

Why East and West need each other

At a time when some are predicting increasing conflict between Western and Muslim nations, **Abdul-Nabi Isstaif** writes from Damascus with a call for partnership.



Tony Hazell

There is an Arabic proverb which reads: 'Man is the enemy of that of which he is ignorant'. How can we remove this enmity from our lives?

According to Arabic culture and society, the answer to this question seems obvious: the key which opens the door to healthy and amicable relations between us and our surroundings is 'to know'. The question is whether 'knowing' can be carried out individually or collectively, and whether it is a one-way street.

We would all agree that knowing must start with the self. Knowing oneself is the best way to achieve inner peace. But can one know oneself without the other? The answer is a big 'no'. I cannot even see my own face, head or back without the help of a set of mirrors. It is only with the mediation of another person that I can form a more rounded picture of myself.

Partnership

The other person has the same problem: he needs me to acquire knowledge of himself. So a partnership can be formed, which will help us both to gain a more complete picture of ourselves. This exchange of knowledge can create a strong bond. It places us on a basis of equality and creates an environment where each party's existence, wellbeing, safety and prosperity are secure.

It is impossible to know oneself without the help of another person. And it is also impossible to construct an identity, which is distinct from other identities, without the presence of those other identities. For identity is always defined by difference. 'It is only through relation to the other, the relation to what it is not, that the positive meaning of any term—and thus its identity—can

be constructed,' writes Stuart Hall.

Identity is a complex mixture of several collective identities. According to Anthony D Smith, 'Human beings have a wide variety of possible collective affiliations—economic and occupational groups, leisure and welfare associations, age and gender categories, territorial and political organizations, as well as families and cultural communities. With all of these, individuals can simultaneously identify, moving with relative ease from one

'There is no civilization in human history which is not indebted to other civilizations'

to another, as circumstances demand. We may be wives or husbands, manual workers, members of a religious community, ethnic group, regional association, or whatever, each of which may become relevant in certain situations and for certain purposes. As a result, we have multiple identities, ranging from the most intimate family circle to the widest, the human species.'

In fact, human identity is so inclusive that it contains within itself a multitude of diverse selves, any of which may dominate according to the circumstances. An Arabic phrase captures this conception: 'You think that you are merely a small planet, while the whole great cosmos is folded within you.'

In short, it is in the presence of, and through partnership with, the other, that man knows himself and constructs his identity. He articulates it through a medium whose very existence is indebted to the other, his mother tongue.

In addition to this partnership between the self and the other, there is a long-standing and far-reaching form of partnership which transcends all linguistic, national, regional and temporal boundaries. This is the partnership among the diverse nations, peoples and ethnicities of humankind.

Fabricated myth

Civilizations may be named after one language, one nation, one people, one region or one age. But they are the product of the partnership between different nations, peoples, areas and ages. There is no single civilization in human history which is not indebted to other civilizations. Hybridity has been the governing force of all human achievements. In this context purity is a fabricated myth which we can do without.

Our knowledge of ourselves, our identities and our civilizations stems from an implicit partnership between 'I' and 'you' on the individual level and between 'we' and 'they' on the collective level. This partnership has always aimed at producing, advancing and disseminating knowledge of ourselves and of the world.

It is high time that this implicit partnership became explicit. Rather than feeding the notion of clash or conflict between the self and the other, or between peoples, nations and civilizations, we should call for partnership at all levels. The resulting knowledge of the world should be employed to serve mankind, irrespective of race, colour, religion, sex or age.

This notion of partnership between peoples from east and west, south and north takes for granted that no one should have a monopoly over any part of human knowledge. As Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri once prayed, 'May rain never fall on me or my land unless it covers the whole country.'

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NEXT ISSUE

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FOR A CHANGE

Volume 12 Number 6

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Still no room at the inn?

- The man who told the world about Pol Pot
- Course for peacemakers
- Too little work, too much work
- Syrian professor's plea



FOR A CHANGE



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- closes the circle between faith and action, action and faith. It is for anyone, anywhere, who wants to make a difference to the world.
- FOR A CHANGE** believes
- that in a world torn by ancient hatreds, the wounds of history can be healed.
- that in the family and the workplace, relationships can be transformed.
- that in urban jungle or rural backwater, community can be built.
- that peace, justice and the survival of the planet depend on changes in attitudes as well as structures.
- FOR A CHANGE**
- draws its material from a wide range of sources and was born out of the experience of Moral Re-Armament.

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A NOTE ON MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

Moral Re-Armament was launched in 1938 when Europe was rearming. Frank Buchman, MRA's American initiator, called for a programme of 'moral and spiritual rearmament' to address the root causes of conflict, and work towards a 'hate-free, fear-free, greed-free world'. Since then people of all backgrounds and traditions have been active in this programme on every continent.

MRA is open to all. Its starting point is the readiness of each person to make real in their own life the changes they wish to see in society. A commitment to search for God's will in daily life forms the basis for creative initiative and common action. Absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help to focus the challenge of personal and global change.

Ear to the ground

by Kenneth Noble in London, 1899

Absorbed in war

As history reaches the turn of the century, your intrepid diarist travels back to its beginning.

Clearly, all is not well. The last issue of *The Times*, London, for 1899 declares: 'The close of the year 1899 finds the British Empire involved in a serious and difficult war.' Amid the Boer War's 'urgent claim upon the brain and the heart of us all, every other contemporary event has become uninteresting'.

However history will judge the war—and, to our shame, 28,000 civilian Afrikaners will die in British concentration camps—it is a costly affair for Britain. There is a poignant drawing in the *Illustrated London News* this month showing a company of British soldiers saluting the first cartload of their dead and wounded—a practice that, apparently, has a long tradition.

Not all doom and gloom

The Times does manage to review other aspects of 1899: 'At home, till the hostilities began, it was a year of prosperity; the perfect health in which HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN [Victoria] spent her 80th birthday, amid the respectful acclamations of the world, seemed a symbol of the soundness and strength of the whole body politic over which she presides. Trade was never better, wages were never so good, nor were there ever fewer workmen unemployed.'

The review notes that there has been almost universal peace overseas. But this has to be seen in the context of the time: 'In March we [Great Britain] agreed with France as to the delimitation of our respective spheres of influence

in regard to the Sudan.' This agreement 'satisfied public opinion on both sides of the Channel'. Though perhaps not in Sudan?

So what's new?

Needless to say, the weather is well covered in *The Times*. A letter dated 29 December from GJ Symons FRS, headed 'Low barometric pressure', discloses that the record at Hampstead Heath covers more than 40 years, but 'in that long period the pressure has been only three times lower than this afternoon'.

Small wonder then that in a long item headed 'WRECKS, CASUALTIES &c.' one reads, 'Falmouth, Dec 29, LENE, Southampton for Brest, has put in here leaky, and with loss of bulwarks and sails'.

Nor are things set to improve. 'The warning signals are still flying on all coasts... Forecast for the next two or three days: Generally wild and changeable.'

Not so new two

The Bishop of London seems stormy too. 'I am asked to write a few words by way of a New Year's message among the clergy of the diocese. I do so with great reluctance, for my words must be words of warning, not of encouragement.

'The Church has adopted the methods of politics,' he goes on. 'It has injured its spiritual influence by descending to trivial disputes...'

'Instead of trying to educate [public opinion], the Church has adopted it, and has set before the public eye the familiar spectacle of bodies of Englishmen desperately determined to have their own way by every means in their power.'

Cheer up, Bishop

The Bishop may be cheered to read an announcement headed CONSCIENCE MONEY: 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledges the receipt of £15 in Bank of England notes, sent anonymously.'

A dog's life

The British love of animals is evident in an advert for the Doggie Wall Calendar 1900. This will be 'interesting to shooting or hunting men. ALSO Ladies and all dog owners.' After giving a list of the breeds illustrated (Samoyede dog, black pug, Royal buckhound...), we are promised 'Drawings of Grey Parrot and Magpie and particulars how to feed and rear them.'

Awe and wonder

All this seems low-key for the start of a new century.

The explanation is found in a phrase in the review of the year quoted above, 'at the threshold of the last year of the century'.

The Times, pedantically perhaps, has decided that the 20th century begins on 1 January, 1901. And it is on this date that we read: 'The 20th century has dawned upon us; and as we float past this great landmark on the shore of time feelings of awe and wonder naturally creep over us.'

The paper asks: 'What will be the history of mankind in the hundred years whose first hours are even now gliding by? What will be the changes the new century will witness? Will they be mainly for good or for evil to the race?'

It goes on to ask whether the sum of human knowledge will continue to increase and fructify as before. There is a degree of self-satisfaction in the question, 'Will a season of sterility follow upon the wondrous advancement of learning made in the era that has closed?'

Wisely, *The Times* does not try to answer its questions but states, 'Do what we will, it is our deeds and the spirit in which we do them that will shape the future.'

All quotes from *'The Times'*, London, copyright 1899, 1901, reprinted by permission.



He greets young January...

Still no room at the inn?

One in 264 people alive today has had to flee their home. While millions struggle in refugee camps (see page 8), others bang on the doors of Western nations asking for asylum.

Mary Lean examines a crisis which tests our humanity at the turn of the Millennium.

In 1979 an 18-year-old Kurdish human rights campaigner, Fazil Kawani, fled to Britain from Iraq. That year 300 people applied for asylum in Britain. In the first eight months of 1999, 44,000 people did.

Such figures put paid to any illusion that on 31 December the 'century of the refugee' will be over. The 100 years which opened with the flight of east European Jews from Tsarist oppression ends with the image of fleeing Kosovans and East Timorese burnt onto the retina of the world community. And, with the rise in the numbers of asylum seekers knocking on the doors of Western nations, the problem is no longer safely 'over there', but on our doorstep.

Refugees: 'a barometer of the world's political fever'

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was set up in 1951 to help resettle the 1.2 million refugees created by World War II. Today its concern extends to over 22 million people—one in 264 of the world's population. The Kosovan crisis saw refugee camps on European soil for the first time since the 1950s. 'After half a century of dealing with refugees, we have come back full circle,' the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, commented sadly in May.

The 22 million people 'of concern to UNHCR' include 12 million refugees who cannot return to their countries; 3.5 million people who have just returned home; 0.9 million asylum seekers who have not yet been recognized as refugees; and 4.5 million internally displaced people who have fled their homes but not crossed borders.

Refugees have been described as a 'barometer of the world's political fever'. Their existence shows how far we still are from a world of peace, or of justice and human rights, as we enter a new millennium. And the issue of asylum seekers, the strangers at our gates, focuses something deep in the spirit of the affluent nations. The late Rabbi Hugo Gryn, a Holocaust survivor, described our response as an 'index of our spiritual and moral civilization'.

So what has changed in the 20 years since Fazil Kawani bribed his way to a student visa out of Iraq?

Little, perhaps, on one level: the persecution which led him to flee still continues, both in his own country and in others. Kawani had already been a refugee in 1975, when his family took shelter in a tented refugee camp in Iran. They returned to Iraq after an amnesty, but when the persecution resumed, Kawani and some fellow students began to campaign for human rights.

