

Innovative Approaches to Peace Building

Michael Henderson



Introduction

This chapter* documents a distinctive and innovative approach to peacemaking. It includes an emphasis on personal, moral and spiritual change as the starting point for bringing change to relationships and to society as a whole, a stress on the importance of apology and forgiveness, and the use of personal stories of change to convey a challenge to conscience and present a positive model for change. It does so through describing the post-World War II interaction of a Frenchwoman, Irène Laure, and German participants at Mountain House, which has been for more than fifty years a centre for reconciliation in Caux, Switzerland.

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- **Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate** (London: Grosvenor Books, 2002; Portland, Oregon: Arnica Publishing 2002)
- **The Forgiveness Factor, stories of hope in a world of conflict** (London: Grosvenor Books, 1996)
- **All Her Paths Are Peace, women pioneers in peacemaking**, Kumarian Press, 1994)
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In 1946 a group of Swiss, at great personal sacrifice, bought the rundown Caux Palace Hotel overlooking Lake Geneva as a place where the warring nations of World War II could meet. It was the fulfilment of a thought that had come to a Swiss diplomat, Philippe Mottu, three years earlier: If Switzerland were spared by the war, its task would be to make available a place where Europeans, torn apart by hatred, suffering, and resentment, could come together. Mottu and the other Swiss were associated with a worldwide work for reconciliation that was then called Moral Re-Armament (MRA) and is now known as Initiatives of Change (IC).

Renamed Mountain House, this distinctively turreted building, which in 2002 celebrated its centenary, is set in restful grounds with a panoramic view of the peaks of the Dents du Midi and has, since 1946, been host to several hundred thousand people from all over the world, many of whom met across contentious divides—whether it be Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots; Muslims, Christians, and Jews from the Middle East; or Cambodians attempting to move beyond the killing fields.

It is only comparatively recently that the Caux centre's role in world peacemaking has been appreciated by scholars, spurred by a study of the contribution of Mountain House to post-war reconciliation between France and Germany. The author, Edward Luttwak, had commissioned a search of some ten thousand monographs and articles in the academic literature on the history of Franco-German reconciliation and found no mention of the role of MRA. There, he says, the matter would have stood for eternity "but for the existence of both unpublished documents and indirect evidence that prove beyond all doubt that Moral Re-Armament played an important role at the very beginning of the French-German reconciliation" (Luttwak 1994, 38). A more recent book by Scott Appleby highlights the service of Caux in providing a neutral and secure place, where antagonists can meet at a physical and psychological distance from a conflict zone and in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect, to discuss their differences and what they hold in common. Of the role of Mountain House as a forum for the discussion and exploration of personal, religious, ethnic, and political differences, he writes:

Transforming attitudes on a person-by-person basis was the goal of such forums, which embodied MRA's conviction that peaceful and productive change in hostile relations between nations or ethnoreligious groups depends on change in the individuals prosecuting the war; that process, in turn, requires individuals representing each side to listen, carefully and at length, to their counterparts. This approach proved productive in settings where other sources of moral authority, hospitality, and disinterested (i.e., nonpartisan) conflict management had been discredited. (Appleby 1999, 225–226)

The Story of Irène Laure

A look into the MRA/IC archives will help us understand this distinct, innovative, and positive approach to peacemaking touched on by Luttwak and Appleby. This might best be done by taking the example of that Franco-German reconciliation, specifically focusing on the visit to Caux of Madame Irène Laure from France, a visit that took place in 1947, the second year of the existence of Mountain House. Drawing from it some idea of MRA/IC's mode of operation, Joseph Montville singles out the change of attitude of Laure at Caux as "perhaps the signature event in terms of psychological breakthrough in the Franco-German conflict" and "one of the most dramatic examples of the power of a simple appeal of forgiveness" (1991, 161). And Harold Saunders, a former U.S. assistant secretary of state, said at Caux in 1992, "If the changes in the human arena involving the French and German people who came to Caux after 1945, if that human relation had not been changed, there would be no institutions of the European community today, or they would at least have taken longer in coming" (1993, 17). The journey of discovery of comparatively few individuals has led on to a greater vision of cooperation and coexistence among many Europeans.

That summer of 1947, five thousand people from some fifty countries attended sessions at Caux. They included the Swiss president and the prime ministers of Denmark and Indonesia, Swedish U.N. emissary Count Bernadotte, a U.S. congressional committee, twenty-six Italian parliament members, U Tin Tut, the first foreign minister of independent Burma, and G. L. Nanda, a future Indian prime minister.

