

# NEW WORLD NEWS

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**A HAPPY 1986  
TO ALL OUR  
READERS**

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The Dalai Lama (above), Bob Geldof (right), and Pope John Paul II (below)



## SIGNPOSTS OF HOPE FOR 1986

WHAT, IN 1985, GIVES HOPE FOR the coming 12 months?

A correspondent in the Netherlands writes that the visit of Pope John Paul II 'has given thousands of people a deepening and strengthening of faith, great encouragement and fresh hope'.

Travelling in the plane from Rome to Eindhoven with dignitaries and pressmen the Pope was asked by a journalist, 'What is your message?'

'The Gospel,' was the answer.

'Yes, but what is your specific message for Holland?'

With a smile the Pope shook his head. 'The Gospel,' he said, 'The Gospel.'

The Pope addressed a meeting of 4,000 young people. 'You are the Church of tomorrow,' he told them. 'Christ expects you to carry the message into the next millennium.' He referred to their 'grievances' against the Church as an institution—that it did nothing but give laws, build fences in the area of sexuality, the place of women etc. 'Let me speak freely to you,' he went on. 'I know you are sincere, but are you sure that your image of Jesus corresponds with reality? Look at the Gospel. Do not present Christ as being

permissive regarding divorce, abortion, extra-marital relationships, homosexual relationships. The Gospel shows us a very demanding Christ who calls for a radical change of heart.... Permissiveness does not make people happy. Strict prescriptions and joy of heart go together through love. That is the secret of the Christian life: the profound love of Christ.... Faith is always a challenge, has always been. To be a Christian has never been an easy choice and never will be. That is what makes it attractive.' (*unofficial translation*)

Our correspondent reports, 'All the time the Pope was interrupted by loud applause and endless cheers from the youngsters, especially at the points where he gave the strongest challenge.'

Bob Geldof is another who has won a response by the clarity of his challenge. The BBC reported compassionately the famine in Africa. As the full horror of the tragedy impinged on the West, Geldof helped to bring out the caring heart of a whole generation. His anger at callousness and inefficiency was a salutary spur to the conscience of many. Phillip Adams, a columnist in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*, had written what he later described as 'a two-



bob-each-way piece' about the Live Aid concert. 'I admitted, almost shamefacedly, that I'd found the great media event impressive and moving. I couldn't resist a hint of cynicism.... I wasn't convinced about the motives of Geldof and his rock stars.' But later he wrote of hearing Geldof address a gathering in Melbourne of around 900 people, many in broadcasting. He said that Geldof 'conceded that the interminable stories of death had become "a cliché" and urged us to recharge the batteries of shame and the sense of outrage you first experienced.... Standing by the lectern, awkward, exhausted and intense, Geldof made what was quite simply the most affecting speech I've ever heard. From anyone, anywhere, anytime.... Among too many people, including me, the tendency to be suspicious of Geldof and his enormous efforts was based on a reluctance to examine our own motives and, insofar as they survive, our ideals. We resented him because he made so many of us feel morally shabby.'

South Africa, where crisis mounts, is not without voices of hope and sanity. The following was gleaned from the *Sunday Times* of South Africa last September: 'At the Transvaal Nationalist congress in Pretoria this week a delegate, Mr Hans Scheepers, chairman of one of Pietersburg's NP (National Party) branches, called on whites to say: "We are sorry for suffering caused".'

'In an interview after he had made his appeal to the congress, Mr Scheepers said he had been influenced by the moving plea made on SABC last week by Sir Laurens van der Post, who called on whites to admit past mistakes.' The paper reports, 'He told the congress: "It is very hard to utter the words 'we are sorry'. We as whites must say we are sorry for our policy, which for almost 40 years caused so much suffering to many other people.'

'If we do this it will release a spiritual power which will reverse the situation in this country.'"

## New jobs

South Africa has given a gift to the world in the video *Promise of the Veld*. This story of a Karroo farmer and his wife illustrates how an unselfish decision to obey God's guidance led to the recovery of the land which was being eroded by over-grazing. Further, the couple and their family have done much to improve the lot of underprivileged Africans, creating new jobs and establishing more caring relationships. The video demonstrates a way of living that, if multiplied, could radically improve the food situation in Africa and transform relationships between peoples.

