

# REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

## Centre de Rencontres Internationales

TÉL. 021/9634821  
TÉLÉFAX 021/9635260  
TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE  
RUE DÚ PANORAMA  
CH-1824 CAUX

Monday, 13th July 1992

Dear friends,

We've just reached the end of the first, European, session. It is amazing how much can be packed into such a short time here. So we're now moving into one of the change-overs, with a good many people leaving, and many more arriving. Most of the Croatians and Bosnians left last night. The Polish group from Crackow leave this morning, and we build up towards the cities conference opening on Wednesday night. The Caux Scholars Program is just getting under way, with 23 young people, half from the US, with 3 Russians and all the continents represented. By next week, the Americans may well be the largest group in the house.

The outer weather: we had almost forgotten what mountains looked like, though we have had many interesting varieties of the view from inside a cloud. Nature is, of course, a luxuriant green, but perhaps we can now start the summer? So far, we've only been able to risk one afternoon tea outside.

A week ago, the German Member of the European Parliament and his wife were just leaving. She said that the meal she had had with some Bosnian Muslims was the very first time that she had talked with people of their faith, and that it had given her a new perspective on Islam. As she left, she said, 'I have found here exactly what I have been looking for.' A Brit expressed gratitude for what her husband, the MEP had said. 'He's changed my ideas about Europe,' he commented, 'he gave us a vision, but he also brought it down to the human factor.' A senior German civil servant later remarked, 'Europeans, especially those from crisis areas, need a place where they can meet and talk in depth and at length. If this place didn't exist, it would have to be invented.'

We have seen a Polish video film of their transition to democracy, contrasting the communist news programmes on TV and the reality of the struggle on the streets and in the factories. Another video showed us the divisions between Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic (Uniate) and between Polish and Ukrainian in South-East Poland. Our knowledge of history and geography expands painfully; but history cannot be healed without understanding. There was a lively meeting on personal and national blind spots - one person spoke with a very obvious spot on his chest, and explained that this was not a blind spot because he himself could see it unaided. But he had another spot on his back that he couldn't see; only others could point it out to him.

We had a memorable evening with a Russian family from a village 350 kms to the North of Moscow, a Russian Orthodox priest, his wife, an English teacher,

and their student son. Marxists had always underestimated the power of religion, the priest said, that was the reason for their defeat in Afghanistan. 'In Caux we learn not to point the finger. I repent; I am to blame. My church must repent, and our primary task is to call all our people to repent.' The church hierarchy had deeply compromised with the communist regime, and yet the victory over communism had been a spiritual and not a material victory. Asked to say something about Orthodox spirituality he said, 'You all know the difference between a rose and a lily of the valley, but can you describe the difference of their scents in words?' He was happy to see so many flowers in Caux. Another Orthodox priest, of Romanian extraction from Germany, gave a seminar on Orthodoxy as part of the days on 'Common ground and common tasks for men and women of faith'.

A Protestant minister from Zaire said after several days here, 'For us Africans, when Europeans admit their mistakes and say that they are sorry, the world is turned upside down.' He had been surprised to hear lay people talking about things that he had felt were the responsibility of church leaders. He returned home, he said, with a clear sense that God wanted him to work for reconciliation between two national figures; otherwise, he feared that his country was heading for a civil war. As one of those responsible for Protestant programmes on the radio and television, he planned to get 'Freedom' and 'For the love of tomorrow' shown on TV. I sensed that his decision might be one of the most important ones taken here this summer. Every single person is important in God's eyes; we can think and plan for one group, one theme, but there are always unexpected people, and advances in unlooked-for directions.

A Croatian Cabinet Minister spoke of the need for moral and spiritual renewal: 'That is why I have come here.' He felt entirely at home, and took an informal seminar on the situation in his country. The enclosed press story gives something of what Karl Mitterdorfer from the South Tyrol and the Croatian Minister said. Some of us can remember seeing Mitterdorfer here for the first time over 25 years ago, with a delegation from his part of the world. It has taken him the best part of a lifetime to achieve a just settlement for his group's rights. So we need patience, but we also need that same dedication if we are to win through to solutions in other trouble spots. And we from majorities need to open our eyes, ears and hearts to the majority problem, to the blindness in us that leads us to label others as nationalists without seeing the nationalism in ourselves. Mitterdorfer's provocative definition of nationalism is 'collective selfishness that demands rights for itself that it is unwilling to give to others'. In the last two years, there have been six major conferences in Europe on these issues, but he is clear that the West's inability to react to the break-up in the East was in part because of our blindness and slowness in dealing with our own problems.

A variety evening took us from the Beatles to Bach, via Croatian and Bosnian contributions, including a poem likening us to the drops of water in a waterfall - each drop can feel quite insignificant and useless, but the rainbow needs them all. One of the Croatian group, an art professor, brought with him an exhibition of pictures by refugee children he works with; he helps them to express through art what they cannot say, and so find some healing. The local paper here has carried a photo and story on the exhibition. The professor spoke of the importance of silence, the inner discipline he'd found in the work teams, and how 'people open like roses'. Caux was the home of his soul, it had helped them all to open their hearts, to see in the inner mirror, half-broken with the pain and with 45 years of communism. He told how after his first visit to Caux in the winter, he had overcome his hatred for a party man who had tried to block his promotion, and they had shaken hands on his return. He had also stopped

smoking; 'in Caux there's no time to smoke; you don't need cigarettes'.

A Muslim woman dentist said, 'I hurry back tonight; I'm eager; there's so much to do. Moral renewal is a popular idea, but so few know how to do it. I'll take the ideas of Caux with me, the renewal that starts inside me. As a Muslim, I never felt for one second that I wasn't one of you.' She told how she had just been able to phone direct from Switzerland to Sarajevo, where 20 of her closest family live. God has a plan for us all, she said, and we also pray for our enemies. A third member of their group spoke about how large conflicts can start at home with little judgements on both sides. He wanted to go back with a spirit of tolerance, love and forgiveness, and to build a team to work for brotherhood in all of ex-Yugoslavia.

The suffering of these peoples, and the pain and illness of close friends here, is part of the stillness at the heart of things, a precious presence in the midst of all the tumble-dryer of activity; the inner weather. It is a reminder of our weakness and our limits, of our human frailty and of our need of God. A reminder too of our closeness to another world and another life. The piano concert last night ended with Franz Liszt's Legend No.2, and the artist explained that it was about Franz von Paula who crossed the Straits of Messina walking on the water. In one hand he holds burning coals as a symbol of the inner fire of faith, and his other hand is stretched up to heaven as he walks over the stormy sea. As I write, the sun is now up, and the birds are hailing a clear sky and a new day. Breakfast calls, but Liszt's legend will live with me through this week.

Regards,

Andrew Stallybrass