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GOOD NEWS FOR CHRISTMAS 1976

On returning to Switzerland from Africa in 1960, after ten years of teaching and preaching (and working as a builder), I was called to teach children in Lucerne. As was usual then among conscientious teachers, I tried my best to follow the curriculum and prepare my lessons with care and imagination. But every so often, to my great dismay, my words seemed to fall on deaf ears — a thing that never happened to me before — with the comment: "It's nothing new — we've heard that years ago". Therefore the fear of saying "nothing new" has remained with me to this very day.

But be it with fear or courage, I have to tell you that there is good news for Christmas 1976. God has promised it, the Churches teach and common sense expects it. And if it were not so I might as well pack up and stop being a Priest. But how and where can we find it? A newsagent once told me that people, as a rule, were not interested in good news, since no newspaper could exist on it, it simply would not sell. It's bad news, such as crimes, scandals and risqué stories which people want and pay for.

This is a rather cynical view, and I do not like to accept it, certainly not without qualification. I do believe that people are still interested in good news and sometimes even read it. But I agree it is a hard and heavy task. One simply cannot share it out like "accidents and crimes". It needs careful research as if it

were buried under lots of ruins and broken hopes. But I shall be glad to help you find some.

Let us recall some famous Christmas stories, either of well-known writers like Dickens or Tolstoi or just simple folktales. There is Scrooge, the mean-spirited miser, who on Christmas morning, after a dreadful dream, turns into a jolly good fellow — not a saint — but a real human person, caring and being cared for. Or the man who comes to Jesus lying on a litter, to offer him a costly present. But the little child, showing not much interest tells him: "Everything the world can offer is already mine, please give me something that I have not got." "And that would be?" he asks. And with a happy smile the child replied: "Give me your sins, so that I can forgive them and teach you how to do the same."

All these stories have one great thing in common: a message of deep human love and care, a message not necessarily religious — it usually stops at the doors of a rich church as if it were afraid of being crudely touched and spoilt by wealthy churchmen, who are thought of as being out of touch with real life. Not so the simple hermit, the beggar and the child, who might hear and understand the animals who, once a year on Christmas Eve, are given the power of human speech. It is a lost reality these stories are concerned with, lost through human greed for wealth and power, like a

lost childhood in which the world was one and healthy — a universal brotherhood embracing every creature, people good and bad, rich and poor, the animals, the grass, the trees who feel and act like humans, even the stone that sheds a tear.

Nice poetic language, fairytales, you might object. Don't dismiss it so lightly, they do go deeper and enlarge upon the greatest mystery: that God has loved the world and everything in it so much that he became a human person — a little child in Bethlehem, in a poor manger among the shepherds and their animals. This is not poetic language any more, it is real life with consequences, a real light, a healing power that embraces all the world — and you are no exception. This is really GOOD NEWS.

But our difficulty lies in finding this good news in one's own life, among the people we know well either as friends or enemies or as neglected nobodies, and to find it at this Christmas season 1976, in spite of all the extra work and book-keeping the closing of the year wants done, and in spite of all we have to buy to make our Christmas a success. One thing is certain, you will not be able to pick good news out of your *Swiss Observer*, out of your padre's message, not even out of your Holy Bible. Because we will not understand the gospel unless we live it — we will not find the good news, unless we make it.

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N.B. Our special Xmas arrangements are now ready.

This means we have to write, perhaps, some fewer Christmas cards, in order to give the rest more time, more thought and heart, or to write that long postponed letter of being sorry — you know you are but do not like to say so — or send someone the message that you have forgiven. This needs a relaxed mind and imagination. We may have to cut the quantity of Christmas preparations in order to give those we preserve the right to keep this extra push of human care and love which those around us badly need in order to be happy.

After all, I begin to understand my newsagent. He probably was right without qualification: People are not very interested in reading good news — deep in their hearts they feel it should be made.

Therefore I sincerely wish for you and me to make GOOD NEWS for Christmas 1976.

Paul Bossard.

For Information, Advice or Help contact the

SWISS WELFARE OFFICE for young people

31 Conway Street London W1P 5HL
telephone 01-387 3608

*Underground Stations:
Great Portland Street
Warren Street*

AMBASSADOR'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

For the first time since assuming my new duties in London I have the great pleasure of wishing you and your families a Merry Christmas and a most prosperous New Year.

As the world is going through a difficult time and many of the problems that face us appear insoluble, Christmas provides a welcome respite in which to pause and reflect a moment. We realize how much we owe to the Christian civilization in which we live and which has inspired, among other things, so many lasting works of art, music and literature. It has taught us the ethics of work and given us a sense of responsibility. In these troubled times we need not despair, but should remind ourselves of what we can look forward to in the coming year.

This country is beset by many tricky problems. The Swiss community in the United Kingdom, which is so closely integrated with British life, cannot ignore them. They are your problems, too, and I am sure you are aware that in your own way you have to help solve them. By making the Swiss voice heard in England you will all contribute to the strengthening of the great friendship that exists between Britain and Switzerland.

I send my warmest greetings to you all and remember in particular those of you who are old, sick or lonely. May Christmas and the New Year bring you comfort and happiness.

Ernesto Thalmann

Swiss Churches

SERVICES EN FRANCAIS: à l'Eglise Suisse,
79 Endell Street, W.C.2, tous les dimanches
a 11h15 et 19h00.

PASTEUR: Frank Orna-Ornstein, 7 Park View
Road, London N.3. Tel: 01-346 5281.

SERVICES IN GERMAN: at Eglise Suisse, 79
Endell Street, W.C.2, every Sunday at 10.00
a.m. Sunday school takes place on the first
and the third Sunday in the month for
children of all age groups. Children assemble
in the church with their parents who attend
the normal Service. Liturgical Service takes
place every second Sunday in the month.
Services also at John Southworth Centre, 48
Great Peter Street, SW1P 2HA, every
Sunday at 6.30 p.m.

MINISTER: Pastor Paul Jungi, 1 Womersley
Road, N.8. Tel: 01-340 9740.

SWISS CATHOLIC MISSION: John Southwark
Centre, 48 Great Peter Street, London
SW1P 2HA.

Sundays: Services at 6.30 p.m. for
Catholics and Protestants. See notice-
board in house for details and
location.

RESIDENCE OF CHAPLAIN: Bossard, Swiss
Catholic Mission, 48 Great Peter Street (2nd
floor), London SW1P 2HA. Tel: 01-222
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