

Theses –

“...education must not be worldly or vain...” : Script Interpretation and Rhetoric in Sermons of the Late Baroque period

The goals of the thesis and an outline of the theme

For a long time the appreciation of the late baroque period in literature showed strong ambivalence: the shades of appreciation ranged from the rather dark “non-national” to the metaphoric expression “fertile soil”, which suggested the lights of the Age of Enlightenment. By now this ambivalence and controversy seem to have disappeared. The significantly increasing number of studies on the fields of culture history, art history and literature proves that more and more attention is given to this period. However, historians still have debts: after synthesizing and giving an overview of the period, it seems inevitable for researchers to focus on detecting “fine movements” and on outstanding characters and their works.

This change in view can also be realized when studying the works of Catholic preachers. In the last two decades the focus has shifted to authors and works whose importance has been recognised for a long time. However, their detailed research has just begun.

From the sermons of the late baroque period I chose the following volumes of Friar Zsigmond Csúzy (?-1729) to study: *Sounding Pipes* (1723, Bratislava), *Trumpets of the New Testament* (1724, Bratislava), *Tiny Bits of Crumbs in a Basket* (1725, Bratislava). From among his contemporaries I chose *Sermons for Corpus Christi and for St. Anthony's Day* (Kosice) and *Heads of Wheat* (1729, Kosice) by Didák Kelemen and *Spiritual Dialogues* (1735, Kosice) by Pál Bernárd.

To introduce the new attitude of preachers, which appeared at the turn of the 18th and 19th century, I chose *Sermons for Sundays and Festivals* (Passage 4) by Damaszcén Török (1805, Eger).

In my thesis I focused on the writings of preachers in the late baroque period, more precisely on the relationship between the interpretation of the Script and rhetoric. With my work I would like to contribute to a thorough research of the cultural anthropological, literary sociological, mentality historical and communication theoretical aspects of the study of the period, as well as its relationship with the preceding and following periods.

My thesis covers the period from Péter Pázmány in the first third of the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th century. It is quite obvious that the changing historical and social climate significantly changed the attitude of preachers as well.

The major part of the activities of Didák Kelemen and Zsigmond Csúzy took place in the first third of the 18th century, in the era of a turbulent period in history and society, after the end of the War of Independence led by Ferenc Rákóczi (1703-1711), when – along with the increasing power and influence of the Habsburg Monarchy – the Catholic Church gained power. A new kind of Catholicism, the so-called “anti-reformist” movement meant a huge task for the friar priests who not only took part in reforming – or in some cases even restoring – their orders, but also practised as preachers. The Catholic preacher was supported by the firmly built religious institution, but the role of the noble *maecenas* was also significant. It is important to note here that the preachers discussed in my thesis were all supported by some extremely influential Hungarian noble families: Didák Kelemen was supported by the Károlyi family, more precisely by Sándor Károlyi, whereas Zsigmond Csúzy’s volumes were “sponsored” by István Koháry (*iudex curiae*).

For Didák Kelemen and Zsigmond Csúzy the historical environment meant an adequate background, and they represented the teachings of the Catholic Church from a protected position. However, at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, at the dawn of the Modern Age a more secular mentality gained strength, and the ideas of the Enlightenment spread among the literate. As a result, people became less interested in religion, and it also meant a decline for baroque sermon literature.

The fact that the writings of Damaszcén Török were given hardly any attention gives a good example of an erudite, sensitive preacher, who was neglected because of the changing environment. By that time the strong and assertive representation of the Faith had lost some of its power, and it had taken up a rather defensive position. The most exciting aspect of his sermon is that his work is exemplary, just like that of Leopold Stankovátsi, Joákim Egyed, Máté Simon, Bernardius Gál and Sándor Kosztolányi, who was a close relative of the poet and writer Dezső Kosztolányi. His speeches are landmarks of a more rational mentality and use of the language as opposed to the over-ornamented style of the early 18th century.

An outline of the methods used

All the studies of the late baroque sermon literature recognise that the overwhelmingly complicated and ornamented rhetoric of the period is significantly different from the language used by Péter Pázmány. The chapters of my thesis discuss seemingly randomly chosen pieces, but they are good representatives of the changing styles of sermons from Péter Pázmány and 18th century baroque preachers to the purer early 19th century style.

In the study I aimed at emphasising questions which were not only theological, but also reflected a change in society and mentality. The goal of the thesis is to introduce the main features of theological ideas by using microfilology or close text analysis. Thus, by using pragmatic points of view, the thesis investigates the question of how the preacher tried to use exegetics as a “language” to address very heterogeneous audiences with different social backgrounds and erudition.

Didák Kelemen and Zsigmond Csúzy, who are referred to as “popular baroque preachers”, are characterised by an energetic mixture of Script interpretation and rhetoric. Their aim was to create an atmosphere for their audiences in which people could identify with the characters and the ideas of the Script, and in this way their focus was not on intellectual recognition. In contrast, we can observe a spectacular shift in the sermons of Damaszcén Török, who gave much more significance to a logical way of thinking and understanding. As the sermons discussed are not easily available for study, in my thesis there is a special emphasis on the texts themselves. The large number of quotations in the thesis is intended to illustrate the colourful language and inventive Script interpretation of the authors. I intended to give some representative examples of the rich language of an era when the information contained by the text and verbal elaboration came hand in hand.

