

Set out for the land- that I will show you/ that I am offering to you/ I want to share with you

**If you would only touch me-
longing for religious know-how**

Considering the rational and streamlined everyday life, the longing for religious experiences is a major request. People within and outside of church communities struggle with religion, they don't want a hearsay account. They want to experience what they faithfully confess. The belief, as churches hand it down, wants to grow into a personal belief, composed of one's own conscious experiences with God. In bible stories, individuals are called by their name and answer to that invitation- this is what people in our community want, too. They want to be called by their names, asked questions about their faith and their journey with God.

People in parishes are looking for new experiences, helping them to progress in mental and spiritual development. Religion is expected to be increasingly supported and preserved by one's subjective experiences.

At the same time there exists a desire to share and be embedded into a group of like-minded people. As other experiences, religious experience is expected to be seen and appreciated by others. It oughts to be celebrated.

With the hunt for an irreplaceable and by one's own skin experienced faith, there is the need of affiliation to find people who made similar experiences, people we can be on the road with.

After the Second Vatican Council the church as “communio”, the parish as community, almost got inflationary evoked. Since the religious styles vary significantly within the parishes as well, not the entire parish but instead smaller, manageable groups, with people of similar styles and experiences are important for religious know-how. The focus is more on personally defined congeniality than institutionally defined collectives. To feel and celebrate the latter, great liturgies for the solemnities throughout the church year are adequate. To experience a burst of growth in one's own faith, smaller groups consisting of similar people is the more efficient choice.

This development challenges people, responsible for the pastoral care, to engage in the variety of spiritual experiences and to enable new forms of membership and relationships.

In his final speech in the 1970s Karl Rahner already suggested, to shape pastoral care in parishes as mystagogical care. Starting with the question, how can one, in spite of the progress in rationalization

and mechanization inseminate a true awareness for God's existence? "Mystagogy" in this case means the accompaniment of fellow human beings towards the mystery of God's gracious self-communication. Mystagogical care is concerned with the personal history and the everyday life of people, the preferential site of God's revelation. The endeavor is to enlighten desires gone lost, suppressed fears, unprocessed sorrows and wounds through dialogue and to get into motion processes, encouraging the healing.

Come and see!

Biblical stories as realm of experiences

Mystagogical care takes place where people are explicitly asked about their personal and shared appeal. If the message of one's call to life in fullness is meant to obtain presence within a parish, then, the people who make up the parish take responsibility, to be lively rooted in their faith.

Based on this conviction, thirty years ago Nicolaas Derksen, pastoral theologian, and Herman Andriessen, pastoral psychologist, developed an experiential model of biblical work, supporting parishioners to create their own collaborative awareness of belief. They called this model "Bibliodrama". It emerged through the cooperation of full-time and voluntary workers. To not only talk about biblical words but to sense them, participants were asked to existentially identify with one person of the story. From that actors point they were held to involve in the bible study group. These role assumptions lead to dynamics and "dramatization" of the conversation. Later on Derksen and Andriessen experimented with the placement of stories' characters within one room. Once the role-taking had taken place the next step, to remove the chairs and keep talking, was easy. Localities and polarities of the biblical story were given certain space within the room and movement enhanced the dialogue. The discussion altered towards a significant encounter. It became a Bibliodrama.

Andriessen and Derksen take Biblical words as unsurpassable experiential basis of belief, which preserve diverse experiences of men and woman whom God offers a personal relationship. Those stories contain extraordinary character, offering faith or salvation to one person or an entire folk. Every situation of mischief is followed by a time of salvation. On their way to salvation, people and folks are confronted with their downside.

Bibliodrama games are identification proposals. They invite people to find their character within a long history of mischief and salvation: Planting participants on the ground of deliverances with roads, detour, resources and resistance.

The text and its roles are given and constitute a frame to perception, in which participants face each other. Due to their current situation, attendants adopt one role present in the biblical story. They find themselves in a situation which points out a message and claims an answer. The telling of the story influences the player. Conversely the story experiences proceeding through the biography and history of faith of each individual.

Bibliodrama of Andriessen and Deksen is not so much about the literary shape of the biblical text. The center of it is to get across a message for participants as of today. Thereby it may happen that the history of salvation goes on today. The question, affecting people in bibliodramatic games is: What is the message of this biblical story and how can I respond to it with my life?

