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CAUX

Caux, 16.08.99

Dear friends,

The sky is still dark, but lightening as I write: the season is moving on. Autumn is upon us. The first leaves are yellowing, are falling, and there is that freshness to the air. But where has summer gone? Can it already be a week since my last letter? How time gallops. It is raining, again, and it seems that we've not been able to have tea outside for several days. The weather has been constantly changing. We are already into the last straight, the last week ('A conversation in Aims and Values for the 21st century') - one more letter to go this year, this century!

I so often think of Sunday as the end of the week, not the start, and my letter is of necessity a report of the week gone by. But yesterday brought the sense of beginnings, of a fresh start, with an international communion service for some of us, with American and Korean accents. Then friends came up from Geneva for the final meeting of the 'Agenda for Reconciliation' and for lunch, a first visit. A great joy - I invite many friends, but not many make it up the hill. And then you listen to a meeting rather differently when sitting with friends. A final, summary meeting may not be easy for them to enter into - there will be references to a week that they've not experienced. But they were deeply stirred, and so was I. All this week, there has been an intensity of emotion, a depth. And we ended the day last night with another superb classical concert by a young brother and sister, the peace and repose of 'not-words'.

A real frustration this week has been the number of options, the programmes running in parallel, the difficult choices. I still haven't learnt how to be in more than one place at a time. So this view is even more than usually incomplete and partial, reflecting my tastes and choices. For instance, I missed the final presentation of the Caux Scholars, at the close of the Caux Scholars Program, because I chose to go and listen to a brilliant presentation on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission through political cartoons by Wilhelm Verwoerd - a difficult choice indeed. Those of you who are starting to be familiar with the World Wide Web and the Internet will have learnt to check the Caux Web page for the latest news - press releases go up there usually within minutes of their being sent, and this week has seen a steady flow. You can find more of the details there (and on the South African TRC, visit www.truth.org.za). I had an amusing conversation with two of the young German translators, who were trying to translate one of my releases into their language, and were surprised to find the language so dry - not a single adjective. I explained to them that I'd been trained by Michael Henderson, who in turn had been trained by Peter Howard. That my personal impressions and feelings have no place in a release, but that in my weekly I can let myself go, and include as many adjectives as I like!

Often, most often, press releases wing their way into a silent limbo, but the first of the week, on what Sir Douglas Graham, the New Zealand cabinet minister responsible for negotiations with the Maoris, said landed with a bang in New Zealand, friends there tell us. It is not often that governments apologise, and make such determined efforts to right past wrongs. 'Those who have suffered may have the most to give' was the theme of one meeting, and is one truth that has run through the week. But I was tempted to add 'those who travel farthest may have the most to give!' Then we have also heard much from the big neighbour, Australia, about their efforts at repairing the wrongs done to the Aborigines. We heard from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians how their government has so far refused to make an apology, but a grassroots people's

initiative has touched hundreds of thousands of Australians, has set the national agenda, and has done much to set in motion a process of healing. 'From Victim to Healer' was the theme of one particularly powerful meeting.

Another highlight of the week - and indeed of the summer - has been the contributions from South Africa. Sam Pono has contributed as an elder of the tribe and on his saxophone. And as Professor Jannie Malan spoke with such conviction, depth and simplicity at the closing session yesterday, I was deeply moved to reflect on the contribution to this summer in Caux on the Afrikaner people. Pieter Horn and Wilma Maritz have been here all summer, carrying the theatre/technical department and the secretariat. Earlier in the summer, there was also a fair part of Pieter's family. And this week started with a public Caux Lecture from two outstanding young Afrikaners, Melanie Verwoerd, the youngest member of the South African Parliament, representing the African National Congress, and her husband Wilhelm, a lecturer at Stellenbosch, and a brilliant teacher and presenter on the South African experience of trying to deal with the past.

A Politicians Round Table has been meeting for the third consecutive year, with 34 senior personalities from 20 countries, including three well-known and widely respected Swiss and an important group from Oregon (as for the previous Cities session). They were meeting in private, but took a main session to report on their time together (see the Web for their final communiqué). They'd discussed the unmentionable 'c' word, one of them said, not 'cancer' but 'corruption', and planned for Kosovo and the Balkans, and other regions in crisis.

Another session was taken by the 'Creators of Peace - a women's initiative', with simple stories of how children can reveal their parents' real natures, and so help to bring change, and of terrible suffering in the Rwandan genocide, and the tasks of healing. 'Better to be a victim than to be guilty of taking the lives of others,' we heard, from a woman who has organised a group to go into the crowded prisons to offer help to some of the killers. An important group from the Middle East have echoed of the sufferings and the search for peace in that region. Yehezkel Landau, co-director of the Open House centre for healing and reconciliation in Ramle, Israel, concluded, 'True shalom, peace can only come through trust and forgiveness and not through state-of-the-art weaponry.' Those from the Horn of Africa have met and searched for ways to help end the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea - and practical initiatives are now under way.

There's even been time and space for an outing day, with buses taking participants to Bern, and to the Jura, for picnics and to visit a watch factory and a music-box museum. One young friend (6 years old) was going with other children to visit a chocolate factory, and was asked whether he was going to make a pig of himself. With great wisdom he replied, 'No. A little chocolate is a good thing. Too much chocolate is not a good thing.'

We've enjoyed dancing in the front hall, with many different styles, Scottish, Moldovan, Lebanese, Guatemalan and Latin American, Israeli and Jamaican reggae, not forgetting an Australian action song that had us jumping like kangaroos. A closing variety evening included the children, and brought colourful and humorous contributions from a host of countries. The African American artist Joe Carter has given us another powerful evening of music and message. The Fitzwilliam Quartet introduced a superb concert in the bay window by saying that they'd never played in such a grandiose setting. The music of Shostakovich seemed to reflect some of the pain and turmoil of this century, of so many individuals and peoples at this session - and to offer the hope of a peaceful resolution, of healing and calm. All in all, a vintage year - for the Caux Scholars, for the Politicians Round Table, for the AfR, the Agenda for Reconciliation, for Caux.

Warm regards from a cool, autumnal Mountain House, Andrew Stallybrass