

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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pour le Réarmement moral

CAUX

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Monday, 24th August 1998

Dear friends,

The sky is still dark, but the morning star is shining brightly to encourage me on this last step of the summer - the final Monday letter of 1998. The start of autumn is with us, with cooler weather, and those amazingly clear skies after rain that this, my favourite season, brings. And already many farewells crowd in, the house is very fast emptying as the changeover to the hotel school gets underway - until we return for the winter session. The dates and the theme are already announced, and the invitation will be available shortly (26th December 1998 - 2nd January 1999), and you can already send in your application form via the World Wide Web. The numbers have been lower than the "Agenda for Reconciliation" to the relief of all, but the "conversation" on "Aims and Values for the next century" brought its own amazing variety of life and search and creativity and depth, and the summer has closed with a modest bang. Of course, I may be a little less than objective, since I have been part of the team planning and carrying this session. I've long felt that the summer where I'm not fully involved in one session is a poorer summer for me. So I've enjoyed this stretching week!

We've heard from the Swiss psychiatrist and balloonist who is preparing his third attempt to drift round the world on the air currents in a vast balloon. He and his teammates got as far as Burma, and are planning a new attempt for the coming winter. In slides, words and music, he showed us that "adventure can be a way of life for all of us", and talks of the "wind of trust and awareness" that all of us can find in our daily adventures of living. Grigoriy Pomerants, Russian philosopher and his poet wife have been a source of inspiration and wisdom for many - not least for the considerable number of Russian speakers, from the former Soviet Union. My community group included a young woman nuclear scientist who has founded a centre for young mothers and their children in St. Petersburg, and a psychiatrist from Irkutsk, who had some difficulty in persuading us that he was indeed old enough to be a grandfather. A visiting German doctor had encouraged him to visit Caux. He presented us a book on the beauties of Lake Baikal, and I was moved to discover that he had been born on the borders of Mongolia near where my great-great-great-grandfather had been a missionary, and had translated the Bible into Buryat.

A Chinese-American scientist, an Italian anti-corruption fighter, a German woman judge, dealing with sexual offenders, a Swiss church minister specialist in interreligious relations, the Jordanian educationalist, the Portuguese economist, the elderly Jewish professor, the Latvian investigative journalist, two young Palestinian men from Gaza, an ambassador, head of the human rights section of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs... so many interesting speakers. But all in the framework of a conversation rather than a series of lectures. So an amazing discipline on the part of our speakers (sometimes aided by cards saying "two more minutes", "thirty seconds"!), and a great freedom for many to pose questions, make comments, times of turning to our neighbours for a short exchange. There has been the experiment - a success, I think - of trying to carry on a conversation with over two hundred people. And as Pierre Spoerri said in the closing meeting yesterday, there was the experiment within the experiment: 15 people, from 8 countries, 3 generations and 4 traditions, who had only "met" by electronic mail to prepare before coming to Caux, trying to carry it all. We could only scratch the surface of our three themes, but we must continue: the spiritual dimension to the fight against corruption and injustice; combating pollution of the spirit and of the environment; and the great faiths' part in building the multi-ethnic, multi-religious community of tomorrow.

As the sky lightens, it is clouding over again - it looks like more rain to come, but the farmers won't complain. I recall Fulvia Spoerri's image about us trampling the grapes together - the harvest is not far off - for a rich vintage. At the end of the balloonist's talk, which drew in many neighbours and friends from the region, I met a wine-maker, who expressed hopes that it would indeed be a good vintage, but

was looking for more rain. There have been the non-verbal elements, the music, the symbols, the images that rest in my mind, even as I start to forget many of the words - the clouds behind the artists, as we listened to the Moldovan string quartet playing in the bay window. Four talented young women, part of a group that have driven all the way from their little known country between Russia and Romania. They play under the eye of Frank Buchman's bust as angry clouds hide the Grammont (the mountain across the end of the lake) as the evening light fades, and in rapt silence we listen to two works that Aureliu Lupan, one of the group has composed. They perform the world première of a work called "Hiroshima" that he has written specially for this visit, and inspired by his concern over the nuclear arms race in Asia. My fears of modern music dissolve - and I find myself one of several humming the haunting melody evoking Japan. And there has been another classical concert, offered by friends of the house, and a final evening of African-American music with the magic of Joe Carter.

We owe a great deal to two young American drama professionals, who have trained community "facilitators" (*not* "leaders"), and have helped us to add fresh elements to the meetings. We started on the first day with the "core team" miming "an inter-active mechanism", and then a graffiti board encouraged all to write up their ideas of what values are needed for the new century to come. And these non-verbal elements have been an important opening of minds and bodies for the conversation, in communities and in all the main plenaries. At the close of the final plenary of the session and the summer, we all lit candles, passing on the flame from one to another, and placed our candles on the board with all our words, in the bay window, which multiplied the candles' light again and again in the reflections.

I recall the small figure of Pomerants, the Russian philosopher, on the platform, almost hidden behind a silver tray with teapot and jugs and cosy. A current passing, between him and his audience, beyond the concentrated thought in Russian coming through translation to most of us. Speaking of his country, he says, "The carrots grow, but the weeds grow faster." He is 81, and expresses regret that he is not going to get another 20 years to carry further the struggles that he believes in - a moving challenge to all those younger than 61! I discover that he communicates with a British Indian on the vegetable team in Sanskrit! An Algerian, with close links with Islamist elements brings some Kosovar friends for the day.

