

# Swiss Abbeys

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Parishioners attached to tradition are usually passive and satisfied with having a minister who can deliver a weekly sermon and be there when he is required for baptisms or burials. But there are some highly active parishes. A revival and growing sense of awareness can be felt in several, mainly missionary circles. There is, for example, a growing concern for third-world and home political matters. New life is burgeoning outside the established Church. In Lausanne young Christians have built *La Paroisse oecumenique des jeunes* or *Eglise en fete* with a threefold aim: (a) to promote participation and sharing, (b) to develop political and social consciousness and (c) to speed up the renewal of Church liturgy and hymns (by introducing modern music).

Many ministers find it hard to go along with this movement. One example of this was the abortive attempt to introduce a new hymn book. Following youth discontent with the *Psautier Romand* whose hymns often dated from the Reformation and contained antiquated verses, a Commission was entrusted with the preparation of a new hymn book. It came out with a highly unpopular hymn book as it had hardly taken account of the experience and wishes of the young in music.

Many Christians are more interested with far-reaching European or world problems than by those of their local parish, for which they often have no time. Various discussions and reflection

groups have sprung up but their effect is generally to enhance the divisions of the Church.

The minister must still carry a ready-made image. When 32 priests and clergymen announced last year that they would not pay their military exemption-tax, an indignant outcry was heard from every quarter. It was felt inadmissible that men of the Church should tread on such a subversive path and cantonal Churches commented on the event with statements that were sometimes very hostile to the 32 churchmen. To my knowledge, the Church of Neuchatel was the only one not to condemn them.

#### NEW IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

An encouraging new development is, to me, the setting-up in most cantons of centres where men of every walk of life can meet, talk of business, children, politics, the Bible, road traffic, medicine and psychology. Those in charge of these centres organise outings for young and old people. Anyone with a problem can find guidance.

Many young people seek in the Protestant Church of *Taize*, in France, the spiritual guidance lacking in their parishes. I know of many such men who have learnt to live by their faith in an international community. One cannot forget the real impact of *Taize* on the life of the Swiss Church, many of whose ministers are members of the *Taize* community.

However, far from all the theology students who leave University seek to strengthen their faith at *Taize*, or in a traditional parish for that matter. Many criticise the Church and reject the idea of running a parish. This breeds grudge and deception among older clerics who are troubled by this undoubted spiritual crisis. What do these would-be ministers do? They opt for an ordinary life in society and seek to live and to preach, the Gospel in a new way. Others are attracted by the communalist ideal and by a life of sharing food, money and thoughts.

Traditional parishioners balk at some of the ideas of the young and even those of the intellectual leadership of the Church. The literature distributed by the World Council of Churches is little read and even the various religious weeklies inspire mistrust among parishioners.

The Church of Geneva is perhaps a model for the future. It has created new specialised ministries in every compartment of society: hospitals, prisons, industry, youth, university, medical circles and tramps.

In conclusion, I will say that the Swiss Protestant Churches are undergoing rapid change. After several centuries of strife and splintering, they were on the road to unification when the pressures of events, ecumenism, inter-marriage, dissent and the crisis of faith has brought about a new diversion that the supporters of change and those for the status quo. Nobody can say what the outcome of this situation will be.

# SWISS ABBEYS

## HAUTERIVE IN FRIBOURG

The ancient and celebrated abbey of the Order of Citeaux was founded in 1137 by Guillaume de Glane, who in 1142 took the habit of lay-brother and settled there until his death. His tomb can still be seen near the high altar.

Several noblemen have enriched this Cistercian abbey, among them the counts of Gruyeres, Neuchatel, Geneva and Savoy. Others took the abbey under their special protection, as did the dukes of Zahringen, the bishops of Lausanne and the sovereign pontiffs. Several popes issued particular bills on the status of Hauterive, which was granted privileges concerning the election of priests and the ordination of monks.

Thanks to reclamations and a good administration, the abbey acquired considerable wealth and became a centre of culture spreading its blessings to the neighbouring country: agricultural institutions, mills, and factories developed along the banks of the river Sarine. The abbey proved at all times benevolent and generous.

In 1848, the abbey was closed and its assets became public property. In

1859, an agreement between the religious and civil authorities allowed a distribution of the convent's fortune between the bishopric of Fribourg, in order to increase its resources, and the State, which was to devote the proceeds to charitable institutions.

Following their secularisation, the convent buildings sheltered an agricultural school which existed for only a few years, it was replaced in 1858 by a training college for school teachers.

The church and cloister of Hauterive, with their particular mixture of Gothic and Roman styles, are remarkable architectural achievements. The chancel stalls, which date from the

second half of the 15th Century, are reckoned to be among the most beautiful in Switzerland.

Five pillars separate the nave from the aisles. The capitals are joined with original arcades; the principal nave and the chancel are surmounted by an equally pointed vault.

The cloister is of Roman, but transitional style. Its arched arcades are supported by coupled columns. The windows are richly ornamented. The magnificent stain glass windows of the chancel were removed in 1848 and placed in St. Nicholas Cathedral in Fribourg.

With the financial support of the Confederation the church of Hauterive has been extensively restored. This has reinstated the famous fresco-paintings of the 14th and 15th Century into their full beauty. They well deserve a visit.

*Pierre Savoie*



HAUTERIVE  
Chapel of the Abbey.