

## Dániel Tóth-Gyóllai: Béla Vasady: A lelkész mint... vagy: mintalelkész (review)

Vasady Béla (ed.): *A lelkész mint... (vagy: mintalelkész), harmincnégy tanulmány az egyetlen-célú és sokoldalú lekipásztori hivatásról*, Igazság és Élet booklets, vol. 20., 1940, pp 3-172.

*Review written by Dániel Tóth-Gyóllai<sup>[1]</sup>*

What is the purpose of the Church in the World? What is the purpose of the pastor in the Church? What is the purpose of the Christian wo/man, in his/her life?

These questions arose in every period of the Church history. It was the same with the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 1930's, which was an era full of tensions, but at the same time charged with vivid energies. The fundamental questions of the life of the believer were ever central in this period and essays concerning the problem of theological education were headlines on the pages of theological journals. The renewal of the theological education was of special importance for dr. Béla Vasady<sup>[2]</sup> too. He was a faithful supporter of the educational reform<sup>[3]</sup> of Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész, who intended to unite the four Hungarian theological seminars in one joint programme, planning to create grounds for training pastors of different types (specialized in different pastoral activities like church organization, preaching, cura pastoralis, diakonia etc.). In 1936 Vasady launched a study series on the pages of 'Igazság és Élet' with the title "The pastor as... exegete, historian, dogmatician, church-organizer, social- and economical politician, pedagogue and psychologist etc." It was his intent to provide appropriate space for debate over the one and many-sided profession of pastoral work, therefore he equally invited professors and parish pastors to write essays on this single topic, approaching it from different angles. The elaborations of 16 theological professors, 17 parish pastors and one non-theologian church worker were first published in the periodicals of 'Igazság és Élet' between 1936 and 1940. Later, Vasady decided to publish these works in one collection, in a compilation book. This book with its plain green paperback is the one the reader holds in his/her hands.

With its 169 pages, 34 essays (with a length 3-10 pages) and 20 different titles this book resembles short-story collections. Every work has its standalone value, and they are prepared mostly without the purpose of creating a whole. A pastor may get an overwhelming sense reading them at once, since most of the titles claim to describe the essence of the life and work of a pastor in an exclusive way. Fortunately, for almost all of the authors the

fundamental governing objective is the 'ministerium verbi divini.'<sup>[4]</sup>

It is a document of exhortation and admonition for all pastors of all ages. It encourages to strengthen our confidence in the ever-living Word of God and warns to never underestimate its necessity in our everyday life, as Vasady wrote in his essay ('The pastor as dogmatician'): "The pastor has a calling for a way of life, not for a career. A way, on which he<sup>[5]</sup> must not stop but always walk forward."<sup>[6]</sup>

As such this book makes a good pedagogical reading for all Christians. Most of the essays start and conclude with ontological questions like the right relation between thinking and believing<sup>[7]</sup>, the purpose of being ethical as a Christian<sup>[8]</sup>, the necessity of humility in the face of the Scriptures<sup>[9]</sup>, the irreplaceability of the communion of the faithful<sup>[10]</sup> or the message of the Bible on the concerning question of social inequality<sup>[11]</sup>.

These works are also critical of the Hungarian Reformed Church. They promote the improvement of the weak areas of the Church's functions. Many authors emphasize the need for extending the Hungarian theological literature.<sup>[12]</sup> Others outline the basic necessity of liturgical reform<sup>[13]</sup>, or that of the returning of theoretical subjects in theological education<sup>[14]</sup>.

