



## Initiatives for Change

### Friends attend 'Renewal Through Arts' week in Montreaux

IF YOU ARE AT ALL like me you often inwardly bewail the number of days that pass in which you seem to have no significant opportunity to share the Faith with anyone.

My wife, Carolyn, has family connections with the Moral Rearmament movement (MRA), now renamed Initiatives for Change (IC). IC have this amazing "palace", their European conference centre, perched halfway up the mountain above Montreux in Switzerland. Originally a luxury hotel, they bought it in a dilapidated condition after the First World War and renovated it. Out of season it is let to a catering school, but in the summer they run courses and are able to accommodate up to about 500 people. Carolyn was invited to play with the Fitzwilliam Quartet, of which her brother is a member. We decided to accept, rather than attend the Scottish Summer School.

We were attending a "Renewal through the Arts" week, but they mostly aim to concentrate on initiating a process of forgiveness and reconciliation and have a fairly impressive record of bringing together people (often eminent) from opposing factions in order to establish true dialogue. They have a long history of using the arts to express their ideals.

During the week we were there, there were over 50 countries represented, including a significant Muslim group from Middle Eastern countries for a dialogue facilitated by Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma. IC's starting point for all they do is the four absolutes : absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute selflessness, absolute love. The idea is that you start the day with a period of reflection and silence in which you listen to that "still, small voice within", examine your life in the light of these four principles and then act to rectify any faults that become apparent, asking forgiveness from anyone you have wronged in some way. I don't think Bahá'ís would find anything to quarrel with in that and, indeed, it might do some of us a lot of good – starting with myself! Everyone is invited to join a team to share in the domestic work including the cooking. Cost of your stay ? – they tell you what it actually costs per person and you pay what you can! Some pay more, some, from poor countries, pay nothing – a real act of faith!

At Caux there is a choice of meditations each morning, starting at 7.30 am. Carolyn was asked to do two, of a musical nature, during the first two days. She boldly requested to include some readings from Bahá'u'lláh and faxed samples to the organiser who agreed. The first morning had not been well publicised, so there were only about six attending. Carolyn played Bach and I read "Be generous in prosperity..."(1) and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prayer for peace, "Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock..."(2) It was very much appreciated.

The second day word had got round and there were many more. This was based on a selection from the Hidden Words interspersed with music composed by Carolyn for the occasion. In order to emphasise the meditative character of the music I sat in front, reading, and Carolyn sat at the back so people couldn't watch her while listening and it had less the character of a "performance". This went down very well and established the fact of a Bahá'í presence for the week to come.

From then on we seemed to have constant opportunities to share the Faith with a great

from men on the scene to have excellent opportunities to share the Faith with a great variety of people. Quite a few knew of the Faith or knew Bahá'ís. Some had visited the temple in India or the Shrine in Haifa. Those from Egypt or the Lebanon seemed to have never heard of the Faith and were quite curious. It was a pleasure to share with them and fortunately we had brought a stock of literature in English and French which we were able to give to those interested. We were able to present the House of Justice statement to the world's religious leaders to the organising body of IC (at their request), as they do a lot of interfaith work, to Rajmohan Gndhi (not strictly a religious leader, but active in interfaith reconciliation), to the Right Rev. Michael Marshall, Assistant Bishop of London, and to a most fascinating person who has withdrawn from the Catholic Church and the Christian Faith, having been a priest, theologian and historian for 16 years. We had a lovely conversation with him and he is eager to read the Dawnbreakers!

Towards the end of the week there was to be a panel of speakers representing different religious traditions to speak about the influence of their faith on their art. Bravely, Carolyn proposed that she could participate as a Bahá'í alongside, among others, the politician, Ann Widdicome, the Bishop of London, Michael Marshall, and Ahmed Moustafa, a distinguished Muslim artist, whose work is on exhibition at the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Art, in Glasgow, and recently his work was exhibited in the Vatican. The panel-members had to check over their statements, especially any quotes, with the translators (simultaneous translations were available in English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Albanian) and the translators proceeded to ask Carolyn many questions about the Bahá'í Faith. The black representative of the Pentecostal Church in London was so delighted with the quote from Bahá'u'lláh : “We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high...,”<sup>(3)</sup> that she leaned over to Carolyn and reread it during her own brief talk – a delightful moment.

We have rarely had such an opportunity to teach the Faith to so many in such ideal conditions, naturally, without pushing. One lady from Northern Ireland said she knew several Bahá'ís and had had the opportunity to attend a couple of firesides, but had not gone. She said she would now make a point of attending one. It has convinced us that if we go out to mix with others more than at present (we are speaking for ourselves) we will be amazed at the openings that emerge. There would also be great opportunities for sharing artistically with such people. We shall certainly be following this up.

Jeremy Fox

- 
1. Bahá'u'lláh: Gleanings, CXXX.
  2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 100
  3. Bahá'u'lláh: Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para 51, p. 38