When Irène Laure arrived at the conference in September that year, she would have felt at home in the presence of dozens of Allied service personnel recently demobilized, and been reassured by meeting former resistance figures like herself. She would have appreciated the "physical and psychological distance from a conflict zone." She was not, however, prepared to meet Germans, even those who had been anti-Nazi or had suffered because of Nazism. Germans at that time were not welcome at other international conferences. She might have been appalled had she known that the first group of Germans was welcomed to Caux by a French chorus singing in German. She was certainly not aware that the first words of Frank Buchman, the initiator of MRA, on arriving for the opening of Caux the summer before had been, "Where are the Germans? You'll never rebuild Europe without the Germans" (Lean 1988, 341). And that, spurred by his challenge, high-level efforts had been made to break through restrictions that prevented Germans from leaving their country. Already in the first summer, 16 Germans had come and 150 in 1947, with 4,000 more to come between 1948 and 1951.

This was an early illustration of a basic approach of Initiatives of Change—that everyone should be welcome at the table. It is still emphasized today, for instance, in IC's work for racial understanding under the aegis of the U.S.-based Hope in the Cities, or for interreligious unity in India at another IC conference centre, Asia Plateau, in Panchgani. Hope in the Cities, in language that would have been as appropriate in 1946 as it is today, calls for honest conversation that "includes

everyone and excludes no one, focuses on working together towards a solution, not on identifying enemies, affirms the best and does not confirm the worst, looks for what is right rather than who is right, [and] moves beyond blame and personal pain to constructive action” (Corcoran and Greisdorf 2001, 23).

The Germans came to Caux as equals. The Hamburg *Freie Presse*, in a report from Caux, commented, “Here, for the first time, the question of the collective guilt of the past has been replaced by the more decisive question of collective responsibility for the future. Here in Caux, for the first time, Germany has been given a platform from which she can speak to the world as an equal” (cited in Henderson 1996, 24). Buchman biographer Garth Lean writes, “Buchman insisted that the emphasis at Caux must be upon Germany’s future rather than her past, her potential rather than her guilt.

Whether dealing with an individual or a nation he was only interested in reviewing past mistakes as a basis for discovering a new way forward. He simply treated the Germans like everyone else” (1988, 351).

Irène Laure, a nurse from Marseilles, was an internationalist. Between the two world wars she had had German children in her home. But her experience in the resistance when Germany occupied her country and the torturing of her own son had given her a passionate hatred. When Allied bombers flew overhead, Laure rejoiced at the destruction that would be wreaked on Germany. After the war, she witnessed the opening of a mass grave containing the mutilated bodies of some of her comrades. She longed for the total destruction of Germany; she never thought that understanding was possible and never sought it (Henderson 1994, 17-27).

At the end of the war, Laure entered the French Constituent Assembly and became a leader of the three million socialist women of her country. Invited to Caux, she hesitated at first because she knew at some point she would have to come to grips with the question of Germany’s future. But she finally accepted, welcoming the chance of a break from the political wrangling in Paris and the opportunity of some good food for her children, malnourished from the privations of the war. The presence of Germans was a shock. Every time a German spoke she left the hall. Although she also noted that the Germans were saying things she had not heard them say before, that they were facing the mistakes of the past and their own nation’s need for change, her gut reaction was still, “I will never stay under the same roof as Germans.” She packed her bags to leave and then ran into Frank Buchman. “Madame Laure, you’re a socialist,” he said to her, and, echoing his remarks the year before, “How can you expect to rebuild Europe if you reject the German people?” (Piguet 1985, 9).

Her immediate response was that anyone who made such a suggestion had no idea what she had lived through. Her second response was that perhaps there might be hope of doing something differently. She retired to her room. “I was there two days and nights without sleeping or eating with this terrible battle going on inside me. I had to face the fact that hatred, whatever the reasons for it, is always a factor that creates new wars” (Henderson 1999, 146).

Emerging, Madame Laure was ready to have a meal with a German woman. She hardly touched her food, but poured out all she felt and all she had lived through. And then she said, "I'm telling you all this because I want to be free of this hate." There was a silence and then the German woman, Clarita von Trott, shared with the Frenchwoman her own experiences from the war. Her husband Adam had been one of those at the heart of the July 20, 1944, plot to kill Hitler. It had failed, and her husband had been executed. She was left alone to bring up their two children. She told Laure, "We Germans did not resist enough, we did not resist early enough and on a scale that was big enough, and we brought on you and ourselves and the world endless agony and suffering. I want to say I am sorry" (Channer 1983).

After the meal, the two women and their interpreters sat quietly on the terrace overlooking Lake Geneva. Then Madame Laure, the French socialist, told her new German friend that she believed that if they prayed, God would help them. She prayed first asking to be freed of hatred so that a new future could be built. And then Frau von Trott prayed, in French. Instinctively, Madame Laure laid her hand on the knee of her former enemy. "In that moment," she later said, "the bridge across the Rhine was built, and that bridge always held, never broke" (Channer 1983).

