



Malcolm Muggeridge and his wife Kitty, talking with members of the audience after the premiere performance.

D Channer

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NEW PLAY STIRS HEATED DEBATE

'I was sharply moved'

SENTENCED TO LIFE, the new play by Malcolm Muggeridge and Alan Thornhill dealing with euthanasia, opened at the Westminster Theatre on May 17 in an atmosphere of heated debate. Featured in television and radio discussions throughout the preceding week, *The Times* greeted it as welcome evidence that 'theatre can still play a role in great moral controversies'.

The *Financial Times* described its subject—mercy-killing—as 'sharply topical', the *Birmingham Post* wrote, 'Not a piece for glib cynicism. Call it a dramatic debate', and the *Evening News* referring to the Mermaid's pro-euthanasia *Whose Life is it Anyway?* said, 'They are fighting out the controversy of euthanasia at two theatres, one at each end of London.'

Sentenced to Life by Alan Thornhill and Malcolm Muggeridge uses the story of a man whose paralysed wife asks him to kill her, to highlight the moral and spiritual angles of the euthanasia debate and to explore the realities of life and death, guilt and redemption.

Asked on Radio 4's 'Sunday' programme why they had written the play, Malcolm Muggeridge replied, 'I'm 75 years old and the idea of writing a successful play in the West End wouldn't make much appeal to me. Writing this play with Alan Thornhill appealed to me enormously because it was a way of attempting to state a Christian conclusion.'

BBC 1's 'Tonight' carried clips from the play and a discussion between Malcolm Muggeridge and Derek Humphry, whose book, *Jean's Way*, tells how he helped his wife commit suicide when her incurable cancer drew near its end. 'If the world pursues false ends, it will lead to disastrous

situations,' said Muggeridge, explaining his conviction that legalised voluntary euthanasia could become a licence to kill the unwanted. 'This is the Gaderene way to disaster even though it is always charted in the beginning by good, rational, atheistic people.'

Radio 4's 'Start the Week', Radio London and LBC discussed the issues focussed by the play, while the *Yorkshire Post* used it as an introduction to its centre-page feature on mercy-killing on May 17.

On May 18 as reviewers in *The Times*,

in intense discussion.

One man who had experienced the issues in his own family was deeply moved by the second act in which the mercy-killer, shattered by the realisation of what he has done, gropes towards an experience of redemption and finds it at the Cross. 'The second half was the one that mattered,' he said.

'I was sharply moved last night by the performance of John Byron as the mercy-killing, guilt-laden husband, entirely compelling and honest in amplifying the dramatists' argument,' J C Trewin wrote in the *Birmingham Post* next day. 'Ruth Goring's sufferer was a vigorous example of a powerful mind at odds with fate,' commented the *Daily Telegraph*. 'Intelligently staged by David William,' wrote Ned Chaillet in *The Times*: 'Susan Colverd gives a funny and sympathetic performance as the maid.'

For Aldersgate Productions, which is the Christian company staging the play, *Sentenced to Life* is their most controversial venture to date. Asked how long it would run, the play's producer, Ronald Mann, replied, 'This is a financial question. Serious theatre depends on a combination of subsidies—from individuals and Trusts—and good audiences. If we can survive the first six weeks, the play could run indefinitely.'



From the debate on BBC TV.

P Riddell

Telegraph, Guardian, Financial Times, Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Financial Times, Daily Mail, Evening News, Evening Standard and *Birmingham Post* entered the lists, from all over the country rang in to respond to Malcolm Muggeridge's interview on the 'Jimmy Young Show'.

The play was well received by the first night audience. Some were surprised that a play on such a subject could be so funny, many were deeply moved, remaining in their seats after the performance, or in the foyer,

Originality ... zest ... absorbing ... every side given a fair hearing ... themes of motive, conscience and choice are deftly brought out ... very funny

BBC RADIO 4

DAME ANNA NEAGLE, Dora Bryan and Julian Lloyd Webber are among the artists who will appear at a Gala Night at the Westminster Theatre next month.

The occasion will be a benefit concert for the Phyllis Konstam Memorial Fund. All the artists are giving their services.

A highlight of the evening will be the premiere performance of *Love All*, a one-act musical by Tony Jackson and Nancy Ruthven with music by Will Reed, which tells the story of Phyllis and her husband Bunny Austin, the former British Davis Cup player.

John Dryden who directs the musical, and Ruth Madoc and Brogden Miller who play the principal parts, are putting in two weeks' rehearsals at their own expense.

