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“We Must Participate with the Fruits of Our Faith in Building Socialism”. The Preaching Committee in the Danubian Reformed Church District in the Mid-20th Century²

Abstract.

As a result of the communist takeover in 1948, the Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District, László Ravasz was deposed, and Albert Bereczky took his place. In the end of 1951, Bereczky wrote a report to the general meeting of the Reformed Church in which he requested the authorization to set up a “preaching committee” with the aim of supervising sermons. He believed it was important for the pastors to talk about issues of their time in sermons because “we don’t preach in a vacuum space but to real people”. In reality, the committee’s function was the full control over pastors and the search for the ideological/theological content (which is called “narrow-road” theology) in preachings. That is why every pastor was asked to

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send in one sermon that was to be delivered between 1/01/1952 and 25/02/1952. József Bodonhelyi, head teacher of practical theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Reformed Church, who was also member of this preaching committee, wrote notes about these received texts and sermons where he probably appeared in person. We could find certain qualifications in his notes that seriously affected the careers of the pastors (for example, "he doesn't address the issues of our time"; "his teaching is dangerous"; "he must urgently retire").

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After the end of the Second World War, the bishops of the Hungarian Reformed Church (László Ravasz, Imre Révész, Elemér Győry, Andor Enyedy) tried to provide some guidance to the pastors on how to conduct their ministry of preaching in the midst of the reconstruction taking place after the great global crisis. For this very reason, a circular letter was issued to all preachers of the Reformed Church in Hungary about the guidelines for preaching in congregations, dated 7 January 1947. It reads as follows:

It is with profound repentance that we must confess that the ministry of the Church as preacher has lately eroded in many places and in many ways.³ [...] But this shows all the more the neglect of overall standards, and in many places their slow depreciation.⁴ [...] Balak won⁵ because he either cut the prophet short or he altered the word on his lips.⁶ [...] We should give a series of sermons, either explaining a whole book from beginning to end or arranging a group of pericopes thematically. Stop preaching from specific, selected texts altogether, or limit it to cases where it is the only possible solution (e.g. at funerals).⁷ [...]

³ RÉVÉSZ, Imre – RAVASZ, László – GYŐRY, Elemér – ENYEDY, Andor (1947): *Körlevél a magyarországi református egyház valamennyi igehirdetőjéhez a gyülekezeti igehirdetés irányelveiről*. Budapest. 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cf. 4Moses 22–25.

⁶ RÉVÉSZ – RAVASZ – GYŐRY – ENYEDY 1947, 1.

⁷ Op. cit. 2.

It must be openly said that the present form of the relationship between church and state will change, at the most, not in a sudden explosion but with a certain transition, which is unlikely to be long. The leadership of the Church does not itself initiate this change, nor does it fear it, nor does it even consider it desirable in principle to bring about a change which does not set the Church and the State against each other as enemies, but which would eliminate the situation in which the Church is entirely dependent on the State for its maintenance. The leadership of the Church wants a Hungarian state whose supreme law is the Ten Commandments and its Christian core [...].⁸ Let us not only not make them feel, but let us not even suggest to ourselves that the Marxist approach is, without exception, in every single case, accompanied by an impious materialism because it is possible for one to apply Marxist dialectics merely as a method of economic life, and at the same time he would recognize the separate world of the spirit and the eternal laws of this special world. Let us not see hypocrisy and tactics in every sympathetic gesture towards the matters of the church and the soul.⁹

In 1948, the Communist takeover took place, and among the first measures taken by Mátyás Rákosi, László Ravasz was requested to resign, but being aware of the situation, he gave in to pressure¹⁰ and was replaced by Albert Bereczky.¹¹ Following the “theology of the narrow way”¹² in the current political situation, Bereczky tried to create an image

⁸ Op. cit. 3.

⁹ Op. cit. 5.

