

CHAPTER 3

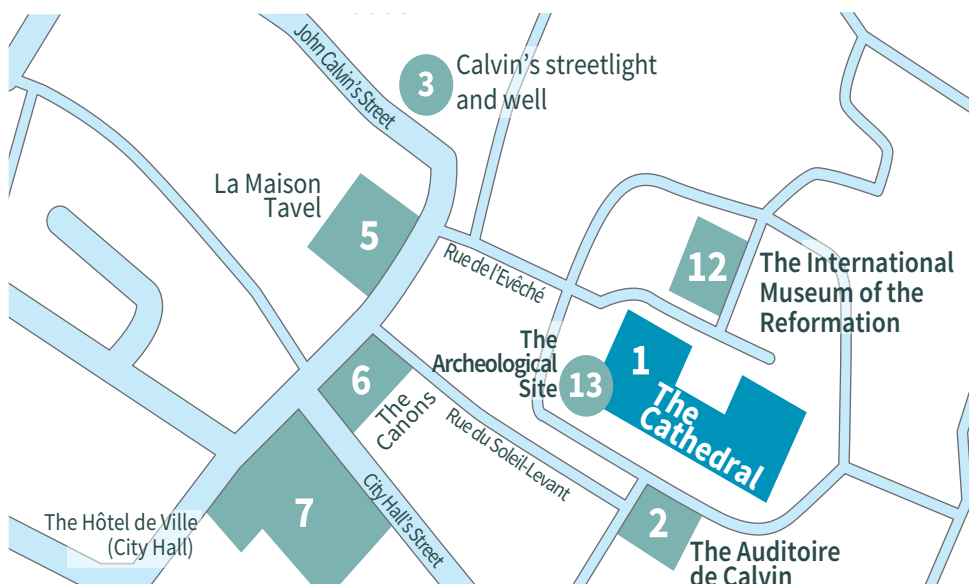


St. Peter's Cathedral



Website:
www.cathedrale-geneve.ch
Address:
Cour Saint-Pierre, 1204 Geneva

The History of The Cathedral



313

The Edict of Tolerance by Emperor Constantine in AD 313 gave Christianity official status in the Roman Empire. Christianity spread rapidly, including to Geneva.

Around the Year 400

An episcopal group of buildings was established in Geneva which became the center of all civil and religious activities. It included churches, administrative buildings for the dioceses, and the bishop's residence. Isaac became Geneva's first bishop.

After the year 443

The slow architectural transformation of the church building took place over many centuries and was brought about by many people. In AD 443, the Burgonde people settled in Geneva, followed by the Franks in AD 534, and the Carolingiens in the 8th century. In AD 888, Geneva was annexed by the Kingdom of Burgundy and finally became part of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire in 1032.

Around 1160

Construction of the current cathedral began. St. Peter's Cathedral be-

came the spiritual center for the local diocese (the administrative territorial unit managed by a bishop). The cathedral and the cloister not only held Catholic liturgical services and Mass, but also hosted city gatherings, celebrations, and municipal assemblies.

August 1535

During the days of iconoclasm, the cathedral was stripped of its liturgical trappings, its sacred images, its statues, its tapestries, and its gold embellishments.¹

May 21, 1536

Geneva adopted the Reformation.

The Fake Relic of Peter's Brain

St. Peter's Cathedral possessed an important relic. Relics (from the Latin word *reliquiae* which means "re-

mains") are personal objects or body parts that supposedly belonged to Christ, to the Virgin Mary, to an apostle or to a saint, that the Catholic Church believes can help promote worship. It was claimed that St. Peter's Cathedral possessed the actual brain of St. Peter. However, after the church was appropriated by the Protestants in 1536, the relic was examined and shown to be a fake: it was nothing but a pumice stone."²

John Calvin himself confirmed the presence of this relic when he wrote: "Everywhere where there are churches... there are relics. If we ask which ones, remember the brain of Saint Peter of which I have already spoken, that was placed at the great altar of this city (Geneva), and that was found to be a pumice stone."³



