



Lukas Vischer: Witnessing Together in Geneva in the Diversity of Languages and Cultures

1. Place and Date of Publication

Lukas Vischer (ed.), *Witnessing Together in Geneva*, Centre International Réformé John Knox, 2003, 7-16.

2. Historical Context

The project was launched as part of the 50th anniversary of the International Reformed Center John Knox. Its purpose was to strengthen the bonds between different Protestant communities in Geneva.

3. Summary

Geneva has for centuries attracted foreigners - refugees, business people, and employees of international organisations. In recent decades the official figures of immigrants have drastically increased, without taking into account the many Africans, Asians, Latin Americans and East Europeans looking for a job, for asylum, etc. In contrast to the past, such immigrants no longer primarily represent intellectual elites but belong to "lower" strata of population. Their great diversity finds expression in religious life. Among them are Muslims, Jews, members of Asian religions and also Christians.

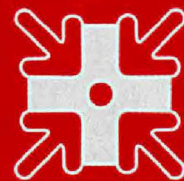
There are more than sixty Protestant communities of foreign origin in Geneva today. Several congregations of the Eglise Protestante de Genève offer hospitality to them. Some communities have roots in past centuries; others are heirs of the 19th century "evangelical" revival movement or have come into existence in Geneva in recent decades. These communities primarily gather people from Southern continents. Most of them belong to the Pentecostal movement. For some time the John Knox International Reformed Center has sought to create closer contacts between the "established" Reformed churches and these communities and organised two events on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. A Day of Encounter with 35 communities on May 24, 2003, resulted in three recommendations: 1) to establish on a website a list of all communities including further information, 2) to name a group to find appropriate places of worship, 3) to offer mutual support when problems arise for members of the foreign communities. That Day of Exchange was followed by a common worship service on Sunday, May 25. The theme was Rev.22,2: the tree of life whose *leaves are for the healing of the nations*. When bread and wine were distributed, everybody was aware of the common ground shared by all communities. Much patient work will, nevertheless, be required to build up real and solid communion in a world of so much diversity.

What are the challenges? 1) There is much talk about a "decline" of religion in Geneva. Are the Christians sufficiently aware of the gifts they are, in fact, receiving through the presence of foreign communities? Communion is primarily a question of recognising one another as brothers and sisters in the service of the same Lord. 2) Many barriers such as language, culture and different classes in society need to be overcome. 3) There is much to be learned from one another. There are as well several differences of spirituality preventing communion. - The main challenge is Pentecostalism. Recognising the urgency of a new mutual approach in many parts of the world, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has engaged in a dialogue with Pentecostals. A local effort might usefully supplement the findings at the international level.

Witnessing Together in Geneva



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Preface

This small booklet gives an account of an effort undertaken in Geneva to strengthen the bonds between Protestant churches and communities of different origin, language, culture and spirituality.

The first part tells the story of the project launched as part of the 50th anniversary of the International Reformed Center John Knox.

The second part recalls an important episode of the history of the Church in Geneva – the life and witness of the English speaking refugee congregation in the 16th century. John Knox was the first to preach the Gospel in English during the few years of his stay in Geneva. The Center is named after him.

The last part offers four Bible studies on the theme of ‘foreigners’ in the New Testament.

The booklet will have served its purpose if it helps to raise awareness of the common calling of Christians in Geneva.

August 2003

Lukas Vischer

I. Witnessing Together

in Geneva

**in the Diversity of Languages
and Cultures**

An increasingly diverse society

Geneva is a small but very international city. For centuries, it has attracted substantial numbers of foreigners – refugees, business people, employees of international organisations. But in recent decades the figures have drastically increased. The official statistics are impressive:

	1989	2002
Africans	7.486	14.727
Asians	8.509	12.082
Latin Americans	4.084	7.428
North Americans	4.269	5.536
Europeans West	104.878	120.892
Europeans East	6.169	12.593

These figures only cover those people who have been officially registered. They do not take into account the many persons without legal status – immigrants looking for a job, asylum seekers, etc. The actual growth of the foreign population in Geneva is therefore considerably higher. The increase of Africans, Asians, Latin Americans and East Europeans is particularly significant. In contrast to the past, immigrants from these parts of the world no longer primarily represent an intellectual elite, but belong to ‘lower’ strata of population.

A multitude of churches

The great diversity of the population finds expression in church life. In recent years many new religious communities have come into existence. They represent different religious traditions – Muslims, Jews, Asian religions – and among those of Christian background Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants. Today, there are more

than sixty Protestant communities of foreign origin. For most, language, ethnic background or culture is the common denominator. Others seek to bring people from different nations to worship together. Several are bilingual and provide simultaneous English-French interpretation.

People in Geneva are aware of the growing diversity of their city. They meet foreigners in the streets, in shops, in public transport and read in the daily papers of the problems arising from the growing presence of foreigners in their midst. They know, at least in theory, that a new situation has arisen in the course of the last twenty years. Many Christians are actively engaged in work among asylum seekers and refugees. A lot is being achieved by committed individuals. But for most it was nevertheless a surprise to learn that so many Christian communities gather in Geneva Sunday after Sunday for worship. Some congregations of the Eglise Protestante de Genève offer hospitality to communities of foreign origin; these communities worship in Genevan Reformed churches on Saturday evenings or Sunday afternoons. But the majority of the new communities live on their own and have little connection with the established churches.

Three types of Protestant communities can be distinguished.

Some communities have roots in past centuries. English and Italian speaking refugee communities already existed in the 16th century. John Knox, the Reformer of Scotland, served as pastor of a small refugee congregation that existed in Geneva from 1556 to 1560 (see below p. 17ss.). The Waldensian community continues to this day. For a long time, groups from Scotland, the Netherlands and German speaking Switzerland have held worship services in their native tongue. In the early 18th century a German speaking Lutheran church was founded. In the 19th century two Anglican churches – Holy Trinity and Emmanuel Episcopal Church – were established. All these communities represent ‘classical’ European or American denominations. They are the result of migration movements in past centuries, and partly also of tourism.

A second type can be called 'evangelical'. They are the heirs of the 19th century revival movement. They place strong emphasis on the call to conversion and renewal and engage in missionary outreach.

While the first type of foreign communities has longstanding relations with the Eglise Protestante de Genève, foreigners of evangelical persuasion spontaneously tend to relate to the Free Churches of Geneva such as the Eglise Libre, the Salvation Army and so on.

The third type is made up of by numerous communities that have come into existence in Geneva in recent decades. While the communities of the first type mainly represent European nations, these communities primarily gather people from the Southern continents – Asians (Korean, Chinese, Filipino), Africans (Erythrean, Ethiopian, Cameroonian, Congolese, Ghanaian, Latin Americans (both Portuguese and Spanish speaking). The spiritualities of these communities differ. While some are closer to the 'classical' and 'evangelical' groups, most of them belong to the Pentecostal movement. While some are limited to a specific ethnic group, others seek to establish a multiethnic community. While some see their primary evangelistic task among their own people, others wish to address the Gospel message also to the indigenous population of Geneva. Each community has its own profile, and classifications can therefore easily turn out to be misleading. A very special group is the Gypsy congregation, a Pentecostal community active among Gypsies in Switzerland and in other countries.

How can these communities constructively relate to one another?

For some time the John Knox International Reformed Center has sought to create closer contacts between the 'established' Reformed churches and these communities. The first step was to put together a reliable "guide" of the communities. Who are they? Where and when do they hold their worship services? How did they come into

existence? What are their main characteristics? It required some time and effort to obtain precise data. In many cases it was possible only through personal visits.