Hitchcock star

The committee of the Memorial Fund includes Bunny Austin; Stan Smith, Wimbledon tennis champion, and his wife Margie; Nigel Goodwin, Director of the Arts Centre Group, London; Johnny Green, Oscar-winning Hollywood composer, and his wife Bonny; and others from theatre and the arts.

'Phyllis Konstam gave most of her life to the theatre,' the committee write in their brochure about the fund. 'From 1924 to 1939 she worked in Paris, London and New York, playing leading parts on the stage and starring in the early films of Hitchcock.'

'After her decisive encounter with Moral Re-Armament, she and her husband set out with others to create theatre that would meet the deepest needs of the human heart. A theatre which would examine the conflicts of contemporary society in the light of the hope and challenge of the Christian faith.'

Their initial goal is to raise £250,000 which will be invested, and the income used for productions of plays, musicals, films and television material that 'proclaim Christian values and help people accept the resulting growth in character without which civilisation cannot survive.'

The Gala Night performance will be on Sunday, 18 June at 6.30pm, tickets at £5 and £10.

A GALA PERFORMANCE



Phyllis Konstam

Nigel Goodwin, speaking at the press conference which launched the fund:

GOOD THEATRE should entertain, should challenge, should disturb, not leaving the audience in despair, raped and more confused than when they came into the building, nor yet sending them out in some kind of a cloud-cuckoo, phoney optimism, but rather satisfied that they have been treated as humans—that they have been allowed to hope, to question and to reach for a destiny that we believe is theirs, not by right, but if they will.

A theatre of sacrifice is the theatre of hope. Phyll began it on a sure foundation. Will you and I build today as she built yesterday, the hope of the children of tomorrow?

Most thinking people would agree that western civilisation is facing a crisis of values. Materialism has failed to meet the aspirations of youth and the dwindling of resources has highlighted the need for unselfishness.

Freedom itself depends on the level of moral responsibility of ordinary men and women.

A rebirth of moral values and sense of purpose on a massive scale is no longer a wishful ideal but has become a global necessity.

Among the most formative influences on western society are television, films, theatre and radio.

Beginning with Ibsen and Shaw, theatre has increasingly led the way, not only in forming cultural opinion, but also in initiating moral and social trends.

If there is to be a renaissance of faith and a resurgence of unselfish values in national life, it is essential to mount a spiritual offensive in the mass media, particularly the theatre.

To aim to shift the values of the media is a daunting project, but is it really beyond the faith, fire and tenacity of men and women united under God to produce and keep on producing the spiritual initiatives in the cultural field that can change the moral climate of society?

From the brochure about the Phyllis Konstam Memorial Fund.

PHILIPPINES Amidst conflict

FORTY STUDENTS from Manila universities have staged a musical revue, *Balms not Bombs*. All the major newspapers carried reports on it, and television broadcast excerpts. The largest circulation daily, *Bulletin Today*, wrote, 'Amidst the conflict in the South there is also the voice of hope—the voice of love and care.' It was referring to a scene in the revue telling a true story from Mindanao, where guerrillas from the Muslim minority are fighting for secession. The scene tells of a family who are working to re-settle the families of refugees there. 'This is a challenge to both sides,' said a senior Muslim government official about the revue.



PHYLLIS KONSTAM CAUGHT from Frank Buchman a vision of a theatre which could bring renaissance to mankind.

Phyll and Bunny were with him in America over 30 years ago when a revue of songs and sketches was created at an informal conference. It met with a great response and they were invited to present it more widely. This caused much heart-searching, as Bunny tells in his book, 'Frank Buchman As I Knew Him':

'For generations those who sought the propagation of the Christian faith had done so through meetings and through personal contact,' he writes. 'That had been the method used by Buchman. Not since the miracle and morality plays of mediaeval days had the theatre been used for Christian purposes. Buchman's belief was that now God was intending to use it again.'

'Many of his friends, however, especially those from conservative Christian backgrounds, were against such a revolutionary new departure. It was an hour of important decision in Buchman's life, an hour which was vitally to affect the whole future of his work.'

'As the days passed, the conviction repeatedly came plain to him. "On the road, on the road with the show." The hesitant elements were won over. The revue was hammered into a shape that was capable of presentation the length and breadth of America.'

It toured 36,000 miles, showing to thousands of people. This was launched a wave of plays—which led to Broadway, London's West End, and throughout the world. Many have been filmed, often with Hollywood technicians and artists giving their services.