Keir Hardie, the father of the British Labour party, died in 1915. But his passionate fight that a just society must be based on the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God continues. *Keir Hardie—the man they could not buy*, Henry Macnicol's play, has been widely shown on video. It has also toured Australia as a live production. It has been thoughtfully and enthusiastically received by parliamentarians, trade unionists, police and many others. One prominent trade union man commented that there was not a single false note in the production.

For the last few years initiatives of the Spirit at local and national level have drawn people to Latin America. Recently in response to requests from Central America, an international group with extensive experience of how God can change lives and situations spent two weeks in El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. (We shall carry a full report in our first issue of 1986). Their visit concluded with a



Two of the cast of 'Keir Hardie—the man they could not buy' meet a couple from the audience (centre) after a performance in Sydney

three-day conference in Costa Rica which was addressed by President Luis Alberto Monge. It was one of many conferences held across the world during the year to further a spirit of moral re-armament. Outstanding amongst these was the week-long gathering at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. And the annual conference in Caux, Switzerland, last summer led to many initiatives which are already having an effect in countries world-wide. Among the 120 from Africa who took part were 30 black, white and coloured from South Africa. They were able to meet in an atmosphere of candour and trust. Asia was also strongly represented.

A forthcoming conference is the sixth 'Dialogue on Development' in India. It will take place in Panchgani and will emphasise the development of the human resources of Asia. The Dalai Lama will open the conference.

Asia Plateau, Panchgani, has been the scene of regular industrial seminars. Many among the workers have found a new approach to the problems they face—starting the process of change within themselves. At the November seminar, for example, Aktar Hussein, a coal miner in Dhanbad, said, 'I used to plan how to get certain people beaten up because they had spoken badly to me. I have decided I won't do that any more.' He said he was going 'to remove all the masks' from his life and then life would become real. Another from the same plant said, 'I used to have a very quick temper. I will now walk a new path. Love was not part of my life. I am sacrificing my decision to commit bloody revolution for this revolution of the heart.' An October session brought together people from top management. One commented, 'I have struggled to reach the top in my profession, but now I wonder if the past 28 years have been wasted. I feel I need to start all over again.' Another said, 'We have sent many men from our company to Asia Plateau for the industrial sessions, mostly the trouble makers. They have all come back to some extent different. This "quiet time" (of seeking God's guidance) is a totally new idea to me. It can take the heat out of my head.' A third said he would meet with others who had attended MRA seminars 'and see how effectively we can introduce MRA philosophy in day to day action'.

These are just a few of the significant developments which have come to our notice and which give grounds for hope in the year ahead. They point to the fact that the only effective basis for creating a better world remains the same: selfless decision by ordinary men and women to let God direct their lives and to seek his leading in matters great and small.

**The Editors**

# NEWCASTLE IMPRESSES

IN NOVEMBER 1984, Hari Shukla, Senior Community Relations Officer for Tyne and Wear, was invited to France by Madame Marie-Josèphe Sublet, Socialist Member of Parliament and Mayor of Feyzin, a suburb of Lyon. At a series of seminars Mr Shukla spoke of a new spirit in community relations in Newcastle upon Tyne and its practical results. Madame Sublet had heard about his work through Jean-Jacques Odier, who lives in Lyon where he works for Moral Re-Armament. Mr Shukla himself acknowledges that applying the principles of MRA in his own life has contributed much to the effectiveness of his work.

On 14 November this year, Madame Sublet and 15 others arrived in Newcastle, invited by Tyne and Wear Community Relations Council to examine community relations in Newcastle. The city and other local institutions supported this initiative and helped to welcome and look after them. The visitors included a Subprefect with special responsibility for immigrant affairs in the Lyon area; a senior judge and a colleague representing the National Committee for Crime Prevention; a head of department at the Ministry of Social Affairs; five Deputy Mayors from industrial suburbs of Lyon; a Catholic priest seconded to work with the interdenominational Commission for the Defence of Immigrants' Rights; and others involved with the issues presented by the integration of ethnic minority communities in French society.

## Multiracial City

The *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* reported the visit on 18 November under the heading 'French team are impressed'.

