

‘A NEW WORLD SPELT OUT IN NEW MEN’: FAITH AND  
MORAL RE-ARMAMENT, c. 1920-1970

by

GRACE FRANCE

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Department of History  
School of History and Cultures  
College of Arts and Law  
University of Birmingham  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses Moral Re-Armament - the evangelical Christian group previously known as The Oxford Group and currently known as Initiatives of Change, which was operational worldwide from the 1920s onward - to demonstrate that religious groups were able to change and adapt to the perceived challenges facing Christianity throughout the twentieth century. By doing so, this thesis directly challenges the assumption made by existing historiographies that a modernising Britain was fundamentally incompatible with faith. Adopting a change-not-decline approach to religion, the thesis brings to the forefront the non-traditional and alternative ways of believing which can be seen in Moral Re-Armament: ways of believing which have typically been dismissed by advocates of the secularisation theory as remnants of a lost religious society, or a desperate last-attempt to uphold the importance of faith in a presumed-to-be secular Britain. By exploring the design and dissemination of Moral Re-Armament's faith, as well as the intense devotion of its followers, this thesis argues that twentieth century Britain continued to witness meaningful experiences of Christianity which were adapted and made new. Additionally, this thesis addresses the surprising lack of historical attention received by a group as large as Moral Re-Armament, particularly within its British context, given its importance to the stories we tell about religious belief in twentieth century Britain. Ultimately, what is made clear through an exploration of Moral Re-Armament is the importance of moving away from historical narratives which presume religious decline and consequently ignore the very valid and real expressions of faith which remain.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership for funding this project.

During the final months of writing this thesis, my Grandmother Kathleen passed away unexpectedly. This thesis is dedicated, partly, to her.

Kathleen's complex Christian faith had been the inspiration behind my research from the beginning. On the surface, Kathleen was a practicing, devout Catholic woman, who said her prayers at night and went to Church when she could. Her sisters were the same: born and raised in the staunchly Catholic County Kerry, Kathleen's sister would sometimes attend mass as often as 3 times a day. At the same time, however, Kathleen also epitomised the modern woman: she was a Business-savvy, open-minded individual who was also an occasional attendee of the infamous 1980s Ann Summers parties with my mother Sharon. Saturday nights were for drink and dancing: Sunday mornings were for God. Never scared of blasphemy, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph" was her most used phrase. Looking back, I can see that my Grandmother subverted what I had come to expect from a Catholic woman: an expectation which had arisen from my experiences at a Catholic all-girls School in the centre of Birmingham. Never pious, and always open-minded, Kathleen took the parts of faith she liked and dismissed the ones she did not. Yet if you asked her, she was a Catholic through and through. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I often wondered: how could history encompass the complex faith of someone like Kathleen?

Though my own upbringing and education had been rooted in faith, it did not seem all that serious: I was taught to pray at bedtime, but my family did not subscribe to the Catholic

morality of anti-abortion, anti-contraception, anti-homosexual and seemingly anti-modern standpoints. Whilst these values were pushed within my school environment, at home my parents worked to challenge them. Such efforts meant that I grew up knowing that whilst religion had been an element of my upbringing, it would not govern my actions. As such, despite 16 years of Catholic education, my sister and I both lived with partners without being married, and my sister has since been divorced. Furthermore, the women in our family use contraceptives and speak openly about sex. At the same time, most of us believe there is some sort of God out there, even if not a Christian one. Such complexities and potential contradictions of our personal faith largely come to a head when we go to fill in any type of form and we pause before choosing an option for the “What religion are you?” box.

After the COVID-19 lockdown was lifted and Church services had resumed, Kathleen struggled with the idea of returning to public life and crowded spaces, such as her regular church in Kings Heath, and therefore stopped going to Mass. Based on this, it would be easy for historians to look back and assume that, when faced with a crisis, my Grandmother lost faith in the face of worldwide tragedy and consequently stopped attending Church. However, it would be false to assume that her lack of church attendance translated into a faltering of her faith; instead, I know her decision reflected an active choice to change the way which she practiced her faith, rather than an abandonment of it altogether. Change of faith, not decline of faith, is a key theme throughout this thesis, and my Grandmother’s experience represents one example of such an occurrence.

Even at her funeral, my Grandmother continued to inspire my research. Our Irish side of the family could not attend due to a mixture of poor health and COVID related travel anxieties. Luckily for us, however, the Church had installed a 24-hour livestream and set up a website during the Pandemic in order to perform virtual masses. Worship had changed form:

there were not bums on pews, but there were people engaging with faith in whatever way possible. At the same time, despite continued engagement in changing forms, it was clear that the Catholic Church as an institution was struggling: Father Dennis' (in my opinion, distasteful) appeal for funds in the middle of Kathleen's funeral was a prime example of this.

All of this is my long way of saying thank you, Nan, for allowing me to see that nothing is ever clear cut, especially when it comes to individual faith. Because of that, this thesis sits comfortably in the in-between, in the unknown, in the assertion that history cannot understand everything. What it can do, however, is appreciate the nuances of lived experiences which are clearly visible, and shed doubt on master narratives such as Secularisation.

I would never have had the chance to even dream about writing a PhD thesis without the encouragement of my supervisors: thank you to them. First, to Professor Matt Houlbrook, whose style of teaching, passion for history, and unwavering support totally transformed my University experience back in my second year of Undergraduate study & led me to begin thinking about further study. From his supervision of my Undergraduate Dissertation, to his (very patient) supervision of this thesis over the past 5 years, Matt has always challenged me to write better history and encouraged me along the way. Thank you.

I would also like to thank my (again, very patient) supervisor Dr Christopher Moores, for his knowledge, understanding, and thorough, thought-provoking feedback which has been instrumental to shaping the core ideas of this thesis. Particular thanks to Chris for his patience when I continued to insist on writing "they" and not "it" when referring to an organisation.

And, to my final supervisor, Dr Matthew Francis, whose support and encouragement to look into further study and funded routes back in my third year made this entire journey a plausible option: I would have never believed I was good enough to apply for funding had it not been for your belief in me. Of course, special shoutout to #ThatcherBham which reaffirmed

my love for history and my distain for Quasi-Markets. Thank you for your continued support and guidance throughout this project.

Now, to my family. First, I would like to also dedicate this thesis to Dr Katherine Roberts, my wonderful Aunt, who showed me at a young age that a PhD was even a thing that existed by getting her own. Thank you. For the hours spent proof reading over the past 9 years – from my final year thesis to now. For the encouragement and the belief in me. For carrying on the legacy of your mother’s blind & unwavering love for her grandchildren through your own love for me. Thank you also to my sister, Alex, for making me feel like I always had this under control even when I didn’t, your love and support of me has meant the world. And most importantly, thank you both for making me feel like I have a fan backing my corner, always.

This thesis is mainly dedicated to my Mom & Dad. I wasn’t joking when I said that a PhD meant I would have to live with you until I was 25. Well, maybe I was, because I am actually now 26 and am still here. Thank you both for your support throughout my entire education. For your continued belief in me when it took me until Year 5 to tell the time (a late intellectual bloomer, some might say...), for your support when I thought I was going to be an actress, then a musician, then a teacher, then a historian, then a teacher again (that went badly), and now who knows, a librarian? To Dad, for playing me such a range of music growing up which I am sure led to my passion for words & writing. Or perhaps it was the *Step Forward* lyricist gene. Either way, you’ll be glad to know that I used the word “catalyst” at least once in this thesis, so all that *The Jam* listening didn’t go to waste. To Mom, for never (visibly) losing faith that I could do this. For the laughter & the prosecco shared over the past 5 years that got me through the process. For always backing me and agreeing to adopt two kittens with me despite swearing we weren’t having any more cats (shoutout Muffin & Lola). Thank you isn’t enough for all you have done for me.

None of this would have been possible without the support of my friends, Chloë, Eleni and Beth. Whilst it was extremely rude for Beth to finish her PhD before me, I am eternally grateful for her and Eleni's support and encouragement throughout the process. From the Library booth sessions, the Zoom work days, the much needed girls nights (Bromsgrove ragers), without both of your friendships I would never had felt at home at UoB. I threw an extra semi-colon in for you somewhere in this thesis, Beth. And to Chloë, my (other) soulmate: for working with me when I needed encouragement, for letting me literally live with her whilst I wrote part of this thesis, and for the laughter. For being her and letting me be me, always. She has brought light to my life throughout this process, and I cannot wait to grow into gossipy old ladies having leisurely coffee in Barnt Green together.

And finally to my partner Tom. Thank you for always believing in me and pretending to understand when I rambled on about Moral Re-Armament. I will save the niceties for if we ever get married, as I don't want to run out of material. Seriously, though, I could not have done this without your support.



*To Lola*

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## INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Belden, member and friend of its founder, Frank Buchman, summarised the appeal of Moral Re-Armament as such:

Part of [Frank Buchman's] genius was to make old truth new, and complex concepts simple enough for everyone to grasp. "Don't put the hay so high the mules can't get at it", he used to say. His approach, so firmly rooted into practical reality and so wide in its horizons, added a new dimension to many people's concept of faith. He helped them to discover it as a revolutionary force affecting society, not only as personal experience sustaining individual men and women.<sup>1</sup>

Such a comment captures the zeitgeist of Moral Re-Armament, the evangelical Christian group previously known as The Oxford Group and currently known as Initiatives of Change – which was operational worldwide from the 1920s onward. By making the “old truth” of Christianity newly relevant to the lives of people throughout the twentieth century, Moral Re-Armament worked to convert every man, woman, and child in Britain and beyond. It worked to do so by promoting its programme of following Four Absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love, combined with a daily practice of Listening to God for guidance. Its focus was on changing all men, women, and children, by converting them to its core principles and thus forming a “new world spelt out in new men”.<sup>2</sup> All of this was in a bid to solve the world's “evils”, be it communism, materialism, impending war, laxing Christianity or sexual immorality. By creating a faith which was adaptable to changing contexts, cultures and societies, Moral Re-Armament saw itself as a cure-all for the world's ills.

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<sup>1</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. vii

<sup>2</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 52.

Moral Re-Armament's story is one of how evangelical Christianity found new forms of expression in the twentieth century, and how through this new expression millions were convinced to follow the ideology of Frank Buchman, devoting their families, lives, and finances to the cause: children sold their toys to finance the campaigns, couples asked permission to court and marry, and wealthy aristocrats donated their entire estates. With no formal membership list or enrolment process, Moral Re-Armament's followers are hard to number, however a *Time and Tide* investigation revealed that as of September 1965, Moral Re-Armament had 3000 full-time workers and "millions of enthusiastic adherents throughout the world".<sup>3</sup> It boasted members such as Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Rajmohan Gandhi, Wimbledon Finalist Bunny Austin, British Members of Parliament including Quintin Hogg and Patrick Wolrige-Gordon. Important figures in the post-war political world, such as Konrad Adenauer of Germany and Robert Schuman of France, were also dedicated followers of Moral Re-Armament. The list continues: famous industrialists such as Henry Ford, and worldwide royalty including Bulgarian Royal Family were also active Moral Re-Armament supporters. More recently, award winning actress Glenn Close has spoken up about her own involvement with the group.<sup>4</sup>

Most unusually, then, Moral Re-Armament's story is one almost never told by historians of religion in modern Britain. Despite its size, spread, and substantial finances, Moral Re-Armament has fallen out of public consciousness: a place where it arguably remained until at least the 1980s. On 13 March 1985, *The Daily Mirror* published its popular daily quizword

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<sup>3</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/204, *Time and Tide* Investigation into Moral Re-Armament, September 1965.

<sup>4</sup> J. Stolworthy, 'Glenn Close opens up about being raised in 'awful religious 'cult' in tearful Me You Can't See interview', *The Independent* (2021), <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/glenn-close-cult-the-me-you-cant-see-b1851372.html> (Accessed 2 April 2023).

search, with the clue for 10 across being “another name for Moral Rearmament”.<sup>5</sup> The next day the results were published: the answer was “Buchmanism”.<sup>6</sup> Assuming that such specific knowledge was general knowledge for the readership of one of the most popular tabloid newspapers in the country speaks volumes about the ‘household-name’ nature of Moral Re-Armament, at least until 1985.

However, as the new century approached, Moral Re-Armament had fallen out of public consciousness, owing largely to its lack of high-profile promotion and the death of its prominent leaders. As *Independent* journalist Neal Ascherson reported in 1996, he was “surprised to find out how completely Moral Re-Armament had fallen out of British public consciousness” when “talking to colleagues”, few of which had ever heard of it.<sup>7</sup> Ascherson, who was age 54 when writing his article, remarked: “it has become hard to realise how familiar this movement was to my own generation, and to the generation of my parents in the Thirties... all over Britain, it was common to hear the comment that ‘he or she is Moral Re-Armament’”.<sup>8</sup> For contemporary readers, Moral Re-Armament is perhaps more recognisable to historians in its offshoot forms of Mary Whitehouse’s National Viewers and Listeners Association or Alcoholics Anonymous: both of which were founded by members of Moral Re-Armament.<sup>9</sup> Whilst historians such as Ben Thompson, Lawrence Black, Trysh Travis and Ian McCabe have written histories of both

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Quizword search’, *The Daily Mirror*, 13 March 1985

<sup>6</sup> ‘Quizword results’, *The Daily Mirror*, 14 March 1985

<sup>7</sup> N. Ascherson, ‘Castle in the Air’, *The Independent*, 29 June 1996.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Mary Whitehouse was, and remains, a household name: she has been referenced in popular culture, such as in *Pigs* by Pink Floyd (1977), and her likeness has appeared several times in the popular satire puppet show, *Spitting Image*. Additionally, Alcoholics Anonymous has meetings all over the world, and is backed by the NHS in the UK; in America, AA meetings are state backed with those convicted of an alcohol related crime, such as DUI, are made to attend.



movements, little to no attention was paid to its founding movement Moral Re-Armament, in which these groups found their inspiration.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of Moral Re-Armament's lack of historical attention, Callum Brown's 2018 work, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, ends with a call to action: "[historians] need to get serious in the study of the world of Whitehouse, Longford and Moral Re-Armament".<sup>11</sup> Indeed, despite its scale and scope, Moral Re-Armament has remained under-researched, owing largely to its inaccessible nature and only recently available archival collections. The first and only publicly available archive with primary Moral Re-Armament material was donated by Initiatives of Change itself in 2014 and was made available to researchers in 2017. Before this, researchers would have to rely on private archive collections made available by making direct contact with Initiatives of Change, something which, as will be explored, proves difficult for a group so interested in carefully safeguarding the histories written about it.

This thesis aims to address this gap and explore Moral Re-Armament's importance to twentieth century British history; specifically, how Moral Re-Armament can shed light on the emergence of a distinct and unfamiliar type of evangelical Christianity, which was not charitable, not doctrinal, and not confined to one denomination. It was not a Christian revival, not a Christian charity, and not a new church. Above all, Moral Re-Armament's Christianity was a chameleon: always able to change to meet the changing trends, problems or ideologies surrounding it, and thus ensure a lifespan which continues into the present day. From the

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<sup>10</sup> Publications include: B. Thompson, *Ban This Filth!: Letters from the Mary Whitehouse Archive 1963-2001* (London, 2012); L. Black, 'There Was Something About Mary: The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and Social Movement History', in N. Crowson, M. Hilton, J. McKay (eds.) *NGOs in Contemporary Britain* (London, 2009), pp. 182-200; L. Black *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954-70* (London, 2010); T. Travis, *The Language of the Heart: a cultural history of the recovery movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Carolina, 2009); I. McCabe, *Carl Jung and Alcoholics Anonymous: the twelve steps as a spiritual journey of individuation* (London, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain: Sex, Humanists and Secularisation, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 288.

beginning, Moral Re-Armament's faith was being expressed outside of the four walls of the church. It was free from the constraints of organised religion, with its rules, theology and dogma, and was thus able to create a faith compatible with the modern world as it changed throughout the twentieth century. Therefore, this is a story about the persistence of faith in changing contexts, utilizing new means of technology and marketing to meet this changing context. A story of how, contrary to popular discourse, Moral Re-Armament's vision was mimetic with the changes in twentieth century Britain. Rather than ensuring Christianity's death, Moral Re-Armament saw modernity, technology, and mass consumerism as useful frameworks for its evangelical program to operate within. As will be explored, Moral Re-Armament should therefore be regarded as important for historians of religion in twentieth century Britain, as it represents a successful example of the change-not-decline counter argument to the traditional secularisation narrative.

This introduction will first establish what Moral Re-Armament was and how it was funded. It will then outline its existing place in historiography, before providing a literature review of the key concepts used throughout the thesis, namely: religion, Christianity, modernity, and secularisation. Once key definitions have been established, the position and methodology of the thesis will be explored, before setting up an outline of the core chapters.

What was Moral Re-Armament?

Moral Re-Armament was a Christian group operating from the 1920s until present day. It aimed to change the world by converting all men and women to follow its Four Absolutes – Absolute Honesty, Absolute Unselfishness, absolute love and absolute purity – as well as practicing Listening to God for daily guidance. Previously known as The Oxford Group, and now known as Initiatives of Change, its original purpose was to address the crisis of faith which arose after

the end of World War One.<sup>12</sup> Its aims would subsequently become more ambitious, with a goal of converting everyone around the world, including those in powerful positions, to Moral Re-Armament.

Throughout its lifespan, Moral Re-Armament adapted its principles to meet the challenges of different eras. At different moments in time, it defined its purpose as destroying communism, promoting Christianity, bringing about world peace, and fighting sexual immorality. Often, it was doing all these things interchangeably, seeing them as united issues affecting Christianity.

As Chapter One will explore, Buchman saw Moral Re-Armament not as a charity, and not a church, not a revival, but a “revolution”.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, Moral Re-Armament was relatively unique: it was not trying to achieve the charitable Christian status of the likes of the Salvation Army, nor was it attempting to replicate the mass revivals of Billy Graham. It wanted to co-exist with the existing Churches, whilst not posing a threat to them or their membership pool. As anonymous author, but ‘friend’ of Frank Buchman outlines in his 1933 work *What is The Oxford Group?*:

[Moral Re-Armament] is not a religion; it has no hierarchy, no temples, no endowments; its workers have no salaries, no plans but God’s Plan; every country is their country, every man is their brother. They are Holy Crusaders in modern dress, wearing spiritual armour. Their aim is A New World Order for Christ, the King.<sup>14</sup>

As will be explored, Moral Re-Armament felt like old faith, made new: these “Holy Crusaders in modern dress”, rather than reviving the same Christianity, focussed on inventing something new altogether: a new way to practice Christianity which its followers believed would have real-world implications. Importantly, as Richard Palmer has pointed out, Moral Re-

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<sup>12</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> The Layman With a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group?* (New York, 1933), p.3.

Armament's approach was "two pronged": it wanted to convert the elite members of society in positions of power.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, however, through its media outputs, it wanted to convert the masses. Buchman wrote to his fellow grouper Shoemaker in 1920 making this clear: "we are after the kings and the poor and needy as well".<sup>16</sup> Both of these efforts will be explored throughout the thesis.

Frank Buchman, Moral Re-Armament's founder, was born in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, on the 4 June 1878: he belonged to a community of Pennsylvanian Germans – a closely knit and conservative society who followed the Lutheran faith.<sup>17</sup> After years training and practicing as a Lutheran Minister, Buchman went on to form The Oxford Group in 1921 as a response to "the social upheavals of the great war", which had "changed the country's economy, politics, religion and social relations".<sup>18</sup> In Buchman's eyes, this "social change created a spiritual crisis" which needed addressing.<sup>19</sup> The Oxford Group thus aimed to create "a new social order... a new illumination that can come to everyone and bring men and women of every creed and social stratum back to the basic principles of the Christian faith, enhancing all their primary loyalties".<sup>20</sup> Buchman attempted to create this new social order by focussing on the conversion of students on American and British campuses through the medium of house parties, which were weekend long events where members would confess their sins and explore their faith, and ultimately, be converted to The Oxford Group's ideology.

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<sup>15</sup> R. Palmer, 'Moral Re-Armament Drama: Right Wing Theatre in America', *Theatre Journal* 31:2 (1979), pp. 172-185, p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> Buchman to Shoemaker 26 April 1920, cited in G. Lean, *Frank Buchman: A Life* (London, 1985), p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman: A Life* (London, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement* (New York, 2009), p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 1; D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 29.

Having already established followers in both America and Britain, The Oxford Group began to spread all around the world with each international visit: to South Africa in 1928, Norway in 1934, and beyond.<sup>21</sup> Its focus expanded in the late 1920s and early 1930s as it became increasingly public in its methods, making itself visible in the media and engaging with public issues.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the 1930s, with its ever expanding goals, Buchman felt it was time for a name change: as historian Daniel Sack points out, “while The Oxford Group had a certain cachet, it was also vague and carried with it a certain tone of elitism. In an increasingly media-centred age, the organisation needed a name that captured the public’s attention and summarised the movements message”.<sup>23</sup> And so, in 1938, Moral Re-Armament was born.

