

MOUNTAIN HOUSE • CAUX

Monday, 22nd July.

Dear friends,

So, here comes the second epistle. We have just ended the Youth Forum, though there are many young people still in the house, and the weekend seminar 'Health workers in a sick world' is just drawing to a close as I start to write this. It is quite a corrida when two sessions overlap - and we've had meetings and discussion groups going on all over the place.

I enclose a copy of what John Lester said at the opening of the weekend seminar. The talk by Professor Felix Labhardt, co-director of the psychiatric clinic at the University of Basel, will appear in our publications in due course. He spoke on 'Psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine at a time of moral devaluation. What part has faith in this?' But we also heard from patients and their families: Les Dennison deeply moved his hearers with his evocation of the last illness of his wife, Vera, and a cancer patient spoke of her struggle to hold to God's thread for her life. Monica Spooner, a pediatrician from Edinburgh, leading a seminar on 'Absolute moral standards are the best preventive medicine', concluded, 'Health, like happiness, is a by-product of the way we live, and defies direct pursuit.'

Lodi Gyari, on a visit for a few hours with a Tibetan delegation, brought the greetings of the Dalai Lama. 'MRA has been an important friend of the Tibetans,' he said. 'We greatly value your friendship and understanding.' Speaking of their relationship with the Chinese, he added, 'No matter how wide the gap may be, we need to talk round the table and not on the battlefield. It is a harder way than taking a gun. One needs more courage and determination.'

The Youth Forum ended with the decision to hold another similar session next year, and a 'bonte avond', which in Dutch signifies a multi-coloured, multi-faceted evening. And indeed it was - with a new song about the kaleidoscope variety of God's creation, and a creative variety to make the words of the song ring true. The poignant grace and beauty of a Lao song and dance, a hard rock Rolling Stones spoof, the productions of the different creative workshops who had been meeting during the week. The workshop without words run by Michel Orphelin and Gerard Gigand showed us the devil at work in a family, blowing out the candles of the hope with each act or gesture of selfishness and sin, before a guardian angel got the different members of the family to re-light the candles. There was a striking modern dance, and a riotous production by the theatre workshop. Paintings and photos produced by other workshops were on display at the back of the hall.

We started our days, some of us at least, in the Catholic Chapel, before breakfast, with a time of silence, followed by a prayer by Michel Quoist, and a simple 'Allelulia' we learned together. We were blessed with good weather when it mattered most - it rained before and

after a barbecue at the end of the terrace, and we had one day out for a picnic and a long walk. Jean Carrard, the great expert on the wash-up and service commented on the willing and cheerful spirit in all the practical work of the teams.

The meetings at 9.30 were kept to an hour, and were marked by great reality and honesty - on relationships and purity, sex and the abuse of sex, fear of friends and of sticking out of the crowd. The themes were: 'Hope for a world in tension', 'Healing the wounds of the past', 'The guiding thread', 'The light of absolute purity', 'What do I dedicate my life to?', and 'From Caux to daily life'. Each day was carefully prepared by a different group.

In the next few days, we hope to run off a translation of Michel Orphelin's deeply thought-out contribution to the meeting on purity, and I'll send it in my next letter. His daughter, Marie, said, 'It is not a cold, difficult moral rule, but peace and joy inside. It becomes a dynamic to advance with.' Another young woman added, 'It gives you a sense of respecting yourself, instead of cheap fulfillment tinged with shame.' A third asked, 'Do we give our friends the bit of heaven God has entrusted us with or a bit of ourselves?'

The final session saw 20 people expressing what the week had meant to them. Seven of the young British had come as a result of the training weeks at Tirley Garth, and one of them invited all the participants to come to Britain for the next one - 'Well, perhaps not all at once'. Said another, 'It's a joyful and happy experience, or it's meant to be. There were no grumpy looks in Tirley, or here. It's a joyful message that we have to proclaim.'

One of the many young Swiss said, 'Caux is a place where I can learn about the world and do something. The news so easily drowns us; it always seems to be bad news. Despair and cynicism come in with a feeling that there is nothing that we can do. What is the point of knowing all that goes on? Here I see the point of knowing: so as to do something. Meeting many people from different countries gives another meaning to what we read and hear. We will be more deeply touched, because we will think of individuals.'

A timid young French girl came up and perched herself on the kitchen stool that stood in front of the microphone. 'I'm at the crossroads of my life,' she said. 'I need to listen to God. I need to purify myself to welcome God in my heart and in my life.' It hadn't been cheap to come, but here you had to pay with your heart. 'I was a very superficial person,' she continued, 'I said I believed in God, but I didn't have him in my heart. I'll be 20 this year, and I'm glad that it was in this year that I met God. He called me earlier, but I didn't listen to him.' She told how she had stolen make-up from a shop, but had been unable to use it, because of her troubled conscience, which only eased when she took it back. A young Austrian, in Caux for the first time, said, 'I can't just go home and forget everything and go on as before.' She had decided to repair a relationship with a colleague at work whom she hated, and to care for her younger brother.

Now we have a few days respite before the merry-go-round of the family conference.

Andrew Stallybrass

P.S. Two of our team who organised the Youth Forum have just announced their engagement: Antoine Jaulmes and Johanna de Boer.