One incident stands out in his mind. 'In 1977 I went to visit my cousin in the jail to which all political prisoners were sent. He was sharing a tiny room with a man in his 50s, who cried when he told me his story. He was a taxi driver, who had been stopped by freedom fighters demanding a lift. When they got to their destination he was arrested, interrogated and tortured by the authorities. He had 12 children at home and he was the only breadwinner. The minimum sentence was 15 years.'

One night a Mercedes belonging to the security forces rammed a car which Kawani was driving. 'When I got out, the driver put a gun to my head and said, "This time you are safe, but next time you will not be so lucky. So shut your mouth." I couldn't stay at home and keep quiet, because I could see people were really suffering.' Friends urged him to flee to Britain, which was then selling arms to Iraq, and tell people what was happening to the Kurds.

In those days, he says, it was difficult to



Albanian refugees seek admission to Italy.

leave Iraq. 'Nowadays there are agents who make money getting people out of their countries; then I had no help. My only chance was to get a visa to study overseas: I had to bribe a senior official in the ministry of higher education. I was frightened that he would hand me over to Iraqi security who were looking for me. Instead, he said, "I feel sorry for you, because you are too young to be a refugee."'

Today, he says, it is much easier for someone at risk to leave their country. 'The demand has risen and so have the service providers. It's no longer a question of a church group getting a trade unionist from one country to another; it's big business and very sophisticated. Twenty years ago it was impossible for me to find an agent who could provide me with a passport—I had to get a government passport, and bribe the mayor to identify me with a different name. It was risky to cross the border because of landmines. Today an agent brings 30 or 40 Kurds from Iraq to Iran or Turkey; then another agent takes them to Greece; and another one on from there.'

Kawani believes that refugees and asylum seekers have increased because human rights abuses are worse than 20 years ago and affect larger groups of people, and because more of the victims are aware of their rights under international law and the possibility of asylum. The fact that human trafficking has become big business does not mean that all those who pay the agents' fees are not bona fide refugees, he stresses.

In his day, he says, persecution was usually targeted at outspoken individuals. Now there is more persecution of whole minorities—as in Rwanda or the Balkans—based not on what people believe but on who or where they are. And, with the superpowers no longer fighting out their battles through other people's quarrels, it is less easy for

resistance groups to survive. 'Nowadays all the Kurdish leaders are coming to Europe because they cannot stand on their feet in the mountains without outside support.'

Kawani's first years in Britain were 'a hell'—in spite of what he describes as a generous reception from the host community. 'Physically I was here, but mentally I was there all the time,' he says. 'I felt sad because I had left my friends behind: I used to walk along the Thames late at night thinking about them. As a refugee I hated myself: what's the difference, I thought, between life in exile and persecution at home?'

Today Kawani is Coordinator of the Southwark Refugee Project and has been a much respected chair of the Refugee Working Party, which brings together representatives of Britain's different refugee communities. Yet he looks on the last two decades as a 'waste of my life'. 'Lots of things have happened at home, both good and bad, that I wish I had been part of. I could have listened to lots of songs, lots of jokes, gone to lots of wedding parties and New Years.... You have to be a refugee to know what it is like.'

Kawani's reception in Britain was very different from Geraldine's, 19 years later. She had been imprisoned and tortured in her home country after taking part in a demonstration against the government. When she arrived at Britain's Gatwick Airport in the small hours of a Saturday morning, the immigration officer told her, 'We've all decided, we European countries, we don't want you black people here.' She was sent to Tinsley House, an immigration detention centre at Gatwick Airport where 150 people are held, often for months at a time.

When I visited her there a few days later

Still no room at the inn?

I found an articulate young woman who had held a good job in her country. Whenever she spoke about her family, who had disappeared, or her experiences, tears trickled down her cheeks. She had come to Britain looking for a safe haven and found only hostility.

Xenophobia about refugees is nothing new. In 1935, an editorial in *The Daily Mail* speculated on the dangers of accepting Jews fleeing to Britain from Nazi oppression: 'By offering sanctuary to all who cared to come, the floodgates would be opened, and we would be inundated by thousands seeking a home.' Nor, to be fair, is this attitude a purely European phenomenon. South Africa, which thanks to its rainbow miracle now houses the largest number of asylum seekers on the continent (though not by any means the most refugees), has seen a number of violent attacks on foreigners by local people.

What lies behind much of the xenophobia is the perception that many of those rattling at our gates are not 'genuine' asylum seekers but simply economic migrants, come to take our jobs and live off our taxes. There is an understandable fear that overstretched public services will be swamped, and that illegal immigrants are taking governments for a ride.

The UN definition of refugees, established in 1951, only embraces people who are outside their countries and who cannot or do not want to return because of 'a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion'. This definition even excludes people fleeing from war or civil conflict, although UNHCR maintains that they should be considered as refugees—and many governments are prepared to go along with this.

In theory the distinction between refugees and economic migrants is clear, but in practice it is often blurred. People may have good reason to be afraid and also want to improve their standard of living. Assessing asylum claims is an imprecise science—and important decisions are often made by quite junior officials who have been encouraged in a culture of disbelief.

Take Celia, for instance, a young African woman whose trade unionist father had died suddenly after exposing corruption in the company where he worked. Her mother fled the country after receiving threats and, when thugs turned up looking for her father's papers, Celia went into hiding at her boyfriend's home.

Because of the economic situation in her country, Celia knew she would find it diffi-

cult to find a job when she finished her studies. So when a friend in Britain wrote, 'Come here, you'll be safe', she bought a false passport (cheaper and safer than bribing her way to a genuine one) and set out, armed with exam certificates to prove what a useful member of British society she would be. All she saw of Britain was the airport, the detention centre where she was held for six months, and the road to the court where her appeal against the refusal of asylum was rejected. Today she is back home and, after some difficult months, apparently safe.

'In many cases both poverty and persecution or conflict are pushing people to leave,' Sadako Ogata told an audience in Mexico City in July. 'Confronted with an upsurge of people knocking at their doors, whom they have less capacity to absorb than in the past, and intimidated by xenophobic calls, governments build barriers to keep people out. The focus has shifted from the protection of refugees to the control of all those seeking entry, refugees and migrants.'

This shift from protection to control can be seen in the fact that in 1997 alone nine European countries adopted major new refugee laws. In Britain a new Immigration and Asylum Bill has spent 1999 going through the Houses of Commons and Lords, promising a 'faster, fairer and firmer' approach.

There is no doubt that reform is needed. Britain's asylum procedures have been chaotic, with a backlog at the end of August of over 85,000 asylum applications waiting for an initial decision—to say nothing of those waiting to appeal against the refusal of asylum. Since 1996 many of Britain's asylum seekers have been refused both social security benefits and the right to work. Instead they must rely on local authorities to provide shelter and food, through a 'cashless' voucher system, which is expensive,

cumbersome and degrading. Other European countries have similar schemes which amount to what has been called a 'policy of deterrence by destitution'.

The new legislation will improve matters. It will allow thousands of those who have been waiting for several years for a decision on their cases to stay in Britain. It will speed up new cases and regulate immigration advisors, some of whom have preyed on the vulnerability of asylum seekers. But there are major downsides. It will continue to allow immigration officers to detain asylum seekers for indefinite periods—something unique in Europe and which affects some 700 people on any one day. Campaigners are fighting its proposal to extend the voucher system to all asylum seekers, allowing them the equivalent of only 70 per cent of normal income support.

It will also make it much more difficult for anyone whose papers are not in order to board a plane, train or ship heading for Britain. This will affect genuine asylum seekers as much as anyone. If Fazil Kawani had applied for a passport in his own name it is hard to believe he would be alive today.

Britain's tradition of taking in refugees dates back centuries. Between 1685 and 1700, for instance, 100,000 Huguenots fled to Britain. Historically these infusions of new blood have energized our economy and enriched our culture: such household names as Marks and Spencer, the Burton's clothes chain, Weidenfeld and Nicolson publishers and the Amadeus String Quartet owe their existence to refugees. The 28,000 Asians who came to Britain from Uganda after their expulsion by Idi Amin in 1972 met considerable hostility—but far from stealing jobs, many went on to provide them.

At the same time, it is clear that there is a limit to how many people one country can absorb, and the decisions involved are



Demonstration in London for asylum rights

Philip Carr



Fazil Kawani: 'What's the difference, I thought, between life in exile and persecution at home?'

unenvious. Abrahaley Mebrahtu, an Eritrean accountant who asked for asylum in Britain in 1990, has some sympathy for the British government's predicament. 'There must be protection for people who need humanitarian rescue,' he says. 'But there are also people who exploit the procedures. There have to be controls. There is the financial issue, of how many people Britain can support, and also the social one, of how many you can accommodate within your culture.'

Mebrahtu came to Britain because as a student during Eritrea's liberation war he was constantly harassed by the Ethiopian security police. He points out that immigration controls often penalize genuine asylum seekers. 'People think that if they tell the truth they will be welcomed,' he says. 'But if the person who receives you asks a lot of questions, you feel desperate. Because of what you have been through, you are not able to cope with big hurdles. Those who are not genuine can cope.'

The root cause of migration—and to some extent of the refugee crisis too—is the vast economic gulf in the world today, where the richest fifth of the population uses over four fifths of the world's resources and enjoys 82 times the income of the poorest fifth. Shirley Williams, now Baroness Williams of Crosby, referred to this chasm in a speech at Guildford University earlier this year. 'We aren't going to be able to live with these inequalities without so many people banging at our door that we have to abandon democratic and humanitarian values in our efforts to respond,' she said. The fundamental answer is not to junk the values but to

address the global economic issues.

For behind the crisis lurk familiar monsters—the trade imbalances which deprive the poor of a just reward for their labour, the injustices which skew the international economy towards the rich, the debt burden which syphons off money which should be spent on health and education, the environmental disasters which drive smallholders from their homes, corruption, the arms trade, ethnic jealousies and prejudices, despotism.... Immigration laws, refugee camps, all the best efforts of UNHCR, the Red Cross and hordes of smaller groups merely respond to the symptoms of a world which is not the way it should be.

'If there was peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia, people would not flow here,' says Abrahaley Mebrahtu. 'But international people do not want to be involved. There must be some solution if we all try to find it, but we can only find it if we are honest, if we are not selfish, if we think about the goodness of other people.'

During 18 years with UNHCR, many of them as regional representative, Iqbal Alimohamed has overseen the resettlement of the Vietnamese boatpeople, helped to open Japanese minds to the needs of refugees and led UNHCR's work in Sudan in the early Nineties when the country housed one million refugees from neighbouring countries. He feels that much of the responsibility for the refugee crisis lies with Western nations whose support for human rights has often been selective and dictated by economic and trade interests. 'Human rights should surely apply across the board,' he asserts.

Alimohamed believes that fundamental changes are needed in the structure of the UN, to make it possible for it to prevent and resolve conflicts through binding resolutions. 'The Declaration of Human Rights is 51 years old,' he says. 'But millions of people have perished in genocides and wanton killing, and the world sits back and finds itself unable to act decisively.'

'If conflicts do develop the international community must prepare itself, through the UN, to deal with the consequences. It must ensure effective coordination among the many human rights and humanitarian aid organizations, who, because of unclear and overlapping mandates, often step on each other's toes. And it is time that the mandate of UNHCR, set in the aftermath of World War II, is expanded to include all people uprooted and displaced by manmade disasters.'