Speaking in London in 1938, Buchman noted that “the world’s condition cannot but cause disquiet and anxiety. Hostility piles up between nation and nation, labour and capital, class and class”.<sup>24</sup> Buchman diagnosed the crisis as “fundamentally a moral one”, meaning that “the nations must re-arm morally”.<sup>25</sup> It was during this speech that Buchman rebranded The Oxford Group as Moral Re-Armament, reflecting this new call to the nations to focus not on military rearmament, but moral: as Buchman would later state, people needed God’s guidance, not guns.<sup>26</sup> During the War, Buchman stayed in America, keeping a relatively low profile.<sup>27</sup> It was after the war that Moral Re-Armament’s efforts resumed, with a heightened focus on the need for direction, for an answer, for a stronger Christianity.

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<sup>21</sup> D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 86-88.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53; *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> F. Buchman, ‘GUIDANCE OR GUNS?’, speech delivered at Interlaken, 6 September 1938’, in F. Buchman, *Remaking the World*, (London, 1961), p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 119.

Thus, from 1945 onwards, conversion efforts, international trips, and public campaigns scaled up. Teams of Moral Re-Armers toured the world in their hundreds – from Germany, to India, and beyond – converting individuals and gaining support. Moral Re-Armament staged plays, published books, and went on world tours to spread its message. During this time, Moral Re-Armament’s property portfolio grew, making ideal spaces for large world conferences and Moral Re-Armament ‘training centres’. In 1946, 50 Swiss families who were part of Moral Re-Armament bought a large, derelict hotel at Caux, Switzerland (Figure One).<sup>28</sup>



Figure One: Caux Palace Hotel, Moral Re-Armament's Headquarters. Caux Palace (2023), <https://cauxpalace.ch/access-contact/our-team/> (Accessed 3 April 2023).

This was to become Moral Re-Armament’s headquarters, where they would host most of its large-scale conferences. Events held at Caux, with guests including European leaders, would result in Buchman being decorated by both Germany and France – with the German Grand Cross of the Order of Merit, and the Croix de Chevalier of the Legion d’honneur – for Moral Re-Armament’s efforts at Caux to reconcile European relations after World War Two.<sup>29</sup> Over in Britain, Moral Re-Armament members bought the Westminster Theatre in London,

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<sup>28</sup> P. Mottu, *The Story of Caux - from La Belle époque to Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1970), p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Frank Buchman’, *For A New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.info/people/frank-buchman> (Accessed 6 September 2022).

where Moral Re-Armament would go on to stage its many propaganda plays.<sup>30</sup> By the 1940s, Moral Re-Armament also owned a large amount of land on Mackinac Island, Michigan, which was considered a sort of second headquarters: it was here it built a theatre, a training camp and a soundstage for its various albums (Figure Two).

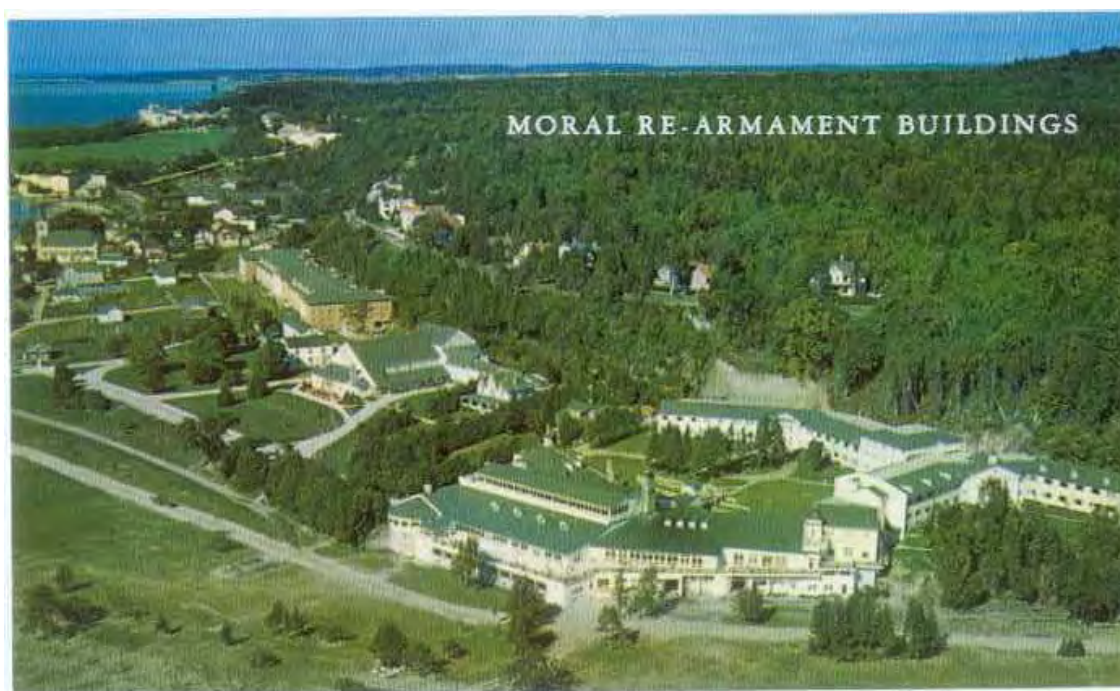


Figure Two: Postcard containing picture of Moral Re-Armament's buildings on Mackinac Island (n.d.), <https://www.hippocard.com/listing/moral-re-armament-bldgs-cedar-point-mackinac-islands-mi/598307> (Accessed 5 April 2023).

These large-scale and world-wide efforts continued beyond Buchman's death in 1961, after which Peter Howard – ex fleet-street journalist, England rugby player, and former British Union of Fascists member – took over as Moral Re-Armament's leader. Buchman's final words reasserted the group's aims: "I want Britain to be governed by men governed by God. Why not the whole world governed by men governed by God? Why not let God run the whole world?"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama: Moral Re-Armament at the Westminster Theatre*, (Crediton, 2013), p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> A.W Gordon, *Peter Howard: Life and Letters*, (London, 1969), p. 286.

Upon Buchman's death, there was speculation that no one would replace him as the Moral Re-Armament leader, with Buchman's secretary Morris Martin telling the *Daily Mail* "there has never been one leader – the only leader is God".<sup>32</sup> Technically, this was true; Moral Re-Armament never had an elected leader. But Buchman was the leader in the sense that he founded, and was the face of, the entire movement. Soon, Moral Re-Armers must have realised that the unofficial leader was fairly important, as Peter Howard became the new face and spokesperson of Moral Re-Armament. David Belden, who was raised in Moral Re-Armament by prominent Moral Re-Armer Kenneth Belden, explained "the office of 'Leader of MRA' was not a bureaucratic one that was automatically filled", but "Howard was accepted as successor to Buchman on the latter's death because he combined outstanding personal abilities with a similar degree of 'closeness of God' and commitment, in the opinion of other leading group members".<sup>33</sup>

Howard's leadership saw no substantial changes, but an increased emphasis on the importance of theatre to spread Moral Re-Armament's message, and a renewed, bolder focus on issues of moral purity, with a 1963 advert in the *Daily Express* stating that Moral Re-Armament was "against... homosexuality, lesbianism, pornography, adultery, lies which say sin is no longer sin when enough people come to like it".<sup>34</sup> Howard also took public issue with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1963, a year before Moral Re-Armament alumni Mary Whitehouse would launch her own *Clean Up TV* campaign. Howard wrote: "Parliament should deal with the corrupting influence of the BBC. From some programmes of the BBC a spiritual sewer flows out into the homes of Britain. It infects the community. They broadcast

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<sup>32</sup> *Daily Mail*, 9 August 1961.

<sup>33</sup> D. Belden, 'The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group', (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), p. 200.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Express*, 23 April 1963.



dirt with the air of intellectual authority”.<sup>35</sup> Never in Buchman’s era was its position stated so explicitly, or on such a public scale: though, such a position did not seem to harm the movement. Reporting in 1964, *Time* reported that Howard was confident in Moral Re-Armament’s continued strength. Howard stated that “we are getting more contributions than we did ten years ago, and many more people are working for MRA”.<sup>36</sup>

Moral Re-Armament’s efforts continued, too, after Howard’s unexpected death in 1965. Once Howard died, Belden outlines, a team of around twenty members from various countries led on a more local scale.<sup>37</sup> However, in 1970, the American faction of Moral Re-Armament ceased activities, with leaders telling the *New York Times* that Moral Re-Armament “had seen its day. Moral Re-Armament activity now is nothing but a drop in the bucket compared with its heyday”.<sup>38</sup> *The Times* reported that “contributions to the cause declined from \$3.5 million in 1967 to 2.7 million in 1968”.<sup>39</sup> However, *The Times* also reported that at the same time “activities continue unabated in Europe, particularly in England”, as well as abroad where “centres were opened in Odawara, Japan in 1962 and Panchgani, India, in 1968”.<sup>40</sup> In response to such report, Moral Re-Armers wrote into *The Times*, further defending its continued international success. Mr H Schaefer, president of the Caux Foundation, wrote “the budget of Caux, Moral Re-Armament’s leading world conference centre, has shown a steadily upward trend”, noting that its income had risen from just under two million in 1968 to 2.5 million in

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<sup>35</sup> A.W Gordon, *Life and Letters*, p. 302.

<sup>36</sup> *Time*, ‘Movements: New Man at MRA’, 30 October 1964.

<sup>37</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 200.

<sup>38</sup> D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 190.

<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 18 August 1970.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

1969. Schaefer was careful to point out that only a small percent of this money came from the failing American faction, and that Britain continued to contribute heavily to Caux.<sup>41</sup>

Two years later, speculation as to the waning popularity of Moral Re-Armament continued. In a review of “the present condition of a once vehement religious movement”, *The Times* reports that “it is clear that the movement is a shadow of its former self”, which it attributes to the fact that “it creates less public controversy because it intrudes less into public life”.<sup>42</sup> This is partially true: since 1920, the large majority of publicity received by Moral Re-Armament was focussed on its controversies caused by its intrusion into public life, namely the sexual habits of individuals. Once it dropped its emphasis on sex, arguably the most private and sensitive aspect of public life – which peaked in 1960 with Howard’s leadership and gradually faded throughout the 1970s – attention in the press began to decline. However, the majority of Moral Re-Armament’s press attention was generated by its controversial leaders and their controversial moments. As Chapter Four explores, Buchman had many of them: from rumours of an inappropriate sexual focus in confessions, to rumours of an overly lavish lifestyle, to his alleged support of Hitler in the 1930s. Howard, too, brought controversy via his much more explicit sexually conservative and openly homophobic standpoints, alongside his British Union of Fascist past. The attention gained from its controversies was supplemented by its paid advertisement space, as Chapter Three explores. With the absence of a controversial leading figure after Howard’s death in 1965, Moral Re-Armament was left to create its own

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<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, 1 September 1970.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, 10 Jan 1972.

press via these paid advertisement spaces.<sup>43</sup> Thus, towards the end of the 1970s onwards, Moral Re-Armament began to occupy fewer and fewer spaces in the pages of the national press.

Reduced press attention, however, did not necessarily mean decline. In the same article, *The Times* reports that Moral Re-Armament in Britain “continues enthusiastically to present plays and films in addition to touring the world with a band of supporters”, stating that “in spite of its setbacks” in the US, elsewhere “it has not crumpled entirely... more than a decade after Buchman’s death, individuals remain as enthusiastic as ever”. Indeed, as *The Guardian* reported 5 years later in 1977, this reduction in public attention “suits it fine”, as members explained “the publicity wasn’t always helpful and they have work to get on with”.<sup>44</sup>

Whilst it would be fair to say the movement which had been charging forward with great energy for 50 years began to slow, it is important to highlight that it did not stop completely. Efforts continued through print, plays and world tours throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s. These efforts were overseen by a Council of Management in place of an official leader and face of the movement, a move which successfully reduced the amount of public controversy surrounding the movement. As Rajmohan Gandhi highlighted in 2009, since the death of Howard: “and this is a welcome change, leadership is widely shared. Instead, country teams have taken the initiative and have generated and found inspiration in their individual circumstances. The Initiative for Change programs today are the result of initiatives generated by local groups, on an amazing array of different topics.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Moral Re-Armament adverts in *The Times*, ‘It will take a revolution’, 2 October 1972 and ‘Who is to Govern Britain?’, 31 January 1974.

<sup>44</sup> *The Guardian*, 24 May 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Berkley Center, ‘A Discussion with Rajmohan Gandhi, President, Initiatives of Change International’, *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs* (2009), <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-rajmohan-gandhi-president-initiatives-of-change-international> (Accessed 1 February 2023).

In 2001, Moral Re-Armament changed its name once again to Initiatives of Change, stating the reason as “there was world-wide recognition that the words 'Moral Re-Armament' no longer hold the same resonance as they did in 1938”.<sup>46</sup> Yet, the core principles remained the same: the belief “that personal change can lead to social, economic and political change. With its emphasis on experience rather than philosophy, it provides a focus where people of different religious and political persuasions can meet without compromising their own beliefs, and be part of a global network committed to working for change in the world”.<sup>47</sup> Currently, Initiatives of Change boast “36 teams and programmes” in “60 active countries”.<sup>48</sup>

How was Moral Re-Armament funded?

The scale of Moral Re-Armament’s operations throughout the twentieth century begs the question of how these operations were financed. Whilst Chapter Four delves into the criticisms waged against Moral Re-Armament for its seemingly illusive sources of funds, this section uses the Bodleian Library archival collection to offer some clarity on the finances of Moral Re-Armament. From this collection, we can conclude that Moral Re-Armament mostly funded its operation via a combination of donations from followers, estates left to them in wills, money generated from sales of books and theatres, interest accrued on investments, and rent paid from various estates.<sup>49</sup> This summary offers an insight not only into the magnitude of Moral Re-Armament’s operations, but also how it was able to fund these operations through such strong financial backing from supporters. Importantly, from the evidence available, it is not possible to separate the British faction of Moral Re-Armament’s income and worth from its

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Our Story’, Initiatives of Change International, <https://www.iofc.org/en/our-story> (Accessed 2 August 2022)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> ‘Initiatives’, Initiatives of Change International, <https://www.iofc.org/en/initiatives> (Accessed 2 August 2022)

<sup>49</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted.

worldwide counterparts, as the statement of income was carried out on a whole-scale basis, encompassing Moral Re-Armament's worldwide operations into one figure.

Moral Re-Armament continuously stated that it was funded via generous donations, from well-meaning believers in its cause. When asked directly about the financials, Frank Buchman maintained that all funding came from generous donations from members, who had been "guided to provide".<sup>50</sup> In a 1928 conversation with Tom Driberg – a Labour MP, alleged Soviet spy and vocal Moral Re-Armament critic - Buchman claimed that "a friend had been guided to provide the luxurious car that was awaiting him outside".<sup>51</sup> Driberg recalls the encounter as feeling like an awkward brush off: a side-step away from the truth. Yet, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two, these claims of generous donations from supporters of Moral Re-Armament were largely true. For example, James Furman wrote to Buchman in 1936, explaining that:

This afternoon, while my wife (Kathleen) and I were resting in our room, she said "it has just come to me that we should write a check to help carry on the work of the group". I remarked that the same thing had just come to me. I told her \$52 (the amount I formerly spent annually on cigarettes – I stopped smoking a month ago).<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, 'Reggie' wrote to Frank in the 1930s explaining that they had received guidance to sell their sword with a "golden covered handle" and send the money to Moral Re-Armament.<sup>53</sup>

"Stella", too, sent £5 which she received for a piece of her jewellery after receiving guidance

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<sup>50</sup> T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament: A study of Frank Buchman and his movement* (London, 1964), p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from James Furman to Frank Buchman, 2 January 1936.

<sup>53</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Reggie to Frank Buchman, 5 April c. 1930s.

that she should sell it and send the money to Buchman.<sup>54</sup> There are many more examples.<sup>55</sup> Not all the money went to Moral Re-Armament, either: During 1959, Frank's Financial statement of his American personal account showed he received \$25,587 in gifts.

Geoffrey Williamson, in his 1954 enquiry into the work of Moral Re-Armament, recalls how gifts would arrive in the post:

Someone writes from the West: "We have sold our savings certificates and send you the money." An old lady with a shaky hand begs "to enclose something towards the expenses". A naval officer sent all his war gratuity. A typist sent the proceeds from the sale of her bicycle. Someone sent valuable rings. Four members of the orchestra returned part of their wages.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst Alan Thornhill, who in 1933 was in charge of Moral Re-Armament's finances, wrote to *The Times* stating: "Actually, the gifts received amount to very little and these are always given unasked to individuals personally, by friends who have reasons to know that those gifts will be wisely spent in God's service", this was no longer true in the following years.<sup>57</sup> In Moral Re-Armament's 1955 *Statement of Recorded Income and Expenditures*, which factored in its worldwide incomes and assets (not just Britain), "contributions", meaning gifts from supporters, totalled \$1,889,432.96 for that year alone, an increase from the \$867,592.60 in 1954.<sup>58</sup> In 1955, sale of books, literature music and films made up just \$68,375.15, with the

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<sup>54</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Stella to Frank Buchman, 29 July 1932.

<sup>55</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Evan Spear to Frank Buchman 4 July 1932; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Frank Cecil Harris from Frank Buchman, 13 July 1932.

<sup>56</sup> G. Williamson, *Inside Buchmanism; an independent inquiry into the Oxford Group Movement and Moral Re-Armament* (New York, 1954), pp. 185-186.

<sup>57</sup> A. Thornhill, *The Times*, 30 September 1933.

<sup>58</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, *Statement of Recorded Income and Expenditures*, 1955; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, *Statement of Recorded Income and Expenditures*, 1954.

remainder coming from “interest income, dividend income, rent from business property and miscellaneous income” bringing the total income for that year to \$1,977,106.90.<sup>59</sup> Its outgoings, listed as “headquarters and training centres maintenance, full-time volunteer workers expenses, theatre and film productions, conferences, cost of books, and general expenses”, totalled \$1,163,056, meaning they ended 1955 with \$814,050 worth of profit.<sup>60</sup> These figures have not been converted into modern equivalents, but rather reflect the actual figures listed in 1955.

Claims of young girls selling their pianos, dolls, and other precious items to donate money to Moral Re-Armament seemed far too idealistic and far-fetched for its critics. As Tom Driberg jested: “it would take a good many second-hand pianos to raise the millions spent by Moral Re-Armament”.<sup>61</sup> This statement was reductive: there were much larger gifts, such as the Tirley Garth estate, that were donated, as well as financial donations from individuals such as Miss Boot, of Boots Chemists, who gave £100,000.<sup>62</sup> It was no accident that the types of individuals Moral Re-Armament attracted were in a fortunate enough financial position to not only work for free, but donate large amounts of money to the movement. Moral Re-Armament purposefully targeted the richer members of society. Marjorie Harrison, a failed Moral Re-Armament convert, wrote that she believed it saw her as an excellent candidate for conversion because of her wealthy family background and access to resources: “Those who by an accident of birth belong to what is curiously described as the ‘educated’ and ‘leisured’ classes are regarded by the Buchmanites as suitable material for their activities. I am a member of this class”.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Statement of Recorded Income and Expenditures, 1955.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, p. 140.

<sup>62</sup> For a New World, ‘Irene Prestwich’, *For a New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.info/people/irene-prestwich> (Accessed 1 January 2023) ; T. Driberg, "The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament, p. 142.

<sup>63</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad: A Criticism of the Oxford Group Movement*, (Plymouth, 1934), p. 1.

Before building up such a large and wealthy following, Moral Re-Armament was largely funded by Buchman himself, with members attending trips and house parties paying for their own accommodation, food and travel.<sup>64</sup> In 1922, Buchman wrote to every member, outlining the source of the finances after a series of questions about how things were paid for: “From my former group I had in the neighbourhood of \$1,000 and of course during that time I have an income from the Hartford Theological Seminary of \$166 a month, which was turned back directly into the work --- and in addition I have been carrying a loan of \$1000 to help finance the different men from abroad”.<sup>65</sup> Chapter Two explores the type of individuals who could afford to be part of Moral Re-Armament, but it is worth flagging that not all members needed to travel with Moral Re-Armament to be a part of it. There was a distinction between what Buchman referred to as “full-time workers” who would travel with and work for (on a voluntary, unpaid basis) Moral Re-Armament to spread its message, and the general supporters who made up a larger number: a sort of inner and outer circle. That being said, it does appear that although not paid a wage, these full-time workers did have their expenses covered by the 1950s: these totalled \$262,492.00 in 1953.<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, its claims of not living a luxury lifestyle, which generated strong criticism amongst many, seem false: whilst the 1934 statement insists “this is not luxury”, documents in the same archival folder suggest otherwise: including insurance documents for Buchman’s fur coat and a guarantee for his “Gentleman’s 18 carat gold wrist-watch” by esteemed watch

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<sup>64</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Frank Buchman letter to ‘Evershed’ 7 April 1952; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Lily to Moral Re-Armament 27 March 1932.