¹⁰ For details of the resignation, see more in: LÁNYI, Gábor (2023): „Inkább okos voltam, mint erős”. *Ravasz László lemondásának körülményei (1948)*. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Ravasz 100 püspöki jelentések. Előadások Ravasz László püspöki beiktatásának 100 éves évfordulója alkalmából. Ravasz László püspöki jelentései 1922–1948*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténelmi Kutatóintézet – Kálvin Kiadó. 49–52.

¹¹ LÁNYI, Gábor (2019): Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893–1966). A Life Full of Questions. In: Kovács, Ábrahám – Shin, Jaeshik (eds.): *Nationalism, Communism and Christian Identity: Protestant Theological Reflections from Korea and Hungary*. Debrecen – Gwangju, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Honam Theological University and Seminary. 123–140.; KÖBEL, Szilvia (2015): „Oszd meg és uralkodj!” *A pártállam és az egyházak*. Budapest, Rejtjel Kiadó.

¹² See more in: BEREZKY, Albert (1953): *Keskeny út. Igehirdetések, előadások, cikkek*. Budapest, Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 321–329.; LÁNYI, Gábor (2024): The Impacts of Ideologies in the History of the Reformed Church in Hungary. In: Kovács, Ábrahám –

of the Reformed Church as the community of God's people who were called to serve with obedient and grateful hearts in the socialist society. In order to do this, they tried to control everything in the Church, to monitor and observe the pastors and, through them, the members of the congregation. In 1951, Bereczky reached the decision that a Preaching Committee should be set up to monitor and supervise what pastors preached from the pulpits. In his 4th report as bishop, delivered in Budapest on 15 November 1951, we read the following:

I have left to the end the most intimate question of our universal ecclesial life: the matter of our *preaching* and our *preachers*. Studying the decrees of former synods, I was struck anew by the serious sense of responsibility with which they honoured the core ministry of the Church, i.e. preaching. What is happening today, at the pulpits of the churches that have survived the war and have been rebuilt by the hundreds? I was pleased to see the initiative of the Dean of the Pest Church County, who requested pastors to report annually on their preaching, and there have been similar ones recently around the district. Only in the Church can it still happen today that 20 of the 41 pastors of the mother parishes did not send in a report, and three of the five curates did not either. The Dean took great care in presenting the most important lessons learned before the diocesan assembly by presenting the submitted sermons. It is interesting and it is no coincidence that in the sermons of the pastors who are the most serious in their preaching, "the matters of our times" are also mentioned. Because we are not preaching in a void bubble but to real people. I consider such a regular theological evaluation and criticism of sermons and teaching to be so important that I ask the district assembly to order the dean of each church county to form smaller, 2-3-member committees and to request each pastor to send in sermons according to the method described before bearing consequences in all directions. We will ensure that our church district sets up an appropriate body to ensure single control over the whole issue. I request therefore the district presidency to be authorized in this sense.¹³

Jaeshik, Shin (eds.): Church and Society: Biblical, Theological and Missiological Approaches by Korean and Hungarian Protestants. Debrecen–Gwangju (Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Honam Theological University and Seminary. 243–257.

¹³ BEREZKY, Albert (1951): *IV. püspöki jelentés. Előterjesztette 1951 november 15-én.* Budapest. 16.

After the appointment of the members of the Commission, Bishop Albert Bereczky sent out the following letter to all the pastors:

I am glad to inform you that, in accordance with the Decision of the General Assembly of our Church District of 1951, the committee formed to assist in the preaching has begun its work. The members of the committee are President János Victor, József Bodonhelyi, József Farkas, Pál Patay, Géza Pap.

Let me emphasize that this work is primarily rooted in affectionate assistance, responsibility, although it will also have a strong monitoring character.

The first step in the Committee's work is to assess the current state of our sermons. In order to make it possible, I command to all pastors, religion teachers, and curates of our church district to send the written sermons they have preached at the Sunday services since 1 January 1952 to the Bishop's Office. Deadline for submission: 25 February 1952.

