradigm has further implications for the hermeneutics of the biblical message: there is no longer an eternal depository of the doctrines of faith (*depositum fidei*), but the Word opens up by listening to it and understanding it, and the meaning of the message changes. The Biblical texts gain their fullness by their intercultural journey: the different cultures and languages will not be ad-

Jacques: From a Theology of Crisis to a Theology of Revolution? Karl Barth, *Mission and Mission*, *The Ecumenical Review*, Volume 21, 1969/3, 210.

⁴² SUNDERMEIER, Theo: *Begegnung mit dem Fremden. Plädoyer für eine verstehende Missionswissenschaft*, *Evangelische Theologie* 50, 1990, 390–400, cited in FAZAKAS: *op. cit.*, 3.

⁴³ FAZAKAS: *op. cit.*, 3.

dressed by but will be part of the Gospel (cf. John 16:13 “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”). This model leaves open questions for criticism as well. Our most urgent question may be: what is the guarantee that the biblical message does not dissolve in this process of intercultural understanding into postmodern relativism or arbitrariness. Is there a limit / boundary for interreligious dialogues?⁴⁴

2. Church and mission – some possible theological focal points / themes

Looking at some basic texts⁴⁵ on mission of the Reformed Church of Hungary, various focal points come to the fore relating to the theme of church and mission. What follows is a short introduction to these theological foci.⁴⁶

2.1. The mission of the church has a Trinitarian basis

“The mission of the church is to be carried out as coming from the Father, in obedience to the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷

“The church received its call to mission from the Triune God, which also determines the method of its service...”⁴⁸

“The mission of the church is to participate in the reconciling love of the triune God who reaches out to a fallen world through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁹ The church receives its call to mission from the Triune God, who lives eternally in mutual self-giving love, wills to include all creatures in that communion of love, and

⁴⁴ Idem.

⁴⁵ See some excerpts in the Appendix.

⁴⁶ Most of these focal points can be found in the final report of the first round of the Reformed – Pentecostal dialogue, *Word and Spirit, Church and World*:

“(64) When we say we are involved in *Missio Dei* it is a correction of the notion that the mission in which Christians are involved is only the mission of the church. The church is a sign of the reign of God that has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ. While it has been called into this privilege, it does not claim to limit God’s reign and sovereignty in all God’s creation. We see that mission has its source and authority in the triune God. The biblical foundation points to the imperative for us to witness to all people in word and deed (Mt 28.18-20; Lk 24.46-47; Jn 20.21-23; Acts 1.8).”

“(74) Within an eschatological perspective, the mission of the church is to witness to the truth that the kingdom of God, which yet awaits full consummation in the future, has already broken into the present age in Jesus Christ. The ministry of Jesus Christ, therefore, continues in the world by the power of the Spirit working through the eschatological people of God. The integrity of mission is bound up in a commitment to multi-dimensional mission. Those dimensions include, but are not limited to, proclamation of the gospel (Mt 28.19-20, Acts 1.8), fellowship (2 Cor 5.17-20), service to the world (Mt 25.34-36), worship, and justice (Acts 2.42-47).”

⁴⁷ The Act on Mission of the Reformed Church of Hungary (1995)

⁴⁸ *Reconciliation – Health / Wholeness – Hope* (2013)

⁴⁹ MIGLIORE, Daniel L.: *Faith Seeking Understanding – An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2004², 265.; “The Triune God’s overflowing sharing of love is the source of

extends this love to the world by God's Word and Spirit.⁵⁰ This movement of God to the world also determines the church's motive for mission (by determining the source, the content and the primary actor of mission)⁵¹ and warns the church to be careful about all human motives.⁵²

The Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 31) explains the saving work of Christ in terms of his threefold office in the following way:

[Christ] is

- our chief prophet and teacher, who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance;
- our only high priest, who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father;
- and our eternal king, who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.

The doctrine of the threefold office of Christ clarifies and provides direction to the understanding of the mission of the church, since by faith we are members of Christ, and so we share in his anointing and are called to participate in his work and to be guided by it.⁵³

Christ as our *chief prophet* spoke from the periphery, exposing “the idolatry, injustice and violence that rule in all domains of human life”. Therefore, the mission of the church will always include this prophetic activity, “teaching God's will made known in Christ and denouncing injustice and oppression as opposing God's will.”⁵⁴ But Christ, the Son, not only reveals God's will to us, but he himself is the revealed Word of God, „the essential, uncreated, personal Word that the Father beholds from all eternity. This eternal, perfect divine image of God is translated into humanity in Jesus Christ.” Christ is „the particular, historical representation of the eternal, only-begotten Son of the Father.” From it follows that our “theologies of mission

all mission and evangelism.” *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, No. 21.