Today a cast of black and white from southern Africa is in Namibia with a play written by a young black Zimbabwean, 'Turning Enemies Into Friends'. Last week the play about the pioneer of the British labour movement, 'Keir Hardie—The Man They Could Not Buy', was presented in Birmingham. In Nigeria 'The Dearest Idol' by Ifoghale Amata is challenging corruption and power-seeking. In August 'Columba' about the great Celtic saint, will be presented in the Netherbow Theatre in Edinburgh.

Next month the play 'Germany, For Instance', a searching portrayal of how Germans feel about their country, of forgiveness and a way forward, will be presented in Freudenstadt in southern Germany on the centenary of the birth of Dr Frank Buchman.

Here FATHER B BOT, S J, writes about Frank Buchman:

'This is my challenge to you'

IN THE WHITSUN HYMN, 'Veni, Sancte Spiritus' ('Come, Holy Spirit'), one verse says, 'Without Thy divine power there is nothing in man, nothing that is blameless.' Frank Buchman's life was a continuous battle to bring to fruition this divine power in himself and his fellow men.

He was a good Christian and wanted to be a good minister of his church. He had dedicated himself to a home for underprivileged boys. But it was exclusively *his* work, typified by that activism which guides many of us, the activism that knows little of the true source of action and of reality, the Holy Spirit.

Explosive name

In 1908 in Keswick Frank Buchman experienced this crucifying and liberating power of the Holy Spirit. He had gone there resentful towards six men whom he felt had destroyed the work he was doing for the underprivileged. Later he spoke of his experience there: 'You remember what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus? Paul heard a voice, but saw nobody, and he became completely different. That is this presence of a heavenly power that guides us if we listen to the still small voice. At Keswick I learned that nobody was more wrong than me. I was the one to start.' That was the beginning of his life-changing, world-spanning work of reconciliation.

Just as we read in the Acts of the Apostles of repeated outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the first Whitsun, and how the young Church grew as a result, so we see in Frank Buchman's life fresh experiences of the Cross, reinforcing and enlarging his Keswick experience. Again and again it meant giving up human security and choosing complete trust in God.

At one stage Buchman had an experience from which sprang a new dimension for his work. What he had been doing till then, he realised, was too limited. A painful widening of his vision and heart was required if he was

to understand his age and get to grips with it.

Shortly afterwards, in Freudenstadt, an irresistible conviction was born in him that the world would not be saved by a material arms race, but by a moral and spiritual re-armament. The innocuous name 'Oxford Group' was exchanged for the explosive name 'Moral Re-Armament'. On 29 May, 1938 he launched it in the East End of London, in East Ham Town Hall.

He fully realised that he was going too far for many, but he destroyed all the bridges behind him. 'If you join in this great crusade; you will go the way of the Cross... That is my challenge to you.'

With renewed energy the movement marched on. The Second World War broke out. It strengthened his conviction that moral and spiritual re-armament was more needed than ever.

The enormous spiritual struggle broke his health—he had a stroke in 1942—but not his spirit. Immediately after the end of the war, though half-paralysed, he started a campaign to reconcile men and nations. Until his death in Freudenstadt in 1961 the fire of the Spirit burned in him that people would find a spiritual and moral rebirth and thus help build a more just world. When he died there was a world-wide team of men and women from every background, race and nationality, spiritually trained, who continued the battle for the remaking of the world.

Never-ending battle

How was this possible? Not because Buchman was a superman. Doubtless he did possess great human talent. But there have been countless people with greater talents whose work has not been permanently fruitful.

When people expressed admiration for the great things he achieved, his invariable response was: 'Not I, but Christ.' He demanded seemingly impossible things from his fellow workers to train them in the same unconditional faith and guidance of God.

'That is your birthright.'

He was painfully aware that he and his friends made many mistakes despite the faithful search for God's will. This admission of his faults opened the hearts of many to him, people from all nations, young and old.

He was not 'nice', but indeed he was loving. That is why everybody felt secure with him, however demanding he could be. He was often demanding because he dared face people with the reality of the world-wide, never-ending battle between good and evil. He knew that this battle goes on in every heart, in every nation, in every race and in every class. He called sin by its rightful name because he knew it alienates people from God and their fellow men.

Shelter for all

He realised that justice and peace would only come about if we are ready to pay the price, to battle permanently, in God's power, against selfishness and complacency everywhere. It was not theory, but practical experience when he stated that only purified and God-guided men and women can bring about a true and liberating revolution which will provide bread and shelter for all, for there is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed.

His concern was that a growing number would offer themselves wholly to God. 'The thing you have to decide is between you and God. Do it alone. Write it down if you want to. It is a deed, like the transfer of property—so you turn over your life to God, for His full and complete direction.'

