



Breaking News
About our New President
Jesús Carpintero
by Alexandr Flek

Parabile: The Breaking News About our New President, Jesús Carpintero, is a contemporary, provocative, yet biblically faithful paraphrase of key passages in the four Gospels. The ancient **story of Jesus of Nazareth is retold as if it were happening today**, in our cultural, geographical, and even political context. Thus, the Nativity scene takes place under a bridge, with garbage men instead of shepherds and pastors instead of Pharisees. But most of all, it confronts today's readers with newly uncovered points from old gospel stories.

Alexandr Flek, BA, MTh (*1968) is known in the Czech Republic mostly as the head translator of the best-selling modern Czech Bible translation called *Bible21*. A sought-after speaker, activist, and author, he travels extensively in the Czech and Slovak Republics, and also internationally. Since 1994, he heads the BIBLION Publishing house in Prague. He also serves on the European board of Media Associates International, a global network of Christian authors and publishers.

Parabile was first published in Czech in November 2018 and immediately became a sensation among both religious and non-religious public, catching the attention of the national TV, radio and other media. The first two prints were not enough to satisfy the unexpected demand, and the book was sold out before Christmas. In a predominantly atheist Czech Republic with a population of 10 million, sales of the book totalled 20,000 in its first 11 months and another 5,000 copies are in print right now. At the moment, Czech national radio is recording the audio version of *Parabile* for a daily airing during the whole month of December, and there are initial talks about a musical based on the book. Over the last year, Alexandr has conducted more than 70 public readings and discussions in bookstores, cafés, libraries, and churches all around Czechia, and also in Slovakia.

Translations into Slovak, Polish, Russian, Bulgarian, and French are currently underway, with interest in more markets once the English version comes out.

Wedding in Caney

John 2:1-11

On Sunday, Jesús and his friends were invited to attend a wedding in the small county of Caney, AR. The couple were close family friends, so Jesús' mother was helping in the kitchen during the reception. She noticed early on that the supply of wine for the open bar was quickly running out. She went to find Jesús and told him, "We may have a problem: we're almost out of wine. Caney is in a dry county and it's Sunday, so we can't buy anymore. But, if we run out, you know how small-town folk are, this is all they will talk about for years!" Jesús replied, "Mom, what do you think I can do about it?" Instead of responding though, she went to the other kitchen helpers and said,

"My son will fix the problem, just do as he says."

In the kitchen, the trash bin was steadily filling with the empty wine bottles. Jesús told the workers, "take the bottles from the trash and fill them with water." So, they dug through the mess, taking out bottles and removing the attached pieces of food and trash as they went. Once they had a good pile of bottles, they filled them almost to the point of overflowing. Jesús then told them to pour a glass and take it to the groom's father-in-law. Though they thought he was crazy, they simply shrugged their shoulders and said, "well, if you say so..."

When the father-in-law took a sip of the water which Jesús had turned to wine, he audibly gasped. This was exquisite—like something from a fine restaurant in Little Rock, but nothing like what you could find out here in the boonies. He called his son-in-law and with approval in his voice, said, "you truly are a classy man and I'm proud to call you my son. Most people would serve the best wine first and then as people drank past the point of recognizing quality, would pull out the boxed wine. But you have not spared any expense and have even saved the best for last."

So it was in this way, in this small little town that Jesús first began to bring people out of their messiness. And It was because of this, that his friends first began to believe in him.

God Can't Be Defiled

Mark 2:23-28

After several days of traveling, Jesús and his friends arrived back to town. They couldn't remember the last time they'd showered or had a decent meal. On the road, they had slept wherever they could find a quiet spot and were now looking quite ragged. They passed a number of restaurants and fast food joints, but didn't stop until they saw a sign:

FOOD FOR THE SOUL, FOOD FOR THE BODY.
FIRST COMMUNITY CHURCH
COURTESY BREAKFAST SERVED AT 8AM EVERY SUNDAY

They walked in, found the table laid in the gym, and happily helped themselves. The coffee was smooth in their parched throats and the aroma of bacon and hashbrowns covered the lingering smell of vagrancy. As they enjoyed their first few moments of warmth and comfort in quite some time, they suddenly noticed that an uncomfortable silence had filled the room. A stiff looking man in an equally stiff suit and tie was making a beeline for them. He stopped in front of Jesús and said, "What do you think you're doing, coming into church with your junkie friends— you look like you're planning to move in to a drug den rather than worship in the house of God. Don't you know it's Sunday, the day we dress up to honor the Lord? You should be ashamed of yourselves, defiling our sanctuary!"

