



## PRESS KIT

### MIR

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## 1. The MIR: a forum for history and dialogue

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The **International Museum of the Reformation (MIR)** was founded in 2005 with the aim of showcasing the history of Geneva and of the Reformation. It traces the origins of both an idea and an ambition.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, John Calvin set out to turn Geneva into a model for a new way of living the Christian life, to serve as an example to the world. This impetus gave rise to the ‘myth’ of Geneva and explains its international reputation.

The aim of the MIR is to present the history of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others. Through objects, books, manuscripts, paintings, engravings and state-of-the-art audiovisuals, the museum tells the story of the movement that spread from Geneva during in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and grew into one of the main families of Christian churches.

The MIR is located on Cour Saint-Pierre, in the magnificent Maison Mallet, a historic dwelling built during the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the former site of the cathedral cloisters where the Reformation was voted in 1536. In combination with the cathedral and its towers, the IMR offers a unique cultural experience in Geneva, known as ‘Espace Saint-Pierre’.

The Museum’s 12 rooms present a chronological account of the history and impact of the Reformation spanning 500 years, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through 620 documents, objects and interactive displays. An manuscript in Luther’s hand, the signature of King Henri IV of France, the minutes of a meeting between Calvin and a group of Geneva pastors, a bible so small it could be hidden in a lady’s chignon, and an original letter from the German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer are just a few of the fascinating artifacts that illustrate the key stages in the spread of Protestantism.

In April 2007, the MIR was awarded the **Council of Europe Museum Prize**.

## 2. The Maison Mallet and “Espace Saint-Pierre”

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**The splendid 18-th century mansion known as “Maison Mallet”, home of the MIR, offers visitors two different ways of encountering the past: by exploring the history of the Reformation, and by discovering a typical classical-era dwelling.**

*This beautiful townhouse was built by Gédéon Mallet, a descendant of French Huguenots who settled in Geneva in the 16th century. The house is entered from the Rue du Cloître via an inner courtyard. An original sculpture by jeweller Gilbert Albert graces the charming courtyard fountain.*

*The museum extends over 400 m2 on the ground floor and cellars of the Maison Mallet. The original 18th-century décor was recreated in the library, dining room and salon. The historic cellars address the 19th, 20th and 21th centuries.*

### **“Espace Saint-Pierre”: a “three in one” interactive space**

*Another attractive feature of the MIR is its position in the heart of Geneva’s historic old town, next to Saint-Pierre Cathedral and its archaeological site.*

*The two museums and the cathedral and towers have been combined into a single entity called “Espace Saint-Pierre”, so as to make the most of their considerable synergies, and enhance their attractiveness, particularly through a combined admission ticket to all three sites.*

*In 2008, the archaeological site was a medallist in the “Conservation” category of the **European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage**, awarded by the Europa Nostra Federation. This distinction recognizes the important research carried out on the site, which was completed in 2006 after more than 30 years of excavations.*

*In 2009, Saint-Pierre Cathedral was awarded the prestigious **European Heritage Label**, confirming its importance in European history and culture.*

### 3. The Reformation and Geneva

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**On 21 May 1536, the citizens of Geneva proclaimed the Reformation in the cloister of Saint-Pierre Cathedral, on the site now occupied by Maison Mallet, home of the MIR. For Geneva, the Reformation was synonymous with revolution: by renouncing the Catholic faith, the Genevese also broke from their ruler, the Bishop of Geneva, to become an independent republic. This decision was to shape the destiny of the city in the centuries that followed. The man who played a key role in shaping this new republic was none other than John Calvin. A refugee from France, he arrived in Geneva in 1536, at the age of 27, where Guillaume Farel, the first person to preach the evangelical doctrine in the city, persuaded him to stay.**

Through his ideas and his actions, Calvin fashioned the small republic into one of the centres of Christianity. Despite constant threats from its powerful neighbour the Duke of Savoy, Geneva became a city of refuge for thousands of men and women in search of a place where they could freely practice their faith. The refugees contributed the leadership the city so direly needed. To this day, many street names attest to the importance of refugee families such as the Candolle, Trembley, Sarasin, Turretini, Micheli, or Fatio.

The Academy, founded by Calvin in 1559 (later to become the University of Geneva), played an important role as the “seedbed of European Calvinism”. Protestants saw Geneva as a “new Jerusalem”, whereas their Catholic adversaries sought by all means to destroy what they viewed as a nest of heretics.

Reformed Geneva remained independent in the face of the territorial ambitions of Savoy – most notably during the attempted invasion of 1602 known as the *Escalade*. The reputation of the city as the capital of Calvinism attracted a new influx of refugees in the late 17th century after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. Huguenots fled France in the hundreds of thousands; Geneva welcomed many of them. These later refugees were the artisans of Geneva’s reputation in the 18th century: they included watchmakers, jewellers and enamellers, like the Barde, Terroux and Liotard families, and business dynasties, such as the Boissier, Sellon and Cazenove, who turned the city into an important centre of banking.

