

Christmas was, to say the least, very disturbing." This one-act multimedia production, performed and adapted by the Rev Rob Gillion from a short story by Adrian Plass, was beautifully presented and interspersed with carols sung by Susanne Scott.

One could quickly identify with the consternation of the congregation at the behaviour of Jesus and with failure to understand the true meaning of Christmas. At one point He was expected to give a sermon to distinguished clerical dignitaries. Instead He spent time with a little crippled, retarded girl who had lovingly drawn a picture. After studying and thanking her for it, He left the hall holding her hand. Observing His care for the child spoke more than any sermon.

Sensitively acted by Rob Gillion and directed by Janine Gillion, the presentation made us think about the simplicity and heart quality of Christmas so often overlaid by our busyness and commercialism. A true celebration of the birthday of Jesus Christ could affect our lives and could affect the world.

Susanne Scott's singing added to the magic of the event. The lively singing of the final carol showed the

response of the audience, which included Indian friends who expressed afterwards how much they had appreciated the afternoon.

Betty Rainbow

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

London, 24 Greencoat Place

Greencoat Forums, 6.30 for 7.15pm

• **March 19**

Ann Widdecombe, MP, will speak on "Faith and Politics"

• **April 16**

Lord Plumb, former President of the MFU, MEP and present Member of the House of Lords

Tirley Garth, National Forum

Weekend of March 22/24

The chance to meet with some of those who were at the Hoho in India.

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THANK YOU

We would like to thank the many readers who have sent contributions towards the cost of producing the *UK Newsletter* throughout the last year.

The cost remains the same this year, at £6 for UK readers and £7 for overseas. Cheques can be made payable to The Oxford Group at 24 Greencoat Place.

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LETTER FROM THE HOHO

A Naga friend spoke in his native language to describe the custom of the Hoho in Nagaland: an assembly of tribal elders who come together to reflect upon matters of spiritual, physical and cultural importance, meeting for days and days and days until a solution or decision is reached. Here the "elders" (almost half under 40) number 185 from 40 countries and represent those from around the world who want to take responsibility for the work of IC over the next 10-20 years.

Geoffrey Craig writes from India:

The Global Hoho is in full swing here in the beautiful surroundings of Asia Plateau, bathed daily in warm sunshine and cool



Asia Plateau, Panchgani

breezes, accompanied by the singing of myriad birds.

We are going through a three-part process:

- Honest conversation about where Initiatives of Change is at;
- "Visioning" – discovering the realisable visions that God has in mind for us in the next years;
- Working out the "how" of realising these visions

As I write, we are in the midst of

the visioning process – and already there seem to be so many visions! We keep reminding ourselves to have faith in the overall process – that God will clarify

things through these days.

We are very conscious of the current world situation, and we have naturally been especially aware of the heightened tension between India and Pakistan. On Sunday we had a change of focus in the daily programme, when two Muslim friends of Rajmohan and Usha Gandhi joined us for the day: Mr Syed Shahabuddin (retired diplomat, former MP and one of India's

most respected Muslim leaders) and Dr Syeda Hameed (academic, leading activist for women's rights and tireless worker for the improvement of relations between India and Pakistan). They gave deep insights on many aspects of Islam and the great variety of its practice and relevance nowadays.

Challenges of reconstruction and healing

Afghanistan and the challenges of reconstruction and healing are never far from our minds. A young Pashtun woman who has grown up in the US is clarifying the issues involved through her work in refugee camps and her study of health and the needs of women in particular.

All participants have been assigned to "story-telling" groups of 8-10 people who meet each day, when an individual shares their life story. Music is never far away and the Africans (30 from 7 countries) keep us from getting too static!

Working groups

Working groups were formed on deeply felt concerns such as poverty and globalisation, reconciliation and reconstruction in Afghanistan, a united action for Africa, leadership development, healing the wounds of history,

moral education and inter-faith relationships. Each group wrestled with the essential contribution we may be called to make.

Early morning reflection times have been a regular feature – with insights from an Indian dentist, an Australian bureaucrat and a French mother, to name a few, and with silence and sharing to follow.

An open review of the day takes place at 6pm when anyone can comment on what has been good, what could have been better and what actions should be taken. Then there is shared silence from 6.30-7pm and varied evening programmes.

Changing pace

The days are certainly intense and yet the pace keeps changing so the variety helps us remain alert most of the time. The Hoho preparation team has worked hard ahead of these days and has been ably supported by the cheerful Action for Life team.

The British participants are: Geoffrey, Owen and Mary Lean, Erik Andren, Nick Foster, Mike and Chloe Smith, Howard and Maria Grace, Jacqui Daukes, Fiona and Claire Leggat, Doug and Franzisca Paine, Joy Weeks, Krish Raval, Laura Trevelyan and myself.

