

Hungarian Bible exhibition offers 'delight beyond words'



The Bible exhibition billed as the last of the three principal events of the Hungarian Bible Society's *Year of the Bible 2008* attracted interest beyond the Society's expectations at the National Library in Budapest last month.

Dignitaries, media representatives and students were among those who crowded the Library's main hall for the opening of *Biblia Sacra Hungarica*, an exhibition tracing the history of the Bible from the oldest fragments of Scripture in Hungarian to the latest electronic versions of the Bible in a way designed to interest not just Bible scholars and Christians but the general public.

In his welcoming speech, István Monok, the Director of the National Library, said that translating the Bible into Hungarian had created a resource which had been invaluable to the nation's writers and poets in the literature they produced. He also emphasised the need of the present age to base its values on those found in the Bible.



'The cross in the market place'

Cardinal Péter Erdo, the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, said that the most ancient written traces of the Hungarian language in existence were of biblical origin and related to the life of the Church, showing clearly that the nation and the Holy Scriptures have belonged together in the life of Hungarians over the past 1,000 years.

"The books on display here clearly indicate the connection between the Bible, the life of the people and our culture," he said.

The Rev Dr Miller Milloy, the General Secretary of United Bible Societies (UBS), told the gathering that the cross needed to be "raised again in the market place of life." The Bible, he said, was at the very heart of the history of Europe and at the heart of the life and history of Hungary. Reviewing the landmarks of the history of the Bible in Hungary, he expressed the hope that people would re-engage with its message.

Gyula Réthi, a visitor at the opening ceremony, said the exhibition's rich collection was remarkable and that he was "delighted beyond what I can express with words."

'Music comes from heaven'

Ferenc Szanyi, a theological student from southern Ukraine, said he had been looking forward to a great experience "and I was not disappointed!" He said that Hungarians had been privileged to have had the Bible in their own language for so many centuries and he echoed Dr Milloy's wish that the Hungarian people might rediscover the Bible. The exhibition runs until March 2009.

Earlier this year distinguished performers on the platform and celebrities among the audience added spice to a concert of Bible-inspired music – also part of the *Year of the Bible* – given by the choirs of some of Hungary's historical churches accompanied by the Budapest Strings Chamber Orchestra and the Szent István Király Symphony Orchestra.

Among the well-known public figures present were László Sólyom, the Hungarian President, and his predecessor Ferenc Mádl. In his welcoming address, János Ittész, the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, affirming the spiritual nature of music, quoted Martin Luther: "Who chooses music gains a piece of heaven because music comes from heaven itself and the dear angels are all musicians themselves."

'Cross-cultural communication'

The evening's programme included Bach's Magnificat, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's Psalm 42 and Honegger's symphonic psalm King David. The latter ended with great applause for the well known singers Edith Borsos and Atala Schöck (alto), Zoltán Megyesi (treble), the narrator György Bánffy and Róza Juhász as the Witch of Endor.

Towards the end of June the Society held an international Bible symposium. After a day of examining matters concerned with the biblical canon and exegesis, the second day's emphasis was on the question of communicating and distributing Scriptures in the 21st century, the underlying theme of the whole *Year of the Bible*.

The Rev Dr Ottó Pecsuk, General Secretary of the Hungarian Bible Society, and Bela Tarjanyi, President of the St Jerome Catholic Bible Society, spoke about both the history and the present challenges of Bible work in Hungary. UBS Translation Consultant Dr Thomas Kaut shared his ideas about Bible translation in respect of truthfulness, understanding and faithfulness. "The aim of a good Bible translation," he said, "is successful cross-cultural communication."

Challenges of translating

Dr Lénart de Regt, the UBS Europe-Middle East Area Translation Coordinator, spoke on the challenges of translating Bible texts today. He said that the aim of UBS was to provide a translation in the common language of the people. That did not mean producing an "easy text" which many regarded as unworthy of Scripture, but a translation that could be understood by all members of a given linguistic community.

In another event in June that was also part of the *Year of the Bible* series, the Bible Society gave Bibles to 150 members of the Hungarian Parliament.