Ultimately, the purpose of this book is to present that the work and life of the pastor is many-sided and single-scoped at the same time. Its single scope is the service of the Word of God, its many sides are the different activities through which the Word of God is proclaimed. The construction of the book helps the reader create their own understanding of the building of a pastor's ministry. It begins with the most evident theological aspects of it (exegesis, Church history, philosophy, dogmatics, and ethics) goes through its practical theological considerations (homiletics, liturgy, pedagogy and psychology) and finds its route all the way to the less popular subjects of ecclesiastical law, social and diakonal ministry and foreign mission. This structure is quite parallel with the outline of the unified theological education of that era.<sup>[15]</sup>

The collection starts with the elaborations of two parish and two academic pastors in the topic of exegesis, and its role in the service and life of a pastor. The authors set off their explanation from the same perspective. They emphasize the cruciality of the Bible (in its original formula[e]) as the most valuable and only irreplaceable device of the pastor. The Old Testament and the understanding and interpretation of its verses are in the focus of Sándor Czeglédy and Kálmán Kállay. Kállay draws the reader's attention to the danger of misleading translations, stressing the importance of using the diagnostic conclusions of historical-critical method. For Czeglédy exegesis is more like close attention and connection between the

reader and the Bible. He approaches the question from the spiritual benefits of the attentive observation of the Word of God. The elaborations of Károly Erdős and János Victor treat the topic of 'The pastor as the exegete of the New Testament'. Both authors narrow their perspective by focusing on the preaching of the Word of God. Victor's writing plays a summarizing and also a widening role at the end of this section. As a good systematical theologian, he defines the exegesis as a many-step process, which ends in the ever-present Word of God as His self-revelation to the congregation.

Péter Görömbey and Imre Révész write their essays under the title: 'The pastor as a Church historian'. On the one hand they list the different aspects of the need for knowledge in church history while on the other note that there is no possible way for a parish pastor to be present in his pastoral work in the congregation and at the same time take it seriously to research in the disciplinary science of Church History. For Révész the implication, that the pastor has to be a church historian means that without knowing our history (which is our path), we are blind in the present and are running foolhardy into the unknown future.

'The pastor as a philosopher' – is the title of the works of Dezső Trócsányi and Ignác Farkas. This section brings about a historical tension and contradiction. Both authors point out that theology is always in connection with philosophy, and the latter has many lessons to teach the former. But the difference is almost as important as the similarity: theology is the science of faith, and not that of the mind.

Two systematic theologians and two parish leading pastors discuss the topic of the pastors' dogmatical and ethical responsibilities. József Kovács's work gives a general clarification about the misunderstandings surrounding dogmas. Béla Vasady completes the argument of his fellow pastor by analyzing the role of dogmas in the life of the pastor (and also in that of the Church) in detail. The same order applies to the pair of Muraközy's and Török's essays. Muraközy introduces the topic with contemplating over the question 'What does it mean for a Christian to be morally perfect?' putting the exemplary life of the pastor in the focus, while Török unfolds the question with focusing on the crisis of the preaching of the Church which lacks practicality and true desirable power. Sándor Czeglédy (jr.), Lajos Darányi, Lajos Gönczy, Sándor Benedek, Endre Tóth and Sándor Vikár carry on with the subject of the sermons and the worshipping of the community and bring the reader to the conclusion: all pastors are primarily liturgists and homilists as it is exclusively their mission to lead the community in the worshipping of God. It shakes the fundamentals of the worship of the Church if pastors cease to be priests and saints of God in this manner.

All pastors must become guide for the mind and spirit of every sheep in their flock. Sándor

Makkai and Béla Soós highlight the above implication with examples of recent challenges pastors must encounter on both scientific and pedagogical levels. In the essays of Andor Enyedy and Kálmán Maller the psychological aspect of pastoral work is underlined with the implication that there is true spirit-curing power in the glorification of the Holy Spirit, and it is of particular importance for the pastor to become a spiritual leader in the glorification of God.

Three authors discussed the role of ecclesiastical law in the life and work of reformed pastors. Elemér Győry (as parochial pastor and bishop), István Kováts J (as professor of theology and law) and Béla Szentpéteri Kun (as Church lawyer) take a similar position on the problematic issue of the ecclesiastical law by articulating the biblical grounds for paying special attention to organizing the life of the people of God.