The visitors were shown the Statement of Intent on Ethnic Minority Groups in Newcastle agreed by the City Council in December 1984 of which the first clause reads: 'Newcastle upon Tyne is, and will remain, a multiracial City. The City Council recognises and welcomes that fact. It is determined to ensure that all people feel at home in the city.' The *Chronicle* reports Madame Sublet's comment: 'We admire very much the political statement of policy made by your



Two of the French deputy mayors are shown children's work at the Westgate Hill primary school by Christine Tomkins, the acting head.



Photos: P Riddell

The Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Cllr Roy Burgess (centre), and Mrs Burgess with Marie-Josèphe Sublet (right), French MP, at a reception at the Mansion House.

council with the aim of racial equality. We are also very impressed by the structure set up to link immigrant groups with the host community.'

In France there is an immigrant population of 7 per cent overall, but reaching 50 per cent in some urban areas. One of the preoccupations of the French visitors was how to find representative leaders from the ethnic minorities with whom the authorities can talk and deal. They were interested to learn how this problem had been approached in Britain through the Community Relations Councils.

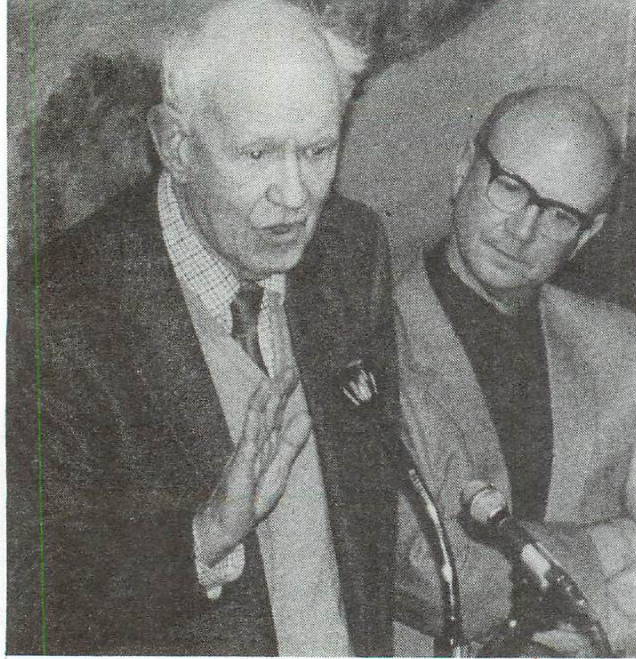
The visitors were received by Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh religious leaders; briefed on the work of the Commission for Racial Equality by Commissioner Gursharan Sarang; and included in Divali celebrations by the Gujerati Association at the Hindu Temple. They were also received by the Lord Mayor at a buffet supper at the Mansion House, briefed by Police on community relations policy, visited Community Schools and were received by trade union leaders.

After the French had departed Mr Shukla told *New World News*, 'This has been a first step towards building a bridge between Newcastle, Britain and France, and we are confident that we shall succeed in building a strong multicultural society in Europe by sharing experiences and working together.'



(Left to right) Hari Shukla, Senior Community Relations Officer for Tyne and Wear, Father Christian Delorme of the Association for the Defence of the Rights of Immigrants shaking hands with the Imam of the Newcastle Mosque.





Garth Lean: 'Great discoveries...'



Patrick O'Kane: 'Get to grips with the past...'

## SPELLING OUT MORAL

'MORAL RE-ARMAMENT TODAY' was the title of a meeting on 1 December in the Westminster Theatre, London, which featured speakers from Britain's inner cities, education and industry.

Some 300 people heard the chairman, journalist and author Geoffrey Lean, define MRA's role in the words of its initiator Frank Buchman: 'Moral Re-Armament is more than remaking what is wrong. It is adding to what is right; it is being originaive of alternatives to evil—in economics, in government policy and so on.'

Garth Lean, the author of the biography *Frank Buchman: a Life*, recently published by Constable, told the meeting that Buchman had felt that Moral Re-Armament was in its infancy. 'Buchman believed that there would be great *discoveries and developments* after he had gone,' said Mr Lean. Buchman had expected everyone to achieve at least as much as he had because he felt it was God's doing, not his. When Jean Rey, President of the European Commission, had congratulated Buchman on all his achievements—the reconciliations he had initiated and the situations he had influenced—he had replied, 'I have had nothing to do with it. God does everything. I only obey and do what he says.'

