

What would it be like if the Good Lord were Swiss? The question is not as idle as you might think, given one's well-founded suspicion that such a state of affairs would make a very great difference indeed. Nor is the idea evidence of overweening pride. After all, other peoples have staked their claim on the Good Lord in their turn. For example, in German a particularly lucky person is said to enjoy the lot of "the Lord God in France." Why should the Good Lord enjoy himself in France, of all places? Is it the food? And does it in fact recommend the Good Lord that he should feel at home in Paris, considering its reputation? Why not say, "He lives like the Good Lord in Switzerland," where things are so much more reliable? Our hospitality industry is world-renowned. As for the Americans, they like to say that theirs is "God's own country." And while that may well be true of the USA, it couldn't possibly apply to us – what with the cost of our real estate. At the very outset of our annals stands the defense of our soil, so we are not about to give it up to just anybody; besides which, we do not tamper with property rights. And in any case, the beauty of our territory is reserved exclusively for the eye of the surveyor, and of the fence-builder.

For their part, the Brazilians go so far as to claim that God is their countryman, although since they also like to say that "We are all Brazilians," the Good Lord wouldn't really stand out. All the same, He can't very well be a "born Brazilian," but must instead have been "naturalized." We Swiss are rather more prudent in this regard. You won't see us proclaiming "Everyone is Swiss" and flinging our arms open in welcome. Only we, the Swiss, are Swiss; and although there may only be a very few of us involved in the business of being Swiss, we practice our calling all the more assiduously for our size. While we understand, of course, that everyone would like to be Swiss, restraint is the order of the day, and not only for fear of crowding in this tiny country of ours. Swiss citizenship comes with a price tag, although the amount varies

depending on the municipality. No – let the Good Lord live it up in France, find his feet in America, and carry a Brazilian passport: we look at things differently. Not only because, as the Swiss writer Carl Spitteler once claimed, if we Swiss had created the Alps ourselves, they wouldn't be quite so conspicuous. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the Good Lord could in fact be Swiss – because remaining aloof from everything and simply observing the goings-on, well, that's as divine as it is Helvetian. The thought of what would have happened if the Good Lord were Swiss arose upon hearing a radio report on Switzerland's potential membership of the UN. It wasn't the arguments against such a move that were interesting, as we'd heard them all before; it was the fact that, here once again, one of us Swiss had taken it upon himself, like a little Lord God, to speak out against a world history in which all the others are embroiled. And of course you could hear a certain disgruntlement in his tone: *If they'd asked us*, he seemed to say, *it would all have come out differently; but no, naturally no one ever asks us*. So if more than one Swiss has what it takes to be the Good Lord, why shouldn't the Good Lord in his turn have the chops to be Swiss? And yet, if this creator of the universe were Swiss, the Bible would have to be told differently as well. There are Bibles for children, for the poor – why shouldn't there be a special Bible for Swiss people as well? But this gives rise to a whole new set of problems. Because after all, this God created the world from nothing; and yet, as we know, nothing comes of nothing. For our part, we the Swiss, we don't ourselves start with nothing, we start with a little bit. We work hard for what we have, which is why we intend to hang onto it. On the other hand, there are times we wouldn't mind if something came of nothing. In the case of our banks, for instance, we'd much rather that it had come of nothing than to know its precise provenance. Nevertheless, the chief problem remains deciding on the moment to create the world. Swiss people are terribly keen to know when the time is right: to give women

the vote, for instance, or to join the UN. No one has ever made as high an art of waiting as we have. Furthermore, Adam and Eve are proof that the world was in fact not created at the right time. No sooner had they arrived than they were forced to leave; no sooner had they reproduced than one boy had killed the other. It would all have turned out differently if He had waited, and that is precisely what a Swiss Good Lord would have done: for everything must grow and mature in its own time. And wait He most certainly could, since a thousand years are like a day for Him, although it would have meant letting a great deal of time pass – which He could eventually have provided to the watchmakers for their use. If the Good Lord were Swiss, He would be waiting to this day for the right moment to create the world. However – if the Good Lord were Swiss, and if He had waited for the right moment, not only would there be no world, there would be no Switzerland either. Which would be a shame. And so it is that we Swiss owe our existence to a Good Lord who is, thank God, not Swiss. Which makes it only fitting that He be honored in our constitution. And yet, when it comes down to it, we are not so very unlike the Good Lord after all. For when God created the world, He “saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was good.” The Good Lord is thus like the Swiss in one respect, since that’s the way it goes for us as well: when we create something, we look upon it; *and behold, it is good.*