

MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

8th August, 1988

Dear Friends,

There have been so many joys, so many reasons for gratitude to share in these letters, so many moving reminders of the amazing world family that we are called to be part of. Why should I have imagined that we should be spared the pain and even the revolt and incomprehension in the face of life's greatest mystery? Yesterday, in the words of one friend, we had a sudden visit from the angel of life. At the beginning of Sunday lunch, in the main dining room, Serge Borel collapsed and died of a massive heart attack.

Within seconds doctors were at his side. For a full hour, a first rate ad hoc medical team fought to restore him to life - a Swedish heart specialist, a Filipino nurse specialising in emergency re-animation, one of Serge's best friends, Dr. Jaccottet, just up for the day with his family, then an ambulance crew, and finally a helicopter team from the cantonal hospital in Lausanne, landed on the lawn. All that could have been done was done. And through it all, there was the most amazing prayerful silent atmosphere in the packed dining room. All those who came from outside were struck by it and commented on it. We can never forget those minutes spent together, the other world just a breeze-breath away through a translucent screen. It was the anniversary of Frank Buchman's death.

Serge was 54, had just come back from a holiday with the family... We cannot yet quite grasp what has happened. How to understand the ways of God? And perhaps if we understood, we'd be gods ourselves - and we're not. It seems that it wasn't an accident; it was the chosen moment. Regula, Jean-Denis, Sylviane and Marie-Claude were all here, are here for now. They already have felt the prayerful support of so many of their closest friends who were on the spot. In the difficult days to come, they will have the prayers of so many more.

It is very hard to continue, to leave Serge, even in words and turn to other matters. What is God telling us all? Life goes on, the conference goes on, there is much to do. The army of helpers on the other side is strengthened by a calm, strong, gentle presence.

Last Monday, 1st August, we welcomed, as expected, 15 from the Chinese diplomatic mission in Geneva for the afternoon and evening celebrations of the Swiss national day. The threatened bad weather passed us by. They heard and tried to play alpenhorns, saw a flag thrower jungling with his Swiss flag. They also had a visit of the house, with some of its past and present, a brief outline of Swiss history and the meaning of the day. They processed up the hill with the rest of the village and the conference. We still have to decide what to do with the crate of Chinese beer that they gave us by way of thanks! But tomorrow, 20 of us are invited to dinner with them in Geneva, so it is an on-going saga.

Then I was away for a few days, but I asked Pierre Spoerri to keep some notes on what was going on. 'In the days before the Asian/African/Pacific session started we were again reminded of the fact that travelling from one continent to the other cannot be taken for granted. Four groups were expected from one Africa country. The first reached the airport, only to be told that there was no room on the plane for them. Of two other groups, no definite information has reached us yet. From the Far East, other friends tried to telephone their arrival date but the bad line and language problems combined to make it impossible to understand. The good news is that they have meanwhile arrived. The baggage of one other Asian couple seems still to be travelling, long after its owners arrived. By the time this letter gets out, we hope that it will have rejoined its proprietor.

'On the eve of the new session, there was a party in the Panorama room for all the participants who had arrived. The atmosphere at the beginning was a bit stiff: there is no natural reason why a Filipino and a Ugandan, or a South African black lady and a Thai military officer would find a basis to converse. The friends responsible for the party had thought through a game to allow informal "introductions". Each one received a bit of paper with half of a contrasting pair - table-chair, thick-thin, big-small, etc. The paper with the word "dirty" (opposite: clean) by chance landed in the hands of an Asian army-officer, who put it with a gesture of shame into his pocket. Only as the game proceeded were he and his partner introduced to each other with great gales of laughter.

'At the opening meeting, the high point was the speech of Mrs Manglapus (see the separate sheet). While some of those who spoke had been active in MRA for many years, the spokesman for Africa was a young Ugandan teacher who told the audience what he had learnt in 24 hours in Caux. With realism and humour he spoke about the needs of his country and his continent and of the necessity of creating an ethical infrastructure on which economic development could grow. The meeting was preceded by a dinner for forty, sitting around a horseshoe table in the main dining-room, with the Filipino ambassador and Gerhard Grob as hosts.

'During the first days of this session, two groups made a very special impression - the Thais and the Filipinos. Since then, others have arrived, from India, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Egypt. Next week, the Latin Americans will also join in larger numbers. Both the Thais and the Filipinos took a whole afternoon session to present their country, their work and their vision of what MRA could do in the future. The needs expressed were great, but even greater were the expectations. As Sam Pono from South Africa said in one of the morning sessions, "Sometimes it takes me months to accept God's will. But whenever I accept it, I start to grow again and people around me change." '

Which brings us back to yesterday, Sunday, and one of the great classic MRA meetings. It was to be Marie-Claude Borel's great day. A group from the Vaud farming women's association was coming for the day, brought by their former president, and some of them arrived already for the session, and sang and spoke. Family life was the theme. A Laotian couple, he a former senior diplomat, spoke, bringing gales of laughter with their honesty and humour. Babulal, a 'Harijan' from Delhi, a senior Sri Lankan journalist and editor, a professional woman from Finland - there was amazing variety and depth. The ladies, in their

national costumes, later served a sumptuous tea that they had baked and prepared in their homes. Daniel Mottu read the notes that Serge Borel had made for the word of thanks that he had planned to say to them. It included a typical note of Serge's humour: 'Have you ever thought that from the Vaud side, the lake takes on the shape of a smile?'

The three local newspapers all carried reports of the farming ladies visit. 'L'Est Vaudois', the Montreux paper had a front page headline 'Celebration touched with sadness' and carried a colour photograph in a back page box; '24 Heures' the largest circulation French-language Swiss daily carried a photo and a story headlined 'Breaking the ice - a better look at Moral Re-Armament'. All briefly mentioned Serge's passing.

There are, as always, many reasons for gratitude. There have been several important and unexpected gifts to the foundation; the bed-nights total for the month of July was nearly a thousand higher than last year, and this week will see the conference overflowing to every bed we can lay our hands on in the village of Caux and a good many in Glion. This is a period when the average age of the participants at the conference goes up again and some guests cannot immediately join a service- or a cook-shift, so the work-teams are stretched a bit more. They are entering this next phase of the conference in great spirits. But they can use any prayers - or additional help, that still could be mustered.

We have also been able to have many of these precious, more private times, to examine a part of the world and our work: an evening with the South Africans, to look with such simple openness and honesty at some of their plans and hopes; a time with R.D. Mathur on the plans for the Indian 'Yatra' (pilgrimage), and the vastly encouraging news that the official gazette carries notice of the government's recognition of the national importance of our work there, freeing our friends to receive gifts from overseas again.

I wanted to conclude by quoting from a letter some of us have just received from one of the young people who was here for the youth session - and I may add that her first language is not English! 'It made me feel like a real person with a sudden value, a human being with a purpose in life. I'm part of God's plan of remaking the world, changing people, to begin with myself and my family. These two weeks in Caux turned me upside down and inside out...Although I've been several times before, this time really changed my life...I'm glad I gave my life into God's hands because it really makes me feel free and happy inside. But I realise now that it is not only a big decision you make once, but that I have to say "yes" to God every day over and over again. And I will!' The life of the spirit goes on.

Yours ever,

Andrew Stallybrass