

CLEANING THE SLATE, THE PROMISE OF A NEW START

Can the turn of the millennium mark more than a date on the calendar and a great party? This has been a century of paradoxes: increasing awareness of human and individual rights – the loss of a sense of meaning and the breakdown of community; ever more efficient means of communication – broken relations between people and within families; unprecedented efforts at peace-making – wars that have killed millions; technological progress and affluence for some – continuing suffering and poverty for many.

The new millennium can prompt reflection on the purpose of life and the direction of society. What will be new depends on each one of us. Too often, hurts received or inflicted, fears and addictions hold back our efforts to create the better future that all long for and so many desperately need. Yet restitution and forgiveness are possible, and the Spirit can set us free to start again with a clean slate.

(from the invitation for Caux 1999 – now available)

LOOKING FORWARD FROM THE PLATEAU

'My life has been reborn,' said a young Taiwanese, summing up her experience at the eighth Asia Pacific Youth Conference, at Asia Plateau. 'It has helped solve my personal problems, and opened my eyes to the world.' She was one of many who spoke appreciatively about the week-long program.

The conference was opened by Sri Prithvaraj Chavan, a central government MP for the area of Maharashtra in which Asia Plateau lies. Its theme was 'how to create a harmonious 21st century'. It included plenary sessions on environmental ethics and family life, and lively cultural presentations from the eight nations represented. In a local village, school children gave us a performance of song and dance. Our own workshops in dance, drama and music created a magnificent final evening.

Among the Indian participants were six from the Bodo people of the North East, where groups of extremists confront each other, and there are killings and injuries every day. The conference offered a different way of resolving problems. Before leaving, a Bodo school teacher said, 'I have decided that I will change. And I will help my family and my people to change too.'

The main initiator of the APYC, Ren-Jou Liu from Taiwan, outlined his concept of a program of training and action starting in September 2000. This aims to bring together a group of young people who will spend

six months in India and six months elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region, supporting initiatives for constructive change.

Goretti Nguyen, Rob Wood

'DARING TO LIVE EFFECTIVELY'

A Sri Lankan human rights lawyer, two psychology graduates from Australia, a Lithuanian MBA student and an Indian homeopathic doctor are among the 28 young adults taking the 'Daring to Live Effectively' course now running at Asia Plateau. They are gaining much from speakers drawn from different parts of Indian life – journalists, industrial managers, AIDS workers, a scholar of Indian philosophy, a senior public servant ...

Half the group are from Australia and New Zealand, many of them offspring of people who came to India at roughly the age that their children are now. In the words of one 20-year old, they have come now 'to find what put the sparkle into our parents' eyes'. Three days in Mumbai before the Course began gave them a good dose of culture shock, including a meeting with homeless street boys under a railway bridge, with a veteran of the Gandhian movement and with a Swamiji at an ashram.

At the end of January all the Course participants go in two groups to Gujarat, and the South.

Vijayalakshmi Subrahmanyam, Mike Brown

INAUGURATING THE AGORA

In St Petersburg, New Year's Day saw the formal inauguration of the Agora Community, the ecumenical forum initiated by academics, students, teachers and church leaders in the city, who have attended Caux conferences during the last six years.

The former vice-rector of the Orthodox Spiritual Academy, Father Benjamin Novik, blessed the newly-restored apartment on the Fontanka Embankment and presented it with a crucifix; Father Stefan of the Catholic Church of the Assumption sprinkled holy water, and the Anglican priests, Father Stuart Robertson and Dr Sergei Makov, offered prayers. The Harmony Choir from Gatchina, led by Irina Roganova, sang Christmas carols and Orthodox church music.

In my address as Chairman of the Community, I quoted Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev's statement that 'the only revolution worth following is a revolution of the human spirit'. Berdyaev, I recalled, had been influenced during his exile in Paris by the

French Christian existentialist, Gabriel Marcel, whose book, *Un Changement d'espérance* (Fresh Hope for the World) expressed the relationship between the global and the intimate in the life of faith. Agora, I said, which next month starts a programme of seminars on the social dimension of Christianity, will stress that relationship.