On September 14, 2002, the Center organised a “Day of Encounter and Exchange”. It invited all communities, known to it at that time, to send two delegates for a discussion on “Our common mission in Geneva”. About 25 communities responded positively. The exchange proved useful to all involved and the participants expressed the wish to meet again in the not too distant future.

Encouraged by this reaction, the Center organised two events on the occasion of its 50th anniversary – a Second Day of Encounter and Exchange to which delegates of the communities were invited, and a Worship Service at the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre, the main church of the city, as an opportunity to celebrate together the name of Christ in the diversity of languages and cultures represented in Geneva.

Days of Encounter and Exchange

The Day of Encounter took place on May 24, 2003. Thirty five communities, ten more than on the previous occasion, were in attendance. The overall question was the same. What is our common mission? How can we grow together in mutual support? Differences are obviously not easy to bridge. But there was also the strong feeling that the fragmentation of the Protestant world needed to be overcome. Efforts should be made to get better acquainted with one another. Mutual visits should be encouraged. Bonds of friendship should be built between the ‘historical’ churches and the foreign communities, and also among the foreign communities themselves.

The Day of Exchange resulted in three recommendations:

- a) to establish on a website a list of all communities, giving their names and addresses, times of worship and a short description of their history and present activities;

- b) to name a group representing different communities to provide assistance in finding appropriate places of worship. Many communities meet with difficulties in this respect. Some pay exorbitant rents for inadequate facilities. With the help of the new group, two communities have already found hospitality in buildings of the Eglise Protestante de Genève.
- c) to offer mutual support when problems arise for members of the foreign communities. Generally, the immigrant population of Geneva belongs to the poorer strata of society. Many immigrants come to Geneva for economic reasons. Often, there are among their members people without full legal status and therefore living under the threat of expulsion. Efforts of solidarity are required. At least two church organisations in Geneva are committed to protecting the rights of immigrants in Geneva. Their services are available, so greater use should be made of them by the communities.

Generally, the hope was expressed that churches and communities in Geneva would move 'beyond generalities' in building closer relations. Within the limits of its possibilities, the John Knox Center will seek to provide a follow up to these three recommendations. It also plans to offer to 'newcomers' courses and workshops to get acquainted with the customs of Geneva.

***And its leaves are for the healing of the nations –
a common act of worship***

The Day of Exchange was followed on Sunday, May 25, by a worship service to which all members of the communities were invited. The theme of the service was taken from Revelation 22,2 where reference is made to the tree of life whose '*leaves are for the healing of the nations*'. Before the service started several choirs and a dance group performed in front of the cathedral. Then the president of the Eglise Protestante de Genève symbolically invited everybody to enter the Cathedral. The emphasis of the service was on intercession. All participants received a

paper in the form of a leaf and were invited to write down a prayer of intercession. Two young trees were placed in front of the cathedral. Leaving the church, people put their intercessions under these trees. The service was characterised by an atmosphere of joy and gratitude. There were moments of excitement. Despite all differences the participants were able to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. When bread and wine were distributed, everybody was aware of the common ground shared by all communities.

But it is, of course, an open question whether the momentum of the service can be maintained. Much patient work will be required to build up real and solid communion in a world of so much diversity.

What are the challenges?

- a) There is much talk about a 'decline' of religion in Geneva. Attendance at worship services in the historical churches is diminishing. Year after year, the churches are running deficits. But are Christians in Geneva sufficiently aware of the gifts that they are, in fact, receiving through the presence of foreign communities. In a very real way, the words of Paul to the communities in Rome apply to the situation in Geneva: "Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." More regular contacts are needed. Clearly, communion will not primarily be built through committees, case studies and reports. Person to person encounters are called for. It is primarily a question of recognising one another as neighbours – more, as our brothers and sisters in the service of the same Lord.
- b) Building fellowship is not easy. Many barriers need to be overcome. Language and culture are formidable obstacles. Even more serious is the fact that the members of the various churches and communities belong to different 'classes' in society. They do not naturally meet as equals. Many communities gather people who hold subordinate jobs. Their community provides them with

protection and self-esteem. In their eyes, the historical churches belong to another world. Building bridges requires therefore an enormous effort. We need to go 'out of our way' to find each other.

- c) There is much to be learned from one another. It is, for instance, impressive to observe how many pastors are serving their community without a salary but make their living at some other job. Generally, lay people play an important role. Most communities have choirs. Common prayer and thanksgiving are the main aspects of worship services. But there are, of course, also differences of spirituality preventing communion. The main challenge in this respect is Pentecostalism. Reformed, and to a lesser extent Evangelical, Christians are not naturally at ease with the Pentecostal way of praising and praying; by the same token, in the Pentecostals' perception, Reformed worship services are dull and lifeless. Are there ways of deepening mutual understanding or at least mutual respect?

Recognising the urgency of a new mutual approach in many parts of the world, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has engaged in a dialogue with Pentecostals.⁽¹⁾ A local effort could usefully supplement the findings at the international level.

⁽¹⁾ World Alliance of Reformed Churches, *Word and Spirit, Church and World*, Report from an International Dialogue (1996-2000), Geneva 2001

Some Prayers from the “Leaves”

Several hundred leaves were brought to the two trees in front of the cathedral. A few examples may illustrate the main lines of these prayers:

O God, may your healing power flow through this land and let the Gospel of Jesus bring recovery to all nations.

We pray that the churches in Geneva will learn to work together in unity to reach the nations, that Geneva will become once more a city of reform and refuge. Let the light and fire of Jesus, the Messiah, burn in this city

Father, make me free, let your Spirit be around me

Jesus, use me to be your hands in my family, with my buddies and with all whose heart you wish to touch. Jesus, heal me and teach me to love others with 100% love.

I pray for more reserve in judging other people, other customs and cultures; that we may share our joys, and not our anger.

That the immigrants find a place in our hearts and in this city – because we are all immigrants before God

I pray that my eldest son can join me in Geneva

O God, think of those who have to sleep in the streets of rich cities

I am praying for my family in Latin America – that it may be helped through my work in Geneva

O Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer. May our heart be filled with joyful expectation

Use me as an instrument to bring the good news to the people. Let Christians live in peace and unity. Let my family get to know you as Lord. I thank you for everything – great and small – which you have given me and I pray for the healing of the people whose illness I know of.

I pray for peace in the world – that true and sincere love penetrate the hearts of all people.

Let us pray for a world with more justice, more fellowship and love – and above all without violence. Leaves will fall but this prayer will stay.

That the power of money be overcome by the spirit of sharing, instead of using violence teach us to respect the rights of people and of nature.

Dear God, I love you and Jesus, Katrine

Thank you for all answered prayers

II. John Knox

**and the English Refugee
Congregation
in Geneva (1555-1556)**



John Knox
from the posthumous woodcut in Beza's Icones

John Knox (1513-1572) occupies a key position in the history of the Reformation. To a great extent it is due to his life and witness that the Reformation was able to take roots in Scotland. For good reasons his statue appears besides John Calvin, Theodore de Beze and William Farel on the monument of the Reformation in Geneva. And it is by no mere chance that the International Reformed Center in Geneva bears his name. The global extension of the Reformed tradition owes much to the fact that the message of the Reformation in Geneva was ably communicated to the anglosaxon world.