This section is followed by five essays concerning the outward and worldly service of pastors. Reading Béla Pap's and János Domján's papers the reader's attention turns toward some recent subjects<sup>[16]</sup> like social-politics, social misery, starvation, poverty, unemployment and other social phenomena. In Pap's and Domján's view the pastor needs to be aware of general as well as locally specified social circumstances to become ever more sensible in his 'social' preaching. In the essays of Sándor Joó, Lajos Szabó and Jenő Horváth more of the pastor's outward activities are discussed. They expose the biblical background for diakonia and foreign mission as basic responsibilities of the Church and outline the pastor's specified work in it as to promote and organize them among the members of their congregation.

The book ends with the subject of 'The pastor as shepherd'. The length of Lajos Imre's and Imre Szabó's essays (both cover ten pages adding up to more than eleven percent of the book) indicate the superior importance<sup>[17]</sup> of the topic. These works are the opposite of the first ones in the sense that they put more weight on the proclamation of the Gospel outside the Church walls.<sup>[18]</sup> It was a special re-recognition of that certain age that preaching without pastoral care is similar to a flower cut from its stem.<sup>[19]</sup>

This compilation book gives abundant material for today's Christian readers struggling with the everyday questions of Christian life. One (especially one with Church historian sensibility) can gain a wide insight to the spirituality and intellectuality of that era through the lines of these essays. The book's pages are full of vigorous thoughts of theologians willing to act today. Therefore, it could make one of the most encouraging readings for theological students fighting with the decreasing of their own readiness to serve the Word of God and to serve others. Every single writing has something more to say about the profession of pastors, and although not all of them are of the same quality, there is not a single essay that lacks attention to the Word of God and its outstanding priority among all other remarkable things

in the work of pastors.

## References

1. PhD Student, Doctoral School – Faculty of Theology of Károli Gáspár University, PhD Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Gergely Hanula. ↑
2. Professor of dogmatics in the theological faculty of Tisza István Hungarian Royal University of Debrecen ([1932–]1934–1949), founder and chief editor of the 'Igazság és Élet' theological periodical for pastoral work (1935). ↑
3. See, Vasady Béla: *A lelkészképzés reformja, különlenyomat a Lelkészegyesület 1939. évf. 50., továbbá 1940. évf. 1–6. számából*, Debrecen, Városi Nyomda, 1940. ↑
4. Ministering the Divine Word. ↑
5. Note that there were no female pastors in that era. ↑
6. Vasady 41. Or elsewhere: „The pastor can never agree with being one-sided, his work and profession cannot be limited to one specific activity, because he’s called for a job covering his whole life-span.” Vasady 3. ↑
7. See Trócsányi, 28. ↑
8. See Muraközy, 45. ↑
9. See Kállay 10–13; Farkas 31; Soós 82. ↑
10. See Vasady 45; Czeglédy jr. 53; Gönczy 64–66; Benedek 68; Vikár 138. ↑
11. See Pap 123; Domján 125; Joó 152; Szabó 156; Horváth 158. ↑
12. See Czeglédy 7; Kállay 12; Erdős 17; Görömbey 24; Kovács 37–38; etc. ↑
13. See Darányi 59; Gönczi 57; Tóth 135; etc. ↑
14. See Czeglédy 7; Révész 24; Vasady 40. ↑
15. See the Curriculum of the General Convent 1924. ↑
16. Inward and outward mission, diakonia and sociology were each frequently debated topics in the 1930's. The curriculum of the theological education was extended in 1911 and 1924 in the direction of these subjects. ↑
17. I mean Vasady's and some of the authors' personal priority by that. ↑
18. See Károly Erdős's comment on this matter: „Today's Church work is leaning toward pastoral and spiritual care. The influence of the intellectual development of this era contributed to the fact that in our most recent Synod articles, the name of the leader of a congregation became the pastor (note the difference between Hungarian words: 'lelkész' or 'pap' and 'lelkipásztor'). And while pastors used to preach the Holy Scriptures, they are now only contemplating or conversing about it.” Erdős 14. ↑
19. See Szabó 168. ↑