Laure asked to be given the opportunity to speak to the conference. Many were aware of her background, but few knew what conclusion she had come to alone in her room or the effect that her conversation with Frau von Trott had had on her attitude. "Everyone was fearful," she remembers. "They knew what I felt about the Germans. They didn't know I had accepted the challenge" (Laure n.d. [1980]). It was a risk for the organizers. They did not believe that the best way to get across new ideas to Germans, who had lived all those years under Nazism, was to put them in the dock. It was not the best of days either for Laure to choose. It was to be a German-speaking session. At the preparation meeting it was suggested that an Austrian minister speak, but he refused: "I was in a concentration camp for four years. I cannot speak with Germans" (Lean 1998, 352). A young German said that if the Germans were guilty, the Austrians were no less so. Buchman, who rarely chaired a session, decided to chair this one.

Laure spoke to the six hundred people in the hall, including the Germans. She told them honestly and, as she says, disastrously, all that she had felt. Then she said, "I have so hated Germany that I wanted to see her erased from the map of Europe. But I have seen here that my hatred is wrong. I am sorry and I wish to ask the forgiveness of all the Germans present" (Lean 1998, 353). Following her words, a German woman stepped up from the hall and took her hand. To Laure it was such a feeling of liberation that it was like a hundred kilo weight, she said, being lifted from her shoulders. "At that moment I knew that I was going to give the rest of my life to take this message of forgiveness and reconciliation to the world" (Henderson 1994, 22).

Rosemarie Haver, whose mother was the German woman who took Laure's hand, said to Laure more than thirty years later, at Caux in 1984, "Your courage in bringing your hatred to God and asking us Germans for forgiveness was a deeply

shattering experience. When I saw my mother go up to you, my whole world collapsed about me. I felt deeply ashamed at what Germans had done to you and your family. I slowly began to understand that these Germans who had also brought much suffering on my own family had acted in the name of Germany, which meant in my name also" (Channer 1983).

Peter Petersen, a young German who was later to become a senior member of the Federal German Parliament, also was in the hall that day. As he told the story:

Ever since the age of seven I had been in a uniform of some sort so, at the end of the war, I had no civilian suit of my own. I arrived in Caux in an old suit of my grandfather's. It was too short in some places and too wide in others. My army coat I had dyed black so it was not too bad. I arrived in Caux with very mixed feelings. I fully expected people to say, "What are these criminals, these Germans doing here?" I was ready with counter accusations to whatever we were accused of. Instead, we were really made welcome. A French chorus sang, in German, a song expressing Germany's true destiny. Every door was open to us. We were completely disarmed. Three days after my arrival I learned of the presence in Caux of Madame Laure. I also learned that she had wanted to leave when she saw us Germans arriving. A violent discussion broke out amongst us. The question of guilt and who was to blame, the question that was so dividing Germany at that time, could no longer be avoided. We all recognized that this Frenchwoman had a right to hate us, but we decided that if she expressed her hatred we would reply with stories of the French occupation in the Black Forest. (Petersen 1947, as cited in Marcel 1960, 24)

When Laure spoke in the meeting, Petersen and his friends sat at the back, ill at ease and asking themselves if it would not be better if they left the hall. After her speech, Petersen said:

I was dumbfounded. For several nights it was impossible for me to sleep. All my past rose up in revolt against the courage of this woman. I suddenly realized that there were things for which we, as individuals and as nations, could never make restitution. Yet we knew, my friends and I, that she had shown us the only way open if Germany was to play a part in the reconstruction of Europe. The basis of a new Europe would have to be forgiveness, as Madame Laure had shown us. One day we told her how sorry we were and how ashamed we were for all the things she and her people had had to suffer through our fault, and we promised her that we would now devote our lives to work that such things would never happen again anywhere. (Petersen 1947, as cited in Marcel 1960, 24)

Irène Laure could, with every justification, have blamed the Germans. She did not do so. In fact, she said many years later, "From the moment I decided to talk to them as friends instead of blaming them, the only thing I wanted to do was to apologize for my own hate" (1971). And as in myriad other examples over the years, this generous attitude on her part provoked a soul-searching in those to whom her words were addressed, whether they were Germans or other nationalities. Assessing the broader implications of Laure's experience, Bryan

Hamlin writes, “One person apologizing to another is nothing new. Most people learn empirically that such exchanges are necessary for the maintenance of successful interpersonal relationships. And all religion teaches contrition. The further step is to take this same approach to the group and national level. To achieve that, strategies for such encounters between representatives of different countries or ethnic groups are consciously developed” (1992, 12).

The Caux Experience

In her three weeks at Caux, Laure was exposed to many other aspects of the centre’s approach, which deepened her understanding, and she had the chance also to express her own convictions, speaking six times. Caux has the advantage, not always present in the work of Initiatives of Change in the field, of tending to draw people who are at least already predisposed to finding a new way of resolving conflict, even if they may not realize that some change may be needed in themselves. Other elements that contribute to the centre’s effectiveness, along with the restful setting, are the nature of the meetings and workshops, the chance for leisurely talks at mealtimes, and the use of theatre and the arts to present universal truths. Undergirding it all is a gracious sense of hospitality, which expresses the esteem in which IC holds every person. Hospitality at Caux is expressed in the fact that Swiss families gave of their best to furnish the place, and by the teams of volunteers taking infinite care in the preparing of rooms, with fresh flowers there and in the public rooms, and meals that take into account the cultural sensitivities of different peoples.