<sup>65</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Frank Buchman to ‘all members’, 25 November 1922.

<sup>66</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Statement of recorded income and expenditures, December 1953.



makers Patek, Phillipe and Co.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, as contemporary observer Marjorie Harrison noted, in the 1930s the Headquarters of Moral Re-Armament were based in the notoriously luxurious Browns Hotel.<sup>68</sup> Yet, Buchman and his associates were insistent on promoting this image of modest income and living, possibly in an effort to ensure the cashflow continued. When writing to secure tax exemption in Britain in 1934, Buchman leaned heavily on this modest image:

I am an American citizen. I have been free from income tax in my own country for some years, as we in The Oxford Group work without salary, only receiving the bare necessities in the country in which we are working. I have a modest pension from a brother who gave his life during the war, amounting to \$690. The Oxford Group is not an organisation. It is a group of people who work for the good of others without profit.<sup>69</sup>

Despite dishonesties regarding its own financial wellbeing, we can assume based on the archival material and publications available that Moral Re-Armament was, as it claimed, largely funded by independent donations. As a 1954 report stated: “From its first beginnings the group has advanced through the sacrificial giving of those who believe in its mission. People have given of their wages, their capital, their houses, their jewellery, their savings to the furtherance of the work”.<sup>70</sup> Whilst criticisms exploring Moral Re-Armament’s finances will be explored in Chapter Four, it is important to go forward with the knowledge that Moral Re-Armament created a faith which appealed to people in such a strong way that they were willing to make financial sacrifices to support it.

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<sup>67</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Marshall & Snelgrove Gents Black Cloth Coat Lined Dyed Hamster, Otter Collar receipt for Cold Storage, 28 June 1946; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, E. Gubelin Lucerne Guarantee for Gentleman’s 18 carat gold wrist-watch, 28 May 1938.

<sup>68</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>69</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Frank Buchman to H.M Inspector of Taxes, 14 December 1934.

<sup>70</sup> Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS.292B/806.1/5, Report on Moral Re-Armament’s Finances, 1954.

## Moral Re-Armament's current place in historical narratives

The few histories already written about Moral Re-Armament fall into two distinct camps: those written by members and associates of Moral Re-Armament, and those with no ties to Moral Re-Armament.

From within Moral Re-Armament, historians such as Pamela Jenner, Garth Lean, David Belden and Philip Boobbyer have published works about different aspects of Moral Re-Armament: from its theatre, its ideology, and its founder Frank Buchman.<sup>71</sup> The thrust of the focus of the work published by scholars within Moral Re-Armament seems to be to chronicle various aspects of its existence. Their work represents a sustained effort – one which has existed and continued from its inception in 1921 – to ensure Moral Re-Armament's place in history by writing it themselves. Each of these authors has direct, personal links to Moral Re-Armament: Philip Boobbyer, chair of Initiatives of Change UK until September 2020, has written several pieces on Buchman and Moral Re-Armament.<sup>72</sup> His parents, Brian Boobbyer and Juliet Rodd were “full-time workers” for Moral Re-Armament.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, David Belden, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Moral Re-Armament in the 1970s, was born into a family heavily involved with Moral Re-Armament, with father Kenneth Belden being a key Moral Re-Armament worker and chairman of Moral Re-Armament's Westminster Theatre.<sup>74</sup> David, himself, was

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<sup>71</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*; G. Lean, *Frank Buchman – A Life*, (London, 1985); D. Belden, ‘The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group’, (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976); P. Boobbyer, *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman*, (Pennsylvania, 2013).

<sup>72</sup> D. Patel, ‘Changes to the Leadership Team’, *Initiatives of Change UK* (2020), <https://iofc.org.uk/news-post/changes-to-the-leadership-team/> (Accessed: September 2022)

<sup>73</sup> ‘Philip Boobbyer’, *Initiatives of Change Canada* (n.d), <https://ca.iofc.org/philip-boobbyer>, (Accessed 6 September 2022)

<sup>74</sup> M. Smith, ‘Kenneth Belden Obituary’, *The Independent*, 4 December 2002 ; ‘David Belden’, *For A New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.info/people/david-belden>, (Accessed September 2022).

christened by Frank Buchman.<sup>75</sup> To a lesser extent, although still connected, Pamela Jenner, has had a “long association” with Moral Re-Armament, from 2006 onwards, and is on the board of Initiative of Change’s Westminster Productions. Jenner is also on the editorial team for its magazine *Changemakers*.<sup>76</sup>

These links to Moral Re-Armament meant that each author had special access to materials that are inaccessible for external researchers; materials held either by Initiatives of Change or available in private family collections.<sup>77</sup> This makes these works valuable because of the authors’ access to an otherwise difficult to reach organisational archive, something that will be further explored in the methodology section. Despite this, the authors’ personal familial or social links to Moral Re-Armament must be considered when reviewing these histories. This is even more pertinent when considering that the authors are writing about a group which still exists and holds relevance in their lives. Such links to the group, although valuable for the enhanced access to materials, undoubtably taints the ability for these histories to be truly transparent accounts of Moral Re-Armament’s history. This is further exacerbated by the fact that external historians cannot access the same materials to interpret for themselves, which goes part of the way towards explaining why Moral Re-Armament remains relatively absent from historical narratives. As Callum Brown states, so far, Moral Re-Armament have enjoyed a “suspiciously supportive historiography”: understanding the links of these others to the organisation itself goes part of the way to explain this.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> ‘David Belden’, *For A New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.info/people/david-belden>, (Accessed September 2022).

<sup>76</sup> ‘Pamela Jenner’, *For A New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.info/people/pamela-jenner>, (Accessed September 2022)

<sup>77</sup> As David Belden highlights in his acknowledgements to the 2018 edition of the thesis, Moral Re-Armament member Garth Lean allowed Belden to use the private papers of Buchman’s secretary Dr Morris Martin. Additionally, Pamela Jenner was allowed access to Initiatives of Change’s private material, as outlined in her acknowledgements.

<sup>78</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, p. 173.

Regardless, each of the authors used their access to create a rich understanding of different aspects of Moral Re-Armament's work throughout the twentieth century. For example, Philip Boobbyer's 2013 book *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman* explores Buchman's theology, something previously contested due to lack of explicit expression from Buchman. He explains that although it may be easy to assume that Buchman had no consistent theology, due to his ever changing approaches – from name changes, tactic changes, and language changes – it should instead be understood that Buchman followed two core themes which he never strayed from: personal evangelical outreach as opposed to mass revivals, and the importance of following the guidance of the Holy Spirit no matter what religion you were.<sup>79</sup> Boobbyer's work is valuable for its rich use of sources and in-depth exploration of Buchman's speeches and writings; through this, Boobbyer allows his readers to begin to see a pattern in Buchman's theological thought. Such an idea is supported throughout this thesis, as we see Moral Re-Armament consistently changing its approaches and tactics, whilst never straying from the two core theological themes which Boobbyer outlines. Additionally, Pamela Jenner's work "provides the first in-depth critical analysis of a movement which aimed to revolutionise British theatre", and utilises a wealth of archival material (which Initiatives of Change granted her access to) in order to ascertain how successful Moral Re-Armament's propaganda plays were, and why it ultimately – in Jenner's eyes - failed in its mission to change society through theatre, opting for different future practices.<sup>80</sup> Garth Lean's work, too, in producing *Frank Buchman: A Life*, a thorough biography of Buchman's activities throughout the twentieth century, proves invaluable for tracing the complex and worldwide journey of Buchman's work, using access to the private archives of Moral Re-Armament.<sup>81</sup> These works not only provide

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<sup>79</sup> P. Boobbyer, *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman*, (Pennsylvania, 2013).

<sup>80</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*.

access to otherwise inaccessible sources, but also provide an insight into how its followers characterise Moral Re-Armament through their writing. The work of Boobbyer, Jenner and Belden is therefore used throughout this thesis, and put into conversation with further reading and new archival research to create the first in-depth study of Moral Re-Armament campaign in twentieth century Britain, written by someone outside of the organisation.

However, David Belden's aforementioned 1976 Doctoral thesis *The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group* presents a unique account of the movement from the perspective of someone who "was raised in the London headquarters of Moral Re-Armament" but wrote the thesis after leaving the movement to "understand what [he] had been raised in".<sup>82</sup> It reads not as an embittered ex-member, neither as a brainwashed follower's account, but as someone who can appreciate how a movement like Moral Re-Armament could elicit both mindsets from people. Belden outlined his reason for leaving as the moment he realised:

...that the world was not going to be remade in anybody's lifetime, that the scroll of stories had included more than one exaggeration to the point of untruth, that the movement, which to my knowledge had never publicly admitted any failings it might itself have had, nor apologised for them, was itself seriously flawed by arrogance, by human as well as divine authoritarianism, by rejection of others' truths, and by overly fearful attitudes towards sex, Marx, beer, argument, free enquiry, long hair, eye shadow, rival evangelical movements, and its own critics.<sup>83</sup>

Belden's work explores the theological underpinnings and developments of Moral Re-Armament throughout the twentieth century, by using the private papers of Buchman's secretary, alongside material he had access to via his familial connection to Moral Re-Armament. Belden produces a detailed account of its members and phases, though by his own

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<sup>82</sup> D. Belden, 'The Oxford Group', (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), 2016 online edition, available at:

[https://www.academia.edu/27545723/The\\_Origins\\_and\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_Oxford\\_Group\\_Moral\\_Re\\_Armament](https://www.academia.edu/27545723/The_Origins_and_Development_of_the_Oxford_Group_Moral_Re_Armament) (Accessed 3 May 2023).

<sup>83</sup> D. Belden, 'Reasons for Hope? From The Forum on MRA' (1990),

<https://davebeldendotorg.wordpress.com/reasons-for-hope-from-the-forum-on-mra/> (Accessed 3 May 2023).

admission in the updated 2018 Preface: “before now there should have been a considerable academic industry analysing Moral Re-Armament. This thesis would then be seen as an early attempt, which left out major areas worth studying”.<sup>84</sup> By this, Belden refers to his lack of reference to Moral Re-Armament’s homophobia and the power-relations within the movement. There are more: for example, Belden did not explore the media campaigns of Moral Re-Armament which were so central to its efforts. Regardless of the omissions, from what is included, Belden’s work and interpretations are of great value to understanding Moral Re-Armament: they present a thoughtful and critical account of its different phases and its theological influences.

From outside of Moral Re-Armament, the majority of its historians are working to establish its previously ignored place in various historical narratives.<sup>85</sup> As will be explored, Moral Re-Armament’s absence from historical narratives may largely lie in the lack of access to its materials as well as the unwillingness for cooperation with historians outside of its following. Importantly, though, such studies shed light on Moral Re-Armament’s international scope, and will be used throughout this thesis to add crucial context to British Moral Re-Armament’s activities abroad, specifically in Chapter Two. For example, historians such as Ismay Milford have explored Moral Re-Armament’s role in African decolonisation efforts – with both its propaganda films and Caux peace meetings.<sup>86</sup> Reto Hofman has explored how Moral Re-

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<sup>84</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), 2018 online edition, available at: <https://www.foranewworld.org/material/publications/origins-and-development-oxford-group-moral-re-armament> (Accessed 5 May 2023).

<sup>85</sup> I. Milford, ‘A New World in the Swiss Alps: Moral Re-Armament, Religious Internationalism and African Decolonisation’, *Cultural and Social History*, 19:5 (2022), pp. 587-603; G. Mason, ‘The Moral Rearmament Activist’, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 28:2 (2015), pp. 154-180; N. Cooper, *The Bougainville Land Crisis of 1969, The role of Moral Re-Armament* (Canterbury, 1992); J. Gathogo, ‘Nahashon Ngare Rukenya and the Moral Re-Armament in Kenya: The Turning Point and the Post Mau-Mau War Reconstruction (1959–1970)’, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 44:2 (2018); R. Hofmann, ‘The conservative imaginary: Moral Re-Armament and the internationalism of the Japanese right, 1945–1962’, *Japan Forum*, 33:1, (2021), pp. 77-102.

<sup>86</sup> I. Milford, ‘A New World in the Swiss Alps’.

Armament influenced three Japanese Prime Ministers' political thought – Nakosone Yasuhiro, Hatoyama Ichiro, and Kishi Nobusuke – to challenge their “older prewar ideas about state power, national community and Asian regionalism” and adjust them “to the age of the Cold War and decolonisation”.<sup>87</sup>

Adding to our understanding of Moral Re-Armament's South African campaigns, a key element of many members' experiences which will be explored in Chapter Two, Garth Mason has uncovered Moral Re-Armament's role in the politics of South African activist Philip Vundla, who was involved in two core events in the history of South Africa's struggle: the school boycott of 1955 and the bus boycott of 1957.<sup>88</sup> Mason argues that both events were heavily influenced by Vundla's Moral Re-Armament values of seeking “political solutions through dialogue”, and thus Vundla can be seen “as an early forerunner of the bridge-building politics of Nelson Mandela”.<sup>89</sup> Julius Gathogo, too has explored Moral Re-Armament's efforts to solve disputes worldwide, and focuses on its work in Kenya, and its influence in the Mau Mau rebels' political advisor, Ngare Rukenya. Rukenya's conversion to Moral Re-Armament ideologies meant that his approach changed to a resettlement of post-war Kenya, thus avoiding civil war after colonialism in 1963.<sup>90</sup>

The appearance of Moral Re-Armament in these historiographies sheds light on its ability to speak to a wide range of international contexts, and its success in doing so. Whilst remaining a faith-based organisation, Moral Re-Armament was able to have an impact on seemingly secular spaces. As this thesis will argue, it was exactly this ability which makes Moral Re-Armament worth studying for historians of religion: in an age of seemingly secular

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<sup>87</sup> R. Hofmann, ‘The conservative imaginary’, p. 77.

<sup>88</sup> G. Mason, ‘The Moral Rearmament Activist’.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>90</sup> J. Gathogo, ‘Nahashon Ngare Rukenya and the Moral Re-Armament in Kenya: The Turning Point and the Post Mau-Mau War Reconstruction (1959–1970)’, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 44:2 (2018).

concerns, it was a religious group in these instances that found a solution. In 1990, when reflecting on his time in the movement, David Belden speculated as to why Moral Re-Armament's efforts in these fields have previously been ignored in academic circles:

It continually bugs me that you can do a PhD in international relations or conflict resolution in just about any university in the world and never even hear a rumour that wars were averted or major conflicts settled amicably through the work of MRA. Why does no one credit them in the institutions we fund to pass on knowledge to the next generations? Is it because the stories aren't true? Or because the counter-propaganda was overwhelmingly strong? Or because MRA's style of discourse just looked too much like mythmaking, hagiography and exaggeration? I believe a good deal of it is the latter. That is, we don't know how true the stories are because MRA's style of discourse has not enabled it to connect with academics and researchers.<sup>91</sup>

Belden's speculation generally rings true. As will be explored throughout this thesis, Moral Re-Armament presents its achievements in such a propaganda-heavy way that is hard to take seriously, or often trust, the claims it makes. Therefore, the work done by historians outside of the movement is necessary to further assess the validity of such claims.

From outside of Moral Re-Armament, historian Daniel Sack has examined the movement in its American context in his 2009 work *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement*.<sup>92</sup> Sack focusses on the "reinventions" of Moral Re-Armament over a period of 50 years, as it reshaped its work and adapted to changing circumstances. Sack's work mainly explores Moral Re-Armament in an American context: for example, its American mass rallies, efforts with the American labour unions, and engagement with American culture, including their offshoot all-singing all-dancing campaign - Up With People.<sup>93</sup> Crucially, just as Belden recognised in his 1976 thesis, Sack's work sheds light on the transformative nature of Moral Re-Armament, with its ability to adapt to meet the

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<sup>91</sup> D. Belden, 'Reasons for Hope? From The Forum on MRA' (1990), <https://davebeldendotorg.wordpress.com/reasons-for-hope-from-the-forum-on-mra/> (Accessed 3 May 2023).

<sup>92</sup> D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*.

<sup>93</sup> D. Sack *Moral Re-Armament*.



challenges of the modern world: this is a premise which this thesis carries forward into the British context.

Thus, Moral Re-Armament's British activities throughout the twentieth century require more attention. As stated, Callum Brown has highlighted the potential historical importance of Moral Re-Armament in his 2019 work *The Battle for Christian Britain*.<sup>94</sup> In this, Brown briefly explores Moral Re-Armament's ambitious efforts to convert British men and women to their Four Absolute standards of living and core ideology, amongst studies of other conservative Christian groups, who Brown argues, were at their prime in the post war years in their fight against a growing threat to Christian values. Brown's study sheds light on the fight which British Christians put up against what Brown argues was a changing religious climate: Moral Re-Armament were a part of this fight. However, Brown's study of Moral Re-Armament is limited for two reasons: firstly, the focus of his work was much wider in scope, and secondly, at the time of his writing, the main Moral Re-Armament archival collection in Oxford was not yet accessible. Regardless, the inclusion of Moral Re-Armament in a high-profile history of religious groups in Britain is a step in the right direction.

This thesis will address the absence of an in-depth study of Moral Re-Armament in its British context, and will use Moral Re-Armament to shed light on the ways in which faith adapted to a changing Britain. Sack's approach of tracing the different phases and ever-shifting nature of Moral Re-Armament is emulated in this thesis, by exploring Moral Re-Armament's different phases in its British context. By drawing together unused and underused archival sources and oral testimonies, this thesis is the first sustained and systematic study of Moral Re-Armament in its British context, written by someone with no connection to the movement.

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<sup>94</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*.

## Terminology & central concepts

Due to the highly contested nature of many of the central terms and concepts used throughout the thesis, namely: Secularisation, Modernity and Religion, it is essential to arrive at agreed definitions for the purpose of the thesis. Additionally, it is essential to position the thesis within these existing debates. Specifically, this section will ensure that when exploring these concepts in relation to Moral Re-Armament, the exact meaning behind the words, terms and concepts used is clear.

## Christianity

Due to the scope of the research, this thesis deals principally with all branches of British Christianity – and does not map out the potential different experiences of Christians in Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland, as has been done in great detail elsewhere.<sup>95</sup> Thus, when referring to British Christians, this includes all variations and denominations including, but not exclusive to: Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and all others who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God but may not belong explicitly to an organised religion or distinct group.

## Religion

This thesis explores the changing role of Christian religion in British people's lives throughout the twentieth century: specifically, how Moral Re-Armament created, and Britons engaged with, a religious experience outside of the institutional Church. Importantly, when exploring religious experiences, this thesis is referring specifically to Christian religious experiences, due

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<sup>95</sup> The specifics of Christianity in Britain are outlined extensively in C. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 2006), pp. 15-25.

to the Christian nature of Moral Re-Armament. But, what does it mean to say something is a religious experience? How does it differ from any other experience?

The answers to such questions are highly debated amongst sociologists and historians alike. As Linda Woodhead outlines:

Few who write about religion begin with a definition. There is a good reason for this, since all these terms are generalised concepts or labels which direct attention to complex constellations and aspects of social and material relations for certain purposes. Their meaning and power lies in the way they are utilised, and their adequacy can be judged from their application and ability to illuminate. Although definitions can be proposed, they necessarily remain general and abstract.<sup>96</sup>

Here, Woodhead sheds light on the difficult to define nature of religion, stating that generally, definitions remain abstract and flexible, and often, religion's meaning lies in what effects it has, rather than what it is. The problem, then, generally lies in the fact that religion can either be defined by what it does – so, its function – or by what it is. Both types of definition, termed functional and substantive, come with their own complications.<sup>97</sup> Whilst it is easier to recognize the different functions of religion in society, which many such as Woodhead have done, it is more difficult to define what religion itself is, whilst being careful not to be too exclusive or too inclusive in our definition.<sup>98</sup> Simon Green proposes a relatively unrestrictive definition of religion, defining it as an “ever changing thing” – one that at times can refer to belief, institutions, notions of the sacred, or “arcane doctrine and unsophisticated attitudes about God or our immortal ends”.<sup>99</sup> Conceptualizing religion in such a way allows for a more inclusive

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<sup>96</sup> L. Woodhead ‘Implicit Understandings of Religion in Sociological Study and in the Work of Hugh McLeod’ in C. Brown and M. Snape (eds.) *Secularisation in the Christian World* (London, 2010), pp. 35-46, p. 35.

<sup>97</sup> S. Bruce, ‘The Pervasive World-View: Religion in Pre-Modern Britain’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48:4 (1997), pp. 667-680.

<sup>98</sup> L. Woodhead, ‘Five Concepts of Religion’, *International Review of Sociology*, 21:1 (2011), pp. 121-143.

