

Wilberforce in Parliament—from a drawing by William Cameron Johnson

## LEWIS AND WILBERFORCE TO SHARE PLATFORM AT WESTMINSTER

THE LION AND THE NIGHTINGALE will sing in harmony at London's Westminster Theatre this autumn, where two plays about very different men of faith will be running.

In *Song of the Lion*, in the evenings from September 25, Hugh Manning will portray one of the leading Christian communicators of our century—C S Lewis. And in the afternoons from September 23, Alan Thornhill's play *Mr Wilberforce MP* tells the story of the politician, known for his singing and speaking voice as the 'nightingale of the House of Commons', who sacrificed his career to abolish the slave trade.

A young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful what he reads or what friends he makes. There are traps everywhere. God, if I may say it, is very unscrupulous.

C S Lewis

Reviewing *Song of the Lion* after its recent one month tour, the *Sunday Telegraph's* reviewer, Francis King, commented, 'The script is so thoughtful, poignant and witty, and Mr Manning gives a performance of such easy mastery in the only role, that I cannot accept that this is the last of the show.' Aldersgate Productions' decision to run the play at the Westminster for a month has shown him to be right.

'The chronicles of C S Lewis's Christian faith touch on greatness of spirit,' wrote *The Times*. 'In Daniel Pearce's play it is mainly the learning and testing of Lewis's faith as revealed through his own writing that gives the evening its power.'

The climax of the production is C S Lewis's rediscovery of his faith after it has been devastated by the death of his wife from

cancer. The *Church of England Newspaper* describes this as 'the most riveting phase' of the play, when 'he came to know pain as more than the academic "problem" about which he had so profoundly written'. It calls the play 'a memorable night of Christian testimony'.

Enemy-occupied territory—that's what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

C S Lewis

*Song of the Lion's* tour took it to Oxford and Cambridge, where C S Lewis spent much of his life. Those who had known him personally approached the play with 'some trepidation' according to Father Walter Hooper, Lewis's secretary and executor, writing to the *Church Times*. Because he knew and loved Lewis, he wrote, he had more to lose and more to gain in seeing the play than those who did not. 'After five minutes I felt tears in my eyes... it was all gain.'

If Lewis was primarily a man of thought, Wilberforce was a man of action. Westminster Productions are staging *Mr Wilberforce MP* for the 200th anniversary of his election to Parliament at the age of 21. The darling of society and best friend of the young Prime Minister, Pitt, he felt God had laid two callings on him—the abolition of the slave trade and the reformation of the corrupt and callous society of his day.

When the play was first staged at the Westminster Theatre in 1965 Harold Hobson of the *Sunday Times* described it as 'a straightforward, well-written, always inter-

# NEW WORLD NEWS

Vol 28 No 36 9 August 1980 10p

esting narrative of the campaign against the slave trade. It gave me a lot of pleasure.' The new production will be directed by Alby James, and will be part of the Day of London Theatre for Schools programme. The programme brought 32,000 schoolchildren to the Westminster Theatre during the last academic year and combines an introduction to the craft of the professional stage with a matinee performance followed by discussion.

God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.

William Wilberforce

*Mr Wilberforce MP* will run from 23 September till 18 October at 2.00pm on weekdays and 2.30pm on Saturdays, while *Song of the Lion* will be at 7.45pm from 25 September till 18 October.

Hugh Manning as C S Lewis in 'Song of the Lion'







Fredy, Andri, Monika and Sandra Bodmer with Beatrice Strub (right)

## Swiss set out on Return Trip

100 PEOPLE DIED in France last year as a result of drugs. In Switzerland, with one ninth of France's population, 104 died. Youth alcoholism and drugs are recognised as two of the country's biggest social problems.

'People outside Switzerland see us as a neutral paradise with no problems,' says a young Bernese, Beatrice Strub. 'In the youth group I belong to there are some people who have been through drugs, and in my job as a doctor's assistant, I often had to send drug addicts away from the surgery. This hurt me. I knew we couldn't really help them, but I wanted to do something.'