John Knox had a militant, even revolutionary, mind. Though he regarded John Calvin as his teacher and model, he went beyond Calvin's positions in many respects. Uncompromising in his attitude towards „papist“ abuses, convinced of the need for a comprehensive reform of the church based on the witness of the Bible, he fought passionately, and frequently by political means, for radical change in his home country. He acted intrepidly in public and did not shrink from confronting kings and queens. He has rightly been called the *Thundering Scot*. In many respects his figure and fury recall the prophets of the Old Testament.

Evangelical Refugees from England in Frankfurt and Geneva.

The year 1554 marked a turning point for the Reformation on the British isles. On July 6, 1553 King Edward VI died at the age of 16 years. During the seven years of his reign, both his counselors and he himself had promoted the Reformation movement. The main achievement of this period was the publication of the second Book of Common Prayer in 1552. New horizons had opened. England became a place of refuge for evangelically minded Christians from the continent of Europe. Refugees from many countries arrived in London. Under the leadership of Johannes a Lasco a multilingual congregation with various language circles had been founded. But the premature death of the king put an end to all hopes for immediate

change. His sister Mary, who succeeded him was determined to restore the catholic faith. Though she promised tolerance at first, it soon became manifest that a time of persecution had begun for the evangelicals. Along with the members of the refugee congregation in London, many English evangelicals fled to the European continent to escape the repression. They found refuge in Frankfurt, Basel, Zurich, Aarau and Geneva.

Since 1549, John Knox was a pastor in Berwick-upon-Tweed in the north of England. He was a promoter of the Reformation and, under Edward VI, played a significant role as counselor at court. When Mary took power, he happened to be in London. He soon recognised that he could no longer live in England. In April 1554, he decided to leave the country. He journeyed first to Dieppe and then to Geneva and Zurich. After a second stay in Dieppe, he moved again to Geneva.

In Geneva, he received the call to serve as pastor of the refugee congregation in Frankfurt. He accepted but soon was forced to renounce his ministry there. The congregation was deeply divided over the question of the right order of worship. Should the refugees follow the order of the Common Prayer Book? Or should they use the occasion of their exile to introduce an even “purer” form of worship? For the more radically minded among the refugees the Common Prayer Book had been no more than a first step in the right direction. While still in England, they had advocated more unequivocal formulations. The conflict in Frankfurt could not be resolved. John Knox, who in principle favoured a radical line, was prepared to accept a compromise. But following the arrival of additional refugees from England, it became clear that this solution could not be honoured. A group of 15 refugees – a total of 27 persons, with the members of their families – decided to leave the city and to move to Geneva. They met with a generous reception by the magistrate of the city and, on November 1, 1555, obtained the formal permission to constitute themselves as an English speaking congregation. The Church *Sainte-Marie-La-Neuve*, today *The Auditoire*, was assigned to them.

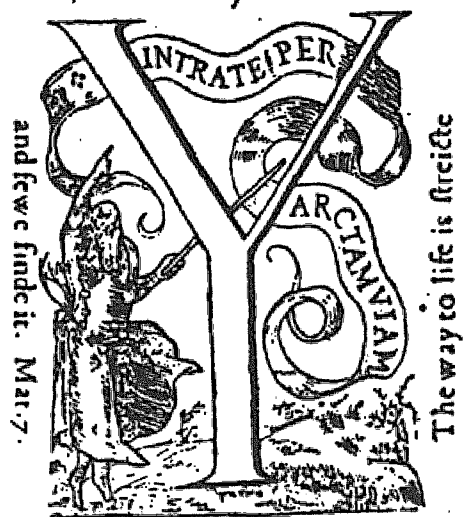
The congregation grew in the following years. At the time of its maximum size in the summer of 1558 it reached around 200 members.

John Knox

When, in 1554, John Knox arrived for the first time in Geneva, he had already lived an eventful life. He was born in Haddington in Scotland between 1513 and 1515. Little is known about his early years. John Knox did not often speak about himself and the developments in his life. He was not of noble descent; his father William Knox was a peasant. John became a priest and acted as apostolic notary. At the university of St. Andrews he heard lectures of John Major, a theologian and philosopher open to ideas of reform. The Reformation movement found an echo in Scotland at an early date. In 1528, Patrick Hamilton, a young Scot, was sentenced to death for his convictions by the Archbishop of St. Andrews. Twenty years later, the death of George Wishart made an even deeper impression on John Knox. Through his preaching, Wishart had provoked the ire of the Archbishop. Like Hamilton, he was executed. John Knox had followed Wishart and had been determined to defend him to the death as a member of his body guard. But when Wishart realised the imminence of his arrest, he urged Knox to leave him. "One sacrifice is enough," he is reported to have said.

Events pressed on. General discontent with the Archbishop's rule was mounting. He was murdered and the fortress of St. Andrews occupied. But the rebels soon had to muster a defense against French troops seeking to conquer the port. John Knox had joined the soldiers in the fort. To his surprise, he was asked by them to act as their chaplain. When the fort fell in August 1547, the French condemned John Knox to the galleys. Over the next 19 months, he served on French ships; this was a period of want and suffering that left its mark on the rest of his life. He was set free in the spring of 1549, but it was obvious that he could not return to Scotland. He went instead to England, which

The forme of pray-
ERS AND MINISTRA-
tion of the Sacraments, &c. vsed in the
Englishe Congregation at Geneva: and
approued, by the famous and godly lear-
ned man, Iohn Caluyn.



*They haue forsaken me. the well of the water of life, and dyged
theym selues pyttes, yea vyle and broken pyttes, that
can hold no water. Iere 2.*

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52 THE PRAYERS:

When the cōgregation is assembled at the
houre appointed, the minister vseth
one of these two confessions, or lyke in effect,
exhorting the people diligently, to examine the
selues; following in their hartes the tenor of
his wordes.

A CONFESSION OF
OVR SYNNES, FRA-
med to our tyme, out
of the 9. chap. of
Daniel.

1
Nehem. 1. b.
Iob. 9. 18. 19.
41.
Psal. 14. 76.
77. 19.
2
Exod. 10. 2.
Iak. 7. 8.
3
Gen. 1. b.
rom. 3. b.
s. Ioh. 1. d.
Psal. 12. c. &
106. a
4
Ieu. 16. c.
Deu. 12. b.
Iere. 26. a.
29. b.
Nehem. 1. c.
5
psal. 11. b.
Lam. d.
Iob. 4. d. & a.
35. b.

Lord God which arte ¹mightie, and
dreadeful, thou that kepest couenant,
and shewest ²mercie to theym that loue
thee, and do thy commaundementes: ³we
haue synned, we haue offended, we haue
wickedly, and stubburnely gone backe,
frome thy lawes, and preceptes. We wolde
neuer ⁴obey thy seruantes the Prophetes
that spake in thy name, to our kinges and
princes, to our forfathers, and to all the
people of our lande. O lord ⁵rightuoulnes
belongeth vnto thee, vnto vs, pertheyneth
nothing but open shame, as it ys come to
passe this day, vnto our miserable coun-
try of Englande, yea vnto all our nation
whether they be farre, or nere, through
all landes, wheruin they are scattered for
the

under Edward VI seemed to be moving in the direction of the Reformation. As we have seen, Knox became pastor of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

After Edward's death, Knox began his exile on the European continent. It lasted from the spring of 1554 to May 2, 1559. Yet even during this time, John Knox's primary preoccupation was the Reformation in Scotland. He pursued every opportunity for return that seemed to offer itself to him. For this reason, his stay on the continent was interrupted by attempts to return to Scotland. Following the unhappy outcome of the conflict in Frankfurt, he went to Geneva for a short while, but left only a few months later for a prolonged exploratory journey to Scotland. He remained in his home country from September 1555 to July 1556 but came finally to the conclusion that the time had not yet come for radical change. He returned to Geneva. A second attempt was no more successful. Though he had been subjected to insistent urging to return to Scotland, on arrival in Dieppe he was warned not to continue his trip. He had to wait until the death of Queen Mary before realising his project of return.