Bibliodrama contributes to the development of a personal relationship with God as well as biblical stories, as realm of experiences, have an impact on parishes as a whole. A parish is inspired and powerfull, when people who take responsibility in it see themselves as appointees, living under God's great message. "Church" from the original literal sense means the gathering of those "who are called out". In Bibliodrama church emerges through relationships within the group, together with the vivid connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Each parish is an organism, hearing the Word of God for the purpose of inner approval and reaction in a visual way. Thereby the consent does not occur in a single situation. The acceptance of God's Word is a process of growing. Disagreement and dispute is equally part of it as identification and solidarity.

The fellowship, mostly existing in the form of smaller groups, is interpreted as a process of shared awareness of belief, by Andriessen and Derksen. Both, Individuals as well as communities are invited to join experiential bible work and find their identity on the horizon of salvation.

Bible brought into action:

The Bibliodrama-modell by Andriessen and Derksen

Before each session of Bibliodrama an agreement about the course and existing aims is made. It is mentioned particularly that in the process of Bibliodrama individuals are asked about their life-experience and their experience of faith because the model is about feeling for each other and mutually sharing experiences with biblical stories. During this practice it always turns personal, though it is meant to be and has to be supervised thoroughly. Each and every participant is free to display as much of oneself as he or she deems right.

The Bibliodrama-modell by Andriessen and Deksen contains the following steps:

1. First, read the text.
2. Based on this first exposure, elements of the text are collected on a poster: Meaning that people, verbs, place names, objects, symbols etc., playing an important role in the Bible passage are collected.
3. Up next, a conversation about the text, allowing participants to get to the bottom of their spiritual affinity: Comprehension questions, exegetical insights, special findings, parallels to ones experiences in present everyday life and emotional reactions. Bibliodrama is not about the establishment of one consistent and binding perspective or interpretation but about building a personal connection to the text.
4. After the conversation the text is read out loud again. Participants pay attention to a role that catches their attraction.
5. After that, the room is divided. Important aspects of the passage are specifically located in the breakout room. Participants are requested to explore each scene and to sense where they would like to stand.
6. Afterwards the spiritual leader of the group asks everyone who one is and where one stands- internally and spatial. The goal is to fill the chosen role with ones elixir of life. It is helpful to consciously perceive where and how one stands at the specific place within the room. It should be transparent to all teammates who they play with and what ones perspective on the Bible passage is.
7. The game starts through either the motion of one fellow member or through direct initiation by the instructor. Participants speak to each other from their role's perspective, they change their posture and walk to another spot, argue with each other and approach or backtrack from other members. All this happens with or without words. Movement and interaction support the individuals on their way to build a personal relationship with God. The instructor is in charge of mediation between individuals and the group as well as the structure and direction of immersing their confidence and faith.
8. A break follows, in which members can distance themselves from any role and get an overview of new experiences.
9. Another conversation starts pursuing the questions: "What did you experience and what impact does it have on your belief?" Everybody has the opportunity to express and exchange thoughts about the adventure. One is invited to interpret experiences from the spiritual perspective.
10. In conclusion the Bible passage is read out one last time.

Within him we live, we change, we are-

Elements of bibliodramatic Bible-work

- **The arrangement of the Text in a room**

The positioning of a biblical story in a room is an effective instrument for the Bibliodrama-model by Andriessen and Derksen. Precedent to that an intense personal-spiritual, exegetical preparation is necessary. The localization makes a story accessible. The words are presented from a theological perspective, leaving enough space for participants to find their personal spot and role within the frame of the biblical text.

The following criteria enable realm of experiences:

- Emphasizing poles to a story (for example salvation and mischief), not solely the topographic history.
- Enough space for all the characters, without defining any role in advance.
- Room as a place making encounters with God, Jesus and personal belief possible.
- Participants are encouraged to start moving and developing.

- **The choice of a certain role**

Participants in Bibliodrama are invited to identify with a role existing in the biblical text, in this way the old story comes very close to the individual.

A gap of more than 2000 years is bridged. Life and belief of Sara, Abraham, Moses, Judith, Peter, Mary Magdalene suddenly have to do with me. The process already starts when listening to the story for the first time. Some things are familiar, others different and repulsive. Over the conversation, via walking through the room, participants choose their role.