⁵⁰ MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 266.

⁵¹ In Newbigin's thought, the source of the church's mission is found in the love of the Father for the world. The content of the church's mission is found in the mission of Jesus: the church is to continue the mission of Jesus by making known the kingdom in its life, words, and deeds. The power and primary actor in the church's mission is the Holy Spirit who brings the life of the age to come and constitutes the church as a witnessing community. GOHEEN: *op. cit.*, 419.

⁵² GUDER, Darrell L.: From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Volume 24, 2003/1, 42.; Guder refers to Barth's *Die Theologie und die Mission in der Genewart, Theologische Fragen und Antworten*. Some inadequate rationales for mission: the effort to save people from eternal damnation; to expand the power and influence of the church; to share the blessings of Western culture with people of other cultures; to transform the world into the reign of God, etc., see MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 265–266.

⁵³ I am relying on D. Migliore's and Seng-Kong Tan's elaborations here.

⁵⁴ MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 266.

must be local, contextual 'translations' of the great translation, and thereby attempts to encapsulate truth, justice and beauty."⁵⁵ "Our words of the Word are truly spoken when they come from the Father and are directed by the Spirit."⁵⁶ It is the Spirit who makes revelation interior and efficient to its recipients.

Christ as our *high priest* descended to become our partner and mediator, the one who in his ministry, cross, and resurrection brought God's forgiveness and new life to the world. Therefore, the mission of the church will always include the priestly activity of proclaiming forgiveness and reconciliation in the name of Christ.⁵⁷ This also determines the way the church is in the world and the ultimate goal of its mission. The eschatological significance of the church's presence in the world and the ultimate goal of its mission is God's glory, in particular the glory of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:10-11). In the meantime, as long as it comes to its completion in the whole created world, it is the privilege of the church, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to confess Jesus Christ to be Lord, and may bow down with such adoration before God who revealed Godself in Him to us.

Christ as our *eternal king* elevated us to become God's partner; He protects and defends us and claims our obedience and service. Therefore, the mission of the church will always include the royal activity of being a protector and advocate of the weak and lowly and using what resources and influence it has not for its own sake but for the sake of God's coming reign of justice and peace that has appeared in power in the royal life, death and resurrection of Christ.⁵⁸ In other words, the church must open up a way in its life and through its life to the manifestations of Jesus Christ's reign. This reign is characterised by the commandment of love that encompasses all of life. Thus the church must become a community of love (*koinonia*) by Christ's Word⁵⁹ and Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ The church is Christ's church;⁶¹ Christ's presence is not

⁵⁵ TAN, Seng-Kong: A Trinitarian Ontology of Missions, *International Review of Mission* 369, Volume 93, 2004, 286.

⁵⁶ Idem., 287.

⁵⁷ MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 266.

⁵⁸ Idem.

⁵⁹ "The Church is the creation of the Word because the Word itself is God's creative Word of grace by which we are justified and renewed. The Church is the human community shaped and ruled by that grace; it is the community of grace, called to let 'this mind be among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...' (Phil 2:5). The community of faith is thus not merely the community in which the gospel is preached; by its hearing and responding to the Word of grace, the community itself becomes a medium of confession, its faith a 'sign' or 'token' to the world; it is itself a part of the world transformed by being addressed and renewed by the Word of God." *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* [TCUC]: Reformed / Roman Catholic International Dialogue: Second Phase (1984-1990), No. 100, URL: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/alleanza-mondiale-delle-chiese-riformate/dialogo-internazionale-cattolico-riformato/documenti-di-dialogo/en1.html> Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 11.

⁶⁰ „The Spirit is the power of God to step over boundaries, to overcome separation and alienation.” MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 267.

