

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Monday, 17th August 1992

Dear friends,

I fortify myself with a strong sweet black coffee from the new third floor vending machine. As I got up, a full moon was bathing the landscape in its pale light, and the signal lamps of the little ports around the lake were flashing peacefully. There's a crisp, first touch of autumn in the air. This morning we have the final meeting of the 'Regions in crisis and recovery' session, and there's a brief lull before the industrial session.

This week could have been the patchwork that didn't work - so many different elements that didn't fit together, so many groups that have nothing in common but their suffering. At the opening meeting, last Tuesday, a Croatian university lecturer spoke of the terrible destruction and killing 'just nine hours away by car from here'. 'But there's nothing special about the suffering of my country,' she went on. She told how her husband had left her, and that this personal suffering left her full of bitterness and without hope. 'I felt that I was the only person suffering in the world; I blamed everyone else for the pain I felt.' An experience of God had given new hope and the great gift of friends. Caux had helped her to see the suffering of others, and she had written a letter of apology to her ex-husband, asking his forgiveness for her hate. 'I had not taken your sufferings as seriously as my own,' she concluded. Then she quoted, 'Those who have suffered the most may have the most to give.'

There was a song for all the continents from a multi-national chorus. A Lebanese Christian rushed up to translate into Arabic for a group of Palestinians. A young Cambodian from Paris told how she had found hope for the first time in Caux last year; she longed for others to repeat her experience this year. 'This is not a conference about results,' said Luis Puig, from Brazil, 'rather it is about equipping us, giving us the skills and the tools.' One of the organizers of the Russian seminar I talked of last week said, 'It is easy to criticize, but it is terribly hard to break with a difficult past. We talked about repentance of the Russian people for the evil that they have contributed to.' They had talked about the need to ask for forgiveness from their neighbours, for example from the Baltic states. 'Much in our country depends on the quality of that dialogue with our neighbours.'

A group from the prestigious Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington reported on a study of 'Religion - the missing dimension of statecraft' by a multi-disciplinary team of 14 - theologians, military strategists, psychologists, sociologists and political scientists - 11 of whom were attending the conference. Two of the eight case studies cited in their work refer to Moral Re-Armament. 'Spiritually motivated people have advanced positive social change on a non-violent basis,' they said. This had gone largely unrecognized in the academic literature of conflict. The Franco-German reconciliation, 'one of the greatest achievements of modern statecraft', could be linked with efforts and initiatives by MRA and this had been backed up by independent academic research.

The second example quoted by them was in Zimbabwe, where MRA had played a part to end 13 years of civil war. MRA's contribution had been the formation of 'a cabinet of conscience of people committed to making a difference', who eventually succeeded in bringing about a face-to-face meeting between the white Prime Minister Ian Smith, and Robert Mugabe, the black guerrilla leader. 'This

meeting had probably helped to forestall a white-led coup which would have resulted in great loss of life,' they said. The effectiveness of religiously inspired peace-makers, they concluded, 'is inversely proportional to their desire to seek public credit and personal advancement'.

Two senior figures from the political life in El Salvador spoke about the peace process that has ended the guerrilla war in their country. Mr Angulo Samayoa, the President of the Parliament, told how he himself had been under fire in his own home, along with his wife and children. He continued, 'Whether in peace or war, our country needed a more credible justice system and a fairer electoral system. We had to fight for a society without privileges.' He concluded, 'We must not forget our past sufferings, but neither must we use them to feed the forces of confrontation. We never want to go back to that past.' Dr Gutierrez Castro, the President of the Supreme Court of Justice, said, 'Our country is now in recovery. The sick man is no longer in a critical state - but we must work so that he does not slip back.'

A North American Indian leader spoke of 'the 500 years since the first coming of a European person to our country'. David Larsen, of the Dakota people in Minnesota, told the meeting on 'The dynamics of reconciliation' that Columbus, one lost man who didn't know where he was, had "discovered" a living people of some 15 million souls. He went on, 'Where were they? At home. It is hard to discover someone who is in their own home.' Larsen presented a video film of a reconciliation ceremony which sought to be part of a process of healing these 500 years. A white American later explained about the ceremonial scarf he was wearing that was part of the symbolism of wiping away the anger and tears, and carrying the burdens of others. He suggested that others might take on the burden for a while before passing it on further.

There are many miracles here, but it's still not possible to be in several places at once - at least I haven't discovered how to do it. But there have been simultaneous seminars on South East Asia (Cambodia, Laos and Burma), the Horn of Africa and Eritrea, the Middle East with Palestine and Lebanon, El Salvador, all areas where new pages of history are being written. An excited first-night audience gave an enthusiastic welcome to the world premiere of a new play on Abraham Lincoln by Hugh Steadman Williams, 'Old Abe'. With a cast of just two professional actors, and a text almost entirely made up of Lincoln's own words, it gives an amazing amalgam of humour and depth, and insight into the strength of character needed to make the ideas of democracy work.

We've also been taking some time together to think for next summer: what is happening in the world, where will events be by then? Where is God's spirit at work, within MRA and without? Caux is the largest MRA campaign-action every year, the largest investment of time, manpower and money. We need enough thought, the input of enough people, to get it right. Any ideas will be gratefully received. So far, it looks as though next summer may have fewer geographical or sectoral sessions, and some more general themes (for example, such as 'Inner freedom', 'Leadership and responsibility - the moral and spiritual dimension', 'Listening silence in a busy, stress-filled world'). Perhaps I can also ask for your prayers for those who seek what God is calling them to, and those who seek clarity on the next steps of a calling already accepted and undertaken. I cherish the times of prayer or worship we can have in the two chapels in Caux. The Protestant chapel is full of angels, and I love the big window there of Jacob's ladder, 'a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it' (Genesis 28,12). So many have gone ahead, or are preparing to leave us, and yet we are all part of one great host through time and space.

Golden autumnal greetings,

Andrew Stallybrass