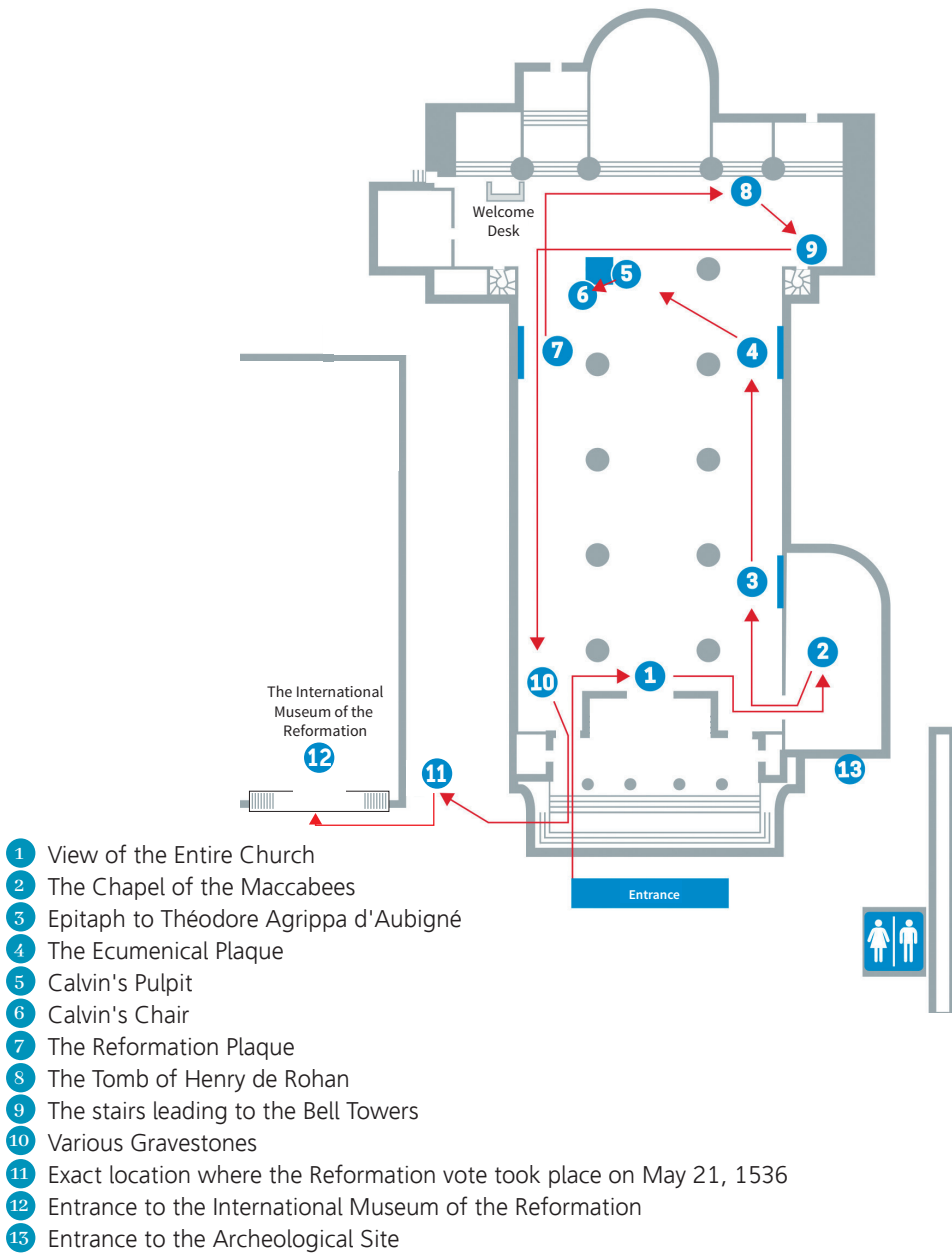
Translation of Drawing

In the treasury of the cathedral, there was, it was said, the brain of St. Peter. It is what the priests had made us believe, but we discovered later that it was a pumice stone.

Umberto Stagnaro,
L'homme de Genève. La vie de Jean Calvin et la Réforme à Genève, 1986.
Examining the Supposed Skull of Saint Peter (p.16)

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The Cathedral



1. View of the Entire Church



Photo : Brian Morley

As you stand at the back of the church looking down the center aisle, try to imagine the emotions felt by the persecuted Huguenots when they arrived in this place. Many had seen friends and family members brutally tortured and killed. Suddenly they found themselves in Geneva where they were free to worship! Imagine them walking up the cobblestoned streets of Geneva to

the cathedral to the sound of ringing bells, entering the cathedral. Imagine what joy they must have felt when they began to sing, and the thrill of hearing John Calvin in person stand up in the pulpit and preach the Word of God!

2. The Chapel of the Maccabees



Photo : Lukas VanDyke

The Chapel of the Maccabees was built between 1397 and 1405 by Cardinal Jean de Brogny (1342-1426), who was born near Annecy in the diocese of Geneva.⁴ The chapel was intended to house his tomb and those of members of his family. Initially called the Chapel of Our Lady, in the mid-15th century it became the Chapel of the Maccabees. The architectural style is flamboyant

Gothic. After the Reformation, it was used as a warehouse for storing salt. In 1670, it was converted into classrooms for the Academy by adding floors.⁵ The current decor most likely reflects the spirit of the 15th century.