⁶¹ "The Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life

mediated by the church; it is through Christ's presence that the church comes into being.⁶²

Migliore adds four more features that characterize the missionary activity of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit:⁶³

- 1) it fosters a just and inclusive community;
- 2) it expects and welcomes the ministerial gifts of all its members to be used for the well-being and peace of the whole;
- 3) it is motivated by thanksgiving and joy rather than fear or a sense of burdensome obligation;
- 4) it recognizes, welcomes, and supports the presence of the Spirit in all fields of human endeavour where life and peace are enhanced and death and destruction are combated.

2.2. The church is missionary by its very nature

This thesis is the reformulation of the Roman Catholic missiology of Vatican II and with 1 Peter 2:9 as the biblical model behind it.⁶⁴ David Bosch refers to Karl Barth in his explanation: here the church is not the sender but the one sent. Its mission, its 'being sent', is not additional to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission.⁶⁵ For Bosch this means that ecclesiology does not precede missiology.⁶⁶ It is impossible to talk about the church without at the same time talking about mission.⁶⁷ "The church is mission." Mission belongs to the essence of the church; it is not one of the many tasks of the church.⁶⁸

The New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism also confirms this "very intimate" relationship between church and mission, when it declares that "[i]t is not possible to separate church and mission in terms of their origin or purpose. [...] the church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church."⁶⁹

The Act on mission of the Reformed Church of Hungary distinguishes three areas of mission:

and united in true faith." *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 54.

⁶² "The church is not a voluntary association called to serve the cause of Christ. The church does not rest upon its members, but the members rest upon the church, since the church is Christ present in the world, associating us with him and his purposed." BRINKMAN: *op. cit.*, 33.

⁶³ MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 267–268.

⁶⁴ *Ad Gentes* [On the mission activity of the church], I.2.

⁶⁵ BARTH, Karl: *Church Dogmatics IV/1, The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, transl. BROMILEY, W., Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1974, 725.

⁶⁶ BOSCH: *op. cit.*, 319.

⁶⁷ GOHEEN: *op. cit.*, 57.

⁶⁸ NEWBIGIN, Lesslie: One body, One Gospel, One World, reprinted in *The Ecumenical Review*, Volume 11, 1959/2, 151.

⁶⁹ *Together Towards Life*, No. 57.

(1) mission towards those who have heard of Christ but have not yet accepted Christ (congregational mission);⁷⁰

(2) mission towards those who have been alienated or detached from the church (inner mission);

(3) mission towards those who have never heard of the saving grace of Christ for all humanity (outer mission).”

Could all the above suggest that the church is always and everywhere explicitly involved in mission? Newbigin has introduced a helpful distinction between the church’s missionary *dimension* and its missionary *intention*.⁷¹ Since the whole life of the church is characterized by witness, a missionary dimension permeates everything it does. The missionary dimension of a local church’s life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is truly a worshipping community, “when it is joined to the worship of the heavenly hosts, is directed wholly to God for His glory.”⁷² The church’s missionary dimension may evoke *intentional*, that is *direct* involvement in society, when it actually moves beyond the walls of the church, with the intention of crossing the frontier between faith and unbelief.⁷³

2.3. The church as a sign, foretaste and servant of the Kingdom of God

“The community of the church is called to be a sign, foretaste and servant of the Kingdom of God in the world through its congregations and church members, who proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the world both with words and deeds.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Church mission involves: (1) proclaiming God’s Word verbally and through all means of communion, in and outside the church, (2) proclaiming God’s Word by administering the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s supper), (3) evangelization, (4) all forms of catechism, (5) a regular visit to members of the church, (6) the *diakonia* care of members of the church, (7) pastoral care and preparing / training members for the ministry.

⁷¹ NEWBIGIN: *op. cit.*, 154.

⁷² *Idem*.

⁷³ BOSCH: *op. cit.*, 320.; GOHEEN: *op. cit.*, 57.; Cf. also Hunsberger’s distinction of ‘vendor-shaped churches’ and ‘mission-shaped churches’. According to Hunsberger in Reformation thinking, the church came to be viewed primarily as “a place where certain things happen” – the right preaching of the Gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, [and the exercise of church disciple and *diakonia*]. In the culture of (post)modernity, the church has grown accustomed to functioning as “a vendor of religious services and goods”. According to Hunsberger, if we are to rethink the church in terms of its missionary nature, the church must come to see itself as a “body of people sent on a mission”. HUNSBERGER, George R.: Sizing Up the Shape of the Church, in ID. – VAN GELDER, Craig (eds.): *The Church Between Gospel and Culture – The Emerging Mission in North America*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1996, 333–346.; Would this suggest that the church as a vendor of religious goods and services is completely void of its missional dimension?