SIBERIA IN WINTER

Chris Evans and I spent a week in Novosibirsk in December. Our aim was to offer support to the many students there who are struggling to live out the ideas they have gained from Foundation for Freedom (F4F) courses, and to work with the IC team there to generate interest among Russian business leaders in F4F training for their managers.

Novosibirsk may have been minus 37°C, but the welcome from the staff and students of the Siberian State Transport University was very warm. Having not known what to expect (apart from the cold weather), the lasting impressions are of how friendly everyone is, how fast they drive on ice and the major investment that has been made in buildings and equipment.

The university has constructed a new 'high tech' building and there are new language labs and computers galore. All the businesses we visited were well equipped and demonstrate an enterprising spirit despite the difficulties created by the 1998 economic crash.

Optimism about improvements

Although there are real personal hardships, everyone we talked to was optimistic about the improvements in the economic climate. At the same time, those focused on

human rights are not so sure.

As a result of the F4F courses, the students have created their own NGO and have run anti-drug courses at local schools. The staff and students have also been raising awareness of the possibility of business workshops. They took us to several very useful meetings with local companies and a bank. Proposals to run workshops in Novosibirsk for business leaders and middle managers that combine with visits to Caux are being circulated and we will see whether there is interest in them.

Enthusiasm in the University remains high. At a meeting to meet us, to hear about the last F4F Visiting Course and to recruit for the next one, 75 students crowded into the room, despite the fact that only 25 can participate in the course. Someone will have a hard job of selection.

THE CHRISTMAS VISIT

Friends of Westminster Productions arranged a memorable Christmas occasion on December 8.

The Barn at Greencoat Place was packed out for the presentation of *The Christmas Visit* about Jesus visiting the church of St Thomas the Doubter on His birthday. As the vicar said, "The unexpected news that Jesus was to pay a us a visit at

BOURNEMOUTH

Over 50 people gathered at a Bournemouth church in November to hear Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid of the Muslim Council of Britain. The Rev Donald Norwood read a letter he had sent after September 11 to members of the mosque next door to the church, offering the hand of friendship from his congregation. He also read the warm-hearted letter he had received in response.

The Imam spoke of the principles of the Islamic faith and his own beliefs, pointing out that there was a difference between the ideals and principles of Islam, and Muslims "who were people full of sin who need Islam". He realised many in the West fear the word "Jihad" but it means first and foremost fighting the evil in oneself.

A criminal act

Unhesitatingly condemning the violence of September 11 in New York and those who committed it, he said, "I do not call them terrorists; I call them criminals because that was a criminal act." He said that hate and injustice must be answered and referred to other violent acts in other parts of the world where thousands had been killed on a single day and which the West had largely chosen to ignore. In Palestine he had been moved to

tears by the poverty and hopelessness of so many Muslim families who felt betrayed by the West and let down by promises not fulfilled, feeling that no one cared for their desperate situation.

The other speaker of the evening was Peter Everington, who had worked many years as a teacher in the Sudan, having felt called by God to learn Arabic in order to serve in a Muslim land. On his first Christmas there, cut off from family, presents and the usual attributes of Christmas in Britain, he had decided to give his life unconditionally to God. Remembering that complete surrender to the will of God was the basis of Islam, he had then felt at peace and at home in that new country, to which he has often returned.

The Imam also spoke of his first Christmas in Britain, when he had felt so alone with no one to talk to, and then of the wonderful experience of being invited to spend the day with a clergyman and his 11 children and immediately feeling completely at home.

As he left Dr Sajid said, "We Muslims and Christians can learn to work together. It will take time. But together we are half of the world's population. Then we can take on the needs of the other half."

John and Jeanne Faber

ENCOUNTERS IN CAMBODIA

An opportunity unfolded for Mary and me to visit Cambodia at the end of November. We were invited by Bishop Emile Destombes and Father Francois Ponchaud (who features in *The Cross and the Bodhi Tree*) to introduce a screening of the French version *La Croix et l'Arbre de l'Eveil* at the Bishoprpic in Phnom Penh.

After the film there was an hour of discussion among the twenty present. A Catholic priest who teaches at the Grand Seminaire in Phnom Penh said it prompted him to a deeper life of prayer. Buddhist monk Venerable Yos Hut Khemacaro, who had already seen a preview of the film in Caux, said it presented the quality of engagement between religions needed in this era of globalisation.

We had many fascinating encounters with Cambodian friends. On our last day we left a copy of the video for Bob Maat, an American Catholic brother who works in the north-west of the country (see *The Forgiveness Factor* by Michael Henderson, also the latest *For a Change*).