3. Epitaph to Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné



Photo : Lukas VanDyke

Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552-1630) was a soldier and poet. He rallied himself to the Huguenot cause under Henry IV, King of France. He is the author of *Tragiques*, in which he recounts the persecutions suffered by the French Huguenots. He took refuge in Geneva in 1620 and died there 10 years later.

4. The Ecumenical Plaque



Photo : Lukas VanDyke

20 FEBRUARY 1946
FIRST ECUMENICAL SERVICE
AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

OFFICIATING:

The moderator, Ch. Cellerier, of the Church in Geneva
The Archbishop of Thyatira, Mgr. Germanos The
Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Fisher Reverend Chester
Miao from the National Christian Council of China Elvind
Berggrav, Bishop from Oslo, Primate of Norway Pastor
Martin Niemoller, from the Council of Evangelicals of
Germany The President of the Federation of Protestant
Churches of Switzerland, Pastor A. Koehlin.

Luke 7: 7

Ephesians 2:14-15

On February 20, 1946, the first ecumenical service after World War II was celebrated at St. Peter's Cathedral, bringing together representatives from some of the belligerent nations.⁶ This event and this movement aimed to bring together several churches to help rebuild Europe. It is said that this service broke down the old barriers that the war had erected between all the peoples of the world and was a precursor to the establishment of the

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World Council of Churches, which was officially founded in Amsterdam on August 23, 1948.⁷

5. The Pulpit (1864)



Photo : Brian Morley

The original pulpit was located on the fourth pillar on the southside of the nave (on the right as you are looking to the front of the church). In 1541, it was decided to remove it and erect a new pulpit on the first pillar on the northside of the nave, which is its current location.⁸ It was from this loca-

tion, through his expository and systematic preaching of the Bible (and through his writings), that Calvin not only structured but also spread the Reformed faith, the repercussions of which can still be felt today. Though the current pulpit is not Calvin's original pulpit, but a replica built in 1864, it looks identical to the original one, and stands exactly where the original one was erected.

6. The Supposed Chair of John Calvin

This is the chair Calvin supposedly used during church services in St. Peter's



Photo : Brian Morley

Cathedral. Some believe this chair was placed in the pulpit to allow Calvin to sit if he needed to.

7. The Reformation Plaque



Photo : Lukas VanDyke

UPPER PLAQUE TRANSLATION (From Latin)

The tyranny of the Roman anti-Christ having been slain, and its superstitions abolished in the year 1535, the very holy religion of Christ having been re-established in its truth and purity, and the church put back into good order by the favor of God; the enemies having been pushed back and made to flee, and the city herself by a great miracle having been given back its liberty; the Senate and people of Geneva have erected and put this monument in this place as a perpetual memorial to attest to all future generations their gratefulness toward God.⁹

LOWER PLAQUE TRANSLATION (From French)

This monument put here in former times by the piety of our Fathers, was restored and put in this place in the month of August 1835 in memory of the Reformation of Geneva accomplished three centuries before by the goodness of our God and by the devotion of four faithful foreigners: Farel, Froment, Viret, Calvin

On August 10, 1535, the Catholic Mass was officially abolished in Geneva by the General Council. On May 21, 1536, Geneva officially voted to adopt the Reformation. From that moment on, the Church of Rome was no longer allowed to exist in Geneva. Catholics who did not want to convert were expelled from the city.

This bronze plaque, written in Latin, was drafted in 1558. It was first placed on the facade of the Town Hall. In honor of the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, the plaque was trans-



ferred to St. Peter's Cathedral in 1835. The lower black granite plaque is in French.

8. The Tomb of Henry de Rohan



Henri de Rohan (1579-1638) was the leader of the Reformed party in France during the reign of Louis XIII. Henri IV made him Duke of Rohan in 1603. When Henry IV was assassinated in 1610, Henri de Rohan led the Huguenot revolt against the reign of Marie de Médicis, who was Catholic. He fled to Geneva in 1637. He took up arms again in 1638 and was seriously wounded during the siege of Rheinfelden. He died shortly afterwards and, as he had wished, was buried in St. Peter's Cathedral. He wrote several books, including *Mémoires*, in which he recounts the last war he fought. The tomb of the Duke of Rohan represents all the Huguenots who died in France for the Gospel and who were never able to be buried in a decent manner.

9. Various Gravestones Inside the Cathedral

Since 1906, a number of tombstones have been placed against the walls of the side aisles of the inside of the cathedral. They belonged to clergymen dating back to the 15th and early 16th centuries.