⁷⁴ Mission statement, proposed by the Church Revision Committee (CRC), adopted by the Synod of the Reformed Church of Hungary in 2012.

“...the church as an alternative community is experiencing the Kingdom of God, it is its witness and sign in its environment. The church announces the Kingdom of God with hope, and it is called to organize its life according to the order of the Kingdom.”⁷⁵

The missionary nature of the church cannot be separated from the eschatological nature of the church.⁷⁶ Mission is ‘anticipation’, a foretaste of the new creation in Christ, and a testifying to it in the present historical-cultural context. This anticipatory nature of mission pointing beyond itself is most closely related to the essence of the church (whose relationship with Christ, according to Eph 5:32, remains a mystery), but which, by its very sacramental⁷⁷ dimension (again in an anticipatory way) already shares in the eschatological reality that is to be fully realized when the Head of the church sanctifies the church “spotless and without wrinkles” (Ephesians 5:27). The church needs eschatology, and faith needs hope to preserve its sobriety during the historical, social, political turnarounds and cultural changes so that it would not advance the promise of fulfillment by itself and would not mistake the structures of the changing world for the Kingdom of God. Moreover, this ultimate perspective helps endure the deficiency and fragmentation of the visible church.⁷⁸ This eschatological determination, however, stimulates us to serve, to make use of the still available time (Romans 13:12). Although the end relativizes what is temporal, earthly, penultimate, it does not belittle them. Even if the church is unable to realize the Kingdom of God on earth, it can testify to its nearness in word and deed, in its responsibility for the ‘penultimate’.⁷⁹

There has been a fear of referring to the church as a ‘sign’ or ‘sacrament’ in Reformed theology.⁸⁰ However, some Reformed theologians argue for the words ‘sign’ and ‘sacrament’ to be the best representative keys to the relation of the church and the Kingdom.⁸¹ Brinkman explains that the word ‘sign’ emphasises the fact that the

⁷⁵ *Reconciliation – Health / Wholeness – Hope* (2013)

⁷⁶ “The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one. Therefore the nature of the Church is never to be finally defined in static terms, but only in terms of that to which it is going. It cannot be understood rightly except in a perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological...” NEWBIGIN, Lesslie: *The Household of God*, New York, Friendship Press, 1954, 18.

⁷⁷ “The Church is thus constituted as a sacrament, an instrument of the unique mediation of Christ, a sign of the efficacious presence of that mediation.” *TCUC*, No. 110.

⁷⁸ “The instrumental ministry of the Church is confided to sinful human beings. It can therefore be disfigured or atrophied, mishandled and exaggerated. But the reality of God’s gift always transfigures human failure, and God’s fidelity to the Church continually maintains it, according to the promise (Mt 28:20) which sustains it in its mission of salvation across the ages.” *TCUC*, No. 109.

⁷⁹ BÜRKLE, HORST: *Mission*, in BALZ, HORST ROBERT – KRAUSE, GERHARD – MÜLLER, GERHARD (eds.): *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Volume VII, Berlin – New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1994, 59–60.

⁸⁰ BOSCH: *op. cit.*, 321–322.

⁸¹ See e.g., the formulations of *TCUC*, No. 108-110.; See also BRINKMAN: *op. cit.*, 29–33.; and ID.: *The Church as a Place of Forgiveness and Freedom*, in ID.: *A Reformed Voice in the Ecumenical Dialogue*, 104–106.; MIGLIORE: *op. cit.*, 263.

church is sent: it expresses the church's dependence on its Lord; it is nothing without its Lord; it exists for others; it is worthless in itself;⁸² this way of speaking about the church as a sacrament has nothing to do with its sacralisation.⁸³ Just at the sacramentality of the church cannot be 'guaranteed' by certain church structures, "but can only be experienced in the salvific meaning of Christ's death and resurrection, mediated to us by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper."⁸⁴

Where does the church's practice take on the character of a sign? Where does the sign become visible in an exemplary way? The church is no more than a sign that points beyond itself in its proclamation of the kingdom of God – this calls the church for modesty and self-criticism. When it fails to reflect the community of love, justice, freedom and peace, it fails in its vocation / mission to be the sign of the kingdom. To be an authentic sign, the historical and cultural dimension of the church and its pastoral work must be constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵

The concept of the church as a sign or foretaste does not allow the church to be reduced to a mere instrument (cf. Hoekendijk), and the concept of the church as an instrument or servant stands against the church-centric emphasis of mission (cf. McGavran et al.)