Next day the youngest member of the community, aged four months, was baptised at the centre, and the following day there was an Anglican communion service. On Christmas Day, January 7, the community entertained a group of homeless children to dinner.

The tel/fax number of the Agora is +7 812 273 1861

Ken Rundell

DOWN FROM THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

The Winter Session on that magic mountain at Caux took place from December 26 - January 2. Many of the 120 participants were children and young people. It was organised, amongst others, by the de Pous and Overdijkink families from Holland, Jan Vandewege from Belgium and Jean-Denis Borel and Seraina Bertsch from Switzerland.

The session's theme was 'To venture or not to venture – that is the question'. We discussed daring to say stop, to be flexible, to be true to oneself, to care.

The leader of my community was Peter Field from England, who has much relevant experience as he gives courses to management and staff with the aim of encouraging cooperation. Peter also gave a workshop in the evenings on 'Listening', which revealed what poor listeners most of us are, and the effect our lack of attention has on the speaker.

Each day we had workshops in painting, theatre, music and writing. I chose painting, led by Ineke Overdijkink, whose enthusiasm and boundless ideas made it a rich experience. At the last session she suggested three of us paint a picture together, one beginning each object, person or animal, the others finishing it! The caused consternation, but the result was amazing. It was an exercise in collaboration, courage, patience, humility – plus a lot of laughs.

In the evenings we had films, games, music and singing. One evening François Maunoir, Daniel Mottu and Jean-Jacques Odier, who have been with MRA since the beginning, told how they became involved while studying together at the University of Geneva. Later each felt a vocation to work with MRA full-time.

On New Year's Eve, there was much merriment, with music and dancing and a mime artist who had us in tears of laughter. Two huge sheets of paper, headed 1998 and 1999, were placed in the main hall. On the first we could write something we wanted to leave behind, and on the second we could write a resolution. Just before midnight the 1998 sheet was burned in the huge fireplace.

On New Year's Day, a large group with skis and sledges took the cog-wheel train up to the top. There

had not been much snow at Caux so it was a chance to enjoy Swiss winter sports.

I liked the friendly, informal atmosphere of the session. Everyone was called upon to participate in the presentations if they wished. As for myself, I ventured, and dared to talk into a microphone for the first time ever. We went home inspired to work for a change during this last year of the Millennium.

Livia Varju (Geneva)

INGREDIENT TO FEED THE WORLD

Seventy-five people attended the International Farmers Dialogue in Poland at the end of November. The three days of discussions ranged from Poland's preparation to join the European Union to the needs of farmers in Madagascar and India. Running through our discussions was the importance of ethical values that are essential ingredients for the future, of rural life, farming development and feeding the world. The 28 foreign participants were welcomed to farms in the region for a two-day stay before the conference.

Claude Bourdin, Jim Wigan

LAUNCHING INTO THE PACIFIC

What have rainforest walks, roller blading, workshops on freedom and conflict resolution, dancing, surfing and creating drama and music got in common? The 1999 teenage beach camp on Australia's Pacific coast – 25 of us from all over Australia. What energy! What talent! What readiness to reassess attitudes! On the final night, many spoke of the value of 'time out' at the start of a new year, of encouragement drawn from others their age who thought faith and values important, of decisions to be less judging and better listeners. The theme was 'Launching Out' and that was the experience of everyone who came.

Jane Mills

TO REACH A MILLION KENYANS

Three thousand people attended the launching of the Clean Kenya Campaign at St Andrew's Cathedral in Nairobi on January 10. The main speaker was James Mageria, Chief Executive of Vision Africa.

