

## MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

15th August, 1988

Dear Friends,

What an unforgettable week this has been. I at least am grateful for one great grace that has been given. It has been one of the busiest periods not just of this summer, but of many summers, with 130 arrivals on Friday, and the housekeepers stretched to the limit, preparing beds and rooms of just-departed guests for new arrivals. Yet it has not been a matter of thrusting down one's feelings and grimly getting on with the work. In a strange way, Serge Borel has been part of it all, and there has been time to mourn, to remember, to be challenged and stirred.

On the announcement of his death that the family sent out were some verses from Serge's favorite psalm, 100, 'Serve the Lord with gladness...know that the Lord he is God...We are his people and the flock of his hand.' On Thursday morning, we all remembered him here. Then at the beginning of the afternoon, in a packed, beautiful old church in Montreux we entrusted him to God, before burying him in Glion, looking out over the lake. That morning, in the Bible readings many of us follow was the prayer, 'Father, you turn on us a look of life, give us attentive eyes, and may life spring forth even at the spot where death breaks us.' Jean Piguet read it at the end of his sober, deeply felt but triumphant service. He spoke of the communion of saints, now reinforced, and of Christ's command to pray 'Our Father'. 'Our papa' would be a more accurate translation, he said, the first word we learn to say as children.

To come back to the morning, at Jean-Denis' suggestion, we all learnt and sang together a canon that he'd learnt in a church group: 'Father, I worship you; I give you my life; I belong to you.' The simple words were an act of rededication for many. Marie-Claude spoke about her brother as a gift for his family, and for us all in this world family, as a pioneer for our times, and as a God-guided non-conformist. His father had first sent him to Caux, but then opposed bitterly his decision to stop his architectural studies to work 'full time'. Then at the wedding reception, after Serge's marriage to Regula, he had humbly said, before the whole 'clan', 'I was wrong and you were right.'

The Chantharasys from Laos recalled the Borels first wedding anniversary on the banks of the Mekong. They spoke of 'a powerful divine message for us all'. Serge was 'a soldier without a gun, a diplomat without credentials'. Sam Pono, from South Africa, recalled Serge's passion for jazz, and their visit together to the head of the Montreux Jazz Festival. He played a haunting melody on his saxophone, and spoke of Serge's 'availability to the Lord that he served'.

An Egyptian general prayed for him in arabic, a muslim prayer. Another general, a Christian from the Sudan, sang a prayer for those who were going to have to learn to live without him. 'He was one of nature's gentlemen,' added another friend, who described receiving from Serge the kind of letter you want to show to your bank manager when you ask him for a loan - an inspiring picture of a man he hardly knew!

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Marie-Claude described the day as 'a bit of resurrection'. For her, something had come alive again. 'A bit of the next world had entered this one, or a bit of this one had entered the next.' Regula herself added, 'It was no human effort of mine. I was carried by the prayers of so many. There was space; there was peace.' At the church, Jean-Denis recognised one of the bus drivers who brought people down from Caux - the man had driven them a few days earlier on a children's excursion. So they drove up to Caux together from the church. One of the black sheep of the village was outside the service, but explained when asked, 'I'm not going to come in to the church. I'll remember Mr Borel out here, looking down at the lake.'

A black American who had never known Serge said after the morning meeting spent remembering him, 'If I did nothing else, this morning has made my journey here worthwhile. I have to re-think everything.' Another person who'd arrived during the week, told me, 'He lives on in me, even though I never knew him.'

I don't claim to know what all this means. I do know that it wasn't an accident. It wasn't an accident that so many of us were forced to experience this departure 'live'. Bror Jonzon observed, 'We have often been together as a world family in life, never like this in death. Maybe God wants to break down this barrier.' So much has been stirred in so many. There are a host of obvious and individual conclusions to draw: we are all reminded that we are only passing through this world, destined for another. We will have to bid farewell to all our loved ones sooner or later; it can come sooner than we think. Do we appreciate our friends enough? One humorous suggestion was that at birthdays we should ask the one we're celebrating to leave the table, and remember them the way we remembered Serge - because many of us realised what a friend we had lost only when we had lost him. I sense that it goes beyond one man and his passing. The empty space is not one of tasks left undone that must now be done by others, though there is of course that too. But God does not take away without giving. There is some new life, some new step that we are on the brink of, if only we will let God give it.

