

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

Siège social:
Case postale 4419
CH - 6002 Lucerne
Tél. 041 310 12 61
Fax 041 311 22 14

pour le Réarmement moral

CAUX

Mountain House
rue du Panorama
CH - 1824 Caux
Tél. 021 962 91 11
Fax 021 962 93 55

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Dear Friends,

The task seems equally „bemusing“ to me as it did to John Williams last week, as I am supposed to fit 11 days into these four pages. But it has to be said that the echoes and comments of people one talks to, make this a wonderful job.

John's letter ended in the middle of the session „Life, Faith and Fellowship“, and on the last page of this „double ration package“ I will come back to those days, which for me were not only unusual and incredibly rich but also refreshing for spirit, mind and heart.

But first to the present: Here I am after three days absence during which Christoph and I were able to show our home and some of Switzerland to Suresh and Leena Khatri, our very, very good friends and comrades of so many common adventures in India, Australia, Fiji, Caux and Jamaica. In those days it was often they who were taking us around.

So coming back last night around ten it was fun to discover the house fuller, the average age considerably lower than during the first three periods and the „Caux-Café“ in full swing. I hear from some of the Café hosts that they are thrilled about the many suggestions coming for interesting evening programmes there and the lively exchange between generations which does seem to be working well this year. Some of the many regular senior guests of the place share the appreciative evaluation and as one of them said, „I would not want to miss those truly fascinating talks with young people I have had there, even if they sometimes are uncomfortable and challenging and even if I then go off to bed earlier than some of them“.

This morning after the main session, while I was dealing with visa-matters in the office, one of the communities was meeting outside my office window: I could see them standing up, laughing, gasping, thinking, obviously acting out some concern in life for the others. I recognise a grandmother, a former school inspector, four students, a Lebanese teacher, a computer expert... They listen to each other intently, then the conversation seems to flow. The community leaders have been trained by Melanie Trimble who has come with a colleague from her drama-therapy school to help with communities and to lead drama workshops linked to the themes of the sessions and of each day.

In the morning meeting this colleague told about this, her very first week in Caux (she will be here for four). She described how she had come here after a time in New York as a successful play director, at the „top“ of her career, with lots of people looking up to her, and landed in Caux knowing little of what to expect. She found herself surrounded by so many people, with all their faces and their stories, so that she - the successful one, but really shy underneath - felt scared and momentarily paralysed. Through the days (and a four hour walk) „I discovered details in my life that I had begun to overlook in the rush of success in New York, and I am beginning to feel a difference.“

In the true spirit of the Intergenerational dialogue she was followed by a 81 year old Swiss lady, a retired teacher, who shared about losing her fear of being alone through trusting God after her husband died two years ago. She has learnt to reach out to others and has joined a programme for senior citizens in her town with whom they plan to start an acting programme. So she joined the drama workshop to learn something: „And I have! It is good to get off your chair and to have to make yourself understood - sometimes without words - about what goes on inside. The open spirit of the community, the common enjoyment and the careful listening to one another during these days makes me forget my old-age aches and pains, so a strong and deep trust in God can grow. Then she held out

her hand and one of the 12 young Indians in the house helped her down from the small circular rostrum. It has been placed at an unusual angle in front of the platform with the chairs in a circle to create a greater sense of a „living, laughing, learning community of generations“, as an obviously happy first time visitor described her impressions of this week to me at lunch.

I was listening to this meeting from the recording room in the fifth floor overlooking the meeting hall. Just next door the German interpreter volunteers are hard at work. One of them has come on the first day of the summer conferences and will be here till the last day. She and her colleagues have taken total responsibility for this aspect of the house. They train in the newly arrived colleagues for each session, they liaise with the session organisers, they even come running to ask me if this letter is ready to be translated before I have finished writing it! Another one just met me in the corridor to say good-bye. Asked how the week had been, she says: „It was a week of upheaval.“ I wait as this can mean anything: lots of difficult clients, too much work,... Then she continues: „The first year I came to get training in translating. The second I joined the communities and said, ‘Hey, there might be something in this for me!’ This time I see some very clear steps of change for my life and I am fiercely, yes fiercely, determined to put them into practice.“ Then her face shines as she tells of some more new ideas before getting whisked away for some work.

