

Pentecost: the festival of new elan

Beloved person,

Do you know the story of the tower of Babel? The Bible states this about it: 'Come, let us make bricks and build a city'. You can see it before you: ovens are stoked, clay is shaped, red-hot bricks come out of the fire. Brick upon brick, wall after wall, house after house, the city grows. A place to establish yourself. A safe place, where people understand each other. They are proud that they are able to erect buildings of a size that they previously never thought possible. And in the middle of everything they also built an enormous tower. It is the representation of a longing for the place where heaven and earth approach each other closest and perhaps can even touch.

As I read it again, I thought: what a beautiful story. A place is being built where people can live, understand each other and move forward together. And then there is this one sentence: 'Otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth'. (Genesis 11:4) That's where the story turns. They don't only build out of longing; they also build based on the need to hold onto what is familiar. They don't want to lose touch with each other. They seek support from each other, within the confines of their own walls. The outside world is vast, unknown and much less manageable. Even though the task that they were given was to spread out over the face of the earth, to view it from a broader perspective and to seek out the new.

I have read that in Hebrew the sound of the word for brick (l-v-n) and the word for confusion (n-v-l) are the mirror image of each other¹. Whether that can be substantiated exactly linguistically, I can't say. I do, however, find this image striking: that when we build something with good intentions, it can turn bad when fear or uncertainty becomes dominant. Perhaps that is where Babel becomes recognisable in our own lives. The story poses questions for us such as: do we build an open meeting place, or do we prefer to remain behind our own walls? Do we mainly stay within the familiar group, or do we want to set out to meet the new? And can it perhaps be both, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes one after the other?

The story of Pentecost also provides a recognisable image. Pentecost is about people who do not understand each other naturally. About difference, strangeness and multiplicity. But there, when a fresh breeze comes, a miracle occurs: people understand each other even though they are all speaking their own languages. That doesn't happen because all differences disappear, but because something has broken through the differences. Strength of spirit. Inspiration. Fire. The activity of the Holy Spirit is experienced. When have you experienced that yourself? And what changed then?

This Pentecost we, as the Apostolic Society, will take a new step. We will raise the flag with our new logo. A fresh logo, visible on our buildings as a sign that we are in motion and want to reach out. A logo doesn't say everything. In that sense it is 'only' an image that can lead to recognition. But it can also invite and make visible: here are people who want to work with love towards a humane world.

At the same time our emblem remains the representation of our ideal. It continually reminds us that we do not want to be people of walls. What we build and maintain together, does not arise and remain by itself. It continues to exist due to both your and my efforts, due to our loyalty, by working hard and through your (and my) financial contribution. We want to thank each other for wanting to do this for each other.²

Pentecost is a beautiful festival. Let us celebrate this with new elan. With a flag fluttering in a fresh breeze and a new strength of spirit and from our gratitude to the generations before us, the people next to us and after us. So that we as Apostolic people wish to continue passing on light and love.

With a warm-hearted greeting, gladly your sister,
Nanda Zierye



¹ Jonathan Sacks, Genesis, boek van het begin (Genesis, book of the beginning, Middelburg: Skandalon, 2020).

² This gratitude is expressed in this apgen webpage link: <https://www.apgen.nl/aanbieding>