John Knox in Geneva

John Knox was not in Geneva when, on November 1, 1555, the English congregation there was constituted. Even so, the congregation issued a call to him to become their pastor. He accepted and settled more permanently in Geneva during the summer 1556. In the meantime, he had married Marjorie Bowes, the daughter of a member of his congregation in Berwick-upon-Tweed. The betrothal had taken place already in 1552, but the complications of the following years had made impossible the realisation of the union. In addition to his wife, John Knox's household in Geneva included his mother-in-law and a servant named Patrick. Two sons were born during the Geneva years – Nathanael und Eleazar. They later became priests of the Church of England.

The small English congregation placed high demands on its pastor. He was supposed to preach three times a week – on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. On the following days of the week, the Auditoire was used by the Italian refugee congregation. John Knox fulfilled his pastoral duties with care and gained the respect of the Geneva magistrate. When he left to return to Scotland he was granted Geneva citizenship.

Polemic pamphlets and appeals

John Knox used the time in Geneva above all to prepare the ground for the Reformation in Scotland. He launched several attacks against the powers in place and issued appeals to promote the reform of the church. The most famous, and at the same time the most questionable, of these writings was no doubt his *First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, a passionate attack against the women ruling England and Scotland. In England Mary continued to pursue her plans to restore the Catholic faith, and it was clear that, in case of her demise, her sister Elizabeth would accede to the throne. Scotland was governed, in close alliance with France, by Mary of Lorraine, and in all likelihood she also would be succeeded by her daughter Mary (Stuart). Her marriage with the successor to the French throne was already negotiated. The prospects of a Reformation in Scotland were therefore anything but promising. But John Knox not only attacked the particular women in power but declared that any regime of women was monstrous, i.e. against nature. „To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire over any realme, nation or citie, is repugnant to nature.” With this affirmation, he went far beyond the immediate goal he wanted to achieve. His pamphlet was bound to be understood as an invitation to rebellion. Elizabeth, later to become the queen of England, was deeply annoyed by this attack, and John Knox had to pay a high political price for his imprudence. Elizabeth mistrusted him. But John Knox also caused embarrassment in Geneva. He was probably aware of the risks

involved. The pamphlet was published anonymously, and despite his high esteem for John Calvin, he did not inform him in advance of the thesis he would argue in this attack.

Further writings followed. In an open letter to Mary, the regent of Scotland, entitled *Supplication*, he called for reforms. It was followed by the *Appellation*, an appeal to the Scottish nobility in which he defended himself against the condemnation by the Scottish bishops. The most important of his missives was the *Letter to the commonality of Scotland*, addressed to the common people, the middle class, which as in other countries was gaining increased political weight. Knox pleaded that they should join the nobility in resisting the tyranny of the bishops. While God has attributed, for the good order of society, a special role to rulers, God also calls all people to follow Christ. All share in the responsibility to see to it that the word of God is preached. He even suggested that the payment of tithes should be discontinued so long as the bishops did not properly fulfil the true task assigned to them – the proclamation of the Gospel.

Return to Scotland

John Knox left Geneva in January 1559. His return to Scotland was delayed because he was not granted permission to enter and to cross England. It was not until May 2 that he arrived in Edinburgh by sea. Largely due to his activity in Geneva, he had in the meantime become the symbol of the reformation movement in Scotland.

Change occurred quickly after his return. A civil war broke out, and when Mary of Lorraine died in 1560, the parliament decided to adopt the Reformation. The *Confessio Scotica*, formulated by John Knox, was officially approved. As preacher at St. Giles in Edinburgh he sought to consolidate these achievements. But his struggles had not yet come to an end. In 1561, Mary Stuart, daughter of Mary of Lorraine, arrived in Scotland to claim the crown. The dispute with the

THE BIBLE
 AND
 HOLY SCRIPTURES
 CONTAINED IN
 THE OLDE AND NEW
 Testament.

TRANSLATED ACCOR-
 ding to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred With
 the best translations in diuers languages.

WITH MOSTE PROFITABLE ANNOTA-
 tions vpon all the hard places, and other things of great
 importance as may appeare in the Epistle to the Reader

FEARE YE NOT STAND STILL, AND BEHOLDE
the salvation of the Lord, which he will bring to you this day. Exod. 14. 13.



THE LORD SHALL FIGHT FOR YOU: THEREFORE
hold your peace. Exod. 14. 14.

AT GENEVA
 PRINTED BY ROVLARD MAILL
 M. D. LX.

court continued over the following years, and it did not end even after Mary's resignation of her claim. John Knox was already seriously ill, when in September 1572 news of the massacre of Protestants in France reached Edinburgh. He died in November of the same year.

The English congregation in Geneva – the liturgy and the translation of the Bible

Let us return to the congregation in Geneva. There were many outstanding personalities among its members. John Knox is the best known but certainly not the only one who should be mentioned. The following names especially deserve to be remembered: William Whittingham, Christoph Goodman, Anthony Gilby, Thomas Lever, John Bodleigh and others. They were all actively engaged in the promotion of the Reformation during their years in Geneva. They considered themselves as an outpost of their home country. Their community as refugees was to serve the common cause at home. Their aim was to lay the ground in Geneva for a new era in the British isles.

After the church conflict in Frankfurt, one of the primary tasks was to agree on a common order of service. Just one year after the formal foundation of the congregation, the Geneva printing press of Jean Crespin published a small volume entitled *The Forme of Prayers* (1556). It contained texts for the Sunday worship, for the celebration of baptism and the Lord's supper, for the blessing of marriage, prayers for use when visiting the sick and for burials, and some indications for the election and the ordination of ministers. In addition, it offers 50 psalms in metrical form as well as a translation of the Geneva Catechism.

A good illustration of the spirituality of the English congregation is the opening prayer proposed for the Sunday morning service, a confession of sin, which establishes the connection between the worshipping community in Geneva and the people in Britain:

O Lord God which arte mightie, and dreadful, thou that keepest covenant, and shewest mercie to theym that love thee, and do thy commandementes: we have synned, we have offended, we have wickedly and stubbornly gone backe, from thy lawes and preceptes. We wolde never obey thy servantes the Prophetes that spake in thy name, to our kinges and princes, to our forfathers, and to all people of our lande. O Lord, rightuousness belongeth unto thee, unto us perteyneth nothing but open shame, as it yscome to passe this day, unto our miserable country of Englande, yea unto all our nation whether they be farre, or nere, through all landes, wherein they are scattered for the offences they and we have committed against thee.

Therefore convert us, o Lord, and we shall be converted ...

The congregation in Geneva not only sought to maintain their commitment to the cause of the Reformation but understood their exile as a summons to repent before God and to ask for his grace on themselves and their country.