Let us take gratefully this God-given opportunity to help one another, as brothers and sisters, to make preaching, the core of the missionary life of our Church, truly the preaching of the Word, encouraging and guiding the members of our congregations to a grateful and obedient attitude today.¹⁴

Regarding the members of the Preaching Committee, it is worth noting that the chairman, János Victor, was reinstated as a professor at the Reformed Theological Academy on 1 September 1949 (he had previously been a lecturer at the Academy between 1925 and 1932) in the regular theological department. His task was the correct theological assessment of the new social situation that had arisen.¹⁵ The rest of the members were as follows: József Bodonhelyi, also a teacher and Head of the Department of Practical Theology at the Reformed Theological Academy;¹⁶ József Farkas, pastor of the Budapest-Klauzál Square (Gyulai Pál Street) congregation, later a lecturer on the subject of *the contemporary life of the Hungarian Reformed Church* at the Theological

¹⁴ Letter of Albert Bereczky to the pastors on the issue of the Preaching Committee, Budapest, 8 February 1952. Archives of the Danubian Reformed Church District (hereinafter referred to as: RL), A/1b Church governance documents 339/1952.

¹⁵ PAP, László – BUCSAY, Mihály (1955): *A Budapesti Református Teológiai Akadémia története 1855–1955*. Budapest, A Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 159–160.

¹⁶ Op. cit. 166.

Academy from September 1954;¹⁷ Géza Pap, pastor in Szabadszállás, Dean¹⁸ of the Bács-Kiskunság Reformed Church County of between 1952 and 1959;¹⁹ Pál Patay, pastor of the congregation of the Külső-Ferencváros-Tisztviselőtelep (now Nagyvárad tér) in Budapest.²⁰

Among the archival material entitled *Church Administrative Documents*, there are several unnumbered notebooks and a bundle of notes. On the stack of paper, we can read the following: *Notes by Dr József Bodonhelyi, Prof. of Theol., on the sermons of the pastors of the Danubian Church District 1952.*²¹ In the notebooks, we find, among other things, short summaries about the sermons of the pastors of the Délpest Reformed Church County.

Table 1.

Délpest Church County	
József Balogh	Targeting the payment of church tax.
Sándor Balogh, Tószeg	Worth dealing with.
Bertalan Sándor	Illustration issues.
Andor Békési, PhD	It would be worth a lot of effort.
György Bódi	Christian utopia.
Nándor Borza	Allegorization.

¹⁷ Op. cit. 168.

¹⁸ For more on the activities of the Preaching Committee, see: RIGÓ, Róbert (2019): *Kettős szorításban. A Bácskiskunsági Református Egyházmegye szerepe a kollektivizálásban (1952–1960)*. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *HIT 2018. Hagyomány, identitás, történelem. L’Harmattan – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézetének Reformáció Öröksége Műhelye – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet*. 295–297.

¹⁹ PAP, László (1992): *Tíz év és ami utána következett 1945–1963. Adalékok a Magyarországi Református Egyház XX. századi történetéhez*. Bern – Budapest, Az Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem kiadása. 399.

²⁰ Zakar, Albert (1937): *Emlékezet temploma. A Budapest Tisztviselőtelep-Külsőferencvárosi Református Egyházközösség gyülekezetének története. Rövid visszapillantással a Budapesti Református Egyház történeti multjára*. Budapest, Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai RT.

