

Dr. Thorday Attila:

**Biblically Grounded Pastoral Care
(Habilitation Thesis)**

Introduction and presentation

According to the actual academic regulations of Romania, the habilitation dissertation must present the candidate's higher education activities, in particular, his or her research and other scientific activities regarding the postdoctoral period. For the sake of transparency, I have divided the dissertation into five chapters.

In the introductory chapter, I give an overview of my scientific work and the structure of my dissertation. In the concluding chapter, I provide an overview of my scientific plans for the near future in the fields of research, education, and the implementation of theories.

Summarizing the results of my two and half decades spent in Hungarian higher education has not been an easy because of its versatility, but it has definitely been inspiring.

In my habilitation thesis I try to focus mainly on my research in the field of biblical and pastoral theology, and my intention is to show up the well-separable route of my own field of research that leads from my doctoral dissertation to my current work.

1. Description of my professional career

I was born at Budapest in 1962 and graduated from the Piarist High School in 1980. I chose my teaching profession when I was at high school. I was first attracted to scientific subjects, so I obtained the qualification of a high school teacher majoring in mathematics and geography at the József Attila University of Szeged, Faculty of Sciences, in 1986. Meanwhile, I became attracted to theology and took up my mission as a Catholic priest. As a priest, I graduated from the Faculty of Theology of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in 1992, obtaining my second MA degree and then a scholarship to the Gregorian University of Rome. In 1994 I obtained a licentiate in biblical theology (Licentia in Sacra Theologia). I wrote and defended my dissertation in Italian under the title "*Benedizione iniziale della Lettera agli Efesini*". This qualification entitles me to teach theology in higher education.

I started teaching at the Theological College of Szeged, the legal predecessor of the Faculty of Theology of Gál Ferenc University, about 26 years ago. In the 1995/96 school year, I taught Old and New Testament exegesis as a part-time lecturer, and later as a full-time instructor from the following school year. It was then that my first publications appeared in the Jerome Booklets, a biblical journal, and my translations at Agapé Publisher House. The title of my first independent volume is *The Covenant as Gift of God and Commitment of Man*.

I defended my doctoral dissertation in 1997 at the Faculty of Theology of Pázmány Péter Catholic University with the qualification “magna cum laude”. My PhD dissertation was published that year with the title: *The Dynamics of the Knowledge of God: Exegetical Studies Based on the Epistle to the Ephesians*. In the following years, I researched modern methods of scripture interpretation. I have given lectures on this topic at workshops organized for pastoral staff, and also at the National Conference of Theology Teachers. Outstanding among the publications of these years are the ones that discuss the process of the description of Jesus' childhood in Luke's gospel, as well as the story of Jesus' suffering, and his resurrection with the help of the chosen research methods. My 220-page monograph was published in 1998. under the title: *He gave himself for us. The Synoptical Tradition of the Passion Narrative of Jesus*. The St. Jerome Catholic Bible Society published a new edition in 2009.

I moved from Szeged to Budapest in 2001, because I won the competition to head the Department of Liturgy and Pastoral Sciences at the Faculty of Theology of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, and at the same time I was awarded the title of „extraordinary university professor”. During my five-year term, I was a consultant in the completion of 109 BA and 29 MA dissertations, and I participated in the Doctoral Committee of the Faculty of Theology not only as an opponent but as the first consultant of three dissertations.

During these years I entered a new field of research, the results of which I published in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology of the University of Passau in Hungarian and in German: *Religions- and Ethikunterricht in Ungarn in 2004*. I continued my research in this area and published more recent results in *Communio*, an international theological journal in 2006.

I am proud to have succeeded in publishing in Hungarian the largest handbook of Catholic biblical studies, with the collaboration of 25 of my colleagues, after 5 years of persistent translation work. Volumes I-II-III of the Jerome Bible Commentary were published in 2002-2003, of which I was the editor-in-chief.

My first English-language article was published in the journal of the University of Babeş-Bolyai *Sacra Scripta* in Cluj-Napoca in 2005: *The Role of the Neoniskos in the Easter Mystery according to Mark*. As part of the Erasmus Socrates Intensive Program, I gave a presentation at a conference in Thessaloniki in 2008 entitled “*Contribution of the Religious Education to the European Identity*”.

At Gál Ferenc College (since 2018 Gál Ferenc University, Faculty of Theology), I gave two series of lectures entitled “The Word of the Bible” and “Introduction to the Christian Doctrinal Faith” for students coming from abroad in the spring of 2016. and three years later in 2019 again “The Word of the Bible”.

Within the framework of the Erasmus + program, I also gave lectures at foreign universities: in 2008 in Thessaloniki, in 2013 in Krakow, in 2016 in Cluj-Napoca, in 2018 in Eichstatt-Ingolstadt, in 2019 in Zagreb, in 2022 in Cluj-Napoca.