The second big project of the congregation was the translation of the Bible into the English language. Several translations were already available. But the distribution of the Bible had suffered a serious setback during the oppressive rule of Queen Mary. The congregation in Geneva sought to redress the situation by publishing a new translation. Several translations of the Bible appeared in Geneva during the same period. Giovanni Luigi Paschale produced a New Testament in Italian (1555) and Juan Perez published a Spanish version (1556). The new English translation of the New Testament was available by June 12, 1557. Translation of the whole Bible demanded more time. William Whitingham and Antony Gilby held primary responsibility for the project. But the translation was a common effort. A whole group of translators was involved in the enterprise, among them William Cole, William Kethe, John Baron, Christoph Goodman, the second pastor of the congregation, John Knox and Miles Coverdale.

The translation was finally published in Geneva on April 10, 1560. Even the printing press belonged to a member of the congregation – Roland Hall. A wealthy refugee, John Bodleigh, had helped to set up the press in 1558. John Bodleigh was the father of Thomas Bodleigh, who later played an important role in England. The Bodleian Library in Oxford is named after him.

The refugees were also active in literary production. On the one hand they sought to make known on the continent the Reformation movement in their own country. With this purpose in mind, Whitingham translated a treatise on the Lord's supper by Nicolas Ridley, the bishop of London under Edward VI who had been sentenced to death by Queen Mary and burned at the stake on October 16, 1555. On the other hand, the refugees sought to communicate the theological thinking of Geneva to the public in Britain.

The end of the congregation and the return

The death of Queen Mary was the signal for return. The majority of the refugees left Geneva in the months following her death. A few stayed behind to complete tasks in which they had been engaged, in particular the translation of the Bible. On May 30, 1560, the magistrate of Geneva officially bade farewell to the last members of the congregation. They expressed deep appreciation to them: "We have found in them much modesty and virtue while they were with us; we have received much satisfaction and pleasure because they have not only served God but have also been obedient and agreeable to us in all places. But we thank the Lord and greatly rejoice in the holy cause of the return to their country which God allows them to visit again." (Nous avons trouvé en eulx telle modestie et vertu pendant le temps qu'ils ont esté avec nous que nous en avons receu grand contentement et plaisir comme de ceux qui servans à Dieu nous ont aussi esté obéissants et agréables en tous endroitz, totefoys nous esjouissans grandement au Seigneur de la sainte cause de leur retour en leur pays qu'il a pleu au Seigneur de revisiter)

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III. And He is Our Peace

**Four Biblical meditations
on the Unity of the Church
in the Diversity
of Nations**

Introduction

In every age people have left their homeland to settle among other nations. Different reasons prompted them to do so. Many were emigrants in search of a better future than the country of their origin was able to offer. There were refugees leaving their country in the hope of finding protection from hunger, misery, violence, war and discrimination. In every age whole groups of people went on the move. In every age the peoples of the earth mixed.

But today the phenomenon has new dimensions. Especially in industrialized countries, migration has become a matter of course. Fewer and fewer people spend their whole life in the same location. In every metropolis, even in every city and larger town, a multiplicity of nations is represented. The proportions have changed. In the Old Testament, measures are envisaged to protect “*the sojourner within your gates* (Ex.20,10).” He was the exception calling for special attention. “You shall not wrong the stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex.22,21).” Today the question is, rather, how the numerous elements of the population from other parts of the world can peacefully live together and form one society.

In every age strangers introduced new perspectives. They brought with them new knowledge and experience that were not available in the inherited tradition. But they were also in every age the cause of tensions and conflicts. They were seen as foreign bodies that needed to be rejected. But today, because of their sheer numbers, they are felt to be a threat in many places. Their presence calls into question familiar values and customs. There is need to accept greater diversity and to develop a new sense of solidarity.

A new situation has also arisen for the churches. Religious uniformity belongs to the past, at least in the industrialized countries of the West. Not only have the Christian confessions mixed; increasingly other religions are also represented in countries with a Christian history. In

several Christian countries, Muslims today form the second largest religious community. In larger cities the Christian church increasingly consists of a diversity of communities differing in ethnic and linguistic origin. They all have their own characteristics. Their worship services not only differ in language but also in style. Elements of a foreign tradition are being transplanted into a new context; and often the life of the community reflects a particular experience such as, for instance, flight from oppression, violence and war. Occasionally Christian communities are the place where the hope for return to the home country is being nourished and promoted.

How do we deal with this diversity? The message entrusted to the church no doubt lays the ground for an answer. According to the New Testament, the Church is a community gathered from all “tribes, languages, peoples and nations.” The experience of Pentecost is fundamental for the Church. The Spirit gives to the disciples the capacity to make themselves heard and understood by all peoples. “And they were amazed and wondered saying: Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ... and we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God (Acts 2,7.11).” The Spirit does not abolish the differences of language and origin. But it makes sure that the message can be understood in all languages. Borderlines are being transcended. A new communion comes into existence.

But has the Church been able to stick to this vision throughout the centuries? Is it really guided by it today? No doubt, it is formally accepted. We continue to affirm with the Heidelberg Catechism that Christ has chosen *one* community out of the *whole* human race, and that he gathers, protects, and maintains it through his spirit and word from the beginning of the world until the end. At the same time the realization of the vision is anything but a matter of course. In the course of its history the Church has not consistently contributed to the elimination of borderlines, but often enough to the hardening and the exclusivity of ethnic and linguistic identities. Instead of building up the body of Christ, it has often been divided according to ethnic and linguistic lines.

On the basis of its message, but not necessarily on the basis of its history, the Church is prepared for the new situation. In fact, the communion among the various communities is in many places a largely unresolved issue. The various communities live each in their own corner; and if they do not meet one another with suspicion, they take little note of one another. Only in rare cases do they engage in common projects involving both the indigenous and foreigners.

The following four meditations are an attempt to recall a few Biblical passages that are of particular relevance in this context.

God's dwelling place in the Spirit

Ephesians 2, 11-22

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The issue addressed in this text was the great challenge of the early Christian mission – the communion between Jews and Gentiles.

The letter addresses Gentiles, people who had not been circumcised according to the Jewish tradition and had not been brought up in the teaching of the laws and commandments. They were Gentiles 'in the flesh,' born as non-Jews, kept out of the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, in

retrospect without any hope in the world. But now their situation has changed. Through Christ they have been included in the promise. He has broken down the dividing wall and has made a whole out of the two – Jews and Gentiles. They are no longer strangers and sojourners, but citizens with full rights and members of the household in God's dwelling place.

In the situation of early Christianity, this affirmation was highly relevant – and represented at the same time a great challenge. Jews were living not only in Israel but were dispersed over the whole empire. They were present as a diaspora in almost every city. As a rule, the Christian mission started in the Jewish communities. But the Christian message laid at the same time the ground for a more comprehensive communion. Greeks, in fact people of every origin, could become members of the body of Christ. For the Jewish minorities in the Roman empire, this prospect meant a revolution. Jews forming one communion with Gentiles? On the one hand, the step opened new horizons and perspectives. By transcending the inherited borderlines, the Jewish tradition was placed into a wider framework. On the other hand, the purity of the Jewish tradition was called into question. To any pious Jew, the idea that the dividing wall could disappear was unacceptable. Jewish identity was at stake.

Communion was therefore far from being a matter of course. Tensions were inevitable. The early Christian community had to come to terms with a variety of views. There were Jews who in principle welcomed the Gentiles as members of the community, but insisted that certain aspects of the Jewish tradition, e.g., circumcision, should be imposed on them. There were, on the other hand, Gentile Christians who were not prepared to bow to such requirements. In the beginning, the Christian movement was perceived in the eyes of the Roman population as a Jewish sect. How should Christians respond? Should they deny their roots in Judaism? Or should they, on the contrary, consistently confess the one God who chose Israel and revealed himself in Jesus Christ? If the unity of the body of Christ was to become visible, the issue of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles had to be answered in a credible way.