In plenary sessions formal presentations are kept to a minimum, and the emphasis is on participants sharing their experiences briefly. In more recent times, it has become the custom to divide the conference into “communities,” smaller groups where people can get to know one another better and explore conference themes. In sessions and conversations, Laure would have heard others tell personal stories of change, stories that were intended to inspire and motivate change in others, without preaching or advising, just as her own story has reverberated over the decades to far corners of the world.

As with Laure and the Germans, when adversaries meet at Caux, the IC approach may open the way to a change in relationship. Rabbi Marc Gopin observes, “Hearing the public testimony of parties to a conflict at Moral Re- Armament’s retreat centre is critical to its conflict resolution process. Empathy is evoked by the painful story of the other party, and, in this religious setting, both parties refer to God’s role in their lives. This, in turn, generates a common bond between enemies that has often led, with subtle, careful guidance, to more honest discussion and relationship building” (2000, 20).

Unhurried meals are an integral feature in the IC approach at Caux, for meals are the prime venue for encounters. Meals are a means of “putting people in the way of others”— bringing individuals who are grappling with life’s tough dilemmas together with others who have met similar challenges honorably— whether through careful planning by IC workers or by the chance “decisive encounter,” as Marcel

(1960, 17) called these interactions at Caux. Anthropologists tell us it is psychologically difficult to continue to hate someone with whom you have broken bread. As in the case of Madame Laure and Frau von Trott, many a mealtime at Caux has brought enemies to a place of new understanding and possibility.

Laure's own experience of a change of heart had been a soul-shaking one for her. Now she was to begin to believe that it could happen to others, even to employers. Another aspect of Caux would have been that she probably discovered early on that some of the persons serving her at table were from the class that she hated. It was through getting to know employers, particularly French ones with a new motive, that she was helped to move beyond her class-war attitudes. In fact, she had first thought Caux was "a capitalist trap." But by the end of her time at Caux, she was working with employers to plan an industrial conference in the north of France. The encounters he observed in Caux convinced the French Catholic philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, that he was seeing a new world conscience evolving: "What strikes me before all else is that you find there the global and the intimate linked together in a surprising way. For the first time in my experience, I sensed a true global awareness in the process of being formed. It is shaped through encounters" (1960, 17).

Some encounters will have been in the serving teams, which are a central feature of life at Mountain House. All guests are encouraged to take a share in the running of the house. Gopin notes: "The Caux centr is organized by work teams, with the specific intention of creating relationships through shared work. This is cost effective, equalizing of relationships, and a powerful non-dialogic way of developing relationships" (2002, 253). He refers to the bonding that occurred between him and some Arab students at Caux in 1991, when they found themselves working together on a service team, having to cooperate to solve practical questions quite separate from the Middle East and being dependent on each other (173-174). At one point in its first years this aspect of life at Mountain House had a downside: a photograph appeared in the Italian press showing members of parliament washing dishes, and this put off some other members from attending! Laure's husband Victor, a merchant seaman, soon became a regular baker of bread in the Caux kitchen.

One of the first acts after the purchase of the Caux Palace Hotel had been to turn the hotel ballroom into a theatre. For, as Marcel observed, "Buchman and his associates have made a real discovery. They have realized that people nowadays are far more profoundly influenced by seeing something acted than you could expect them to be by hearing a sermon" (1960, 13-14). Laure saw plays in the theatre, which sometimes presented vision, sometimes historical or biographical stories. One was *The Good Road*, a musical with humorous sketches of contemporary life and a moving pageant of history that proclaimed dramatically the basic ideas of freedom and the necessary conditions of a sound society. She saw *The Forgotten Factor*, an industrial drama that contained that basic principle of Initiatives of Change—it is not who is right but what is right that matters — and she recognized in the unfolding clashes between employers and workers something

of her own experiences in Marseilles. Later she was to have that play staged in France, in French.

Also shown that summer was *And Still They Fight*, a dramatization of the life of a great Norwegian patriot, Freddie Ramm, who had helped his country be reconciled with Denmark and who died as he was being repatriated from a German concentration camp. With the horrors of the Holocaust shocking the world, Germans were very much on the defensive. After Reinhold Maier, minister-president of the state of Wuerttemberg-Baden, saw *And Still They Fight*, he slipped away from the theatre and threw himself on his bed "completely shattered" with shame at what his country had done. "It was a presentation without hatred or complaint and therefore could hardly have been more powerful in its effect," he later wrote (Maier 1964, 383).