The following are extracts from some of the other speeches:

### Patrick O'Kane, building trade, Coventry

AS A TRADE UNION MAN I feel we've got to end the class war in this country. It's gone on far too long. Britain gave the world the materialistic ideas of Adam Smith and, because of what he saw here, Karl Marx. What would happen if this country could demonstrate that you could end the class war; that you could look honestly at the past and put it right, make restitution where necessary and build reconciliation? The aim is not a more cosy relationship or to regenerate British industry but to give a desperately needed answer to the world. If we begin to see the bigness of what Frank Buchman was offering us we can see that the past is not the Devil's property, it is the raw material which God is waiting

to use. Once we get to grips with the past and face it honestly and *begin to learn* the secret of reconciliation, we begin to find our destinies. ■

### John Vickers, Chairman of Vickers Oils, Leeds

I AGREE THAT OUR JOB IS TO END the class war because it would show the way out of so many other difficulties. I believe it is up to management to set the pace. We should change first and fastest.

Two weeks ago I was at the Confederation of British Industry conference in Harrogate, on the theme 'Change to succeed'. I put in a resolution from our company which said, in effect, 'We recognise that a change within industry would draw a new attitude towards industry from outside. Recognising that, the conference calls upon labour, management and government to work together as the fingers of one industrial hand. Secondly, we should put as much resource and resolution into creating jobs as we have done into containing inflation in recent years.'

Several speakers said, as I would have if I had been called, that they would opt for taking less tax cuts, if the money is available, and have the money put where it would make jobs for other people. They also said, to my pleasure, management should change first and should be the pacesetters in industry.

There is a lift in the nation's economy. In my company this year we have exceeded our volume target, so we have made more money than we thought we were going to do. So this past week I've had the happy job of looking at how to use the profit made—what we could give as bonus to the staff, what we could give as grants to retired members of staff who are on fixed pensions, what we could offer to the shareholders as dividend. Then I said to the directors: what should we do this year, out of the balance, to help create jobs. Why should not a firm or a community which has a good year do something creative for those who have not?

So I feel that the CBI was on the right track but it needed the further dimension of giving people a vision of what they can do and challenging them to sacrifice to achieve it. We





John Vickers: 'Help create jobs...'



Miguel Richards: 'Bold initiative...'

Photos: Margaret Gray

## RE-ARMAMENT TODAY

are not going to get where we want to be without that, in my view. I believe that in 1986, if we use our hearts and minds and wills and allow ourselves to be steered by God, we might begin to do something significant for the country in this realm. ■

### Miguel Richards, building worker, Streatham

I READ RECENTLY: 'The universe is full of magical things waiting for us to be a little bit wiser.' I feel this is true in race relations today. If we can find the way to deal honestly with each other, I feel we could find the way forward. I think the challenge is to see how to halt the swinging finger of blame. The blacks blame the police for our riots and the police blame the blacks. The blacks blame unemployment, and so it goes on. This, it seems to me, only makes everyone want to justify his own actions. Recently we had trouble with one client. Many things went through me—which is what happens with young blacks—you think of revolution, you think of violence. The thing that helps me keep away from these actions is that I have a bigger purpose to live for. That is what MRA has given me which I'll always be grateful for. We blacks need to focus on what impression we make in this society. What impression of black people do we transmit to the South African government, for instance?

I am part of a multiracial group called Bridge Builders in Croydon. We had one bold initiative recently to raise funds for a well in Ethiopia. An Ethiopian musical band gave us a rendering of their culture. We raised £143 that evening. We want to make it a long-term commitment. ■

### Howard Grace, comprehensive school teacher, Newbury

A FEW MONTHS AGO I was discussing the so-called North-South divide in our country with a man from Yorkshire. The result was that a month ago I took four of the sixth-formers from my school to stay for four days in the homes of students from his old school in North Yorkshire. We had a great time attending lessons, and experiencing life in a

school 'up North'. We also visited Bradford, had curry and chapattis in a Pakistani restaurant and met an Asian community relations officer.

I have conviction to do this sort of thing because I am responsible for lower sixth A-level current affairs. Once a week 100 or so students and eight members of staff meet for an hour and we have a big discussion on all sorts of topics: drugs, international terrorism, South Africa, embryo rights and the European community, in the last month. As well as what we do at school, we have held at least a dozen occasions in my home over the last two years when up to 20 sixth-formers have come for the evening. They sit on the floor and talk with interesting people whom I invite.