In our passage Gentile Christians are in the first place reminded of their past. At length the author enumerates what they have been – Gentiles in the flesh, strangers, people far off, even enemies of God’s cause. These formulations were no doubt deliberately chosen. Christians of Gentile origin should indeed not forget that a short while ago they did not know anything about God’s promises. It is due to Jesus Christ alone that they have been called into the orbit of God’s presence. The communion with the Jews rests on Christ and on him alone. He is the cornerstone, he is the peace, he is the bond uniting them. In his letter to the Galatians Paul declares that there are no longer any differences in the body of Christ. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus (3,28).” This does not mean that being Jew or Gentile has become irrelevant. Even in Christ Jews remain Jews. But they have become Jews in a new and different way. As they share, together with the Gentiles, in the communion with Christ, the promises received by the fathers extend to all nations. They are Jews, representatives of the Jewish tradition. But through Christ their own tradition has grown beyond them. Something new has come into being – a communion that includes those who have until now been far off.

How has this change occurred? What made the difference so that the dividing wall could be abolished? Why can it be said that Jesus has put an end to the hostility? Why can he be called “our peace”? Christ has become the cornerstone of the new communion because in him and through him God’s deepest nature has become manifest and even tangible. The text refers to Christ’s sacrifice. In his life and action Jesus has faithfully reflected God’s love. There was no room for hostility and exclusion. He has brought peace by following to the end the road of love. God’s presence has been made tangible through his death, sealed by the blood that he shed. Because Christ has been accepted by God, those who were far off have now gained access to the Father. Through the presence of love, commandments and ordinances that separate people from one another have been abolished. In short: his cross and the blood shed by him are the mystery behind the new and unexpected communion of Jews and Gentiles.

Therefore the new communion only exists as an answer to the revelation of God's love. It is not the result of human planning, not brought into existence by a political programme or by applying subtle psychological methods. Faced with the overwhelming experience of God's love for the "work of his hands" we can no longer be held back by borderlines that separate people. The communion, therefore, exists as long as this experience exists. It disintegrates as soon as the experience begins to fade away. It returns when both sides remember their common roots and place their confidence in the fact that a new ground has been laid for the communion with God and with one another.

The communion involves the renewal of the human person. Through the power of the Spirit, Christ brings into being a new humanity (2,15). In the Biblical creation story we are told that God created human beings in his image. In comparison with other creatures, God entertains a special relationship with human beings. The human person is destined to praise God freely and reflect God's love on earth. But in reality Jesus is the only human being having fulfilled this vocation. He is the only one who can claim – as the letter to the Colossians says – to be "the image of the invisible God (1,15)." In contrast to the imperfect humanity of both Jews and Gentiles, the perfection has become manifest in him. As people become renewed in communion with him, they are able to form one body. The new community gathers around the true image of God.

And how can this new communion be described? The text uses a variety of terms and images – some of them rather unexpected. The point of departure is the common access to the father. Doors that have so far been closed for Gentiles have opened. The inscription "no access for the unauthorized" has disappeared. Those far off and those nearby can enter the door. They are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fully qualified citizens of the commonwealth.

The image of the access leads to the image of the building. They have entered a house and have become members of God's household. The

image provides the opportunity to describe the nature of the construction. Jesus is the cornerstone. The apostles, the messengers authorized by Christ, and the prophets, those who are capable of interpreting Christ's message for the congregation, determine its shape. Those far off and those nearby are the living stones necessary to raise the building.

But now the image suddenly changes in an unexpected way. In contrast to buildings in stone, this building is capable of "growing." The building thrives and develops. It is being transformed step by step into a holy temple in the Lord. The Church grows as the individual stones allow themselves to be used for the construction.

And you also are built into it. The sentence refers to the Gentiles to whom the whole passage is addressed. You have become part of the whole. Together with the Jews who confess Christ, you are being joined into one building. Jews and Gentiles have in the meantime become one. Ultimately the phrase "you are built into it" now refers to both sides. Whoever is in Christ has the mandate to participate in the construction of the temple.

He is our peace. In the midst of the tensions and conflicts in this world there is now God's own dwelling place in the Spirit.

Sojourners in the Diaspora

I Peter 1, 1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the dispersion (diaspora) in Pontus, Galatia Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

The perspective changes. In Ephesians 2:19 we were told that the members of the Christian community should not consider themselves as strangers, since they had found in Christ a common dwelling place. But here they are addressed as strangers (“exiles”). The perspective is obviously no longer the same. The letter to the Ephesians makes clear that there are no strangers in God’s eyes. Peter’s letter emphasizes that the communion with Christ makes people strangers and exiles in this world. The message here can be summarized in the following way: Through your faith in Jesus Christ, through his suffering and death, you have become strangers. Ultimately, your home is not in this world. You have here no lasting city (Hebrews 13,14) but are waiting for the coming kingdom. You wander therefore through this world like aliens and strangers. As much as you are engaged for this world – for the people and all creatures around you – you know that your ultimate destiny is elsewhere. While you live and act in this world, you know that there is another inheritance waiting for you (1,4).

The salutation adds another aspect. You are sojourners in the dispersion. The letter is addressed to several communities at once. They are dispersed over the Roman provinces in Asia Minor, small groups of Christians who distinguish themselves from the people among whom they live by their allegiance to Jesus Christ. A new kind of diaspora! In the past the term referred to the Jewish communities that were dispersed over the entire Roman empire. They had their true home in the promised land. From time to time they returned to

Jerusalem to praise God and to offer sacrifices in the temple. The diaspora mentioned here is of a different kind. It is not defined by any fixed point on earth but by God's dwelling place in the Spirit. Because they have been called to be part of God's household, the Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Phrygia and Bithynia have become a diaspora in this world. They have no place in the world to return to. Dispersed in the world, they are waiting for their true home.

The vision implied in the salutation is highly relevant today as we face an increasing interpenetration of the nations. It may help to solve a question causing much debate today. How should the communities of 'foreigners' that have come into existence in so many places be called? All designations are unsatisfactory. Are they ethnic communities? Or churches using a different language? Or simply communities of foreign origin? All these terms have the obvious disadvantage of defining the communities by insisting on their being different. They represent the "others," those who are not from here, those who have another past and another history. The impasse becomes even clearer when we look for adjectives to describe the local churches. Can they be called autochthonous or indigenous churches? Or should they be referred to as mainline churches? Or as traditional or historical churches? Or perhaps as host churches? Taking the affirmations of the New Testament as a measure, all these terms are inadequate. Because ultimately all churches are equally "at home" and "sojourners in the diaspora." The salutation of the First Letter of Peter names the common denominator that unites them. Whether immigrants or hosts, they are in the eyes of God a diaspora of sojourners in the world.

This consideration is significant for the self-understanding of the churches today, especially those in urban settings. They face the challenge of making visible the communion shared by the diverse communities – despite their differences. Both immigrants and hosts are confronted with the same task.

