

What do we take with us down the mountain?

Hennie de Pous-de Jonge, Tools for Change, 15-8-2009

Someone said to me after the free afternoon: 'Nice to be for a while in the real world.'

What do we take with us, down the mountain into 'the real world'? What is needed to take something permanent with us? To make sure that it will last?

What we heard here, will only last if it becomes something of ourselves. I think of the first time I went down the mountain and took something lasting with me. It was the idea of a quiet time. This has become a habit, a second nature. That I have kept to it, maybe is because I have acted on the idea I got in that time of reflection. That was to have an honest conversation with my sister, in which I apologised for my jealousy. No one could take that away from me anymore. This talk has had a good influence on our relationship till the end of her life.

We are here high on a mountain, but our idealism is rooted in realism. Society is not manageable. If we are back in our own situation, we will notice immediately that it is not easy to put into practice good intentions. Then a time of quiet reflection can help. Maybe there is one step we can do. Maybe one lesson we have learned. And so something can grow.

Even though this place seems an ideal community: don't be fooled. This here is just as much a real world as down in Montreux. A world where a little devil looks for chances to create division. This evil we can only combat by creating connections.

That is what a peacemaker does: to connect. This is what we have been doing these last ten days. (Devil: he who divides. Religion: to connect)

Identity: Young Muslims have looked into their religious identity. With the aim to be better equipped to go into dialogue. Sure in their identity, they do not have to prove themselves anymore. They are free to give a worthwhile contribution to our European society.

And what about the identity of the other Europeans? Are they, are we, afraid for the Islam, because we are not rooted firmly enough in our Christian, Jewish and humanist traditions? Dutch people have an identity crisis, was the challenge of an integrated Turkish Dutchman recently at an IofC conference about 'Cohesion in Society'.

Our democracy, our social and moral conscience is rooted in our Christian and humanist tradition. Should we not take that tradition more seriously? Then we don't need to be afraid of islamisation.

To stand firm in our identity we need to know our history. Ajmal spoke the other night about the crusades and colonialism. One could add the slave trade. If you don't know the past, you do not understand the present. (Example of Lothy Bouwe: people ask why the black people are in the Netherlands. It is a direct result of colonialism and slave trade)

And when you know your history, you see that you cannot divide humanity in victims and culprits. We all have something of both.

Every generation of peacemakers has to learn this art themselves, but we can also learn from the peacemakers in the past. That is why I wrote a book about that, which is for sale afterwards. It is a 'tool for change'.

It is good if we have learned new things here this week, new truths. But what do you do, when once down the mountain, you discover that not everyone is open to the truths you have discovered. That my truth is not necessarily also the truth for someone else.

It is ironic that the division and violence in the world, often is caused by seekers of the truth, who step into the trap that whatever is true for me is true for everyone.

Ajmal gave a good example of that. There are different narratives, convictions, views. You can choose one, but must at the same time admit that not everyone makes the same choice. Do not judge, the Koran says. But also the Bible. How difficult that is!

There are things in the convictions of others that I do not understand (I experience that also here), but I have to accept that for these things can be a task or truth for the other.

I said before: not everything that we take down the mountain, will stay, will last. Only what becomes something integrated in ourselves will stay. And it only becomes something of ourselves, if we decide to do something with it, to act.

Finally: one can go into endless discussions. But what is it that unites? Our human, authentic experiences. That we can share those with each other. And that is what we have done the past week.