3. Summary

What has been elaborated above, might be summarized as follows:

The church needs a mission and mission requires a church that participates in the reconciling love of a sovereign God who reaches out through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to all of creation.

The church is the special instrument of God's mission in the world, for the world, and in solidarity with the world, proclaiming Christ as crucified and resurrected in an incarnational and kenotic way.

The goal of the church's mission is God's glory. The church must define itself in terms of the Kingdom: it is to be a sign of the Kingdom and must exist in a redemptive tension with culture.

The church, gathered around the Word and the sacraments, is the place where the reign of God is experienced in foretaste (*koinonia*). The power of the Spirit equips

⁸² BRINKMAN: The Church as a Place of Forgiveness and Freedom, 105.

⁸³ "The Church then is only a sacrament founded by Christ and entirely dependent on him. Its being and its sacramental acts are the fruit of a free gift received from Christ, a gift in relation to which he remains radically transcendent, but which, however, he commits to the salvation of humankind. [... There is a] radical difference which remains between Christ and the Church. In particular, the Church is only the spouse and the body of Christ through the gift of the Spirit." *TCUC*, No. 105.; „The terms 'sacrament' and 'sign' imply coherence and continuity between diverse moments of the economy of salvation; they designate the Church at once as the place of presence and the place of distance; and they depict the Church as instrument and minister of the unique mediation of Christ. Of this unique mediation the Church is the servant, but never either its source or its mistress." *TCUC*, No. 107.

⁸⁴ BRINKMAN: Unity: A Reformed Contribution, 31.

⁸⁵ BRINKMAN: The Church as a Place of Forgiveness and Freedom, 105.

men and women to serve others in all their needs (*diakonia*). The church is the place where a verbal witness is borne to Jesus Christ (*marturia / kerygma*).

4. Appendix: Church and mission in the Reformed Church of Hungary

4.1. Excerpts from the Act on Mission of the Reformed Church of Hungary (1995)⁸⁶

“The mission of the church is to be carried out as coming from the Father, in obedience to the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. According to our Reformed faith, mission is the practical realization of God’s gracious election. The church makes the gospel public so that those who have been elected to salvation but have not yet heard the good news of eternal life could finally hear: ‘faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.’ (Romans 10:17) Mission is therefore the unceasing work of Christ and of his church [...], by which he wants to gather God’s elect to his church.”⁸⁷

“The purpose of mission is not only the salvation of humanity but above all serving God’s glory: ‘...from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever!’ (Romans 11:36)”

“The Reformed Church of Hungary carries out its mission towards all people without discrimination:

- (1) towards those who have heard of Christ but have not yet accepted Christ (congregational mission);⁸⁸
- (2) towards those who have been alienated or detached from the church (inner mission);
- (3) towards those who have never heard of the saving grace of Christ for all humanity (outer mission).”

⁸⁶ 1995. évi II. törvény a Magyarországi Református Egyház Missziójáról, *reformatus.hu*, URL: https://www.reformatus.hu/documents/920/1995._évi_II._tv._Misszioi_tv..pdf Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 13. (My translation).

⁸⁷ Cf. *Heidelberg Catechism* Q&A 54: Q. What do you believe concerning “the holy catholic church”? A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.

⁸⁸ Church mission involves: (1) proclaiming God’s Word verbally and through all means of communication, in and outside the church, (2) proclaiming God’s Word by administering the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s supper), (3) evangelization, (4) all forms of catechism, (5) a regular visit to members of the church, (6) the *diakonial* care of members of the church, (7) pastoral care and preparing / training members for the ministry.

4.2. Mission statement, proposed by the Church Revision Committee (CRC), adopted by the Synod of the Reformed Church of Hungary in 2012⁸⁹

“The basis of the church’s existence and mission is that the redeeming will of God has become manifest in Christ. The church, therefore, is both a partaker and an instrument in God’s mission. The community of the church is called to be a sign, foretaste and servant of the Kingdom of God in the world through its congregations and church members, who proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the world both with words and deeds. The organization of the church, the structure that provides the framework for the community of the congregations, must be a tool and medium of the communication of the Gospel creating values, identity and community.”

