

MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

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NEWSLETTER 5

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Dear friends,

Autumn is creeping up on us, playing grandmother's footsteps, coming up on us while our backs are turned. The leaves are beginning to change colour, and the wild raspberries make eyes at me on the rare times I can steal a run, beckoning me to stop and taste. Unlike last year, when the roses were at their best in September, the flowers are a glory, and superb arrangements grace the house. The lime tree by the tennis court as I pass by each morning is a-buzz with bees. The harvest of a vintage summer in Caux is ripening.

Still more people are flooding in. I don't know where we manage to put them all - we were 623 last night. And yet there are more spaces for cars, as the mixture European number plates thins out, and more people come from further afield, and by plane. When we started to think of this summer, there was a strong consensus that we should move away from the usual series of special sessions this year, and it has worked. The youth-hosted session was hosted by youth, but included all ages, and now the American-hosted time includes an amazing variety of people, and the dialogue of the continents, scheduled for next week, is already well under way.

We started the week with a Swiss welcome - an evening with the Swiss and the honorary Swiss who make Caux possible. It was clear that all can earn honorary Swiss-hood, and many do. I thought back to the preparations for the summer. Four weeks before the conference started, there was no way we could know how we would manage, we were so few. Caux is an amazing sum total of many individual convictions and senses of calling. Out of the blue, John Williams wrote from Australia. His thought was to leave his family in Australia for two months and more, and to come and help on the accommodation team here. Chris Harding, a retired BBC sound engineer offered to come and work on sound and the translation system; his wife, Shirley, offered to work in the diet kitchen... We are so grateful. I hope we'll see more honorary Swiss every year.

Through the week, the first of the two morning meetings had been on the theme of the art of friendship, ending this morning with friendship with God. One of those leading them with Randy Ruffin has been Alan Thornhill. 'The secret of reading people is to let others read you,' he said. The programme has been a very rich and varied diet, so it was with some relief that half way through the week, nearly 200 were able to go out on a choice of outings - and the earlier forecasts of rain proved wrong again. We have been lucky with the weather. The plays and evening entertainments have been of the highest standard, the new all-black British production of 'The Ladder' being

one of the greatest moments in the life of the Caux theatre.

Bonnie and John Green (winner of 5 Oscars for his film music) held us all spellbound in the hall one evening, with their story of 42 years of marriage, and his playing - he is 78. 'We've learnt what it is to care,' he said simply. As the light faded in the sky, and the mountains disappeared into the dark outside the bay window, he told how he as a Jew had found a faith in Jesus - a mid-night inspiration for a commission to mark the American bi-centenary, and then a long and detailed study of the Bible. Asked by an interviewer whether he was a born-again Christian, he has replied that he was a 5000-year-old Jew who believes that Jesus was the Messiah - and who bets that Jesus didn't know that He was a Christian!

The main meeting on Thursday saw the platform crammed with Central and South-Americans, and including a few from the Carribbean. Three Central American trade union leaders spoke simply of their experiences of jail, persecution, kidnapping and attempted murder. 'What is the right path to follow?' asked one, who said that he had been strongly tempted to turn to violence. 'Perhaps my work for social justice has been slowed down by my hatred of those who exploit,' he concluded. A second colleague from another country in civil war added, 'We want to change the structures and to change society so that our children can know a better world. MRA came with a moving message that reached to the bottom of our hearts.' A third spoke of the long struggle to overthrow one dictatorship, only to find themselves saddled with another 'more cruel than before'. 'Often, we who dedicate ourselves to the social struggle,' he continued, 'we forget God. Sometimes we forget the spiritual part to dedicate ourselves to the material. Structures can't change if people don't change in their own human nature. We need a renovation of hope, to see that people and society can be changed.'

A young Indian woman member of parliament from Guatemala spoke movingly of the problems of her people. 'One can also kill by excluding and marginalising people,' she said. 'Men are very clever,' she concluded, 'but they sometimes need a woman's help. Don't forget the things that you have learnt here. Now we must go home and apply them.' Others talked of healing in family relationships. A Costa Rican young husband spoke of his hatred for his alcoholic father. He said, 'I didn't want to admit that I held this grudge. But if I didn't free myself from this hate, I could never be free to build a better world. I have promised to speak with him, and ask his forgiveness on my return - and now I can better love my wife and baby.'

A lawyer, now living in exile, vividly described how he had escaped kidnapping and assassination in a dramatic car chase, and then disguised as a woman. 'Meeting MRA, I felt I had to remove that hate,' he said, and he went on to tell how he was building a friendship with one of the military men whom he'd blamed for his exile.

Another deeply stirring main meeting was on forgiveness. A lawyer from Buenos Aires, speaking on behalf of several Argentinians present apologised to the people of Britain and the Malvinas (Falklands) for the war. 'I still feel we have a better claim to the Malvinas,' he said, 'but the war was a political, military and moral error, and I apologise. We from Argentina have met together and felt it was our duty to say this.' He went on to say how he had at first refused the

invitation to come to Caux because he could not contemplate the possibility of sitting down at table with British or Americans. 'I want to ask forgiveness for this hatred,' he said. He appealed for help in starting a dialogue between the two countries which could lead to reconciliation.

An Englishman responded, 'All of us British are very moved. Thank you. For our part we were totally ignorant of what people in Argentina felt about the islands. Perhaps because we have been a dominant power for so long, we often don't live into what other people feel about us.' He also felt, he said, that Britain had been wrong to refuse the bereaved Argentines the right to visit the graves of their dead and to honour them. 'We missed a chance for magnanimity and generosity which could have started the healing process,' he said.

At the same meeting, a woman from Cambodia who has not heard from her husband since she fled from her country at the time of the Khmer Rouge take-over in 1975 spoke of her decision to forgive, after seeing the film 'For the love of tomorrow'. 'If I seek to kill the Khmers Rouge, I become like one of them,' she said. She spoke of her longing to work for healing, and she presented an exquisite Cambodian silk to Caux. 'This piece of silk will speak for me if I die,' she said, 'and it will speak for Cambodia even if Cambodia is wiped off the map.'

Every afternoon through the week there has been a two-hour conflict resolution workshop, led by a group of Americans. I've heard very positive reactions, and look forward to hearing a more detailed report. A highlight of the week was an afternoon when Irish from North and South and British, from different communities and political perspectives opened their hearts to us.

Cheers,

Andrew Stallybrass