

25th August, 1986

Dear friends,

The metaphors from athletics seem ever more appropriate, and as we turn into the last straight and urge ourselves on to the finishing post, we realise better what is at stake. We are on the brink of what may prove to be one of the most important times that Caux has ever seen. We expect 126 arrivals today, and a housecount tonight in the 570s; yesterday already we started overflowing down to Glion. This is of course the industry-hosted session, but Caux is also for a few days going to play host to a small but very distinguished group of American, European and Japanese top industrialists, invited for a 'round table' by Frits Philips and Olivier Giscard d'Estaing.

The new session opens tonight, with a special banquet for the 'round tablers', and then an evening meeting for all. My mind is straining with problems of accommodation, and the creative inspiration failing, I'm afraid. We all need an extra gift of energy and grace and giving. Lotty Wolvekamp tells me that the secretaries have made over 35,000 photocopies in the last month! And certainly our bed-night count is going to be way up on last year. It was nearly double in June, and in July came to 11,286 compared with 7,047 in 1985.

The weather is freshening, after several wet days, and the Dents du Midi are clothed in a generous covering of fresh snow. The Africans and Asians start to leave for home or London and Tirley, warned to move on by the first fore-runners of winter. Chronic activists like me are already trying to turn their minds to the lessons from this summer for the future, and an outline for next summer's conferences. It is something of an effort to turn the mind back to the week just gone.

The dialogue has not always been easy to promote; the Afro-Asian team were not able to see each other before Caux to plan and prepare. But at the heart of the session there has been the powerful example and leadership of some of the group of young people who took part in an action in India leading up to the dialogue in Panchgani last year, and then went on to a further action in Zimbabwe and Uganda, before coming to Caux.

There has been the 'usual unexpected', some deeply stirring unplanned moments. One of the young Indians spoke of the need to go beyond peaceful coexistence to useful coexistence in their relationship with Pakistan. He was followed onto the platform by a Pakistani from Britain who told of the re-kindling of his faith here. Then another Indian spoke of the terrible hurts in his own family at the time of partition, and of his own deep bitterness. 'If I can't cure the bitterness in my own heart,' he went on, 'then we cannot heal the relationship between our two countries.' He apologised, and in front of us all, sought out the Pakistani and shook his hand.

The wife of an Indian general told at a later meeting how she had been moved to tears by that handshake. She spoke honestly of her fears that her husband was 'getting committed to MRA'. 'I should trust in God, and I should not grumble about what my husband is going to be committed to,' she said. Ten Zimbabweans took the platform, and in twelve minutes each one gave his or her new decision. And a Nigerian lawyer told how his wife had come back from Caux last year 'so changed a woman' that they had had no more quarrels, and their marriage had been re-made. The important group from Sri Lanka have kept that troubled part of the world in our prayers: part of a constantly fresh-woven tapestry of the intimate and the global. Mr Dalmia, the head of the vast Indian industrial empire, has been staying down in Montreux, and coming up daily with a group of friends. In himself he is a bridge between the dialogue of the continents and the industrial focus of the week to come.

A similar moment, equally rich in possible consequences was the meeting of hearts and minds between a senior British police officer and a group of young black British. 'I came to Caux to observe but under no circumstances to participate,' said the recently retired commandant of a police training college. Then he had gone to see a performance of 'The Ladder' by a black British cast. 'My heart sank,' he said. 'My relationship with the black British has been somewhat confrontational.' He had written a manual on riot tactics. But the quality and content of the play had taken him by surprise, and he had come out 'feeling a little ashamed'.

Later he had had an 'energetic' meal with some of the cast. One of them had come at him 'like an intellectual Exocet missile'. 'But as I looked at their faces, they blurred into the faces of my own children,' he said. Britain faced three options, he went on. One was to repatriate all blacks to their countries of origin. Another was to send the whites back to their roots. And the third was to become one nation under one flag. He would be pleased to see a black Prime Minister 'who was my Prime Minister'.

Two of the cast came up to the platform to thank him for his words. 'They mean a very great deal coming from the mouth of a policeman who represents everything that I dislike,' said one, while the other added, 'I wish there were more people like you.' He thanked the conference for 'making me feel welcome'.

I sat through the Afro-Asian variety evening in which the black British cast played a leading role next to a couple from the South African mission in Geneva - another of these unexpected moments. The couple were among the very last to leave the house after the evening, plunged as they were into deep dialogue with black, white and coloured South Africans.

May there be similar flashes of the unplanned and unexpected in these closing days - golden shafts of the Holy Spirit cutting through the clouds, as the sun breaks through after the storms over the lake. So, goodbye, until next week's final epistle.

Cheers,

Andrew Stallybrass