As we came close to the end of the meeting we were led into a time of reflection on our inner resources. In a most tactful and respectful way we were introduced to some helpful suggestions of exercises - making quite sure that any one who prefers not to join felt free and relaxed to just sit and be quiet. The others were taken on an inner journey which - judging by the eager writing down by most I could observe from my vantage point - seemed to be helpful for many. This was the second quiet time of this morning’s meeting, during the first one Louise Marsh played the piano as we thought about university lecturer Philip Boobbyer’s challenging questions on the theme of the day: „Finding our inner resources“. „What prevents us from being free and seeing what God has in store for our lives?“ „I have learnt to start my quiet times by laying down my burdens before God and asking the Holy Spirit to come in.“ He goes on to suggest that the Holy Spirit reveals areas of self-pity and criticism. It can be a painful process. But it leads to an amazing experience of living in the presence of the Spirit and to become free to really enjoy everything that happens. We can then become free to enjoy anything, talking to difficult people In the spirit that God gives we are then free to discover the things that God wants to create in us.

As I sit here I thank God for all those friends, known and unknown, who have stepped into this funny, wonderful old house, have made it their own for one or several chapters and have taken real and full responsibility: for the sessions of each day - Frédéric Chavanne, Douglas Paine, James Wood, Jacqui Daukes and their band; for the „point fixe“ to start every morning, hosted by Nathalie Chavanne and Peter Jones; for the communities Melanie and Co.; for the „Caux-Café“ Catherine Ruffin and Co., andall the many, many, many others.

As I write, the Variety evening is going on over in the hall, and judging by the shouts and applause it must be another of those showers of talent which we also experienced through many of the workshops offered and through the ideas put into the presentations during these days.

Some will have missed this evening and tomorrow’s closing session „and onwards“... because they had to travel back to work or study. One couple from the Middle East whom we saw off at the train station had told how they had chosen this session because the dialogue with their daughters was getting more and more difficult. When they asked the daughters what they would like from Switzerland, „chocolate?, or ...“ one of them had said, „please bring back some cheerfulness“. On a little message the parents discovered in their suitcase on arrival in Caux the girls had written: „Enjoy yourselves there, relax and come back renewed („et revenez tout neufs“). These days have indeed meant a lot to the parents. She told of overcoming her initial surprise at discovering their young

community leader who took off his shoes at the beginning of the time together. Through the days they both discovered a wonderful friend in the young man and described those community-times as „one of the most meaningful experiences in many visits to Caux“.

As I mentioned to some that I was going to miss the evening programme to write this letter, comments came shooting from all sides:

- „Don't forget the 1st of August, the mini procession in the fog, the rain which forced us into the theatre for the programme, but therefore enabled all of us non French speakers to finally get the whole thing translated including the reading of the pact of 1291 and that speech by the Mayor of Montreux who was so appreciative of Mountain House, „that jewel of Caux“. And all the neighbours and other people from the region who came in as well and stayed to talk afterwards.“

- „You must mention the workshops: the one on ‘Women's voices for peace’, where more came every day, the drama workshop which had such a good mixture of generations, and then that wonderful concert with Joe Carter's story of slavery, of God's forgiveness and of our own.“

„You must mention the flowers: when one goes through inner questioning and emotions, looking at the flowers on the table, the many colours, they radiate a peace that helps me to reflect.“

- „Tell how Trudi Trüssel, who says she is post-mistress for the last time this year, celebrating her 79th Birthday today, looked around the dining-room with an amused smile and said: ‘When I think of this big house, how it does work. Just look at all those people! Then I think of our fears about how it would go on. Well....!’“

- „Do mention that eleven year old Tunisian boy who said: ‘I have taken two decisions: with Dad we will help mother more. I will set the table. And then I want to learn English, this international language, because I want to come back here. Next year I will still be too young to lead a service-shift, but maybe I could be a „petit chef de communauté“ (a small community-leader)’ „

- „And do not forget those mornings on the ‘Quality of listening’, the one about no one being too small to make a difference, the one on responsibility... And there was that fascinating morning where that French horticulturist took us back to the beginning of the century, to Philadelphia and told the story of that young pastor Frank Buchman, how he was touched by the misery and took in young boys of refugee families off the street into a kind of community centre, wanted to give them care and affection and ran into a fight with the administration. His work had become his idol, she said, and his contact with God had got frayed... and then how it all went on, those first steps that lead to this ‘big force for unity that is MRA’, as she called it. You know that story is so very topical for today.“

More and more suggestions came, and finally I just had to say that there are only so many pages, and that I still had that special last part to return to. While I was writing these last lines the sun has set, the orange sky has grown darker and soon the (almost) full moon will be up shining over the lake as it did last night, while a group of the younger energetic ones will climb to the Rochers de Naye for sunrise.