Personal Story as Positive Image for Change

Laure had to return home from Caux for an election campaign. In a speech before leaving, indicating how far she had come in her thinking, she said, "I ask you to understand the suffering and needs of the working people, as I shall ask myself in campaign speeches to remember that employers are not always wrong either." To the Germans she promised that she would fight for reconciliation between France and Germany. "Here at Caux," she said, "my heart has been liberated from bitterness against Germany. I shall use my position in politics to see that France and other countries do not have any desire that Germany should starve. France, too, has been an occupied country just as Germany is today. We have all been wrong. Now we must build a bridge of caring across the Rhine" (MRA 1947).

Responding to Laure's words, Madleen Pechel of Berlin, who had been with her husband in a Nazi concentration camp, said, "I shall take Madame Laure's words to the women of Germany. Many times tears of joy have come to me at Caux. I do not think from 1934 to 1947 I have ever laughed with such a full and open heart as in the last eighteen days, here among people who would have every right to hate us Germans" (MRA 1947).

In 1948, Laure and her husband Victor traveled to Germany. For eleven weeks they criss-crossed the country, addressing two hundred meetings, including ten of the eleven state parliaments. With them went some of their compatriots who had lost families in the gas chambers, as well as men and women from other countries who only a short time before had been fighting against the Germans. Everywhere she repeated her apology. Laure reported that after hearing her speak, "Generals and other officers, politicians, and young former Nazis apologized to me" (Henderson 1996, 29). Of the travel of Laure and others to Germany at that time, Robin Mowat writes, "Such actions played their part in preparing the ground for the political decisions which made it possible for the statesmen to carry through on another level the work of reconciliation, and open a new way towards the future of Western Europe" (1991, 197).

In her lifetime Laure traveled thousands of miles to share her experience of the answer to hatred, sometimes alone, sometimes with her husband, often with small or large teams of people. This aspect of teams traveling together has continued to be a favored IC way of conveying to audiences the power and diversity of an answer, whether it is in recent years with senior Africans from the Horn of Africa visiting European capitals, or with a mixed faith team of Christians, Jews, and Muslims visiting Israel and Palestine, or with young people in “Action for Life” visiting South Asian nations.

In the decades that followed Laure’s visit to Caux, the work of reconciliation on the basis of the principles outlined above continued. Appleby writes:

MRA played important supporting roles in resolving dozens of conflicts in the decades that followed that impressive debut. Its loose organizational structure as a network of spartanly motivated professionals—“citizen diplomats”—based in Switzerland with small national branches operated by a few full-time staff and supported by local funds, was appropriate to its ethos of fostering personal relationships across battle lines. (1999, 225–226)

Caux became the hub of its peacebuilding work under the rubric Agenda for Reconciliation and through its NGO (nongovernmental organization) office at the United Nations in New York.

Around the world even today, fifteen years after Laure’s death, there are men and women, active peacemakers, who owe their commitment to or were vitally influenced towards it by the life of Irène Laure, either by meeting her in person, by reading her biography (Piguet 1985), or seeing the film about her, *For the Love of Tomorrow* (Channer 1983). One is Renee Pan, now a Buddhist nun, whose husband, the deputy prime minister of Cambodia, was murdered by the Khmer Rouge when they took over her country in 1975. She escaped to the United States where she struggled to become economically independent. But over time she felt that her mind had been consumed by what her Buddhist religion calls the “three fires of the world”—greed, anger, and foolishness. At a low point when she felt her heart was numb and her brain empty, she had a talk with Laure that gave her the key to overcoming her hatred of the Khmer Rouge: the taking time for *le silence* (Henderson 1999, 29–41).

Central to the experience of Caux and to the continuing work of Initiatives of Change is that of taking time in quiet, recommended to Pan by Laure. This is not a religious doctrine so much as a practical experience. Each person interprets it differently. Laure, who wrote down her thoughts in a notebook, saw this practice in a broad dimension (Channer 1983). She called the quiet time the strongest weapon of all. “Instead of dropping bombs or firing guns, be quiet and listen. For some it is the voice of God, for others the voice of conscience; but every one of us, man or woman, has the chance to take part in a new world, if we know how to listen in quiet to what is in our hearts” (Piguet 1985, 58).

Laure also stressed to Pan the importance of forgiveness. Her message on this was clear: "What I learned at Caux was how to forgive. That is a huge thing, because one can die of hatred. If I had continued as I was, I should have spread hatred right through my family. My children would have started off hating the Germans, then the bosses, and who would have been next?" (Channer 1983). Pan's meeting with Laure led her to treat the Khmer Rouge differently. "It was very hard for me to forgive the Khmer Rouge for what they did to me, my family, and my friends," she says, "and especially to my beloved country. But the burden of revenge that I carried for a decade was lightened from the moment that I did so" (Henderson 1994, 33).

