

# REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

## Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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Monday, 14th August, 1995

Dear friends,

The still darkened sky reminds me that autumn is on its way, as does the first touch of autumn colours to the trees. So too does the title of this document on my word-processor: Cauxlet6. The 6th letter already? But yes. It looks like being a nice day though, after several cooler wetter days, including some torrential downpours that have all but blocked some paths round Caux with mudslides and rock-falls. Our picnic yesterday gave us more of a close up view of clouds than grand vistas of mountains, but was a very welcome break for all of that.

The 'cities session' closed on Friday. Now we're on the verge of the last lap, for those who've been here all summer, and a stretching once round the track for the team who have been preparing the 'Regions in crisis, regions in recovery - learning from one another' session. They have been hard at work over the last few days and this morning we start. The house has been filling up - we should be 448 tonight, with an even wider range of variety, though that seems scarcely possible. Last night I heard a strange language on the stairs, and was in the process of placing it as coming from somewhere in central Europe, when to my surprise, I discovered that it was from Tanzania.

The 'cities consultation' saw a rich range of experiences shared and exchanged. Two French talked of the four years of opposition to their plan for a home for mentally handicapped from the people of the area they had chosen, the fears of difference and of a drop in property values, the many meetings with individuals that had just allowed the project to move forward with the full support of all the former opponents. The experiences of integration in Mannheim, Germany, were presented by the civil servant responsible. An Imam from Britain told of his refusal to let outside influences divide the Muslim community in his city. A black Britisher described his 'chance encounter' with MRA some years ago as 'a life-changing experience'; a session like this one in Caux 'renewed and restored' one. The core group of those planning these sessions met in conclave to look ahead at future plans: there'll be a day in Caux on the 'hope in the cities' theme next summer, in the framework of an 'agenda for reconciliation' - so many of the problems of the world now meet in our cities.

Dialogue between different faiths was vital for the future, said a Roman Catholic priest responsible for relations with Islam for his diocese. Father Christian Delorme, from an area of high immigrant population in Lyon, France, gave last week's 'Caux Anniversary Lecture'. We hope to translate his text and make it more widely available for study and reflection; it is especially valuable for those of us who are Christians, but it was moving to see the warmth with which his words were greeted by those of other faiths - Muslim, Hindu

and Buddhist. A Muslim married to a German Protestant thanked him for his humility.

'We are entering a new period in the history of religion,' said Father Delorme, 'due to the fact that societies that have been up until now homogeneous are finding themselves to be multi-ethnic and multi-faith. In a world where people and cultures find themselves in closer contact with each other than ever before, the dialogue between faiths becomes vital.' For centuries, people of different faiths barely met each other, and the very concept of inter-faith dialogue was unthinkable, he went on, but in recent decades, it had made great strides. 'Major Christian denominations have put aside the spirit of conquest,' he said. But though the dialogue progressed in some areas, there were others where it ran up against 'fundamentalisms which reject all attempts at dialogue as treason'. So-called religious conflicts mostly had their real roots in political and historical tensions, he suggested.

Believers of all the great religious traditions were asking themselves the same existential questions. The different faiths offered different answers to these questions, but the answers could never be rigid, since each human being asks himself or herself these questions, and each generation does so anew. 'We are all pilgrims. The believer knows that he comes from elsewhere, and that he returns to this elsewhere,' he said. Father Delorme stressed that a healthy dialogue depended more on common action and daily contacts, than on a theological debate which could all too easily turn out to be sterile or simply too difficult. The dialogue becomes possible when we are convinced that there are things to say to each other, and things to build together - peace, development, solidarity. Yet the inter-religious dialogue remains a challenge that demands clarity, trust, gentleness and goodwill, prudence, and finally a good dose of patience, Delorme concluded. These lectures seem to be drawing anything up to 40 outside visitors, so it looks as if one of our aims is being well met.

We have had music, mime and dance from a young Czech group, a further performance of 'Skeletons', complete with a borrowed skeleton from Montreux hospital, and the first performance of a new play by Jean-Jacques Odier, 'Tell me that you love me'. Odier's play sensitively explores a young Russian girl's quest for love and security, a young Frenchman's unwillingness to commit himself and explore the unfamiliar world of feelings, and a father's efforts to re-establish communication with his son. The stage crew have had a hard time, with thinning numbers in their team, but no reduction in the evening programmes.

There has been a tense and sometimes difficult dialogue Croats and Serbs. One observer likened it to the enemies of the last war meeting in Caux in 1941, not 1946. There were the beginnings of a real meeting of hearts. May such seeds continue to grow, and may this coming session see the further growth of such delicate shoots of dialogue and understanding, forgiveness and healing.

Grateful greetings from the long-distance runners, and from the sprinters of the 'regions session'.

Andrew Stallybrass