²¹ A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

Délpest Church County	
Zsigmond Bükki	Serious theological blunder.
István Demjén	Poet; holy lyre. Outrageous style.
Dezső Fónyad	Formal preaching. “The wise keep silent in times like these.”
László Gaál	Fear for the Church, pessimism.
Lajos Gombos	Propaganda instead of testimony.
Lajos Göde	Extended advertisement for the religious education.
Miklós Halasy	Allegorization: David = Christ, Goliath = Satan.
Gábor Jakus, Szigethalom	Not a malicious pietist.
Gábor Kovács	Peace and serenity.
István Kovács, PhD, Szentmártonkáta	Outstanding preaching. Solving a core issue.
Sándor Kovács, PhD, Albertirsa	Earnest, instructive preaching.
Kuthy Béla	It’s time to retire! As soon as possible!
Lénárt László	Symbolization.
István Mészáros	Harmful timeliness.
György Paczolay	Outstanding preaching.
László Páll	Serious, outstanding preaching.
Gusztáv Pinkóczy	Horrible.
Ferenc Soós	Timely, just not Word-like.
Vilmos Tasnádi	Not Word-like, still timely.
István Szabó	Wailing pietism.
Zoltán Tánzos	Chaotic.
János Tóth	Hopeful pietist.
Tóth Pál	In case of breach in discipline, he cannot preach any longer.
Sándor Balla	Horrible!
László Főző	Non-Christian preaching.
Lajos Kiss	Outstanding preaching.
László Kovács	Lexicon. Unqualified.
Benő Vörös	Nice style, timely, he can evolve.
József Papp	One of the best sermons. ²²

²² Ibid.

From the comments on the sermons we can conclude that there were some pastors who did not live up to the preaching style and message expected by the church leaders at all (e.g. Béla Kuthy, Pál Tóth, László Kovács). For those who were noted as having the potential for development or were worthy of attention, it meant that after some careful consideration there was hope that they could become excellent preachers adapted to the social situation (e.g. Sándor Balogh, Dr Andor Békési, Benő Vörös). However, there were also some who were perfectly capable of delivering the expected message (for instance, Lajos Kiss, Dr István Kovács, Dr Sándor Kovács, György Paczolay, László Páll, József Papp).

The other pages of the notebook contain more detailed analyses of the sermons, presumably also written by József Bodonhelyi. It is not clear from the descriptions whether he based his analyses on the sermons submitted or he personally attended the services. In the following, I will present a more detailed evaluation of some of the sermons without, however, being comprehensive.

László Ágai, Belső-Csepel, 01/10/1952

The Only Deliverer, *Reading: Isaiah 45:15–25; Text: 2Moses 20:1–3*

“The introduction is vivid and rich in experience – unfortunately, despite the specifics, it is still general and formal. The concept of the world can be misunderstood. It does not address today’s problems in an unambiguous way. Nor does he assess well the ‘alien god’ of the faithful in Csepel, the building of houses. His guiding service is almost null.”²³

Two very important sentences from the description should be highlighted: “It does not address today’s problems in an unambiguous way” and “Its service as an educator is basically nil.” Bereczky also points out in his bishop’s report that the “questions of our time” are also “frequently mentioned” in the sermons of pastors who “take preaching most seriously in faith”. We must conclude that only those are truly faithful pastors who address the issues of their day in their sermons, but not in the way they think or understand from the Word but in the way they are told from above. László Ágai did not comply, and so his guidance was qualified as next to nothing. We must conclude that

²³ Ibid.

this evaluation shows that it was not the pure preaching that was expected of the pastors but the ministry of guidance.

Lajos Madarász, Fót, 02/10/1952

In the Hands of a Merciful God. (Joseph's Life, Part 2), *Reading: 1Thes 5:1–24;*

Text: 1Moses 37:12–30

“The use of concrete examples exudes pietistic subjectivism. It tries to give guidance, but with little success. Judging our past only reveals that God has worked out ~~our circumstances, the people around us, the world~~ for the good of our heavenly lives as believers in God through judgment, but it is not revealed in the joy of merciful judgment that we are to share the fruits of our faith in building socialism.”²⁴

From the evaluation of the sermon, the theological vision of the evaluator Bodonhelyi and, through him, of the members of the Preaching Committee, becomes increasingly clear. Alongside the guidance, a very important task in the Reformed Church in 1952 was to build socialism with the fruits of faith.

