

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Sunday, 2nd August 1992

Dear friends,

I'm cheating - it's not yet Monday. But I have a godson from Canada whom I've promised to take out into the mountains for three days, and we leave today. So here I am, fighting with habit, and worrying a little about the weather, since we had a thunder storm last night, after many days of increasing heat, when we were all glad to be up in the mountains and not down in the valley. The trouble is that last night was the 1st of August, Swiss national day. It was the first time in many years that it has come on to rain as we were gathering outside Mountain House for the procession up the hill to the bonfire at Hauts de Caux. Still, it gave all the village the chance to come in to the Great Hall, and listen to an Alpenhorn trio indoors. The local postmaster, in his speech of welcome (as head of the village committee) remarked on the 'carpeted alpine meadow', and requested that no fireworks be let off. The poor technical crew having slaved to put up lights, sound and decorations, raced against the rain to get them all down again in record time. The children of the village played the fifes and drums, the trumpet, and read the founding pact of 1291. Conference participants joined in the party, the Africans singing and dancing, a Czechoslovak group singing songs from their now-divided land, and explaining that they'd decided to sing together, 'and not to split like our politicians did'. Two men from the Bulgarian mime-circus group amazed young and old with their magic, drawing apprehensive and energetic 'volunteers' from the audience.

The head count is over 500 for the first time, and the house is bursting at the seams. The house-keepers are stretched to the limit, as many of the young people leave at the close of the session they hosted, and more people arrive for the session on 'Learning and teaching'. How on earth to distil the essence of this last week for you? It has been so full. This youth-hosted session, like last year's, was the fruit of a massive labour of preparation. There was a sense of spiritual battle, an effort of imagination to reach out in fresh ways to those searching for meaning in life. With all the life and variety and fun (and late nights for some), there has been a seriousness of purpose, encouraged by the daily times of quiet on a theme and a simple list of questions.

A Lebanese Muslim spoke of his inner battery of goodness being recharged by last year's session. He'd stopped drinking, and this year he'd stopped smoking. In Caux he had learnt to serve strangers, so back at home he'd surprised his mother by helping her. 'But after six months, my batteries were flat again,' he said. He ended, 'I found it is because I did not manage to have regular times of quiet. It changes my life towards the good and helps me to be practical about my faith. God is near to us. When He is not near, we are the ones who have moved away. So I have decided to make my quiet time regular because it keeps me near to God.' A Christian friend added, 'Lebanon is not just a country. It is a message. We need to build anew.' Their work across the divides between communities was to help people see clearly the conflict between good and evil. They were followed by a group of young Europeans who had just visited Jordan. They spoke alongside a Jordanian-Palestinian student. One of them said, 'When you travel from the West, you need to pack a whole lot of humility in your bag.' He went on, 'Ignorance is not bliss, but one of the reasons for the walls between our cultures.'

At the final meeting, a young Hungarian spoke of the deep impression the session had made on their group. It represented a new hope and a new start. 'In Eastern Europe, the real problem after the changes is not economics, but with thinking and identity,' he went on. After communism's collapse, nothing was left but nationalism. 'Caux for me means that I am not alone. I've started to trust Romanians again after talks here. We can build new relations between our two countries,' he said. A Czech psychologist pleaded for help in tearing down walls. 'These last 45 years of communism are nothing to him for whom everything is possible,' she said. 'We have learnt to love the life with God,' a German said. A Canadian talked of the wall of shelter that he'd built between himself and the world that he'd decided to break down.

We've heard Latvian songs, seen Hungarian dances (and joined in), listened to a Romanian group leading a meeting on 'Walls between different parts of society' enlivened by sketches showing that you can't always judge by appearances. The many children, with a clear sense of priorities, have twice held a sale of their handiwork to raise money (80 francs so far) to repair the ice-cream machine.

In one of the 'open forums' (I suppose it should really read 'fora'?), we met the 7 members of the technical crew who work so hard behind the scenes for the evening programmes. 300 man-hours went into the evening with Saint Birgitta from Sweden. Despite the years (600), and the language barriers (how many of you are fluent in Swedish?) she spoke to us with great artistry and directness. Another evening, all those disliking laughter were warned to stay away from the theatre as the Bulgarian mime-circus-magic group wowed us all. Then there was a variety evening, with a resurrected Elvis Presley making a come-back with a new version of 'Are you lonesome tonight?' Ten young Japanese, including one in a wheel chair sang with great gusto. The Latvians dazzled us with the beauty of their national costumes. The German contingent mounted a deeply-felt sketch on the breakdown of a Mercedes, and the solidarity of a Trabant-load of East Germans. The humbled Mercedes was towed off stage by the Trabant! The 16 Poles sang a song from the Solidarity era: 'If I hit the wall, and if you hit the wall, if we all hit the wall together, it will fall and bury the old. But beware of new walls growing up.' There was a colourful, tuneful African chorus; song and dance seem as natural as breathing. The New Zealanders got all the audience on their feet singing a simple Maori action song.

The many different actions under way or planned that need help and support were outlined. I have the feeling that we are on the brink of some important growth - but we must claim the spiritual authority and leadership to bring it to maturity. After the end of the session, we had a brainstorming with over 100 people on the future of Caux, drawing out the ideas of young and old. We concluded that we could well do such a time after each session.

I want to conclude with some of the words of a new song on the theme of the youth-hosted session by Karen Elliott (with music by Andrew Smith):
'There's a wall around my heart, it's been there for years,
Built with bitterness and the salt of my tears.
Can't go over it; can't go around. There's only one thing left to do - that's
tear it down.
And I pray: Help me tear down this wall, not one brick, but them all,
For too much in me has died, living on this side.'

Greetings from this mini-olympic hive of athletic activity!

Andrew Stallybrass