<sup>99</sup> S.J.D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c.1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 3.

approach to what types of behaviour we can identify as religious. More specific, yet equally inclusive, is Steve Bruce's definition of religion as something which "consists of beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose".<sup>100</sup> Bruce's definition is inclusive in that it allows for both institutional and non-institutional forms of religion to be recognised, as well as those who do or do not believe in supernatural beings but instead supernatural processes. For example, as Bruce outlines, "Gods are an example of the former; the Hindu principle of karma is an example of the latter".<sup>101</sup>

For these reasons, for the purpose of this thesis, Bruce and Green's definition of religion are most useful: allowing for the inclusion of non-traditional, non-institutional religions, whilst also creating a set of exclusionary categories. Other definitions come with problems, for example those offered by Sociologist Émile Durkheim, who defined religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things".<sup>102</sup> The problem here is the danger of the potential for anything to be labelled as sacred and have a belief system attached to it, as Steve Bruce outlines in his die-hard football fans analogy.<sup>103</sup> This problem can also be identified in Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as:

a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.<sup>104</sup>

With such a definition, it would be possible to define many obviously non-religious practices, for example, supporting a football team, as religious.

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<sup>100</sup> S. Bruce, 'Defining religion: a practical response', *International Review of Sociology*, 21:1 (2011), pp. 107-120, p. 112.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. J.W Swain, (New York, 2015), p. 44.

<sup>103</sup> S. Bruce, 'Defining religion: a practical response', p. 110.

<sup>104</sup> L. Woodhead 'Implicit Understandings', p. 43.

Crucially, a flexible definition of religion – but one which does not make the error of including more than it excludes – applies to Moral Re-Armament’s style of religion, which shifted so much throughout the twentieth century. A definition which encompasses a range of experiences is essential to understanding the religious experiences of a Moral Re-Armer: one which includes everything from subscribing to the rules of the Four Absolutes, practicing morning meditation, and avoiding alcohol, smoking, and pre-marital sex.

### Problems with identifying religious experiences in Moral Re-Armament

Moral Re-Armament offers a complicated nuance to understanding religious experiences. The complication comes from the fact that despite Moral Re-Armament being intended as a religious experience, not all its followers would have viewed themselves as participating in something religious. Indeed, whilst we can identify religious intent in Moral Re-Armament’s activities, as this thesis will explore in Chapter One, we must also consider how its followers experienced it.

This variety of experience can be attributed to the unclear nature of Moral Re-Armament’s religious core. Debates emerged at various points from its inception onwards between individuals wondering whether it should even be considered a religion, or something else altogether. Whilst Moral Re-Armer Arnold Lunn maintained that Moral Re-armament “is a religious discipline, but it is not a religion”<sup>105</sup>, other commentators noted that since Moral Re-Armament “clearly professes to have a revelation”, in the form of its claim to provide a direct line to God through morning quiet times, a process which Chapter One explores, “it is,

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<sup>105</sup> Fr. J. A. Hardon, ‘An Evaluation of Moral Rearmament’, *American Ecclesiastical Review* (1935), (1956), pp. 217-226.

therefore, a religion”.<sup>106</sup> But such ambiguity surrounding its religious nature was central to Moral Re-Armament’s ability to collect Christian and non-Christian followers alike; arguably, this confusion was deliberately manufactured for this purpose. Alternatively, the confusion stemmed from the fact that Moral Re-Armament was not working with the same definition of religion as its critics. There is evidence for both. Firstly, although, as Chapter One explores, Moral Re-Armament actively avoided being referred to as a religion – with Buchman stating in 1949 that Moral Re-Armament was “not a new religion... it is the remedy in the common fight for a new world” - this can partially be viewed more as an attempt to co-exist peacefully with the existing Churches who would forbid membership to another religion, more so than an actual anti-religious standpoint.<sup>107</sup> Thus, it is possible that its avoidance of being classified as a formal religion grew out of its desire to be able to recruit Christians who already belonged to a Church and therefore would be unable to follow another religion simultaneously: thus, it designed itself as a supplement to the existing Christian religions in order to widen potential participation, a plan which had mixed success amongst leaders of the existing Catholic Church and Church of England, which Chapter Four explores. Secondly, whilst some Moral Re-Armers maintained it was not a religion due to its lack of dogma, official structure, and membership processes, its critics such as the aforementioned Father Hardon maintained that its seemingly religious practices of Listening to God were enough to qualify it as a religion. Clearly, these two interpretations stem from fundamentally different perspectives on what religion is.

Such an example illuminates a central issue for historians of religion: we are not all singing from the same hymn sheet, so to speak. Whilst some focus on the need for, to borrow the wording of the above agreed definition, “arcane doctrine” to be present to qualify a religion,

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<sup>106</sup> Fr. J. A. Hardon, ‘An Evaluation of Moral Rearmament’.

<sup>107</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 42.

others appreciate that the presence of “unsophisticated attitudes about God or our immortal ends” also make something religious. By using a definition which encapsulates both, Moral Re-Armament can be classified as a religious group despite the absence of formal doctrine. However, the issue remains that although Moral Re-Armament was certainly religious in nature, it was not experienced as such by all of its followers. This poses problems for historians of religion when trying to use Moral Re-Armament to demonstrate the continued relevance of religion in twentieth century Britons’ lives.

Another issue is that, whilst we may be able to classify Moral Re-Armament as religious, some of its contemporaries also called into question the Christian nature of Moral Re-Armament, meaning that this complicates our ability to use it to evidence continued Christian belief in twentieth century Britain. Whilst at its core Moral Re-Armament viewed itself as a Christian group, acting on behalf of a Christian God, and promoting a belief in the Holy Spirit, it at times moved away from promoting itself as a Christian group for reasons which will be extensively explored. For example, at various points, phrases such as “quiet time” or “listening to your inner voice” were used instead of the popular Moral Re-Armament practice of “Listening to God”, and references to explicitly Christian figures, such as Christ, dwindled in its various publications, as Chapter Three explores. Thus, recruitment by saying whatever was necessary, rather than a strict adherence to Christian principles, seemed to be the standard practice. Consequently, individuals recruited via these methods would not have understood the experience of being a Moral Re-Armer as an explicitly Christian one, even if this was the intention of Frank Buchman and later leader, Peter Howard.

This poses a question to historians of religion in modern Britain: can we consider something a Christian religious experience if some of the people participating do not experience it as such? And if so, how does this fit into narratives of Christian strength or decline? Whilst

the above different interpretations of what constitutes a religion can account for the varied interpretations of whether Moral Re-Armament was one or not, what these varied interpretations cannot account for is how to reconcile a Christian group converting people from all religions. Would a Hindu member of Moral Re-Armament consider themselves converted to Christianity by their participation in the movement? Unlikely. But they also would not necessarily ignore the Christian element of the movement. As Rajmohan Gandhi, a Hindu and long-time follower of Moral Re-Armament highlighted, Moral Re-Armament was a supplement to the members already existing faith; a way to apply their principles to real life.<sup>108</sup>

Ultimately, everything Moral Re-Armament did should be considered the actions of a religious group which packaged up existing Christian ideals into a not exclusively Christian experience. Thus, the Moral Re-Armament experience of faith was complex and fragmented, but still at its core, Christian. Founded for “the advancement of the Christian religion” in the 1920s, this is still the object of Initiatives of Change, as outlined in its most recent Annual Report.<sup>109</sup> Although, as the Objects of the Charity point out, Buchman “expressed truths in ways that were unconventional and sometimes did not sound religious”, he did so always with a core Christian goal, viewing all actions of Moral Re-Armament as “practical expressions of Christ’s commands”.<sup>110</sup> This allows us to appreciate the complexities of Christian faith, particularly in a diversifying twentieth century Britain. Through Moral Re-Armament, we can see Christian religion navigating through a religious and culturally diverse landscape.

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<sup>108</sup> Berkley Center, ‘A Discussion with Rajmohan Gandhi, President, Initiatives of Change International’, *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs* (2009), <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-rajmohan-gandhi-president-initiatives-of-change-international> (Accessed 1 February 2023).

<sup>109</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Annual Report 2021’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://iofc.org.uk/uploads/2023/03/The-Oxford-Group-Annual-Report-2021-1899.pdf> (Accessed 1 March 2023).

<sup>110</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Annual Report 2021’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://iofc.org.uk/uploads/2023/03/The-Oxford-Group-Annual-Report-2021-1899.pdf> (Accessed 1 March 2023).



Based on these complexities, it is important to stress that we cannot speak for all members of Moral Re-Armament's experience or perceptions of what it meant to them. Certainly, as this thesis will explore, in no way was the experience uniform across the board of its followers. It meant different things to different people. Chronology also played a part in this. To early followers, it was more likely they would view Moral Re-Armament as an authentically Christian experience because this was how it was marketed. As stated, as the decades progressed, although Moral Re-Armament's core ideology never changed, the way in which it marketed itself to recruit new followers did, and thus these followers were less likely to view their participation in Moral Re-Armament as participation in a Christian activity but rather, more broadly, a new way of life. Thus, whilst Moral Re-Armament were promoting a set of core beliefs based on the Bible, a way of life based on Jesus and his disciples, and had a moral foundation in line with the teachings of Christianity, it could convert members without them being aware of any of this.

However, whilst the religious experience of Moral Re-Armers differed from decade to decade, group to group, and person to person – based on the shifting approaches of Moral Re-Armament itself – they can all still be loosely classified as Christian, religious experiences. Moral Re-Armament therefore challenges historians of Christianity in modern Britain to be flexible in their approaches. It challenges us to look for these alternative ways of believing and to appreciate the individual experience of faith in modern Britain.

## Modernity and modernisation

Defining modernisation, modernity and post-modernity is also highly contested ground.<sup>111</sup> As John Carter Wood outlines, modernity is a notion that is on “endless trial”, one which amongst academics faces constant evaluation and criticism.<sup>112</sup> When this process of modernisation was said to have occurred, what it refers to, and whether it led to a state of modernity, are the main areas of disagreement amongst many.

For the purposes of this thesis, modernity will be used to refer to state which was assumed to have existed after a process of modernisation had unfolded in twentieth century Britain. As John Carter Wood outlines, the key features of this assumed process of modernisation in this context are:

The acceleration of industrialisation, urbanisation, democratisation and the functional differentiation of social spheres as well as the impact of new technologies (particularly mass communications) and the growing predominance of scientific knowledge.<sup>113</sup>

As Wood outlines, there was a feeling amongst Britons from as early as 1900, but at its peak after World War Two, that they were living in a distinctly modern, new age due to the widespread changes unfolding in the areas outlined above.<sup>114</sup> Then, as Wood highlights, in the last few decades of the century there was a widespread belief that modernity had been replaced with post-modernity.<sup>115</sup> It was assumed, then, that from a period of around 1960 onwards, with

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<sup>111</sup> See recently: J. Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (London, 2018); A. Jacobs, *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis* (New York, 2018); R. Heynickx and S. Symons, *So What's New About Scholasticism?: How Neo-Thomism Helped Shape the Twentieth Century* (Berlin, 2018); S. Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England and the Invention of the British Sixties, 1957-1970: The Hope of a World Transformed* (Oxford, 2018); J. Wood (ed.), *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe: Conflict, Community, and the Social Order* (Göttingen, 2016); J. Wood, *This Is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1937-49*, (Manchester, 2019).

<sup>112</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century’, *Contemporary British History* 34:4 (2020), pp. 495-509, p. 495.

<sup>113</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities’, p. 495.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

the cultural, political, social and economic changes facing Britain, that it had entered a period *more* modern and new than the previous state of modernity.

Crucially, however, it is not the aim of this thesis to argue about the particulars of if, when, where and how a process of modernisation unfolded. Indeed, as Sam Brewitt-Taylor has outlined, it is perhaps more useful to think of modernity not as a tangible and definable thing, but rather, as an emic category. This would mean moving away from looking for “essential characteristics of modernity” and towards an appreciation for what people perceived at the time to be modern: a “collective ideology of modernity”.<sup>116</sup> Instead, what is deemed important for the purpose of this study is that modernisation was *perceived* to be unfolding; a modernity which posed a threat to the assumed dominance of Christian ideals in British society. This perceived threat provoked a reaction amongst followers and founders of Moral Re-Armament. John Carter Wood outlines why this distinction is important:

Christians throughout the twentieth century *believed* that they were experiencing the birth of a new social reality that they described as ‘modern’ This *perception* of modernity by clergy, lay intellectuals, politicians and individual congregants sparked a range of reactions.<sup>117</sup>

Wood highlights the importance of exploring this range of reactions, in that by doing so, historians, “rather than depicting the Churches and committed Christians more generally as merely a beleaguered group reacting with anxiety and/or hostility to the social changes around them”, can instead appreciate the more proactive role of religion.<sup>118</sup> This gets us to the crux of the thesis: the idea that Moral Re-Armament, as a response to the perceived modernisation of the world around them, actively adapted its approaches to suit this changing context. Rather

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<sup>116</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, “‘Christian civilisation’, ‘modern secularisation’, and the revolutionary re-imagination of British modernity, 1954-1965’, *Contemporary British History*, 34:4 (2020), pp. 603-628, p. 604.

<sup>117</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities’, p. 496.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

than “reacting with anxiety and / or hostility to the social changes around them”, Moral Re-Armament changed its approach to speak to these changes.<sup>119</sup> Crucially, this thesis characterises Moral Re-Armament as largely reactionary: responding to the perceived process of modernisation unfolding around it, and adapting its approaches and focus as a consequence of this.

This view opposes the dominant narrative that modernity, or as later proposed, post-modernity, inevitably led to the decline of religion. As Sam Brewitt-Taylor has outlined, amongst historians and sociologists alike, there has been an assumption that modernity and post-modernity naturally favour secularism; meaning, once society became modern, Christianity was no longer compatible.<sup>120</sup> This argument, originally promoted by the likes of Alan Gilbert, posited that the process of secularisation therefore began to unfold as early as the Industrial Revolution.<sup>121</sup> Callum Brown adapted this timeline in *The Death of Christian Britain*, by arguing that on the contrary, Christianity in Britain experienced decades of strength up to and including the 1950s, before the changes of an era of postmodernity from the 1960s onwards eventually led to a secular Britain. As Brewitt-Taylor outlines, whilst breaking the assumed link between modernity and secularism, Brown simply replaced it with a new link between postmodernity and secularism.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, most histories which have tried to explore religious decline as intrinsically linked with other processes, such as democratisation or mass affluence “have done little to disturb the underlying premise that modernity intrinsically favours secularism”.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities’, p. 496.

<sup>120</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, “Christian civilisation”.

<sup>121</sup> A. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (Boston, 1976)

<sup>122</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, “Christian civilisation”, p. 603.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

This thesis holds as one of its underlying principles that the assumed intrinsic link between modernity and secularisation is best severed. Such an approach changes the questions historians can explore regarding faith in the modern world. Rather than exploring how modernity led to the decline of religion, we can instead consider what opportunities modernity offered Christians: how did they adapt their approaches; how did they translate their faith to speak to modern contexts?

Exploring these questions through the lens of Moral Re-Armament's activities throughout the twentieth century allows further insight into the actions of British Christians as a response to the changing, perceived to be modernising, world around them. How this changed their faith, the way faith was practiced, promoted, understood, and received, will be a central focus of the thesis. Crucially, this process of adaptation to changing contexts was not unique to the twentieth century but was instead a process which had been ongoing for centuries before. As John Carter Wood has highlighted, “the twentieth century was certainly not the first in which British and Irish Christians have sought to relate their faith to changing political, social and technological conditions; such efforts have been a part of Christianity since its origins”.<sup>124</sup> We can therefore view Moral Re-Armament as a part of a longer tradition of adaptable Christianity, offering an example of how a Christian group was able to adapt specifically to the changes unfolding in twentieth century Britain with each decade offering fresh challenges to faith, as Chapter One explores in detail.

However, whilst this thesis does assert that Moral Re-Armament was modern in presentation, it was not always modern in thought. For example, it would be false to equate the attitudes of Moral Re-Armament with modern, progressive attitudes. As already alluded to, and as will be explored throughout the thesis, it was openly hostile to issues of homosexuality, pre-

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<sup>124</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities’, p. 495.

marital sex, and masturbation. Arguably, Peter Howard's leadership during the 1960s, a decade of increasing sexual freedoms, saw Moral Re-Armament's most vocally anti-sex era. However, it promoted these arguably increasingly outdated and unpopular viewpoints via more progressive means than its institutional counterparts, as Chapter Three explores in detail. As Lawrence Black stated in his exploration of the National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVALA), a descendent of Moral Re-Armament, a "social movement that was 'traditionalist' in 'content' could still be 'modern in form'".<sup>125</sup> Meaning, despite old fashioned values, the ways in which these were expressed were increasingly modern, moving with the times and audiences which they were speaking to. Additionally, as Amy Whipple states in her work on the Nationwide Festival of Light: "The NFOL, like the NVALA, was embedded in cultural trends in post-war Britain... the NFOL did try to engage with the present to preserve traditional sexual morality".<sup>126</sup>

### Secularisation and Christian decline

In its simplest form, the secularisation debate centres around the question of if, how, and when British society became secular: meaning, when Christianity lost its status as the dominant ideological, organising, and moralizing force within British society. However, the secularisation debate is by no means clear cut. Most elements are contested: the timings – whether pre or post 1960; the causes – whether changing gender roles, industrialisation,

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<sup>125</sup> L. Black, 'There Was Something About Mary: The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and Social Movement History', in N. Crowson, M. Hilton, J. McKay, (eds) *NGOs in Contemporary Britain*. Palgrave (London, 2009), pp. 182–3.

<sup>126</sup> A. Whipple, 'Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the 'Silent Majority'', *Contemporary British History*, 24:3 (2010), pp. 319-339.

modernisation, or something else altogether; and the end product – regarding the extent to which Christianity had truly ‘disappeared’ from society, or as Callum Brown puts it, “died”.<sup>127</sup>

Ian Jones outlines the classic thesis which argues that secularisation was an “inexorable product of modernity”, an argument first put forward by the likes of Bryan Wilson and Steve Bruce.<sup>128</sup> However, what element of modernity – be it affluence, industrialization, or changing gender roles – is contested amongst proponents of the theory. For example, one of the many causes of secularisation which prominent secularisation theorist Bryan Wilson identified was growing Western affluence, which had made the “elaborate compensatory system” of an afterlife – the idea of working on earth now to reap the benefits in heaven – largely redundant.<sup>129</sup> With this redundancy, Christianity had lost one of its main pulls: the idea that with Christian belief came the promise of a better life after death. With growing opportunities, technologies and consumer cultures, people could create a better life for themselves in the “here and now”.<sup>130</sup> Interestingly, as the thesis will explore, it was precisely this mindset that Moral Re-Armament capitalised on: the idea that people wanted a better quality of life in this realm, rather than the emphasis being on the next. However, in Wilson’s narrative, alongside many other sociologists and historians, it was Christianity’s inability to continue to speak to these changing desires and mindsets which had been brought about by modernity which led to its inevitable decline. For others, such as Callum Brown, the decline of Christianity was attributed to the to the changing attitudes of Briton’s women and laxing sexual attitudes as underlying the rejection of Christian

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<sup>127</sup> C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Oxon, 2001).

<sup>128</sup> I. Jones, ‘Secularisation in 1960s Britain: triumph of rationalism or self-fulfilling prophecy?’, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 42:4 (2021) pp. 553-563, p. 553.

<sup>129</sup> B. Wilson and D. Ikeda, *Human Values in a Changing World: A Dialogue*, trans and eds R. L. Gage and I.B Taurus (London, 2008), p. 136.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

values. Conversely, Hugh McLeod adopts a multi-causal approach to religious decline, pointing to a multitude of factors, including student protest and affluence.<sup>131</sup>

As well as the cause, there is significant disagreement over the timings of secularisation. Whilst the likes of Hugh McLeod and Callum Brown argue for the 1960s as the turning point – the watershed between religious and non-religious Britain – others, such as Simon Green argue for a much longer process of change, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>132</sup> Brown and McLeod’s works, however, argued that pre 1960s Britain was still a strongly Christian society – and it was the 1960s which represented a sharp turning point. For this reason, David Nash describes the work of McLeod and Brown as belonging to the cataclysmic movement, which “sets itself against gradualism and, in particular, against continuity which most observers of religion’s power to reconstitute itself have tended to promote”.<sup>133</sup>

As Jeremy Morris outlines, the early versions of secularisation argument which proposed that religion had been declining decades before the 1960s, faced a “growing tide of revisionism”.<sup>134</sup> Jeffrey Cox, through his work *The English Churches in Secular Society* demonstrated the strength of late Victorian religion.<sup>135</sup> Additionally, the likes of McLeod, and Sarah Williams, “showed how religion remained a pervasive and important aspect of working-class culture, even in the early twentieth century”.<sup>136</sup> Consequently, there was a reassessment of the timeline of decline. Still, though, there remained significant disagreement, with Cox and

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<sup>131</sup> C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*; H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*.