Our school has about 600 sixth-form students. One of the big events of the year is our staff sixth-form ball. It takes place in about three weeks' time. The price this year is £7 per person. I found it quite a stretch to think of paying £14 for my wife and myself. A few days ago I heard some of the students talking and one said that last year he had paid £35 to hire his dinner suit. That sort of money seemed to be no problem. Being in the middle of the dispute over teachers' salaries, you can imagine what went through my heart.

It's interesting, isn't it, how easy it is to compare ourselves with those who have more than us.

But then I ask myself, what is my purpose in life? Why have I become a teacher? Certainly as a mathematician I want to give as good an academic training as possible. But it is much more than that. It is also about how to help young people develop those qualities of life which will enable them to go out into the world with a conviction to change the atmosphere of society.

What sort of effect does it have on young people to realise that they are being used as pawns in the present dispute, by both sides? For me that consideration outweighs the frustration I feel as a teacher which drives many of my colleagues to take disruptive action. I wrote this in a letter to my local paper and it continued: 'Striking is a dangerous weapon, whose fall-out is likely to produce deformity in future generations. The more fundamental changes we seek need a different foundation—a selfless quality of life. That tends to be caught rather than taught.' *contd over*





**Howard Grace: 'Purpose in life...'**

*contd from page 5*

Three of us—teachers from different schools and in different unions—have written a letter expanding on this approach to the education dispute which has appeared in *Polestar*, the education paper. ■

#### **Steve Rayner, student, Loughborough**

MY PARENTS MET people committed to Moral Re-Armament over 40 years ago and I was brought up to believe in the guiding power of God and in his absolute standards. But I rebelled against my parents and against what I knew of God. I rejected God's ways and began to live as I pleased. For years my life revolved entirely around my own personal ambition.

Last September, after leaving school, I left home to train for a year with the Ministry of Defence. I had no real purpose in my life and I began to seek comfort in alcohol.

One morning I had the clear thought: 'What are you doing with your life?' I suddenly realised that I did not know the answer to that question—but I saw that whatever it was I was living for was not adequate.

For the first time in years I turned to God for help, and I began to discover that he was able to help me—to overcome my homesickness; and to help me stop drinking which I could not do in my own strength.

Soon afterwards I began to read the collected speeches of Frank Buchman. I found through this book a new purpose for my life. I suddenly discovered that God wanted to use me and that he had a plan for me. I discovered a passion in my life to be a part of God's plan to rebuild the world. I also learned that I had to be prepared to change my own life before I could expect others to change. I began spending time, every day, asking God what he wanted me to do and then obeying the thoughts which he gave me. I looked at my life in the light of Christ's absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. I wrote many letters of apology to people for whom I had felt hatred and bitterness. I returned money to British Rail for unpaid fares and to my school for stolen equipment. Most difficult of all, I was absolutely honest with my parents about my life. Through this I discovered a new, loving relationship with them.

In April this year I spent a week with MRA at Tirley Garth



**Graham and Jean Turner: 'Beans began to jump...'**

with other young people. During this time I learned much about the kind of life God meant me to lead—but I kept asking myself: 'What about the future?' I had a place at university but I wasn't sure that God really meant me to take it. I arrived at the point where I was prepared to give up all I had if that was God's will. It was then that he clearly showed me that he wanted me to go to university and to take up the battle for moral re-armament there.

Nine weeks ago I began a course in aeronautical engineering at Loughborough University. During the short time which I have been there, I have been used in ways I would never have dreamed of—the least expected being as a producer of a weekly Christian programme on Loughborough Campus radio!

The message of Moral Re-Armament has changed my life over the past 12 months. This message is no less relevant than it was 50 years ago, and I believe that this way of life is the greatest revolution of all time whereby the Cross of Christ will transform the world through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in human hearts. ■

#### **Graham Turner, journalist, Oxford**

THE ABSOLUTE STANDARDS of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love are right at the heart of MRA. They are, for me as a Christian, the standards which Christ's life exemplifies. When I first came across them they seemed rather dreary and a little drastic. I found that they only got interesting when I asked God to tell me some of the places where my life did not match up to them. That was the point when the beans began to jump. They've kept on jumping ever since.