Two young Palestinians from Gaza take us into the sufferings of their people, and into their history. "We don't want to be victims of our past, but to build a better future," says one of them. A Lebanese judge pleads for a self-examination and self-criticism of cultures and civilisations. "We must teach our children to see God's light in each person," says a young Russian, and Leena Khatri teaching us different national greetings explains that the Indian "namaste" means "I greet the divine within you". Another day has a Hungarian greeting, meaning "It is God who has brought you", and a New Zealand Maori pressing of noses to exchange breath, in order to see if we are really friends. Two ladies from Pittsburgh in the US talk about their work for racial reconciliation, and using the techniques of Alcoholics Anonymous to help individuals deal with the many addictions of our culture. We greet the first tooth of Anne-Katherine, at 7 months, the youngest member of our community. An evening in the Caux café: Russians, Moldovans, Poles, Latvians are all singing in Russian, along with Africans, Lebanese, Brazilians, Americans... A final church service, to give thanks for all that has been given by God through these busy days and weeks, to pray for safe travel for all those leaving, and a chance to renew our commitment to our creator.

Trudi Trüssel is thanked at the final meeting for her 32 years of service at the internal post office which come to an end this morning. After an interview where she describes her early years in the Caux kitchen (feeding the hedgehogs saucers of milk so that they'll come and eat the mice!) she gets a standing ovation and a long line of 30 young and old coming up from the audience each give her one rose, making up a big bouquet, and express a word or a phrase of thanks. And our grateful thanks go to all those who have made this summer possible, in more ways than it is possible to count. Now I just have to shut down my office, pack up my computer, put my files into boxes, and head back to my wife, my home in Geneva, and our cat, Calvin.

A very weary and thankful farewell, until we meet again,

Andrew Stallybrass

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21th August 1998 Caux, Switzerland

Press release

THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Corruption is not an inevitable or a necessary evil, said the President of the Italian section of Transparency International, the Berlin-based non-governmental organisation active in the battle against corruption, today. The spiritual dimension to the fight against corruption was the theme of a day during "a conversation" on "Aims and Values for the next Century" at the international conference centre for Moral Re-Armament in Caux, Switzerland.

"The enormous costs of corruption are a source of terrible injustice," said Maria Teresa Brassiolo. It was very hard to judge whether corruption is more widespread today or not, she went on, but there was certainly a far greater awareness of the problem, due in part to the work of her organisation internationally. "It is not an inevitable evil. Each one of us can do something," she said. She and her husband had been moved to anger by the corruption in Italy, and had decided to set up a section of Transparency International - and had found that many doors opened for them, and that they had received much encouragement and support. There were now sections of the organisation in 60 countries. In Italy, they were giving seminars in schools, participating in the in-service training of teachers, being consulted by parliament on the formulation of new anti-corruption laws, and the media were turning to them as a source for information.

Inese Voika, an investigative journalist from Riga in Latvia announced that she was part of a group that was launching another national section of Transparency International next week. In the former communist countries, people still had a relationship of fear towards authority. Under communism, an ethic of "do not denounce" had grown up, but this had been translated into "do not denounce the person who steals from the state since he is resisting injustice". "Systems change quicker than people," she said, "but there are no completely corrupt governments and no completely incorrupt people". As an investigative journalist, often seeking to uncover corruption, her aim was "to create an informed discussion, and not to hide in the bushes and catch a politician coming out of his mistresses' house".

Professor Xavier Pintado, an economist, and the Vice-Rector of the Catholic University in Lisbon, Portugal, said "Corruption reduces the economic performance of countries, making the poor countries poorer." He quoted a Latin saying that the greater the number of laws, the greater the corruption - and it was said that there were 100,000 laws in Italy. The perception of economist had changed, he said, from regarding corruption as just another form of tax to a major brake on development. There was a clear link between development and the fight against corruption. He called for the creation of "islands of integrity". Justice Margrit Maria Weber, a judge from Bonn, Germany, presented the latest changes in her country's laws to combat corruption. "Money has become the new God of our society," she said, "and every person has a part to play in this struggle."

On Sunday, the six weeks of conferences on the overall theme of "Changing the Ways of the World" come to a close.

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22nd August 1998 Caux, Switzerland

Press release

HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE CENTRE OF 21ST CENTURY'S VALUES

"As the 20th Century has been a century of wars, genocide, massacres and the most terrible destruction, the 21st Century must be a century of Human Rights," said Ambassador Urs Ziswiler, head of the human rights division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, last night. "The 21st Century must be humanist or it will not be," he went on. The century just ending revealed "tragic examples of the triumph of barbarism", but the human rights movement was not just an important development for humanity, it also marked the emergence of a universal moral reference for the century to come."

The world conference on human rights that had taken place in Vienna in 1993 had underlined that human rights were "universal, indivisible and interdependent". But this universality was threatened by "cultural relativism" Ziswiler said. He went on, "Some voices, especially in Asia, were denying the universality of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, saying that they were a product of the West, applied artificially to other cultures, sometimes at their cost." But the ambassador insisted that there are core values which spring from the common longings of all religions, all cultures, and all peoples. "Universal does not mean uniform," he said. These core values include the banning of torture, modern forms of slavery, genocide, summary executions, and kidnappings.

Ziswiler expressed concern at the erosion of the authority of the state in the face of rival parallel poles of power, where multinational companies sometimes exerted more real influence in the lives of individuals than the State. He spoke of the ethical dimension of economic activity, and noted the "Caux Round Table Principles" adopted in 1994 under the title "Ethical Principals for Business". He also spoke of the modern problem of trying to apply human rights in states that are disintegrating, such as Liberia and Somalia, as well as the problems posed by mercenaries and the activities of private security firms.

Ambassador Ziswiler was speaking during "a conversation" on "Aims and Values for the next Century" at the international conference centre for Moral Re-Armament in Caux, Switzerland. On Sunday, the six weeks of conferences on the overall theme of "Changing the Ways of the World" come to a close.

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