10. The Bell Towers and View

A Reformation tour of Geneva should include, if possible, a climb up the 157 steps of the spiral staircase of the cathedral towers. Visiting the North Tower will suffice, as the south tower, enclosed by glass, is less spectacular according to the author. This is what you see from the top of the North Tower:

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Photo : Lukas VanDyke

The Lake Side View

When you step out onto the terrace, a breathtaking view of Geneva spreads out before you. From there, you can see The Jura Mountains (in France) to the left, the United Nations, the lake, and the famous Jet d'Eau (if it is running, depending on weather conditions). On the hill to the right, you can see Cologny, a high-end residential area of Geneva, and the French Alps in the background.

The Alps Side View

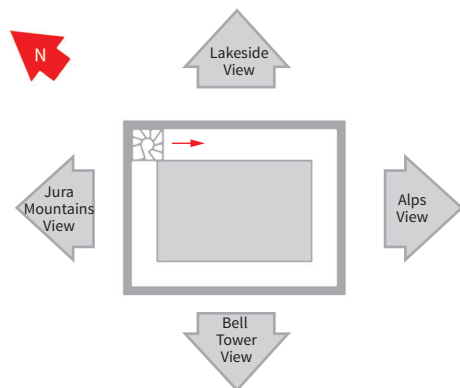
The east side reveals the Alps in the background, with the Salève Mountain and its quarries. You can also see the golden domes of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the roofs of Calvin College, founded by John Calvin in 1559.

The Bell Tower View

The south side reveals the spire and bell tower. The copper spire was added at the end of the 19th century.

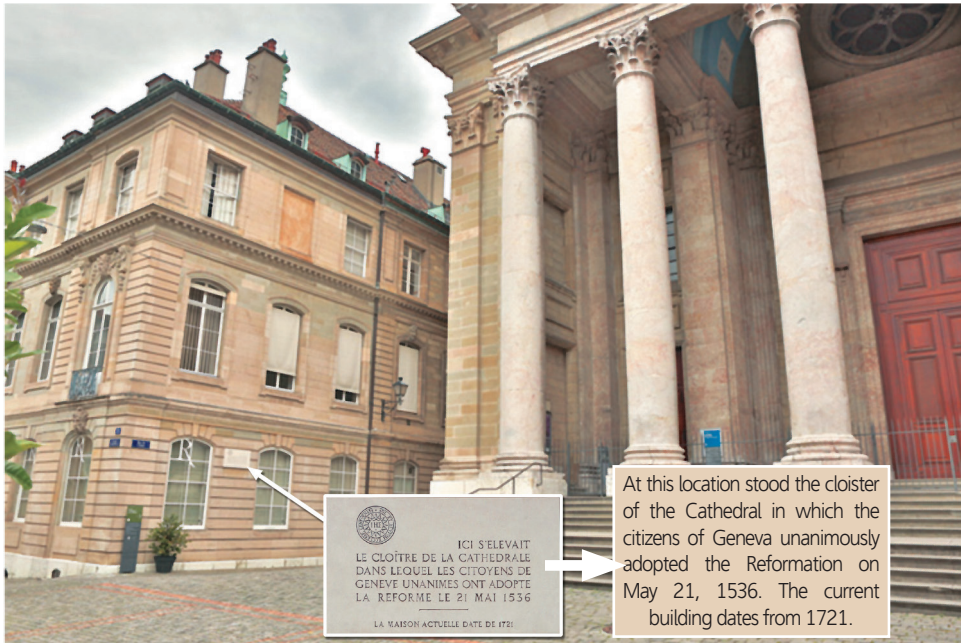
The Jura Mountains View

If you look down on the nave of St. Peter's Cathedral and the old town from this vantage point, you will notice that the roofs of all the buildings in Geneva's old town are covered with orange tiles. This precisely delineates the size of Geneva in Calvin's day when it was a walled city. All the modern buildings beyond these were more or less fields then.



ST. PETER'S CATHEDRAL

11. The Exact Location Where the Reformation Vote Took Place on May 21, 1536



As you leave the cathedral, you will see a plaque on the wall on your right indicating the exact spot where the Reformation was adopted. The cloister that adjoined the cathedral in Calvin's time was demolished and replaced in 1721 by the current building. It was built by Gédéon Mallet, a Protestant banker whose family had settled in Geneva as refugees from France in the mid-16th century. Today it houses the International Museum of the Reformation.

12. The Entrance to the Reformation Museum



The International Museum of the Reformation adjacent to the Cathedral

For a detailed guide to the Reformation Museum, see Chapter 11.

13. The Entrance to the Archeological Site Underneath the Cathedral

For a brief explanation of the Archeological site, see Appendix I.