

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANOPAMA
CH - 1824 CAUX

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Dear friends,

The sky is dark, yet the few clouds and the mountains are bathed in bright moonlight, an encouraging sign, since today is another outing day, with bus-loads of conference participants heading for Berne, Geneva, Gruyère, and the Emmoson dam high in the Alps, with picnics. All the more encouraging since I was woken up in the middle of the night by a spectacular thunder-storm. I got up and watched the lightning illuminating the landscape, and listened to the thunder rolling on and on, from valley to valley and echo to echo, like the fading last note of some mighty symphony.

The session on 'Regions in crisis, regions in recovery' started just a week ago, and so much has happened that I think I am going to be pushed into a bumper-sized letter. The 'women's initiative' logo against the back of the hall, behind the stage, has given way to a new design. A young Lebanese artist has done a brightly coloured, stylized world, linked to a home by a road, with people on it, some helping each other over difficulties, and the session's sub-title 'learning from one another'. There are again more than 500 people in the house, from every continent and 66 countries. And what an amazing variety of experience, colour, dress, accent they all bring. We translators have had quite a hard time, running 'Radio Babel', with channels in Khmer, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, English, French and German at times! I've even been tempted to pray for some boring meetings, since the quality has meant press story after press story (several picked up and printed or aired on the radio), with meals delayed and the adrenalin flowing. Fortunately there is a third alternative: the excellent, moving meeting, built around well-presented experience that has already been told! Indeed, if you'll forgive me, I'll draw on my press releases, since most of the notes in my little book have already found their way onto paper in them.

The session opened with a presentation and launching of the new book, 'Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft' (published by the Oxford University Press), based on a seven-year study by researchers from the Washington 'think-tank', the 'Center for Strategic and International Studies' (CSIS), of seven conflicts where 'religious or spiritual factors have played a part in preventing or resolving conflict and achieving nonviolent change'. Douglas M. Johnston, Jr., principal author of the book, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the CSIS, spoke of the post-war reconciliation of France and Germany, in which the Caux conference centre and Moral Re-Armament had been 'a key factor' in 'one of the major achievements of modern statecraft'. Over the four years after 1946, when the first large delegations of Germans had been allowed to come to Caux by the Allied Military Government, some 2'000 French and 3'000 Germans had attended conferences in Caux, he said, 'to take part in a dialogue of reconciliation'. Many had been from the coal and steel industries of the two countries - and thus had played an important part in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the European Union. Juliette Danguy from France, who had first come to Caux in 1947 with her mother, Irène Laure, recalled the revolutionary nature of those first meetings. She recalled her shock at hearing her mother's apology for her hatred of the Germans.

A second 'case-study' in the CSIS book, also presented to the conference, concerned the end to the war in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. A chapter in the book documents the roles of the Catholic Church, the Quakers, and MRA. Steven Sibare, one of those responsible for the work of MRA in Zimbabwe, spoke of his own difficult decision to work for change within the country, while others left for guerrilla training outside during the 14 years of bitter struggle. He thanked the researchers for their sensitive handling of a delicate issue. 'We lost so many lives,' he said. He concluded, 'It is not a success story, but an endless

adventure of seeking and following God's leading.' Ex-US President Carter in his foreword to the book writes, 'Religion can be a potent force for encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict.' Carter quotes from his own experience of the Camp David talks with Sadat and Begin. The book poses a challenge, he says, 'to diplomats and politicians, religious figures and laypersons, analysts and academics alike'.

Sir Howard Cooke, the Governor General of Jamaica heads a delegation of 25 from his Caribbean island, including Members of Parliament from the two main parties, businessmen and trade unionists and a journalist. His concern, in a region of instability, with Haiti and Cuba in the news, is to ground Jamaican democracy solidly on ethical foundations. A Member of Parliament and a Senator from the two main, opposing parties spoke together of 'the political tribalism' that had divided their island, bringing with it violence that had cost more than 800 lives. Each recognized where their party had been wrong. 'We began to learn from our mistakes,' they said, 'and in 1988 the two main parties signed a treaty and started on the path of reconciliation.' The entire delegation rocked the house with a musical and dramatic evening of presentations from their island in the theatre, and the finale saw the Governor General himself conducting the chorus.

There is an important delegation of 19 from Cambodia, including members of the Government, and they have been joined by 30 more Cambodians resident in France. They too, along with those from Laos, gave an evening of music, dance and culture in the theatre, which included the remarkable sight of a Cabinet Minister singing a song about a cow that had all the audience mooing. There are 16 Lebanese, more Israelis and Jews than we've ever had at one time, along with Palestinians. There was an evening public dialogue between Muslim, Jewish and Christian ministers and lay people, and there have been several further private dialogues. Several African countries are represented: Algeria, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa and Zaïre. A moment of high emotion was the presentation and the raising of the new South African flag, with all the South Africans, black and white, singing the two national anthems outside the front door, to the amazement of passing tourists. There are groups from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Albania. For the third year running, there is a delegation from the People's Republic of China at the conference.

