

I was wondering how to discuss Geneva. How to present the city, bearing in mind it is a planetary centre. As an approach to that question, we may want to warm up our thoughts and consider what a centre is in the first place. It comes readily to our minds that a centre is some form of an outlet which transforms non-expressed energies into expressed ones. I guess it's another way of saying that a centre is akin to a plexus which transmutes energy into force, or some form of a door through which that which is esoteric becomes exoteric. Of course, this inner expression then blends into the manifested world and to the extent that this blending occurs harmoniously then the inner becomes the outer. Otherwise, the outer form, that has a latent potential along certain lines and certain habits, behaves as a deflector of some sort. This is the way I would like to bring the topic of soul and personality to our discussion today because we can talk about a city in terms of soul and personality.

As much we may reflect on the energy of Geneva as much we might see that that energy is somehow frustrated by the actual state of things. This is a simple conflict of soul and personality. Furthermore, looking at it in a symmetrical way; as much we will consider and understand the personality characteristics of Geneva as easily we may plunge our vision through the form that Geneva is today and get a feeling for its heart and its unseen nature. Indeed, I hope that our discussion today may serve to evoke the heart of Geneva in us. As we explore these ideas, let us remember and place into our quiet mind, the keynote for Geneva: "I seek to fuse, to blend and serve".

With such ideas in mind, let us put Geneva sequentially under the light of geography, history and society.

Geography comes first because there was landscape before there were people. History is painted on the canvas of the landscape and the evolution of a city is conducted by the landscape in similar ways as a river is funnelled between two opposite banks. The river in question is the Rhone, and Geneva is built on both its shores. The Rhone has its source in the Alps and runs about 300 km to Geneva. On its way through the valley that bears its name, it collects a profusion of mountain streams, and finally forms a lake of about 600 km<sup>2</sup> which we call the "Leman lake" and sometimes even the "Geneva lake". Which tells us a lot about the relation between the whole lake and a single one of the numerous cities of both France and Switzerland built upon its shores. The location of Geneva at the termination of the lake could in fact be described as a symbol for what a centre is: we can observe the vast pristine accumulated potentiality of the waters finding its tumultuous way through the city and continuing its life bringing journey to neighbouring France. As the waters accumulate near Geneva the mountains enshrine the city... Ancient cultures would call the sheltering landscape of these mountain a collector of energy, for to some extent, the mountains hold and focus the energies that are there.. Before we leave those consideration aside it is worth mentioning that another river coming down from the Mont Blanc (the white mountain) which is one of the highest in Europe, blends with the Rhone in Geneva in a place now named "Jonction" or junction.

Such a specific location is fundamental to the strategic importance Geneva had over the years and is a reason for the historical battles that took place for its control. We must realise of course that a major part of the swiss valley's economy could float its way to Geneva, be traded there and then transported along the river to the important French city of Lyon. And so, it seems that Geneva's landscape is a signature of its keynote, "I seek to fuse to blend and serve"

In historical terms, the city was successively Gaulic, Roman, independent within the authority of what we could broadly call France, somewhat independent again after the defeat of Napoleon and finally allied to Switzerland on Mai 19, 1815. The history of alliances is best left to an historian, but it is

interesting to have a sense of the specificity of the population of Geneva and one historical event of importance in this regard will help us do that, it concerns what we call “The Reformation”.

The Reformation is a movement of transformation of the religious spirit that took place in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1517, Luther, who was a priest and professor of Moral Theology in Germany published his “Ninety-five Theses”. In short he invited people to interpret the Christian scriptures for themselves and clearly identified theological flaws within the dogma as it was practised. (In essence, the movement testifies of the rising desire and intention to think for oneself). The recent discovery of the printing press was very instrumental to this world period and meant that messages could be spread and shared much more easily. This spirit of reform was fought by the Church and that led to much suffering and turmoil; among which we could mention the Thirty Year War which is regarded as a sort of European civil war, with millions of dead due both to the war itself, as well as famine and disease. At that time, Geneva was a safe city for Protestants and in fact, had in the meantime become the capital of the entire Protestant Movement – this is the reason why the city is sometimes referred to as the protestant Rome. But there were Catholics in Geneva as well and latter there where also Calvinist, and all these people, while animated by faith but interpreting the scriptures differently learnt to live together in harmony and did not fight. This is still true today and testifies in some ways to the ideas of fusion, blending and the ability to serve together.

Over the course of time, in this geographical and economical plexus that is Geneva, and owing to the way different - and sometimes very polarised - ideas have been held together, some sort of spirit has emerged which is becoming recognised and referred to. Today, we give it the name of the “Spirit of Geneva”. And in the words of the first director of the International Labour Organisation (Albert Thomas) the “Spirit of Geneva” consists in, “Never giving up on a human cause, as difficult as it may be”<sup>1</sup>. This is an interesting definition. It is very broad.

And perhaps this is where our presentation should lead us; that is in perceiving something that is of spiritual nature and yet tangible enough that people start to describe it and may readily refer to it. Whether we call it the spirit of Geneva or something else, or its soul influence is not so important. Over the last 100 years this spirit has flourished. And flourish it has, unsurprisingly, in the entire world; for it expresses an aspect of the planetary expression which is to the benefit -and service - of the planetary body as a whole. Geneva stands, for instance, in defence of fundamental human decency; through the “Geneva Convention” or the forming of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, or the High Commission for Refugees. But as notorious as these examples are, we must take stock that there are 41 international organisations in Geneva and another 750 NGO’s<sup>2</sup>. Many of these organisations were created after periods of great human suffering, when the invocative appeal of the masses reached a high mark, and a few qualified, dedicated and inspired people gave all they had. Today the hypnotic, mundaness of everyday life, dulls our sense of urgency, and some of these institution do not receive enough credit, moral or financial. And just to be fair, while some institution may be motivated by a high ideal, that ideal, as it is appropriated by the people may become something quite materialistic.

It is furthermore to be noted that some of the world contributions that fall within the close circle of influence of Geneva seem to concern the world at large while some are more discreet but may be of equal import if not more. The http protocol which permits the web as we know it was born in Geneva, at the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN). The CERN itself is a very good example

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.letemps.ch/opinions/esprit-geneve-estu>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/home/geneve-international/faits-et-chiffres.html>

of fusing, blending and service. It is a research centre where the scientific minds and the budget of European countries fuse in order to perform research. And that research, as well we know concerns particle physics and the fundamental relationship between light and matter. Is it even anecdotal that the building of the 27km circumference of the underground ring in which they conduct their experiments of having atoms run and collide was decided over by 12 nations. As such, it constitutes a microcosmic analogy to the science of Astrology and suggests perhaps another dimension of Geneva's key note: I seek to fuse to blend and serve.