When examining the practices of late baroque preachers, it is crucial to understand how and how strongly they are related to Péter Pázmány. The research into the compilation techniques and text composition of sermons started in the 1980s and has become more significant in the past decade. Research has shown that Archbishop Pázmány’s sermons started a tradition which could not be neglected by the preachers of the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. What is more – as I stated in the last chapter of my thesis –, the legacy of the “Archbishop Cicero” was even longer lasting, and was still observed at the turn of the 18th-19th century.

I chose Didák Kelemen and Zsigmond Csúzy to discuss in the main part of my thesis firstly because of the importance of their sermons, secondly because they represent two opposite poles of the same process. Friar Didák Kelemen had strong links with Pázmány’s

legacy as far as applied theology, rhetoric and text structure is concerned. Studies of his sermons appreciate his clear frame of thinking and his easily comprehensible rhetoric, which convey the theological message. At the same time, it is easy to recognise Pázmány's legacy in his extensive use of compilation.

In contrast, Csúzy only occasionally relies on the Archbishop's legacy, his intention to differ is obvious. He created his own style. His sermons marked an ultimate dead end for late baroque prose writing: Leo Szaitz in the late 18th century, who apparently followed in his footsteps both in his frame of thinking and rhetoric, remained completely unappreciated and unrecognised, which meant that this mentality simply could not live on.

From this aspect, the shift in the mentality of Catholic sermons in this period can be considered experimental. While at the time of Didák Kelemen and Zsigmond Csúzy the late baroque religious attitude was thriving, the eroding factors which led to the change of the role of the Catholic Church at the end of the century were already tangible. The long lasting answers of homiletics were simply not satisfactory for people who experienced the new secular attitude and mentality, the changes in society and the crises of identity that followed.

At the turn of the 18th-19th century, for Damaszcén Török these tendencies were not latent any more, but indisputable facts. As I showed it in the last chapter of my thesis discussing the sermons of Friar Damaszcén Török, preachers drowning in the controversy of old techniques and new contents could only be reformed with a more self-restrained approach.

Results

- 1) Examining Script interpretation and rhetoric, the thesis demonstrated how sermons of the early Modern Age used abstract theological doctrine as a “language” to address audiences of different social backgrounds and erudite. To achieve this goal I used a chain of case studies.
- 2) Examining the sermons of Didák Kelemen and Pál Bernard on the Eucharistia, which generated a religious dispute, the thesis was to prove that according to the practices of the period, there was only a narrow path dividing disputes and sermons. The theory is supported by the analysis of the guidelines given by Péter Pázmány, who was considered a role model for both of the above mentioned preachers, as well as the consideration of modern communication theories. These two different points of view indicate the same tendency and seem to support the view that strictly separating the two genres is unjustifiable.
- 3) The examination of the sermons of Zsigmond Csúzy on the miraculous fish catch shows what kind of Script interpretation techniques the preacher used. The use of the rules of quadriga exegesis suggest how strongly the preacher related to the traditions of scholastic theology. At the same time I aimed to clarify what the preacher meant by “typological” and “allegorical” Script interpretation.
- 4) By studying the miraculous fish catch and the use of the tools of modern narrative psychology I tried to find an answer to the question of how the preacher tried to cope with his frustration in his everyday practice. I also examined how Zsigmond Csúzy tried to preserve his professional identity despite the lack of success.
- 5) In the course of the study I gave an outline of how Zsigmond Csúzy considered world history from his eschatological point of view and how this is reflected in the eschatology of the individual. I paid special attention to the figurative and allegorical interpretation of the “garden”, in which the preacher says that the ultimate realization of God’s care is the existence of the “courageous and fighting Church of our days”.
- 6) Because of its eschatological significance, I also examined the question of why Zsigmond Csúzy laid such emphasis on discussing the original sin.

- 7) In connection with the description of the sacrificium in Csúzy's sermons as an eschatological turning point, I proved – by using culture historical and iconographic analogues – that medieval scholastic theology had a significant effect on the preachers' mentality and rhetoric. At the same time I pointed out the parallels between the sermons of the priests and the apokrif aspects of folkloristic religion, and how he became a forerunner and enhancer of certain cults in folkloristic religion.
- 8) By the examination of the sermons of Damaszcén Török I pointed out that by the end of the 19th century the social role of sermons had changed, and this change brought about a change in rhetoric and reasoning as well. Following a changing historical climate, the previously over-ornamented late baroque style adjusted to the ideas of Classicism of other genres in the last third of the 18th century. The same direction is indicated by the fact that Damaszcén Török's sermons seem to fulfil the Classicist requirement of imitation as he tries to imitate the language and clear frame of mind which was so typical of his great predecessor, Péter Pázmány.