A Cambodian mother of 3 and wife of a senior member of the pre-Kmer-Rouge government in her country spoke of her experience of 'liberation from the burden of hatred'. Her husband was one of the hundreds of thousands who had vanished in the chaos and killing that followed the Khmer-Rouge take-over. Renée Pan, who had been forced to make a new life for her self and for her children in the United States has now returned to Cambodia to serve in the reconstruction of her country, leaving a well-paid job to work first as a translator for the United Nations, and she is now a consultant to the Ministry of Education. 'The United Nations helped us to find outer peace as a country,' she said, 'but inner peace can only be found by individuals. I liberated myself by giving up my burden of hatred.'

Sergei Kovalev from Russia, a friend of Andrei Sakharov, who spent 10 years in the Gulag and internal exile, and is now President of the Russian Human Rights Commission, spoke of 'the miracle in Russia' that had seen the overthrow of 'a regime that had followers all over the world, controlled half of Europe, and sought to control the rest'. 'The superpower that tried to teach the world for years,' said Kovalev, 'is now sitting in school learning about democracy. This revolution has changed the map of the world. Those under the evil will of this state have become free.'

But, Kovalev continued, there was a widespread myth in the West about how these changes had come about. The myth was that Gorbachev and those around him 'had suddenly decided that freedom was good, and slavery was bad, that he and other good people acted to bring about these changes'. Simplistic, naïve people in the West, he said, had believed that the Soviet revolution would help them to overcome problems in their countries. 'These people could not accept any criticism - even the brightest among them praised the Soviet Union. They closed their eyes to the things that went wrong in this evil empire,' he said. But he thanked the Western intellectuals who had seen through the lie and supported the forces for change. The truth was that for 70 years, 'some simplistic, naïve

people in Russia believed that freedom was every human being's birthright, they naively believed that they could think and speak freely - and they were sent to prison for that. But they were the real creators of the Russian "miracle",' Kovalev concluded.

The Cypriot Minister of the Interior, Mr. Dinos Michaelides, called for 'an all-out effort to reach a workable and lasting solution' to the problems of Cyprus. Last year, at Caux, he had proposed a theme: 'learning from our mistakes'. So he had come back again to speak on the subject. 'It was a mistake that instead of discouraging foreign interventions, they were often encouraged. This resulted in the separation of the two communities, and finally to the events of 1974, with all their tragic consequences,' Minister Michaelides said, referring to the Greek coup and the Turkish invasion. The Minister, who fought in the underground movement for the independence of his country before serving for 22 years as a diplomat, and then entering politics, continued, 'A genuine solution in Cyprus serves the interests of all, not only the interests of all Cypriots, but also of Greece and Turkey, and it would strengthen peace and security in the sensitive region of the Eastern Mediterranean.' He warned, 'The status quo will never be accepted as a solution to our problems.'

Mr. Michaelides concluded, 'There is still hope for Cyprus. But this hope can only materialize if all of us in Cyprus, both Greeks and Turks, and also Turkey (which remains one of the three guarantors of the Republic of Cyprus) change attitude, learn from past mistakes, and give a chance to reconciliation and forgiveness, instead of trying for revenge and superiority, which have only brought disastrous consequences for the past 40 years.'

The Cypriot Minister was followed on the platform by Archibald Mackenzie, a retired British diplomat, who had served in Cyprus during a long and distinguished career. 'We British did nothing in 1974,' he said. 'We failed to carry out our moral and political obligations, as guarantors of Cyprus' integrity and independence.' He saw the same failures in ex-Yugoslavia, where he had also served, 'failures to act soon enough'. In his view, the conflict in Bosnia was the fifth act in a tragedy that had started long before in Kosovo. 'Either we act on the basis of what is right, or we follow our national interests, and pay the price later. Others too pay the price, as Cyprus is still doing now, twenty years later,' Mr. Mackenzie said.

Sypros Stephou, who has just retired as Deputy Chief of Customs from Cyprus also spoke. If he had succeeded in learning from all of his mistakes, he said to laughter, he would have been a professor of philosophy at the finest university in the world. He gave examples from his private and professional life where he had succeeded in learning from his mistakes, and he concluded, 'We Greeks must overcome our superiority and dominating attitude.'