So as we prepare to receive the 565 or so who have announced themselves for the *Agenda for Reconciliation* starting on Sunday night, we do not have to worry so much about where they will all have tea, meals and group-meetings. Some should be able to sit outside as the forecast continues to be rather good for the coming days. (I thought it would be original to end with the weather news for once instead of putting it at the beginning!)

With cheerful summer greetings,

Marianne Spreng

(With apologies for the Swiss inverted commas here and there!)

And now please turn to the next page for the second part of the special week on „Life, Faith and Fellowship“!

So, back to the special week on Life, Faith and Fellowship“ which meant so much to the 280 or so who attended it. In his letter of July 27th, John Williams described the first days with the Jesuit Father Ramsperger who helped us to discover „The joy of a new start“ and the experience of the pilgrimage-trip to St. Maurice.

Then the morning with Dr. Omnia Marzouk on „Lessons of Sufism“, in which she shared her own spiritual journey, gave a fascinating, albeit very succinct introduction to the Sufi tradition in Islam. She then read a series of Sufi poems on finding God, on aspects of the path of faith, on pain and on hope.

Our teacher for the final two days was Ajahn Sumedho, Abbot of a Buddhist monastery in England. His two sessions on community life and on responsibility while letting go produced ripples of laughter and recognition as well as long moments of silence filled with discoveries for many of us. He mentioned gratitude and contentment as main ingredients for community living. “It is like a rock polishing machine“, he said. „You throw in grey, dull, odd shaped and coarse pebbles. The machine goes round and round and stirs everything up and all the pebbles rub against each other. Eventually they come out with shiny surfaces and are sometimes very beautiful with beautiful colours because the exterior has been worn away,“ he concluded.

„In meditation (your quiet time)“, he explained, „one of the main insights that we get, is through letting go of everything. The idea of letting go is the ability we have, when we see the suffering that we create in our lives through grasping everything, through being attached to our ideas, to our thoughts, to our emotions, to the way we look.....

...what remains at the end of the day, when you’ve let go of everything and there is no attachment, is purity. Absolute purity, like in MRA. We can say that the pure nature of all of us is absolute purity, when the impurities of attachment no longer delude us.

...the ability to let go comes when we see that suffering in our lives is created through grasping...“

There would be so much more I would love to quote - from Ajahn Sumedho and from the Sufi poetry - too much to pack into one page, enough to say that all our spiritual perceptions have been stretched and deepened.

After the thoughts given by the speakers, we tried to embrace silence together. Easier said than done with almost 300 others! A precious half hour after the teaching, and when the creaking of the floor and the whispers ceased, we found a contemporary union that occurs when people open their hearts to listening and reflecting together.

Each of these mornings has given us ample „spiritual food“ to digest over weeks, months, possibly longer. In the community times which followed the silence there was so much to say about what we heard, so much to share that in our group for example, lunch kept coming around too soon. The chance to open up, in full confidentiality and respect, sometimes helped by questions given to us by the morning speakers was used to the full and seemed to „unblock“ things as well as indicate new directions.

The echoes in the evaluation time and since then would fill many, many pages. Here are just a few:
„The Sufi prayers Mona read created an ambience where one could just be or bask in the loving presence of God, - by being pure and humble.“

A miracle of God happens when a preparedness meets an opportunity. I think that happened as we centred our lives around God and listened to our three presenters from the Christian, Muslim and Buddhist religions.“

„The similarity we discovered brings about acceptance of the other’s faith and solidifies a personal relationship. The differences we discovered give understanding of individuals of each faith and should bring respect.“

„Ajahn Sumedho’s second talk on „letting go“ reminded us of Frank Buchman’s suggestion to some of his over-active companions: „Let go, let God.“

„Several unresolved things from the past came up, were faced and put to rest, as well as new insights into the need to grow on a specific point.“

„The week has given me, at 22, a totally new understanding of what MRA is. I wish many more younger people, also professionals could have been here. We must have them if we do this again!“

Marianne Spreng helped by some of Jean Brown’s notes.

A fuller report with a digest of the contributions of the three speakers and echoes from those who attended is being prepared by Alan Channer and will be sent to all readers of these (almost!) weekly Caux-letters.