"Don't you remember?" Jesús replied, "When hurricane Katrina hit, churches opened their doors, ready to clothe and feed those in need. I'm sure they would've even broken into the communion supply if necessary. Do you think they've defiled the church by welcoming all those people in need? Do you think they said 'No, we can't help everyone— only the people who look and act exactly the way we want them to'?"

The entire congregation seemed to be holding their breath.

Then he said: "The church is made for people, not people for the church. Don't be so concerned with how they look or smell. God can't be defiled, can he?"

Jesús for President

Matthew 21:1-11

When they got closer to Alexandria, VA on the Greyhound bus, Jesús told two disciples to go on ahead to the metro station, where they would find an electric bike unlocked and parked beside the western entrance of the station. “If anyone stops you or seems to be calling the police, tell them that the president needs it, and they will immediately leave you alone.

This was to fulfil what was written in the Good Book centuries ago:

**Tell the nation’s capital:
Finally, a worthy president!
Humble and kind,
Riding a bike,
Not in an armored motorcade.**

The disciples did exactly what Jesús told them. They brought the charged electric bike to the bus stop, checked the tires, adjusted the seat, and set off for the capital together.

When they reached the National Mall there were already crowds of people waving signs: “JESÚS FOR PRESIDENT” Others had brought red carpets for him to ride on. The crowds grew and became rowdier. Riot police started to form a distinct presence around them. As Jesús rode past, the crowds fell in behind him shouting:

He is here!

Jesús for President!

God bless President Jesús!

The whole District of Columbia was electric with excitement over Jesús for president. Many still didn’t understand who Jesús was and asked; “Who’s the guy riding the bike?”

“Jesús Carpintero” the crowds responded. “The independent candidate from West Virginia.”

JESUS FOR PRESIDENT!

A new Bible paraphrase becomes an unexpected bestseller in Czechia

Christians around the world celebrated Easter last month – a reminder of Jesus' death and resurrection in Rome-occupied Jerusalem some 2000 years ago. But what would it look like if Jesus lived today, among us Europeans, in the 21st century? What if he would be born in the small Czech town of Beroun, grew up in the remote regions of Silesia by the Polish border, started a popular movement among the marginalised country folks and finally arrived in Prague to confront the corrupt political and religious powers and show the world an alternative way to live in love and peace?

Those are some of the thoughts that lay behind the Parabile – a new Czech paraphrase of the Gospels recently published in Prague. Its author, Alexandr Flek – an IBTS graduate, church-planter, activist, and publisher – previously led the team of translators that produced the so-called Bible21 – the 21st Century Translation of the Bible – into the contemporary Czech language.

When Bible21 was published in 2009, it immediately became the number one bestseller in the notoriously atheist country. Encouraged by the success of the new Bible translation, Alexandr started a new congregation in Prague, comprised of previously unchurched, and also some 'de-churched', students and professionals hungry to hear some Good News. While preaching the Gospel pericopes to his mixed audience in one of the most secularised places on Earth, Alexandr soon realised that though the new Bible translation used quite contemporary language, its stories and sayings were still hard to understand by most listeners due to the complete lack of understanding of the Biblical cultural, historical, and religious context.

As a Bible translator, Alexandr had to be faithful to the wording of the original. Now, as a church planter, he was striving to convey the biblical metaphors in a way that would speak to a very different group of people. Explaining the historical, cultural, and theological background of the Gospel texts meant preaching long, and for some, boring sermons. Alexandr often thought: Is there a better way to communicate the power and beauty of the biblical literature to the new generation of listeners? Could we use contemporary metaphors instead of the historical ones? Could we ask ourselves what Jesus' story would look like if he lived today? Who would trust and follow him in our time, and who would oppose him? How would I personally react to him and his teachings if he lived and walked on my street? So, using his experience as the Bible translator and expositor, Alexandr started to retell the Gospel texts instead of explaining them.

While working on his paraphrase, Alexandr had two groups of people in mind. First were those who had never read the Bible – the overwhelming majority of the Czech population today. The Bible has become as exotic and distant to them as the Quran or the Hindu Vedas. By transposing Jesus' story and words into the contemporary Czech setting, the Parabile provides a gateway for this post-Christian audience to open and start reading the actual Bible.