<sup>132</sup> H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, (Oxford, 2007); C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Oxon, 2001); S.J.D Green, *Religion in An Age of Decline: Organization and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: 1996).

<sup>133</sup> D. Nash, ‘Believing in Secularisation – Stories of Decline, Potential, and Resurgence’, *Journal of Religious History*, 41:1 (2017), pp. 505-531, p. 520.

<sup>134</sup> J. Morris, ‘Secularisation and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion’, *The Historical Journal* 55:1 (2012), pp. 195-219, p. 201.

<sup>135</sup> J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982).

<sup>136</sup> D. H. McLeod, ‘New perspectives on Victorian working-class religion: the oral evidence’, *Oral History*, 14 (1986), pp. 31-49; S. C. Williams, *Religious belief and popular culture in Southwark, c. 1880-1030* (Oxford, 1999).



Green arguing for secularisation beginning as early as the 1930s, and Brown identifying the 1960s as the sharp and sudden turning point, when in 1963 Christianity “really quite suddenly” died.<sup>137</sup> The problem is, all these historians are working with the assumed end point of a dead Christianity. Debating the why and when which a conclusion in mind therefore ignores the very valid question of “to what extent?”, a question which more carefully considers the nuanced and complex changing Christian faith unfolding in twentieth century Britain.

At moments, we do see some consideration of the complexity from some historians. The likes of McLeod did work to demonstrate that Christians were not simply passive victims of a change which was enforced totally and uncontrollably on them. For example, McLeod explores that the “relaxation of harsh laws on homosexuality, abortion and divorce in England and Wales were not only supported, but partly initiated, by the established church”.<sup>138</sup> It was not until his latest work, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, that we saw this level of consideration from Brown. By exploring “the battle that erupted in the mid-twentieth century over the threat to Christian Britain that was feared would follow from three major menaces of the period: sex, Humanists and secularisation”, religion is “put much more firmly, and complexly, into the secular historian’s narrative”.<sup>139</sup> Whilst Brown therefore sheds more light on the complex and nuanced processes of religious change than his previous works, he arrives at the same conclusion: a “civilised country [was] forged in the sixties and seventies [through] a new and burgeoning disregard of faith”.<sup>140</sup>

Despite differences only lightly explored here, what remains consistent amongst these narratives is the agreement that by the 1960s, Britain had ceased to be a Christian country. As Ruth Lindley outlines in her exploration of the spiritual Goddess movement:

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<sup>137</sup> C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup> H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, pp. 217-231.

<sup>139</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, p. 291

Although the simple narrative of religious decline has undergone multiple and varied revision... these only nominally question secularisation's theoretical framework and never in ways that succeed in totally dismantling them. What remains, woven into multiple subfields of modern British history, are unstated assumptions about the incompatibility between modernity and belief, as well as assumptions about what signifies valid forms of religiosity.<sup>141</sup>

It is with this conclusion in mind that we turn our attention to the significant criticism the secularisation debate has received.

### Criticisms of the Secularisation theory

The academy is unfortunately subject to fashion: it is always easier to build a reputation by opposing the positions of one's predecessors than by working in the dominant paradigm. Hence the irony that, at the same time as modern societies have become increasingly secular, the sociological explanation for that change has become as unpopular as the religion whose demise it explains.<sup>142</sup>

Steve Bruce's above comment points to the generally dismissive attitude which proponents of the secularisation thesis have held towards fair and balanced criticisms of the flawed theory. This section will explore the various criticisms waged against the secularisation theory before ultimately arguing that there is a need for a step away from it. As will be explored, whilst some critics have attempted to alter or add much needed nuance to the existing theory, others have argued that the theory is best scrapped in order to liberate future histories of religion and society in twentieth century Britain from such a seemingly predetermined framework.

Green outlines that most anti-secularisation arguments have failed to persuade historians because "the evidence of real and general organizational decline is still

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<sup>141</sup> R. Lindley, "'The Personal is Political is Spiritual': feminism and religion in modern Britain", (Doctoral Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2020), p. 16.

<sup>142</sup> S. Bruce, 'Appendix Two: Fifty Years On', in B. Wilson and S. Bruce (eds), *Religion in Secular Society: Fifty Years On*, (Oxford, 2016), pp. 241-258, p. 258.

overwhelming, however much the basic numbers are revised and however much attention is paid to the numerical significance of new cults, fleeting affiliations of casual responses to survey”. But, as will be outlined, it is not the organizational decline that most anti-secularisation arguments are speaking to. Whilst accepting as truth that institutional religion – in terms of church membership and attendance – did decline, anti-secularisation arguments still propose that this does not reveal the whole story of religion in Britain. As Rodney Stark outlines, if proponents of the secularisation theory were simply arguing that engagement with institutional religion had declined, “there would be nothing to argue about”.<sup>143</sup>

Indeed, the picture is more complex than originally depicted. Green highlights that although, at the time of their writing in 1996, “fewer than 20 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom today are members of Christian churches”, conversely “more than three-quarters of the population still profess to believe in God, nearly one-half believe Jesus to have been His Son, and about one quarter consider religion to be ‘Very important’ in their lives”.<sup>144</sup> Whilst often dismissed by proponents of the secularisation debate as residual religious sensibility, critics of the secularisation theory offer other solutions. Such results speak to the theory of divergence first proposed by sociologist Charles Glock. Glock’s theory proposes that the secularisation theory is inherently flawed due to its uni-dimensional model of religious commitment, which presumes that commitment can only be measured by church membership, fee paying and attendance.<sup>145</sup> Glock proposed a model of religious commitment which identified five dimensions: belief, practice, experience, knowledge and a commitment to the

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<sup>143</sup> R. Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.”, *Sociology of Religion*, 60 (1999), pp. 249–273, p. 252; K. Dobbelaere, ‘Bryan Wilson’s Contributions to the Study of Secularization’, *Social Compass* 53:2 (2006), pp. 141-146, p. 142.

<sup>144</sup> S.J.D Green, *Religion in An Age of Decline: Organization and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: 1996), p. 11.

<sup>145</sup> C. Glock, ‘The Religious Revival in America?’ in J. Zahn (ed.), *Religion and the Face of America* (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 34-63; C. Glock and R. Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago, 1965).

consequences (personal, moral and political).<sup>146</sup> Glock's study demonstrated that in different cultural and historical environments, people tended to hold these values in unequal weightings.<sup>147</sup> It is therefore important to be clear about what aspects of the theory we take issue with: rarely does someone's anti-secularisation argument rest on a dismissal of the statistics. Additionally, anti-secularisation theorists are not criticizing the theory on this basis, because they are aware that proponents of the secularisation debate are not framing the decline as purely statistical. Of course, secularisation theorists have identified what they deem to be decline in elements of religious outside of membership numbers – take for example Bryan Wilson and Karel Dobbelare's multi-dimensional definitions of religion – including practice, institutions, and wider belief (termed macro, meso and micro by Dobbelare), and Callum Brown's most recent work which steps away from “number crunching”.<sup>148</sup>

The problem which most anti-secularisation scholars have with the theory is therefore not the demonstrable decline in religious participation on an institutional level, but rather the assumed inevitability and totality of this decline: the idea that all roads lead to a secular society because of a process of modernization. David Martin, for example, was one of the earliest critics of the theory, who attempted to demonstrate that religious could survive and adapt in modern contexts, thus questioning the link between modernity and secularism.<sup>149</sup>

Other challenges to the secularization theory center around the idea that religion continued to exist, just in different forms. Simon Green outlines one of the key challenges to the secularisation theory, that is: the theory of religious transformation, which “rejects [the secularisation theory's] underlying principles, tout court”.<sup>150</sup> Proponents of the theory argue

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<sup>146</sup> C. Glock, 'The Religious Revival in America?'

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*; C. Glock and R. Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago, 1965).

<sup>148</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, p. 295.

<sup>149</sup> J. Cox, 'Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation: A Progress Report', in C. Brown and M. Snape (eds.) *Secularisation in the Christian World* (London, 2010), pp. 22-34, p. 25.

<sup>150</sup> S.J.D Green, *Religion in An Age of Decline*, p. 9.

that what actually happened when traditional organized religion declined, was “new, implicit, and complex manifestations” of religion occurred; a sort of one door closes, another opens approach to religious decline. This is another manifestation of what is elsewhere referred to as the change-not-decline debate. Similarly, there is the relocation theory, which holds that “religion in modern society is directed away from the fortunes of the churches, as institutions, and towards the religious orientation of those modern institutions - political parties, trades unions, welfare organizations and the like - which are generally agreed to have usurped the wider social role of the Church during the twentieth century”.<sup>151</sup> All of these theories speak to the pressing need to look for religious belief outside of the institution, and thus identify the surviving remnants of British Christianity.

It is these surviving remnants of British Christianity which Matthew Wood considers in *Re-Assessment of Public Religion and Secularisation in England*.<sup>152</sup> Wood opens with the following quote: “God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which his shadow will be shown”. Wood argues that “British proponents of secularisation theory have often shied away from clearly investigating the manner in which religious institutions continue to act in social life”, thus ignoring these shadows in caves of modern religion.<sup>153</sup> Peter Berger’s later work, too, puts forward an argument outlining the ways in which religion continued to exist, but in the private sphere. Berger argued that whilst secularisation undoubtedly happened in the sense that church attendance fell, “in the sphere of the family and social relationships, religion... continues to be relevant”.<sup>154</sup> Thus, Berger took issue with the fact that most arguments for secularisation rest firmly on data showing the

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<sup>151</sup> S.J.D Green, *Religion in An Age of Decline*, p. 9.

<sup>152</sup> M. Wood, ‘Shadows in Caves? A Re-Assessment of Public Religion and Secularisation in England Today’, *European Journal of Sociology*, 56:2 (2015).

<sup>153</sup> M. Wood, ‘Shadows in Caves?’, p. 241.

<sup>154</sup> P. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London, 1969), p. 137.

“structural manifestations of secularisation”, but to claim there was also a “secularisation of consciousness” as Brown does is false.<sup>155</sup>

### The stance of A New World Made Up of New Men

However, there are some who argue that rather than adding nuance to the existing theories, it is more useful to move away from them. David Nash, for example, has advocated for an abandonment of engagement with the secularisation thesis altogether, arguing that it hinders the work done by historians of religion by putting a hyper focus on “counting and assessing the supposed ‘viability’ of beliefs’ rather than their existence in the first place”.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, historians of religion are haunted by the shadow of secularisation, looming over their narratives and casting an importance on finding the reason behind, timing of, and numbers involved in the gradual decline of any religion or religious movement. Such a narrative ensures that any engagement with a religious group in the twentieth century means eventually explaining how they failed and fell into obscurity, or opposing this viewpoint and arguing for their continued strength and existence. This process, as Nash points out, forces “historians to articulate their positive or negative views of the theory and to live thereafter with some uncomfortable problems associated with their respective positions”; here, the “uncomfortable problem” refers to the fact that no religion neatly fits into a story of absolute strength or absolute decline.<sup>157</sup> An all-encompassing theory – a statement of yes or no – completely fails to respect the nuances of the lived religious and non-religious experiences in history. Therefore, as Nash rightfully

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<sup>155</sup> P. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, p. 114.

<sup>156</sup> D. Nash, ‘Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's Failure as a Master Narrative’ *Cultural and Social History*, 1:3 (2004), pp. 302-325, p. 303.

<sup>157</sup> D. Nash, ‘Reconnecting Religion’, p. 308.

states, we need to “wean ourselves off a history that sees religion as, by definition, in a state of withering decay, and instead be prepared to acknowledge its stubborn persistence”.<sup>158</sup>

This thesis takes heed of Nash’s warning, and instead acknowledges religion’s stubborn persistence: the story of Moral Re-Armament is one of change rather than decline. It is therefore not helpful to map the secularisation thesis onto the efforts of Moral Re-Armament, as it would direct the focus of the thesis towards explaining an inevitable decline of Moral Re-Armament’s activities, when in reality we can see its adaptation to changing circumstances. Imposing the assumed end point of failure, obscurity, and a totally secular state onto the story of Moral Re-Armament would not only be historically inaccurate, but would also present its messy, nuanced, and complex story as entirely too uniform. Indeed, as stated, Moral Re-Armament still exists today, under a new name Initiatives of Change: it is active in 60 countries around the world, including Britain. Its 2021 financial report showed that its total fund balance as of 31 December 2021 was 32 million pounds, in the UK only.<sup>159</sup> Crucially, its 2021 report also highlights that it is still working towards the “advancement of the Christian religion by the means and in accordance with the principles of the Oxford Group Movement”.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, as will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, despite changing tactics and external image, Moral Re-Armament never fully abandoned its Christian core. Meaning, not only does the secularisation narrative fundamentally not align with the story of Moral Re-Armament – because a Christian group adapted and changed with modernity rather than inevitably declined – but it should not be imposed onto a story and thus force historians to identify the ways in which the organisation declined, when it clearly did not. Viewing these

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<sup>158</sup> D. Nash, ‘Reconnecting Religion’, p. 323.

<sup>159</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Annual Report 2021’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://iofc.org.uk/uploads/2023/03/The-Oxford-Group-Annual-Report-2021-1899.pdf> (Accessed 1 March 2023).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

changes as evidence of decline would be to mischaracterize the efforts of Moral Re-Armament throughout the twentieth century. By doing so, the thesis disagrees with Steve Bruce's claim that:

Change-not-decline is obviously possible, but to date the evidence for it is unimpressive. ...Although the decline of the once-dominant Christian churches has made it easier (both in the availability and the plausibility of alternatives) for people to 'freestyle', there is little evidence that many do so.<sup>161</sup>

Further, Bruce claims, this emergence of new religions instead of evidencing the power of religion to transform should instead be viewed as expressions of secularisation.<sup>162</sup> This is a common rebuttal to the change not decline debate: some argue that the fact the religions felt the need to change where and how they operated is in and of itself evidence of the power and prevalence of secularisation. As Ruth Lindley outlines, there is a general dismissal of such criticisms of the secularisation narrative amongst its proponents: "Rather than unseating the secularisation paradigm by pointing to the growing popularity of new forms of belief, scholars such as Steve Bruce, Bryan Wilson, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead solidify disciplinary assumptions about the content of religion, reading spirituality as inherently 'other', or indeed even symptomatic of secularisation".<sup>163</sup>

People argued the same about Moral Re-Armament: As David Belden outlines, by the 1950s its contemporaries were noting the less Christian nature of Moral Re-Armament: "this might seem a clear case of the secularisation of a movement."<sup>164</sup> Yet, as Belden notes whilst "during the 1940s and 1950s the group's message was presented much more than before as an answer to current social concerns and in a more secularised terminology suited to non-churchgoing men of affairs. Whether this is evidence of the secularisation movement, however,

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<sup>161</sup> S. Bruce, 'Appendix Two: Fifty Years On', p. 244.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>163</sup> R. Lindley, "'The Personal is Political is Spiritual'", p. 16.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



is highly dubious”, due to the continued belief in the Christian principles upon which Moral Re-Armament was founded.<sup>165</sup>

As this thesis will demonstrate, there is plentiful evidence that Britons created and engaged with their own version of faith in very meaningful ways. As Marion Bowman has argued, historians of religion should consider what Leonard Primiano originally termed Vernacular Religion, which “demands that scholars take seriously the minutiae of how people live their religion in particular contexts, their interaction with material culture, their often flexible attitude to and use of tradition, their frequently complex relationship and negotiations with institutional forms of religiosity, and above all their agency”.<sup>166</sup>

Similarly, David Reagles’ work *Searching for God in Britain and Beyond* uses letters written to Malcolm Muggeridge to explore how British people made sense of religious change in the twentieth century by reaching out towards more spiritual, “eclectic” faiths such as those proposed in Muggeridge’s work, as opposed to the “dense theological works” of traditional religions.<sup>167</sup> Writers to Muggeridge would “wrestle with matters of faith and doubt in a rapidly changing religious climate”, in a way which makes visible to historians “the profound and sometimes unexpected ways fans used reading and letter writing to make sense of the religious crisis of the 1960s and 1970s”.<sup>168</sup> Crucially, Reagles work restores agency to the historical figure of Christians in Twentieth Century Britain, emphasising that whilst the writers to Muggeridge “may have passively accepted that Christianity they knew it was declining”, they

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<sup>165</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 11.

<sup>166</sup> M. Bowman, ‘Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spiritualities. Tribute to Leonard Norman Primiano (1957-2021)’ *Traditiones*, 50:3 (2022), pp. 7–14, p. 8.

<sup>167</sup> D. Reagles, *Searching for God in Britain and Beyond: Reading Letters to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1966-1982* (Canada: 2021), p. 5.

<sup>168</sup> D. Reagles, *Searching for God in Britain and Beyond: Reading Letters to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1966-1982* (Canada: 2021), p. 5; D. Reagles, *Searching for God in Britain and Beyond: Reading Letters to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1966-1982* (Canada: 2021), p. 28.

were not mere victims. Instead, they “actively participated in this history by redefining how they practised faith in a secular age”.<sup>169</sup>

This thesis will therefore follow the path of the likes of Lucy Delap, Jacqueline de Vries, Joy Dixon, Sandra Holton, Alex Owen and Jane Shaw, who, as Ruth Lindley points out, resist applying secularisation to their historical subjects’ lives, but rather “take at face value the religious ideology, both orthodox and heterodox, that animated the lives and politics of their subjects”.<sup>170</sup> These histories, “by resisting linear narratives of secularisation... draw attention to the transmutations of spiritual commitments to different modes and objects, denying the conflation of secularism and modernity”.<sup>171</sup> This thesis will also resist the linear narrative of secularisation which historians dealing with any religious group feel immense pressure to speak to. This thesis positions itself against the secularisation theory by arguing that faith transformed, not disappeared, in twentieth century Britain.

Imposing the secularisation thesis onto the historical past means to ask the wrong question to begin with, because of the assumed end point whereby religion can no longer exist in any meaningful way. Because of the popularity and magnitude of the secularisation thesis, historians are thus forced to demonstrate how religion declined, by explaining the assumed failure of whatever religious group or individual they are exploring. If historians wish to combat such a view, there is still the expectation that they need to speak to these narratives and prove that decline did not happen in order to make their story of religiosity worth telling. Consequently, the religious historian has to perform intellectual somersaults in order to attempt to disprove strongly evidenced forms of religious decline. But the problem is, both things can be true: religion can have declined in some ways, and changed in others. This one side or the

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<sup>169</sup> D. Reagles, *Searching for God in Britain and Beyond: Reading Letters to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1966-1982* (Canada: 2021), p. 28.

<sup>170</sup> R. Lindley, “The Personal is Political is Spiritual”, p. 26.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

other approach means that nuanced, real stories get forced into uncomfortable categories in which they do not belong. Rather than asking “how did religion decline?” in twentieth century Britain, we should be asking “how did religion transform?”.

As Alastair Lockhart, in his study of the Panacea Society, points out, there has been an awareness amongst some historians and sociologists that “declining religious activity in visible and mainstream contexts does not necessarily imply a decline in religiosity or spirituality in society in general”.<sup>172</sup> Lockhart points out that the religious sphere is a “dynamic and mobile one”, in which we can identify non-mainstream forms of religious engagement: that is, engagement outside of the Church.<sup>173</sup> Ultimately, decline in church attendance does not map onto Moral Re-Armament’s version of spirituality – as will be explored in Chapter One, Moral Re-Armament outside of any institutional Church.

This thesis thus strongly aligns with the change-not-decline rejection of the secularisation thesis outlined above. However, it must be made clear that the changes to Moral Re-Armament’s image and activities presented throughout the thesis are not done so to argue religion did not decline; rather, they are done so to present one example of an organization which successfully continued to express its faith in a modern world. It is this persistence and transformation, and the dynamic and mobile nature of Moral Re-Armament’s faith, that this thesis sheds light on.

As Charles Taylor has outlined, we should view secularity and secularisation as “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which

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<sup>172</sup> A. Lockhart, ‘Religious and Spiritual Mobility in Britain: The Panacea Society and Other Movements in the Twentieth Century’, *Contemporary British History*, 29:2 (2015), pp. 155-178, p. 155.

<sup>173</sup> A. Lockhart, ‘Religious and Spiritual Mobility in Britain’, p. 168.

it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace”.<sup>174</sup> Viewing Christianity as one option amongst others explains the moments of crisis and strength of the Christian faith that this thesis will deal with, allowing us to understand why Moral Re-Armament was constantly shifting its approach in order to make itself, as Taylor suggested, easier “to embrace” within a changing society. This thesis accepts as truth that religion ebbs, flows, and changes within society, and this is not unique to the twentieth century. We can understand Moral Re-Armament’s changes as responses to perceived crises of Christianity, caused by these ebbs and flows, throughout the decade.

