

CX 1997

## International Conferences for

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Moral Re-Armament

# CAUX

Caux, 6 August 1997

Conference Centre:  
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### ARCHIVES

Mountain House  
CH - 1824 CAUX

Dear Friends,

As I write, the front of Mountain House is a mass of people, laughing, hugging, waving farewell, at the end of the reunion of 'Anything to Declare', the MRA musical launched in 1967.

'Anything to Declare' travelled to many parts of Europe, Asia and Australasia, including explosive areas such as Derry in Northern Ireland, Shillong in North-East India, and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. Well over 100 of us, mostly in our twenties, took part in the venture, for short or long times. Many of us, whether now in a profession or full-time with MRA, have been creating and involving ourselves in all kinds of MRA initiatives ever since.

The idea of a reunion was conceived several years ago by Eliane Stallybrass, and she and others have worked steadily to bring it to fruition. Two hundred came, including spouses and children of cast members. Some had not met for years, and the first day was punctuated by cries of delight all over the house as recognition dawned.

At the opening meal, Margaret Smith described the scene into which 'ATD' was launched: 'Many of us arrived at Caux with our mini-skirts and long straight hair. Psychedelic colors were everywhere. The old order seemed to be crumbling... For some ATD was an adventure, for others perhaps a protection from the confusions of the world. Certainly we wanted to take up the concerns of our generation. We were cavalier about the sacrifices involved - of education and family life. But those four years gave us an amazing exposure to the world. When we disbanded, this was liberating for some, allowing them to find vocation in areas that the group did not particularly nurture. But to have been part of such a fellowship was, and continues to be, a great, great privilege.'

Then quizmasters Rob Corcoran and Andrew Stallybrass launched questions about the exploits of ATD, and a roving microphone brought answers, and introductions, from every corner of the room. In the following days, there was ample opportunity to talk - at a barbecue (which rain forced indoors), over a fondue, between vigorous Scottish dances one evening on the terrace, and on a two-hour walk up to the Col de Jaman. When we arrived at the Col, there was a picnic feast awaiting us - one example of the meticulous preparations which made the gathering such a memorable event.

The children of ATD members were a lively presence throughout. 'I am so proud of my Dad,' said one teenager after watching a video of 'Anything to Declare'. Before long, the cupboard where the ATD costumes are stored had been located and, at the final bonanza evening, fifty of them presented a hilarious send-up of the musical's

opening number, lampooning its 'old-fashioned' choreography. Unknown to them, some of their parents had also been preparing a sketch - an ATD song, set to the 1990s 'macarena' choreography that the teenagers had taught everyone one evening.

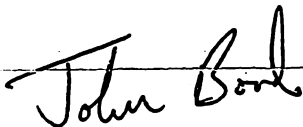
On Sunday morning we sat on the lawn in front of Mountain House for a time of remembrance and thanksgiving. All our friends in ATD felt very close. One by one we remembered each of those who have died. And we looked forward. A 'tree of life' had been created, and everyone was provided with paper, to shape as they wished, as a means of symbolically laying down hurts and claiming freedom for all that the years ahead offer. Before the session ended, the 'tree' was festooned with paper shapes.

On the final day we met in the bay window of the Great Hall. In the free-flowing discussion, many described their discovery of a calling. 'During my time with ATD, I learned to care for people,' said a Frenchman. 'Now I am working with Cambodian refugees in my city.' A Swiss participant is working with an international relief agency in Africa. 'When my agency needs to challenge the authorities, I am often asked to draft the letter,' she said. 'I attribute this to the experience I gained with ATD.'

All of us have known times of perplexity and pain, some very sharp. Dang Thi Hai and Osman Shum were with us; both have seen their countries go through immense suffering. Others told of personal suffering. One described years of severe depression, and of working her way out of it until, supported by a new depth of faith, she is now a community worker helping others in their struggle with mental illness. Another said that he had found tremendous liberation when he realised that 'honesty about our weaknesses is our greatest strength... Frank Buchman emphasised this basic truth, and we do damage if we get away from it.'

