

MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

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NEWSLETTER 3

28th July, 1986

Dear friends,

At last we seem to have summer with us; warm days, and glorious long views down the lake and along the Jura. The right kind of weather for a barbecue and 'sing-a-long' (as on Saturday night), and for quiet meals out on the terrace as the sun goes down. The house is full, and filling further in the next few days, so we rejoice at the way people pour in - and look for beds!

You will have to wait for next week's letter for a full report of the youth forum; we're only half way through now. But it is already striking that a largely new team of young British have effectively planned the session and taken on the leadership. As with the Franco-German team for the first period, the preparations and team-building before Caux may prove as important as what takes place here. There has been lively discussion within this group whether the appeal to personal values or the challenge to a world in need should come first. The presence of a Southern Sudanese journalist who has suffered for his beliefs, a Sri Lankan former head of UNCTAD, Maronite Christian and Shia Muslim from the Lebanon, Alec Smith and his family, have all helped us to stretch our hearts and minds.

Last week's letter filled up in an amazing way, and I wasn't able to say as much as I had wanted about the content of the Nordic revue. Last year already, I described the amusing family communication sketch, with all the family members wearing walkmen, and a growing cacophony of different styles of music, until a loud 'inner voice' comes over the loud-speakers, interrupting their music, and ordering them to take their headphones off. There is also an adaptation of a well-known Norwegian fairy tale of three brothers, and their response to a world that cries out to them, 'I need you'.

Some of the lyrics of the songs: 'The lie of lies: nothing can be changed. The truth of truths: every problem has an answer. There is always one step that you can take, the power of forgiveness to put right what went wrong, a chance for everyone to begin again.' 'Do you dare to listen to the weak, you who live in comfort? Do you feel their helplessness? Are their cries of pain like salt in your wounds? Do you dare to call a spade a spade? To accept betrayal for what it is, without first glancing at your party's political manifesto and saying that wrong is right?...Only then will you be ready to step out into a poor and desolate world, next to Him who was born in a stable.' 'It's up to you, even if you think you're too insignificant. He who gave you life has a thrilling plan. You're important to Him.' 'The acid rain of hate and fear...Dare I perceive the part I play in others' suffering, and need? Or do I go my happy way and feed myself upon their bread?'

The cast are now leaving for a well-earned break, and meet again at the beginning of September in Oslo for the first leg of their tour and campaign in Scandinavia. But there is already a search going on for common aims and tasks with the other young people in Caux, a search that will gain in clarity and definition in the days to come.

The show really is entirely written by the young people taking part, and is an attempt to use a completely contemporary idiom - in music, dancing, lyrics - both of which are 'firsts'. It is an honest expression of where they stand now, not going beyond their own faith and experience. I think we can all pray for their growth and development in this year ahead.

The presence of this group in our midst has provoked a real search for how we are meant to reach this generation, what values are eternal, what demands and discipline are we meant to lay down - and how we overcome our own fear of young people, with whom we may seem to have no normal point of contact. One of the revue noted in a meeting, 'I find idealistic youth everywhere. But you meet here people in middle age who still have a passion and ideals. MRA's needed in the future because of the challenge to all, without comparison, to live what they talk about.'

Of course, many other young people have been speaking, for example of the pressures to go with the crowd at school, and of a new decision to be honest with parents. A student, until recently a Marxist, who had met MRA through the Tirley training courses noted, 'My belief grew as I went out to look for God instead of trying to decide whether He exists.' He is now one of those running the forum.

A meeting on honesty started with a current pop-song on the rarity and value of this standard - and ended with the admission that the tape had been pirated, but that they were sending a letter, plus cheque and invitation to Caux to the singer concerned. A meeting on unselfishness opened with a sketch from the drama workshop on the difficulties of deciding who decides which TV channel the family watches - plenty of room for unselfishness there!

Why get married? What is the cost of pretence in the family? Last night saw the première of Hugh Williams' play 'Skeletons', in its first full production, with a part-professional British cast. It deals with these questions in an authentic way, yet it is far more than a vehicle for expressing ideas - it is gripping, heart-stretching and soul-searching. Many in the audience were deeply moved by this powerful family drama, with only 4 actors and one set, where each member of the family in the course of the play is challenged to empty the skeletons from their cupboards. The play ends with the pain and joy of honesty and healing.

Cheers,

Andrew Stallybrass