Sándor Juhász curate, Veresegyháza, No title, Acts 1:6–8

“He begins with a ‘poetic image’, which can be used as an introduction to any text: here’s just as bad as anywhere else. The sermon expounds on the text. It moves on a contemporary historical plane, and only in the final paragraph does it attempt to apply it generally, formally, to the people today. There is no guidance whatsoever.”²⁵

The criticism of Sándor Juhász is the same as that of László Ágai: the lack of instruction and service.

Béla Papp, Isaszeg, New Life, New Light, Not dated, Reading: John 9:1–12;

Text: John 9:5–7

“A brief summary, a few pious sayings, full of allegory, which doesn’t make clear at all what the people of the Church should do in obedience in 1952 (the sermon was probably delivered on New Year’s Day).”²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

It is clear from the evaluation of Béla Papp's sermon that Bodonhelyi did not attend this service personally. The sermon's greatest flaw is that it does not speak about what the people of the church are to obey. Logically, this obedience is not directed towards God but to the church leadership appointed by the state.

László Rápolti, Martonvásár, 1952. I. 1. Scripture reading: Ef. 4:22–24; 1952. I. 13. Scripture reading: Mt. 2:16; 1952. I. 20. Scripture reading: Mt. 2:22; 1952. I. 27. Scripture reading: 1Pt 4:15–16; 1952. II. 3. Scripture reading: 1Pt 2:12–13a; 1952. II. 10. Scripture reading: Mt. 5:13.16

“The error does not rest in the intent of the guidance but rather in the interpretation of the Word that is the basis for the guidance message. For example, he speaks of Herod's infanticide and persecution of Christ in order to conclude by stating: ‘the life of a Christian is smooth today, the greater gratitude and obedience we owe for that!’ A good example: ‘Obedience is our duty... for the Lord. Not out of pressure, nor for appearances, nor out of opportunism, nor out of deceit, but for the Lord.’ ... ‘Don't let it be known that you are not a Christian, but behind the cloak of religiosity you are rather a reactionary, rebellious, restless individual!’”²⁷

The first good example is found in László Rápolti, an excellent illustration of the kind of thinking that characterized the church leadership serving the state power. If you are not obedient, then you are just the contrary: a rebellious, restless reactionary.

József Lukáts, Kölked, 1951. I. 1. More! Reading: Lucas 15:21–24; Text: Filem. 20–21

“His sermon is suitable to teach the love of God and to point out the obedience of the believer. His biblical teaching is clear, his exposition convincing and sincere. Doing more in the service of peace: in prayer as in action... Try for once to believe that it is possible to earn peace and to maintain it, if many will. Have faith and a great desire that the great disputes can be settled at the negotiating table by those into whose hands God has placed the destiny of peoples and that it can be so settled without necessarily requiring blood and suffering on the battlefields. Look, our world, the country in the making, the people who live and work in the plan start the new year with the promise that they will produce more, build more, produce better, so hear ye that your Lord is teaching you, as a member of the Church, the same thing, and He's giving you a greater responsibility.”²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

We have got two highly positive points in the evaluation of József Lukáts' sermon: he points out the obedience of the believer, and his exposition is convincing and sincere. It is worth noticing that in the fragment of the sermon, presented as a good example, he equates the propaganda of the socialist state – i.e. to produce more, to build, to produce better – with the word of God, as the preacher says: “Your Lord teaches you the same and places even greater responsibility onto you.”

Jenő Rákossy, Bálványos, 02/10/1952, Are You a Living Member of a Church? Reading: Mt. 5:18–48; Text: Mt. 5:47

“Time has taught us that we must learn, albeit slowly, that we must also work for the progress and peace of our whole nation. Because the sound of the rumbling chariot of history (?) urges us to learn, to work, but also to take off, because it is not good to lag behind and not to understand the signs of the time.’ An honest speech by a preacher of the so-called ‘revival line’, who wants to guide us in our daily, worldly lives. It is a pity that he is not very specific, that he does not show the implications of the individual readings.”²⁹

The biggest flaw of Jenő Rákossy's sermon is that the guidance is insufficiently supported by examples.

