

## Press kit of the International Museum of the Reformation

The Musée International de la Réforme (MIR) reopened its doors on April 27, 2023 after 21 months of renovation. Located next to Geneva Cathedral, it presents a secular history of the Reformation in nine spaces and offers two temporary exhibitions each year.

### The Reformation

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The Reformation provoked a schism at the heart of Western Christianity. It began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its protagonists were literati. They challenged the authority of the Roman Church in favor of the Bible, the source of Christian tradition. The Bible focuses on the destiny, message and posterity of Jesus of Nazareth, a founding figure born in Palestine 2,000 years ago. The German Martin Luther, the Zurich-born Ulrich Zwingli and the Frenchman Jean Calvin translated or had translated the Bible so that everyone could understand it in their own language and have direct access to it. They commented on and interpreted its texts to explain their significance to contemporaries living 1500 years after they were written.

In contrast to the Roman Church, the Reformed insisted on divine transcendence, calling into question the search for salvation through personal action or human mediation. By freeing themselves from the tutelage of Popes and Bishops, new autonomous communities developed in Europe and beyond. Geneva is central to the birth of Protestantism, the name given to the many denominational families that sprang up under the impetus of the Reformers. Today, there are some 800 million Protestants worldwide.



Portrait of Martin Luther, Cranach the Elder, Private Collection

## **A museum for the Reformation**

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The International Museum of the Reformation presents a version of this story from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. It came into being in 2005. It is unique in the world. Its approach is international, secular and pluralist. It offers two different spaces: one dedicated to the permanent exhibition "A History of the Reformation", the other to temporary exhibitions. The Museum is housed in a private mansion built in 1723 on the site of the Cathedral's former cloister. The museum's exhibits are housed on the first floor and in the basement of this listed building.

From 2005 to 2021, the MIR welcomed over 300,000 visitors and mounted 15 temporary exhibitions. Winner of the 2007 Council of Europe Museum Prize, it has actively complemented Geneva's museum offering by highlighting the major role played by the Protestant Reformation in the city's development since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The personality of Jean Calvin, the main Reformer alongside Martin Luther, is closely associated with this.



Museum entrance on the Cour de Saint-Pierre, next to the Cathedral

## **A renovated Museum**

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The MIR closed its doors in 2021 to transform its circulation and move its entrance to St. Peter's Square, next to the cathedral. After 21 months of work, it reopened on April 27, 2023. For its transformation, the MIR called on Basel architects Christ & Gantenbein and French scenographers Alain Batifoulie and Simon de Tovar.

The Museum is set in the natural flow of this mansion's adjoining rooms. Twelve of these rooms, on the first floor and basement, are devoted to the permanent exhibition "A History of the Reformation", covering a surface area of 250m<sup>2</sup> and five spaces, located in a homogeneous area of 160m<sup>2</sup> , host temporary exhibitions.

The guiding principle of the scenography is to fully respect the volumes of this 18<sup>th</sup> century building, restored to their original function. To facilitate the arrangement of works and the installation of audio-visual devices and computer graphics, walls have been erected in front of the woodwork and walls of the 18<sup>th</sup> century rooms, which nevertheless remain visible through loopholes and from above. Each room in the permanent exhibition has its own color. On the floor, five ground-floor areas are covered with woven carpets that reproduce in large-scale color the motif of a page from a book or engraving on display.



Museum entrance, large vestibule



Room 1: The Reformation



The permanent exhibition is chronological and thematic. It tells the story of the birth and development of the Reformation through 340 documents and installations, forming a narrative that we follow room by room, like the pages of a book that we turn with its chapters and intertitles.

The displays group together works of the same genre or relating to common periods or fields. In the Reformation room, for example, portraits of key figures in the Reformation of 16<sup>th</sup> are displayed on one wall, prestigious writings on another, and on a third wall, the changes in religious practice of the early Reformed compared with the old Church. There are also testimonials highlighting the cultural and political dimensions of this phase of change.