Meanwhile people will continue to arrive at the passport gates of the West, asking for refuge and asylum. Some will be flying torture, oppression and genocide; some will be escaping poverty; many will be a mixture. 'The perhaps inevitable confusion between refugees and migrants can result in some of the latter being admitted as refugees,' says Sadako

Ogata. 'But isn't it preferable to err on the side of generosity than to send people back to situations of extreme gravity and danger?'

Generosity to the stranger runs deep in the traditions of the world's great faiths. The Sanskrit word for guest or visitor is *atithi* which means 'without date or appointment'. The Hindu scriptures instruct, 'treat a guest like God'. Jews, Christians and Muslims trace their origins to Abraham who, according to the Book of Genesis, offered food and hospitality to three strangers, who turned out to be angels and promised that his elderly wife would have a son. 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares,' advises the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. A Muslim friend describes how his grandfather used to walk around his village in the evening, and bring home any strangers who had nowhere to go.

In October, European leaders meeting in Finland agreed to develop a common asylum policy. As we enter a new century and a new Millennium, will compassion and generosity dictate the immigration policies of the West, or fear and stinginess? This is an issue not just for governments, but for individuals—for in today's Europe there are few towns and cities without refugees. Will we welcome these strangers who are, in fact, our brothers and sisters? Or, 2,000 years on, is there still no room at the inn? ■

Mary Lean is a volunteer with the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, whose members befriend asylum seekers held at Gatwick Airport. The names of Geraldine and Celia have been changed.



Abrahaley Mebrahtu: 'People think that if they tell the truth they will be welcomed'

Life in Sherkole refugee camp

Five weeks in a refugee camp in Western Ethiopia shattered **Fiona**

Leggat's stereotypes.

This summer I spent five weeks doing what millions do every day—I lived in a refugee camp. Unlike the 16,000 Sudanese refugees in Sherkole camp in Western Ethiopia, I had not come to seek shelter but as part of the UNHCR Camp Sadako Youth Awareness Programme, which offers young people the chance to learn about the lives of refugees by actually living with them.

Unlike my stereotypical image of a hot, desolate, wind-swept plain covered with tents, Sherkole was disorientatingly beautiful. The camp, set in the green hills of Western Ethiopia, seemed more like a village, with the refugees living in *tukuls*—round mud huts with thatched roofs. It was the rainy season and often very cold.

After the initial shock of arriving, I was relieved that the refugees do receive food. But then I saw the children's bellies, swollen by malnutrition, and their skinny legs. Their ration of grain, pulses, oil, and salt is adequate for short-term survival, but has little nutritional value and is totally insufficient for a prolonged diet. They receive no fruit or vegetables, meat, eggs or dairy products. Some of the children grow up on little other than basic gruel.

In spite of this, the refugees of Sherkole camp are lucky. For a couple of months every year they can grow a few crops or vegetables outside their huts with seeds given by UNHCR. If they lived in Eastern Ethiopia, they would have only dust to plant in.

It is what they lack that strikes you most:



Some refugee children have never known their homeland.

possessions, identity, the things which affirm their dignity. Most refugees only have the clothes they came in, very few have shoes, and many of the children have no clothes at all. There are no funds to distribute clothes. Some people sell part of their ration and save up for months in order to buy an item of clothing for their naked children. It only costs £3 to clothe a refugee child, but when the most you can earn working in the fields of a local farmer is 25p a day, and that money buys barely enough vegetables for one meal, it takes a long time to clothe a family of eight.

The refugees are given a stove, a pot and a pan, and a container to carry water. A few lucky ones have a bible, or photos of a loved one that they brought with them. But most walked for days to reach the camp, and came with nothing.

I realized that I usually thought of refugees in terms of immediate short-term aid, with little consideration for the long term. They need shelter, water and food—which the UNHCR does its best to provide. But in camps such as Sherkole, many have already been refugees for years and have no

immediate prospect of returning home. In reality they are trying to build a town with adequate educational, community and health facilities to support 16,000 people.

The people of Sherkole camp are not just desperate for food and clothes, but for contact with the outside world. They feel forgotten. Most of their families do not know where they are.

Daniel's experiences are typical. He is 18, and what is called an unaccompanied minor. His father was killed and he became separated from his mother when the fighting took over his town, so he was forced to flee with some relatives. That was over ten years ago, and he has since lost his relatives. He is alone, has spent more than half of his life as a refugee, and does not know if any of his family are alive. He may never know.

The refugees' response to me being there was overwhelming: I was the first Westerner to have spent more than 24 hours in the camp. The old women cried because they were so happy to meet me, the children followed me, singing and wanting to touch my skin. I would teach them tricks, play ball



New arrivals waiting to be screened for admission to the camp. Those who are fleeing famine will be sent home to await food aid; only those fleeing war, or famine caused by war, will be allowed to stay.

with them, or traditional games (which I could never get the hang of). Often I just felt helpless, that all I could give were token gestures, a smile, a hug, a game with the children, an ear to their problems. Yet these things can mean everything, because they acknowledge a person as a person, not just as a refugee.

I found myself shutting off the reality of the situation, chatting to people as if I had just met them in the street. 'Hi, how are you?'—'I'm fine thanks.' But of course they are not fine, they are never fine, they never have a good day, or sleep through a whole night. I sat and listened to their stories and felt heartbroken. You wish there was something you could say to make the pain go away, to make things better. But you can't. And all they actually want is someone to listen. I thought of how frivolous my life is at home, and of all the possessions I own, and opportunities I have. No one could believe that because my parents come from different parts of the world I have two countries and two passports when they don't even have one.

Feeling a bit silly, I had brought some past copies of *For A Change* with me, thinking how inappropriate they were to take to a camp. But they were like gold, as for many they were the first contact they had had with the outside world in over a year. Never has a magazine been so well read. As most cannot read English they were translated and read out to large groups. Everyone laughed at 'Ear to the Ground', and sat and discussed the articles.

My biggest fear when I left Britain was whether I would cope, and at times the suf-

fering, disease, flies and attention were almost too much. But you do cope, because you have to. The refugees need you to be strong, and having your own personal crisis does not help anyone.

At home it is easy to picture these people as hungry mouths to feed, totally dependent on aid workers and unable to do anything for themselves. But in fact they get on with it. They build their huts, and work to improve the camp: building the clinic or the school. They find some inner strength to make the most of the hand they have been dealt.



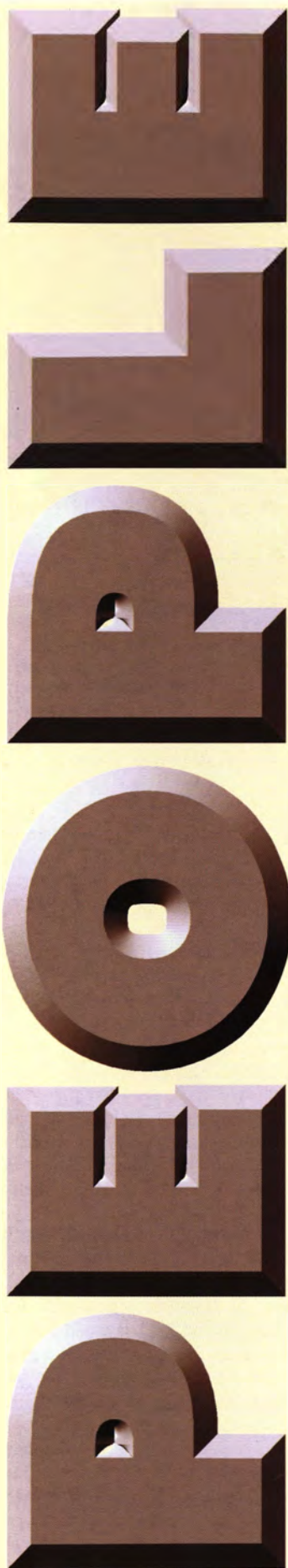
Samera Ahmed, a widow from Northern Sudan, suffers from anaemia.

A few of the people in Sherkole camp are educated, and used to live in beautiful homes, with cars, money and good jobs. A degree means very little in a refugee camp, so now they dig their own latrines. Yet they try to live with pride and dignity. They do not beg, or steal one cob of corn from their neighbour's garden, even if they have no food to give to their children that night.

I had expected to feel distress, shock, anger, frustration, helplessness, disillusionment and a desire to change things. I did not expect to laugh so much, to make so many friends and to be so sad to leave. In many ways I have come home heartbroken. To leave was actually more distressing than it was to arrive.

The prospects for the refugees of Sherkole camp are bleak. They have little chance of returning home to Sudan in the near future. If they do, they will find destroyed houses and land ravaged by war. Their prospects in the camp are not a great deal better. The war in Sudan is an old conflict, and not often in the news. Its victims are not a fashionable cause. The refugees at Sherkole had heard that more aid money was raised for Kosovo in a few weeks than they had received in years, and they asked me why. What can you say? Yet, compared to millions of their compatriots, they are lucky, because they are safe. They have been granted refuge. ■

For more information about Sherkole Camp, and how you can help, you can contact Fiona Leggat at 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD, or by e-mail at fionaleggat@hotmail.com



MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Didacienne: 'At first, they could not believe that the widows of the genocide would bring them food.'

From the heart of Rwanda

On the forest paths around Mountain House, the MRA centre in Caux, Switzerland, you may find yourself taking a walk with a new friend and hearing an unexpected story. This is how it was for me with Didacienne, a striking young woman trade unionist from Rwanda.

In her melodious French, she explained that she was one of six children and was brought up by her grandparents until she was 15. 'My grandfather was a Pastor: life was well structured and serene. I don't know if that is where I got my dislike of violence but it is very strong in my character.'

As an 18-year-old, Didacienne trained as a nurse, and then went to work in a factory dispensary. 'I found the workers abnormally exhausted. I discovered their working hours far exceeded 40 per week. They did not dare complain, for fear of losing their jobs. One day I said to them: "Tomorrow morning, I want you all on the steps, in front of the factory!"'

When the boss arrived, he was outraged, particularly when he discovered that the demonstration had been organized by Didacienne, who had a well-paid job. 'I told him I could not live off the backs of

the workers and that I wanted to create a union to protect the rights of the weakest.' As a result, she was sacked. Later, when the boss offered to re-instate her, she refused to go back unless he admitted that he was abusing the rights of the workers.

'In the meantime,' she says, 'I had married and had two children. My attitude was causing my husband some anxiety.' To compensate for the loss of salary, she had started a small pharmacy. 'Then came this terrible war: enough to drive one mad.'

The events at the factory had made Didacienne's name as a trade unionist, and in 1996 she was elected to the national federation of trade unions, in the post of education and training. Later on, she became involved in human rights issues and went to the US for training

Tony Hazel

in democracy and government. There she met a colonel in the State Department. 'I asked him: "Why did you let us down? Just one of your tanks would have put the killers to flight!"'

On her return she gave free training sessions in democracy and government in all the prefectures of Rwanda and two years later she attended a three-month course in Canada on conflict resolution. She is now a counsellor in conflict management and a trainer in mediation and conciliation at Rwanda's national university.