We think with great gratitude of those who worked behind the scenes in Caux, and enabled us to have the leisure to meet as we did. As friends depart, many of us have been given a renewed comradeship with those who have been led along a different path to us; and new friendships among the next generation. We have been immeasurably enriched, and I am left with a tingle of excitement about what will develop amongst such a wonderful crowd of people.

Ever gratefully,



John Bond

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*Dear Friends,*

*As you read in the first letters of this season we will continue to have a different "Scribe" passing on in his or her or their particular style what happens in the week they are describing. For the week of July 21st to 28th it was a "tandem". For a change they wrote the original letter in German so this is why this translation reaches you a bit later, (as normally is the case for the non English-speaking readers every week)*

*M.S.*

Caux, 29 July 1997

*"Where does God dwell?" Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk asked his guests. They laughed at him: "The whole world is full of his glory!" But he answered his own question: "God dwells where people let him in."*

*Mother Teresa: "I would rather give up my life than my faith."*

Dear Readers,

We are Alix Bettinger, 26, from France, in Caux for the sixth time, and Phyllis Scholl, 19, from Switzerland, in this soul stirring place for the second time. We have been asked to write this letter to include you in the "Life of Faith" week of the conference.

The conference was for everyone wanting to explore what it means to have a wholehearted faith in God, to develop a living relationship with God, to find God's will for career and profession, to make the connection between faith and daily life in our own surroundings and country.

We would like to pass on the events of the week in a somewhat unusual, but for us meaningful way. We will not attach names to quotes. We realised that each of the 360 participants made an essential contribution to the whole and this would mean that we would have to list all the names, all the countries and all the religions represented - which included various Christian denominations, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism - and this letter would have been even longer than it is!

So as a change of style we shall simply put down for you the thoughts that struck us most out of each plenary:

**Noted from Opening evening, 22 July 1997:**

- There is a thread running through all the conferences in Caux. This thread seems to be asking basic questions about the meaning of life.
- Living by faith is the foundation of this place.

- "Most people lead lives of quiet desperation" (Thoreau). How can I develop my faith when people around me quietly desperate? How can I live to give my son the best opportunity to choose a life of faith?
- How can I get involved in the problems of the world when my life is already filled with my own problems?
- How can I live authentically in my relationship to God and to others? People tend to try to answer these fundamental questions with a lot of activity.

#### **Searching for God, 23 July, morning:**

- The search for God always has to do with your neighbour. If you cannot love your neighbour whom you can see, how can you love God whom you cannot see?
- What is faith? Faith is the opposite of seeing. It means acting as if we have seen the hidden reality. Faith is the healing of my sight so that I can see God at work around me.
- Faith helps me to accept myself as I am and to be concerned with others.
- The faith that a young Ukrainian received from her family as a child helped her to finish university despite huge obstacles.
- We meet God when we are at the end of our own strength. Our faith shows when we still believe, even if we are down.

#### **The quiet time, 23 July, 5pm:**

- Some minutes of quiet every day is not a life style; it is a life requirement.
- All of us are guided by something through life, for instance the desire for success, the wish always to have our own way. Arrogance and fear provide the worst guidance. In the Bible it says that the Holy Spirit guides and leads. Many people ask the Holy Spirit for strength - but for what? The person who wants to decide his or her own life needs no guidance!
- Listening God is dangerous. It is a declaration of war against the plurality of our desires, against every second-rate action. Listening brings greater responsibility for the world.
- Care for two or three people and entrust God with the others.

PS An American couple, in Caux for the first time, took the title of the session literally and spent the time in quiet in their room, while in the main hall a plenary session was taking place on the theme! In the evening we enjoyed a high-quality concert of Russian music.

#### **Moral absolutes - inner freedom? 24 July, 10am:**

- Today people often do not dare to say what is right and what is wrong - not for reasons of tolerance but for fear of being dismissed as old-fashioned and narrow.
- The example of paragliding was used to illustrate the steps to inner freedom: first we have to take off the rucksack with the folded parachute (lay down burdens). Then carefully unfold the parachute. All the cords (obedience) have to be meticulously mended and laid parallel to avoid an accident. When everything is in order: "Decide, start, run." We will remember the imagery of this talk.