I think pledging yourself to measure your life against those four standards does a number of things.

First of all, it helps you lose the earnestness and heaviness which burden a lot of extremely worthy people. Because, once you have tried to do that and realised what a total chump you are, you find it quite difficult to take yourself as seriously as you did before. It does take something of a burden off your back.

Secondly, because you are never going to come near to living any of them—I'm certainly not—it quite naturally takes you out to doing things way beyond yourself. The thing that's often gripped my mind was the phrase Frank



# ILLUSTRATING AN ANSWER

Bill Cameron-Johnson, the resident artist at the Westminster Theatre, London, talks to ALISTAIR MOIR:

BILL CAMERON-JOHNSON is an artist, illustrator and set designer, or as he jokes 'Jack of all trades, master of none'. For over 20 years, he has been utilising his skills and talents for the work of Moral Re-Armament receiving no salary or financial remuneration for his efforts. He has designed 40 different theatre productions in London's West End, Switzerland and America and has illustrated 14 books and numerous articles. He is a man motivated beyond the need for material comfort or wealth, a man with a calling from God. From his early childhood, Bill felt called to the world of art and design, but it was not until he reached his early twenties that he began to sense a greater purpose for his artistic abilities. He says, 'I began to feel that I wanted to use whatever ability and talent I had to give faith to people, and to let God use what I had for his purposes in the world.'

When Bill found a faith, it was not a lightning bolt from Heaven, more a culmination of events and personal experiences. Perhaps the one that was to have the biggest impact on his life was his transfer to a new school. This decision was made by his parents as a result of their experiments in seeking God's guidance. One immediate upshot was Bill's overnight recovery from the asthma which had afflicted him for many years. As he puts it, 'My parents didn't know that this was going to happen, it was just one of the fringe benefits.'

Bill was also affected by what he saw at the end of the war when he was in Germany with the Army; the ruin, the devastation and the people living like animals in the basements of bombed-out houses. 'It was then that I understood that change in people was what was most needed. It was when I came out of the Army that I made the basic decision to serve God.'

As Bill returned to civilian life he felt that there was a danger of his artistic capabilities becoming a security, 'a be all and end all to life'. A radical decision was needed. 'I had reached the point of knowing that I needed to say to God that I was absolutely prepared, if it was his will, never to pick up a pencil again, never to draw.' It took him weeks of soul

*contd from previous page*

Buchman spoke just before he died: 'Why not a Britain governed by people governed by God.' Sometimes it means saying to people what you feel God has told you to say to them. That involves risking relationships. What does that mean? Well the bloke who helped me to start this way of life said, 'I think you are the most self-centred man I've ever met.' I think that qualifies! I threw a bar of soap at him and it just missed. It's not easy for a journalist to risk a relationship with a politician or a businessman or whatever, because a journalist without contacts is like a windmill without wind.

Thirdly, absolute moral standards are really the egg in the cake. They bind things together and make them rise. That applies both to marriages and to our whole civilisation. If we can somehow put the egg back in the cake, our civilisation is going to rise again and be the sort of civilisation which is worth having for our kids. It depends quite simply on what each of us is living for. ■



Yvonne Mozee

Bill Cameron-Johnson with his wife Phyllis

searching before he actually made that decision but he realised that unless he did so, he would never be wholly free to serve God. For the following year, he did not, in fact, pick up a pencil. After that, he became sure that he was meant to enter the world of art and design. What was more, 'I found that, technically, I was ahead of where I was when I left off.'

For Bill, God is a living reality in everything that he does. 'I learn things in my design work that are relevant in life. For example, theatre, in which I am heavily involved, is a question of relationships. It is essentially a team operation and unless you can build relationships with the team that you work with, it tends to be chaos.' And he adds, 'If we pursue the will of God in every aspect of our lives, he will use us and the repercussions will go far and wide.'

