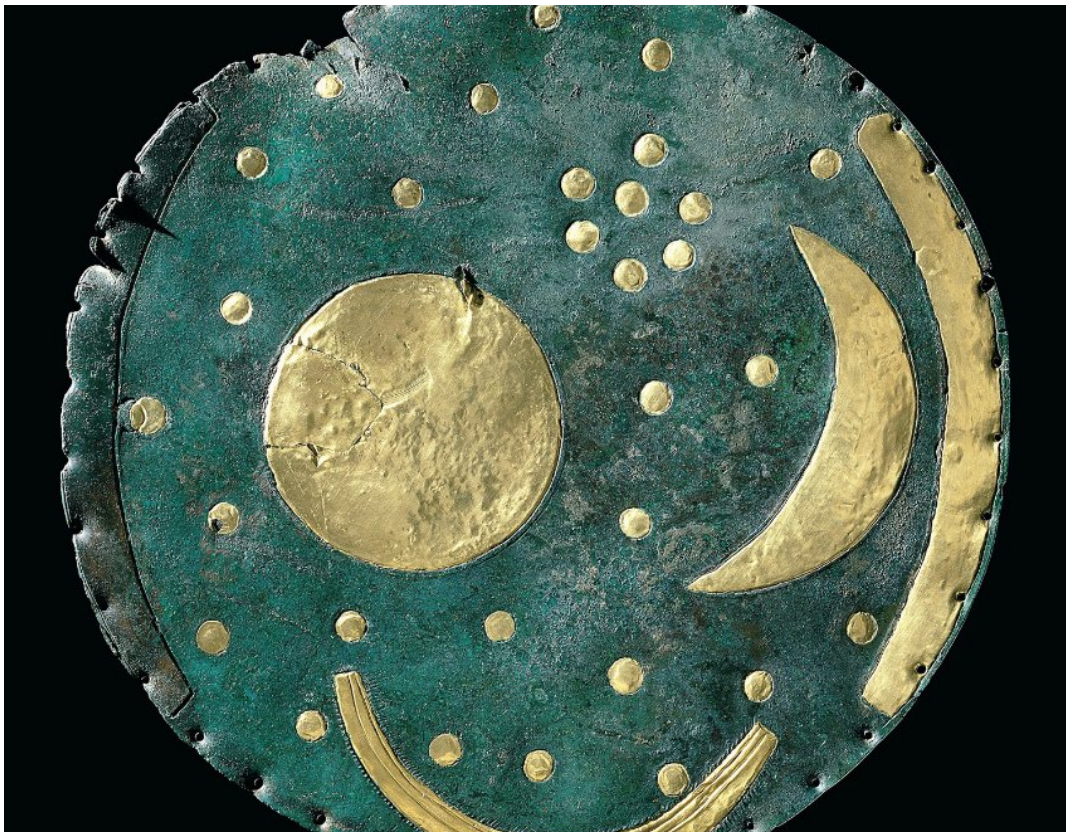


Spreading the Gospel at school

Some of the first Latin I had to translate was "De catechizandis rudibus" by Augustine of Thagaste. Seems I've not gotten much further than this. I am at work trying to catechise learners in the rudimentary beginnings. Standing before 5-10 graders, who are unchurched, 90+% not baptized and generally in pubertal turmoil is rather challenging every week - not only because of my age, nationality and confession. Still, I am very grateful for this opportunity of voicing the saving gospel in such a mission context of secular society, where I try to share the Christian confession, which carries me day-to-day and God willing finally home, to such children preferring Rap music, expressing themselves in mono-syllables and



crude sign language. Do I really share a language with these some 60+ kids, forty years my juniors?

The message is the old and proven one. Even older than this ancient depiction of the heavenly bodies dated 2 000 years before Christ and originating in neighbouring Halle an der Salle (Sachsen-Anhalt) and on display in Berlin presently, but it's much more reliable and trustworthy than this outdated map of the skies. The gospel shines bright and comforting in our time and age, illuminated and filled by Jesus Christ - the Son of God the Father and the virgin Mary, mother of our very God. Taught by the Holy Spirit, we confess this truth with the words of the Apostolic Creed, which the Church has utilized as Baptismal instruction, sure guideline and faithful measure since those early days. Hopeful that one day - rather sooner than later - the children will also confess this as their faith and rejoice in their holy Baptism in the name of the triune God. Mission is all about God's command, promise and faithfulness.

How beautiful upon
the mountains are
the feet of him that
bringeth good
tidings, that
publisheth peace;
that bringeth good
tidings of good, that
publisheth salvation;
that saith unto Zion,
Thy God reigneth!

(Isaiah 52,7)



We sing one of the classical hymns of the Lutheran Church: Paul Gerhard, Nikolaus Herman, Johannes Zwick and Martin Luther. The music teacher accompanies us on the grand piano. He does a tremendous job. The music is magnificent. Still, the children are rather dumbfounded. They are not into this kind of singing really. Where should they learn it, if we don't teach it. So, we start from scratch. The texts in the flashy song-book are no alternative: Moralistically concentrating on what we are supposed to do and not do. Sadly, it's not like the 10 commandments of what God wants of us, but some modern ideas of propriety and social correctness. Nothing about Jesus Christ, nothing about God's goodness even, never mind his works of salvation and sanctification through faith by grace.

Preaching is based on the Herrenhuter Losungen. That's customary here at school. I think, it is rather too random for unchurched heathens and so I resort to the tried and tested ecclesial program of the church using the 5 main parts of the Christian faith as we learn it in every Christian Catechism from the start. We're looking at all the commandments - one by one - and then concentrate on the Christian creed even as we recite the prayer of our Lord. Even that is a strain to many of those children... So, I really have to try to be as friendly, inviting and accommodating as I possibly can in my black outfit, pastoral collar and foreign message. I only have them for a fraction of an hour before regular school. So, I better be very prepared and most dedicated in my presentation. I pray, that the children will finally find the way to the holy gifts of God too: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We've only got very limited time and space to proclaim God's goodness. My limitations become obvious, when faced by these challenges. So, I plead to God, that he may grant flourishing fruit - as we continue in his calling to be his faithful witnesses. We know the message of Charles Gore: "His charge to the candidates on the eve of the ordination was always most impressive, 'Tomorrow I shall say to you, 'wilt thou, wilt thou, wilt thou?' But there will come a day to you when Another will say to you, 'hast thou, hast thou, hast thou'". (Dobberstein 244) So, we go about our work, trusting in his calling: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil.2,3)