The Campaign has produced a new brochure, challenging everyone to play their part in cleaning up corruption, and including a pledge 'to God and my country' which all who take on this task can sign. At the heart of the brochure is a large illustration depicting 'the four pillars of a new Kenya – absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love'. The brochure describes the Campaign as 'a call to build the moral heart of our land and make it strong.... We are not going to stop until the job is done.' We have decided to print a million copies, and are hard at work raising 750,000 Kenya Shillings to do this.

Joseph Karanja, Alan Knight

From the International Co-ordination Group

In the November and December WBs we have tried to spell out some implications of the mandate for the proposed International Council, both to clarify our own thinking and to stimulate the world-wide MRA community to give thought to 'the new patterns of international consultation, communication and decision making' proposed in Jamaica. We hope these patterns can be discussed in groups or team meetings.

The first two points of the mandate were 'encouraging a shared global vision' and 'responding to and empowering committed teams at every level'. The third is 'nurturing the quality of MRA's spiritual life and fostering the development of people'.

NURTURING THE QUALITY OF MRA'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

When it comes to such nurturing, MRA has both a proud tradition and some serious failures to look back on. Buchman's constant - perhaps even his first - concern was rooting his team in the deepest spiritual truths he knew. He would not hesitate to pull full time workers away from important tasks and fly them half-way around the world to assure purity of purpose and a renewal of expectancy. 'Meeting the needs of nations through a change in men' was convincingly demonstrated. An example is the contribution to post-war European reconstruction through tackling that era's energy crisis, the production of coal. Or the contribution to peaceful decolonization by bringing opposing parties together.

But there have also been periods of misguided activism, when achieving results and involvement in social and ideological issues have replaced spiritual depth and sufficient thought. The balance between the inward rooting and the outward action will never be easy, as can be seen from the example of the so-called 'worker priests' of the Catholic church. They entered industry to bring about change by moral and spiritual means, but some ended up as social activists with a class war philosophy.

The IC should be alert to the importance of this balance, and search for ways to keep our work grounded in the right values. But that is more than a group or council can achieve. It is everybody's responsibility to enrich our common life with the precious insights and experiences of their own faith tradition. Not to do so would be to cheat our fellowship of the universality and depth which is its most attractive quality.

FOSTERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE

In any enterprise there will be a temptation to use people to reach proclaimed goals. Where this happens, the result will inevitably be a skewed development of people. Genuine care, on the other hand, will discern people's qualities, obvious or hidden, and help them to unfold. For a person to be whole, a Swiss psychiatrist asserts, four elements need to be kept in balance: the physical, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual. MRA should be a framework for this kind of rounded development.

An indispensable basis will be the experience of a change of heart, restitution for past wrongs and a decision to live by God's guidance or obedience to the inner voice.

MRA should also help people to grow in their understanding of and responsibility for the world around them. There will always be a danger of some finding a protected existence within a caring and idealistic fellowship. Exposure to the realities of social problems, hardships and conflicts of interest should be part of MRA training. This may involve theoretical or academic studies as well as living and working for longer periods in problem areas. The process of globalization poses an extra challenge: to reach out beyond our own nation or continent and live relevantly in a wider context.

The purpose of the session on 'Life - Faith - Fellowship' in Caux this summer (July 26 - 29) is both nurturing and developing people. The initiators call it 'three days to share and learn how to accompany each other on our common journey: spiritual insight, discernment and how to work it out in daily life'.

Amina Dikedi

James Hore-Ruthven

Suresh Khatri

Ren-Jou Liu

Anne-Marie Tate

Jens J. Wilhelmsen

AFRICA'S SEARCH FOR HEALING

How does healing come? Through justice, retribution, compensation? Or through something happening within, maybe with the help of our faith, counselling and/or support groups? These questions were posed by Caesar Molebatsi in a discussion on South African TV in December.