A few days before our conversation, Didacienne had spoken to a plenary session of the conference. 'The war and the genocide of 1994 left deep hurts amongst Rwandans: on one side are those who have lost loved ones, on the other the families of those who participated in the genocide,' she said. 'The two sides suffer from an illness called hate and need the remedy of forgiveness and reconciliation.'

'I also knew hate. I was completely traumatized, I did not know what to do to overcome the pain of the massacre of members of my family, or how to bear to live near the families of the killers.'

In 1998, when someone else died in her family, Didacienne realized that 'death is a natural stage, and that it is worse to be responsible for it than to be the victim'. This made it possible for her to 'put myself in the place of the wives and children of the killers and feel great pity for them'. With some friends, she set up a women's group, which helps prisoners in hospital, particularly by taking meals in to them.

'At first, they could not believe that the widows of the genocide and Tutsi women would bring them food; they

were afraid of being poisoned. But little by little they realized that our motivation was compassion. Some cried, some asked for forgiveness. It is terrible to see people brought low by their own wrong-doing: that is what gave me the strength to hate the sin without hating the sinner.'

Didacienne finished her talk by asking the international audience to stand so that she could ask for their forgiveness on behalf of the Rwandans present—'for the feelings of hate that we had for the whole world, accusing it of betraying us by not helping in the face of the massacre of our parents, spouses, children.' The whole assembly stood in silence, astonished, moved and abashed by her words.

Nathalie Chavanne

Russian's bridge to Estonia

One of the most important things in life is to know which bridges to cross and which to burn, says Violetta Sokolenko, Rector of the Tallinn Commercial College in Estonia. 'Every day I try to burn the bridge which leads to fear.'

When the small Baltic state emerged from under the shadow of the Soviet empire in 1990, many of the Russian minority left to return to their homeland. Sokolenko, then a researcher at Tallinn's Institute of Pedagogy, asserts she was not tempted to do the same. Rather, she 'burnt the bridge of any hesitation' and stayed in Estonia.

She set up a private college for 250 Russian students intending to go into business and industry in Estonia, with the aim of building bridges between the communities.

'We started, from the very beginning, to pay a great deal of attention to the Estonian language.' The Russian students have to pass exams in citizenship as well as studying Estonia's culture, literature and constitution. And Estonian businessmen are



Violetta Sokolenko: 'people confuse freedom and democracy with anarchy'

invited to give lectures.

Another bridge, says Sokolenko, has been to the West. Lecturers come from Notre Dame University in America for a month each year and the Russian students spend three weeks there. There are other exchange programmes with Finnish and German institutes, particularly on Total Quality Management.

So successful has the college been that most of its 200 graduates so far have landed good jobs with Estonian firms or have gone on to study for their masters degrees, says Sokolenko.

She is keen to instil in the students a sense of ethical and moral values, as a foundation for democracy. 'There are many problems among the young because people confuse freedom and democracy with a sort of anarchy. They think they can do anything they want.' Before, they were held together by ideology, 'but now they unite on a materialistic basis and the only question is how to make lots of money. They want to be rich immediately after leaving the college.' So they make terrible mistakes,

including joining badly run companies. 'We try to persuade them that business is not done in this way.'

Sokolenko likes to quote her eight-year-old granddaughter who once asked her, 'Why in our world is money more important than love?' And while Dostoevsky once wrote that 'beauty will save the world', Sokolenko believes that 'love will save the world'.

Michael Smith

Campaigner against dowry murders

Media exposure could reduce dowry deaths—the murder of young brides whose families fail to give enough dowry to their husbands—and other incidents of sexual harassment in India, says the Indian broadcaster and campaigning journalist Jennifer Arul. In Chinai (formerly Madras), for instance, reported cases of sexual harassment fell from 1,200 in the first six months of 1998 to 560 in the first six months of 1999, she told an international conference of journalists in Chichester, England, recently.

Arul, who is South India

bureau chief for New Delhi Television, an independent channel, says she would be thankful if she has been responsible for even one case of avoided harassment, though she is cautious about making overt claims about her influence as a broadcaster. 'God doesn't want me to conquer the world,' she says.

One dowry death she covered was that of a 26-year-old Pondicherry woman, only two years after her marriage. The woman was allegedly raped and then murdered by her brother-in-law, in her in-laws' house, and her mother-in-law was involved. She died on the way to hospital. Her brother-in-law claimed that her wounds were self-inflicted and that an intruder had broken into the house.

Arul and her camera team rushed to the hospital, where the brother-in-law feigned sickness in front of the camera. The story was broadcast the next morning. 'All the women's movements surrounded the hospital, up in arms,' Arul says. 'We forced the authorities to arrest him and his mother. They are now in jail, due for trial. The media outcry forced the authorities to act.'

Without such coverage, the police too often do nothing in a culture of dowry-giving that sometimes demands extortionate sums from the bride's family, even years after the wedding, Arul says.

Arul admits that in her broadcast she failed to emphasize 'the very core of the story—this young woman had been raped and murdered because her family had not parted with money'. The boy's family were rich diamond merchants and offered Arul a huge amount of money not to follow up the story. She says she was tempted to accept the cash, 'but how could I sleep at night?' after hearing the dead woman's mother 'screach and collapse' when the broadcast was first aired.

'These stories oppress me a great deal,' she says. 'The authorities have tried to shut me up. But that, for me, is not even an issue.'

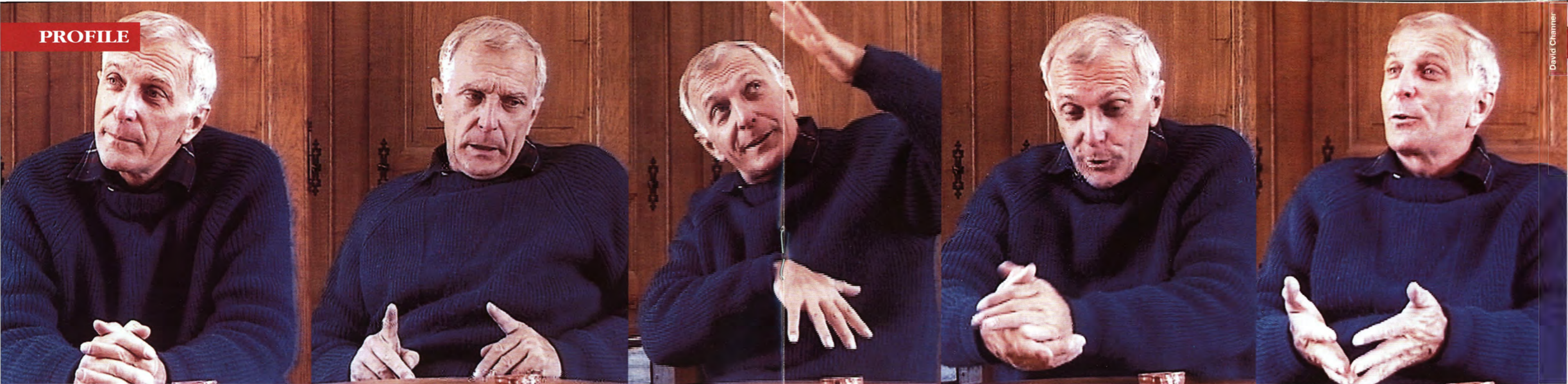
Arul was speaking at a conference organized by Gegrappa, a Washington-based group of Christians in journalism. (<http://www.gegrappa.org/>)

Michael Smith

FOR A CHANGE

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Priest of many frontiers

Alan Channer meets François Ponchaud, the Catholic priest who brought the Cambodian genocide to the attention of the world.

The air was heavy with dust, exhaust fumes and the stench of drying fish. We were stuck in a Phnom Penh traffic jam close to a bridge over the Mekong river. Suddenly the driver saw a gap and tore down the inside lane, inadvertently splattering dust over pavement hawkers and artisans. 'It's like the Wild West here,' he grinned.

The driver was François Ponchaud, a French priest who has spent most of his working life in Cambodia and the refugee camps on its border with Thailand. As author of *Cambodia: Year Zero*, he was the person who first alerted the world to the genocide perpetrated by the Pol Pot regime.

He took me to a chapel on the outskirts of the city. Sisters of Charity, dressed in the sari-like habit which Mother Teresa made famous, were seated on the stone floor. Lay people filed in at the back, poor and thin, with troubled, timid eyes.

Father Ponchaud emerged from behind the altar, wearing priest's vestments over his dusty clothes, and celebrated mass in fluent Khmer. He punctuated his homily with questions to the congregation. One young man stood up several times and professed his knowledge of the Gospels with evident pride.

We met the same man afterwards in the AIDS clinic which the Sisters run. They said he would die soon. Father Ponchaud chatted with him and with the other patients, found several points of contact and

fostered moments of joy.

François Ponchaud was born in 1939 in Sallanches, France, under the shadow of Mont Blanc. 'I imbibed the Catholic faith with my mother's milk,' he told me. He seems to have imbibed more of it than his 11 sisters and brothers; by the age of 19 he was a seminarian.

At 20, national service summoned him to fight as a paratrooper in Algeria for two years. 'It was a very difficult time,' he recalled. 'It became more and more evident to me that a different dimension must be introduced to rebuild the world. To make war in the way we did in Algeria, of which I'm deeply ashamed, with a materialist and a colonialist rationale, where human action was unilluminated by faith—well, that can only lead us to catastrophe.'

He felt a calling to work in Asia, but says it was 'chance' that led him to one of its most war-torn lands. The Missions Etrangères de Paris (foreign missions of Paris) simply told him to go to Cambodia, and that was that.

'The Missions Etrangères de Paris dates back to 1660,' Father Ponchaud told me. 'In our first three years abroad we are charged with the specific work of studying the language and the customs of the country, in order to work as intelligently as possible.'

He recalled an early experience of trying out his recently acquired knowledge of Khmer on the Superior of a Buddhist monastery in a densely-forested area on the border with Vietnam. 'I told him that

Catholics worship God, who created heaven and earth and is the Father of humankind. The monk listened to me with a faint smile on his lips and then started explaining to an elder of his monastery that Catholics believed stories that were made up in olden times to teach the ignorant!.... I began to realize how difficult it is to speak about God to Cambodians. We were all speaking Khmer but there was no communication; our whole conception of the world was different. I concluded that on the intellectual level there was no bridge.'

On 17 April 1975, Father Ponchaud was using his knowledge of the Khmer language in very different circumstances, under the whine of rocket shells, for the International Red Cross, as tens of thousands of frightened people streamed into the centre of Phnom Penh. When the city finally fell to the Khmer Rouge, Ponchaud remembers a strange discrepancy between the people's jubilation that the war was over and the sullen attitude of the victorious soldiers.

Later that day the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh began. A phone call asked whether the Red Cross could take all the inmates from the biggest civilian hospital in town. Then, moments later, he witnessed an appalling, 'hallucinatory spectacle'. Thousands of sick and wounded people were abandoning the city, some carried by friends, others lying on beds pushed by their families with intravenous drips still attached.

'I shall never forget one cripple who had neither hands nor feet, writhing along the

ground like a severed worm,' Ponchaud wrote later, 'or the man with his foot dangling at the end of his leg, attached only by skin. "Can I spend the night here with you?" the man asked.' Father Ponchaud was obliged to refuse. He recalls that it made him feel as if his own last shred of human dignity had been lost.

