

In response to the confession coming from the Reformed Church of Zurich

Dear members of the Reformed Church of Zurich, our brothers and sisters in Christ

We are very touched to have been invited to prepare and live out this day with you. Already in 1925 and in 1952, other international Mennonite representatives were officially welcomed here in this place which represents a very significant moment at the beginning of our history. Though issuing from the same source in the Reformation, Anabaptism has been marked by the breaking off and rejection of the accents of a radical theology and the "following" of Christ. Persecution, in Zurich and in other places, provoked the scattering of the Anabaptists in many other countries where our way of understanding were lived out and tested in many different situations.

As of today, Swiss Mennonites as such are no longer present in the land around Zurich. Throughout the last few centuries, we have been influenced in different ways. Having been pushed to the side, we have become used to – and even finding some satisfaction in - being a bit cut off from the world and society. We confess that the reality of our communities do not always correspond to our interpretation of the Gospel; we can find there conformism, atrophy, withdrawal, and pride.

History may designate us as victims, and could incite us to find satisfaction in that. However, those here among you today, descendants of those Anabaptists persecuted in the past, no longer feel as victims. We do not ask for material retribution for the past: that would seem to us to be contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel. But the fact that you recognize the difficult points of your history in relation to ours helps us to see ourselves and to meet you differently. We receive your confession with a forgiving attitude.

For many years now, and in many places, many opportunities for collaboration between members of Reformed and Mennonite churches have demonstrated a common will to overcome our old conflicts and to live out our belonging to the same body of Christ. This is why it is sometimes embarrassing for us to be once again asked for forgiveness. Maybe it is a sign that it is the moment for all of us to revisit our past, with the help of the Holy Spirit? There is no longer any church for us to oppose, and you no longer have any believers to re-integrate by force. We maintain however strong convictions, which are often shared by other free church movements issued from successive Revivals, in particular to that which pertains to more ethical and ecclesiological questions, that we would like to see more widely shared throughout the body of Christ. We would like to see them shared more broadly in the body of Christ and we would like to engage in a longer dialogue concerning our church and theological traditions in order to reinforce our common witness to Jesus-Christ and his gospel.

The 26th of June 2004 will remain an important step forward on the road of reconciliation. The plaque that will be unveiled today in this city of Zurich attests that actions have been taken with determination. We feel concerned by your words and deeds and we want to express our gratitude. Dear brothers and sisters of the Reformed Church of Zurich, may God bless you and give you his grace and his peace!

Swiss Mennonite Conference