Another person influenced by Laure's life was Eliezer Cifuentes of Guatemala, who is lucky to be alive. One night in 1980, four carloads of attackers ambushed his car and shot him. With a bullet in his arm and crouching low in his car, using the outlines of houses to steer by, he managed to evade his pursuers, then jettisoned his car, and ran and found shelter in a shop for five hours. At midnight, borrowing the shopkeeper's car and disguised as a woman, he drove back to Guatemala City where he found asylum in the Costa Rican embassy. After four months of negotiations he was allowed to fly to San José, Costa Rica (Henderson 1999, 143–144).

In exile, Cifuentes' hatred of his would-be killers grew. He could not bear to see a policeman; he had terrible headaches. Then one day after seeing the film about Irène Laure, he had an experience that transformed his life. He recognized "the tigers of hatred" in his heart for the military and for the United States, which he felt was backing them. He realized that he had not practiced the love that he had repeatedly preached. "I found a renewal inside that began to change my feelings of hatred and my desire for vengeance. . . . Giving up hatred is a wonderful, personal experience, but my danger was to leave it at that" (Henderson 1999, 143–144).

Cifuentes decided to go and see a former Guatemalan intelligence officer, who he thought responsible for drawing up the lists of intended kidnap victims. Eventually, as they had further meetings, Cifuentes was able to be honest about his hatred of the military. This led to changes of attitude on the part of both men and to a meeting outside the country with senior army officers, who expressed their readiness to work with him for national reconciliation. After a struggle, his wife Clemencia and their children also decided to forgive. Of the experience of seeing *For the Love of Tomorrow*, Cifuentes says, "What the Germans were for this Frenchwoman in the film, the military were for me. God has laid on my heart a task—the reconciliation of the military and the civilian population of my country" (Henderson 1999, 145).

A third person influenced by Irène Laure's story was Abeba Tesfagiorgis, an author from Eritrea, who was suspected by the Ethiopian occupiers of her country of being in the underground resistance. She was imprisoned and at one point faced a firing squad as a ruse to extract information, but was spared. In prison Tesfagiorgis came face to face with the man who had betrayed her. She forgave him. She then tried to help the other prisoners see that it would be a disservice to

their fallen comrades if they did not forgive their enemies. "We all pray together for our release and peace," she told them, "but God will not answer our prayers if we keep on nursing resentment and hatred for one another" (Henderson 1999, 43–53).

After her country's independence, Tesfagiorgis set up a centre for human rights and development. Speaking to a symposium on regional cooperation, Tesfagiorgis said, "Let us get rid of our enemies not by imprisoning or killing them, as many African regimes are known to do, not by belittling them or humiliating them, but by resolving the conflict." It was the Frenchwoman's story that Tesfagiorgis told the other prisoners in her cell: "Just as Irène Laure could not hope to see a united and peaceful Europe without Germany, we could not say we love our country and then refuse to understand and forgive our fellow Eritreans" (Henderson 1999, 51–53).

We take for granted that hatred can be passed down from generation to generation. The experience of Laure suggests that love, too, in all its supposed softness, can have that same permanence. People who never met her have been moved by her example and taken her experience forward in unexpected ways. Peace dividends continue to come in long after she has passed from the scene. The idea that one day her actions would inspire not only these three people but thousands more around the world would have been far from Laure's mind during those nights in 1947, when alone in her room she wrestled with the question of whether she would give up her hatred for the sake of a new Europe. Her life is but one example of IC's strong conviction that the ordinary person can be used by God to do extraordinary things.

More than fifty years later, Mountain House continues to operate on the same principles as it did in those first years. An honest facing up to the past still today evokes a dramatic response. One example comes from Lebanon.

In February 2000, just ten years after a civil war in which seventy thousand Lebanese died and seventeen thousand are still unaccounted for, a remarkable letter appeared in Beirut's dailies (Sennott 2000). It was an apology by Assaad Chaftari, a high-ranking officer in the Christian militia, for what he had done in the name of Christianity. For ten years he had wanted to make this apology. "We were all responsible," he said, "those holding the guns, those giving the orders, even the civilians applauding it." Charles Sennott, writing in the *Boston Globe*, said that Chaftari had "stunned Lebanon with a statement extraordinary in its simplicity and honesty" (2000).

Some months later at a conference in Caux, Chaftari repeated his apology before an international audience. He outlined his previous beliefs to the conference. Chaftari had regarded Muslims as a danger. They were brothers, yes, but of a lesser God. Because they looked toward the Arab world and he toward the West, Muslims were traitors for him. In the war he shelled Muslim areas or passed sentence on adversaries who had relations with Muslims, with what he thought then to be a

clean conscience. "After a week of mischief I could go to church on Sunday at ease with myself and with God" (MRA 2000a; MRA 2000b).