Father Ponchaud crossed the border into Thailand on 7 May with the final convoy of foreigners to leave Cambodia. Back in France, the Missions Etrangères de Paris advised all its priests and staff who had escaped from Cambodia to begin working in another country. Father Ponchaud refused. 'I needed to reflect for a while and digest what had happened,' he recalled. So he stayed in Paris and worked for the Society's information office.

He said it was 'chance' which led him to write *Cambodia: Year Zero* in 1976, though when I probed further he admitted that he sensed a clear calling to maintain solidarity with the Cambodian people in their difficulties. 'God leads us,' he said, 'but often in curved lines'.

In the summer of 1975 Ponchaud had begun receiving first-hand accounts from escapees of the Cambodian holocaust and was listening to Khmer Rouge radio bulletins relayed to him by friends in Thailand. The following February, angered by a fatuous article on Cambodia in *Le Monde*, he sent the editor-in-chief some of the information he had collated. Several days later the paper carried a three-page article by Ponchaud. Early in 1977, he launched his book. The *New York Review of Books* described it as 'by far the best informed report to appear on Cambodia, where the bloodiest revolution in history is now taking place'.

For Father Ponchaud, as for every Cambodian who survived the killing fields, there was great personal loss. In the early 1970s he had been responsible for 40 young Cambodian Catholics. Only two survived.

In 1979 Pol Pot's regime was forced out

of Phnom Penh by Vietnamese forces and the number of refugees living in makeshift camps on the Thai-Cambodian border swelled to 300,000. Ponchaud went to live among them.

The situation posed not only massive humanitarian problems, but also, for Ponchaud, theological ones. 'Some of the refugees wanted to become Christian in order to get US passports,' Ponchaud told me. Sometimes we would just say, "Go away, become good Buddhists and only then can you consider becoming Christian!"'

Ponchaud felt led to preach Christ's message—'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'—though he knew that his hearers had seen loved ones murdered in front of their own eyes. He recalls his amazement when a man emerged from a congregation, said he wanted to forgive the Khmer Rouge and then sought out some Khmer Rouge cadres in order to do so.

I asked whether Christians and Buddhists could work together to rebuild Cambodia. 'Without Buddhism Cambodia is lost,' Ponchaud answered. 'Personally I consider Buddha to be a prophet like Moses, with extraordinary intuition and an important place in God's plan. Buddha educated Asia on the moral plane and discovered a way of resolving humanity's problems. Jesus does bring us another way, but it is quite futile to be critical of one another. We are each in our own way searching for the Absolute.'

What had Ponchaud himself learnt from Buddhism? 'Meditation has become more important in my life,' he replied. 'Before I would read a passage from the Bible and say a number of prayers daily. Now I cannot live without meditating for half an hour, or an hour, every day. It places me again before God and purifies me. It has become the heart of my life and the source of my motivation.'

He explained how the Buddhist practice of 'loving kindness meditation' helps him on those occasions when he feels hatred for someone. 'I take about half an hour, and I think about the people whom I like most,

and I send them good wishes. Then I think about people I like less, and send them good wishes; then I send good wishes to people I don't like, and finally I send good wishes to people I detest! Gradually one's attitude changes. It is a simple method, but it has helped to transform my heart.'

For him, serving Christ has meant taking seriously Christ's call to sell everything he has and give it to the poor. 'I feel happier like that,' he says. 'I am no longer in need of anything. Jesus Christ puts human existence into its real context and affirms that love and life are good.'

Father Ponchaud took me to a slum in Tuol Kork, the suburb in Phnom Penh where he lived for many years. We walked along precarious footbridges, over murky puddles, between densely-spaced wooden houses on stilts. Children shrieked, giggled and ran helter-skelter. Adults hailed him respectfully as 'Grandfather' and came over to chat.

Ponchaud had lived in one of these houses, to understand better the daily lot of the poor. When I asked how it felt to come back, a light gleamed in his moistening eyes. 'It makes me happy,' he answered. 'These people live in very difficult circumstances but they always manage to smile. In Western societies people always manage to complain. Sometimes I feel it is these people who are closer to salvation, not me, not us in the West.'

Later I saw Ponchaud in his office. Bible commentaries in Khmer and texts in Greek and Hebrew were scattered across his desk. Dominating his bookshelf was a Khmer version of the Bible, translated by an ecumenical team which Ponchaud had headed.

'I have to leave for a lunch appointment with a Cambodian couple who are going to get married,' he said suddenly. He fished out a helmet, got onto a weathered moped, smiled warmly and disappeared into the swirl of the Phnom Penh traffic.

When I think of Father François Ponchaud now, it strikes me that I have met someone wholly given to following that 'curved line' of God's leading. ■

Learning to ask good questions

Will the 21st century see as much human suffering as the 20th? Not if the graduates of the Caux Scholars Program have anything to do with it, writes Evelyn Ruffin.

Sam Doe, a Liberian raised in poverty amidst the ravages of prolonged civil war, directs the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, based in Accra, Ghana. Tanya Peric, a Bosnian whose father is Croatian and mother Serbian, was twice a refugee of the Balkan wars and now works to protect the rights of Europe's gypsy minority at the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest. Zack Rothschild, an American from a well-to-do mid-western family, is working with Mercy Corps in Kosovo helping coordinate humanitarian aid.

These young professionals have one thing in common. They are all graduates of the Caux Scholars Program (CSP), a month-long course in conflict transformation. For eight years it has drawn talented young men and women from all over the world to a Swiss centre for reconciliation to learn more about peacemaking. Perched on a mountain-side high above Lake Geneva in the village of Caux, the centre, run by Moral Re-Armament, has been a beacon of hope for the world for over 50 years.

Many of the students, like Sam and Tanya, have been personally scarred by conflicts in their home countries. Others, like Zack, were on track for successful careers in a variety of fields and simply longed to find ways to make more of a difference in the world. All were highly motivated to learn how to play a part in bringing healing both in personal and community conflicts and to people traumatized by war.

Amy Potter, for instance, came to Caux from Principia College in the US 'fairly certain' that she wanted to pursue a career in conflict resolution. Taking part in the programme 'cemented my desire', she says. She went on to work with the Iowa Peace Institute in America's heartland.

Amy says that the close personal relationships that developed during the programme have helped her in her work. 'Knowing people I deeply appreciate and respect who have lived through destructive conflicts, or are actively working to prevent them, gives me more motivation and sincerity. With sincerity comes the realization that I can't only teach conflict resolution skills, I



Caux Scholars reunion, Washington DC, 1995: (clockwise from top left) Sam Doe, Liberia; Ni Thiyanan Thon, Malaysia; Dr Barry Hart; Hatti Morrow, USA; Jelena Vranjesevic, Yugoslavia; Dale Linder, USA; Juliet Nemiroff Hodder, USA.

need to live them. This has made all the difference in the quality of my work.'

Similarly, Patrick McNamara had decided to pursue a master's degree in conflict analysis and resolution when he enrolled in the programme in 1996. He saw it as a way of making a transition from community-based mediation to resolving conflict in a global context. After obtaining his degree, Patrick joined the Western Justice Resource Center, a conflict resolution organization in Los Angeles, and became a trainer and facilitator with Hope in the Cities, a programme of interracial dialogue in US cities.

Patrick, a Christian, has married Aviva, who is Jewish. 'Today, my interfaith dialogues extend beyond just the community conference table to my own dinner table,' he says. 'This builds on the taste of religious diversity that I experienced in Caux.' He adds, 'The CSP widened my eyes, deepened my practice and grew my network to do better what I am meant to do: be a peacemaker in the world.'

During their month together, Caux

Scholars learn how to analyze conflict; examine case studies brought by their fellow students, faculty and guest lecturers; and practise skills of facilitation, negotiation and mediation. They are aided by a variety of surprisingly realistic role-playing exercises.

For example Sam Doe, who was partly impelled into attending the CSP by witnessing a young child die in the street, has returned each summer to help teach. One year he created a simulation of a peace negotiation, drawing on the history of the Liberian conflict. Students assumed the roles of both antagonists and mediators. When a photographer knowledgeable about Liberia arrived to take some photos of the programme, he thought he was witnessing a real life negotiation.

Tanya, the Bosnian working on Roma rights, is one of a number of students from Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. They have helped their fellow Caux Scholars to better appreciate the historic roots of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and also to care personally for the people of the region and

for its future. Tanja had fled with her mother and sister from her home in Tuzla in the early Nineties, settling in Novi Sad, Serbia. She says, 'Peacebuilding, or—as I would modestly call it—crossing the bridges, seems to me to be a natural choice for someone born in Bosnia in an ethnically mixed family. The CSP was my first chance to meet young people from all over the world who shared a similar vision.'

'Since then I have studied interfaith relations and human rights in Switzerland, the US and South Africa. Through my current work, I am trying to cross the gap between my own, non-Romani community, and the other group. At the CSP, I learnt how to deal with prejudice, acquired skills in cross-cultural communication, and made wonderful friends who have been an important network of advisers and supporters in many a difficult moment.'

One such difficult moment was last spring, when Serbian cities were being bombed at the height of the Kosovo conflict. Graduates and faculty from the CSP kept in touch with the students from Serbia through e-mail messages and phone calls, offering support, a word of humour, or just a vent through which pain and anger could be expressed. The CSP invited its six graduates from Serbia to return to Caux for a week this August, and five, including Tanja, accepted. They found refreshment, wider perspectives and hope, and began the process of reconciliation with individuals from the NATO countries and with a refugee from Prystina, Kosovo, currently living in Sweden.

Zach, the American working in Kosovo with Mercy Corps, looks back on the road that led him there after he 'came down the mountain' from Caux in 1996. 'Returning to Drew University, I tried to use what I had learned at Caux as a moral and political compass, organizing a walkathon fundraiser for



Zach Rothschild (left) talks to Rabbi Marc Gopin, a member of the CSP faculty.

peace in places of genocide. Following graduation, I headed off to Washington DC, where I worked for FINCA International, a micro-credit organization dedicated to fighting poverty worldwide through tiny loans. My work included five weeks of research in Kyrgyzstan.

'I now find myself in Kosovo, working for Kosovo's oldest international NGO—and one of its largest—coordinating food and non-food aid, health, agriculture, economic development, and civil society initiatives. I feel that Caux has strengthened one of the most useful things I can do here: ask good questions—a key to navigating all the surprises that Kosovo has to offer.'

The CSP's impact on its graduates owes much to a faculty that has offered a rare combination of academic credentials and field experience. Barry Hart, the CSP's

Academic Director, researched his doctoral thesis working with victims of trauma in Liberia. He has also spent four years in former Yugoslavia, developing programmes for schools, working with women who have lost husbands or sons, or who have been raped, and facilitating ecumenical dialogues. He teaches at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia.

Another faculty member, Dr Mohammed Abu-Nimer, teaches in the School of International Service at American University in Washington DC and conducts workshops in conflict resolution in Gaza. Out of his work there, two teachers have come from Gaza to take part in the Caux programme.

Farooq Hassan, an international lawyer from Pakistan who has years of experience working with the UN, has talked to the students about formal international instruments for resolving conflict. And former US diplomats Harold Saunders and Joseph Montville have included students in work they are doing to create consensus through dialogue in Tajikistan or to further the healing process in the Middle East.

