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**Research of the Book of Tobias in Light of the  
Canonical Approach of Brevard S. Childs**

– Thesis Booklet –

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In recent decades the Book of Tobias is getting into the lime-light of research interest<sup>1</sup>, which is particularly important compared to the fact that the work is nowadays located on the periphery in the Catholic theology and liturgy.<sup>2</sup>

The thesis of our dissertation was as follows: The Book of Tobias can be examined by using the scriptural explanatory approach and canonical interpretation proposed by Brevard S. Childs (1923-2007). According to our opinion the perspective of the canonical interpretation to the Book of Tobias was still missing from the wide range of researchers. We consider our work as if we had focused heavy-duty canonical spotlights on the Book of Tobias placed at the centre. Based on our thesis we sought answers to these exact questions: What role exegesis plays in the Catholic Church? What is the method of canonical interpretation and the idea of Brevard S. Childs in it? (Chapter 1). What is the connection between the Book of Tobias and the canon of the Old Testament and other scriptures of the ancient times? (Chapter 3) Is the Book of Tobias instrumental in the Old Testament, and if it is, how? Is there any other information behind the scriptures of the Book of Tobias observing the New Testament and using the canonical interpretation? (Chapter 4).

In the first chapter we presented Brevard S. Childs' approach. It is taken up by a brief, modern, catholic exegesis, concept clarification and explanation of the academic reception of the canonical interpretation. The chapter is descriptive but not fully detailed, since several respectable works talk about the processing and evaluation of Childs' suggests.<sup>3</sup> Our aim was not this, but to demonstrate the theoretical and practical ways of the suggested forms of Child's canonical interpretation, so it could be applied clearly on the Book of Tobias. It was obvious that the surplus of Childs' exegetical approach compared to other types of methods and interpretations owns a deep faith-character and it seeks completeness. Childs' terminology, attitude, and relationship to the scriptures reflect the ways of a scholar and a believer as well.

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<sup>1</sup> E. g. DESELAERS, P., *Das Buch Tobit* (Geistliche Schriftlesung: Erläuterungen zum Alten Testament für die Gesitliche Lesung 11), Patmos Verlag, Düsseldorf 1990; DESELAERS, P., *Das Buch Tobit: Studien zu seiner Entstehung, Komposition und Theologie* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 43), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1982; SCHÜNGEL-STRAUMANN, H., *Tobit* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament), Herder, Freiburg 2000; MOORE, C. A., *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible 40/A), Doubleday, New York 1996; NOWELL, I., *The Book of Tobit*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume 3. 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Additions to Esther, Tobit, Judith* (Ed. Keck, L. E.), Abingdon Press, Nashville 1999, 973-1071; NICKELSBURG, G. W. E., *Tobit*, in *Harper's Bible Commentary* (Ed. Mays, J. L.), Harper et Row, San Francisco 1988, 791-803. Cf. XERAVITS, G., *A deuterokanonikus könyvek: Bevezetés keletkezés- és irodalomtörténetükbe* (Deuterocanonica 4), L'Harmattan-Pápai Református Teológiai Akadémia, Budapest-Pápa, 2008, xii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the number of references to the Book of Tobias in the encyclicals of Pope Francis and the occurrence of the work in the Roman rite.

<sup>3</sup> See e. g. NOBLE, P. R., *The Canonical Approach, A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Biblical Interpretation Series 16), Brill, Leiden-New York-Köln 1995.

In the second chapter we dealt with the canonical context and process of the Book of Tobias. Our aim was to create a thoroughgoing frame of reference, which helps to find the way around the writing. Related to the canonical process we have sought a particularly detailed illustration, in order to clearly demonstrate the role of the Book of Tobias in the research history as referred above. According to the image emerged before our eyes the Book of Tobias was written around the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BC, most likely in Aramaic, by only one author in a place currently indeterminate. It is part of the Catholic and the Orthodox canon but missing from the Protestant and Jewish scriptures. In research history the Qumran Caves Scrolls of the 20th century brought a significant turnaround, and as a result of their publication from the 1990s interest in Tobit and his family has spectacularly revived.