#### 4. A dynamic and lively museum

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### TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

#### “PRINT! The first pages of a revolution”



The exhibition explored the historical significance of the invention of printing, the greatest revolution since the invention of writing 5000 years ago and before the digital revolution of today. Over 130 days, from 4 June to 31 October 2017, an entire Bible has been hand-printed using period techniques, on a replica of a Gutenberg press built especially for the exhibition. The text of the anniversary Bible followed *La Bible des écrivains* (Bayard, 2001) a recent French version jointly translated by a group of biblical scholars and famous writers. Four well-known contemporary artists as well as famous writers and personalities participated in the printing this 800-page anniversary Bible.

#### “The Sky Before Us: Photography and sacred architecture” (2015)



On the occasion of their 10th and 20th anniversaries, the MIR and Mamco jointly presented a temporary exhibition dedicated to photography. This ambitious collaboration between two of Geneva's most prominent cultural and historical institutions took a resolutely contemporary approach. The works on display, by contemporary artists from Switzerland, Germany and Great Britain portrayed interiors and exteriors of sacred buildings in various countries.

### « 1814, the first genevoiseries ? Caricature by Adam Töpffer » (2014)



As part of a series of events commemorating the bicentenary of Geneva's admission into the Swiss Confederation, the IMR presented a selection of caricatures by the famous painter Adam Töpffer, in which he attacked the politicians who played an active role in the Restoration of Geneva and its incorporation into Switzerland. The 40 watercolours in the temporary exhibition, which took place from October 2014 to February 2015, were on loan from Musées d'Art et d'Histoire and private collections. They presented a vivid portrait of Restoration society and life in Geneva between 1814 and 1817.

### “Hell or Paradise : the Origins of Caricature” (2013)



Caricatures lampooning the faults of the Church have existed for centuries ; the imagery of the Middle Ages was full of strange creatures, and illuminated manuscripts contain many splendid examples of satire. Many engravings, flyers, medals or other objects from this period display crude, aggressive, sometimes even scatological images. Artefacts from Geneva as well as Swiss and European institutions, some of which were being exhibited for the first time, were presented during this temporary exhibition that took place between October 2013 and February 2014.

### “Ancient Perfumes, Biblical Scents” (2012)



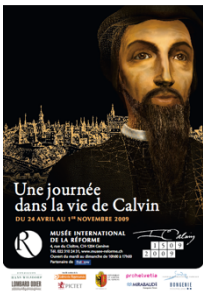
The Bible is full of fragrant stories... so, for its third temporary exhibition, the IMR decided to put perfume in the picture! from June to October 2012, “Ancient Perfumes, Biblical Scents”, allows visitors to explore the olfactive dimension of the ancient world.

### *“Calvin World” (2011)*



For the 500th anniversary of the birth of the reformer John Calvin, photographer Nicolas Righetti and journalist Pierre Grosjean travelled to five continents to meet forty people named Calvin. In front of the camera, 8 women and 32 men, aged 9 to 79, revealed their personalities as modern-day Calvins. Most feel no direct connection to the great reformer, but all in their own way express a rich sense of identity. Originally published in book form by Labor et Fides in 2009, Righetti and Grosjean’s work was the focal point of a temporary exhibition at the MIR from June to September 2011.

### *“A Day in the Life of John Calvin” (2009)*



On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin’s birth (1509–2009), the IMR organised a series of activities, either alone or with other institutions, between March and end of October 2009.

## 5. The IMR in brief

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- A prestigious location in the **Maison Mallet**, 4 rue du Cloître, 1204 Geneva
- Almost **400 m<sup>2</sup>** on two levels: ground floor and the historic cellars
- **Winner of the Council of Europe Museum Prize 2007**
- **“Espace Saint-Pierre”, a “three in one” offer:** the IMR, Saint-Pierre Cathedral and its towers, and the archaeological site constitute a coherent combined attraction for visitors.
- **14 rooms**, plus a museum shop
- Around **615 original objects** on display: paintings, engravings, books, manuscripts, medals and other artefacts, such as communion chalices, Huguenot crosses and Pentecost crosses
- **147 rare books, engravings and coins** from the time of the Wars of Religion in France (second half of the 16th century) donated by art collector Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller
- **1 online shop on the website [mir.ch](http://mir.ch)**
- An activity for children called **“The MIR superheroes”** with **SuperTheo, SuperCalvin, SuperJohn et SuperFarel** and downloadable teaching kits on [mir.ch](http://mir.ch)
- **An association of 750 friends of the museum**, the **AmiduMIR**, that aims to promote and support the MIR in Geneva, Switzerland and abroad.

### **The MIR: a private institution**

The MIR is a fully private institution that relies on the generous support of donors and patrons.



## 6. Practical information

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### **International Museum of the Reformation (MIR)**

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- **Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm.** Open also on the following Mondays and public holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, August 1st (except when it falls on a Monday), Jeûne genevois (Thursday after the first Sunday in September) and Jeûne Federal (Second Monday in September).
- Free audio guide in French, German and English
- Guided tours in several languages on prior reservation
- Free admission for the disabled

#### **MIR admission:**

**Adults :** CHF 13.-

**Concession :** CHF 8.- and CHF 6.-

#### **Combined ticket « Espace Saint-Pierre »:**

- the MIR

- the Cathedral and the towers

- the Archeological site

**Adults :** CHF 18.-

**Concession :** CHF 12.- and CHF 10.-

A selection of free visuals is available on [mir.ch](http://mir.ch), click on “**Press**”.