

# A message from a Swiss Padra

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# A MESSAGE FROM A SWISS PADRA

Dear Compatriot,

First of August Celebrations – patriotic feelings and pride in being Swiss – I am all for it but it is not all, it can and should be an opening into some deeper reflections, on the fundamental idea of the constitution of our country. “In the Name of God – a life worth living.” This could well be the theme of the pact of 1291 and could be set over it as its title. Therefore I wish to ask you the question: “How do you stand with God?” But now, I should stop talking or writing and let you think. - - - If you can do so, do it, but soon you will be distracted, it is not easy to keep a thought for a long time and so I keep on and give you a hand..

God, who is he? An idea man has formed in order to cope with life? Or is he a person at the beginning – in the middle – at the end of life? Our Forefathers who, nearly 700 years ago, thought out and wrote the first constitution had no such problem. They simply did it “in the Name of God” in whom they believed. And in the same name of God, some years later, they slaughtered the helplessly trapped knights of King Leopold at Morgarten and in other battles without great compunctions. Yes, in the name of God very good but also very bad things have been done – the churches and the clergy are no exception. And if we look into history

– and into our own personal life – one can really be frightened. Personally, I really am, since this name can take out the best in me – and cover up the worst.

I can accept the view of the agnostic or the atheist because many of them do think – and are frightened too. It really is horrible what people have done, and still do in that name of God. On the other hand, should we give people so much power over us, that we let them stop being ourselves? Should people frighten us and stop us thinking? Should danger stop us from decisions and actions, or should it sharpen our minds and our will to exercise great care and attention?

Does God exist? I cannot prove it though I have pondered a lot about the so called proofs of his existence. They are good enough for me, because I believe in him. But are they good enough for you? Perhaps not. I have decided to believe in him, because I cannot believe that I come from nothing and go to nothing, I cannot believe in nothing, nor in something – it does not make sense. But it does make sense to me to believe in somebody. And I find meaning and a life worth living. It is of interest that things which matter most in our lives depend on belief, the loyalty of a friend, the love of a wife or husband – and without belief in myself, in my abilities and my strength in dealing with difficult situations, I would not be able to succeed in anything. Is it

therefore so difficult to accept that in the question about our beginning and our end or aim there is belief? Belief in God – or belief in nothing. There is no force of evidence, only a free decision. How God must love freedom!

How do I stand with him? If I think it over, I must say, I am friendly with him, I trust him, I do not understand him, but I am friendly towards him – and I believe he is very friendly with me – even if I did not go to church. Of course, as a Priest, I do go to church, but I do not believe that he is friendly towards me because of that. It is the other way round. Because he is friendly towards me that is why I wish all the people I know realised it too, he is friendly to everybody – even to sinners – especially to sinners.

How do I know? I have never had a great experience – I am too practical a man and mistrust my emotions. I believe that he has revealed himself in many different ways, in many religions, but most of all through the man of Nazareth, Jesus Christ. The way Jesus of Nazareth thought, that is how God thinks, the way he acted and felt, is the way God feels and acts. For whom Jesus of Nazareth takes sides that is the side where God is, Jesus of Nazareth had great difficulties with the priests, the just ones,

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# A NOSTALGIC MOMENT



*On this Rütli meadow on the shores of Lake Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden signed a pact of mutual defence in 1291, thus founding the alliance which was later to become the Swiss Confederation.*



*The lighting of bonfires as night falls is one of the ceremonies attached to our National Day.*

One early August day in 1291 men from the valley communities of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden met and swore to help one another in warding off attacks and thwarting injustice. The pact – written in Latin and sealed – is still preserved in the Swiss archives at Schwyz. Since 1st August, 1891, the 600th anniversary of this event – the birth of the Swiss Confederation – has been a day of national celebration, though until a few years ago the ceremonies were confined to the evening hours. As night fell church bells rang out through the land and the people of town and city assembled in school grounds and, by the light of bengal flares listened to brass bands, watched the local gymnasts build human pyramids and paid attention to solemn addresses by a representative of the local government. And then, at about 10 pm, the party broke up and each and everyone went his own way to finish the evening.

Now, the evening event has grown into a day's holiday. The bells still ring, the fascination of the tall bonfires, and the windows decorated with glowing Chinese lanterns remains. The Swiss flag with its white cross on a red background decorates public buildings and many private houses. The speeches – including one from the Confederation's President to all the people – have become a platform for statements on current affairs.

In the founding cantons, in rural areas and among Swiss people overseas, 1st August still remains a celebration during which thoughts go back to the origins of the homeland. But for the country's children history takes second place to the lanterns and fireworks associated with Switzerland's National Day.

Pictures and story by courtesy of SNTO.

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the pious ones, the doctors of the law and of theology. This is a warning for me. He loved the sinners, the poor, those who asked for his help. He did not fight to defend his life and his property – but he defended his friends and everybody who was maltreated. He stood for the truth – and it cost his life. But he knew, it was not the end. That is how God thinks and acts – a God of great freedom.

This is how I feel and what I think and believe – and I wish you could do the same. In the Name of God – a Life worth living! whatever your Creed. May your God go with you.

Fr. Paul Bossard.