Toward the end of the war, however, Chaftari had met some Lebanese who were associated with Caux and Moral Re-Armament and who were providing a forum for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Here, again, there was a link with Laure, for one of the things that played its part, "perhaps subconsciously," he says, was the film about her life (Chaftari 2002). In these occasions for dialogue he heard about the dreams, the hopes, the grievances of the other Lebanese people. In March 2000, he had prayed in a mosque. As Chaftari told the Caux audience, "For the first time it felt like we were praying to the same God." He concluded, "I am ashamed of my past. I know I cannot change it. But I also know that I can be responsible for the future of my country" (MRA 2000a).

As the audience in Mountain House rose in a standing ovation, another Lebanese man, Hisham Shihab, came up to the platform and embraced Chaftari, shouting out, "I am a Muslim who was shooting at his countrymen from the other side of the 'green line'. I also apologize and accept his apology and will help him in any way I can." Shihab said that he had been trained as a young man to shoot straight with the admonition, "Imagine there is a Christian in your sights." He had shelled Christian areas and sniped at Christians. But his conscience had told him that all political causes were not worth the bloodshed. "I pledge to walk hand in hand with Chaftari," Shihab promised (MRA 2000b).

The next year, in 2001, on the same platform, Muhieddine Shihab, an elected official from Beirut, apologized for atrocities he had committed as a leader of a Muslim militia in the civil war. "Nothing in the world is more dangerous than a man who fears for his life and property," he said. "Self defense can quickly turn into vengeance and the wrongful taking of life. What motivated me and people like me to take up arms was absolutely evil." He was followed to the platform by Jocelyn Khoueiry, who had led a corps of Christian "girl soldiers" on the other side of the barricades from Muhieddine Shihab. Khoueiry, too, had found her attitude to the enemy shifting (Lean 2001, 5).

In 2002, Lebanese from different sides and different faiths, including Chaftari and the two Shihabs, came to Europe to speak together of their experiences of finding healing and unity. These former enemies had become friends, with an impressive depth of honesty and trust built between them. Wherever they spoke they gave moving accounts of their involvement in atrocities, not just against the other community, but also between rival groups of the same faith. For each one there had been a defining moment when they came to the realization that violence was not the way forward. At risk to themselves, they each had reached out to meet someone from the other side, discovering "they were a human just like me." Chaftari is still worried about his country's future, but welcomes these signs of hope. "Asking for forgiveness is difficult," he says, "and forgiving seems impossible, but is essential for the reconstruction of a country" (MRA 2002a).

IC's Principles for Positive Change

What, in essence, does Irène Laure's change and commitment and that of the others who followed tell us of the methodology of MRA/IC? Some who work with it would even deny there is a methodology. They would caution against reducing to a formula what is often spontaneous and driven by care for people. Certainly there is a serendipity about some activities, even coincidences or encounters that IC adherents might put down to God at work. They would definitely suggest that an openness to unexpected ways is vital. "One of their great strengths," writes Gopin, "has been the model of informal networking and relationship building, which has important theological roots for them, for it is in the 'surprises' of human connections and chance meetings that they see the Divine Hand guiding human beings toward reconciliation with others and with God" (2002, 161). Nonetheless, certain principles do stand out and are there whenever you meet IC's committed people and try to learn what it is they do.

It is no surprise that the word *change* should be enshrined in the organization's new name, *Initiatives of Change*. MRA often speaks of the "full dimension of change." As early as 1921, Buchman defined his aim as "a program of life issuing in personal, social, racial, national, and supernational change." In 1932 he stressed, "Lives must be changed if problems are to be solved. Peace in the world can only spring from peace in the hearts of men. A dynamic experience of God's free spirit is the answer to regional antagonism, economic depression, racial conflict, and international strife" (1961, 3).

Archie Mackenzie, a British diplomat who has been long associated with Initiatives of Change and with Caux, writes in his recently published memoirs that when at international conferences, he often reflected that the problems on the table were not so difficult as the problems sitting around the table, and yet no one was doing anything about the latter. A feature of his contribution to diplomacy was that he did try to do something about them, and in some cases succeeded (2002, 54).

From the outset the heart of MRA's philosophy has been that if you want to bring a change in the world, the most practical way is to start with change in yourself and your country. Laure often made the point in later years that if you have less to put right than the other person, then isn't it easier for you to start first? The emphasis on starting with yourself and your own group can help break the endless cycles of blame and retribution. It is certainly extraordinary that at the Caux conference just two years after the end of World War II, blaming of the Germans and Japanese happened only when someone was overcome by their wartime experiences. Instead, British ex-servicemen, for example, went out of their way to express their regret for the way Germany was treated by the Allied governments after World War I. Buchman's question to Laure about rebuilding Europe reflected an element of vision for the Germans, despite all that had happened.

Initiatives of Change puts forward the practice of taking a time of quiet, alone or in community—*le silence* of which Laure spoke to Pan—helping each individual find for himself or herself the right course of action. As aids to identifying the next

steps forward, and as standards for private and public life, IC recommends universal benchmarks of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. Laure said of these standards, "It is this that gives strength to the quiet time. Otherwise one comes out of a time of meditation with a vague feeling of personal uplift, but without having faced the reality of life. It is through these times of silence and in obeying what was deepest in myself that I have been able to accomplish things that were humanly speaking, for me, impossibilities" (Marcel 1960, 26).