In 2006 I moved back to Szeged, where I became the Rector of the Major Priestly Seminary, and I was able to make use of my experience as a vice-rector of the College of Theology in the field of education organization. In 2007, I received a parish appointment, which provided an opportunity to put into practice what I had taught to young priests and pastoral staff for years. During these years, my research was focused on pastoral theology. I reflected on my experience and compared it with the research results of other professionals.

My principal concern is biblically inspired pastoral care, as pointed out in my presentation at the 25th International Biblical Conference in 2013. A written version of my lecture was published as "The Principles of Ownership in the Early Church. The Punishment of Ananias and Safira (Acts 5: 1-11)" in conference volume "*The Bible and Economics: International Biblical Conference XXV*" in 2014. Continuing my research in this area, I published it in 2016 in the journal *Studia Biblica Athanasiana* entitled "The Punishment of Ananias and Safira (Acts 5.1-11: Right to Property in the Ancient Church").

I have published my studies with preference in the scientific journal *Deliberationes* of the Gál Ferenc College (University from 2018): "The Person of Christ in the Work of St. Paul" (2008), "The Concept of Revelation in the Corpus Paulinum" (2011), "Serving Young People: Antioch"(2015)," Mystery Plays in the Service of Evangelization "(2016), "Possibilities of Communicating the Faith"(2018). My most recent study was published in the journal *Folia Theologia et Canonica* (2021), entitled "I am with you every day... God's Promises According to the Scriptures".

2. Presentation of the structure of my habilitation thesis

Following the introductory chapter, in which I give an overview of my thesis and my carrier as a scientist, in chapter II. of my thesis I report on the results of my research in the field of Biblical Studies.

In the first section of chapter II (II. 1.) I present an examination of basic biblical-theological concepts. In the subsection II. 1.1. I claim that the descendants of Abraham were called to be the 'chosen ones' not by their genetics but mainly by their common faith: in their only God who is their personal caretaker and who invited them to become his people. I present the development of the historical approach formed in Israel, as well as the steps in the development of their historiography.

In subsection II. 1.2. I present the results of my biblical research on God's promises and covenant. In my approach, the concept of covenant is at the centre of the Bible. God creates an alliance through his promises with his chosen ones. The person who accepts this alliance and expresses it by living out God's law lives a Covenant lifestyle deeply rooted in his faith in God's promises.

My research has covered the connections between the concept of biblical wisdom and the knowledge of God. The results of this are shown in II. 1.3. subsection.

I have also examined the Psalms, more lyrical writings of the Bible, especially from the point of view of how these prayers of the Old Testament could have become meaningful tools of praise for Christian believers. I quote from my publications on this in II. 1.4. subsection.

My research in the field of Biblical Studies are presented in section II. 2 where I talk about the results obtained using different methods of text interpretation.

In subsection II. 2.1. I point out the orientation towards passion through the example of the Gospel of Mark, that is, from the very first chapter onwards, in almost every pericope it can be shown that the evangelist directs the reader's attention to the end. In addition to the vertical (forward)

approach, I present the so-called horizontal (parallel) approach and its results when I compare descriptions of the same event according to three evangelists. In addition, I have combined these two approaches, and I present highlights from two monographs entitled *Jesus Gave Himself for Us*, which have been published as a result of all of these.

In subsection II. 2.2. I present the results of rhetorical analysis applied to biblical texts in my university curriculum.

In chapter III. I summarize my teaching and educational activities from the beginning to the present day. In section III.1., I list my education development activities.

At the Theological College of Szeged, I had the opportunity to develop the system of teaching biblical exegesis using the experience of my studies in Rome. The results are shown in subsection III. 1.1.: I present the content and interdependence of the units of Old and New Testament exegesis, which I introduced in 1995, in the College - we still teach exegesis using this structure.

In subsection III. 1.2. I describe the process of my invitation to develop the training structure in accordance with the Bologna Convention at the Faculty of Theology of Pázmány Péter Catholic University in 2005. The system I developed was approved in that same year, and since the 2006/07 academic year education has been provided accordingly.

The new training structure also provided new opportunities to create a framework for long-needed developments. This is what the III. 1.3. a subsection is about, where I present the topics of the new units introduced by me at the university. It was my job at the time to work out all of the details and to find qualified instructors for the subjects.

In section III. 2, I list out the subjects I have taught and the courses connected. I am introducing their subject matter, and the contents of my notes prepared to support my lectures. Appendix No. 5 contains a chronological list of which units I taught in which higher education institution, in which academic year, and in how many hours.

