

Caux, Monday, 5th August 2002

Dear friends,

So we're into August, past the Swiss National Day, the 1st. The nights are lengthening – it's still quite dark as I start to write. The *Road to Renewal* conference ended on Saturday morning, and already on Sunday afternoon, we were launching in to 'Peace-building initiatives' of the *Agenda for Reconciliation* week. Yesterday, at the opening, we were all asked by four of the Caux Scholars, who are all this conference, to note down our expectations and hopes, for display on a board, and then to talk with our neighbours. I confess that my first hope was for some nicer weather after all the rain of the last week, and only then thought that I should also wish for refreshing inner weather for us all!

It's even more impossible than usual to summarize a week with days starting at 7.30 with five choices of meditations – an Anglican assistant bishop, a French Dominican, in French, a Buddhist, and walking and musical meditations – and going on until I am with a late night film festival after the superb and varied evening programmes. After breakfast there were impossible choices between nine interactive workshops: drama, creative writing, choral singing, musical theatre, 'the voice behind the mask', communications and film-making, flowers and cards, composition and improvisation in jazz and contemporary music, and a study-visit of the architecture of Mountain House and its contents. Then for the latter part of the morning, a main session in the hall, a journey through artistic renewal and its inner, spiritual springs.

Over lunch each day there was a chance to meet with 6 different artists. Masked players invaded the dining room one day, and babbled in an invented language... Book signings and sculpture demonstrations over tea lead in to 'arts à la carte' with a mind-blowing series of 17 possible choices of offerings, some as a series, some as repeated events, and others as one-off opportunities. Several participants from the Muslim dialogue mentioned in last week's letter stayed on, and there were 'à la carte' contributions on Islamic architecture and music – the latter turning into a 'jam session' of popular Arab music. Their 'Caux Dialogue' was well reported in a two-minute spot just before the 7am news. Russian and Polish film-makers presented their works. Czech senator Jara David Moserova presented the world première of the film based on her play *Letter to Wollongong*, play that has often been put on in the Caux theatre.

A 'youth focus' running through the week brought together some 25 people between 15 and 23 or so, partly with a view to planning for a youth conference in Caux in 2003. At the last of their series of daily themed sessions, British politician Ann Widdecome led a lively discussion with them on apathy and involvement, with a strong challenge to participate in the democratic process.

The Fitzwilliam String Quartet – by now a regular special feature of Caux – as well as giving a classical concert, introduced a BBC film about Shostakovich, and introduced beginners and more experienced listeners to 'new ways of hearing music'. Then in a change of styles, they helped German composer Uwe Steinmetz in his composition based on the poems of German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer for 'jazz ensemble, string quartet and narrator'. A German, deeply stirred, said 'The music – not "easy listening" – expressed the architecture of



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Bonhoeffer's prison and the struggles of his soul.' It was part of a double bill, with American actor Al Staggs' one-man show on the German pastor.

Ahmed Moustafa, the noted Muslim artist, gave the Caux Lecture – see the attached press release – and took us into the vast world of Islamic culture and art. The conference saw the world première of a 1000 cube art installation, which arrived in crates and was assembled in the Great Hall. At the closing session, all the participants carried the cubes back to the scene-dock for packing, for its onward journey to London, a community gesture that deeply moved the artist.

Liverpool sculptor Stephen Broadbent talked of his vision of art as part of a dialogue between the artist and a community, as opposed to 'public art' dropped on the community by municipal authorities. He spoke also of his work to create a triangle of reconciliation, linking Liverpool, Benin in Africa and Richmond in the USA, to heal the terrible wounds of the slave trade, one of the foundations of Liverpool's wealth. 'Speak Truth to Power' a dramatic reading of victims of torture and fighters for human rights was in six languages, including Afrikaans and Zulu – with translation, fortunately for us. A wet Swiss National Day was enlivened with a Gospel choir of 6, who were joined for one number by 25 more conference participants who'd had a morning workshop with them. The traditional procession, instead of heading up to the field at Hauts-de-Caux wound through the garden to a modest fire outside the front door, where conference participants and villagers mixed and enjoyed the traditional buns and chocolate!

At the final meeting, hands shot up as participants were asked if they'd been refreshed, inspired, challenged, encouraged. Someone in the audience shouted, 'Who had fun?' and another forest of hands shot up. All those who had contributed were thanked – and it seemed that half of the hall stood up!

A new day is dawning. The dark clouds are rolling away, and the mountains across the lake and the long sweep of the Jura are coming into view. Perhaps a symbol for this new week starting, with many in the house from regions of conflict. A Seminar on the African Great Lakes region starts today, with 28 participants (and perhaps another 10 still on their way here) from Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, representing governments and armed rebellions. Supported by *Initiatives of Change* in France, this represents a follow-on from last years meeting, and efforts through the year in Africa for further a peace process for an area that has suffered perhaps 3 million dead over the last four years, largely unreported and unseen.

At yesterday's opening meeting, when participants were invited to share their hopes and dreams, a Syrian was the first to speak, followed by a Palestinian, expressing hopes for peace and reconciliation in their part of the world. A Sudanese spoke of the recent outbreak of fighting that was threatening a fragile peace process. Cornelio Sommaruga called for divine blessings on these days, with a greater sense of the need for each one of us to be responsible for the dialogues that can lead to real reconciliation. Michael Henderson gave an inspiring overview of the history of Caux, and the many conflict situations that have been impacted over the last 56 years. Ramez Salame from Lebanon spoke of our need for a change that starts with ourselves. 'The world doesn't change just because we want it to, but because we act,' he said. As Gulliver, in Swift's novel, was held down by a thousand small threads, we are so often held back from taking the steps we know that we should.

Greetings from a now sunny Caux.

Andrew Stallybrass