

MOUNTAIN HOUSE · CAUX

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

25th July, 1988

Dear Friends,

On Wednesday last week, as the youth training session was starting, 'Le Monde', the most influential newspaper in the French-speaking world came out with a major three-column article on Caux and MRA, by their religious correspondent, Henri Tincq. Under the headline 'The City of Utopia', he writes, 'This is the place where since 1946 a thousand and one links have been forged in a kind of parallel diplomacy, apparently unstructured, which counts on the human heart rather than on the weight of arms to resolve conflicts and bring the world closer together.'

At fifty years old, Moral Re-Armament 'has aged well', Tincq says. He talks of the disciplines of absolute moral standards, what he calls the 'magic circle', and of listening. He gives a host of examples of MRA at work, from the Franco-German reconciliation to Zimbabwe, to India and the Lebanon. He notes MRA's teaching: 'one example of the fight against corruption is worth more than a thousand moralising speeches on the subject'. He goes on, 'Neither boy scouts of peace nor policemen of a new moral order, those committed to Moral Re-Armament have no intention of competing with anyone; on the contrary, they want to offer auxiliary troops for the churches, for political parties, for diplomats.'

He concludes, 'Examples of a "turnaround" like that of Sadat towards Israel, are rare in international relations. At the risk of being regarded as dreamer or idealist, Moral Re-Armament remains incorrigibly optimistic that they can happen. "One way to reverse the tide of history is to touch and change the motivations of people," says Michel Koechlin, one of the French working with Moral Re-Armament. A conviction which, from 1938 until 1988, has not developed one wrinkle.'

The article has already provoked many letters and 'phone calls, since it gives the MRA addresses in France and at Caux. A further 16 Swiss articles and press cuttings now grace the third floor corridor here, and we continue to get 'phone calls from the media, asking for more information.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we are at a vital stage in the youth conference, with many on the brink of important decisions. Do please pray for the miracles that are so close, I feel. The first evening of the session saw us drawing lots to eat in the cafeteria, and getting to know each other. Then, after coffee at tables in the Great Hall (now a regular feature of these sessions), there were reports in slides from actions during the year by young people in the USA, Costa Rica and Morocco. The days again start with a 'daybreaker' meeting, with a short input on 'spiritual life as a journey', followed by a time of quiet for all, before breakfast.

The morning themes have been: 'To what do I say "yes" in life', dealing with materialism, and fitting 12 speakers into half an hour; 'Fear and faith'; and 'Relations with relations', which opened the way to much painful honesty in the discussion groups about problems with parents, divorce and separation. The themes, as last year, have been followed by 'trend-setters' who have shared from their experience of applying their faith: Osman Schum on honesty in business, Peter Everington on building bridges with the Arab world, for example.

The evenings have seen great variety - magic and music, slides and videos - and a great premiere for Caux: a magical performance of Michel Orphelin's evening with St. Francis of Assisi outside on the terrace under the trees, with the moon rising over the backcloth.

This last weekend has also seen a round-table meeting, on the initiative of Cardinal König, with a group of 40 or so scientists and people from the church, industry, politics and the law. Among them were Prof. Kellenberger, the father of Swiss micro-biology, Dr. Laufs, the spokesman on ecological matters for the government party in the Bundestag in Bonn, the Mother Abbess of a Cistercian convent (who is also a graduate in nuclear science), and the heads of four biological research laboratories in France, Holland and Britain.

Prof. Kellenberger spoke about the need for an 'ideological evolution or revolution to re-establish good relations between nature and mankind', Cardinal König spoke on 'Freedom and responsibility', and the Mother Abbess about 'ethical foundations as a pre-condition for decision-making. During a discussion on the new ethical issues in medical science, the parents of a boy who died of AIDS, and a doctor whose child has been handicapped since birth made important contributions.

'We have gone from the protection of the environment to the preservation of the creation, and discovered a spiritual dimension,' said a French physics student. Another young colleague added, 'I now feel responsible, as a man and as a scientist, and wherever I head in life from now on, I'll keep that with me.' A young librarian from Washington, already a veteran of ecological campaigns expressed surprise at meeting 'grey hairs' as passionately interested in these issues as he was. It is only a beginning, and it was decided to pursue this 'thread', with regional and national meetings, before meeting again in Caux next year. This could be one of the important threads from this anniversary summer which will direct our course in the next fifty years.

I have already asked for your prayers for the miracles in people that are meant to be at the heart of all we do. Do think too for the human framework and fabric of the house. The spirit is excellent, but truth to say, we have rarely been so few and so stretched - and the numbers are soaring for the month of August. We hope to take some time in the days to come to search out what are the new ways that God must have in mind for us.

Without breaking my promise not to talk about the weather, I'd just say that we have been able to enjoy most teas and many meals outside, and to experience the feeding, healing touch of nature, for reasons that you can perhaps guess! A happy piece of news I forgot to pass on earlier was the engagement in the first week of the conference of Christoph Keller (Swiss, our resident engineer) and Ulrike Bickeböller (German, and one of the head cooks).

Yours ever,

Andrew Stallybrass

The Fiftieth Anniversary of Moral Re-Armament

THE CITY OF UTOPIA

CAUX (Switzerland), from our special correspondent

Perched above Montreux, the one-time Caux Palace contemplates its own reflection in the Lake of Geneva. With its luxurious salons, it resembles a spa hotel for aristocrats more than an international conference centre. This is nevertheless the place where, since 1946, a thousand and one links have been forged in a kind of parallel diplomacy, apparently unstructured, which counts on the human heart rather than on the weight of arms to resolve conflicts and bring the world closer together.