Beatrice Strub is one of a group of young Swiss who presented *Return Trip*, a play about the causes and cure of addiction, at the Evangelical Alliance of Bern's Easter '80 crusade this year. The performances in Bern and Spiez were packed out and requests for the play have come from many parts of Switzerland as a result. She and others in the cast have given up their jobs to travel with the play in the autumn.

The idea of the production arose when one of the organisers of Easter '80 asked Fredy Bodmer, a young man who had recently come with his wife to live in Bern, to help with the crusade. 'That's not my scene,' Fredy Bodmer thought. But he was used to adventure—when he and his wife Monika had got married, their wedding presents had not been fish slices and fondue sets but two air tickets to Papua New Guinea. When they returned to Switzerland a year later to continue working full-time with MRA, they had set up home in Bern. 'We decided to try to live on the basis of the prayer of St Francis,' they say, '... "where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon, where there is despair, hope."'

### Roots in relationships

Thinking about Easter '80, Fredy Bodmer remembered *Return Trip*. The play, written in English by Alan Thornhill and Hugh Steadman Williams, had been translated into German. He decided to suggest a production for the crusade. 'My friend asked me to direct and produce it. I'd never done anything like that before. People who knew about theatre told me, "You'll never do it

with amateurs.'" But he went ahead.

It took a year and a half to find the actors. The plot centres on a young addict who comes home after being cured in a Christian rehabilitation centre. He is confronted by his mother, who tries to hush the whole matter up, his father, his brother and his first girl friend who have just got engaged, and the girl he introduced to drugs. 'The play goes to the root of our social problems—relationships,' wrote the leading Bernese daily, *Der Bund*, in its review.

### No breakaway

Beatrice Strub was one of the first to join the cast. Others came and went. 'One day we'd think at last we'd got five—and then next day we'd be back at two or three,' remembers Mr Bodmer. They wrote a letter to every youth group member in Bern—and only two people phoned back. But both joined the cast. One had come off drugs herself through a spiritual experience.

The most unusual member of the cast was Gerhardt Grob, one of those responsible for the MRA centre at Caux, whom the Bodmers had asked to play the father. The Evangelical Alliance had seen the play as a youth project—and so were surprised, though pleased, to have another generation taking part. For Mr Grob, too, the realisation that most of the cast were a third of his age came as a bit of a shock. 'In some of the rehearsals I felt I was making a fool of myself,' he says. 'But as I learnt the part I realised that one message of the play is that it is the parents in our society who are most in need of change.'

'The play took me through the same process of self-discovery as it did the younger ones—so we were all on the same level. I'm the type of person that a French psychologist describes as *'impulsif retardement'*—one in whom the explosion comes some time after the event! For a type like that acting in a play is a great help—you have to come out with your reactions.'

Several of the other actors, like him, found that the play brought them face to face with themselves. 'I realised that I could not act in a play about relationships if my own did not work out,' says Beatrice Strub. She decided to move back to live with her

parents, having left home because she felt they were trying to protect her. 'It's worked out well. They've accepted that I'm a person in my own right, and I've come down from my high horse a bit.' Friends have commented on how she has changed—'You may think I am quiet now, but I was very quiet before!'

Last September rehearsals began, even though they had still not found the central character, Paul. But they did not run as efficiently as Fredy Bodmer had planned. 'By the time everybody had unwound and talked about their problems at work or the issues raised by the play, there wasn't much time left to rehearse. I had to keep asking myself, "Which is more important, the people or the play?"' It was only after Christmas they found someone to act Paul. 'And then, of course, he wasn't free on Tuesdays, so we had to have a second rehearsal on Saturdays, when some of the others couldn't come because they were working!'

Then, just as the play was ready, Fredy Bodmer discovered that every evening of the fortnight's crusade had been allocated to a visiting evangelist. The only time free for the play was 10 o'clock on a Saturday morning. And they were expected to perform in a hall which seated 4000-5000 people. Furious, he booked a theatre and decided they would do an evening performance as well. 'This made the organisers angry, because they wanted everything to happen in the same place.'