The second group targeted by the Parabile are seasoned church-goers who have been raised on the Bible. They know it very well; so well that perhaps the wording of the Gospel parables and stories is so familiar to them that they no longer feel its power or the impact of the texts. For them, the Parabile offers a new and fresh way to meet Jesus and his message as if for the first time.

Thus the Parabile does not translate the words of the Bible, but rather its concepts and contexts. This reflects the way this book was born: Alexandr started to share the newly-retold pericopes on facebook, and soon hundreds of readers started to follow, comment, refine, and share them. Each

week, a new gospel pericope based on the ecumenical lectionary reading appeared just before Sunday, and among the readers were also a number of pastors and priests who started to use them in their sermons and read them in their churches the next day. It was this community of online fans who came with the idea that the Parabile should go to print.

The book does not cover the whole Bible, though. The Parabile tells only the story of Jesus in sixty pericopes adapted from the four Gospels. Some of the well-known texts are missing, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. These gaps are very intentional – Alexandr hopes to infect his readers with a ‘para-virus’ so that the next time they read the Bible they will start imagining and retelling its events and sayings in their own contexts. This is actually the whole point of the Parabile: not just to put another book on the market but to inspire a fresh way of appropriating the ancient Bible texts for ourselves and making them personal and relevant for us and our friends today.

But there were also texts that Alexandr did not dare to paraphrase. One example would be the story of Christ’s Transfiguration on the Mount. He felt this was such a transcendent and mysterious situation without a parallel in our modern experience that it was best left untouched.

Parabile was published in November 2018, was immediately sold out, and by Christmas the reprint also completely sold out. Many people bought whole batches to give away as Christmas gifts to all their relatives and friends. Since then until now, Alexandr travels extensively around the country (and also in neighbouring Slovakia) to conduct public readings and discussions with mixed audiences in bookstores, cafés, libraries, and churches. Currently the book is in its sixth printing (the print run totalling at 25,000 copies), and translations to Slovak, Polish, Russian, Bulgarian, and French are under way.

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<https://www.bmsworldmission.org/product/mission-catalyst-europe-3-19/>

New Book Places Biblical Stories in Contemporary Czechia

Christians around the world are celebrating Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. But what would it look like if Jesus was born today, in the 21st century, in the Czech town of Beroun? This paraphrase of the birth of Jesus and other Biblical stories retold and reimagined can be found in a newly published book called **Parabile**. Its author is **Alexandr Flek**, a publisher, theologian and the chief translator of the modern Czech Bible version, **Bible 21**.

I asked Mr Flek to tell me more about the Parabile and the motivation behind the project:

As a translator I am always striving to communicate the message of the original text and of course in a traditional translation you are bound to the wording of the original and you have to be faithful to the original language.

Often I have thought how nice it would be to be able to say it as we say it today and maybe to use some other metaphors that are meaningful to us today. You cannot do that as a translator - hence the paraphrase.

Did you feel that people couldn't really understand the original text or that they couldn't perhaps relate to it?

Not necessarily, working on the Parabile I have been thinking about two groups of people. One group are those that do not read the Bible, ever. Many people, in my experience most people in the Czech Republic, have never read the Bible.

So for them, the Parabile might mean a gateway through which they might get some kind of access to the Biblical story or the message of the Gospels and they might end up opening the real Bible, not just the Parabile.

And then there is another group, which is actually a huge target group of the Parabile, and that's people who have been raised on the Bible. They know it very well, maybe even too well, so the wording of those parables and stories is so familiar to them that they no longer feel the power or are impacted by those texts.

Was there any story that you didn't dare to paraphrase for some reason?

Yes, definitely. The Parabile covers the story of Jesus Christ, it's not the whole Bible. I skipped over some stories that are too notoriously well-known. For example the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan are missing.

I wanted to give space to the readers to create their own versions. That's actually the whole point of the Parabile. It's not just to put another book on the book market but to share a way of appropriating the Bible text for ourselves in a way that make those ancient texts relevant for us today.

The other type of texts were those that I didn't dare to paraphrase. An example of that would be the Transfiguration. I just felt this was such a transcendent and mysterious situation that I found

no parallel to that in our modern experience. So I didn't dare touch it. So there are definitely texts in the Bible that I do not understand well enough to paraphrase.

By Ruth Fraňková

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