

# Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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**pour le Réarmement moral**

# CAUX

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Dear friends,

Once again it is Monday morning. As I sit and type this letter from the familiar environs of the third floor offices corridor, dawn is rapidly breaking and a beautiful, sunny day is in prospect. If I am completely honest, during my stay in Caux I have rarely had the discipline to be awake at this time, but looking out over Lake Geneva and over on to the mountains, I know now what I have been missing! I'm sure that you will have realised, after this last comment, that this is definitely NOT Andrew Stallybrass writing! As always, coming to Caux has meant meeting many old friends and making new ones. It is always a real challenge to balance the profound late night conversations with the demands of the wider conference programme and the various lines of work which we all pursue during the day.

As Andrew said in his last letter, I originally came to Caux to work on the press team during the Caux Conference for Business and Industry. Time flies, however, and only a week later an entirely new conference has already been and gone and yet another one has begun in earnest. A time of 'Life-Faith-Fellowship' took place from Monday to Wednesday, in which a wide cross section of the world-wide MRA fellowship had an opportunity to meet together for a period of meditation on our spiritual lives. On the opening evening, a Buddhist couple spoke very movingly about faith in family and working life, and we had excellent speakers from the three Abrahamic faiths who gave a talk each morning, after which there was a time of reflection and an opportunity for sharing in smaller groups. I was a co-facilitator of one such group, and my pride suffered a considerable blow when only three people signed up for it, and an even worse one when only one person turned up! Even within groups of two and three, however, there was much open and intimate fellowship between us, which I valued very much and will carry with me when I return to England on Friday.

The keynote talks of the three days were given by Sœur Françoise from the Sisters of the Grandchamp community in Switzerland, Professor Fathi Osman, a Resident Scholar at the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World in Los Angeles, and Rabbi Julian Jacobs from Britain, now retired in Israel. Rabbi Jacobs, who was responsible for the inter-faith portfolio on the Chief Rabbi's Cabinet, was instrumental in bringing the Chief Rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth, Dr Jonathan Sacks, to Caux in 1996. All three gave meditations on the inter-related themes of 'Life, Faith and Fellowship', both within their own faith traditions and also how this related to those who belonged to a different tradition. I was particularly moved by Sœur Françoise's talk, which included the story of Moses, a story that occurs in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. When Moses approaches the burning bush, he is commanded by God to take off his sandals, for he walks on holy ground. It is a great challenge to all of us to 'take off our sandals' when we come across those who are different to us, as they too are God's holy creations.

As always we have been blessed with a very large and varied collection of people throughout the last week, with various groups bringing their own unique contribution to the life of the house. The Latin American cast of *Gente que Avanza* have, merely by their natural presence and *joie de vivre* around the house, made the spirit of Caux their own, and continue to pass on this spirit to all around them. Among many more little groups I could mention are the young team from Britain, Switzerland and Moldova taking on the service shifts, the night watch team, including my Brazilian room mate who I rarely see out of bed (and vice-versa), and the sound crew and stage crew, who constantly ensure that the house works and is put together the right way! One afternoon we had a visit from a 94-year-old lady from Lausanne, who was born here in Caux when her father was the then Deputy-Manager of Caux Palace.

Friday evening saw the start of the International Cities Consultation, and once again the house is full, with hundreds of people from all over the world, including delegations from Richmond, Portland and Ohio in the United States, the mining town of Middleburg in South Africa, including the mayor, and Ramle in Israel. These groups have already given very moving examples of 'Honest Conversations and New Partnerships' in their own highly sensitive local environments. For someone who has come to Caux on numerous occasions, it is refreshing to see so many new faces in this conference, each with a story to tell and also the deep desire to listen to others.

As well as the overall topic of "Partners on the Road to Reconciliation and Justice: Sustaining the Builders of Community", there are also workshops which deal with more regional concerns, such as race relations in the USA and South Africa, the challenges facing the various Latin American countries, and Europe and its Muslim communities. I have joined the last of these three, as during my studies in Arabic and Middle Eastern history at the University of London I have made many Muslim friends who have felt discriminated against in the media, in the job market, in school and so on.

On the afternoon of the first full day of the conference, a Caux lecture entitled 'A Wisdom beyond our own?' was delivered by the Reverend Canon Nicholas Frayling, Rector of Liverpool in the UK. The Canon is deeply involved in the fragile peace process in Northern Ireland, and warned that "decommissioning of arms will not secure peace without the decommissioning of hearts, minds and attitudes," despite profound efforts to fashion a political solution. He stressed that a true solution to this and countless other crises around the world depends on people remembering the past and, where necessary, repenting for it, rather than the old cliché of 'forgive and forget', which, he claimed, goes against the grain of human psychology. Canon Frayling also delivered a sermon in the Anglican Church yesterday morning, and took time out to have lunch with a group of more than 30 young people.

Aside from the more serious side of things, we have been very blessed over the last week in terms of the arts, with much entertainment from *Gente que Avanza* and our now almost resident pianist Victor Ryabchikov, as well as some very vigorous Scottish dancing. The most memorable occasion for me, however, was the performance on Saturday evening of 'Return Trip', written by Alan Thornhill and Hugh Steadman-Williams, by the Totley Operatic Amateur Dramatic Society (or TOADS). The play tells of the experiences of a rehabilitated drug-addict on his 'return trip' back to 'normal' life with his family and friends. Although the play deals with very serious issues, it is told in a very witty and moving way, and was excellently played by T.O.A.D.S. Alan Thornhill's daughter, Susan Corcoran, was present at the play, and her three sons worked with the stage crew to construct the set.

As I started this letter with meditations on the weather, so I must conclude with it (how typically British!), as unlike last year, we have been able to hold the Swiss National Day celebrations in the open air of *les Haut de Caux*, rather than in the decidedly non-bonfire-friendly Main Hall! Even though our own celebrations were slightly smaller this year, losing out no doubt to the *Fête des Vignerons*, a large wine festival in Vevey which only occurs once every 25 years, we had a very cosmopolitan programme. This included jazz from a Canadian, South African and American trio, a pan-African song, an American singing group, and many Latin American songs and dancing, as well as the traditional celebratory Swiss songs. In many ways it was very symbolic of the global fellowship we are enjoying here, that is an atmosphere of sharing with many nations giving wonderful contributions, all within a very Swiss setting.

With warm regards,

John Everington.