'Then I realised I was in the wrong,' he goes on. 'I had agreed to be part of this event, and here I was breaking away. I decided we should give our best, whatever we were offered.' He went and told the organisers what he had decided, cancelled the evening booking, and they in their turn accepted his alternative venue.

### Blunt

Five hundred people came to the performance—for only 350 seats. Monika Bodmer stood outside asking people to come back next week, while Fredy rushed backstage to see if the cast would be free. The play had a profound effect on many of the audience.

'I was afraid that the blunt way it talked about Christ wouldn't reach people,' says Mr Bodmer. 'But as I watched I realised that He was the only reality in that situation, the only hope left, the only power in the world that can deal with a situation like that in the play. And people seemed to see this... one young man who said he was an atheist said to me after a performance, "That was an incredibly powerful message". He couldn't say anything more, he was so shaken.'

Their plans for the autumn are hardly settled yet—with no money, no certainty that all the cast will be free to travel, only the pressing invitations and their own conviction. 'The play's never been a success in the sense that everything runs smoothly,' says Fredy Bodmer. 'Whenever we can see the next step ahead, it's clear that we'll need a miracle to make it. That tests whether we are just doing a show—or living it out.'

Mary Lean

# Freedom fighters meet in Zimbabwe

LIBERATION FIGHTERS from three countries came together recently in the home of a university lecturer in Salisbury to watch *Freedom*—the MRA film written by Africans out of the experience of the freedom struggle in their countries.

George, a Zimbabwean, has spent the last 14 years in detention. He had brought three guerrilla fighters with him.

Spyros, from Cyprus, was a member of EOKA, and aimed to explode a bomb a day in the port of Famagusta, where he worked, to convince the British occupying power that the time had come to leave.

Stanley, from Kenya, was at the heart of the Mau Mau revolution, and spent several years in the detention camp for hard-core Mau Mau.

Both Spyros and Stanley have since taken on the struggle for honest and selfless leadership in their independent countries. They had been invited to Zimbabwe by men

and women in action with MRA, to tell of how they are working to answer their countries' post-independence problems.

George had brought his friends to see the film because, he said, 'Its message is reconciliation.' He liked coming to this home because the lecturer, though white, treated him like one of his own family and had visited him several times in the detention camp.

## Past past

He told of an experience he had had in detention. A gaoler had vindictively poured water all over his blankets. George was seeking an opportunity to take revenge. Then one night, lying awake, he asked himself what kind of country he wanted Zimbabwe to be. Revenge, he knew, had no part.

After he was freed he plunged into the pre-independence election campaign, and, while campaigning, ran into his former gaoler. George told the man about this experience, and then said to him, 'The

past is past. Let us put it behind us.'

The film has three reels. At each change, and after the film, there was animated conversation. First it was on Cyprus. 'I used to blame the British for all our problems,' said Spyros. 'But we had great quarrels in the port because we all wanted the jobs the British had left vacant.'

He talked of the subsequent struggles on the island. 'We Greeks have learnt to our cost that a country must care for its minority groups,' he said sadly.

Then the talk turned to Kenya. Stanley had been one of those who, seeing in *Freedom* the idea he wanted for his country, translated it into Swahili and, at the request of President Jomo Kenyatta, took it around the country. He told of the impact of the film both before and after independence. 'It helped to meet the need for an idea in our hearts to replace the spirit of anti-colonialism,' he said.

The guerrilla fighters were amazed to meet like this in a white home, they said. And before the party left George had arranged for Stanley and Spyros to meet others of his friends.

# Coolmoreen fair



J Bond

Buyers at the 'African Fair'

fair has almost covered the costs of building a new kitchen, and now we want to move on to the dining room,' says Mrs McGill. 'We hope that there will be similar fairs in other parts of the country.'

A group of people attending a weekend conference there wrote to the fair's organisers, 'We love Coolmoreen as a place where all people are welcome and where everyone can learn to build the unselfish society, starting in their own lives. Also as a dairy and poultry farm, Coolmoreen is helping to feed a hungry continent.' Among the signatories were Ndebele, Shona and white Zimbabweans.