Additionally, whilst secularisation will appear within the thesis, it does so in the sense that members of Moral Re-Armament were identifying it themselves at the time, rather than it being a theoretical category imposed onto them. As Sam Brewitt-Taylor’s work outlines, many Christians were aware of the concepts of modernization and secularisation and their perceived threat to Christianity, and began acting accordingly to “jettison religion of all kinds, and embrace a new Christianity that would focus on ameliorating ‘the secular world’”.<sup>175</sup> John Carter Wood also explores the idea of “subjective secularisation”, which he claims was “widespread in the 1930s and 1940s and shaped Christian responses to modernity”.<sup>176</sup> Subjective secularisation focuses on “the perception by religiously motivated protagonists of living in societies where Christianity was being marginalized by secular movements or simply by religious indifference”.<sup>177</sup> This is important, as Wood outlines, because “large numbers of people believed [secularisation was happening] and acted accordingly”.<sup>178</sup> Secularisation thus

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<sup>174</sup> C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (London, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>175</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England and the Invention of the British Sixties, 1957-1970: The Hope of a World Transformed* (Oxford, 2018), p. 27

<sup>176</sup> J. Wood, ‘Going ‘part of the way together’: Christian Intellectuals, Modernity, and the Secular in 1930s and 1940s Britain, *Contemporary British History* 34:4 (2020), pp. 580-602, p. 580.

<sup>177</sup> J. Wood, ‘Going ‘part of the way together’, p. 580.

<sup>178</sup> J. Wood (ed), *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe: Conflict, Community, and the Social Order*, (Göttingen, 2016), p. 24.

appears in the thesis as a motivating factor for Moral Re-Armers to prompt change; however, it is not the aim of the thesis to qualify or quantify how valid these perceived threats to Christianity were. As will be explored, throughout the twentieth century, Britain was met with challenges which, often, disrupted the status quo and the assumed dominance of Christian ideology in people's lives. With the conflicts of World War One and World War Two disrupting belief in God and faith in the Church as an institution; the threat of the Cold War and Communist thought challenging Christian ideology; and greater sexual freedom in both culture and the everyday lives of individuals; Christianity was, many times, faced with a decision: adapt or decline.

Exactly how faith adapted is the focus of this thesis. In his 1989 study on Evangelism in Modern Britain, David Bebbington noted that through Moral Re-Armament "the influence of cultural modernism of evangelical religion can be detected".<sup>179</sup> Indeed, as this thesis demonstrates, Moral Re-Armament can be used to explore the changing ways in which faith was expressed to meet the changing contexts and cultural mediums of each decade.

We must take seriously Moral Re-Armament's faith and see its adaptations as deliberate decisions to ensure survival, rather than evidence of decline in the face of a modernising world. We must also move away from the narrative that these adapted versions of faith are not authentic enough to pose a serious challenge to the secularisation thesis; as David Nash asserts "we should move on from counting and assessing the supposed 'viability' of such beliefs", and instead move towards taking these expressions of faith seriously in their own right.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (London, 1989), p. 430.

<sup>180</sup> D. Nash, 'Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's Failure as a Master Narrative' *Cultural and Social History*, 1:3 (2004), pp. 302-325, p. 303.

Consequently, this thesis joins into conversation with an already rich body of work which explores the persistence of non-traditional forms of faith.

In the American context, Robert Fuller's work *Spiritual, but not Religious: understanding Unchurched America*, explores the "history and present status of unchurched religion in the United States", meaning religion with no connection to an organised religion.<sup>181</sup>

Fuller points out the difficulty of this task, in a way which strongly resonates with the explored experiences of Moral Re-Armers in Chapter Two, with their wide variety of held beliefs:

We can with some precision determine how many people regularly attend church and how many almost never do. But many individuals fall somewhere in between. To complicate matters, some church attenders are very liberal in their beliefs and find themselves attracted to a wide variety of unorthodox ideas and practices. Meanwhile, many who don't attend church continue to draw on their religious backgrounds when they find themselves praying or when they contrast stories about their own personal spiritual journeys.<sup>182</sup>

Fuller's work makes visible the individuals who are unaffiliated with a church but should be considered religious due to their participation in spiritual issues outside of formal religion, as well as the concept of "dual allegiance" in which church-goers also subscribe to a supplementary form of spirituality, such as fortune telling or astrology, in a way which bears resemblance to how Moral Re-Armers rationalised their own faith co-existing with Moral Re-Armament's beliefs and activities, as will be explored.<sup>183</sup> Crucially, this thesis agrees with Fuller's assertion that "those drawn to unchurched spirituality often have prior dissatisfaction with institutional religion as well as a keen focus on personal religious experience", something which, as Chapter One will explore, was certainly true for most Moral Re-Armers.<sup>184</sup> Sarah Williams too has explored the importance of recognising these "unchurched" forms of belief,

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<sup>181</sup> R. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>182</sup> R. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*, p. 2.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>184</sup> R. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*, p. 10

stating that by prioritising “social structures and institutions over and above mentalities and cultures”, we will continue to ignore valid forms of belief.<sup>185</sup>

Building on this idea of faith groups adapting to changing times, the thesis additionally engages with Alana Harris’ work on the revival campaigns of Billy Graham and Father Patrick Peyton, who also utilised modern media forms to create a “widespread revival of religion in Britain in the 1950s”.<sup>186</sup> Crucially, as Harris points out:

[their] success was not simply attributable to a re-presentation of old-fashioned verities, nor the reinvigoration of latent faith. Rather, a good measure of the crusaders’ success was because they intuitively articulated, through their increasing emphasis on a faith personally experienced and authentically practised, messages which resonated with the shifting social and spiritual currents of the moment.<sup>187</sup>

As Chapter Three explores, Moral Re-Armament’s media campaign mirrors that of Graham and Peyton’s, further demonstrating that the combination of traditional ideas with modern techniques represents a “shift in post-war England towards new configurations of religiosity”.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> S. Williams, ‘Victorian Religion: A Matter of Class or Culture?’, *19<sup>th</sup> Century Studies*, 19 (2003), p. 15.

<sup>186</sup> A. Harris, ‘Disturbing the Complacency of Religion?’ The Evangelical Crusades of Dr Billy Graham and Father Patrick Peyton in Britain, 1951–54’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 18:4 (2007), pp. 481-513, p. 481.

<sup>187</sup> A. Harris, ‘Disturbing the Complacency of Religion’, p. 511.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

## Thesis overview and methodology

When I began this project in 2019, I emailed Moral Re-Armament, who are now known as Initiatives of Change.<sup>189</sup> I wanted to speak to the members who had lived through the history I was writing, in an effort to reflect their experiences as accurately as possible. I was met with extreme caution: what was the tone of my project, how was I framing Moral Re-Armament, and what did I want from the members? Before proceeding with any further conversations and circulating my call for participants amongst the Moral Re-Armament community, I was referred to their Partnering management department, who would vet my questions and assess whether to allow me access. I never was allowed access, and after two years of relative silence, received this email:

We have a duty of care towards these wonderful people, many of whom have deteriorating health and are now quite vulnerable, so we are sensitive to their needs. Consequently, we did not think it was appropriate to send out a call for participants.

We appreciate that you want to avoid mischaracterising what Moral Re-Armament did. In that regard, we noted your use of the wording 'moral campaign' and wondered if you'd consider describing Moral Re-Armament 'as a movement for moral and spiritual renewal', as we think that is a more appropriate phrase.

For a group so concerned with securing their place in the history books, their reluctance to let 'outsider' historians, in, seems counterproductive. As has been established, relatively little has been written about Moral Re-Armament by those without links to them. This is largely due to problems of access: problems only exacerbated by their unwillingness to work with external researchers.

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<sup>189</sup> Email from Initiatives of Change to Grace France, 07 October 2019 14:21



The only substantial archival collection in the UK is in the Bodleian Library, and was curated and donated by Initiatives of Change themselves in 2014, and opened to researchers in 2017. This thesis represents the first extensive piece of writing that has been produced using this material. It is therefore not hard to understand the lack of historical attention Moral Re-Armament have received: before the Bodleian collection, trying to access material on Moral Re-Armament was a near impossible task. However, what we do have access to was carefully curated and donated by Initiatives of Change themselves: a careful level of filtration, and arguably, sanitisation, has already happened before it reaches the researcher's desk.

Researching Moral Re-Armament therefore called for more than relying on the material that Initiatives of Change deemed acceptable: this meant finding other, small pockets of archive material. Individuals and organisations who, like me, had tried to make sense of what Moral Re-Armament was, left behind traces: MI5's investigation into it, and Arthur Primrose Young's – a Christian Industrial Works manager with a vested interest in Moral Re-Armament's Trade Union involvement – research collection on Moral Re-Armament. It also meant curating a private collection of my own: Moral Re-Armament's pamphlets, albums and books, sold for pennies on eBay. Additionally, I was fortunate to be able to interview one ex-member of Moral Re-Armament, Geoffrey Burns – who grew up in Moral Re-Armament, attended its school, and subsequently left – who I got in contact with after reading his mother's autobiographical account of life in Moral Re-Armament: this interview is mentioned briefly in Chapter Two.

Understanding Moral Re-Armament's faith, its members, its advertising techniques, and the backlash it faced, was the principal focus of this research. This thesis does so by utilising all available archival collections relating to Moral Re-Armament available in Britain, as well as through personal collections of Moral Re-Armament's literature, films, and – surprisingly – albums, which have been collected over the years of research. Archives consulted included: the

Bodleian Library, Warwick Modern Records Centre, The British Library, The National Archives, London Metropolitan Archive, and The Women's Library at London School of Economics. Because of the nature of the source base, the thesis only explores Moral Re-Armament's activities up until the 1970s. The main archival collection at the Bodleian only comprehensively covers the years which Buchman was alive (that is, until 1961), and the investigations into Moral Re-Armament's activities from the Warwick Modern Records Centre and the National Archives reached their height in the 1950s and 60s, during the movement's arguably most controversial era due to its involvement in Trade Union affairs, as Chapter One explores. Additionally, due to closures because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and its subsequent closure for relocation, the thesis does not contain the archival material housed at Lambeth Archives, which relates to Church of England investigations into Moral Re-Armament. Chapter One and Chapter Four, certainly, would have benefitted from this material: though, the wide range of sources consulted elsewhere gave a fairly well rounded picture of the Church of England's attitudes to Moral Re-Armament.

Important to note is that, despite the transnational nature of Moral Re-Armament, with operations on a world-wide scale from its inception onwards, this thesis explores its activities within a British context. It does so not only because of the absence of such a comprehensive history of its British efforts and members, but also because exploring Moral Re-Armament's activities in Britain offers a unique insight into how faith changed in Britain throughout the twentieth century. The history of British Moral Re-Armament is uniquely positioned to speak to the exact debates ongoing about religious decline and change throughout twentieth century Britain, because it existed for the large majority of it. It was not a short lived, single issue campaign or revival. Through its decade-spanning existence, we can see how British Christians responded to the various perceived crises of faith from the World Wars, Communism, the Cold

War, the sexual liberalisation of the 1960s, and onwards. At the same time, understanding Moral Re-Armament through British history is a sensible place to start. Its key thinkers – Buchman, and later Howard – lived and worked in Britain and America for a large majority of their careers: it was to these trends in British and American faith which Moral Re-Armament was initially designed to speak to. We can therefore make sense of the changes it made throughout the twentieth century by viewing them through the lens of the countries for which the changes were intended. As aforementioned, Daniel Sack has already covered its US operations comprehensively.

Chapter One explores the origins of Moral Re-Armament's Christianity – asking what religious context it was borne out of, and thus situating it amongst existing religious institutions and movements in the early twentieth century. It is important to do so, because the various religious influences that Frank Buchman, the founder, encountered during his early life, shaped Moral Re-Armament. Having contextualised Moral Re-Armament's faith, the chapter then explores what Moral Re-Armament's central beliefs and practices were, before subsequently exploring its key phases throughout the twentieth century. Chapter One will demonstrate that by designing a practical faith, which borrowed from its evangelical and Baptist counterparts, and infusing these ideas with modern notions of self-help, Moral Re-Armament was able to constantly reinvent itself in an effort to speak to the pressing issues of each decade.

Chapter Two uses letters of support written to Frank Buchman from Moral Re-Armament supporters, to establish what Moral Re-Armament meant to those who believed in it, thus revealing the lived experience of being a Moral Re-Armer. Using the emotive & passionate letters from hundreds of Buchman's followers, the chapter will dissect exactly why people subscribed to Moral Re-Armament's ideology, and how devoted they were to its cause. By doing so, the chapter reveals the scale, impact, ambitious and widespread nature of Moral

Re-Armament. Crucially, the letter writers had a large variety of reasons for believing in Moral Re-Armament: they found in Moral Re-Armament the answer to whatever problems were most important to them, thus demonstrating the success of Moral Re-Armament's attempt to appear as the answer to any and all problems. Through these letters, we can see British Christians yearning for this different expression of Christianity to meet the perceived problems of the decades. This chapter really cements how serious people were about their faith in Moral Re-Armament.

Chapter Three explores the details of how Moral Re-Armament actually promoted and communicated its faith. By looking at the creative mediums through which Moral Re-Armament expressed itself, we can see religion being communicated outside of the traditional channels, and Moral Re-Armament utilising developments in culture to dispense its religious message. This allows us to understand how Moral Re-Armament continued to thrive in the changing cultural climate. This chapter will demonstrate how Moral Re-Armament were at the cutting edge of using propaganda, media, and other persuasive tactics to promote their ideology; tactics which even impressed and intimidated MI5 workers, causing them to refer to Moral Re-Armament as “the most forceful non-governmental organisation operating in Western Europe”.<sup>190</sup> Thus, as Chapter Three will explore, Moral Re-Armament turned secular conditions into opportunities to make lucrative and religious promotional material.

Chapter Four sheds light on the criticisms Moral Re-Armament faced throughout the twentieth century, and argues that most of these criticisms stem from the way in which Moral Re-Armament subverted the norms of what was expected of a Christian movement. By not adopting a charitable stance, or a rigid theology, Moral Re-Armament created unease amongst

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<sup>190</sup> The National Archives, The Oxford Group: Moral Re-Armament Group Catalogue, KV 5/67, Report on the ‘World Movement of Moral Re-Armament’, (n.d).

the general public and Church officials alike. Crucially, this Chapter will argue that - as opposed to the argument outlined above which posits that Christian groups failed due to their incompatibility with the modern world – Moral Re-Armament’s original aims were only met in very limited ways because they were perceived as not truly Christian enough for twentieth century Britons.

Stating the importance of studying Moral Re-Armament, Daniel Sack points out that Moral Re-Armament “may not have changed the world, but it did change lives”.<sup>191</sup> This thesis argues that in fact, Moral Re-Armament changed the way evangelical religion was practised in modern Britain. The above chapters will demonstrate that through its adaptability, Moral Re-Armament was able to speak to different contexts and through different mediums, and it was this way that Moral Re-Armament ensured the longevity of its campaign: something we can still observe today.

Looking at its successes, as well as its failures, allows us to witness how these changing expressions of faith were created and received as the twentieth century unfolded in Britain.

Frank Buchman stated in 1953:

It all comes back to basic moral truth, to Absolute Honesty, absolute purity, Absolute Unselfishness, and absolute love, to the guidance of God, and the total commitment to His Will. Without that experience we have nothing. With it, we have everything. A new world spelt out in new men. That is our only hope.<sup>192</sup>

Exactly what the new world looked like, what it meant to its followers, how its message was disseminated, and how it was received by its critics throughout the twentieth century is the focus of this thesis. Ultimately, what will be demonstrated is the ability of Christians to transform their faith to meet changing contexts, thus shedding light on the importance of

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<sup>191</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 6.

<sup>192</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 52.

historians recognising the lived experience of Christianity in twentieth century Britain in order to shift the focus away from religious decline and towards religious change.

## CHAPTER ONE: MORAL RE-ARMAMENT'S FAITH AND PHASES THROUGHOUT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

So this is God!  
How very, very odd!

So this is God!  
How very, very odd!

- Philip Leon, 1935.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Philip Leon, a Classics Lecturer from the University of Leicester, had only ever known God as an elusive character, and religion as something to debate and analyse, but not to feel and believe in.<sup>2</sup> After meeting members of Moral Re-Armament in 1935, then known as The Oxford Group, Leon's worldview – and other-world view – changed dramatically: Christianity, Leon began to believe, could be a real, practical, life-changing force for good. Leon wrote the above refrain immediately after this encounter: “So this is God! How very, very odd!”<sup>3</sup>

Leon's understanding of a Christian God had clearly been challenged by Moral Re-Armament's ideology. Leon left the meeting feeling devoted to, and invigorated in, his Christian faith, and ultimately inspired to write a book examining this encounter and spreading the message of the “world revolution” that was Moral Re-Armament's ideology.<sup>4</sup> But, what version of God and Christianity had Moral Re-Armament revealed to Leon that had seemed so “very odd”? What was different about its version of Christianity?

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<sup>1</sup> P. Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage or The Oxford Group Way* (Oxford, 1939), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Our First Staff’, *University of Leicester*, (n.d) <https://ourhistory.le.ac.uk/introduction/home/our-first-staff/>, (Accessed: September 2022).

<sup>3</sup> P. Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Leon was not alone in his sense that Moral Re-Armament was doing something different. Arthur James Russell, a Fleet Street Journalist for “the most virile and progressive London newspaper” (which he leaves unnamed), but was later identified as the *Sunday Express*, also had a transformative Christian experience upon meeting Moral Re-Armament in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> In his book, *For Sinners Only*, he wrote:

The more they talked the more convinced I was there was something brand new about these men, even though they claimed nothing more than primitive Christianity. They were not an organisation, for there was no membership; not a sect, for they were interdenominational; not really a new movement, for they were but a continuation of early Christian fellowship; not a church, but aiming at an inner spiritual fellowship in all churches.<sup>6</sup>

Russell’s experience reveals that Moral Re-Armament was experienced as something “brand new”, despite not being a new organisation, sect, or Church, but rather “a continuation of early Christian fellowship”.<sup>7</sup>

For Leon, Russell, and thousands of others, Moral Re-Armament’s way of doing religion reinvigorated Christianity’s old truths, and made them newly applicable to the ever-changing world. As Leon remarked, Moral Re-Armament “did not change [his] philosophy. Rather it confirmed it by living out that which [he] had merely guessed and written about”.<sup>8</sup> As will be demonstrated, it was the practical, real-life-applicable nature of Moral Re-Armament’s ideology which meant it was a new experience for those who encountered it. Moral Re-Armament incited a practical Christian revolution in its members; one which aimed to equip them to tackle problems and spread religion outside of the four walls of the institutional church.

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<sup>5</sup> A.J. Russell, *For Sinners Only* (New York, 1932), p. 1; P. Boobbyer, ‘Moral Re-Armament’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2014), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-96078> (Accessed 1 May 2022).

<sup>6</sup> A.J. Russell, *For Sinners*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> P. Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage*, p. 137.



Its style of Christianity was free from dogma, internal disputes, and institutional rules, and thus was experienced by members as a relatively new, energetic style of Christianity with a more universal appeal and practical potential.

As this chapter will explore, Moral Re-Armament's Christianity was based around a select few easy-to-understand rules – often made into catchy slogans and phrases. Thus, rather than getting tangled up in religious dogma and theological debates, Moral Re-Armament poured its energy into creating a Christianity which the people of the world could *do*, not just believe in. By combining Moral Re-Armament's own publications, Frank Buchman's speeches, literature and news articles written about it throughout the twentieth century, as well as existing work done by Daniel Sack and David Belden which usefully traces some of Buchman's early religious influences, this chapter will explore the design of Moral Re-Armament's practical Christianity. It will firstly identify the influences of Moral Re-Armament's Christianity – influences both from Buchman's personal life and the religious climate that existed at the time when Moral Re-Armament was formed - arguing that although Moral Re-Armament was a product of the religious and evangelical background from which it arose, it was distinctive in many of its other features. For example, its non-charitable nature and distinctly modern marketing styles - making it an example of a different type of Christianity, one not comparable with the likes of The Salvation Army, emerging in twentieth century Britain. The chapter will then explore the specifics Moral Re-Armament's ideology – the 'how-to's' of being a Moral Re-Armer – in order to further demonstrate the practical nature of Moral Re-Armament's Christianity. Finally, the chapter will explore that whilst keeping these core beliefs and practical practices central to its operations, Moral Re-Armament adapted its focus throughout the twentieth century to speak to what it perceived to be a modernising and changing Britain. However, there is a crucial nuance to this argument. As explored in the introduction, and

outlined by John Carter Wood, twentieth century Christians believed they were witnessing modern changes which posed a fundamental threat to their Christian beliefs.<sup>9</sup> Distinguishing whether or not this threat was credible is not the goal of this chapter: rather, exploring the action it prompted in Moral Re-Armament – through its creation of new phases, focuses, and delivery – in response to what John Carter Wood terms “subjective secularisation”, meaning “the perception by religiously motivated protagonists of living in societies where Christianity was being marginalized by secular movements or simply by religious indifference”.<sup>10</sup>

In the eyes of Moral Re-Armers, Britain needed a Christianity which was different, new, or as Leon termed it, “odd”: one which was trans-denominational, anti-organisational, appealing to all, and crucially, able to speak to modern concerns. As this chapter will establish, Moral Re-Armament attempted to deliver this to the British people throughout the twentieth century. Its success in doing so speaks directly to the ability of Christianity to adapt to changing contexts, thus further highlighting the flawed assumption that modernity meant the inevitable decline of Christianity.