One of those taking part was Agnes Hofmeyr. She recounted the healing of a sour relationship with her father, a farmer in Kenya, and his change of attitude towards the Kenyan people. When her father and step-mother were killed by the Mau Mau, she found healing as she looked at the way she and other white

people had lived in Kenya, and apologised for arrogant, hurtful attitudes. Years later, she said, one of the men who had planned her parents' death came to her, asking forgiveness. Thanking her, Molebatsi exclaimed, 'That was more than I bargained for!'

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, spoke recently on this subject after a visit to Rwanda. 'We must break the spiral of reprisal and counter-reprisal', he said. 'I told them in Kigali, "Unless you move beyond justice in the form of a tribunal, there is no hope for Rwanda." Confession, forgiveness and reconciliation in the lives of nations are not airy-fairy religious things, nebulous

and unrealistic. They are the stuff of practical politics.' The Rwandan Government is now taking steps to set up its own 'truth and reconciliation' process.

Sam Pono, Edward Howard

ARTISTRY AT CAUX '99 AND BEYOND

Those responsible for, and concerned with, the contribution of the arts will meet February 12-15 near London. All ideas are welcome. Anyone wishing to attend should contact Hugh and Dell Williams.

Gunnar Söderlund, Hugh Williams

STARTING THE SUMMER IN CAUX

The right start is always important. That's why we want to invite you to join us in preparing Caux for the summer conferences. This warm-up week starts at supper on Friday July 2. Maya Fiaux and Douglas Paine have prepared a letter of invitation for those who want to use it – please ask for a copy. And then there is the first session on the theme, 'Cleaning the slate, the promise of a new start' (Saturday July 10, 12.00 - Friday July 16, 14.00). This is also the overall theme of the summer.

At the Haguenau planning meeting, we agreed that

each summer we need some more sessions with general themes, and that when we make these really interesting, they can become a positive alternative to the periods of the summer which attract more people than we can cope with, for example, during the Agenda for Reconciliation. We hope that those involved with the British 'Clean Slate Campaign' will have a part in this first session. But many other countries and communities have made recent efforts to clean their slates, and could contribute greatly. Please send Andrew Stallybrass your ideas and suggestions – but above all, he wants a team to carry this session with him!

Maya Fiaux, Douglas Paine, Andrew Stallybrass

SORTING OUT CHANGE

Articles from *For A Change* on the World-Wide Web are now indexed according to subjects as well as under each edition. Please check out our website at <www.mra.org.uk/fac>

Mike Smith

FACTS ON FAXES, PHONES AND ADDRESSES

Australia: John Mills has a new e-mail address: JohnBPMills@compuserve.com

Calendar of Events

JAN '99	<u>Batemans Bay Australia</u>	'Launching out – beach camp for young teenagers	Jan	6 - 12
JAN '99	<u>Asia Plateau India</u>	Study Course – 'Daring to Live Effectively'	Jan	8 - Feb 12
FEB '99	<u>Armagh Melbourne</u>	'Life Matters' course for young adults	Feb	12 - 21
MAR '99	<u>Chapel Hill South Africa</u>	MRA Global Consultation	Mar	5 - 12
MAR '99	<u>Tirley Garth UK</u>	Global Club	Mar	26 - 28
APR '99	<u>Simperofol Crimea</u>	'Foundations For Freedom' Visiting Course - Crimean American University	Apr	10 - 21
APR '99	<u>To be announced</u>	Spring planning meeting for Caux 1999	Apr	30 - May 3
JUL '99	<u>Caux Switzerland</u>	Summer conference: 'Cleaning the slate, the promise of a new start'	Jul	10 - Aug 22
DEC '99	<u>Collaroy Sydney Australia</u>	A conference to mark the new century	Dec	3 - 7

The deadline for the next Bulletin is Monday, February 15, 1999

John Bond
151 Kent Street
Hughes ACT 2605
Australia

Tel: +61 2 6281 0940 - Fax: +61 2 6285 3616 - Tel: +61 2 6281 2107

e-mail: 100035.3123@compuserve.com

Andrew Lancaster
10 Dooley Place
Curtin ACT 2605
Australia

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