While daily headlines face us with the gory details of the cost of human conflict—whether it stems from unhealed history, economic injustice, or deep seated prejudice—and other voices decry the purposelessness and self-indulgence of young people, this small and little known programme sends a steady stream of young men and women out into the world to bring healing. They not only take their skills and learning with them, but they also train others and play a creative role in developing a committed global network of peacemakers who support and encourage one another. ■



Academic Director Barry Hart refers to a diagram on the cycle of violence.

Evelyn Ruffin was Program Director of the Caux Scholars Program from 1994 to 1999.

It all began at school

When Joseph Karanja started primary school in the small Kenyan town of Eldoret, at the age of seven, his hero was the retired Anglican Bishop Manasses Kuria. Karanja's secret ambition was to become a bishop like Kuria.

What prevented school from being an enjoyable experience was his former teacher who was addicted to an over-reliance on the cane. 'He would cane us for coming late or for failing to answer a question.' The school was nearly four miles from his home and if he wasn't in his place by 8.00 am he would be punished. 'Running to school became a regular part of school life. Probably that is one of the reasons that Kenyans are good runners! I had my full share of canings.'

One morning instead of going to school he decided to spend the day alongside the railway line. He found a strategic place where he could be well hidden and stayed until the normal time to return from school. He maintained this routine for about three weeks. 'One day, while in my hide-out, something in my heart told me that my longing to become an Anglican bishop would not be fulfilled unless I went back to school.'

The next day he attended assembly on time and from there went straight to class. 'I knew it was going to be hell as I had no explanation as to why I had been away all that time.' Minutes ticked by but the teacher didn't arrive. 'I began to pray in my heart that he would not come. Eventually the headmaster walked in to tell us that our teacher had been transferred to another

school. We were to come back the following morning when a new teacher was expected.' Life at school for Karanja was transformed. 'We even started to look forward to coming to school the next day,' he says.

A few months before finishing at primary school, open warfare erupted between Karanja's class and the English teacher. As class prefect, he decided to lead his fellow students in a boycott of all English lessons. The boycott went on for almost two weeks. 'We thought we were punishing her and she took the attitude that it left her with less work to do for the same pay.' He didn't tell his parents that there was a problem at school, but he did find himself asking them to explain more exactly the movement called Moral Re-Armament with which they had become involved and how it worked.

He says it was the idea of listening to God, or the 'inner voice', that struck him most. 'The following morning I woke up early and tried to write down what the voice of God had said. The thought that came to me was to apologize to my classmates for misleading them and to the teacher for my role in the whole affair. It took me four days to face the teacher. When I finally apologized to her, she felt challenged for not caring enough about her students.'

The upshot was that the two of them apologized to the class together. 'A new spirit was born,' says Karanja, 'and at once a sense of family was felt in the classroom.' They made arrangements to make up for the time that had been lost. In a few months the pupils sat the final Certificate of Primary Education. Over half the class had an A in



Joseph Karanja: 'The rot in our country is curable.'

English. Karanja had As in everything and emerged as top student. 'After that experience,' he says, 'I decided to make listening to my inner voice a part of my life.'

After high school he went to India to study for six years, taking his second degree in law. On returning to Kenya in 1993, he spent a year with UNHCR before being admitted as an advocate of the High Court of Kenya. Now he gives most of his time working to clear up corruption on a national level. The 'Clean Kenya Campaign' he helps to run aims to tackle corruption, tribalism, family breakdown and poverty. 'The good news is that the rot in our country is curable,' he says. With other African countries beginning to adopt the crusade, he looks forward to the time when a Clean Africa Campaign will take root in the whole continent.

'My dream of becoming a bishop never came to be,' he reflects. But perhaps, as a prime mover in the Clean Kenya Campaign, he will be every bit as effective.

Paul Williams

From Dr Frances McAll, Hampshire, England

Three months ago I had a heart attack. Life, which had been full, suddenly stopped. I was made acutely aware of my mortality and vulnerability. I had been feeling particularly well and had thought God's idea was that I would care for my husband, who is older than I, as long as he needed caring for.

I have always said that I had no fear of death, but now it came with a shock that it was I, myself, who might experience it and what on earth would it be like? When I spoke to the Lord about it the thought that came was that actually I was still alive and to concentrate on that. I did not need to bother

about what might come next as I could not possibly imagine it anyway and He was fully to be trusted.

I remembered the thought I had when going through the doors of the Japanese camp in China where we were interned during World War II and when life, as we knew it, seemed to have stopped and our work had been interrupted: 'This is the next part of life so get on and live it'. They proved to be

some of the most productive years of our lives, for which we have no regrets.

I am surprised to find that I now feel totally at peace about the future. Although we cannot ignore what will come, 'now' is the only time we actually possess. I can say with a patient of mine with terminal cancer of the pancreas who, to my surprise, had turned down stronger pain relief, that 'the peace of God really does pass all understanding'.

The editors welcome letters for publication but reserve the right to shorten them. Please write to 'For A Change', 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD, UK. E-mail: fac@mra.org.uk



LETTER

There is no doubting the fact that family life, from the family of origin where we begin as children, to the family we create in the present, is what orientates us towards the future. It presents the profoundest and most far-reaching challenges to our personal growth. There is a lot of baggage in this package, from the role models our parents and grandparents present, to our own over-idealized notions of what we do and no longer expect to do.

But, as St Francis reminds us, 'It is in giving that we receive'. Part of the problem is that we see marriage more as a contract than as a commitment, seeing it as a 'deal' between two partners. Most of the time we are distracted and confused by the false ideas in the media and in our culture and even in the representation of our religion. In marriage and family life these new ideas have created havoc because women have dropped their self-sacrificing notions and are suspicious of concepts of 'maternal instinct' that seem to reinforce the power positions of men.

The decision to marry was an agonizing one for me. I never doubted my love or commitment to Paul, my husband, but marriage didn't look much of a deal for the women I knew. I trusted Paul and declared to myself and others very loudly that it wouldn't change things.

But marriage does make a change in one's life—for both partners. It is a profound challenge to the past, the family of origin, where we begin our experience of family life and where we are given the opportunity to interact with new choices and experiences.

Today the old role models are gone; both men and women work outside the home and juggle to sustain a meaningful family life. Women in Ireland, and certainly in the Derry I grew up in, always worked inside and outside the home. But they are now redefining themselves and wanting more from their relationships, particularly the fundamental marital one.

The growing pains are real and visible for all to see. Marital breakdown reveals the very real pressures couples experience in redefining their relationships in our complex world. Parenting also challenges one in new and significant ways. We tend to idealize happy families and can be easily discouraged by the magnitude of the challenges presented in rearing children. Not least because it seems that children's physical demands diminish at only a fraction of the rate at which their emotional ones multiply.

Popular culture influences this situation immensely. Especially media culture, which is the never ending spin of products, lifestyles, entertainment, music and TV that effectively teaches our children, while we live with the consequences. Combining motherhood and career is a very political agenda these days. The media promotes the glossy image of motherhood, while the rest



M. Smith

First things first

Family life is a juggling act these days, writes Catholic journalist, lecturer and mother Faustina Starrett.

of us feel we are not measuring up.

Our moral compass is totally disorientated by the confusing messages in our media culture. We need to go where, ironically, former Prime Minister John Major suggested—to get our house in order. Unfortunately, his call for 'back to basics' did not get us very far as his government seemed as confused as the rest of us about how these basic guiding principles should be lived. To rebuild anything, self, marriage, family and the connected relationships and institutions of our time requires 'moral re-armament', to use Frank Buchman's phrase.

The challenge of personal growth in family life is to put 'first things first' and make our families the priority in our turbulent world. We need to cultivate a sense of shared purpose, and unconditional love that confronts and redirects our course where necessary.

Pope John Paul II speaks of the cementing nature of a couple's love. In quoting the example of his own parents, he comments, 'To their loving union I owe my love of God and of humanity,' confirming that the greatest gift you can give your children is to love your spouse.

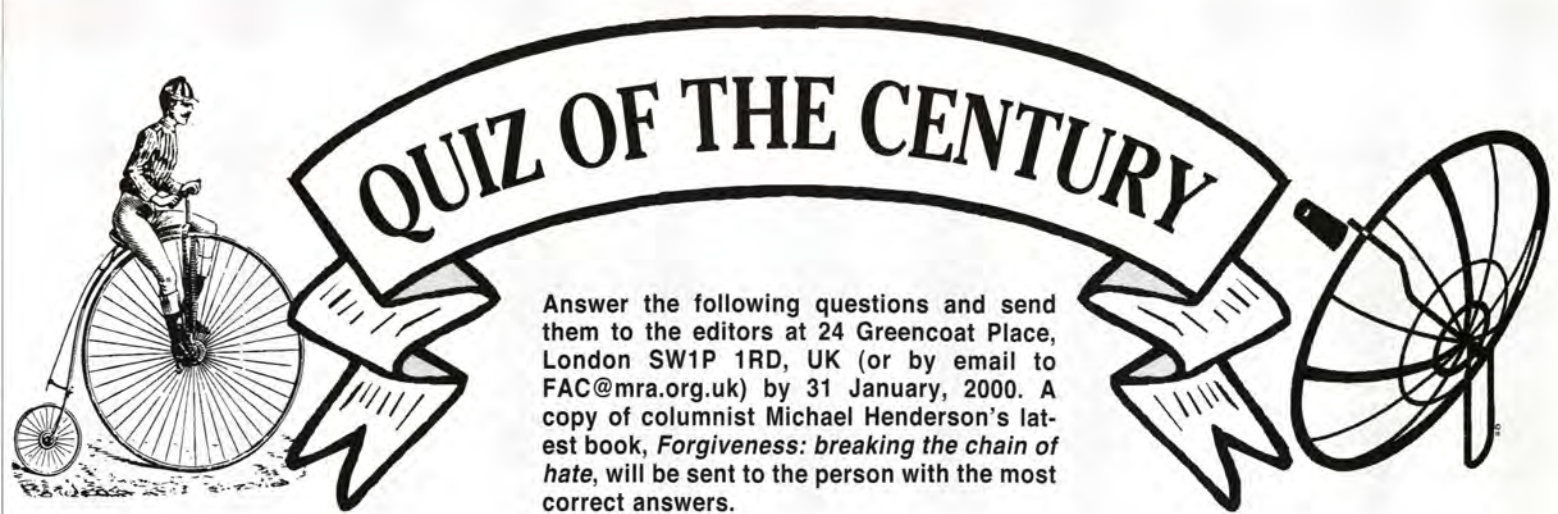
Family seen in this way becomes a powerful agent of change. 'We—not me' has priority, initiating a personal odyssey.

The challenge of family life is to give it priority as our greatest investment. Dividing ourselves between so many things often sees things that matter most at the mercy of things that matter least. Juggling the needs at home and the demands of an increasingly ruthless and relentless work culture means we sometimes feel driven by forces outside ourselves. The glossy media images that permeate our lives with a relentless emphasis on success and achievement make the feeling we are not measuring up almost inevitable.

Good families may be off-track most of the time, but it seems to me they know what the track looks like, informed by values. Without values we apply relative truths that will suit ourselves. In this confusion, as Yeats put it, 'things fall apart, the centre cannot hold'. We need to use these core values to provide effective leadership in ourselves, in our families, workplaces and relationships. The image of ourselves as 'professional achievers' leaves a gnawing emptiness at the centre.