Dance of Death, Wilhelm Stettler after Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, Bernisches Historisches Museum

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### Course

The tour begins with a room devoted to the first moments of the Reformation in 1517, then moves on to the Wars of Religion in France in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, before examining the various aspects of the image in the context of nascent Protestantism. The next room is devoted to Calvin and Geneva in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. After a time-line of 21 dates spanning two millennia, we move on to the Reformation Expansion Room, which looks at the Reformation's development across centuries, spaces and mentalities. After two rooms devoted to the translation of Bibles and to music, we descend to the basement to tackle the contemporary period, with the presentation of personalities, debates and drawings, culminating in a large immersive film. [360° tour](#)





Space 9, Commitment, multi-screening of film extracts

## The showrooms

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A total of 340 works are on display, most of them books, engravings, paintings and objects. There are also letters, manuscripts, medals, statues and stained glass. The audio-visual component is significant, with over 30 film and archive extracts and 11 musical passages. Installations play a key role: a giant animated map, a graphic presentation of 244 bibles, a music room with moving stained-glass windows, a small animated theater and a large film on three screens punctuate the exhibition route. In addition, 31 quotations are inscribed in large letters on the walls of all the exhibition rooms.



Room 6, Expansion



Room 7, 244 Bibles



Room 8, Products of Protestantism



Room 9 Commitment, 21 Personalities. Detail : Germaine de Staël

## Tour assistance

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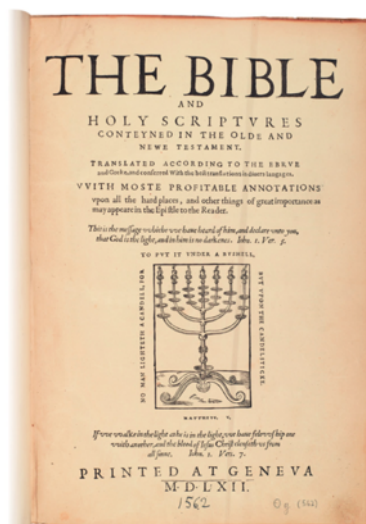
The first museum in Geneva to provide this service, the MIR offers a free tour guide in 10 languages. It can be activated by smartphone using a QR code. It gives access to voice or written explanations of each of the 340 works on display, with versions in French, German, Italian, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Chinese, Korean and Japanese. Other language versions are in preparation.

15 major works at the MIR can be viewed in augmented reality. Using an iPad loaned free of charge at the reception desk, visitors can discover a work by means of an animation triggered on the screen when the device is placed in front of the painting, engraving or object concerned. [Melanchthon](#) welcomes visitors, a psalter from the 16<sup>th</sup> opens its pages to vocal interpretations, while the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre is recounted by one of its victims on the large painting depicting it.

In the main hall, a film entitled "[The Reformation in... 7 minutes](#)", produced by *Karambolage* (Arte Channel) in collaboration with the MIR, gives visitors a free initial introduction to the Reformation and its history.

## Some outstanding works and installations with their museum labels

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### Geneva Bible

Printed on paper, 1561-1562

Musée historique de la Réformation

Published between 1561 and 1562, this Bible was translated in Calvin's Geneva by the future Scottish reformer John Knox (1514-1572) and scholars who had fled the England of Catholic Queen Mary Tudor, sister of Elizabeth I<sup>re</sup>.

### Elizabeth I of England

*Excerpt from the film Elizabeth by Shekhar Kapur, starring Cate Blanchett Universal, 1998*

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) reigned for 44 years over a country that, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, had experienced many upheavals caused by the struggles between Catholics and Protestants. Daughter of Henry VIII, Elizabeth decided to anchor her country in the Reformation by proclaiming herself supreme ruler of the Anglican Church.







### **On the Bondage of the Will**

(De Servo Arbitrio)

*Martin Luther*

*Printed on paper, 1525*

*MIR*

"I recognize none of my books as adequate, except perhaps *De servo arbitrio* ...", Luther explained at the end of his life. In response to Erasmus' assertion that the individual can work out his or her own salvation, the reformer refuted the Dutch humanist in this treatise, which emphasizes that one can only be saved by grace and justified by faith.