Bob has just written back: "It was well worth the wait!...At this very moment I'm off to screen your creation with the woman who is the program advisor of Catholic Relief Services and two Josephite sis-

ters... (one of whom is) the head of their chapter. I'll let you know if the technology works..."

"It worked! Sr Joan was nodding 'yes' throughout most of the video. The other sister was already speaking of groups she would like to share it with back home... Sincere thanks to all of you for helping all of us reflect on what this walk of life is all about. You've helped me listen a little deeper and that's a great gift."

The international Catholic weekly *The Tablet* published a 350-word review of *The Cross and the Bodhi Tree* in the December 1 issue.

Mary and I are working on the public launch of the French version of the film in Paris later this year.

Alan Channer

THE TIMES, January 1, carried an obituary of **Senator Shidzue Kato of Japan**. One paragraph from a full report of her 104 years writes:

Kato attended a Moral Re-Armament conference in the United States in 1951. Though at first sceptical of the idea that change in society could stem from change in the individual, she decided to apply it in her own life. "It was almost like the funeral of an arrogant woman," she said later. On her return to Japan she was, by her own account, so different that her husband at first did not recognise her when she stepped off the plane.

REFLECTING ON 'INITIATIVES OF CHANGE'

Peter Thwaites of Sydney, Australia, presently a member of the International Council, spoke to the national gathering at Greencoat Place in December:

In 'Initiatives of Change' we have a new name which is also a new phase and a new concept. It is a phrase which we are getting used to. I for one am still not quite comfortable using it. During the search for a new name I proposed three and voted for a fourth. But the process we followed together produced this one.

Its newness and unfamiliarity gives us the chance to do some thinking about it. We have a major new concept to work with.

The phrase has two main words. The first is 'initiatives'. It can sound a little administrative – like an outline waiting to be coloured in. But it hints at enterprise, at introducing a fresh element into a situation. And it has a certain tradition in MRA when we think of the way Frank Buchman, as the one who set the ball rolling, was mostly described as the 'initiator' of Moral Re-Armament. It is the plain inscription on his grave.

The second main word is 'change' – a word with as many meanings and colours of meaning as the word 'love' – and even more

able to provoke ambivalent or contradictory feelings. Is change a threat or a hope? Do we fear it or long for it? As one of the central concepts of MRA for as long as most of us can remember, we need to think about what we mean by it. It is a rewarding word to reflect on.

In between these two is the preposition 'of' – indicating that the first part of the name comes out of the second part. The 'initiatives' come out of the 'change' and are part of the process of change. So 'change' is really the primary principle and 'initiatives' are secondary – but still essential. I am reminded of the 'first and great' commandment of Jesus, and the 'second which is like it'. One comes first but both are equally needed.

'Initiative' is in the realm of decision and action. 'Change' is close to the core of life itself.

Many of us will have been through a period of pain or suffering or weakness, and then found it was the key to a new, expanded life. That to me is the doorway to understanding the phenomenon of change. While initiatives are something that we decide and 'initiate', change is often something that comes to us unsought, unwished and unexpected – our decision then is whether to accept it. This is where we are helped by our moral sense and our moral principles, if

they are basic enough. It is something that is stretching, uncomfortable, even painful – just like life's other great processes such as growing or learning.

Change is one of the central characteristics of the Creation. Earlier this year I thought of it as 'the movement without which there is no growth, no life, no hope, no future, no ascent to a higher life.'

Even good people have to go on changing or they cease to be good! If it is really God we are reaching out to, we can expect to go on being shown new things, and at times saying goodbye to old ones.

Tennyson had a great vision when he wrote:

*'The old order changeth,
yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in
many ways*

*Lest one good custom should
corrupt the world.'*

People reach the age of professional retirement relatively early today – but I think the continuing youthfulness of many MRA people comes from the fact that there is no retirement from change!

I have a picture in my mind of

'Initiatives of Change' in a kind of cross formation. The initiatives are (naturally) the horizontal dimension, our relationships and outreach to the people and the world around us. But this is borne on the vertical dimension which change represents.

This life force is rooted in our quiet times or in those moments where we are praying to the highest we know, but are also discovering our deepest feelings and our deepest – sometimes lowest – natures. Then that span from the depth to the height is bridged by (1) our humility and honesty but also, I believe, by (2) God's grace, the gift of power when all our own power has been exhausted.

This is the dimension of change, the vertical dimension. I believe it represents spiritual growth that goes on long after the body, and then the mind, have reached their limits and started to decline.

'Initiatives of change' in fact is very close to another concept that came to us from German in the 1970s and describes the core of the MRA approach – 'the dynamic out of silence.'