The challenge is to communicate, learn, support, solve problems, forgive, repent, serve, worship, survive, hopefully thrive and have fun in the process of living and loving together. The challenge of family life to personal growth involves each of us in this journey, leaning on and learning from the heritage of our faith. For, as Pope John Paul II reminds us, 'Whoever shapes the family shapes the future.'

Faustina Starrett is coordinator of media programmes at the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Derry.



Answer the following questions and send them to the editors at 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD, UK (or by email to FAC@mra.org.uk) by 31 January, 2000. A copy of columnist Michael Henderson's latest book, *Forgiveness: breaking the chain of hate*, will be sent to the person with the most correct answers.

1900: Which country became a Commonwealth?
1901: Which sport became legally recognized in England?
1902: Which dam opened in Egypt?
1903: Which continent was first crossed by car (in 65 days)?
1904: With which country did Chile conclude a treaty?
1905: Who published *Two tactics*?
1906: What novel led to the US Pure Food and Drugs Act?
1907: Who founded the Boy Scouts?
1908: Where did 150,000 die in an earthquake?
1909: What new material was manufactured?
1910: Who wrote Concerto for Violin in B minor, Op 61, London?
1911: Which future French President was born?
1912: Who detected electrons in a cloud-chamber?
1913: What show introduced cubism to New York?
1914: Who was assassinated in Sarajevo?
1915: Which pioneer of the British Labour Party died?
1916: Which Russian 'holy man' died?
1917: Which future American President was born?
1918: What ended on 11.11.18?
1919: What forerunner of the UN was set up?
1920: Who wrote *The adventures of the good soldier Schwejk*?
1921: What did Albert Schweitzer write?
1922: What was Aniakchak?
1923: Where was a peace treaty signed with Turkey?
1924: What did RC Andrews discover in the Gobi Desert?
1925: How did Baird transmit human features?
1926: Who wrote *Winnie the Pooh*?

1927: Where did the economy collapse on 'Black Friday'?
1928: Where was Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne founded?
1929: Where did King Alexander I establish a dictatorship?
1930: Who became King of Romania?
1931: What US gangster was jailed for tax evasion?
1932: Who wrote *Christian dogmatics*?
1933: Who became German Chancellor?
1934: What school, later attended by Prince Charles, was founded?
1935: Who died in a Dorset motor-cycle accident?
1936: Who flew from England to Cape Town in 3.25 days?
1937: What fabric was patented by Wallace Carothers?
1938: What masks were issued to British citizens?
1939: With which country did Britain sign a treaty of mutual assistance?
1940: What did George Dempsey retire from?
1941: What sort of photography did Hans Haas undertake?
1942: Whose submarines failed to penetrate Sydney Harbour?
1943: What new drug successfully treated chronic diseases?
1944: What were the V-1 and V-2?
1945: On what date did the war in Europe end?
1946: Where did a three-year civil war begin?
1947: Where was the capital of the German Federal Republic established?
1948: Where was Mahatma Gandhi assassinated?
1949: Which airlift ended?
1950: Which South African soldier and statesman died?
1951: Which musical, set in

Siam, opened in New York?
1952: Where were Britain's first atomic tests?
1953: Which English queen died?
1954: The clown Grock retired. What nationality was he?
1955: Which country declared the end of war with Germany?
1956: Who wrote *Look back in Anger*?
1957: Which West African country became independent?
1958: Where was there a Fifth Republic?
1959: The 200th anniversary of the death of which composer?
1960: Which country became independent under Makarios?
1961: What was the destination of the last 'Orient Express'?
1962: Which Dutch Queen died?
1963: Which Australian Prime Minister was knighted?
1964: Where did 300 die in soccer riots?
1965: Who declared independence unilaterally?
1966: Who landed Luna 9 on the moon?
1967: What element of living organisms did Stanford University synthesize?
1968: Who were rioting world-wide?
1969: Who took a small step for man?
1970: Whose portrait of Juan de Paraja sold in London for \$5,540,000?
1971: What adverts were banned from US TV?
1972: What did the US return to Japan?
1973: Who seized power in Chile?
1974: Which island did Turkey partially occupy?
1975: Which capital fell on 30 April?
1976: What did Argentina devalue by 70 per cent?

1977: Whom did the Ethiopian Dergue name as head of state?
1978: Who became the first to reach the North Pole solo?
1979: Where was a nuclear disaster narrowly avoided?
1980: Who became Zimbabwe's first Prime Minister?
1981: Which country joined the European Community?
1982: What trees fell in their millions in the UK?
1983: Who did Nigeria expel two million of?
1984: Who launched *Do they know it's Christmas*?
1985: Who imposed a year's silence on Leonardo Boff?
1986: Which planet was found to have 10 more moons?
1987: Which international magazine was launched?
1988: Whose unfinished Tenth Symphony was premièred in London?
1989: What ozone-threatening chemicals did 80 nations agree to stop producing by 2000?
1990: Who was the most famous South African prisoner to be released?
1991: What major airline closed?
1992: Where was the Earth Summit?
1993: Where did Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin first shake hands?
1994: Where was a human skull, believed to be 3 million years old, found?
1995: Which Portuguese speaking country was accepted into the Commonwealth?
1996: Where were the Olympic Games?
1997: What territory returned to China?
1998: Where was the world's longest suspension bridge opened?
1999: What round figure did the world's population hit?

A cool and moral campaign

The Clean Slate Campaign is a very good idea—personally I am not waiting for the year 2000—cleaning my own slate is a daily ongoing matter which I take seriously and try to carry out the cleaning with the help of the Lord "maker of heaven and earth".

Thus writes celebrated flautist James Galway to the organizers of the Clean Slate Campaign, a British initiative to give added meaning to the Millennium.

As reported in *FAC* (Feb/Mar 1999), the Clean Slate Campaign invites people to promise to take at least one practical step during 1999 towards cleaning their slate.

The basic concept of the campaign, together with a list of patrons and some examples of 'slate cleaning' appear in a *Clean Slate Guide* which has been widely distributed. There is also a newsletter and a website (www.cleanslate.org).

The 80 patrons of the campaign cover many walks of life. Among their number are senior religious figures (Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks; the late Cardinal Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster; and Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain), sporting personalities (Sir Bobby Charlton, Gavin Hastings and Lord Cowdrey of Tonbridge), academics, journalists, people in industry and housewives.

One patron, Baroness Shreela Flather, wrote, 'I have been hurt by the gender dis-



Clean Slate Campaigners Edward Peters (left) and Christopher Morgan

crimination I often experience within my own Asian community. I have decided to clean my slate of this hurt, and not allow it to make me angry or have a negative effect on the way I treat others.'

Sir Cliff Richard commented, 'A new Millennium, a new start, a clean slate. It makes sense!' And a student added that the idea was 'cool and moral'.

The campaign is not orchestrated from headquarters. Its originator, Edward Peters, says that it is a free idea for people to take up as they will. So initiatives are bubbling up in many parts of the country and in several facets of national life.

Schools are showing interest in the campaign as a useful resource for classrooms. A short study guide for use in primary schools has been prepared by teachers. One of the patrons, the Director of Education for Newcastle, wrote about the campaign to all the schools in his education authority and also to all the chief education officers in England. This led to a dozen CEOs requesting copies of the Guide for distribution to schools in their area. Nearly half of Scotland's 30 education authorities have also requested material on the campaign.

More recently, David Blunkett, Britain's education minister, has commended the Clean Slate initiative. He has put the government's Schools Division in touch with the campaign to see how to make it known more widely in schools.

The Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education adopted a special resolution to recommend the *Clean Slate Guide* to all SACRES throughout the UK.

In the campaign's birthplace, Oxford, the Lord Mayor, Val Smith, launched the idea of a Clean Slate Week in the town hall. She had the backing of the city council and local MPs.

Some responses:

- Recently I lost my temper with a woman in a council department. The next day I took a box of chocolates to her office!
- I can make myself miserable by being envious of those who, unlike myself, have grown up in a happy family. A mood can attack me and put me out of action for hours. After this happened recently I decided to do something about it... so I wiped the hateful word 'envy' off my slate and in its place I put 'contentment'.
- I have decided that I am not going to feel guilty any more about my actions and behaviour from the ages of 19-27. These years included my college years when I behaved promiscuously and hurt my friends very badly. I thought only about myself and lost contact with God. I am putting the guilt of those youthful years behind me in the knowledge that if God can forgive all I've done then I can wipe my slate clean.
- I expect soon to meet up with local councillors regarding the litter campaign in Wrexham, which arose out of my promise—to do something instead of moaning.

The hope was that the week, due to begin on 29 November, would unite many communities to do something positive for the city.

The clean slate theme is being used in many churches. And all delegates to the Church of Scotland General Assembly in Edinburgh in May received a copy of the Guide.

On 11 September the Chairman of the Liverpool District of the Methodist Church, John Taylor, arranged for a local activist to speak to Synod about the campaign. Dr Taylor told the 200 delegates that it was 'a simple idea that anyone can use'.

A press release from the Board of Deputies of British Jews explained that the aim was 'to encourage people of all faiths, or none, to take some individual action or decision which will put right a past wrong'.

There has been considerable media interest, with interviews on local and national radio programmes as well as coverage in several papers. Jennifer Cunningham wrote in the Scottish daily, *The Herald*: 'The Millennium has been a focus for grand projects, but there's still space among the new museums and public works for a bit of individual action'. The paper offered a bottle of champagne to readers who sent in the best stories of how they had cleaned their slates. But a cartoon by Noel Ford in *The Church Times* showed one prisoner telling another: 'My mistake was having all my Clean Slate pledges published in the local paper.'

As we go to press, there are still two months until the new Millennium. Further events are planned, including a national occasion gathering many of the campaign patrons at the same moment in the four provincial capitals of the UK. 1999 may be rapidly running its course but as the Clean Slate Campaign publicity says, 'It's never too late to clean your slate.'

Kenneth Noble



Vijay and Sheel Rege and family: 'We've learned to value each other.'

Following the heart

The company I was with closed in September 1997. Till then I had a good pay packet, a company car, a telephone and an annual vacation. Suddenly, for the first time, our family had to tighten our belts and count the paise. I had to watch every call I made and every kilometre I drove. In India, petrol costs half a fortune, and so do local telephone calls.

I applied for many jobs and spoke to thousands of people but nothing worked out. Strangely, even in the few places where I had been verbally offered a position the jobs seemed to dissipate into nothingness. Everything that I tried during this period of 18 long months seemed to lead to a dark wall. Each one of us has a period in our lives we would rather forget about. What we see generally in other people are happy faces. Nobody likes to talk about the bad times. And we mislead ourselves into believing that we are the only ones in a bit of a mess.

During those 18 months my wife Sheel and I learned that it is possible to do without a whole lot of conveniences. We learned to value what we have—each other and our families. And we were happy that things were not worse—as they were for so many. Maybe we did not have the extra pair of shoes, but at least we had our feet.

Friends gave us moral support and family

helped us materially. We knew this phase had to end sometime. Just as all good things come to an end, so do bad.