Something borrowed, something new: contextualizing Moral Re-Armament’s faith.

Although the official stance of Frank Buchman was that Moral Re-Armament was “religion anew”, the influences of pre-existing religious practices which inspired Buchman in his creation of Moral Re-Armament’s organisation and ideology are clear.<sup>11</sup> Identifying them contextualises the religious climate out of which Moral Re-Armament arose. Frank Buchman’s personal philosophy and Moral Re-Armament’s core principles are almost inextricably connected: so

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<sup>9</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities’, p. 496.

<sup>10</sup> J. Wood, ‘Going ‘part of the way together’, p. 580.

<sup>11</sup> C. Benson, *The Eight Points of The Oxford Group* (Oxford, 1936), p. 58.

much so that Moral Re-Armament was referred to as Buchmanism interchangeably. Buchman's theological and life experiences shaped what would go on to become the core ideologies of Moral Re-Armament: it is therefore worth exploring Buchman's religious encounters en-route to founding Moral Re-Armament in some detail, in order to understand the religious climate and conversations Buchman was joining in with.

Throughout Frank Buchman's education and early life, he encountered several religious traditions which directly influenced the group he would go on to form: religions that ranged from strict Lutheran traditions, to more experimental and liberal styles of faith. The first – and longest – connection that Buchman had with an established religion was with Lutheranism. Buchman was born in 1878 into a German Lutheran family in Pennsylvania, and became a Lutheran minister in 1902. Consequently, Reverend Thornton-Duesbery commented in 1932 that Buchman was “firmly grounded in the best traditions of Lutheran theology”.<sup>12</sup>

At a young age, Buchman was sent to a seminary school run by the Schwenkfelders, who practiced a more liberal style of Lutheranism which moved away from ritual and towards a freer spirituality.<sup>13</sup> The Schwenkfelders were a German pietist sect, considered the most liberal in the area, who believed in daily, individual contact with God.<sup>14</sup> The Schwenkfelders' core belief was that “people could communicate directly with God, that true spirituality didn't need all the machinery of hierarchies and priests and sacraments”.<sup>15</sup> The desire was to create a theological system which would appeal to all Christians, by removing the traditions and sacraments which came with institutional religion. This desire to be cross-denominational, as well as to encourage direct communication with God, clearly translates into Buchman's

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<sup>12</sup> J. Thornton-Duesbery, ‘Dr Frank Buchman and the Group Movement’, paper presented at The Cheltenham and Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen, 8 April 1932.

<sup>13</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> S. Golberg, ‘Meet The Schwenkfelders’, *The Smart Set*, (2014), <https://thesmartset.com/article05161401>, (Accessed 1 June 2019).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

programme in Moral Re-Armament. As will be explored, Moral Re-Armament required its members to have direct communication with God daily, through a process referred to Listening to God and Quiet Time.

After high school, Buchman attended Muhlenberg College, which was run by the Lutheran Ministerium and aimed to provide the Lutheran Church with a steady stream of ministers.<sup>16</sup> Here, as biographer Garth Lean points out, Buchman's hopes for the future were displayed in a speech he delivered in 1899, entitled *The Dawn*:

When, in the twilight of the coming century, the roll will be called of those who figure prominently in the moulding and guiding of our nation, may we hope that the names of some of us may appear thereon. Though our names may not appear on earth's scroll of fame, may they appear on Heaven's roll of honour.<sup>17</sup>

Buchman graduated from college in 1899 with this in mind: he wanted to make a name for himself both on earth and in heaven. From here, he went to Philadelphia to attend the Lutheran theological seminary at Mount Airy in Germantown.<sup>18</sup>

After attending a meeting of the Lutheran Church's Inner Mission Society in 1901, Buchman was left "moved" by the movement's focus on reuniting the masses with the Church and the call to "visit the sick, lift up the fallen, counsel the tempted, cheer the aged, instruct the ignorant and reclaim the children".<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Buchman went on to join the Sunshine Society: a group which carried out charitable work for orphans.<sup>20</sup> However, this image of a charitable Buchman, inspired to do good in the Lord's name, is quite far from the type of movement Buchman would go on to form. Perhaps more recognisable was his subsequent

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<sup>16</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

experience at the Northfield Student Conference in Massachusetts in 1901, where Buchman first encountered the idea of conversion rather than charity as a Christian's true calling.

The Northfield Student Conference was founded by the evangelist Dwight L. Moody. It is impossible to say with any degree of certainty, but it seems possible that witnessing a powerful man, with thousands of listening ears, and a zeal for converting individuals for his own Church, planted in a seed in Buchman that he would like to do the same. Moody emphasised his unwillingness to work within the confines of denominational differences, and so worked to transcend them, thus widening his potential conversion pool to include all types of Christians and non-Christians, something Buchman would later emulate in his own work.<sup>21</sup> According to Buchman, the experience of seeing Moody changed his whole life, and it was here he decided that his life was to be devoted to converting people to Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Individual Baptists also played a part in the development of the Buchman's theological thought – notably F.B. Meyer, who had hosted the aforementioned Moody's first evangelical meetings in Britain and whom he had remained close associates with since.<sup>23</sup> Buchman also heard Meyer speak at Northfield. According to Ian Randall, Meyer had been the first to advise Buchman that he should set an hour a day aside to listen to God as a way of opening up direct communication. Additionally, Baptist Oswald Chambers had also been influential: Buchman took inspiration from his view that God was not being heard “because we are so full of noisy, introspective thoughts”.<sup>24</sup> Chambers had advised Buchman about the importance of engaging directly with the currents of popular intellectual thought, and engaging with real world issues

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<sup>21</sup> M. McGeown, 'The Life and Theology of D.L Moody', *Covenant Protestant Reformed Church* (n.d), <https://cprc.co.uk/articles/moody/> (Accessed 5 September 2022).

<sup>22</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 17; A. J. Russell: *For Sinners Only* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), pp.148-50.

<sup>23</sup> I. Randall, 'Arresting People for Christ: Baptists and the Oxford Group in the 1930s', *Baptist Quarterly*, 38:1 (1999), pp. 3-18, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> I. Randall, 'Arresting People for Christ', p. 5.

rather than taking an isolated spiritual approach.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Baptist influence on Moral Re-Armament was substantial: with Moody's cross-denominational approach, Meyer's advice about talking directly to God, and Chambers' advice to engage with real world issues, all of which would go on to be core principles of Moral Re-Armament. For Buchman, such meetings were pivotal. As Garth Lean reports, Buchman's letters back home to his family appeared to mark a change in tone after this encounter: Buchman would be constantly reporting on individuals he had converted, marking a more "self-important" tone combined with unsound theology.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of this change in focus, the Christian predisposition to charity still ruled Buchman's decisions for the time-being. In 1905, Buchman took on the role of Housefather at a Lutheran Hospice for poorer members of society.<sup>27</sup> The aim was to provide a warm, family-style home for those in need.<sup>28</sup> Ample meal, shelter and care were provided: but soon, the Board of the Hospice began to grow concerned over the expense of the operation.<sup>29</sup> They believed Buchman was being too extravagant in his caring for the guests.<sup>30</sup> In retort, Buchman submitted a seventeen-page document to the board, defending his position and the success of the hospice.<sup>31</sup> In this document, Buchman also asked for more power in the running of the hospice, and extra salary and vacation time.<sup>32</sup> When it became clear that this was not a likely outcome, Buchman submitted his resignation.<sup>33</sup> This incident is immortalised in most Moral Re-Armament accounts of Buchman's early life - most recently in the Initiatives of Change film

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<sup>25</sup> B. Chambers, *Oswald Chambers: His Life and Work* (Eugene, 1941), p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman – A Life*, (London, 1985), p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Man Who Built Peace* (2018) - as a dispute over Buchman wanting to give more food to the poor, during which Buchman acted selflessly, putting his job on the line in order to line the bellies of the poor.<sup>34</sup> Rarely do these accounts mention Buchman's denied request for a salary raise as a motivation for his swift exit.

Consumed by bitterness, and funded by his parents, Buchman travelled around Europe to try and relieve some of the hatred he was feeling towards the board which had forced him away from what he viewed as his life's purpose.<sup>35</sup> Buchman found himself in Britain, where he attended the Keswick Convention in the hopes of seeking the advice of F.B Meyer, the evangelist whom Buchman had met in Northfield.<sup>36</sup> The Keswick Movement – also referred to as the Higher Life movement or Holiness Theology - held an annual meeting originally for Anglicans, but subsequently many other denominations of Christians, who desired greater spiritual depth and more intense experiences of faith in their lives.<sup>37</sup> It grew out a mood of faltering enthusiasm for institutional religion, which Anglicanism, the Plymouth Brethren and British Methodism attempted to revive through a renewed emphasis on personal experiences of faith and a move away from strict literalistic interpretations of the Bible.<sup>38</sup> Those attending the convention hoped to achieve this by learning how to apply biblical teachings to real life. Crucially, the convention had no membership rolls or denominational rules: something which, as will be explored, Buchman emulated with Moral Re-Armament.<sup>39</sup> The Keswick Movement

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<sup>34</sup> *The Man Who Built Peace*, (Initiatives of Change, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to The 1980s*, (London, 1989), p. 280; Keswick Ministries, 'History', *Keswick Ministries*, <https://keswickconvention.ca/about/history> (Accessed 1 May 2023).

<sup>38</sup> D. Bundy, *Keswick: A Bibliographic Introduction to the Higher Life Movements* (Kentucky, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> D. Bundy, *Keswick*, p. 9.

was a movement which came to be seen as the “religious equivalent of the secular cult of self-help improvement”, where changing yourself as an individual was seen as the core task.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately for Buchman, F.B Meyer was not at the Keswick convention, but he stayed and attended several services, including that of Jessie Penn-Lewis who had worked with Meyer during the Welsh Revival of 1904-5. It was during Penn-Lewis’ talk that Buchman realised how the harbouring of his ill-will towards the six board members had created great distance between himself and Christ. Buchman, too, finally realised his own wrongdoing in the *Home for Working Boys* situation: “I began to see myself as God saw me, which was a very different picture than the one I had of myself. I don’t know how you explain it, I can only tell you I sat there and realised how my sin, my pride, my selfishness and my ill-will, had eclipsed me from God in Christ”.<sup>41</sup> This experience motivated Buchman to write to the six board members asking for their forgiveness, a process which he felt immediately made his life lighter and brought him closer to Christ. As Archie Mackenzie, another associate of Buchman, outlines: Buchman “felt such a strong sense of release that he told the other delegates in the hotel of his experience”.<sup>42</sup> After listening to a sermon at Keswick by the Welsh revivalist Jessie Penn-Lewis, Buchman had a “poignant vision of the Crucified” and surrendered his life to God. He recalled: “it was to me as if a strong stream of life suddenly passed through me, at the same time as my surrender”.<sup>43</sup> Through these encounters, we can see Buchman’s theological beginnings as part of this larger trend of evangelists in Britain. Moral Re-Armament was thus tapping into a mood which had been developing for many decades: a mood of Christians looking for a more meaningful faith outside of the institutional Church.

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<sup>40</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 305.

<sup>41</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> A. Mackenzie, *Frank Buchman’s Legacy* (London, 2008), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> P. Boobbyer, *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman*, p. 12.



Through these encounters, we can also see Methodist influence on Moral Re-Armament, with its emphasis of salvation by personal experience: that is, the importance of being aware of sin and asking for forgiveness, rather than a simple relying on the sacraments of the Church to ensure forgiveness. Such an idea had strong influences in Wales, which had experienced a Methodist Revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century which had created a nonconformist society.<sup>44</sup> Yet, this society was losing its religious focus – the reason for which was attributed by contemporaries to the rise of socialism, new scientific knowledge, and new cultural activities distracting followers - prompting a revival in 1904, which began in Wales but spread to other parts of the world.<sup>45</sup> By transforming religion into something more accessible, and seemingly more important in solving the world’s perceived ills, the Welsh revivalists captured the attention of waning Christians and non-Christians alike. Two evangelicals involved in this revival – F.B Meyer and Jessie Penn-Lewis – would greatly influence Buchman’s style of faith.

With these influences brewing in Buchman’s mind, he returned to America where he took up a position as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Secretary at Pennsylvania State College, something Buchman was originally reluctant to do due to Penn State’s reputation as “the most godless university in the country”.<sup>46</sup> Regardless, in letters back home to family members, Buchman reported great success within months of his starting.<sup>47</sup> As Daniel Sack remarks, these Penn State years were “the laboratory where Buchman developed his evangelical style”.<sup>48</sup> Within three years, the YMCA had more than 75% of the student body as members, compared to 35% when Buchman had arrived.<sup>49</sup> It was during this time that

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<sup>44</sup> C. R Williams, ‘The Welsh Religious Revival, 1904-5’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 3:3 (1952), pp. 242-259.

<sup>45</sup> C. R Williams, ‘The Welsh Religious Revival, 1904-5’.

<sup>46</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*,, p. 35.

Buchman began allowing for an hour of quiet time in the mornings where he could receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> Buchman would go on to convert many students at Penn State, before leaving in 1915 for a religious campaign in India, at the invitation of the evangelist Sherwood Eddy, who had also have a profound religious experience at the Northfield Student Conference before going on to work for the YMCA.<sup>51</sup>

During this trip, Buchman met Howard Walter – a “fellow believer in the principles of personal evangelism” – who wrote what would go on to be the “most systematic presentation of Buchman’s evangelical method”, *Soul Surgery: Some Thoughts on Incisive Personal Work*.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, during the India trip, Buchman witnessed large scale preaching to audiences of tens of thousands, organised by the different YMCA factions in India, something he deemed largely ineffective, emphasising again the need for personal, small-scale conversion work where they could deal with the details and individual spiritual needs of people: something he and Walter would go on to term *Soul Surgery*.<sup>53</sup> In 1916, Buchman was offered a job at the Hartford Theological Seminary, where he trained students in personal work.<sup>54</sup> Then, in 1917 Buchman left for China with a group of YMCA missionaries, hoping to put into practice his process of Soul Surgery.<sup>55</sup> Summarising this journey, Garth Lean states: “at Penn State he had found that people could change radically and that, through such change in individuals, the tone of an institution could be altered; and in China he had come to believe that what was true for a university could prove true for a nation”.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16; R. Nutt, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Sherwood Eddy and the American Protestant Mission* (Georgia, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 49.

<sup>55</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 73.

Upon his return to England in 1921, Buchman reports that he heard the voice of God tell him “you will be used to remake the world”.<sup>57</sup> The aftermath of the World War One served as a catalyst for Buchman’s call to action. Buchman, rightly or wrongly, observed that the devastation of the war had brought about cynicism and loss of faith, meaning that his approach would have to be more intense. It was then, in 1921, that he formed The Oxford Group: an evangelical, and anti-institutional group, influenced heavily by the Baptist and revivalist traditions which Buchman had encountered up until this point.

The decision for Buchman to operate with the Oxford Group in evangelical spaces, rather than establish itself as a new, formal religion, was both tactical and born out of Buchman’s personal distaste for institutional religion and all its perceived pitfalls. The decision was tactical because, as already alluded to, many religions - notably, Catholicism – forbade its members from following any other external religions. Therefore, if Moral Re-Armament was considered a supplement to existing religions, it was not limiting its member pool by excluding those who already belonged. Indeed, Alcoholics Anonymous historian Terrance Hodgins noted that Frank Buchman “always maintained that converts should remain in their own church. New people may be converted to believing in Buchmanism, but they were supposed to continue as members of their original church while simultaneously attending numerous Group meetings”.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, Father John A. Hardon wrote in 1956 that:

Moral Rearmament is not a new organization which prescribes allegiance to a system of truths or precepts, but avowedly is only a means of deepening the truths which every man must hold. It is neither a church nor a religious sect. There are no dogmas to profess; no rites to practice. Moral Re-Armament exists only to change the lives of men, to make zealous reformers out of sinners, who still remain members of their individual churches.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 93.

<sup>58</sup> T. Hodgins, ‘The Religious Roots of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps’, *Orange Papers*, (2014), <https://www.orange-papers.org/orange-root090.html> (Accessed 1 June 2019).

<sup>59</sup> Fr. J. A. Hardon, ‘An Evaluation of Moral Rearmament’, *American Ecclesiastical Review* (1335), (1956), pp. 217-226.

A more prevailing force in the decision to resist being viewed as an official religion was Buchman's "strong distaste" for existing institutional religions and their comfortable "nice arm chair" faith, one which he viewed as ineffective in solving real world problems, evidenced by what he perceived as the spiritual crisis plaguing the world after World War One.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Moral Re-Armament was largely founded as a protest against "committee-ised and lifeless Christian work".<sup>61</sup>

When the Oxford Group was founded in 1921, it was joining a wider movement of practical Christianity – meaning, a Christianity that could be lived and experienced outside of the Church - which was already operating in Britain. Groups such as The Salvation Army had been active since 1865, with an aim to "escape from the constraints of denominationalism, in order to pursue a spiritual agenda of revivalism in seeking the salvation and the sanctification of all, across the denominations and beyond".<sup>62</sup> The Salvation Army's holiness theology drove their urge to "transform the secular world in the Kingdom of God", meaning, previously 'un-religious' spaces became places of spirituality and faith.<sup>63</sup> And places completely devoid of faith – brothels, bars and dancehalls – were also targeted by the Salvation Army in their "pursuit of lost souls".<sup>64</sup> In an effort to not preach to the choir, the Army operated outside of conventionally religious spaces in order to forge a faith outside of the physical boundaries of the Church walls, and the spiritual boundaries of denominational difference. Winston terms such efforts the Salvation Army's "cathedral of the open air".<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> I. Randall, 'Arresting People for Christ', p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> D. Taylor, *Like a Mighty Army: The Salvation Army, the Church and the Churches* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 261.

<sup>63</sup> D. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (New York, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> D. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> D. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, p. 10.

Despite differences in style, goals, and crucially, Moral Re-Armament's lack of charitable works, both The Salvation Army and Moral Re-Armament operated worldwide to spread the Word of God outside of the institutional Church: they were both focussed on a vernacular Christianity, one which could exist in the streets and the homes of the average Briton. Both groups possessed an ability to adapt their faith to their surroundings, thus moving with societal changes. Whilst one war correspondent wrote of The Salvation Army that "they apply their Christianity to whatever needs to be done at the moment", another noted that "they seem to be just as religious when frying doughnuts or axing the machinery of Fords . . . as when mounted on a cracker-box for a pulpit".<sup>66</sup>

Crucially, as this section has begun to demonstrate, Moral Re-Armament was not the first, nor the last, Christian group which had arisen from a place of being dissatisfied with the existing forms and expression of religion. The new nature of Moral Re-Armament must not get lost, however, when tracing its influences. By combining various influences, and infusing them with his own personal ideologies and new approaches, Buchman created a different religious experience. As Daniel Sack remarks, Buchman's "evangelical style brought together Lutheran theology, Schwenkfelder mysticism, Keswick perfectionism, and YMCA personal work, resulting in something entirely different".<sup>67</sup>

There are notable differences between Buchman's efforts and contemporary approaches of other evangelicals, such as revivals. As A.J Russell outlined in 1932, Moral Re-Armament members preferred to be referred to as "life changers" not evangelists. They paid tribute to their evangelical influences whilst realising that a new age required new approaches – emotionalism and religious jargon which dominated old style Christian revivals were abandoned in favour of

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<sup>66</sup> D. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, p. 218.

