

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Monday, 7th August 1989

Dear Friends,

Alas, no weather report this week. Your usual cloud watcher, Andrew, has headed off to the mountains with 13 teenagers for this year's mountain camp. Fortunately he left a few notes to give his deputy a head start....

The caravanserai of Caux creaks and bulges at the seams. The July bed-night total is already well up on last year - by nearly 500 (check with Jean Fiaux). The average housecount for the past seven days has been 473, and we reached 536 on Saturday night for the start of the African, Asian and Pacific session. During the last few days the turnover of people has been such that the valiant housekeepers have sometimes almost been waiting outside the rooms of departing guests to clean them for same-day arrivals.

Many Mediterranean friends have been leaving. A Greek Cypriot, encouraged by his wife waiting in the car, delayed his departure by half an hour to seek out a Turkish Cypriot who had felt hurt by something he had said, and talk it out. Meanwhile most of the Lebanese have stayed on, meeting daily among themselves as well as taking a full part in the whole conference.

42 Poles have been here, in two groups. 38 of them were invited by Wiesek and Marzena Kecik, leaders in Rural Solidarity. Three priests have come, one sent by his Bishop. Also academics, students, farmers, engineers and a film director. On their arrival, a Polish woman who is spending the whole summer here marched them all off to Kath Moir's 'work table' to sign up for the practical work. One of them later confessed that he was peeling potatoes for the first time in his life.

'We have seen here signs of God's love for us,' one of them said, adding, 'We need to change, and deeply. We must give our lives to God, and commit ourselves to His plan.' Another remarked, 'Here in Caux one finds the truth about oneself.' After the Polish premiere of 'For the love of tomorrow', a Polish priest commented, 'As a priest, I agree with it entirely, but some of the people find it a bit difficult.'

Indeed, change and reconciliation can never come cheaply. We think and pray for our friends in Paris at work behind the scenes of the international conference on Cambodia. We marvel at the way they have already been used to bring together representatives of the different parties to the conflict and the conference, and the way that one man, Daniel Dommel, who has put the aim of service before success in his career, has been able to play a key part.

A little more about the Dialogue on the Preservation of Creation last weekend. It allowed a deep exchange of views and convictions between people who would normally never meet - scientists, theologians, politicians, industrialists, journalists, young people. For instance Professor Weisskopf, a theoretical physicist from the team around Einstein and Bohr, had profound discussions not only with his old friend Cardinal Koenig, but also a group of young researchers from France, Germany and Holland. The spokesman for ecological affairs of the government party in the Bundestag in Bonn, Dr Laufs, expressed the desire to participate in the next Development Dialogue in Panchgani at the end of this year; this was after talks with Alan Porteous and Mohan Bhagwandas, and seeing their fine slide presentation of the remarkable reforestation programme at Asia Plateau.

One of the most lively exchanges of the Dialogue took place in the garden of the Cistercian convent in Romont, half way to Berne. The Mother Abbess of the Convent, a graduate of nuclear science and one of the Dialogue's most active participants, invited the whole group to take part in the afternoon prayers.

On Monday, we celebrated 10 years of 'Poor Man, Rich Man', and honoured Michel Orphelin's role as St Francis of Assisi. To gales of laughter, Peter Riddell recalled the hiring of a piano which, when tested, made some strange sounds. Opening it up to find several broken strings, he was asked, 'But are you sure that you need those notes?' Hugh Williams recounted a conversation overheard between the technicians after the arduous video recording of the play. They'd been amazed that such a great artist showed so little 'temperament'. 'His ego is elsewhere,' one of them explained.

We have also spent an evening with many friends looking to the future of Caux, an evening enlivened by the presence of some young people who have asked to be included more fully on the needs. We are now seeking to put on paper some of the ways others could help, in a clear and simple manner.

August 1st, Swiss National Day, dawned cloudy and wet, but the children in the kindergarten prayed that the weather would clear, and it did. The Swiss, as usual, started the day earlier, and woke us up with a brass band!

This past week has been a continuation of the 'Care for Creation' theme, with young people taking the leadership. 'My motive for wanting to care for creation,' said Philippe Odier, a French physicist, in the opening session, 'is a sense of wonder and marvel at what God has made.' Discussion and decision quickly got down to practical ways in which ordinary people can take responsibility for their own and the global environment - waste disposal, use of energy, etc. But we gave greater emphasis to the framework of faith and the moral values which are needed if the fight to preserve our creation is to be sustained at a deep enough level. We talked about the answer to materialism; 'freedom from acquisitiveness enables us to appreciate God's creation,' one young person shared. We had daily sessions before breakfast on inner freedom - the 'freedom from...' which gives the 'freedom to...'

Afterwards, one young German said that she had come intending to help others with the session but had been expected to take total responsibility. 'I never thought I could lead a meeting. I've really enjoyed it all.' Indeed the week was a welcome reminder that people (whatever their age) grow most in spirit and commitment when expected - and trusted - to be fully responsible.

The Asia/Africa/Pacific session started with a bang on Saturday, as the great hall - packed to overflowing - resounded to the clapping for each of the 22 countries of the region represented. Notable is a large group from Korea, and 11 Burmese. A community entertainment evening, followed last night by an evening of Indian classical dancing, helped everyone to feel at home. At yesterday's plenary session on the subject, 'What values make democracy work?', one of the speakers was a representative of the Swiss Foreign Ministry in Berne.

So much more to tell but so little space. Rudyard Kipling's injunction to 'fill the unforgiving minute with 60 seconds worth of distance run' is well and truly followed here! Sometimes the myriad of subjects, countries and people is bewildering. One's heart is wonderfully stretched. Above all there is such a sense of God's gifts - usually unexpected and always unearned. It is truly such a privilege to be part of all that occurs here.

Next week Andrew will be back... Until then, and beyond, I am

Yours truly,

Edward Peters