## Why them?

Why had Mrs Harrod and Mrs McGill decided to help in this way? Out of gratitude for what the country had given them when they lived there in the '50s and early '60s, they say. 'When I went to Africa I was living just for what I could get,' says Pat Harrod. 'There I ran into the work of MRA. I learnt to think in terms of what I could give. It turned my whole life upside down.'

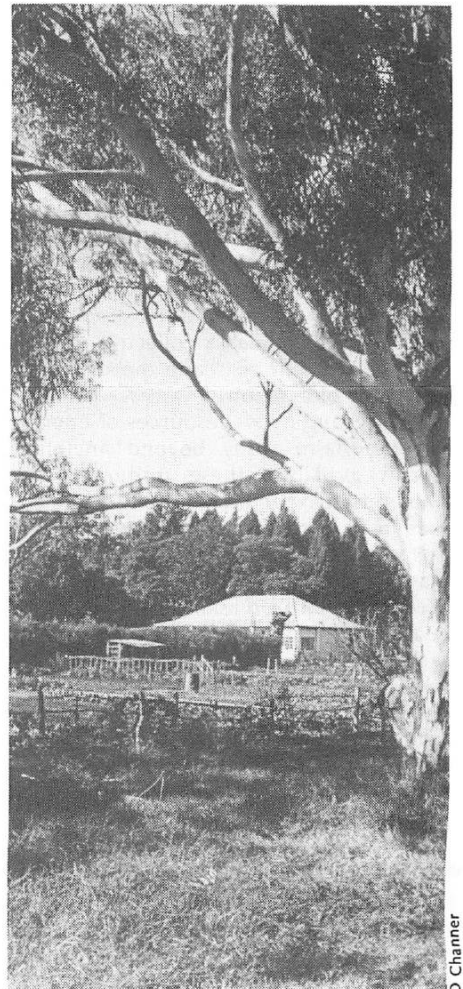
Till then she had never sat down and talked with an African. Now she did. One conversation was decisive. An African had asked her, 'Do you care as much for the black children of this country as you do for the white?' With shame she admitted she did not. But she decided to be different. From then on African children were often in her home, and she was often in the African townships. It gave her a concern for the people of Zimbabwe which she has never lost.

For Elizabeth McGill, tragedy had struck in Zimbabwe. She and her husband were driving home from a conference in South Africa when their car spun off the road and he was killed. 'There are things I cannot understand,' she says. 'But I felt so strongly

the love of Jesus being poured out to me that I knew beyond doubt that He was there, and He had a plan for me. It has given me a longing to pass on faith to those who have suffered, and this Coolmoreen is doing.'

John Bond

## Coolmoreen Farm



D Channer

ROBERT MUGABE, Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, has asked the world for help in the reconstruction of his war-ravaged country.

Two British women decided to do something themselves about this. Elizabeth McGill, who works in a theatre box office, and Pat Harrod, a secretary at London University, organised an 'African Fair' in Westminster Cathedral Conference Centre. Through the sale of Zimbabwean crafts and a wide range of other goods, they raised £1,700.

The money will go towards the MRA training centre being developed at Coolmoreen Farm near Gwelo, in the centre of the country. Here reconstruction is happening in the hearts and attitudes of all races, who then take it further in their homes and jobs. With an increasing number of visitors, better facilities are urgently needed. 'The



# THE URGENCY THAT IS PATIENT

THE WORLD is in chaos. There is a spirit of fragmentation within families, and between races, classes and nations. This spirit is at war with the secret of union. I believe God has a plan to lead our nations out of chaos into order.

Henry Drummond, a 19th century professor of Edinburgh University, said in his address, *The Programme of Christianity*, 'A personal God is all that, for a long time, many a Christian understands. But as clearly as there comes to the growing child a knowledge of its father's part in the world, there must come to every Christian, whose growth is true, a larger view of Christ's purpose for mankind.'

In His purpose for mankind, I believe, God has a specific purpose for every man, woman and child. The joy and satisfaction of life lies in our discovery of that unique calling, and the dedication of our lives to its fulfilment.