4.3. Excerpts from *Reconciliation – Health / Fullness – Hope: the concept of the Reformed Church of Hungary’s ministry among the Gypsy*, adopted in 2013⁹⁰

“Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) as a sign and agent of God’s Kingdom will be a church of personal and social transformation, a community where irrespectively of origin or race, people can experience the welcoming, reconciling and healing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“God created man [and woman] to live in loving community (*communio*) with Him and each other, and the evolution for this community glorifies Him.”

“The church is missional by its very nature. God shows His truth and redeeming grace to His chosen people. He blesses His people and in turn makes them blessings to all the nations. His selection is a privilege, which comes with responsibility: God called His people to be a presence and active participant of mission. In the Old Testament, Israel became an indication for God among the nations, as long it organizes its life to respect God and follow God’s law regarding social life. The Gospel of the New Testament is the arrival of God’s Kingdom in Jesus, the possibility of reconciliation, restoration of relationships and healing of the whole life. Jesus’ life and miracles – through which He emphasized, particularly service among the poor, the outcast, the sick and those living on the margins – as well as His death and resurrection, by which He will win the final victory and open the way toward the Kingdom of God, toward the restoration of creation for all the world, speak of this.”

⁸⁹ Mission Statement and Developing Vision and Strategic Objectives, *reformatus.hu*, URL: http://www.reformatus.hu/data/documents/2014/03/25/Mission_statement_developing_vision_strategic_objectives.pdf Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 11.

⁹⁰ Reconciliation – Health – Hope, Concept of the Reformed Church in Hungary’s ministry among Roma (Working paper), *reformatus.hu*, URL: http://www.reformatus.hu/data/documents/2013/10/30/Concept_of_Roma_Ministry_of_RCH_full_text_working_paper_fin.pdf Last Accessed: 2022. 01. 11.

“The church received its call to mission from the Triune God, which also determines the method of its service: ‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ (John 20:21) In the church, God’s love and grace opens a new perspective for the individual and the community. Therefore, the church as an alternative community is experiencing the Kingdom of God, it is its witness and sign in its environment. The church announces the Kingdom of God with hope, and it is called to organize its life according to the order of the Kingdom. It follows the welcoming of poor people, people who live on the margins, outcasts and the lifting of prejudices. Announcing the Gospel brings the hope and possibility of reconciliation, the healing of relationships and the hope of a new life, even in hopeless situations. The holistic nature of mission comes from Jesus’ example, which is evidenced in words (church service and witness), in deeds (*diakonia* and fight for justice) and in practicing community (*communio* and worship). The manifestation of Jesus and His community with the downtrodden, calls the church to discover the reality and presence of Christ in the experience of those living on the margins.”

“The incarnation of Jesus entrusts the church the task of being the cultural embodiment of the Gospel. Every culture can become a carrier of the Gospel’s message, but there are elements in each culture that contradict the order of God’s Kingdom. The contextualization is a missiological work, where in both communities, the Gospel confessing and the hosting, welcoming community, examines its culture with the aim of finding elements that serve the order of God’s Kingdom, in which these two communities can learn from each other and enrich each other. However, at the same time it also names the ‘life-destroying’ elements of both cultures, and against them it bravely accepts the challenge of the Gospel. This work can be done accurately only by the members of the community in dialogue with other cultures. One of the tasks of the church’s Gypsy ministry is to nurture a new generation of Gypsy theologians and church leaders, who do the work of contextualization in regards to the Gypsy culture.”

Abstract

The paper gives an overview of some examples or models that have been influential or typical, at least in the author’s opinion, in the recent past in thinking about mission in the Reformed Church in Hungary. Thus, the article briefly deals with J. C. Hoekendijk’s theory about mission as the church living for others; D. McGavran’s understanding of mission as church growth; and Th. Sundermeier approach to mission as the church living with others. The second part of the article looks at some basic texts on mission formulated by the Reformed Church in Hungary, focusing on the theme church and mission, and provides a theological analysis of these focal points: the Trinitarian basis of mission, the church being missionary by its very nature, the church as a sign, foretaste and servant of the Kingdom of God. The Appendix contains excerpts from the documents analysed. The paper, as its context indicates, was written from a perspective that would make the topic suitable for an ecumenical discussion.