At fifty years old, Moral Re-Armament - which year in year out brings nearly three thousand of the faithful to Caux(1) each summer - has aged well. Its name is a stumbling block. Current thought is turning more to disarmament; it has nothing in common with the moralistic campaigns of the other side of the Atlantic; far from being military, it carries its rejection of any form of hierarchy almost to the absurd.

Moral Re-Armament has no subscribing members and pays no salary to its thousand full-time workers around the world. Among these you meet young people committed to it as to a vocation, and older people who have chosen this service in preference to a career in industry or finance. They live quietly, if not on fresh air, at least on the uncertain current of gifts. The American founder, Frank Buchman (1878-1961), felt a kinship with the first Christian communities.

It is neither a humanitarian non-government organisation, nor a brotherhood of lay church people, nor a club for international good works, but all of these at once. Moral Re-Armament offers a conviction, almost more than an action - that the gap between "the intimate and the global", as the philosopher Gabriel Marcel put it, is not so very wide. In other words, that there can be no social or global "revolution" without personal "revolution".

Magic circle

"What the world needs today is moral and spiritual re-armament." This phrase of Frank Buchman's from 1938, the era of grand manoeuvring before the Second World War, fifty years on retains its prophetic quality for the faithful of Caux.

To convince themselves that this is not a Utopia, the children and grandchildren of Buchman go back to the source, pass on the heritage to their families, evoke the same memories and impose the same self-discipline. Each day they take a long time privately in quiet, reinforced for believers - and they are many - by prayer, set

themselves to listen in a particular way, and place their lives inside a sort of magic circle defined by four virtues taken to be absolute: honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

This lay morality, at the same time private and public, produces fruit. French management and workers, in the textile industry in particular, as good as signed the first post-war collective agreements at Caux. If the decolonisation of Tunisia and Morocco happened without major bloodshed, it was due in part to informal meetings under the aegis of Moral Re-Armament. The Tunisian negotiator Mohammed Masmoudi, a follower of Caux, said that in diplomacy, "It is better to say directly what one has to say than to play games, to manoeuvre, to cheat." Much later, in Rhodesia, the dialogue between Robert Mugabe and Ian Smith was opened in part also thanks to Moral Re-Armament, as Alec Smith, son of the former Prime Minister, relates.(2)

The high point for the organisation was the Franco-German reconciliation. Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer were also familiar with Caux, as the place where the frontier between Switzerland and Germany was opened up in 1947, an era when, as one eyewitness says, "Even a dog would have refused a piece of bread offered by a German."

When a hundred and fifty Germans arrived in Caux, Irène Laure - a great figure of the Resistance in the South of France, a militant who went on strike beside her father's workers, a Socialist Member of Parliament - packed her bags. "And you think you can rebuild Europe without them?" asked Frank Buchman. Her eyes opened. Little by little, she freed herself from her "hatred", crossed the Rhine, and publicly asked forgiveness from her German hosts, in factories and universities, for the last thirty years of her life.

Forty years later, troubled by the centuries-old conflict between his country and Pakistan, Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma - who has also been formed by Caux - invited French and Germans to India to tell of this reconciliation between two European countries decimated by three successive wars. With the centre at Panchgani, India has become one of the major growth points of Moral Re-Armament. Next September Rajmohan Gandhi is to organise a protest march against the caste system, as he did in 1963 "for a strong, clean, united India".

Five Lebanese - Christians and Shiite Muslims - are at Caux this mid-July. Nagi, a Christian lawyer in Beirut, was a member of the Phalangist militia. Until the day in 1978 when, he says, "In my daily hour of silence, I heard God asking me to leave behind my gun and go to meet my Muslim brothers." Since that day he has not touched a machine-gun, and has quietly been organising Moral Re-Armament meetings, in Cyprus or in the Bekaa Valley, with militant Shiites.

South Africa, Poland, the Philippines, South Tyrol, Central America, Eritrea - there is no flashpoint on the planet with which Caux is unfamiliar. Spyros Stephou is a Greek Cypriot. He is trying - at the risk of his life, he says - to renew contact with the Turks. But his participation in Moral Re-Armament also makes him a champion in the

fight against corruption in his country. He is Director of Customs at Larnaca, hub of the Mediterranean drug traffic: "If I was less observant of the heroin going through, I could make millions of pounds every day." But for him the spirit of Caux is above all the working out of democracy. "Everyone talks about it," says Spyros, "but who applies it? At home, man is a dictator. At work, he cheats his superiors or exploits his subordinates."

Examples not speeches

There is the teaching of Moral Re-Armament: one example of the fight against corruption is worth more than a thousand moralising speeches on the subject. In mid-August at Caux, elected representatives and experts are going to put their minds to the quality of life in cities, starting with Newcastle where relations between the Asian and British communities are said to have become a kind of model for the country.

Neither boy scouts of peace nor policemen of a new moral order, those committed to Moral Re-Armament have no intention of competing with anyone; on the contrary, they want to offer auxiliary troops for the churches, for political parties, for diplomats. In the corridors of Caux you regularly meet ambassadors, parliamentarians, international civil servants, religious leaders like Cardinal König, former Archbishop of Vienna, or the Dalai Lama.

Examples of a "turnaround", like that of Sadat towards Israel, are rare in international relations. At the risk of being regarded as dreamer or idealist, Moral Re-Armament nevertheless remains incorrigibly optimistic that they can happen. "One way to reverse the tide of history is to touch and change the motivations of people," says Michel Koechlin, one of the French working with Moral Re-Armament. A conviction which, from 1938 until 1988, has not developed one wrinkle.

(1) Moral Re-Armament conference centre. 1824 Caux, Switzerland.
Tel. (021) 963-48-21. Information also in Paris, 68 boulevard Flandrin
75016. Tel. 47-27-12-64.

(2) Now I Call Him Brother by Alec Smith, Nouvelles Editions
africaines - Editions de Caux, December 1986.