As last week, it is still hard to turn to other things, but Caux has overflowed to Glion, the house is full to bursting, but we've still found beds for all, and we've been through one of the major turn arounds, with many departures, and many more arrivals, drawn by the theme of 'Change in the cities'. Clearly this theme touches a nerve. There are big groups from many cities - I'll give a full report next

week. One of my little games has been to try and guess which are the policemen, since there are many: a black American who wouldn't be out of place on 'Miami vice', a square-built British bobby, a deceptive blonde lady...

The reception for 17 of us at the Chinese diplomatic mission in Geneva which I mentioned in my last letter went off well. The senior man present encouraged several to get in touch with the Chinese ambassadors in other countries, using his name as an introduction. Sylvie Söderlund took their breath away (the first time I've heard this phenomenon!) by singing (without practice or rehearsal) a song in perfect Mandarin that she'd learnt 18 years ago with 'Anything to Declare?' in Hong Kong. We checked the words in a corner with a Chinese friend for political content, and discovered that Sylvie was word perfect, and that the song was 'very romantic'. Another Chinese said that his favorite foreign author was Robert Burns, and his favorite poem was 'My love is like a red, red rose'. To his amazement, Sylvie and Alison Hutchison gave him an unaccompanied rendering of it set to music. There is a magic of the heart...

Another major event of the week which cannot be forgotten was the world premiere of Hugh Steadman Williams' new play 'Liberation'. A team have been hard at work for weeks to prepare the set, on a sturdy turntable, to speed the action of this dramatic tale of kidnapping and hostage taking by urban guerrillas of a senior treasury civil servant in London. It is interesting to note that since the play was written, but before it saw the stage, one of the French hostages released from Lebanon spoke of a renewal of faith through reading the bible in captivity that parallels the hero's own development.

Yours ever,

Andrew Stallybrass

## SERGE BOREL

There have been so many joys, so many reasons for gratitude this summer in Caux, so many moving reminders of the amazing world family that we are called to be part of. Why should we have imagined that we should be spared the pain and even the revolt and incomprehension in the face of life's greatest mystery? On Sunday, 7th August, in the words of one friend, we had a sudden visit from the angel of life. At the beginning of lunch, in the main dining room, Serge Borel collapsed and died of a massive heart attack.

Within seconds doctors were at his side. For a full hour, a first rate ad hoc medical team fought to restore him to life - a Swedish heart specialist, a Filipino nurse specialising in emergency re-animation, one of Serge's best friends, Dr. Jaccottet, just up for the day with his family, then an ambulance crew, and finally a helicopter team from the cantonal hospital in Lausanne, landed on the lawn. All that could have been done was done. And through it all, there was the most amazing prayerful silent atmosphere in the packed dining room. All those who came from outside were struck by it and commented on it. We can never forget those minutes spent together, the other world just a breeze-breath away through a translucent screen. It was the anniversary of Frank Buchman's death.

Serge was 54, had just come back from a holiday with the family... We cannot yet quite grasp what has happened. How to understand the ways of God? And perhaps if we understood, we'd be gods ourselves - and we're not. It seems that it wasn't an accident; it was the chosen moment. Regula, Jean-Denis, Sylviane and Marie-Claude were all there. They already have felt the prayerful support of so many of their closest friends who were on the spot.

It is very hard to continue, to leave Serge, even in words. What is God telling us all? Life goes on, the conference in Caux goes on, there is much to do, the children have gone back to school. The army of helpers on the other side is strengthened by a calm, strong, gentle presence.

The Sunday was to have been Marie-Claude Borel's great day. A group from the Vaud farming women's association was coming, brought by their former president, and some of them arrived already for the morning meeting, and they sang and spoke. Family life was the theme. A Laotian couple, he a former senior diplomat, spoke, bringing gales of laughter with their honesty and humour. Babulal, a 'Harijan' from Delhi, a senior Sri Lankan journalist and editor, a professional woman from Finland - there was amazing variety and depth. The ladies, in their national costumes, sat with us in prayerful and peaceful silence during those long minutes in the dining room. Later they served a sumptuous tea that they had baked and prepared in their homes. Daniel Mottu read the notes that Serge Borel had made for the word of thanks that he had planned to say to them. It included a typical note of Serge's humour: 'Have you ever thought that from the Vaud side, the lake takes on the shape of a smile?'

The three local newspapers all carried reports of the farming ladies visit. 'L'Est Vaudois', the Montreux paper had a front page headline 'Celebration touched with sadness' and carried a colour photograph in a back page box; '24 Heures' the largest circulation French-language Swiss daily carried a photo and a story headlined

'Breaking the ice - a better look at Moral Re-Armament'. Two of them mentioned Serge's passing.

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Andrew Stallybrass, 15th August 1988