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: - (1972)

Heft: 1638

Rubrik: Swiss Cathedrals

areas included medicine, chemistry, mathematics and physics, and the work was done almost exclusively at the universities.

But after the war, Speiser continued, it became clear that the universities could not go on meeting the rising costs of scientific research at the same rate. This lack of funds led to the setting up of Nationalfonds by Alexander von Muralt in 1952. Von Muralt laid down that scientific projects should be judged only by their scientific excellence and not by their practical utility.

The Nationalfonds distributed 70 million francs per year, and was the largest single factor in Swiss science, said Speiser. And although, he added, this was a relatively small amount by contemporary standards, the influence of the Nationalfonds had been large and beneficial.

The second largest factor in Swiss science was the country's largest research establishment, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. This institute, under its three presidents, Rohn, Pallman and Burckhardt, had been very successful in attracting world famous scientists. There were in addition nine further schools of university rank.

Research conducted in industry made a major contribution to Switzerland's scientific standing, said Speiser —and traditionally, this work had been carried out with virtually no government support. The biggest contributions had come from the chemical industry, which particularly in the post-war years had linked well with the universities to produce valuable results. However, he added, co-operation between industry and the universities had been "distinctly less fruitful" in other fields.

Switzerland's scientific standing was excellent if measured by the country's size, said Speiser. But to maintain this standing it was vital to concentrate on a sufficiently small number of fields: "A sprinkling of the limited resources would be ruinous," he said. Partly with this in mind, the Wissenschftsrat had been set up in 1967 to advise the government on scientific policy. But while it had done good work, it had been faced with serious problems.

A basic problem was that setting priorities inevitably meant cutting out areas which seemed to be promising. Said Speiser: "This process is painful and also contrary to many people's idea of academic freedom".

This problem was made worse by the position of the universities. For of the ten universities, only two were under federal control—the others belonged to the Cantons. The Cantons could not afford to meet the growing costs of scientific research, and everyone agreed that they needed federal support. However, while the past few years had shown that the Cantons were quite willing to accept federal cash, they were equally unwilling to accept the federal influence "that certainly ought to go along with it," Speiser remarked. "Thus, even when priorities are established it is going to be a painful process to enforce them," he concluded.

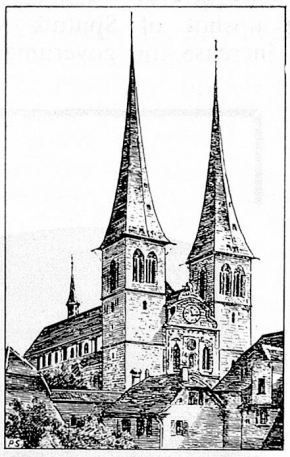
A feature which set Swiss science apart from all other industrialised countries was the almost total lack of government support for research and development projects with a view to industrial exploitation. Swiss industry maintained that it neither wanted nor needed government cash for research. But, said Speiser: "Whether or not this should stay so is a matter of considerable debate. As long as profits are good, the will to stay independent no doubt demands respect. With shrinking profits, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to survive against a competition which is so heavily subsidised by its governments".

Research policy, said Speiser, was dynamic, not static, And there was ample proof of this in the reappraisal of science which started in America in 1969 and was now in full swing. The shift in attitude, with a diversion of federal support away from scientific and technological excellence and into housing, health and environmental protection, would have far-reaching effects, Speiser predicted. Since 1967, research spending in America had fallen from 3.1 to 2.7 per cent of the gross national product, and many scientists were out of work. But, he said, "while it may sound almost ruthless to say so, this could be a necessary process". America may have been spending too much money on research.

Switzerland had not yet been forced to undergo such a reappraisal. But the changing psychological climate would necessitate some re-definition of research goals. Speiser ended his talk by quoting Patrick Haggerty, president of Texas Instruments and former president of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers: "It will take a very wise people indeed to make the choices that will allow us to improve the total quality of our life without simultaneously destroying the only system that thus far has made such choices feasible".

(MD)

SWISS CATHEDRALS



LUCERNE:
ST. LEGER CATHEDRAL
(HOFKIRCHE)

The part of the town separated formerly from the other quarters by the lake, was at all times called Im Hof. The most important of all churches in Lucerne is the principal edifice, the collegiate church of Im Hof, consecrated to Saint-Léodegar (Saint-Léger), patron of the town to whom it owes its name.

This church, founded in 735, was destroyed, except the towers, by the fire of 27th March, 1633. It was reconstructed in 1633-35. From the ancient edifice, both Gothic towers, 75 m. high, have been preserved. The new church is in German Renaissance style. The high altar of black marble, with decorative marbling in alabaster and a tableau by the famous Italian painter Giovanni Lanfranc, was given by the chargé d'affaires papist Ranutius Scotti.

The stalls are splendidly ornamented. The chancel gate, of wrought iron, is very artistic. The baptismal fonts are encircled with gilt trellis richly open worked. Two excellent reliefs in Renaissance style "The Piety" and "Death of Mary", along with other sculptures, adorn the nave. Good organs, constructed in 1650 by Johann Geisler, have been repaired and improved several times.

Porticos with columns of Tuscan order surround the church on three sides; here repose representatives of ancient families whose names recall many glorious deeds in the national history.

Very much bent to ancient habits, Lucernese have treasured their religion through the centuries and have remained loyal to the Catholic faith. The beautiful churches of the canton bear witness to the piety of the inhabitants.

The sanctification of Sunday, the Church festivals, are speaking testimonies of the religious spirit that gets in all public and private life of the country. Children, education and family life rest on religious principles.

Religious feasts are sometimes united with patriotic ones, such as the commemorative festival of the battle of Sempach.

Pierre Savoie