Reflecting on my role as a teacher, I present my motivating and evaluative role in section III. 3. For the motivational activity, I write about the biblical text translator seminar and list its fruits. I present my evaluation activity as supervisor and reviewer of several theses. In Appendix No. 6-7, all of the dissertations supervised by me are listed in chronological order in which higher education institution, in which academic year, and at which level of education (Bachelor's and Master's degree or doctoral).

I have also worked in the field of training and education of seminarians training for the priesthood. My experience of this can be found in subsection III. 3.3. As the leader in the Seminary of Szeged next to the Theological Faculty, I organized and supervised the pastoral practices of the students. This also means that I put a great impact on their educational development, and motivated and evaluated them, but I also devoted space to nurturing talent by editing the Seminary Yearbooks, the content of which were made from their writings.

Chapter IV is about my work for wider society. In the first section (IV. 1), I reflect on the role of the church as a keeper and provider of faith, examining what new coping strategies can be demonstrated in a changing social context. I will present my role in it as a priest and researcher as well more in detail. In the following subsection IV. 1.1. I distinguish between religious education in schools and catechesis in parishes in terms of its aims and methods, I point out their mutual alignment. This distinction is supported not only by the guidelines set forth in Church documents but also by my own experience and examination.

In subsection IV. 1.2. I summarize the results of a multi-year research project. I collected data on the situation of religious education in Hungary, based on which I outlined actual trends and tendencies. In my two studies published in Hungarian and in German as well, I also explained the causes of the quantified facts and indicated their consequences.

In subsection IV. 1.3. I list out my activities in the further training of religion teachers. Previously in chapter III. I presented my activity in the development and implementation of education, where the emphasis is on the postgraduate phase of religious educators and priests. Their pedagogical work is aided by case discussions, the practice of interactive methods, and curriculum development. Here I turn to my commission assignment, which I have been exercising since 2005, which has been manifested in the elaboration of the theological graduation items.

In section IV.2. I present the results of my interdisciplinary research in the field of pastoral theology. I gave lectures at conferences organized at the Department of Ethnography of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Szeged, and some of my publications are presented in subsection IV. 2.1. In these papers, I monitored the church's faith-transfer processes, while reflecting on my own pastoral experience, and even drawing general conclusions from practical insights into evangelization.

In my research on the tension between institution and charisma and their complementarity connection in subsection IV. 2.2. I refer to the chances of the faith-transfer process in Hungary several times. Knowing the historical experience of the church and studying the local church situation over the past 80 years, I have found interesting parallels: the stages of development of any human community are essentially the same. However, if we know the processes, it is possible to make timely adjustments to achieve our goals.

In section IV.3 I present the ways of marriage and family pastoral care based on my own experience and activities. Considering that I have been a member of the Marriage Encounter renewal movement in the Church since 1997, I list the stages of my work within the frame of this movement in this section. I myself always work in a team, which means that I work as a priest with a married couple in holding pieces of training and workshops for priests and couples across the country.

The following, IV. 3.2. subsection is about Engaged Encounters, - communication trainings for young adult couples preparing for marriage. I am convinced that systematic preparation is needed for long-lasting and loving marriages. I have brought this type of training to Hungary twenty years ago, and we adapted it to the local conditions in teamwork with the help of Marriage Encounter thematics and methods. I present the theme and methodology developed, as well as the

research on young people preparing for marriage, based on feedback from 64 three-day training sessions over the past two decades.

In section IV.4 of my thesis, I present the national context of my pastoral engagement. First, in subsection IV.4.1, I list my work in the field of ecumenism. My spirituality is defined by my personal and professional relationship with Taizé. In addition to my articles on them, my translation of their biblical textbooks is significant (see Appendix 2. listing my publications).

In subsection IV. 4.2, I will present my activities where I am involved in Christian organisations at the national level, which is focused on training and educating youth or adult Christian intellectuals. Among my media activities, I will highlight the many programmes I have recorded for MóraNet TV and my participation in the public service channel "Evangélium" on Hungarian state television 5 ("MTV5"), which has a cultural theme.

Finally, chapter V of my habilitation thesis is about the professional development plan for the future, which is, of course, less extensive than the previous ones, as this work should mainly present the results already achieved. I will mention, however, that I plan to continue teaching pastoral and biblical exegesis at the Faculty of Theology of the Gál Ferenc University, where I am based. I am also happy to continue guest lecturing at universities abroad under the Erasmus+ programme, not only in English but also in French and Italian, if required.

My special research topic is marriage pastoral care in the field of pastoral theology. I continue to be invited to international conferences on this topic. The Lighthouse-2033 project, launched in 2017 in the framework of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter, involves teams of three from 13 European countries, and I am a member of the Hungarian team in my capacity as a theologian. This interdisciplinary research explores contemporary forms of interpersonal communication with a special focus on the life vocations that form the basis of society.

Szeged, 27th of June, 2022.