Professor Vytautas Landsbergis, the music scholar who led Lithuania to restored independence, and became its President in 1990, spoke of the need for reconciliation founded on justice. He came with his wife. At a meeting on the theme of 'Healing the wounds of history', Professor Landsbergis spoke of next year's 50th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War as 'a milestone on the never-ending road of humanity towards peace'. The war was only now ending for the Baltic States, he went on, with the withdrawal of Russian occupying troops 'after 50 years of moral devastation'. Their region today was not one of crisis, but of potential crisis, he said, since the Russian government continued to consider it as 'their zone of special interest, or their "near abroad"'. The Russians - and those who had compromised with Soviet Communism - needed to accept responsibility for the past for reconciliation to become a reality, he concluded.

He was followed by Mrs Abeba Tesfagiorgis, the co-founder and Director of the Center for Human Rights and Development, in Asmara, Eritrea, another small country that has recently won its independence, but only after 30 years of bloody struggle. She recounted the story she tells in her book, 'A painful season, and a stubborn hope', of being imprisoned under the Marxist regime. She had been filled with a desire for revenge, but then had apologised to the prison warder she most hated. 'When we forgive, doors open,' she said - and the very next day, she had been transferred to another, better prison. 'Reconciliation

and healing takes time,' Mrs Tesfagiorgis concluded, 'but you win as an individual, as a family, as a nation.' At the fall of Asmara to the freedom fighters, she said, there had been no taking of revenge, indeed the troops of the Marxist regime had been cared for and then swiftly sent home. This victory and generosity had not been adequately recognized by the world media, she felt.

Mrs Nurta Hagi Hassan, a lawyer and a recognized poet, who is the wife of a major political figure in the inter-clan fighting in Somalia spoke of her own experiences during the fighting, and of her brother who had nearly died of wounds. 'I had promised myself to take revenge and do the same to the people responsible,' she said. She had then had to escape in disguise. She went on, 'It was after this that I realised the importance of peace and reconciliation. When I arrived here, I felt very strongly the need to change and seek forgiveness from all those that I have wronged. I am convinced that I must replace all my hate with love and understanding.' She ended chanting a poem in her own language that she had written in Caux: 'O Lord, with respect, I ask for your forgiveness and your leading. I have no bitterness, and I have washed my heart of hatred and revenge.'

Others who spoke included the Albanian Secretary of State for Religious Affairs, and Giovanni Bersani, from Italy, until recently the longest-serving Member of the European Parliament, and co-President of the Joint Assembly of the Lomé conventions (between the European Union and developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific). Mr Bersani thanked Caux and Moral Re-Armament for the quiet, unofficial role they had played in bringing people together, and helping to create the spirit that underlay these treaties.

The meeting was led by former West Indian Test cricketer Conrad Hunte, who is now coaching young blacks in the townships of South Africa. Mr Hunte said, 'The doors to the future we all long for are barred and blocked by the unhealed wounds from the past, but when forgiveness meets repentance, a new dynamic is released.' He cited seven 'rivers of hate' from the past: the industrial revolution and the social problems it brought in its wake, the traffic in slaves 'which deepened the gulf between the races', the legacy of colonialism and imperialism, the West's humiliation of China, the break-down in family life and the alienation of many young people, the deep divisions between people of faith, and the ideological rejection of God. 'These unhealed wounds,' Mr Hunte concluded, 'make us very aware of where others have hurt us and still hurt us, and blind us to where we have hurt and are still hurting others.' Among those present were the Japanese and Albanian ambassadors to Switzerland. Yesterday it was the turn of the ambassadors from China, El Salvador and Nicaragua, to the United Nations in Geneva, the Chinese arriving in two cars with 6 other diplomats. The Swiss Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the top civil servant, also paid a visit, and spoke briefly before leaving. 'I have felt that you are dealing here with the essential themes,' he said, 'and healing the wounds. The precondition is a readiness to listen to and learn from one another.'

The children paraded through the dining room at supper the other night in masks that they had made in their 'work shop' - this is also a session with many families. The children were very present - some sleeping peacefully - in last night's evening of classical music in the theatre, with the remarkable young French pianist Eric Davoust, who gave introductions to all the pieces, playing extracts from the themes, and helping all to enter into the world of Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy and Liszt.

I'd like to close my letter with the striking 'exhortation' at the end of yesterday morning's Protestant church service: 'Forgiven, freed and strengthened, we are sent out by God into the world, as He says to us: Go and break the chains of injustice, free the oppressed, put an end to every kind of slavery, share your bread with those who are hungry, look after the destitute and homeless, and do not turn away from your neighbour.'

Weary greetings from Caux, where the end is at last in sight,

Andrew Stallybrass