

# International Conference Centre

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Geneva, 26th August, 1996

Dear friends,

The view and the time are different today. The Monday morning letter-writing ritual is changed. I'm in the Geneva MRA office, looking across the city towards Mont Blanc, which rises to the clouds. We moved back home yesterday, among the many hurrying away from Caux, and welcomed friends from Australia for the night and a farewell fondu. It's hard to put into words all our gratitude for what God has given, and for what so many people around the world have poured into this summer; in this last period, particularly the 'most of the world', those from Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Pacific. I won't be able to check this letter with friends involved in these last days and the final events of the summer, so it will be even more of a personal view than usual, written with weary gratitude, and considerable emotion. The Swiss MRA Foundation are meeting downstairs, and with the help of some of the other spouses, we're preparing this last send-out.

I must express my thanks to all the 'publishers' who take the letter that I write, and send it out to you, my readers. I don't know many of these people. Edward Howard has been doing a rapid and important work in sending out e-mail copies - but this last time, I'm going to have to handle it all myself. Thanks too to you the readers, for your many expressions of gratitude, for your thoughts and prayers throughout these busy weeks that have been an important if invisible part of the undergirding of this amazing Jubilee. A cheery card arrived 'from Tasmania, not to be confused with Tanzania', from one of the many expressing their prayerful support.

This is something of a farewell. I will now be starting a sabbatical year. I won't be in Caux next summer, so I won't be writing these letters again, at least for a while. There's an opportunity for something new to develop. Perhaps several different people will feel led to report of the different events and sessions... I'll be doing some part-time studies in theology at the University of Geneva, working as a volunteer with our church's AIDS ministry, finishing my book on the history of Caux - I completed a first draft before the summer, but there's a good deal more work to do on it.

In Caux, the work is starting on the change-over to the hotel school, but don't forget that the Caux Expo will remain available for visitors. There'll be regular opening hours on Saturdays, and for groups on request. On Saturday, there was a superb 'open day' - a final underlining of the fresh openness to the village, to the region. Between 1pm and 7pm, some 500 people poured through, round a well-planned circuit of the house, with guides and photocopied notes. The video shows were packed out. Many of our overseas friends lent a hand. One of our senior Swiss Caux team was touched to be accosted by a New Zealand Maori lady who offered to show him round the house. Many spent time going through the Expo. A fair number left their names and addresses: they want to come back to take part in one of the conferences. The Brandt family from Bulle, and other French-Swiss friends had prepared and advertised the day, and we just had to follow instructions.

The day started depressingly wet, with good views onto the insides of clouds, but nothing else. My heart sank, because the day was meant to end with a big bang - a firework display on the terrace. God gave us a last big friendly

wink as the clouds cleared, the sun set over the Jura and the lake, garlands of lights appeared around the shore. There were even the lights of a flotilla of boats on the darkening water. After energetic Australian 'bush dancing' in the front hall, we expectantly gathered outside, at the top of the lawn. We were startled by three loud bangs, followed by a '50' in fire that burned throughout the minutes that came, of ephemeral cascades of colour in the sky, punctuated with the 'oohs' and 'ahhs' and applause of the appreciative crowd.

Yesterday was marked with a final church service in the Protestant chapel, where instead of the sermon, there were times of quiet, with prayer, and the chance to put burdens, inner knots or decisions on a piece of paper that the minister blessed before we took communion together. Then a final meeting; numbers have dropped fast, but a large circle of chairs in the hall, and lively participation in a first effort at evaluation, led by the 'trio' of Anne-Katherine Gilomen, Pierre Spoerri and myself, closing with our spouses coming up unexpectedly, to thank us.

The week started for me in bed with a cold, so I'm afraid I'm not well-placed to report on the 'Creators of Peace - a women's initiative'. I heard the Tanzanian delegation singing on the lawn, and then in several meetings. I heard of the tableau-scene that opened the event, with some of the great women pioneers of MRA who have passed, on presenting in a phrase or two their message, and then a panel of senior ladies all fully present still, giving theirs. The Irish group from the 'Women Together' group displayed three colourful quilts as a backdrop, each representing hours of work and discussion during the work by groups from the different communities. The children singing for us all in a celebration of difference and diversity. A Canadian First Nation chief, a member of parliament, who has called a sacred assembly to bring healing, telling of his experience, speaking with his traditional head-dress of eagles' feathers.

A session on 'the bare-footed heart' brings together speakers from Ireland, Lebanon, South Africa and Croatia. Dozens of people sum up their experience of Caux in one word: freedom, understanding, hope, forgiveness, honesty, laughter, tea-time, working together... The baton is passed, as we are invited to write down our commitment to peace-making, to roll the card into a tube, a baton. So each one passes on, but each one also receives a fresh challenge, concern or prayer. A group from Moldova, one of the 'Commonwealth of Independent States' that has replaced the Soviet empire, present their country and its history. The Mufti of Albania, who spent 21 years in Communist prisons, shares of his faith and experience. Young Japanese and Taiwanese sing together, each in their own language, but to the same melody, after moving apologies from the Japanese. A First Nation Canadian tells of the healing she has experienced in her feelings of bitterness towards the British - and a Scot rises in reply to express hew own sense of regret for the darker parts of her nation's history. A group of us gather outside as it starts to rain, and thunder rolls, to plant a tree in memory of Andrew Smith, a young Scot who died last year, who loved Caux and gave so much here. Despite the rain, there is a luminous pool of golden light, a patch of sun on the lake.

The final Jubilee lecture of the summer, from Swiss theologian Walter Hollenweger, was a firework display of ideas on the theme of 'tolerance and conviction', and of dialogue as the true missionary call to Christians: God is already present in the other, we cannot, must not, try to make others into carbon copies of ourselves. He cited the story from the Acts of the Apostles (Ch.10) where Saint Peter and the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, meet. Both have already had some experience of God, and through their meeting and dialogue, both are changed by the encounter. 'A Christian is a clown who plays with his life,' Hollenweger said. 'He undermines the seriousness of institutions with the joy of his grace.'

I'm looking forward to having the time now to read and study Mike Henderson's new book, 'The Forgiveness Factor', specially written and produced for this Jubilee summer, an up-to-date and documented compilation of all the best stories of MRA. (And I hope before too long to be able to recommend to you my book on the history of the centre itself.)

Grateful greetings, Andrew Stallybrass

*Andrew*