Béla Gáspár, curate³⁰ Budapest-Óbuda, 02/17/1952, Work, Text: 1Thes. 4:11

“Without taking the gospel into account at all, it tries to discuss the work according to today's understanding. The name of Jesus Christ hasn't even been mentioned in the sermon. In spite of his modernist zeal, he makes major errors in his ‘social’ interpretation of *work*, which is also – and this is the interesting thing about it – a theologically false doctrine. I consider his church ministry to be dangerous.”³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ On the case of Béla Gáspár's marginalization, see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2020b): *Méltatlanul. Háttérbe szorított dunamelléki református lelkészek az 1950-es években*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézetének Reformáció Öröksége Műhelye – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet. 72. For its summary in English see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2023): Church Disciplinary Procedures in the Early 1950s as Tools of Political Sidelineing. In: Bárh, Dániel (ed.): *Lower Clergy and Local Religion in 16th–20th-Century Europe*. Budapest, MTA – ELTE Lendület Történeti Folklorisztikai Kutatócsoport. 345–366

³¹ A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

Béla Gáspár's sermon, although it tries to comply with the contemporary understanding, does not mention Jesus Christ on the one hand and gives theologically false teaching despite being modern on the other. The combination of the two is a danger to today's church.

The situation is similar with László Széles, whose ministry is also considered dangerous, as his teaching is "insidiously spiced with the acid of his reactionary personality".

Minister László Széles, Bp. Máv-telepi préd. áll., Not dated, Care for Your Salvation!

Text: Jews 2:3a

"The sheer gospel that he seems to preach is insidiously spiced with the acid of his reactionary personality. It's dangerous for the ministry of the church today."³²

Miklós Katona, curate, Szedres, 02/17/1952, Follow Me! Reading: Mt. 16:13–28;

Text: Mt. 16:24

"The author is pietistic at heart and combines it with modernity in this sermon. (1. Following Jesus Christ, 2. Self-denial – sacrificing, 3. Only the committed should follow Him.) He discloses the theological basis of evil drop by drop. In Part I, he says: 'Let's not think that Christ leads only in the Western world order. Nay, he leads in the Eastern world order, in our world order, too.' In Part 2, he wants to make the congregation love communists by emphasizing self-denial: 'Christ quite definitely wants us to love our brethren in this world order, to love this people who is building socialism, to love socialists and communists.' As if the Church were an outsider and not part of the community of the people building socialism!"³³

The preacher went too far: he was so eager to conform to the ideology that he urged everyone to love not only the socialists but also the communists. One might legitimately ask how he got from the Gospel according to Matthew to this. Nevertheless, it is precisely this exaggerated message of love for one another that makes the Church an outsider in the existing socialist society, which is, according to Bodonhelyi, a wrong conception since the Church is also a social segment of socialist society.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Gábor Mező, Tamási, 02/24/1952, No title, Reading: Col. 3:16–24; Text: 1Thes. 4:10/b–12

“The sermon is about the value, the way, and the purpose of man’s work. It goes beyond the limits of the scripture reading. One gets the feeling that he wants to say all he can about work. Otherwise, his statements are correct and point exactly to Christians’ duties today. The social explanation of work is instructive: how did the work ethic, rightly understood at the time of the Reformation, degenerate in the course of the capitalist order? It is one of those sermons whose writers seek in faith to find the relevance of God’s word today.”³⁴

According to the analyser, Gábor Mező’s preaching should be held up as an example because he belongs to those ministers who “seek in faith the actual message of God today”, i.e. he obeys the theological guidance that the church leadership expects from its pastors.