The third chapter, in which the relation between the Old Testament and the Book of Tobias is explained, is the heart and the centre of our work since our dissertation was written at the Old Testament Department as well. Accordingly, this chapter is twice as long as the fourth chapter, which deals with New Testament references. Our goal was to apply the canonical approach, not an itemized analysis, because it would have stretched the frames of this work. In this chapter we demonstrated – following the traditional division of the Christian canon (historical, wisdom, and prophetic books) – the relation between the precanonical material of the Book of Tobias and the family history of Tobit. In connection with the Book of Tobias we took a look at Qumran and some Jewish/Christian pieces of antiquity as well as a non-canonical motif.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter we did not intend to make introductory considerations in connection with other Old Testament Books, so we relied on Zsolt Cziglányi's work<sup>5</sup> for a brief description.

In the fourth chapter the relationship between the New Testament and the Book of Tobias was taken under scrutiny. Our goal was to present and investigate 28 connection points. Due to the extreme discursiveness of the material, this chapter may give the impression of fragmentation in the reader, but with the editing method, our goal was clarity. We did not wish to make detailed introductory remarks in this chapter either, so we have used only a few such parts to describe the New Testament books and to position the texts. In the third and fourth chapters, we went into the introductory presentation of the book for a longer time in those parts only where this was considered reasonable and useful for better understanding. In our work, we have always tried to apply a precise and clear, unambiguous methodology<sup>6</sup>, as for its primary

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<sup>4</sup> We have chosen the legend of Bentes because we consider this as one of the least presented part in the Hungarian literature in connection with the Book of Tobias.

<sup>5</sup> CZIGLÁNYI, ZS., *Az Ószövetség története*, Pécsi Püspöki Hittudományi Főiskola, Pécs 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Served as a starting point: KRÁNITZ, M.-TÖRÖK, CS., *Teológiai módszertan: Elméleti és gyakorlati bevezetés*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2008.

purpose was controllability. We used the available Hungarian, English and German literature for our work. We consciously used Hungarian Catholic technical terms and names in our terminology, even if it did not correspond to international scientific terminology. The purpose of this was to express our desire to practice Hungarian Catholic theology. Throughout our writing, we have kept in mind the usual scientific framework. We have made summaries and conclusions in our work. The most important of these are the followings (shortly listed):

*1. Both the Book of Tobias and Brevard S. Childs' method are not widespread in Hungarian Catholic theology.* So the topic of our dissertation and the matching of its two components are the novelty of our work. According to our knowledge no dissertation neither major analysis about the Book of Tobias have been written in recent decades in Hungary therefore, we hope that our work has contributed not only to a wider understanding of an Anglo-Saxon scriptural interpretation method, but also to the rediscovery of the Book of Tobias, one of the forgotten classics of our Catholic Church. We need to pay more attention to the Book of Tobias in Hungarian research.

*2. Brevard S. Childs' proposal for a canonical approach has not yet been examined in Hungary in such a deep and broader context.* In addition to presenting and applying Childs' ideas, the review of the historical context and scientific acceptance further deepened our understanding of the proposal itself, which, along with all its shortcomings, was intended to be a thorough and fair work of us. In the research, it would be useful to translate some of Childs' basic works into Hungarian and to carry out a comprehensive analysis of each piece of the oeuvre.

*3. In connection with the editorial and theological context, we compiled a list of topics for the Book of Tobias, arranged in three large groups and containing a total of twenty-six elements.* There are usually two types of research attitudes: either they note that a number of topics appear in the work, or they carry out their research by selecting a particular topic. With this general systematization we wanted to promote a better overview of the extraordinary richness of topics in the work.