### **Communion cup (Abendmahlsbecher)**

*Wood, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century*

*Bernisches Historisches Museum*

The Reformation reintroduced wine into Eucharistic communion under both species. It is still not present in the Catholic rite, except for the priest. This St. Gall Protestant cup differs from the Catholic chalice in its simplicity: it is made of wood "to prevent the return of custom", according to Ulrich Zwingli. Its volume is much greater, as it is distributed to the whole community.



### **Temple de Paradis**

*Jean Perrissin*

*Oil on canvas, 1565*

*Bibliothèque de Genève*

This oil on canvas by artist Jean Perrissin (1536-1616) depicts the Protestant Temple de Paradis, built in Lyon in 1564 and destroyed three years later. It bears witness to the new religious architecture of the Reformation. The emphasis is on the pastor's words, at the center of the canvas, to the detriment of the view, a priority in the Roman Church.



## The battle of Saint-Denis

Jacques Tortorel, Jean Perrissin  
Wood engraving, 1569-1570  
Don Simone Saxer, MIR

The Battle of Saint-Denis was the main confrontation of the Second War of Religion. On November 10, 1567, near Paris, it pitted the Protestant troops of Condé and Coligny against those of Constable Anne de Montmorency, shown here, in the center of the image, on horseback,

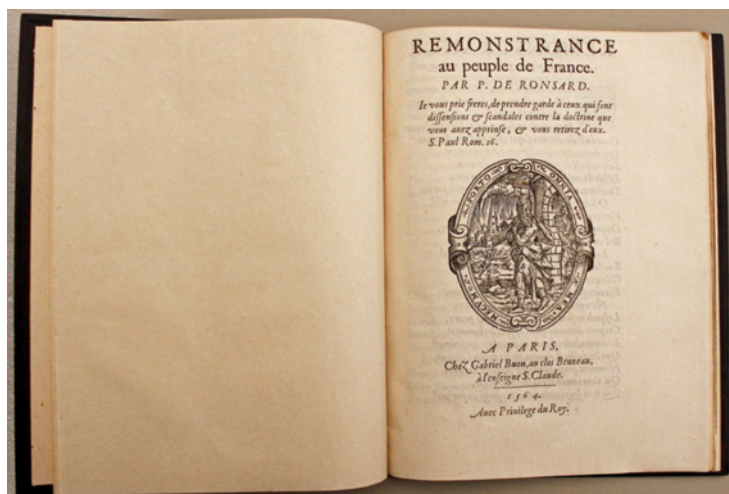
sword in fist. The death in battle of this supreme leader of the royal army gave the Catholic victory a bitter taste.

## Remonstrance au peuple de France

Pierre de Ronsard

Printed on paper, 1564, MIR

In this text, the famous poet Ronsard sharply attacks Protestants, their dogma and their conduct. Then, following the codes proper to "Remonstrance", he dictates to everyone their duties: Princes, Clergy and Justice are exhorted to act better. In the final oration that concludes his work, Ronsard outright prays to God to exterminate the Protestants.



## Pope of Hell

Wood engraving, 1550

Coll. MHR, BGE

Facsimile

This hideous monster could be Julius III, elected pope in 1550 and nicknamed "Pope of Hell" by Protestants for his determination to fight the Reformation. This caricature appeared on the back of a "placard" (a polemical poster).



### Damaged head of a bishop

3D printing from the molasse original (1510-1520) in the  
Bernisches Historisches Museum  
Photopolymers, 2022, MIR

This head of a bishop wearing a mitre was damaged during an iconoclastic campaign launched in Bern shortly after the adoption of the Reformation in 1528. Created around 1510-1520 by Albrecht von Nürnberg, this sculpture originally decorated the interior of St. Vincent's Cathedral. Buried beneath the terrace adjacent to the building, it was unearthed among some 550 other fragments during archaeological excavations in 1986.