Keywords: church and mission; church growth; the church living for and with others; Kingdom of God; threefold office of Christ and of the church

REVIEW

GÁBOR ÉGERESI



Rome, Basilica di Santo Stefano Rotondo al Monte Celio. The interior of the church with the altar. The temple was built on the foundations of a sanctuary of Mithras, beginning in the 5th century. Its unusual circular floor plan is thought to be based on both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the description of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation.

Áron Kovács, Éva Kusnyír (eds.):
Reformed College of Sárospatak,
 London, Scala Arts et Heritage, 2020
 (Curators' Choice), 80 pages

Gábor Egeresi

WHICH IS THE MOST INTERESTING MUSEUM IN HUNGARY?

Which is the most interesting museum in Hungary? The dear reader may have several answers, as our homeland has a magnificent cultural heritage, which is quite well represented on a wide spectrum of different museums. Some of them are worthy of international attention; these are usually situated in the capital city. Therefore, we should make the question more precise: which is the most exciting museum in Hungary from the viewpoint of a patinated British art publishing house? Which institute should be the first one in the series of Hungarian museums?

The Scala Art and Heritage Publishers Ltd.'s project editor, Sandra Pisano has chosen the Scholarly Collections of the Reformed College of Sárospatak. It would be a surprising answer for those who do not know this institution and have no idea what a treasure chamber we have here in Sárospatak.

The publication has a standard form as it is a series piece. It has a very practical hand-held shape and a clear structure with charming imagery. The authors' task was to fill it with content. The curator's choice was prosperous not only in the institute selection but in the author-finding as well. Two young, ambitious and prepared scholars were chosen to describe the great heritage of the College. Áron Kovács (PhD) is a historian and curator of the Manuscript Collection. Éva Kusnyír is an ethnologist, folklorist and museologist. She is the curator of the institute's museum. Their duty was to select 37 books, documents and museum objects to demonstrate the nearly 500-year history of the College.

It was a difficult challenge concerning the length and diversity of this history. Furthermore, such an experiment is quite difficult when the targeted readers are probably not familiar with the historical background. A good sense of sensitivity for grabbing international interest seems to be necessary for success too. In spite of these stumbling blocks, the authors may expect a favourable reception of this publication. Adopting to the genre, the style is educational, but a kind of scientific accuracy is perceptible in the descriptions, which is one of the main virtues of this booklet.

The introduction tries to bring readers close to the theme and emphasize the human side of the issue: *“For almost 500 years, the resourceful ‘Patak student’ has been a recognisable figure in Hungary’s culture – someone who can always find a way through difficulties. (...) His most typical characteristic is loyalty to his alma mater, the Reformed College of Sárospatak.”* (p.4)

The College consists of three main parts: a theological seminary, a grammar school with its member institutions and the ‘collection’. This latter constant, as it is officially named, the Scholarly Collection of the Reformed College of Sárospatak is the narrower theme of this booklet. The Collection includes the Great Library, the Museum, the Archives and the Repository. In this institution, we can find 680,000 library items, some 30,000 museum objects, 505 linear metres of documents and nearly 240,000 repository items. Is it possible to introduce such an enormous cultural heritage through only 37 items? This booklet gives the answer, which is yes. It finds the correct rate among the different materials and offers an edible mixture for the readers.

The chosen items are shown in full-page pictures. The descriptive text is written in a popular style and is usually spiced with some curiosities. For instance, the ‘Philosophia Naturalis’, the first Hungarian academic-level-written book in the field of physics, is portrayed in this way. In its clause – just like a marginal fact – it is mentioned that the author, János Pósházi published Newton’s first law in it, actually 19 years before Newton!

We are looking forward to the publication of the Hungarian version of this great work with great excitement. With expanded content and a new target audience, it will surely be very useful in the introduction and promotion of the Reformed College of Sárospatak.

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Rome, altar of the Basilica Papale di San Lorenzo fuori le mura. The church, which has a history of building dating back to the 4th century, is one of the seven pilgrim churches of Rome. The remains of one of the first deacons, Saint Lawrence, were buried here.