In the afternoon following the meeting on moral standards there was a packed seminar

on the subject of sex in connection with a life of faith. The themes of sex, marriage and family were repeatedly the subject of smaller discussion groups.

#### **Conversation with Russian poet Irina Ratushinskaya, 24 July, 5pm:**

Irina Ratushinskaya spent over four years as a prisoner in Soviet gaols and labour camps.

- Compassion and prayer for the oppressor helped her to endure this situation.
- Also the thought: "If they kill us today, tomorrow we will be in heaven".

For ten years now she has lived in England:

- It is easier to serve God when in trouble than on holidays.
- After spending ten years here in the West, if next time I have my quiet time I hear "Rise up, leave everything as it is and go somewhere, North Korea for instance...", sometimes I feel it would be difficult for me. I hope I'm still ready...
- The individual wants security; this is the problem of our civilisation. Jesus said: "Leave everything you have."

People were recommended to read Irina Ratushinskaya's book: "Grey is the colour of hope". In the evening there was a slide presentation about the cathedral of Chartres.

#### **My career and God's will, 25 July, 10am:**

Various people including some married couples told what it meant for them to follow God's will instead of their own in their professions.

- Are we conscious of our common goal?
- Is it a sign from God if someone asks you to do something?
- How to choose between two good offers?
- How do I discover my calling in my job?
- It takes time to become conscious of one's deeper calling. The more time passes, the more the consciousness grows.
- I feel privileged to be completely happy depending on God.
- Lord, make me worthy to refer to You.

#### **Prayer and meditation, 25 July, 5pm:**

- When man listens God speaks. When man obeys God acts.
- Prayer: continually presenting oneself to God's gaze.
- Prayer protects faith.
- Someone who prays tries not to neglect other people.
- Prayer uncovers what is hidden.
- The highest activity is to keep strictly to the times for prayer.
- 2541 years ago people did not say: "How are you?" but: "What have you let go today?"
- It takes discipline to keep in contact with God.
- Like the little Prince I let God tame my fears.
- Prayer: a way of coming before God.

The evening saw everybody in action: the program was Scottish dancing.

### **Faith in the world, 26 July, 10am:**

- God does not change the world until we change ourselves.
- If you take on a situation with your whole heart and keep yourself ready for God's call, don't fear what the future will bring but simply take the next step.

In the afternoon at 5pm we heard about the life and spiritual teachings of the great Sufi mystic al-Ghazali, and about the life and work of St Benedict and his Order.

Russian ballet and Russian poems, juggling, Polish, Czech and Swedish folk songs and a skit on the theme "We want peace" were pieces in the mosaic of a superb cultural evening.

### **The nature of commitment, 27 July, 10.30am:**

- Commitment means binding ourselves in some way, nailing ourselves down.
- Commitment needs renewal day by day.
- Every time we give ourselves it is blessed.

### **Final meeting, 28 July, 10am:**

On the last morning a great array of people spoke, reporting briefly on what they were taking away from the week. Here are just a few:

- "God is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be enjoyed." That puts everything in a completely new light.
- God takes us where he finds us, but he does not leave us there.
- Think globally, act locally.
- Faith prepares the ground for love.
- God is not only in God's house but is present everywhere.
- Let's take from this "Life of faith" conference the motto: "Faith in daily life".

*And just after this last session, the two "scribes" had to leave. In the evening Phyllis said on the phone, that she had already had a few hours with three of her student friends, telling them about the week all she had discovered. She had read them part of the above notes and this had lead to a most meaningful exchange. She had already talked about it to some others, on the phone immediately after coming back, who wanted to continue this conversation on faith in daily life...*

*A huge thank you goes to the team from Britain and France who over the last six months have put their hearts, minds, energy and time into preparing this week. It has meant a lot of travelling, taking time to meet and plan on rare free moments like week-ends, e-mailing and phoning at all hours of the day and night, etc.*

*As people queued up in the closing session to tell of hope and healing discovered through these day and a s some brought up their questions and suggestions, it was obvious that this was a precious beginning of a new stretch ahead on our walk together in a life of faith. A walk during which we learn from each other, discover new sources of strength, a new dimension to commitment, new depth and new openness.*

*Marianne Spreng*