### View of Geneva as a heretic fortress

Eberhardt Kieser, Engraving, 1624  
Coll. MHR, BGE  
Facsimile

The elephant is a negative characterization of the city of Geneva, whereas the animal usually symbolizes wisdom and memory. The cartoon emphasizes that Geneva is an impregnable fortress, defended by warriors gathered at the top of a tower standing on the animal.

Their headdress designates them as Ottomans, a metaphor perhaps referring to the infidel Protestants for the cartoonist.

### Calvin and the teachers in the college courtyard

Ferdinand Hodler

Oil on canvas, 1883-1884

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève

"Send us wood, we'll make arrows out of it", wrote Calvin to the Reformed Churches of France from the Academy he had just founded in Geneva. In 1559, Theodore de Bèze and Jean Calvin began training future pastors from France and elsewhere. Three years later, 2,000 students of all ages flocked here. In 1884, painter Ferdinand Hodler portrayed the reformer and four teachers in the courtyard of the former academy which, since 1969, has been known as the Collège Calvin.





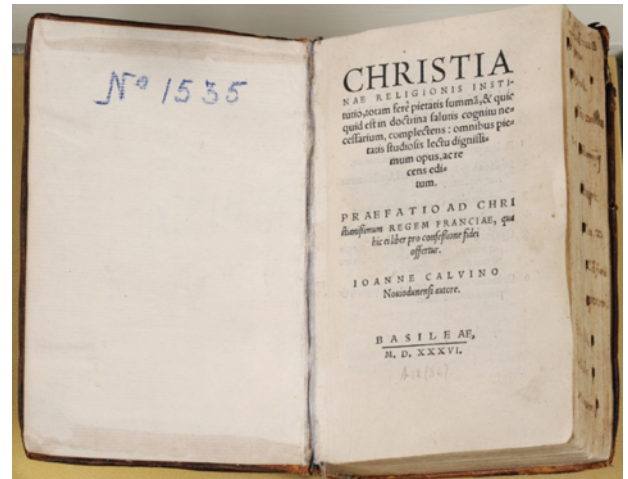
## First edition of Calvin's Institution of the Christian Religion

*(Christianae religionis institutio)*

Printed on paper, 1536

Musée historique de la Réformation

This first Latin edition of the *Institution of the Christian Religion* was published in Basel in 1536. Calvin stayed there for 15 months. He wrote this exposition of the new Reformed faith on the model of Luther's catechism. The work was printed by Thomas Platter, a son of mountain farmers from the Goms valley who settled in Basel.



## Old woman reading the Bible

Karel van der Pluym (Leiden, 1625 - Leiden, 1672),  
ca. 1660,

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève

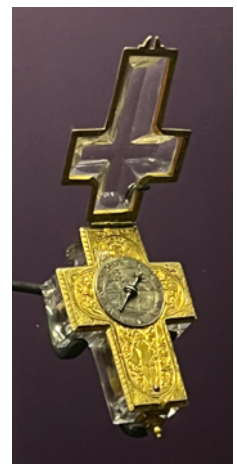
This depiction of an elderly woman reading the Bible has long been attributed to Rembrandt. The artist was Rembrandt's pupil. This depiction of a woman's private, secular reading of the Bible underlines the Reformed context of Holland. The Netherlands was born of its Calvinist identity. Many Huguenots sought refuge here after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

## Cross-shaped pocket watch,

Jean Rousseau, 1640

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève

This watch is the work of Jean Rousseau, great-grandfather of Jean-Jacques and son of a refugee who landed in Geneva around 1549. Over four generations, all the Rousseaus were watchmakers, right up to the philosopher's father. With Calvin, jewelry was banned. Jewelers turned to watches, contributing to the development of a tradition of excellence. Here, Jean Rousseau skilfully circumvents the censorship. This watch-croix was worn on the collar... like a piece of jewelry.





