

MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

CONFIDENTIAL - NOT FOR PUBLICATION

NEWSLETTER 4

4th August, 1986

Dear friends,

This has been a great week, rich in new decisions, and with a feeling that the Holy Spirit has been at work in many lives, not just young ones. Now we are in another change-around period, but no time to digest! In the last few days, hundreds of people have left, but 123 more arrive today and more again tomorrow. By Wednesday, we'll be well over 600.

Since the sale of the Grand Hotel, we are full with around 500, so over a hundred will be in beds outside our houses - and indeed a good many will be lodged with our kind neighbours in the Grand. We've been rather taken by surprise with the numbers. We expected to be full from mid-August to the end. While there is a warm welcome for each one, some will have to wait for the previous occupants of their room to leave, and others may be invited to make their own beds! There is a great spirit of willing service, but the flesh is weakening...

The week's meetings have seen a constant stream of young and old coming up to share new decisions and insights. I can't remember ever seeing anything quite like it. Increasingly, the line between the two morning meetings blurred - the first more on personal faith and convictions, the second on a theme. Brian Boobbyer led the former in relaxed style. On Wednesday, a group of seven young teenage girls marched up and sat on the steps of the platform, in turn climbing up to say their piece. Their honest and courageous sharing started a chain reaction that ran down the following days.

An Indian living in Britain confessed that she hadn't always had the courage to affirm her faith in school - 'I thought it wouldn't be good for my cool image. But it's not un-cool to have faith in God.' In a broad American accent, another girl spoke of her hatred for 'my parents, for myself, for God for making me the person that I am'. She had been tempted by suicide, but she felt how she was hurting God by refusing His love and hating what He had made. 'It may be easier to end one's life than to die to self and live,' she concluded. A third told how she had rushed up to her room in tears after a previous meeting where a friend had spoken of her new-found honesty with her parents. She had then written five sides in her notebook without stopping, and sought out her parents to be honest in her turn. She described 'three people sitting on a bench on the terrace with a deep lasting friendship between them'.

The theme of commitment provoked much heart-searching. 'I want to commit my life to God for the everyday decisions,' said a young engineer. 'It's a contract for life that has to be signed on a daily basis.' Another spoke of playing chess eight days a week, and then deciding 'to surrender it to God'. 'I've been living two lives,' he confessed; 'now I have more time for people, and I try to be one self, though I wasn't quite sure who that was'. He was followed by a British girl who said, 'I wanted to become free without God at the centre of my life. I wanted to become a punk rocker. But I just became selfish,

self-centred and lonely.' 'I must give back to God the right to say "no" and pull back,' said a German girl. A French girl spoke of the inner poverty that is hard to recognise, and hard to admit. Commitment means opening your heart to other people and listening, said another in a broad Scots accent. A student who had also rushed off to her room in tears apologised 'to all the people I've made rather wet', and spoke of the healing she was finding to 'the hurts that had built up over the years, the fear of being inadequate, the fear of being alone' as she decided to give her heart and her pain to God.

'I've been involved with MRA for 56 years,' said a senior lady, 'but I've never been 100% committed to God. But I've decided to be fully committed for the next five minutes - and the next five.' The mother of another of the teenagers who spoke also admitted, 'I've agreed with the ideas of MRA and wanted to help, but I've always kept a certain reserve. I've felt it was better not to make a promise than not to keep one. I had no faith that God and my friends could help me keep to a decision. I have decided to let God run my life to create new structures worldwide.' Many touched on family relationships that needed healing, or spoke of situations that had already started to change. Alec Smith gave 'the incredible story of reconciliation' of Zimbabwe, and 'the decisions, commitment and change of certain people' that lay behind it. A talented young American artist spoke of 'the good process of painful healing', and noted how 'so many good things we do may distract us from doing the best'.

We celebrated Swiss national day on the 1st of August. As one of the young people noted in the morning meeting that day, 'My alarm clock was broken, but there was an obliging brass band!' Some Swiss celebrate by getting up even earlier than usual. After the Caux mix of barbecue, folk-songs and -dances from around the world and games for the children, we wound our way up the hill to the bonfire. As far as the eye could see, other fires winked in the dark, and fireworks spluttered, flashed and cascaded, under clear, star-studded skies.

A variety evening brought together folk-lore from Japan (a group of students have been with us), Finland and India. Ten young Austrians got everyone to sing with them an 'action song'. A young Dutch magician gave us a taste of his magic. The drama workshop presented a humorous sketch about the different kinds of spectacles that people wear, which affect the way they see the world and reality. Two classical musicians gave us a taste of their art. There is an amazing quality and variety to these evenings - from the sublime to the ridiculous and back again!

Yesterday's meeting was another of those magic moments in the life of Caux, with South Africans sharing the pain and promise of their country. One told how he had been deeply moved when a little black girl had leapt into his arms and hugged him the night before. Then quite unplanned, the little girl's father came up to speak, about the quality of love and care that the people of his continent need for each other if their problems are to be solved, and if Africa is to give all she is meant to to the world. Black and white Africans meeting, shaking hands can sometimes lose its wonder; the miraculous becomes normal to us. This gives us a foretaste for the rest of the month. Half-way through, and miracles galore.

Cheers,

Andrew Stallybrass