Bill Cameron-Johnson is as much a revolutionary as an artist. He longs to see more people of Christian conviction in the media, theatre and television. 'The media is one of the strongest and most powerful influences in the world, for good or for ill. There are many fine, creative people in the media, but the question is how to get God's spirit into the creation of films and TV programmes. I suppose only God can show us how to do that.' He has hope for the future, but at the same time, he is never satisfied with his own efforts to affect that future. 'I do have hope for the future. I've seen that people can change and that situations can change as a result.' He sees his design work as part of a bid to multiply this across the world. ■

**DANIEL PEARCE'S** play about St Paul, *Man of Two Worlds*, which ran at the Westminster Theatre for nine weeks last summer, has now been made into a video. It was launched at two occasions at the Theatre, when the guests of honour were Lord Coggan, former Archbishop of Canterbury, and Bishop Agnellus Andrew, who also represented Cardinal Hume. Both commented that the video was even more powerful than the play, urging that it be seen in every college, school and church study group. One person said of the video, 'Quite stunning in its impact. Superb drama—it must change attitudes in all who see it.' ■

*The video is now available in both VHS and Betamax for use in housegroups and schools. Daniel Pearce has prepared accompanying notes. Videos can be bought from Ronald Mann, Aldersgate Productions, 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF. Application forms for the special schools rate can also be obtained from him.*



# A REWARDING JOURNEY

DERMOT McKAY reviews 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', currently being presented at the Westminster Theatre:

WHEN WE SPEAK OF FAIRY TALES, we may forget that some of them, often the best loved, contain terrifying characters and sinister echoes. C S Lewis's children's best-seller, which has been adapted for the stage by Glyn Robbins, is a fairy tale of that sort.

His White Witch is in the tradition of Hans Andersen's Snow Queen and Mozart's Queen of the Night: a spine-chilling but beautiful sorceress, malevolent but magnificent.

Meanwhile, her arch-enemy, Aslan the Lion, for the most time positively radiates good-will: but he too can be terrifying. When he roars, the rafters shake; his leopard guards are as daunting as the SAS.

Lewis had a purpose with this excursion into a menacing fairyland. As the curtain rises, four children, Peter and Edmund, Lucy and Susan, explore a rambling house. They soon find the magic wardrobe, through which mortals can enter fairyland. From then on, as in most fairy tales, everything means one thing to the children in the audience, another to the grown-ups.

The land they enter, Narnia, is being taken over by the Witch and her secret police, appropriately wolves. To the children it is no more than that, but for the grown-ups there are sinister implications. When Narnians are arrested and disappear, elders recall certain South American generals, or the wolfish police who did away with the Polish priest.

But it is not a political lesson for the grown-ups that Lewis has: what he intends is to bring home to grown-ups and children alike, even children hardly more than tots, the *most profound truths of the Christian religion*, not to say its ultimate mystery.

This may sound a forlorn endeavour; but he makes it happen, and without mentioning a word of religion.

To the children, Aslan is a noble, strong, and lovable lion, and no more. Yet for Lewis's purpose this is enough. Aslan voluntarily submits to being brutally done to death for the sake of Edmund, because the boy has played spy and traitor, and has served the Witch. Thus, Lewis puts into the minds of even the smallest of his audience the notion of man's redemption from his sins by the sacrifice of a loving saviour.

By this time, the adults have long since guessed who Aslan is. But the truth contained in his power to thaw people and a world frozen by the Witch, and make them warm and free, is just as real to children wholly under the spell of the fairy tale, as to any of their elders.

When near the end of the play, the two girls stand weeping by Aslan's dead body, to the younger members of the audience they are only Lucy and Susan. The elders know they are also Mary Magdalene and Salome of the first Easter



Melanie Graham F.

Aslan (David Banks) with Susan (Helen Copp) and Lucy (Caroline Evans) in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'.

morning. But once again what the children know is enough.

This is one of the play's solemn moments. For much of the time the action is fast, fascinating, and furious. Some of the staging is highly ingenious: a war is mimicked on a few yards of boards; and memorable is the limbo into which the children emerge from the wardrobe, with ghostly white shrouds gently swirling in a wind, and looking for all the world like that eeriest of phenomena, the swaying curtains of the aurora.

There is a period in life, when we are no longer children, but not yet adults either, during which fairy tales have no appeal. People of this age will probably not want to follow the four children into the enchanted land. But for both younger and older people it is a rewarding journey, and one whose ending, as in all fairy tales, leaves us with that deep glow of satisfaction we feel whenever after all the tensions and traumas we see justice and goodness prevail. ■

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