Now the darkness of the tunnel seems to be giving way to some fresh air and light.

This came about in a strange way. When I was talking to people about the possibility of a job, two of them independently suggested that I should do the things that I enjoyed and that money would follow. I was sceptical.

But when nothing else seemed to fall into place, I thought I might try this approach. So I did a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and came up with some ideas. I tried some without much success but now I have started one that seems promising.

For some years, with others, Sheel and I have been organizing annual family workshops and children's camps at Asia Plateau, the MRA centre in Maharashtra. I felt that these should be done more often to include more people. We have always enjoyed interacting with families and children. It is satisfying and you learn a lot.

So I spent three months putting together a module for a two-day workshop called 'Happy Families'. From 1 February this year I started marketing it with some 55 companies in Pune, and received a positive response.

Some people have too little time, others have too little to do. **Vijay Rege** from India writes about his experience of unemployment and Dutch businessman **Maurice Stroop** gets to grips with his overbusyness.

The first workshop took place at the end of February. The participants were thrilled and still talk to their friends and colleagues about the effect it had on their lives.

Sheel and I also organized a camp for children in the 10-15 age group, which was also great fun.

During my period of unemployment there have been many times of dark gloom and frustration. But I am beginning to think that it was necessary for us as a family to go through it. It has been a time of inner growth, learning to value the essentials. We've learned to prioritize; we've learned to value each other. Our two children have been supportive and understanding. They have also become responsible on a lot of different fronts; and we continue to share laughter.

I believe that what we have started is just a small part of what needs to be done on a huge scale.

Vijay Rege

From workaholic to family man

Driving to the office one Sunday morning I passed a church just as its bells started to ring. I stopped the car, asked myself what on earth I was doing with my life and instead of going to the office went to church. It did me a world of good.

A couple of months later I met my present wife, Edith, who is the opposite of my first wife whom I had divorced some years earlier. After much hesitation she agreed to start a relationship with me. She knew of my ambition, my craving for success and my none-too-decent lifestyle. Yet we got married and now have four children.

I had not been converted nor become all at once a model father. On the contrary, I was working day and night, eaten up with ambition. The morning after our second baby was born, I was on a plane to Japan for a meeting I thought I couldn't skip—stupid in retrospect, but at the time I didn't know any better. This kind of life continued till mid 1996, and I brushed all my wife's objections aside. I was making a fortune and I was doing it for the family, wasn't I? I was not travelling for fun, was I?

What I didn't realize was that, having become a regular churchgoer, I was increasingly shifting my standards and values, and my busy life was more and more an alibi to ease my conscience. I set up companies in India and South Africa where bribery and slush money were part of the pattern. Aged 45, I was Financial Director for a major Japanese multinational, responsible for Europe, Africa and Asia, up to and including India. I was the youngest statutory director in the company, one of two Europeans on the Board. I was stressed up to my eyeballs, was a jerk at home. I took to drinking more and more.

Early in 1997 I stopped drinking from one day to the next. This may have seemed easy to people like my wife who hardly ever used alcohol. But professionally I suddenly found myself pretty much an outcast. 'Where is that jolly Maurice Stroop who went boozing night after night with his business partners?' I no longer belonged. Too bad. My eyes were slowly opening again. My stress and agitation began to decrease. All at once I knew how to say no to yet another business weekend travelling to Japan, India or the United States.

One thing that made me decide to do things differently happened when I was in New York for a management meeting in December 1997. With a couple of colleagues I crossed Time Square where a woman tramp was lying on the ground dressed in nothing but a plastic bag. I stopped short, hoping to help her. My colleagues pulled me away, saying, 'Don't get involved'.

Later that night, during dinner in an expensive restaurant, I realized I did not want to be a part of such a company any longer. This led to the opportunity to fulfil one of my dreams: to dedicate my energies to a company that is partly my own. A few business colleagues and I founded Panta Electronics which in January 1998 bought 10 companies from Philips Electronics. They had 1,500 employees and a turnover of 500 million Dutch guilders. Our first year was not easy but we have shown a small profit and even bought and sold a few businesses.

I still work hard, with 60 per cent of my time spent abroad. But I have also made firm deals with my wife and children about the part I play in our life together. I am

supervisor of my eldest son's baseball team and assistant coach to my second son's soccer team. I have become treasurer of the foundation which manages Catholic elementary education in my town. I help my wife in her church activities and try to be more of a father to our younger children.

In the past, when I came back from a business trip the children hardly noticed me; now there is disappointment when they ask my wife, 'Why is Daddy not coming home tonight?' I am still ambitious and want to achieve a lot, but no longer at any price. Professionally I have stopped compromising on the basic values of life. Less is more. I admit that all this may be easier for me than most people as I have a good income with a surplus every month.

I do not want to give the impression that I have found the perfect balance between work and family life. My wife still feels that my work comes first. We still have our arguments about where and when the balance should be. But she is happy with what has been achieved so far. We took the decision together to put everything we have into Panta, and she would rather have a husband who is happy with what he does than continuing as before. I now believe that money should never result in squandering the basic values of life. Most of all, I realize that happiness with one's family and friends is far more important than material prosperity.

Maurice Stroop



Maurice Stroop and family: 'I have also made firm deals with my wife and children'



A DIFFERENT ACCENT

by Michael Henderson

A grandmother's dandelion seed

Bina Gibson was born in Berlin in 1920 and now lives in a quiet village in Devon, England. Her life embodies many of the struggles of this past century. Hers has been a journey of fears and faith, of joy and pain, of war and peace. This bold grandmother compares her latest move—a call for a UN World Day of At-One-Ment - to a dandelion seed. 'I keep blowing hopefully in different directions and ask God to bless the thought which he put in my head until it finds fertile soil.'

Being of Jewish heritage, she fled with some of her family to South Africa in 1933. At the outbreak of World War II she and her two brothers volunteered for the army and by the end of the war she was a captain in British Intelligence. She was involved in interrogating German prisoners in Italy and in the denazification of Austria, where she learned through the Red Cross that her father, whom she had not heard from since the beginning of the war, had died in Auschwitz nine days before the Russians reached the camp. The hurt was so deep that she could not speak of it for 40 years.

When she returned to South Africa, she became involved with the Black Sash movement against racial segregation. Then in 1947 she went to England to marry the British officer who had been her boss in Intelligence. For the next 40 years, they

were both involved in education.

In 1980 she plunged into the peace movement and was even arrested for demonstrating against nuclear weapons at the Ministry of Defence in London. Her protest was driven by her conscience as a Christian and her experience of the results of the lack of resistance in pre-war Germany.

In 1994 she went to Auschwitz to honour the memory of her father, to mark the passage of 50 years and, with Jews, Christians,

'The thought of being in the same room with a former member of the SS repelled and terrified me.'

Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, to inaugurate a Pilgrimage for Peace and Life from Auschwitz to Hiroshima. There she met members of One By One, a Massachusetts-based non-profit organization created by people whose lives had been deeply affected by the Holocaust. Members include both children of survivors and also children of perpetrators or bystanders in one of the most evil chapters of human history.

'The thought of being in the same room with a former member of the SS, the children of Nazi officials and mass murderers repelled and terrified me at first,' she says. 'But when I saw their tears and despair and felt their grief, I could let my own tears flow and realized almost for the first time that the anguish of victim and perpetrator is the same.' Some became her friends.

While she was in Auschwitz she wrote in a poem about her father, 'I pray with others for those of good will and also for those of ill will, for after all we are part of each other... May God forgive you and me. Forgive what you did to them. Forgive me for having hated you.'

Her proposal of the UN instituting a World Day of Atonement draws on her work with One By One, her experience of Yom Kippur and the example of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She sees it as a celebration of the new Millennium.

She compares this approach with President Lincoln's call in 1863 for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer. 'We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity,' he said. 'We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and have vainly imagined that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behoves us then, to confess our national sins, and pray for clemency and forgiveness.'

Since Lincoln's day, she says, we have become a global village. Our children may not repeat our many transgressions if we acknowledge our past with truthfulness and remorse.

British journalist Michael Henderson lives in Portland, Oregon, USA.

REFLECTIONS

by Leone Exton Beale

Gentleman of the Road



Richard Austin/Daily Mail

some recognition when they spoke about Malta. They asked him if he was Maltese and he said 'Yes'.

Tony was afraid of anything to do with blood and refused a DNA test. It took three weeks of patience to persuade Tony to show his tattoos. From these, his true identity was to emerge. A video with these further facts was sent to Malta.

By this time Sister Rosina was in Sidmouth on her second visit. She was filmed as she left Malta and appeared on TV with an inset photo of Tony. Tony's real sister saw this and went straight to the police. Seeing his tattoos the forensic team said they needed no better evidence and faxed the Prossers in Sidmouth about Tony's sister.

Of course Sister Rosina was saddened that he was not her brother, but she has kept in touch with events and helped when needed. His real sister came twice during the summer to visit him.

All these happenings stirred even more interest from the press and TV. Did Tony want to go back to his homeland? He had no passport but he said he was dreading another winter on the streets. He couldn't wait to be reunited with his family and Joce was to accompany him on the flight to Malta.

The air carrier discovered Tony's fear of flying and set up a special reconnoitre to give him a tour of an empty plane. They also insisted that a nurse fly with them.

In Malta he met up with the rest of his family and was very happy. He tried to get adjusted to sleeping indoors at his new home. Friends and family kept an eye on him until he got settled, and he became quite a local celebrity.

I have followed this story of human kindness, commitment and giving in these modern times, so often thought of as materialistic. I wonder what commitment followed for the Good Samaritan in the Bible who crossed over the road to help the man of another race who had been attacked?

On 31 January 1999 friends realized that Tony was ill. They phoned his family and Joce. He died the next day. He was not alone. His family and friends were with him. He knew Joce was coming from England.

At Tony's memorial service in Sidmouth, the priest said, 'Christianity is all about being concerned for those on the margins and left out.' Tony's story touched people throughout the community and, through the press, the world. Unconsciously, he brought out the best in people, and through helping him, many experienced God's love.

Just over 20 years ago when I was running a restaurant in London, we were visited now and again by a tramp. There was always a disturbance amongst the staff when he was seen coming up the steps. It was up to me as the person in charge to come forward and greet him.

It was not an easy task, as his appearance and odour were not favourable. We had a policy in the restaurant of treating each person with dignity and service, no less 'our tramp'. He always paid his bills. We trust he never felt unwelcome although some were critical and told me not to encourage him.

Some years passed and we wondered what had happened to our tramp as Tony didn't visit us anymore.

To our surprise, on 12 January 1998 his

photo appeared on the front pages of a number of daily papers with the title 'Old Man of the Sea'. He was photographed hand in hand with a nun, Sister Rosina Apollonia from Malta. She said she felt that Tony could be her long lost brother, Georgio Borg. It was thought he had been in the Merchant Navy and that when his ship sunk, he had suffered brain damage and memory loss. Little is known about how he arrived in Britain and lived as a vagrant for 35 years.

This 'reunion' happened because Tony was befriended by a Sidmouth lady, Joce Prosser. She saw him on a bitter November day in a shop doorway and asked him 'Are you hungry?' He answered 'Yes.' She and her friends cared for him on the streets and got to know him during the next eight years.

Joce said he was often confused but did show

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