What does this mean? The First Letter of Peter offers many clues. Four considerations stand out:

1. *Declare God's wonderful deeds.* The image used in Ephesians also returns here. "Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (2,5)." More insistently than in the letter to the Ephesians, the emphasis is placed here on the common proclamation of the good news. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy (9-10)."
2. *Live as strangers before God.* Christians are called strangers ("exiles") also in later passages. "I appeal to you, beloved, as pilgrims and exiles (2,11)." He urges them not to become prisoners of this world, but to witness together to the freedom of God's children. Not only through words but also through their behavior, they are to touch the hearts of the people around them (2,12). As strangers they live in this world without adapting themselves to it. They are not bound to follow inherited ways and patterns, but can open themselves to new and creative perspectives.
3. *Be prepared to give an account of the hope in you.* The congregations to whom the letter is addressed were apparently exposed to slandering and hostility. Because they regarded themselves as sojourners, independent in their hope and confidence, they were treated as a foreign body by the people. Why are you different from us? Why do you not accept the same norms? The tensions were obviously cause for alarm. The congregations lived in the constant fear that open hostilities could break out. What should their reaction be? Should they withdraw from contacts? Should they confine their life to the circle of the elect? The author of the letter urges them, on the contrary, to face the world and to respond in freedom and openness to all who ask them for "an account of the hope" that is within them (3,15).

4. *“Love the brotherhood (2,17).”* Throughout the letter the author pleads for a commitment to mutual love. For the construction of the spiritual house everything depends on the quality of the relations between the members of the body. Communion can exist only if mutual love is constantly renewed. “Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins (4,8).” Hospitality is a special characteristic of Christian fellowship. “Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another (4,9).” And summing up all exhortations the author concludes: “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s grace (4,10).”

The Church of Christ in Rome

Romans 16, 1-20

*I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a deaconess of the church in Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well.*

*Greet **Prisca und Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved **Epaenetus**, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet **Mary**, who has worked hard among you. Greet **Andronicus and Junias**, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet **Ampliatius**, my beloved in the Lord. Greet **Urbanus**, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved **Stachys**. Greet **Apelles**, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the house of **Aristobulos**. Greet my kinsman **Herodion**. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the house of **Narcissus**. Greet those workers in the Lord **Tryphaena and Tryphosa**. Greet the beloved **Persis**, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet **Rufus**, eminent in the Lord, also his **mother** and mine. Greet **Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas**, and the brethren who are with them. Greet **Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas**, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the simple-minded. For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I would have you wise as to what is good and

guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

This chapter of the letter to the Roman can easily be overlooked. At first sight it contains nothing more than a long list of names, most of them unknown to us. What is there to be learned from such a passage? Nevertheless it is worthwhile to stay a moment with this list of names. Because on closer scrutiny it offers precious information about the Christian presence in the metropolis of the Roman empire during the first decades of Christian history.

Let us first try to visualize the context of the epistle to the Romans. Paul addresses his letter to “all God’s beloved in Rome who are called to be saints (1,7).” He has not yet visited Rome (15,22). It is for a particular purpose that he now establishes the contact with them. He wishes to pay them a visit. The letter is meant to prepare the ground for it. His concern is not only the fellowship with the Christians in Rome. His plans go further. He would like to travel from Rome to Spain (15, 24-28). It is his hope that the Christians in Rome will help him to realize this project. “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey, once I have enjoyed your company for a little (15, 24).”

What do we know about Rome, the capital of the empire? It was a sizeable city. According to the estimates of competent historians, it had at that time over one million inhabitants. As the capital of an extended empire, it exercised a strong power of attraction. From all provinces ‘foreigners’ moved into the city. Many sought the neighborhood of power. Others followed trade interests. Many were slaves purchased in the Eastern part of the empire. For some time already, Latin was no longer the only language spoken. Large parts of the population communicated in Greek. There was also in Rome an important Jewish colony. Though tolerated, its situation was vulnerable. In 49 A.D., only a few years before the letter to the Romans was written, the Jews were expelled from the city by an imperial decree (Acts 18,2).

The Christian message had reached Rome in various ways. The roads that connected the empire with the capital were also used by the Christian mission. Details are unknown. At the time of Paul and for a considerable period of time after him, the Christians in Rome did not form one unified Church. The Christians were dispersed in various communities, groups and house gatherings over the whole city. These communities differed in origin and style. While some had their roots in the Jewish tradition, others, probably the majority, were of Gentile background. But there were even more serious divergences. Together with genuine Christian missionaries, dubious figures had found their way to Rome. Paul explicitly warns the Romans against them. “For such persons do not serve the Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the simple-minded (15,18).” Rome was the theatre of a vast variety of perspectives.

The Christians in Rome also communicated in Greek. Latin became the official language of the Roman Church at a much later date.

The letter to the Romans is to be read and understood against this background. Paul’s purpose in writing his letter is to lead the Christians in Rome to greater unity. Already the salutation makes clear that he is not addressing one unified church. The greeting is addressed to “all God’s beloved in Rome who are called to be saints (1,7).” And more than once he insists on the need for a more consistent commitment to the unity of the body. “Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God (15,7).” “I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties (16,17).” And perhaps he has in mind the situation in Rome when he underlines, with a view to his own missionary efforts, that it was his ambition “to preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest he would build on another man’s foundation (15,20).” Presumably missionaries liked to establish themselves in the capital. Paul directs the attention of the Christian communities in Rome to the outside; he wants them to engage together in his project of a mission to Spain.

What do we learn from this long list of names in Romans 16? In the first place it is striking to realize the extent of Paul's network of relations. Without his ever having visited Rome, numerous Christians in the city are known to him either from earlier contacts or some perhaps from hearsay. If we add to those greeted the list of those who join in Paul's greetings (16,21-23), the network grows even larger. In his missionary efforts, Paul can, obviously, rely on a wide fellowship of friends and collaborators. Paul works together with others. He has colleagues. Tertius serves him as secretary (16,22). And he does not lose contact with those who have moved elsewhere. The list of chapter 16 shows clearly that the apostolic mission was the joint effort of a missionary community.

What do we learn about the Christian presence in Rome? Paul refers to 26 persons by name. Two women are added without name. Probably Paul had met all these persons in the East except those of whom he only knew from hearsay. Many names are Greek and it can be assumed that at least 12 of the 26 persons listed in the chapter were of Greek origin. This suggests that a large part of the Christian population in Rome came from other parts of the empire. Most probably the Christian presence in Rome was ethnically rather diverse.

The immigrants each brought their own spiritual experience and also their network of relations. The experience of Christians in other regions of the empire was represented among Christians in Rome. Several of those receiving Paul's greetings had suffered persecution. Prisca and Aquila had left Rome when the Jews were expelled but had apparently returned to the city. Paul mentions with gratitude that they "risked their neck for his life." Andronicus and Junias have shared a prison time with Paul.

Three of the person in the list - Andronicus, Junias and Herodion - Paul explicitly calls 'kinsmen,' i.e., Jews. Others in the list, e.g., Prisca and Aquila, were probably also of Jewish descent. There must have been a considerable number of Jews among the Christians in Rome.

The number of women appearing in the list is impressive. There is Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the unnamed mother of Rufus, the sister of Nereus, Julia, possibly also Junias. Women must have played an essential role in the missionary activities of Paul and in the Christian communities altogether.

Twice greetings are addressed to people belonging to a household. Probably this refers to slaves who belonged to the head of a family but had found their way into the Christian community. Probably, Aristobulos and Narcissus were not themselves Christians but only the owners of Christian slaves. A Christian cell had come into existence in their household.

The Roman communities most probably did not represent the higher strata of society in the city. The Christian message touched in the first place the heart of simple people and among them especially slaves.

