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Agnes of God

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John Pielmeier's

AGNES OF GOD

May 1, 2, 8, 9, 1987
Little Theatre

Taylor University
FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Recently I was driving across the country at sunset. There had been a fairly severe thunderstorm that day which was in the process of dissipating. Heavy dark clouds were still very much in evidence, but here and there the sun was penetrating them lending an aura of mystery to the scene. Near the horizon the sky was turning pink and gold. In several places the clouds had parted and the edges were tipped with bright white-gold light. Directly in front of me, the rays of the sun actually pierced the clouds sending mysterious shafts of light toward the earth.

John Pielmeier’s play is very like that skyscape. The basic plot line is dark and foreboding, dealing with events most of us would rather not think about. However, the darkness is shot through with the golden rays of mystery and faith. The play’s meaning exists on a variety of levels. Beyond the surface of the story there is a rich panoply of symbols many of which are drawn from the mysteries of the Church.

The basic structural framework of the play is the Mass itself which is sung by Sister Agnes. Before the action begins we hear her ethereal voice invoking God’s presence with the words of the Kyrie: “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy upon us.” A few scenes later, Pielmeier juxtaposes the words of the Gloria, “Thou only art the Lord. Thou only, oh Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit are most high in the glory of God the Father” with Dr. Livingstone’s memory of her childhood rejection of Catholicism, thus reinforcing the dramatic tension between belief and non-belief. This tension is further heightened by the words of the Credo: “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty...in one Lord Jesus Christ...and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.” This precedes the first verbal duel between Mother Miriam and Dr. Livingstone regarding the nature of faith and scientific rationality. The Sanctus, another paen of praise to the Lord God of Hosts whose Glory fills the earth is interjected between the two women’s confessions to each other. Finally, just before the climactic revelation of the final hypnism scene, Agnes pleads, “Oh Lamb of God,...have mercy upon us. Grant us peace.”

Mother Miriam and Dr. Livingstone share many aspects of their experience, but each has made a choice about how to respond to life. One has run from religion as fast as her mind can take her while the other has embraced faith even in the midst of doubt and unbelief. As the verbal competition progresses, the smoke from Dr. Livingstone’s cigarette curls upward. Just as the incense and the smoke from the candles in countless churches has served to remind the faithful of the presence of the spirit in the world, Martha Livingstone’s Virginia Slim presents a uniquely modern testament to faith which even she does not understand.

As the play concludes, Agnes raises her hands bearing the stigmata, the visible wounds of Christ, and offers absolution to both women. Despite this application of grace, Dr. Livingstone’s faltering steps toward affirmation and faith do not bring easy resolution to life’s mystery. She still wants answers. She still wants to believe in an alternate reel that will lead to the promised “happy ever after” ending—the ending that she now acknowledges can never be.

— Jessica Rousselow
Production Staff

Assistants to the Director ............ Shawna Stoll
Kelly Spencer

Technical Director ............... Dr. Oliver Hubbard

Set Crew ...................... John Hossack
Mike Kennedy
Tim Lambert
Toby Shope
Brian Smith

Light Crew .................. BRIAN SMITH
Scott Clarke
John Hossack
Joe Maniglia
Dave Myers

Sound Crew .................. Lee Crawford
Philip Roberts

Properties .................. ROB HARTWELL
Tom Verratti

Make-up Crew ............... LISA SNAPP
Christine Durrer
Tina Fares
Heather Long

Costumes .................. STACIA MILLER
Cassandra Edgecombe
Nancy Plumb

House ..................... PHILIP ROBERTS
Jen Aldridge
Tad Atkinson
Heather Long
Julie Miner
Richard Muthiah
Kelly Pool
Toby Shope
Andy Winters

Program Cover Design .......... Darrin Fuller