My life is given to seeking out God's vision for each person He puts me in touch with, and for their nations, and to helping each one move towards the fulfilment of that vision. I believe that He has laid upon me specifically the task of helping Britain to become a nation governed by men and women who are themselves governed by God. This means working to encourage a change in the character of Britain, to reach the spiritually impoverished at all levels of society with an answer that heals and gives hope, and to lay the foundations for a new society.

## Breaking the chains

Everyone can find his or her own calling. It is more important than career—although the right choice of career helps us to prepare for our calling. Beyond that, each of us can learn to work with others, forming a collective of people who have each discovered their individual calling. Such a collective can be given the dynamic to shape the direction and destiny of a nation.

Such a group needs resources of energy and enthusiasm vastly beyond anything humanly available. These resources can come from an expanding love of God which issues in an increasing readiness to serve one's fellow men. We need spiritual skills if we are to shoulder this responsibility.

Recently I felt God asking me to learn to live a prayerful life—to pray for everything needed and everyone called to the task of re-creating the world through the re-creation of people; to pray that all be given heightened skills of discernment, faith, inner healing, wisdom and knowledge. I have begun to pray in the following ways:

by Conrad Hunte



A Weeks

**Praise.** Give thanks and praise to God for the gifts He has promised—whether or not they have yet been given—and for everything that happens, good or difficult. Rejoice in the achievements of others.

**Petition.** Spend some time every day in prayer on behalf of someone in need—someone in the family, perhaps, or a friend, a colleague, a political or religious leader.

**Penance.** Atonement, or 'at-one-ment' with God. It means accepting forgiveness for sins committed, and making restitution where possible. But it is more too. A black American said to me, 'We black men and women must atone for the sins of slavery'—of the trans-Atlantic traffic in slaves and its legacy. We need to forgive the wrongs done to our race or class—and so help to restore the relationship between God and those who have oppressed or hurt us, as well as between God and ourselves.

It is my experience that those who have suffered and let Jesus transform this into a heightened concern for the world's suffering, are given a perception and sensitivity to people's needs which enables them to cooperate with God in bringing healing.

Earlier this year I suddenly realised that I still resented the past humiliation of my race. I sought revenge for the way my people's views had been ignored. As a result everything I said came out as a sermon. I realised that I was about to make the same mistake as those who humiliated us—to take God's gift of perception to myself and try to play God in the lives of others.

I asked God's forgiveness for my resentment and vengeful spirit, and shared my discovery with my friends. It freed me to contribute fully.

'The human mind says that man is bound to history,' a friend said to me last week. 'The truth is that the chains of hatred and violence can be broken. God says they must be broken, and gives the strength to do it.'

**Perseverance.** Pray to stick at the task shown by God, even though others misunderstand or waver in their own calling. This is a prayer for unwavering hope based on faith made real to us daily through the change we see in our own lives and in those around us.

This prayer of Sir Francis Drake helps me: 'O Lord God, when thou givest Thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through Him that for the finishing of Thy work laid down His life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.'

**Passion.** Prayer for purity and patience, for the creative, joyful, all-out, wholesome cooperation with God in His plan for my life and the world. It has been said that no heart is pure that is not passionate. It is equally true that no motive is pure that is not patient. This is the paradox—the sense of urgency that comes when we care about bringing healing to a situation, and the awareness of the timeliness and timelessness of God's work of redemption. 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.'

A friend wrote to me once, 'Your strength is your all-outness. Your weakness is that you sometimes put women in the place of God.' I accepted the truth of his diagnosis, and set out to discover the answer to it. Time and again I have had to ask myself the question, 'What do I burn for? What consumes my energy and my intelligence?' The answer is that whatever comes immediately to my mind is, I know, my god and it rules me. If it is anything other than God, I am not free.

Today I can say that foremost in my thinking is the raising up of the spirits of men and women to the task for which God has chosen them. My life is not my own. I have no right to do what I want, only a right to obey my Father in heaven. And when I do that, He can give whatever He wants to give. I am free and I can help others to be free.

## Foundations for faith

by Harry Almond

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