

From Zig-Zag, December 2014

Thirty years ago, a ‘full-timer’, a volunteer in Caux wrote...

René Thonney worked for 42 years as the treasurer of the Caux conference centre. At the end of each year, he would write a letter to his friends and acquaintances. This is an extract from his December 1984 newsletter:

‘Firstly, I’ve sold my car. Now that I’m making fewer visits, it’s not really needed. A half-price card on the railways can replace it, even if I miss it a little. But I feel great gratitude that I’ve been able to drive my own car and others cars belonging to the Foundation for over thirty years without a single accident.

‘Second piece of news: as from the start of next year, I’ll be living in Montreux where I’ve found a room to rent. It seemed to me that the time had come to take another step towards retirement, even though in reality I continue to do much the same work in Caux. I’ll go up from Monday to Friday, from midday to evening, and so I’ll have a cooked meal there!

‘With these two decisions, a new chapter in my life opens, with a different rhythm of work, and a new environment, after living in a community for 36 years. But I take all this with a feeling of confidence and trust. In future – as up to now – the challenge remains the same: to seek first for God’s will. I rest in that, that gives me the strength to do what I need to do. One thing must be crystal clear when my own self-will tries to take the upper hand: I can’t just go my own way. I’ve received a calling. I accepted that calling. And nothing permits me to turn my back on it, retirement or not.

‘To discern what God is wanting to tell me, and to pass that on to others. To pass on life, and not just content myself with my convictions. To be deeply grateful to have been associated with this great adventure of Moral Re-Armament for most of my adult life. The word ‘adventure’ doesn’t seem to me to be out of place, because things have happened in this little mountain village that have influenced the course of events in many countries and countless situations. We’ve seen here the proof that even if man can divide the atom, the power of the Holy Spirit can create unity where there is division.

‘God can reveal himself in the simplest of thoughts, but the noblest of thoughts must also be translated into daily realities – otherwise they remain unreachable philosophy. Theory and practice must advance hand in hand. There are no small things, there’s only obedience and disobedience, all day long.

‘I have to be alert not to let fear take its place in me; not to confuse laziness with patience. To accept to have the same attitude, the same sense of responsibility, if I’m in the front row or the back... To sow, that’s my destiny. It’s not by chance that I come from a farming family!’

(translation, A. Stallybrass, 17.5.2015)