

International Conference Centre

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for Moral Re-Armament

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Caux, 15th July, 1996

Dear friends,

As the sky lightens and takes on a pink pre-sunrise glow, the house starts to stir. In a short while, the Dalai Lama and his party will leave. ~~Tomorrow will bring the close of this exotic 'flower'.~~ The numbers will start to drop again - for a short while - and we enter another phase of this roller-coaster summer. And thank God that summer seems to have come at last, and large numbers have been able to eat out on the terrace. It's even more impossible than usual to give a whole picture, so much has been going on. Two evenings running, the press team has been hard at work producing press releases on major events with the Dalai Lama, and so have had to miss the evening programmes - two remarkable concerts, where the music helped many to digest the rich diet of words in a wordless banquet. Mind you, such was the power of the Russian music evening in the theatre that we heard at least some of it in the third floor office where we work! The Russian mezzo-soprano Olga Bouzina must have been shaking the chandeliers, and since her many encores followed an encore-extended solo performance by the Russian pianist Victor Ryabchikov, the concert and the story closed together. Last night brought a clarinet ensemble from Zürich, several of them involved with Swissair for another venture into wordlessness (but for the singing), and for some it was a stirring symbol and gesture of 'healing part of the Caux past'.

The words struggle more feebly than usual to transmit something of the experience - see our press releases. The sight of a little boy wandering to the front of the super-packed hall yesterday to help himself to the Dalai Lama's sandal, the Buddhist leader's laugh and loving gestures; will remain in the memory when some of his words start to fade. The 300 plus overflow in the theatre, watching on a large-screen TV link, could follow as well as (or better than) the 700 or so in the hall for the 'Jubilee Lecture'. The precious heart of these days has been an important step forward in the difficult, sensitive dialogue between faiths. The hallmark of the speakers from the platform has been the love and respect for the otherness of the other. The phrase that sticks in my mind is from the American Jewish Rabbi Marc Gopin, about pieces of the divine to be found everywhere, as we search for and discover 'long-lost cousins'. The spiritual discovery of others can be the greatest gift and challenge for the human race in the century to come. We can see this unavoidable process either as a threat to, or as a completion of, our own identity. And the Dalai Lama himself pointed to the role that Caux may play in the future in the area of interfaith dialogue.

It has been another of those periods of massive collective effort, with many hard at work unseen, in the different invisible 'engine rooms' of the house, so that the whole does not just work but radiates some spiritual force. One of the younger people who carried the preparatory days with such originality and humility spoke of a collective energy bank into which we

can all either put in or draw out. We have all given out a good deal, and received much too, I hope. We have been praying that we would not milk the Tibetan leader dry, but that there would be such a spirit of selfless care in the house that he himself might leave refreshed. That it is not ours to know. He certainly had a full programme here, one that was not entirely of our doing. In the gaps between the two or three main events we had planned, there was a stream of visitors, ranging from journalists to large groups from the Bhutanese and Mongolian embassies or diplomatic missions.

Moments of magic, of great depth and importance rush by before we can fully digest or assimilate them in the preceding days. 'The meaning of life goes beyond time,' a Russian told us, in response to a question about what he had found in his three years in a labour camp under Stalin. 'Very important spiritual processes are under way in Russia,' he adds, sadly commenting that he fears the worst is still to come, and that in the elections, he voted for thieves so that the bandits wouldn't come to power. A Polish intellectual spoke with simple clarity about his country's relations with the Jewish people, and the shadowy chapter of the last war, so seldom addressed honestly.

I hurry up to the front door, where the Swiss bodyguard team have brought their sleek black cars to the door, and a small group is gathering to say farewell. In a rush, the Dalai Lama appears with his suite, thanking each one of those present, a video crew filming away, as he heads out of the door, bows heads and clasps hands with Rajmohan Gandhi, doors close, a last smile and wave, and the motorcade sweeps away for Geneva airport.

There've been sunsets and lighting effects on the lake that stop even old Caux hands in their tracks and make them say, 'I've never seen it like that, never so beautiful before.' Perhaps one of the keys to the peace-in-activity has been the daily times of prayer in the Catholic chapel just before supper; another the 7.30 planning meetings, where there has always been space for prayer, for the sharing of some reading to meditate on in the midst of the host of details to be decided. Stunning flowers have brightened our days - including a large gift of orchids, which arrived with the group from Malaysia.

The preparation days, on the theme of 'renewal of the spirit' were taken in hand by the 'making Britain a home' team of young professionals and others of their generation from across Europe and further afield, with a few older helpers, including my parents as honorary grandparents. We moved from a day on listening - with space for the practice as well as the theory, and 'heavy duty unclogging' - to a day on yearning, hope, fear and attachment, and finally a meditation on God's love for each one of us. The proposed themes for reflection were not easy, provoked some pain and tears in the deep sharing in the community meetings. For example, the suggestion that we take time to write our own obituaries takes on a very different 'feel', depending on the stage of life that one has reached. But then, the aim is not to get everyone agreeing, but to start or further a process of renewal, and all felt this not-easy aim was achieved. A striking new British production of Peter Howard's classic play 'The Ladder' was a powerful part of this process for many. Music, poetry in a variety of languages, beautiful slides have all played a part. A younger Swedish friend who arrived during this time brought laughter in a 7.30 meeting by commenting that this was her first visit in ten years and that the faces she saw hadn't changed a bit. She hastened to add that she sensed a spirit of joy and freedom in the house. She had hesitated between a visit to Caux and a folk-dancing course, and had arrived in Caux for an evening of Scottish and other dances out on the terrace.

Rather saturated greetings from a summery Caux,
Andrew Stallybrass