**Red Cross flag in Arabic,  
1990, private collection**

This flag, dated 1990, was used during the First Gulf War for an ICRC action carried out in response to the displacement of populations in Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan. Founded by the pietist Henry Dunant in 1859, the ICRC has always sought to address the consequences of war. Acting

to ensure that non-combatants (wounded, prisoners or civilians) enjoy the sacred right to protection. Containing the effects of evil rather than trying to extirpate it, the anthropological pessimism of Protestantism finds an operational expression here.

### **Basketball**

20<sup>th</sup> century

MIR

Basketball was born in 1891 in an American YMCA, a place of moral and sporting edification for young people idle after work. A physical educator and Christian chaplain, James Naismith, invented a team game modelled on soccer and rugby, but with less risk of injury, and capable of being played indoors, whatever the season.



### **Quotes**

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*The right to examine what one ought to believe is the foundation of Protestantism.*

Germaine de Staël (1766-1817)

*God can speak to us through Russian communism, a flute concert, a bouquet of flowers or a dead dog.*

Karl Barth (1886-1968)

*Non-violence is a healing sword.*

Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

*Humans constantly fail to recognize the infinite distance between what manifests the sacred and the sacred itself.*

Paul Tillich (1886-1965)

*I believe that to truly heal the world, we need the "wisdom" of darkness. From the Third World, from people of color, from women...*

Hyun Kyung Chung (1956)

## Other devices

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Wall map: The Reformation in space: some highlights



On the world map, the Reformation, which began in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, travelled to Brazil with Pastor Jean de Léry or to the future United States on the Mayflower. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes set off 200,000 Protestant refugees from Louis XIV's France, while the missions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century anchored Protestantism in various regions of Africa and Asia in particular. Today, 800 million Protestants make up the majority of the world's population.

### The 244 Bibles

Without translation, there can be no Protestant expansion. 243 Bibles in as many different languages are on display here. An anonymous collector brought them together. They have been dressed in the same dust jacket, indicating the original title, the language and the country or countries where it is spoken, as well as the date of the first known translation. It is this last criterion that organizes the chronological order in which the works are presented. Eight of these excerpts are opened by two biblical episodes concerning the confusion and spread of languages: the Tower of Babel and Pentecost. These extracts can be heard in English, Yoruba, Chinese, Italian, French, Esperanto, Korean and German.

The 244<sup>th</sup> Bible is displayed in the center of the room. This is Protestantism's oldest Bible, the Zurich Bible, first published in 1531, the complete contents of which can be admired in the film projected in the room. The version in the showcase dates from 1536.





### Music Salon

Music was a privileged art form of the Reformation. With Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, singing in church was democratized, replacing the contemplation of images without excluding all forms of light inside temples. In an enchanting environment created by moving, multicolored stained-glass windows, eleven Protestant-inspired pieces of music beat out the rhythm of a centuries-old tradition. For eight minutes, we hear excerpts from two Psalms in Old French and Hungarian, the South African hit *Jerusalema*, Americans Johnny Cash, Aretha Franklin, Larry Head and... Martin Luther King, a gospel choir in Xhosa, Ethiopian Protestant Afro Jazz and two versions of a medieval melody by Paul Gerhardt by the Dave Brubeck Trio and the Windsbacher Knabenchor.



### Film Protester

To protest is to speak out forcefully against something, or to assert one's convictions vigorously. The Reformation is called Protestant because it expresses both these vocations. But it has no monopoly. In this immersive room, three screens present an eight-minute combination of 27 audiovisual excerpts spanning a broad genealogy of protest. We meet Desmond Tutu, Pier-Paolo Pasolini, Billy Graham, Angela Merkel, Greta Thunberg, we walk with Suffragettes, we sing with Lutherans...



### Temporary Exhibitions

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Every year, the museum hosts two temporary exhibitions.

The first is called *Déflagrations* and concerns 140 children's drawings that bear witness to a century of war. This moving exhibition is a vibrant plea against all forms of violence.

**Next exhibition:** [\*Rembrandt and the Bible\*](#). Unique exhibition of 72 original engravings by the Dutch Master from November 30, 2023 to March 19, 2024



Christ in the Garden of Olives, Rembrandt van Rijn, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

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