There must have been house churches in the city. Even archeological research points to this conclusion. Paul adds to the names of Prisca and Aquila who were particularly close to him a special greeting to the "community in their house." And twice he speaks in connection with people receiving his greetings the "brethren" or the "saints who are with him." This refers most probably to house churches around certain persons.

Taken as a whole, the list shows that when Paul wrote to "God's beloved" in Rome, he was faced with a bewildering diversity. As in other cases, he was concerned with suggesting arguments and ways likely to facilitate a clearer manifestation of the communion in Christ. The letter to the Romans is in the first place significant as a summary of Paul's basic convictions; but it is also significant as a testimony of his strategy for the unity of the Church.

The main part of the letter concludes with the blessing: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the

power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (15,13).” Almost like appendices three more passages are added to the letter: 15, 14-33; 16, 1-20 and 16, 21-24. Each concludes with a new blessing (15,33; 16,20 and 24).

The letter was no doubt delivered by a messenger. Does this perhaps explain the composition of the letter? Is it not conceivable that Paul handed to this messenger the letter and separately the appendices with the mandate to visit the various communities in the capital? The appendices were, so to say, additional instruction for the messenger. Since the situation was different from community to community the letter needed to be delivered with care.

The main part of the letter ends with the exhortation: “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (15,7).” The Church of Christ – in which Jews and Gentiles are joined together – is called to the common praise of God. “Praise the Lord, all Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him (15,11).”

The appendices contain information, considerations and exhortations that could be used by the messenger according to the situation and needs of the receiving communities.

And is it too daring to assume that this messenger was in fact a woman? The second appendix opens with a recommendation of Phoebe, the deaconess of the church of Cenchreae. Paul asks that she should be received in the Lord and be helped in whatever she might require from them. He emphasizes that she had been a helper of many and also of himself. And *if* Phoebe was indeed sent to carry Paul’s letter to Rome, she was most probably more than a mere postal messenger. Mandated by the apostle and on the basis of his authority, she was to create new lines of communication among the Christian communities scattered in the city. She was to explain Paul’s convictions and intentions and seek to strengthen the bonds of communion in Rome.

Rome, the metropolis of the *oikumene*, the inhabited world, rallying point and mirror of the nations, was at the same time the center of imperial power. The presence of the Christian church in this place was of special symbolic significance. Paul and his colleagues had therefore every reason to be concerned with the communion of “God’s beloved in Rome” and their common praise of Jesus Christ.

Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Zweite Reihe 18, Tübingen 1989.

And They Sang a New Song!

Revelation 5, 6-14

*And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a **Lamb** standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the **scroll** from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne; and when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

*And they sang a **new song**:*

*„Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God
from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on earth.”*

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all therein, saying:

*“To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!”*

And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

The Lamb

In the vision that we are invited to share Jesus Christ holds the center of the stage. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has suffered and died on the cross. The image of the lamb serves to visualize his suffering. The image is familiar. According to the Fourth Gospel, it has been used by John the Baptist: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The saying has become an integral part of many eucharistic liturgies. Jesus, the expression tells us, is like an animal destined for sacrifice. As he fulfilled God's will throughout his life and until death on the cross, a new relationship between God and human beings has come into being. The sin of the world has been taken away. The vision of the book of Revelation pushes the image even a step further. The heavens open and before the eyes of the visionary, the lamb appears, surrounded by the heavenly host. It still bears the signs of suffering. It is obvious that it was slain. But everything has changed. The lamb, slain, has become the principal actor on the stage. The heavenly hosts bow down before him, play on their harp and join in praising his name. According to human standards, the death on the cross was the ultimate defeat. All hopes raised by Jesus' coming were buried. But what applies on earth is obviously not valid in heaven. The lamb appears in the glorious light of heaven! True, the future opened up by his cross is not yet manifest on earth. But in heaven it is already full reality. "Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

The scroll

A second image is added: a scroll with seven seals (cf. 5,1-5), a book containing decisive secrets that have so far not been revealed. Nobody in heaven or earth is in a position to open it and to get acquainted with its content. What is it that is written in this mysterious scroll? What is the hidden secret? It is the future destiny of the world. Human beings

have only limited knowledge about the world and about themselves. They live and move in uncertainty. All plans and programmes they conceive are inadequate.

The unfolding of history takes its own unexpected course. But it is nevertheless in God's hands, written down in a scroll with seven seals. But now it is precisely the lamb who is in a position to open the book. "Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals." Why? Because Jesus followed the road of love to the very end. His suffering is, so to say, the key giving access to the secrets of history. Whoever understands his message and follows him, will also understand what in history counts in front of God. The world is in reality kept together by love; and only by following the road of love are we in harmony with God's plans for this world.

From every tribe and tongue and people and nation

The vision is expanded by a further element. We hear of people gathering around the lamb. Jesus has ransomed people from all tribes, languages and nations. With the coming of Jesus the borderlines between nations have been overcome. The fellowship created by the common allegiance to Jesus is stronger than the bonds of tribes, nations and common language. The encounter with Jesus opens new horizons surpassing everything else.

New things call for a new song

They follow the lamb on earth. They share the road of love with him. As they have been told, they take the cross upon themselves. Even when their witness seems unrealistic and holding no future, they do not give up. What they are capable of achieving may look insignificant and without impact on the course of human history. But in heaven the true nature of this new communion from all nations is

already manifest. They are, in fact, the true kingdom; they are priests allowed to stand before God. Not the powerful of the world but they shall reign on earth. The world to be brought about by God has already started in their midst. And this is also the content of the new song in heaven. It is not new because it differs from earlier songs, a new text and a new melody in the endless up and down of hit parades. It is new because of its new content. By sending Christ, God has accomplished 'new things'. Heaven is already full of them. The new is being praised by new songs. And the community on earth, gathered from all tribes and nations, joins in awe in this praise.

They shall reign

But what about this promise "they shall reign"? Does it simply mean the reversal of the situation? The lamb has suffered and was slain but now it has been given might. The disciples have been humiliated and defeated, but now they have the upperhand and can reign over the powerful. Will the game continue as before, just with exchanged roles? The images and expressions used to describe the new world may suggest this conclusion. The disciples, so it sounds, are richly compensated in heaven for everything they have missed on earth. But this is definitely not the conclusion to be drawn. The communion gathered from all tribes and nations represent a 'kingdom' of another kind. They are a priestly communion serving God in the name of the lamb and interceding on his behalf for the world. Their reign is a reign of love.

The old song - the new song

We are invited to join in the new song. What does this mean?

The old songs talked of the principle of self-interest that determines the course of the world. Each person, each group of persons and even

nations, we are told, must pursue their own interest. As each part of humanity looks after its own interest, everyone's interests will be looked after.

The new song is the song of gratitude and mutual love. As everyone bears the burden of the other, all burdens will be borne.

The old song glorifies violence. Where I am unable to win, resistance needs to be broken by violence. The old songs are the melodies of the military bands that do not invite to follow Christ but to march against enemies under the banners of our own cause.

The new song is the song of understanding and peace. It praises the lamb and the road proposed and realized by him. It creates space for love.

The old songs are the songs of human arrogance against the whole of God's creation. They are the songs of conquest and human self-glorification and dominion over the planet earth.

The new song is the song of respect for God's creation, praising the rules of wisdom in dealing with the gifts of God's creation. According to John's vision, not only the communion from all tribes and nations, but every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth join in the new song. The singing of the priestly community on earth must be in harmony with this song in heaven. There cannot be any dissonance between the two. This is the newness of the new that the whole creation – human beings, animals and plants – raise their voice together to praise the lamb and his love.