These words seem to echo those of a sixteenth century Christian revolutionary. At the end of his 13-day training course, St Ignatius made the trainees pray: 'Take, Lord, and accept my freedom, my memory, my brains and my will, all I have and possess; You have given it to me, to You, Lord, I return it; everything is Yours, dispose of it according to Your will; give me Your love and grace; for that is enough for me.'

BOMBAY Significant factor

ALAN THORNHILL'S PLAY, *The Forgotten Factor*, has been playing to full houses in Bombay. Several performances were booked out by industrial groups—the Bombay Management Association, the National Organic Chemical Industries, and the All-India Federation of Management and Labour.

Under the heading 'MRA play topical', *The Indian Express*, India's largest daily newspaper, wrote: 'A play like *The Forgotten Factor* has validity at all times, but in the present conditions of strife and labour unrest in our country it has special significance and topicality.'

'Its subject is industrial relations and Thornhill has weaved around it a plot that is moving in its appeal, with superb characterisations and spontaneous humour. It concerns two families—one, of the chief of a plant and the other of the union leader. The union is on the warpath, the plant chief is equally aggressive and the tensions and bitterness that are generated in their dealings have strong repercussions in the two families.'

'It is in these family scenes that the play has its lighter moments. Ultimately, it is the younger generation that sees light and tries to bring about a rapprochement based on higher values and a human approach.'

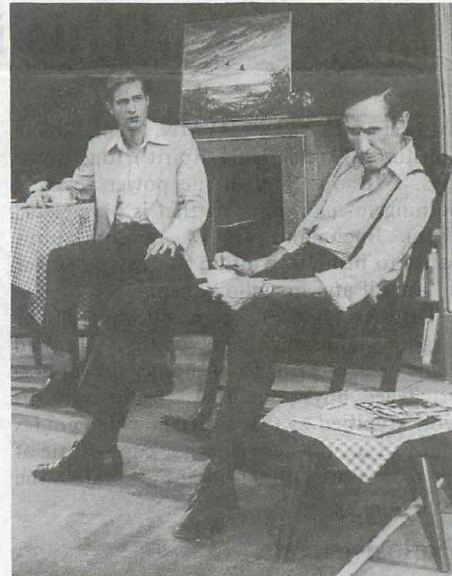
'As performed by an international Moral Re-Armament cast at the Tejpal during the week, *The Forgotten Factor* becomes a stirring enactment. Laughter and drama are neatly combined, and every scene provides purposeful entertainment, thanks to Thornhill's brilliant lines, splendid performances by all concerned and firm direction by Hugh S Williams.



Eve Ageless (Janet Bouch) has decided who to marry. Here she tells Terence Soul (Jonathan Wheeler) and Jack Muscle (Philip Tyndale-Biscoe) in a scene from *We Are Tomorrow*.

'Outstanding in the cast is W Cameron-Johnson as the union leader. In a superb portrayal he brings out the feelings and foibles of the character. Every expression, every movement and every word that he utters is charged with meaning, and the last scene in which he confronts an angry mob led by an agitator makes a gripping climax.'

The cast, who first presented this play, as well as Peter Howard's play *We Are Tomorrow*, at the MRA International Assembly in Delhi in March, then went to Manipal in south India before the Bombay run.



The union leader (W Cameron-Johnson) with the son of his boss (P Tyndale-Biscoe). A scene from *The Forgotten Factor*.

DELHI CONFERENCE REPORT

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Flashpoint



PEOPLE OF MANY RACES filled the hall when *Flashpoint*, a new play by Betty Gray, was presented as a dramatised reading in Lewisham, South-East London, earlier this month. Several of the cast had travelled from Newcastle to present it at the request of South-East Londoners.

One of those who invited them, John Richards, introducing the play said: 'I would like to pay tribute to the work MRA has been doing quietly at this time. I speak for the immigrant community and for all communities when I say we welcome *Flashpoint* to this area. You have an important job to do here.'

Betty Gray was brought up in conditions that made her turn to Marxism as the way to bring change. Later she became convinced

there was a better way, and she and her husband Rex are now active in community relations work in Newcastle—Rex is Chairman of the Tyneside Committee for Racial Harmony. Thus they have found themselves working with people of different political groups—since anti-racism is a cause espoused by many groups, including some who use it as a means to advance their own objectives.

All Mrs Gray's experience goes into this play, set in an English town where the 'Society for World Oppressed People' is planning a demonstration to coincide with one by the 'Association for the Defence of British Heritage'.

Many commented afterwards on the intense relevance of the play to the situation in Lewisham.

JCB

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