Endre Sik, Mórág, 02/03/1952, Christ Brings You to Life, Text: John 5:21/b

“He uses the above verse as a basis for his timely reflections on community life and is not bothered by the fact that the sermon has nothing to do with the reading. The mixed metaphors in the various illustrations make him look ridiculous from start to end. At one time, he turns his listeners into gears of machinery, at another into instruments in an orchestra. In his pursuit of timeliness, he goes so far as to say that the pioneers of Mórág were led by the Word to start community farming. Two quotes: ‘There is no rusty plane iron that cannot gain new light, new edge in the hands of the Master, and therefore a new life.’ ‘The most characteristic feature of time is its transience. It is also the time of grace! One word has already been uttered. Jesus said He would undertake you. But the phone rings in vain, the telephone exchange staff rings in vain if the caller doesn’t pick up and can’t hear it. Pick up the phone, brother!’”³⁵

Endre Sik’s sermon was the same kind of exaggeration as Miklós Katona’s, with a primitive example, and it is no coincidence that it did not win the sympathy of the member of the Preaching Committee.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

József Adorján, *Sztálinváros (Dunaiújváros)*, 02/10/1952, No title, Text: John 8:29–32

"The text of the sermon is actually only verse 29; there is no reference to verses 30–31 at all, and a very vague reference to verse 32 at the end of the sermon. In the introduction, he speaks of those who fear of being abandoned by God, and hence he gets to the text. He explains the meaning of the text clearly and logically, reaching down to the real life of today's man.³⁶ It stands out far above the other sermons.³⁷

I saved the review of the sermon by József Adorján for last, as this is the only sermon other than József Lukáts's that received an entirely positive review. Its main positivity lies in the following: "reaching down to the real life of today's man". It is not surprising that Adorján later became pastor in several congregations in Budapest and later the Dean of the Dél-Pest Reformed Church County (1959–1968) and then of the Budapest-Észak Reformed Church County (1968–1990).³⁸

Finally, I left a review of the sermons of some well-known figures of the time and in church history:

László Ravasz: "Even if the author were not marked, one could guess that it was written by L[ászló] R[avasz]. With his usual classicism, he expresses the message of the Word. The reader feels as if he is being given a precious stone. There is no guidance or concrete message.³⁹

Gyula Muraközy: "A beautifully coloured, sterile, enjoyable gospel, which has nothing to do with real life. It is objective bourgeois thinking."⁴⁰

Imre Szabó: "He annoyingly ignores everything that G[od] does in our life on earth. Pietist-quietist, sterile speech."⁴¹

³⁶ The words "real life" are underlined in pencil, as if highlighted in the text.

³⁷ A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

³⁸ LÁNYI, Gábor (2020a): „Az utolsó meghódítandó” – *Társadalmi változások hatásai a Szigetszentmiklósi Református Egyházközösségre az 1950-es években*. In: Kolumbán, Vilmos József (ed.): *Egyház, iskola, művelődés. Egyháztörténeti tanulmányok*. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 432.; LÁNYI, Gábor (2020c): "Ecclesiastical Authority Terror". The Downgrading of the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Parish to Mission Parish in 1956. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 14, 2. 53–78. 74.

³⁹ A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

József Farkas:⁴² “Today’s concrete guidance is totally missing from his sermon, which would be much needed by the people building socialism.”⁴³

Endre Gyökössy: “A bit of a prima donna, the absolute favourite of the congregation.”⁴⁴

The Preaching Committee, in addition to reviewing the sermons, later tried to prepare preaching drafts, especially for the most important celebrations of the church year, which all church pastors had to follow. These outlines were accompanied by prepared sermons to be read from the pulpits. These sermons were, understandably enough, sufficiently instructive for the churchgoers of the time: they conveyed what an individual of God’ nation should do gratefully and obediently for the Lord, recognizing in judgment the grace of being a member of the community of the people building socialism. The story of the Preaching Committee is a good example of what happens when state power wants total control of the church, the ministers who serve in it, and, through them, the laymen. But let us not forget the words of the Word: “But the word of God is not chained” (2Tim. 2:9).

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⁴² One could wonder why a pastor whose sermons were not sufficiently instructive for the people of the time was member of the Preaching Committee.

⁴³ A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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