Adopting a role can be protection as well as challenge. The identification with a biblical character could appear like walking in way too big shoes. For one moment I can live on approbation, experiencing where my desire leads me.

Biblical persons awake my inside, consciously or not. Therefore role-taking often comes with the rediscovery of something, already assumed lost.

Participants report similarities and differences between themselves and the chosen character.

The role brightens the view on the self and permits new, unusual perspectives and opportunities of action.

Connecting one's experiences with those of other believers brings light into darkness, what yet

has been shady now wants to shine.

- **Expressing and talking about one's experiences**

With Bibliodrama individuals experience the process of personal relationships with God, inside groups. Whatever impressed me most about a biblical text can be complemented, questioned or confirmed by fellow players. Thus the appreciation of one's experience and the affiliation to a group is guaranteed. Belief depends on sharing one's lives with each other, the folk of God. It is indispensably necessary to sympathize with followers; this can happen without a word.

Fellowship is not called into existence verbally but emerges as a quality of shared life-experience and experience of faith.

By turning the inside out, other players of Bibliodrama take an interest in your experiences.

This happens through hearing, gestures, creative shaping and walking through the room as well as bible study, collecting all roles, in Bibliodrama itself and dialogue about faith.

Mutual perception of what is vivid in each individual has a subtle emancipatory art. Humans who know about their feelings, longings and wounds are harder to be manipulated. They have a sense of subjective truth and live in confidence that they are, the way they are, destined to be free.

- **Growing into a church through the sharing of "adventurous remembrances"**

Church in its deeper sense is the gathering of men and woman who are called out according to the word. In the First Testament this is called "kahal", in the New Testament "ekklesia". In Bibliodrama players witness a connection between people, in relation to a biblical text. The biblical story, again, merges presence and today's view with the legacy of mothers and fathers in ancient belief. Participants meet people who have, in connection to God, experienced relief, rescue and cure. They meet the smaller, who came into their distinctive life. They come upon bowed, mute, blind who turn to be erected, heard or seen. They meet men and woman who pluck up the courage to claim for righteousness, reconciliation and peace. They witness individuals who, in the name of God, defend losers and those without rights. Briefly: They give those "adventurous remembrances" of our Judeo-Christian tradition room and sharpen the eyes for exposure of disempowering situations. Therewith the story of God and his folk and the latest story of God's self-revelation in one's everyday life and in groups is told. If church is that part of the world, which rules in favor of walking one's way with God, then it is absolutely necessary to remember God's saving work in the older stories and God's presence today, in our

lives.

Parishes, achieving those remembrances in their pastoral work with groups, facilitate the importance of God's presence in everyday life. They bring forward God as strong commitment and assignment, as current presence and remaining future. They put the enduring mystery of God central to their work. Planning and Acting therefrom receive center, measure and perspective.

Opening up space for religious experiences- Bibliodramatic variations for practical use

The full dimensions of the Bibliodrama-modell by Andriessen and Derksen requires time, openness and a solid schooling for the instructors. To meet the people's needs in parishes, who are longing for experientable faith and for other individuals they can share their personal experience of faith and life with, we developed smaller versions, which methodologically and temporarily are simpler. Those forms, inspired by the work of Andriessen and Derksen differ from other Bible work in that they include the basic elements. The smaller versions can't replace the full Bibliodrama-modell, but they might whet ones appetite for more. We want to lead people towards a vivid experience in faith, therefore we reduced the "letting oneself go" and modified the small version compared to the full. Nonetheless those reduced Bibliodrama-modells aspire a personal appreciation and growth in belief.

Today, more than ever, it is necessary that people in parishes discover a standard and center for their life. This book offers suggestions for different target groups. One can find articles for the parish council and administrative board.

The bibliodramatic impulses for the church service address the emotional level in contrast to the sermon rife of words.

All chapters of this book originate from theologians, who have completed the Bibliodrama-schooling by Andriessen and Derksen. They work in diverse areas of practice – church pastor, adult education, school, hospital, spiritual companionship and counseling and have experimented with the Bibliodrama-model since many years to adjust it to the needs of participants.

They have in common the inspirational strength of bible work and the fruitful results with smaller Bibliodrama-modells. Also they share the devotion and respect for experiences of faith and life experience of individuals and every-day life as a favored scene of God's self-revelation.

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