

The “Fuchs Chapel” in the Parish Church of St. Egid

More than 20 years ago Professor Ernst Fuchs started on the decoration of the Chapel in Klagenfurt’s parish church of St. Egid. On 30 September of this year, during a solemn mass, the Chapel was blessed by Diocesan Bishop Dr. Alois Schwarz, and thus was handed over to the parish.

In his homily, Bishop Schwarz emphasised that we “do not have a reproduction of the Revelation of John before us, but an independent artistic response to the burning questions that move Prof. Ernst Fuchs the artist, and have always moved him – and which perhaps move us also.” The Diocesan Bishop referred to the “Secret Revelation of John” as a Biblical book that tells not of the end of the world, but of the government of the world, the judgement of the world, and the perfecting of the world: “On the throne sits the Lamb, and not the emperor. On the throne sits the Lamb, marked by blood, a God who allowed himself to be given up in Jesus of Nazareth, who let himself be nailed fast in his light for mankind.” Bishop Schwarz thanked the artist and spoke of a “life’s work of hope” created by Prof. Ernst Fuchs with this special and sacred work of art.

Governor Gerhard Dörfler and Mayor Christian Scheider also thanked Prof. Fuchs in their speeches at the end of the celebration for his many years of artistic commitment. Now the general public and numerous art lovers can have the opportunity to see this life work by Prof. Fuchs, who is the most famous representative of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism.

We look back here and give a brief chronology of how the Fuchs Chapel came into being. In 1985 Dr. Markus Mairitsch was appointed main priest of St. Egid’s. As early as October 1987 he started the project for a Winter Chapel in the old north sacristy of the parish church of St. Egid, appealing to the parish for funds for the necessary reconstruction of this part of the building. At the same time, Dr. Mairitsch held talks with specialists, including university professor Dr. Karl Matthäus Woschitz, about possible artists to whom the decoration of the weekday chapel could be entrusted. In the course of these talks the name of Prof. Ernst Fuchs was mentioned, among others. During a trip to Israel, Prof. Dr. Woschitz quite by chance had his first personal contact with Prof. Fuchs at Tel Aviv airport. Prof. Dr. Woschitz presented to Prof. Fuchs the idea of decorating a chapel in Klagenfurt and mentioned that the priest in charge would contact him. The priest first visited Prof. Fuchs on 31 December 1987 at his villa in Vienna. In their discussion of this project it was still being assumed that it was the north sacristy that was to be decorated. Prof. Fuchs gave his assurance that he wanted to carry out the project. However, the issue of financing (approx. 4.5 million Schillings) had still to be clarified. After the priest had endeavoured in vain to find sources of financing from both the church and the secular sphere, the project had to be dropped, and Prof. Fuchs was duly informed of this. In October 1988, however, a letter arrived from Prof. Fuchs’ Management stating that he was delighted to be able to carry out the project, and that he would waive any fee, although the parish would have to find funding for all additional costs. On 4 January 1989 Prof. Fuchs for the first time inspected the space intended for the Chapel. At this point, however, there was a change of plan and it was decided that because there was twice as much space in the south sacristy the Chapel should be set up there. The basic theme for the pictures decorating the Chapel – the Apocalypse – was also decided as a thematic structure for the pictures for the Chapel. After various discussions on the design of the space it was jointly decided that not only would there be some individual larger pictures, but that the entire space should be decorated with oil pictures. 1995 was also agreed with Prof. Ernst Fuchs as the date of completion. The decisive discussion on the decoration of the Chapel took place on 5 January 1989 at the office of Diocesan Bishop Dr. Egon Kapellari, with Dr. Mairitsch, Prof. Dr. Woschitz and the artist Ernst Fuchs present. At this meeting, the theological and artistic concept was presented to the Diocesan Bishop. The Bishop then gave his agreement to the realisation of

this work, except for the decoration of the altar. At the beginning of July 1989 Dr. Elisabeth Reichmann, the competent conservation officer at the Federal Monuments Office, gave her agreement to the artistic decoration of the Chapel by Prof. Fuchs, and so the conversion measures and the laying of the marble floor designed by Prof. Fuchs were completed. Very soon, however, it became clear that it would not be possible to adhere to the date set for the completion of the Chapel, partly because of Prof. Fuchs's painting technique, glaze painting, which requires lengthy drying periods for the pictures, and also because of the fact that Prof. Fuchs was only able to spend short periods of time in Klagenfurt as a result of various other commissions. He was after all working free of charge and had to "earn his living" during the remainder of his time. From the outset, Prof. E. Fuchs gave the Chapel the name "Apocalypse Chapel" because of the underlying theme of the pictures. In general parlance, however, the title "Fuchs Chapel" has become established. The Chapel is certainly the largest and most important work by Prof. Fuchs, and falls within his most recent creative period, which by contrast with the earlier phase (graphics, smaller oil paintings) is characterised by oil paintings in a strikingly colourful and powerful style. An important aspect of the project has been to combine oil painting and space together to create a unified design. As a result of the glaze technique used (coat-upon-coat painting), not only do the large figures create a spatial effect, but also the pictures lift the space up, giving it a new spatial effect. For the observer, this emphasises the effect of the narrative theology of the pictures. The pictures themselves start to tell us about the most important themes of the Apocalypse. At this point we would like to point out that Prof. Woschitz will be giving 3 lectures as part of the parish educational programme in January 2011, when he will be providing greater detail on the themes of the pictures in the Chapel. Most of the people of Klagenfurt are enthusiastic about the Chapel. Opponents of Fantastic Realism, however, are critical, although they are certainly in favour of the altar set with pure glass and Swarovski crystals, as well as the ambo and the marble floor with its strictly geometrical pattern. No doubt it will only be after some decades have passed that a final judgement will emerge. Certainly the Chapel (as Prof. Lötsch pointed out in his speech at the blessing) is a great gift to the parish and to the City of Klagenfurt, and to the Province of Carinthia.

Opening times:
Monday to Saturday
9am to 12 noon

Guided tours for groups:
at 9.30am, 10.30am, 11.30am,
2pm and 3pm

Sundays and public holidays:
Guided tours at 2pm and 3pm

Contribution to the maintenance of the Church and the Chapel:
€ 5 per person; € 4 per person in a group; € 1 per schoolchild; children under 6 go free