

Press conference of 3 November 2016

Address by Emmanuel Fuchs, President of the Protestant Church of Geneva

The spoken text shall prevail

Celebrating an anniversary is always an opportunity to look back, and it is plain to see how much the history of our city over the last 500 years has been closely bound with the emergence and development of the Reformation.

Without the Reformation, what would Geneva be today? Probably a small provincial town. And yet, thanks mainly to the Reformation, today Geneva's influence spreads unusually far and wide: is it not said that Geneva is the smallest of the great capitals? The Reformation gave Geneva a taste for freedom, but also the values on which the city was built; values such as respect, hospitality, rigour, knowledge-sharing and a sense of responsibility.

An anniversary is also an opportunity to look to the future.

We are here this morning in this beautiful International Museum of the Reformation – and we are very grateful that this museum exists; yet “being Reformed” is not just about being the custodians of a tradition. *Ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda* means “the church is always to be reformed.” In other words, being reformed, being true to the genius intuition of reformers such as Luther and Calvin, implies a duty to understand our world, our culture, our means of communication; to be open to the questions of our contemporaries; and to be aware of the challenges of our time. Indeed, today we are faced with a host of questions and challenges: migrants are dying on our doorstep, climate change is forcing us to change our behaviour, the unequal distribution of wealth is a scandal, globalisation is disrupting our points of reference, and our values are coming into question.

Today in Geneva, our Church seeks to remain true to its history. It is a Church established all over the world that pays particular attention to people in need, those left by the wayside. A Church that is open to questioning with faith and reason, but a Church that is also able to question civil society and speak out, just as it did in the 16th century, against everything that continues to oppress individuals and their consciences today. A Church that accepts and recognises its minority status but which seeks to remain the leaven in the dough, because being Reformed means bringing a message of hope and peace to the whole world; a message taken from the Gospel, a message that is fundamentally liberating, but also a challenging message that calls for individual and collective responsibility.

The programme that we have prepared for the next two days is intended to show clearly how our Church has remained true to its tradition, and also how it remains open to the modern age. That is why the celebration we have just enjoyed was prepared with the help of several communities of migrants, and why the evening youth event was organised by the Interfaith Platform, to name just two events.

I am proud to be able to celebrate this jubilee, proud of the tradition on which we are founded. 500 years of history between our Church and Geneva that has at times been difficult but has often found fertile ground. It could have been a heavy burden, but this is not the case. From the legacy and commitment of all those who have come before us and made our city what it is today, I take great encouragement in our efforts to maintain the course that has been set, continuing to ensure the city is an open and welcoming city and that our Church can continue to breathe life into the city, a life that is the Spirit of Geneva.