

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1977)
Heft: 1732

Artikel: First of August a thought for the day from one of our Padrés
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690869>

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TIME ONCE AGAIN TO

FIRST OF AUGUST — A THOUGHT FOR THE DAY FROM ONE OF OUR PADRÈS

This year will mark the third time that the Swiss in London celebrate the First of August in the Eglise Suisse in the spirit of true ecumenical life which has grown in the past years. This is not only for practical reasons, for the conviction has always been that the origin of our national unity is deeply rooted in the Christian belief in GOD. Whatever modern trends, thinkers or non-thinkers say about it, no one can escape the facts which are clearly expressed in the original document of our Pact — the "Bundesbrief" of 1291.

But allow me to draw your attention to some of the problems of our times in the light of our Constitution. The spirit which is expressed in this document must live on even in these times of transition, change and uncertainty.

There was anarchy in Europe towards the end of the 13th century, "the terrible and frightening years of the interregnum", as the contemporary historians put it, with violence and wars, suppression of the poor and the weak and their exploitation by those who had power, the feudal warlords and their families. The covenant of the three valleys mentions the "malice of the age" against which they have to defend themselves. The situation grew even worse when, in 1307, the interdict of the church on the quarrel with the convent of Einsiedeln and the ban of the Imperium was declared against the confederates which led to the battle of Morgarten. The similarities to our times, therefore, do not seem so very far-fetched.

The pact of 1291 was by no means a letter of "freedom" — it restricted the freedom of decision and the liberty of the individual valleys involved in an act of solidarity and mutual help which paved the path to freedom and independence, AND it was done in the name of God. Though this name has often been taken in vain, this was certainly not the case on that occasion.

Let us now look at our own times. Experience has taught us to be careful with the name of God. Indeed, we have grown so careful that we are afraid of mentioning it at all, except perhaps in religious talk (which is often regarded as irrelevant). It is high time we begin to talk again in the name of God, especially in politics and business and in the deep relevance it has in our Constitution.

Or has the "malice of the age" ceased to exist in our welfare state? Under the so-called titles of freedom and liberation anarchy, violence and mob-rule are preached and practised while we are often appalled by the blackmail and senseless destruction against which we feel absolutely powerless. Under the cover of "freedom of the press" a malicious war against our deepest human

and cultural values is waged by a minority, through pornography, in the name of scientific enlightenment. Our young people are brainwashed into a disregard for life, in its beginning and its very end, and into a despair of true love. And WE feel helpless.

Freedom of the market, of technical progress and of scientific experiments are all too often a cover-up for the exploitation and suppression of weaker and less developed countries by powerful organisations and business concerns (in the east and in the west), both of whom blame poverty and misery on the "population explosion" which our science already has all the means to control. People of the wealthy nations believe these doctrines while stuffing themselves, die of overfeeding and overdrinking while using what remains of their brain to search for better and more expensive means to keep fit and slim without foregoing the pleasures of good food and drink. Thus there are few resources left for research into the real causes of so much misery in the world and cheap slogans of a so-called science provide an easy antidote for a bad conscience. They keep counting the mouths to feed and forget that attached to each mouth there is an intelligence, a human being who can think and work — if he or she is given the chance to do so. Meanwhile, two-thirds of the world's population goes hungry, has the means of knowing what goes on, is filled with frustration and hatred and prepares for a

bloody revolution. Of course the strong have all the answers and arm themselves with always more sophisticated weapons of destruction, thermo-nuclear and biological.

Is this the world we really want for our children? I cannot believe it. This is in truth the "malice of the age" against which we have to defend ourselves, which calls for a new covenant or constitution. What will our ancestors think of us, if we are subsequently found to fail to have had the brains and guts to find it? Of course, this will mean restriction of some individual freedom and many "sacred" liberties which are nothing more than "holy cows" will have to be sacrificed to find the only way to real freedom. This has been said for nearly the last 2,000 years if we still care to read the Bible. "You, my friends", writes St. Paul to the Galatians, "were called to be free men, only do not turn your freedom into licence for your lower nature (science, it is worth to note, occupies itself with our baser nature which can be measured and controlled), but be servants to one another in love ... but if you go on fighting one another, tooth and nail, all you can expect is mutual destruction." (Gal. 5, 13ff).

Is it not high time for us to do some better thinking and act with more courage and faith? I think of our first constitution which made us Swiss: "In the Name of the Lord — Amen".

Paul Bossard



This view of the Bürgenstock and the central Swiss alps viewed from Mount Pilatus will surely stir a feeling of "Heimweh" in at least some of our readers. Photo by courtesy of SNTÖ.