Gopin, who has studied the subject thoroughly, writes that MRA's methods of peacebuilding and relationship building involve

a profoundly persistent pattern of relationship building with key individuals on either side of a conflict, and the use of spiritual awakening to provoke self-examination and transformation of one's relationships. It also involves support for and evocation of a spirit of personal responsibility that recognizes primarily one's own part in the failure of one's relationships. Further, awakening to the "spirit of God" within you as well as between you and others is critical, in addition to a very strong focus on personal morality. Indeed for many associated with this society, personal morality and the morality of one's culture are at the heart of their message and teaching, with peacemaking taking a secondary role. (2002, 110)

Wanting the best for the other person does, indeed, take precedence over the results, whether political, social, or economic. In other words peace is a fruit of change in people. A vision is held before people of the wider part they can play in their countries and what could be different as a result. Those surrounding Madame Laure, for instance, wanted to build on her desire to see a new Europe and her compassion where there was suffering. It was not for them to tell her that hatred was wrong or to suggest that she should apologize to the Germans. No one had any idea of the dramatic form her change would take. It was Laure's spiritual growth that would have been the priority for those who lived alongside her, helping her to be ready to accept the next step God had for her, whatever that might be. Of her encounter with Buchman in the hallway as she was preparing to leave Caux, Laure said: "If at that moment he had pitied me or sympathized with me, I would have left. He gave me a challenge in love. It was the quality in him that arrested me. One felt his life corresponded exactly to his belief. He transmitted the feeling of certainty to you, that if you accepted change, you could have a part in the transformation of the world" (Lean 1982, 353).

Montville sees the experience of Madame Laure as a model for relieving a sense of victimhood and the violence associated with it, which usually defies traditional diplomatic attempts at a solution. Although it is rare for national leaders to admit past national misdeeds, he believes that individual representatives like Laure can assume such responsibility. By their acts of forgiveness or contrition, they then become spokespersons for a new way of thinking and a new image for their respective nations (1991, 161).

Laure's readiness to apologize not only for her own hatred of the Germans, but also to admit to failings by France in North Africa and Southeast Asia, was a key to helping nationals from those parts of the world break free from their bitterness about the past. Such readiness has been encouraged at all levels by MRA over the years, in the belief that an individual prepared honestly to acknowledge his or her own country's failings may defuse the antagonism felt by a person from another country, whose heart has been closed to any form of dialogue. As we have seen with the Laure example and also the Lebanese, Caux conferences have often witnessed such unofficial apologies. They are said to have had significant influence in issues as varied as Tunisia achieving independence without bloodshed and the resolution of the conflict between German- and Italian-speaking people in South Tyrol (see Henderson 1996, 37-43; 148-160).

The role of MRA has traditionally been an enabling one. A French Member of Parliament Georges Mesmin says that political figures who come to Caux find three things:

- *A respect for all opinions.* "Despite certain remarks which could be hurtful, people have not become angry. We have listened to everyone, and we have all benefited."
- *An openness to others and to forgiveness, even when one thinks another is wrong.* "We politicians are inclined to battle at the level of personalities. One thing we slowly learn at Caux is to distinguish between the battle of ideas and the battle with a person who is an adversary now but who tomorrow could become a friend."
- *An atmosphere of friendship.* "In this building you make friends who want nothing from you. Here we have a vision of a world of goodwill, a world where one cares for the real interests of others and not one's own. It is a well of living unselfishness" (cited in Henderson 1996, 15).

Hamlin puts it this way:

It should also be emphasized that after these intense animosities are removed or alleviated, all the political and economic differences remain to be negotiated. MRA has seen its role as enabling those who finally have to sit down to negotiate a settlement, to be better able to negotiate or even be willing to negotiate. It is therefore a precursor work to the formal diplomacy, rarely involving negotiation itself, but rather working privately behind the scenes at the different ends of a dispute, to prepare or enable the parties for negotiation. (1992, 14)

Richard Ruffin, executive director of Initiatives of Change in the United States, believes the challenge before positive peacemakers is to build longterm relationships of trust with people on all sides of a conflict. He adds: "For the first time in modern history, those shaping policies in the major nations recognize that traditional concepts of international relations no longer explain the interdependent world in which we live. Nor do traditional instruments of policy reliably produce the expected results. This . . . led to a recognition that current reality requires an approach to the resolution of conflict that involves the healing of wounds and the

building of new relationships across a broad spectrum. This recognition, in turn, brought an understanding of a moral and spiritual dimension to statecraft, a dimension that should prompt the foreign policy community to draw on the resources and experience of spiritually-motivated individuals and groups in quest for solutions” (1993, 10).

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