

MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

NEWSLETTER 2

20th July 1987

Dear friends,

The weather has been swiftly veering between summer and autumn, sun and rain, long views to the mountains (with snow rather low and copious for the time of year) and swirling mists. And the mood of the conference too has veered between laughter and fun, and tears and great depth of change and challenge. The young woman I mentioned at the end of the last letter, who left determined to make her marriage work instead of divorcing her husband, rang to say that she had found the courage to follow her convictions and say the things she had thought out in a time of quiet. Now we should pray that her sharing would be received in the right spirit. So we pray.

We think too of the Laure family, and of the remarkable spirit-led two hours we spent remembering her, in the hall where she had so often spoken and given her challenge. We were a world family around Juliette and Charles Danguy. Time stood still as many messages from around the world were read. Young and old came up and shared simply, as the voices of children playing in the garden floated up into the hall, reminding us of her great love for children everywhere and for her own family. A Turkish Muslim who had never met her, but who had just seen the film 'For the love of tomorrow', spontaneously came up to recite a prayer from the Koran, explaining that he was praying that Irène's soul would go straight to paradise.

Stuart and Polly-Ann Smith came specially to represent her American friends - Irène had been 17 times to the USA, and had met five Presidents. After reading a message from the Colwell brothers, with whom Irène had worked closely in the difficult and dangerous days after the Congo's independence, they concluded, 'friend, teacher and stateswoman, such a heart is never stilled'.

An Italian lawyer who had come for the jurists round table, and had known nothing about Moral Re-Armament when he had walked through the front door of Mountain House three days earlier, asked if he could say a word - and as he committed himself to work in the same spirit, we saw that Irène's power to move and change lives continues unabated. We were reminded of her vision for the countries to the East of the Iron Curtain, and of the unfinished business in the reconciliation of Europe by the presence of people from these countries. And Marcel Grandy quoted a senior Turkish civil servant who, after seeing the film 'For the love of tomorrow', had commented that what had been done in the 50s between France and Germany should now be done between Turkey and Greece.

Then on Wednesday, we started the 'session of study and training for young people', with some 120 youngsters from 27 different countries, and with a good many changes and new experiments in the times and structures of the house. We have all been struck by the maturity, expectancy and seriousness of purpose of so many of the young people who have come. And we are grateful too for all the young people from outside our old continent who continually give perspective to our discussions.

The days start with a 'daybreaker' session at 8 am of 20 minutes of teaching and sharing on a spiritual theme, followed by 25 minutes of quiet and listening in the hall or elsewhere - all the participants received a folder on arrival which included a note book and pen. Breakfast follows at 8.45, with sharing and discussion in 'units', who also meet for discussion after the main morning session, who work together in the kitchen or service, and who meet at 5 pm as a creative workshop to prepare a presentation for the whole session on the theme of trends, on Thursday and Friday this week. Each 'unit' has its allotment of 'unit coordinators' and 'creative counselors' - well over half the conference is involved in the session.

The first evening saw a swift programme of slides, music and sketches, presenting an impressionistic picture of today's world, with the glossy dreams of advertising clashing with the pain-filled realities of the headlines. The next morning 8 young people gave in a few sentences a picture of the trends that they wanted to change, and Archie Mackenzie gave his own experience from a life-time's obedience to a calling. A mysterious visiting professor of trendology gave a learned and humorous introduction to the subject of trends, with visual aids, and quoted the Oxford Dictionary's definition of a 'trend' as 'that part of the shank of an anchor where it thickens towards the crown'!

The main sessions have been well-prepared half-hours on materialism, self-discipline and freedom, the need for global thinking, followed by a second half-hour with one or more 'trend-setters' sharing their experience. The half-hour on global thinking exploded into life with a song and dance by a group from Cameroon, which was followed by a deeply felt reconciliation and apology between an Argentine Malvinas-Falkland Islands conflict veteran and several British. 'We thought that to be a patriot meant to hate the British,' said the veteran, who went on to add, 'I fought a war with God, and now I've opened my heart to Him.'

Allan Griffith, foreign policy adviser to five Australian Prime Ministers, ended the meeting, who noted that 'the real dynamic of world change is the dynamic of reconciliation' such as we had seen before our eyes. In the West, he said, 24-hour live news coverage encouraged cynicism and despair - people feel paralysed by problems about which they can do nothing. In another part of the world, the ideas of Lenin seek to create revolution by looking for divisions and exaggerating them. Finally, there is God's idea of global revolution 'which begins in the simplest way. He uses every basic decision of our wills to lead us into the task of world rebuilding.'

The 'daybreakers' and main sessions are open to all, but there has been a separate programme at 5pm - and many of us have wished we weren't 'UCs' or 'CCs', or have wished we could be in two places at once. There have been seminars on Poland, with a Polish university professor, two on Africa, one with Ethiopians and Eritrean exiles, the other with General Joseph Lagu, former Vice-President of Sudan, on India with a very senior Sikh lawyer and former High Court judge...

The evenings have started with coffee round tables in the Great Hall - the 'Sundowner' in the new slang of the session. It helps to make the hall the natural heart of the house, where you can sit and talk, knit, read, play games....Last night saw the première of this year's production of Hugh William's family drama 'Skeletons'.

Cardinal König left at the beginning of last week, very happy with his stay, and reminding us of his conviction, expressed the last years here, that there should be a round table in Caux on the protection and preservation of the Creation, to promote a real dialogue between ethics and science. Perhaps this is an idea whose time is coming?

All in all, we are having a rich diet of vintage Caux: the Greeks and Turks meeting and sharing a birthday party; a smoker surrendering his cigarettes to his room-mate, and admitting to spending a good while searching to try and find them again; the businesswoman who says, 'I've been looking for something all my life. I think this is it, but I'm not sure that I have the courage.'

Today all the youth 'units' head out for picnics, walks, swims. After an excellent start we need to find a second wind, but there is a great sense of the spirit on the move in people, and a great hope that the vision of helping young people to discover a calling and purpose in life will be rewarded.

With best wishes from us all here,

Andrew Stallybrass