

Separation and unity

External borders have fallen, new ones are being constructed. What helps overcome them? Where do I experience contact that opens up my horizons?

**There shall be one flock and one shepherd.
John 10,16**

Berlin and Jerusalem – two of the cities in which one can experience what separation means. In October 1989 festive feelings ran high for weeks in Berlin because people could shake hands again. The energy of a new beginning still hangs in the air when the scent of linden trees in June makes the residents of such diverse shades happy and when, aware of its historic break, a Germany that stands for openness and unity is reflected in the new government buildings. And Jerusalem, where one presses through between the military and spiritual barriers of the old city. Where the Wailing Wall of the Jews stands as a counterpart to the recently constructed concrete wall guarding against Ram Allah and Bethlehem.

The tension of separation and unity is a basic human experience. This is perceptively broached already in the Biblical story of creation. Adam "the human" is dissatisfied until he finds in Eva "life" someone of his own kind in order to become "one flesh" with her (Genesis 2). The unity of the primordial family promptly breaks down with the first pair of brothers, Cain and Abel. The unity of humankind breaks down again with the tower of Babylon. With hard work Israel establishes itself as a people of the one God in contrast to the many peoples with their many gods.

For the first time a universal religious vision of a common search of all peoples for one God becomes perceivable when Isaiah sees all nations making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and they confess: "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isaiah 2,5). The same idea moves Psalm 117: "Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples." In this tradition, Mathew has the resurrected one say at the end of his Gospel: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Certainly this thought has contributed to missionary measures that have served more to divided than to unify. However, in Johannes the "one herd" appears not to have been unified by human means. In fact Jesus himself brings the sheep which "are not of this stall" together to form "one herd".

As much as the heavenly Jerusalem in the Revelations of Johannes is marked as a symbol of a finished and unified humanity, to the same extent does the real Jerusalem reflect its current division. As with the tower of Babylon, fundamental questions arise today at the site of the Twin Towers in New York. What was constructed as a symbol of world wide trade has now become an emblem of the explosiveness of global pretensions. Even the Christian church is arduously wrestling for a new path of unity and only experiences sporadic openings. The desire for unity always burns in individual people. In which moment do I experience the joy of encounters that go beyond my small horizons? When can I talk again with my African friend and with my Muslim colleague? When will we experience the "Fall of the Wall" in Jerusalem?