*4. As part of the canonical process, we made a new proposal for the structure of the Book of Tobias, the micro- and macrostructure of which was described.* As the focus of our dissertation was not on the method of literary criticism, we used it merely as a support, so we did not develop

this idea in its entirety. According to our plans it will be developed in the future and be published in English.

*5. Examination of the Book of Tobias in the light of biblical/extrabiblical material deepened and nuanced the book itself.* There are a number of biblical elements in the Book of Tobias that are included in the Jewish and/or Christian canon. By seeking for and finding a connection between the canonical texts and the Book of Tobias, we made a journey into the Old Testament that was not a self-serving – but ultimately – dead end. Using the canonical approach, we were able to unfold the historical, wisdom, and prophetic character of Tobit and his family’s narrative. In addition to the longer or shorter references in the commentaries and articles, our work has led to the fact that the independent and interrelated meaning of both the Book of Tobias and the other canonical texts has come to a stronger light. The structure, historical background, and theology of the Book of Tobias are incomprehensible without prior canonical material.

Extrabiblical Jewish and pagan material drew attention to points of connection in the sacred scriptures that are not found in the canon, yet enrich the understanding and explanation of the Book of Tobias. The work was part of the spirit of the Jewish era between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD. Here is the widest path in research, as a significant amount of material to be processed and compared. In addition to the “big” topics already covered, there are a number of minor references and contexts to pay attention to in Tobias research of the future.

*6. The book of Tobias was known to the New Testament authors, and certainly to Jesus himself as well.* But the New Testament use of the Book of Tobias is highly fragmented. The work was part of the religious knowledge of the age and, as such, was used. Even then, it was not in the mainstream of the theological thinking: and this is exemplified by the fact that there is no literal quote from the work in the entire New Testament. Despite the varied and plenty of points of connection, the Book of Tobias is underrepresented in the thinking of the authors of the New Testament. But it is certainly noticeable and remarkable that the Book of Tobias is present in the New Testament, enriching it with its peculiar message, so it was considered and treated as a religious record by the holy authors. This fact reveals that the story of Tobit and his family was not only known but enjoyed fame as well. In examining the New Testament allusions, we made several minor remarks about the relationship between the texts. Despite the fact that the widest path in research is the relationship between the Book of Tobias and the Old Testament

due to the amount of material, the relationship between the Book of Tobias and the New Testament deserves special attention in the future because of its unprocessed state.

*7. The examination of the work in the research using in terms of a reduced topic could be a consistent topic selection procedure by the canonical approach.* This would provide an opportunity for detailed analysis and a re-introduction of the canonical approach. Examples of possible topics: The pedagogy of the Book of Tobias and its canonical embeddedness; Spirituality in the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Tobias; The road motif in the Book of Tobias and the Old Testament.

*8. There is an urgent need for pastoral rehabilitation of the Book of Tobias.* Another study would be needed to find out how deeply and with what emphasis the Book of Tobias is currently included in Hungarian Catholic religious education. It can be assumed that very little text is known to students in public education from this Old Testament book and, presumably, “only” on the topics of marriage and angelology from its rich sayings. It would be important to create lesson plans and thematics that specifically cover Tobias book, of course according to the abilities of different age groups. This book could be the main theme and guideline for triduum, and seminars, and also a biblical thematic year/period that might put the less well-known books (e. g. the Book of Esther, the Book of Judith, the Book of Tobias, the Letter of Judas) in the spotlight and interest.

We think we have provided satisfactory answers to the questions raised in our work. Hopefully, all of these have convincingly and clearly proved our thesis: the Book of Tobias can be examined using the scriptural explanatory approach and canonical criticism proposed by Brevard S. Childs. With our dissertation and research, we wanted to contribute to the re-emergence of this inspired writing, which was marginalized in Catholic theology and faith, towards the centre of theological thinking. May our work be for the building up of the kingdom of God and for the greater glory of God.