<sup>67</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 26.

intellectual, rational discussions about the need for change through a belief in God.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, Buchman was always sure to assert that Moral Re-Armament was not a revival:

I know what some of you would like out of the Oxford Group – a nice comfortable awakening; you would call it a revival. A nice armchair religion. I am not interested, nor do I think it adequate, if we are going to begin just to start another revival. The next step is revolution.<sup>69</sup>

For Buchman, short-lived revivalism was not enough to meet the challenges that Christians were facing. Buchman wanted something more permanent for his followers. As Ian Randall notes, by the 1930s, Buchman viewed revivalism as a kind of “spiritual deformity”.<sup>70</sup> Instead, as David Bebbington argues, Moral Re-Armament “blended evangelicalism with the growing interest in exploring interpersonal relationships, self-expression, therapy and non-institutional modes of living” to create an experience which was distinct from both the institutional church and more traditional forms of religious revival.<sup>71</sup> Bebbington points out that members believed they were engaging in a form of therapy, in which confession led to an unburdening of sorts, and salvation for the soul. Indeed, traces of psychotherapy, self-help, and mental-hygiene can be seen in the practices of Moral Re-Armament. Alison Falby argues that, within the American context, this type of “lay psychotherapy” visible in Moral Re-Armament – whereby practices of group confession encouraged sharing and healing – can be seen as the root of what we recognise as the modern, psychological confessional practice of therapy.<sup>72</sup> Such a combination of religion and psychology created “much wider ways of being religious”.<sup>73</sup> A 1939 commentator Hilary J. Carpenter, writing for *Blackfriars* - a Catholic publication, based

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<sup>68</sup> Russel, *For Sinners Only*, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> I. Randall, ‘We All Need Constant Change: The Oxford Group and Mission in Europe in the 1930s’, *European Journal of Theology*, 9:2 (2000), pp.171–85, p. 183.

<sup>71</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 428

<sup>72</sup> A. Falby, ‘The Modern Confessional: Anglo-American Religious Groups and The Emergence of Lay Psychotherapy’, *Journal of History of the Behavioural Sciences* 39:3 (2003), pp. 251-267.

<sup>73</sup> A. Falby, ‘The Modern Confessional’.

in Oxford - noted that Moral Re-Armament's ideology featured Christian views which were "mixed up with a certain measure of knowledge in the realm of psycho-analysis", adding that: "Buchman himself shows a queer mixture of Lutheranism and psychology".<sup>74</sup> Again, this emphasis on personal experience and self-help probably can be attributed to Buchman's own background. Buchman – being an American – can be seen as part of a larger trend of the "great wave from America", which brought holiness theology to the forefront of British evangelicalism: put simply, Holiness Theology held that every individual should have a 'second' encounter with God at some point in their life, a 'conversion' of sorts which allows the individual to live a life closer to God.<sup>75</sup> This was a movement which came to be seen as the "religious equivalent of the secular cult of self-help improvement", where changing yourself as an individual was seen as the core task.<sup>76</sup> We can particularly see these influences in Moral Re-Armament's 1920s campus-based work, which focussed on personal confessions, as will be explored. B.H Streeter, a biblical scholar, noted in 1935 that the practice of confession in Moral Re-Armament, which will be explored, was more a therapeutic act than something "concerned with moral values", like it was in the Catholic Church, for example. Streeter continues, "sharing [is] something conducive to psychological health in that the expression of moral conflicts, resentments or phobias was likely to result in the relief of psychological tension".<sup>77</sup>

We can also trace the influence of the mental-hygiene movement on Buchman's practices. The mental-hygiene movement focussed on the "prevention of mental disease, mental defect, delinquency, and the many milder forms of social maladjustment and inefficiency", through "the management of the bodily powers in regard to exercise, rest, food, clothing and

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<sup>74</sup> H. Carpenter, 'Moral Re-Armament', *Blackfriars* 20: 229 (1939), pp. 248-262.

<sup>75</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 303.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>77</sup> P. Boobbyer, 'B. H. Streeter and The Oxford Group', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 61:3 (2010), pp. 541-567, p. 558.

climate, the laws of breeding, the government of the passions, the sympathy with current emotions and opinions, the discipline of the intellect”.<sup>78</sup> Buchman was in frequent contact with Seventh-Day Adventist Doctor and prominent Mental Hygiene figure John Kellogg, who combined his religious beliefs with scientific practice to deliver a wellness experience at his Battle Creek Sanitarium. Ellen White, an early prophet of the Seventh-Day Adventist movement, had a revelation in 1863 that there needed to be “abstinence from eating meats of any kind, and from the use of alcohol, tobacco and tea or coffee”.<sup>79</sup> This abstinence would be practiced in the Health Reform Institute, which would become Battle Creek Sanitarium. According to Historian Daniel Sack, and letters shared between Buchman and Kellogg, Buchman and fellow Moral Re-Armers stayed at the Sanitarium regularly.<sup>80</sup> Buchman wrote to Kellogg in 1939, stating that “I value all of your help in making this place a demonstration spot for people from all corners of the world to realize what a true aristocracy of health can mean for the future of civilisation”.<sup>81</sup> In fact, Dr Kellogg catered a 1927 Oxford Group House Party.<sup>82</sup> Though never officially attributing his decision to enforce abstinence from alcohol and smoking in Moral Re-Armament to his encounters with the likes of Kellogg, we can assume that socialising within such circles presented Buchman with ideas about seemingly modern and cutting edge ways to approach the mental health of the nation. Interestingly, in a 1954 Moral Re-Armament meeting at Caux, an unknown Indian doctor likened his Caux experience to that

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<sup>78</sup> J. W. Bridges, ‘The Mental Hygiene Movement’, *The Public Health Journal*, 1:XIX (1928), p. 1 ; A.M. Rossi, ‘Some Pre-World War II Antecedents of Community Mental Health Theory and Practice’, *Mental Hygiene* 46 (1962), pp. 78-94

<sup>79</sup> A. Beebe, *The History of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, 1866-1903* (Michigan, 1949), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from Secretary & Business Manager to Frank Buchman, 29 November 1932.

<sup>81</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 205.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.



of a Sanatorium, stating: the medicine is the Four Absolute standards, the prescription the Quiet Time, the taking of medicine the putting one's thoughts into practice.<sup>83</sup>

Moral Re-Armament was also infused with ideas around the importance of physical health. A 1930s Moral Re-Armer, Hallen Viney, wrote to Buchman exploring the possibility of a “healthy men's group” for young Moral Re-Armers, and refers Frank to a London-based “Games coach and physical culture expert” Captain Welsh in 1931.<sup>84</sup> Viney wasn't alone in his focus on the importance of physical fitness for a strong Christian faith. Moral Re-Armament films from the 1930s show fitness being incorporated into their weekend camps. The 1938 film *Youth Awake* includes footage from a girls' summer camp. The film begins, “Moral Re-Armament means new life and fitness”, before cutting to a shot of the women exercising outside (Figure Four).<sup>85</sup> A film of Moral Re-Armament's “first national assembly”, in Birmingham, 1936 shows similar scenes of the male attendees exercising together, as does footage from a 1937 Birmingham camp (Figure Five).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> F. Buchman, ‘Frank Buchman in chair. Speakers from America, Germany and India’, Caux Meeting 1 January 1954, <https://www.foranewworld.info/material/talks/meetings/caux-meeting-01-january-1954-16>, (Accessed 7 April 2023).

<sup>84</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/157, letter from Hallen Viney to Frank Buchman 10<sup>th</sup> March 1930 ; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/157, letter from Hallen Viney to Frank Buchman 1<sup>st</sup> May 1931

<sup>85</sup> Moral Re-Armament, *Youth Awake Girls' Camp* (1939), <https://vimeo.com/437798525> (Accessed 7 April 2023)

<sup>86</sup> British Pathé, *Oxford Group Camp in Birmingham*, (1937), <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/oxford-group-camp/query/the+Oxford+group> (Accessed 7 April 2023)



Figure Three: Footage of women exercising at Moral Re-Armament camp: Moral Re-Armament's 1938 film, *Youth Awake*.



Figure Four: Footage of men exercising at Moral Re-Armament camp: Moral Re-Armament's 1936 film, *Rousing a Nation*.

This Christian emphasis on health was not unique to Moral Re-Armament. Speaking in 1901 to the Boston Branch of the Young Men’s Christian Association, religious psychologist Granville Stanley Hall stated “health means holiness”.<sup>87</sup> The connection which Stanley Hall outlined was between physical strength and wellbeing and soundness of the mind: “as muscles grow weak and flabby, the chasm between knowing and doing the right, in which so many men are lost, yawns wide and deep”.<sup>88</sup> “Muscle culture”, as he refers to it, has moral effects: “we are soldiers of Christ, strengthening our muscles not against a foreign foe, but against sin within and without us”.<sup>89</sup> Donald Hall’s study of “Muscular Christianity” traces the roots of such an idea back to Charles Kingsley’s 1857 work *Two Years Ago*, which presents the ideal of a man “who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours... who breathes God’s free air on God’s rich earth and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker around his fingers”.<sup>90</sup> Hall highlights the association made by contemporaries between “physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself”, something which was deemed essential in periods of threatening changes.<sup>91</sup> Moral Re-Armament’s call for its followers to neither drink nor smoke begins to become clear when considering this emphasis on physical well-being as an essential characteristic for strong, Christian life-changers. Physical culture and strong bodies was thus, in some Christian minds, equated with strong faith. However, these examples on the emphasis on physical health largely dwindled after the 1930s. Indeed, it was common in Moral Re-Armament that some ideas would come and go without manifesting into anything meaningful. Buchman’s willingness to experiment with different forms of practising faith – a sort of throw it at the wall and see what

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<sup>87</sup> G.S Hall, ‘Christianity and Physical Culture’, *The Pedagogical Seminary*, 9:3 (1902), pp. 374-378.

<sup>88</sup> G.S Hall, ‘Christianity and Physical Culture’.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> D. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (New York, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>91</sup> D. Hall, *Muscular Christianity*, p. 7.

sticks attitude to theology – is evident. Buchman was thus in tune with, and engaged with, emerging trends in psychological and physical health, regardless of whether these became permanent features of Moral Re-Armament’s approach.

As A.J Russell outlined in 1932, “this was the “same old Christianity, but one so intelligently phrased it became a fresh challenge”.<sup>92</sup> This intelligent phrasing came in the form of Moral Re-Armament’s ability to translate faith from something preached about within Church walls, to something members could actively live out in their day to day lives. However, its distinctive nature also came from its efforts to stand separately from the revival campaigns and charitable Christian groups which came before, infusing its practice with a fresh emphasis on physical and mental wellbeing.

We can therefore see how Moral Re-Armament drew inspiration from various religious and evangelical influences, and how it also set out to do things differently from the groups that had come before, making it a religious group that would leave an established philosopher such as the aforementioned Philip Leon with the impression he had just experienced Christianity in an entirely new way. With regard to its evangelical influences, Moral Re-Armament pushed the boundaries of evangelicalism further, by undergoing what Bebbington terms “an exercise in maximum acculturation”, with its specific ability to adapt to cultural moods and variations; a process which often meant an abandonment of specific theological terminology so not to deter potential non-religious recruits, a move which attracted criticism from many within the Evangelical movement.<sup>93</sup> Writing in 1930 after attending an Oxford Group House Party, a journalist for Blackfriars questioned why people were joining Moral Re-Armament. The answer, they found, was that: “some of them said quite frankly that they were seeking an answer

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<sup>92</sup> A.J Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 426.

they were not finding in their own denominational churches”.<sup>94</sup> Moral Re-Armament’s practical Christianity offered these discontented Christians with a new way of practicing their faith. As Buchman stated in 1943: “you will find here the old fundamental truths – but you get them with a mighty, moving crescendo”.<sup>95</sup> The practical elements of this “mighty, moving crescendo” will be explored next.

### A practical religion – cells of living Christianity<sup>96</sup>

Writing in 1933, anonymous author “the Layman with a notebook”, stated that:

Practical Christianity is the only possible solution to the economic and peace problems of the world. There is no other solution. Every other method has failed and will always fail. Wars are not the invention of the man-in-the-street but of the man seated in a comfortable armchair behind bullet-proof walls. The aim of the Oxford Group is to penetrate those walls with a common-sense message from Jesus Christ; to Change the World to Christ by Changing lives; to make every one face squarely not only his own problems but World problems without fear or favour and to solve these problems by Changing those responsible for them. Ambitious? Yes, but what an ambition for you to have, too!<sup>97</sup>

Such a statement captures the nature of Moral Re-Armament’s practical Christianity: one which aimed to “change the world by changing lives”, and hoped to see real world changes as a result of doing so. Moral Re-Armament did not require its members to grasp theological concepts of heaven and hell or wrap their heads around the bible from front page to back. It instead focussed on practical life changes, and consequently, made its ideology relatively simple to follow. The hope of this, as summarised by the above quote, was that the walls of the real world could be penetrated with Moral Re-Armament’s “common-sense message”, resulting in total world

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<sup>94</sup> J. Shrady Post, ‘What Happens at a Buchman House Party’, *Blackfriars*, 11:129 (1930), pp. 715-724.

<sup>95</sup> Speech in Mackinac Island, July 1943, K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 32

<sup>96</sup> I. Randall, ‘Arresting People for Christ: Baptists and the Oxford Group in the 1930s’, p. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group* (New York, 1933), p. 69.

change. The emphasis on personal responsibility - the need to change yourself as an individual before the world could change – was also part of Moral Re-Armament’s design. As will be explored in Chapter Two, this real-world change refers to changes in politics, sexual morality, Christian belief and world-peace.

The rules of being a Moral Re-Armer – many of which have taken obvious inspiration from a variety of evangelical groups - can be summarised as such. First, followers were expected to practise Listening to God in a daily quiet time – a sort of meditation in which they would receive guidance directly from God and then act upon it in their day to day lives. Secondly, throughout their lives, they were expected to follow the Four Absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness and Absolute Love. It was these two things combined: following God’s direct orders through daily quiet time, and acting in accordance with the ‘Four Absolute’ standards, that Moral Re-Armament believed could change every man, woman and child’s way of living, and consequently, the world. More specific expectations came with each of these steps: for example, absolute purity meant there was no drinking, sex or smoking.<sup>98</sup> Such an attitude was likely inspired by YMCA leader and friend of Buchman, John Mott, who also took a stand against the use of alcohol, calling for “pure Christianity” which would resisted western social evils, one of them being smoking and alcohol, as well as by the same attitude adopted by the likes of The Salvation Army, and Moral Re-Armament’s Methodist influences.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Moral Re-Armament were not unusual in their focus on abstinence from alcohol: it was a common feature of religious groups such as the Quakers, Methodists and Baptists. Members of Moral Re-Armament, Bill Wilson and Dr Bob were inspired to quit drinking through Buchman’s guidance and subsequently formed Alcoholics

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<sup>98</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group* (New York, 1933), pp. 73-107.

<sup>99</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 61.

Anonymous.<sup>100</sup> Smoking and drinking were common sins which were allegedly cured at early Moral Re-Armament house parties, as outlined throughout *For Sinners Only*.<sup>101</sup> This attitude surrounding abstinence from both alcohol and sex was consistent from Moral Re-Armament's inception onwards. Writing in 1972, a Moral Re-Armament author stated that alcoholics "wreck not only their own lives but also those of their families"; of sex, they wrote that sex distracted our energy away from other, useful efforts, and that "adlib sex in or out of marriage does not satisfy. It destroys trust. Breaks up homes. Kills the conscience. In the midst of sex people get moody, self-centred, dull-eyed, bad-tempered, sloppy at work".<sup>102</sup>

With the Four Absolutes and memorable anagrams like P-R-A-Y (Powerful radiograms, always yours), Moral Re-Armament attempted to make itself an easily remembered and accessible faith.<sup>103</sup> No year-spanning processes of Christening, Communion, and Confirmation stood in the way of becoming a member of Moral Re-Armament; you just began living life following the above principles – no official membership ever existed. As Bebbington highlights, and Chapter Three explores, the practice of putting "programmes into slogans" adopted by American advertisers, was one of Buchman's shining abilities at making Moral Re-Armament so easily accessible and liveable.<sup>104</sup>

For something to have a real-world effect, people needed to understand how to do it. What Moral Re-Armament did therefore, by drawing on its influences from the Evangelical realm, was make its ideology simple to both understand and act upon. As well as making it more accessible, this also meant that Moral Re-Armament could spread with more ease, as there

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<sup>100</sup> Recounted in many places: J. Stinnet, 'Frank Buchman and Alcoholics Anonymous, *For A New World*, <https://www.foranewworld.info/material/articles/frank-buchman-and-alcoholics-anonymous> (Accessed April 2023); E. Kurtz *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Minnesota, 1979).

<sup>101</sup> A.J Russell, *For Sinners Only*.

<sup>102</sup> S. Cook and G. Lean, *The Black and White Book*, (London, 1972), p. 47.

<sup>103</sup> A.J Russell, *For Sinners Only* (Arizona, 1932), p. 68.

<sup>104</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to The 1980s*, (London, 1989), p. 430.

was no formal signing up process standing in the way of becoming an active Moral Re-Armer; as most of their publications point out, you just started living like a Moral Re-Armer to become one. Let us look at each of the Moral Re-Armament processes in detail, in order to highlight exactly what being a Moral Re-Armer entailed, and what Moral Re-Armament's practical Christianity looked like.

### Quiet Time, or Listening to God

Having daily, direct communication with God was an essential task for Moral Re-Armers. It was through this process that they received guidance on how to proceed with all aspects of their life. As stated, the process of Listening to God was already practiced by F.B Meyer, who had advised Buchman to take up the habit, something he was already familiar with due to his previous Schwenkfelder education (who believed in daily contact with God).<sup>105</sup> The YMCA for whom Buchman had been a Secretary, practiced a "morning watch" to focus on prayer also.<sup>106</sup>

*Soul Surgery* (1919) by Howard Arnold Walter and co-authored by Buchman set out the very early principles of what would become Moral Re-Armament. Arguing for the importance of what Walter termed "personal evangelism", meaning promoting personal work over prayer and bible study, Walter explains the rationale behind the core Moral Re-Armament practices.<sup>107</sup> Stating that "one main reason why there is such laxity in prayer and Bible study among Christian people is, that those practices are considered to be ends in themselves instead of pre-eminently the means of daily equipment and guidance for effective personal evangelism."<sup>108</sup> Part of this 'daily equipment' was quiet time: a process which Walter argues

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<sup>105</sup> I. Randall, 'Arresting People for Christ', p. 6

<sup>106</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 13

<sup>107</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery: Some Thoughts On Incisive Personal Work*, (Oxford, 1919), p. 27.

<sup>108</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery*, p. 28.



brought spirits “into tune with the infinite”.<sup>109</sup> The emphasis, then, was on affirmative God-guided action, rather than actionless prayer and bible study.

Quiet Time was something anyone could do without training; Buchman was always keen to emphasise the accessibility of God’s instructions. “Any man,” said Buchman, “can pick up divine messages if he will put his receiving set in order. Definite, accurate, adequate information can come from the Mind of God to the minds of men”.<sup>110</sup> Although no formal training was needed, quiet time did have general guidelines. As Father John Hardon outlined in his *Evaluation of Moral Re-Armament*, “everyone must set aside a “quiet time” of fifteen minutes a day to listen to the voice of God”.<sup>111</sup> During this time, members were expected to use a “pencil and note-book so that [they] may record every God-given thought and idea that comes to us during our alone time with Him”.<sup>112</sup> As David Belden, who grew up in Moral Re-Armament, outlines, full-time workers – of whom we will learn more about in Chapter Two – were expected to have longer quiet time of around an hour:

Buchman explained in 1922 that ‘I do it better when I am on my back in bed’ shortly before 5 a.m. Most preferred sitting up in bed or in a chair, it appears. The quiet time notes would cover the day’s plans, thoughts for the future, worries about the work or about relationships, guilt about ‘sins’ and determination to improve or to make restitution, thoughts about the Bible reading and lessons to be learnt from it: in short the gamut of the team member’s feelings, resolutions, philosophy and plans.<sup>113</sup>

The guidance should always be measured against the ‘Four Absolute’ standards and measured for quality, as Philip Leon pointed out, in three ways of testing:

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<sup>109</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery*, p. 13.

<sup>110</sup> F. Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1955), p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Fr. J. A. Hardon, ‘An Evaluation of Moral Rearmament’, *American Ecclesiastical Review* (1335), (1956), pp. 217-226.

<sup>112</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group*, p. 40.

<sup>113</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 195.

1. By its fruits: True guidance produces love and health. Fanaticism produces terror, torture, death, and fear.
2. By motive: People who are truly guided begin by confessing their own sins and their need to correct their own defects. Fanatics try to deal with their own fears and resentments by blaming others and attacking the sins of others instead.
3. By the end: Fanatics have limited particular ends, specified rigidly, to which they will sacrifice everything and everyone else. Those who are truly guided, on the other hand, see that true goodness usually expresses itself in novel and creative ways, which may break or transform all the old rules.<sup>114</sup>

Testing guidance in this way was Moral Re-Armament's attempt to protect the process of Listening to God against false guidance: that is, thoughts that did not come from God, and did not have God-like intentions. This was one of the main criticisms waged against Moral Re-Armament's practice: that is, that anyone could say anything and say God had told them to do it. As Marjorie Harrison stated:

As The Times [of London] put it in a leading article, "It would be incredible if the bulk of the 'guidance' received in 'quiet times' would not consist of submerged thoughts and desires. Most of what is put forward as guidance received in these periods of relaxed attention is so trivial that it would be impious to ascribe it to the promptings of God... The Group itself does not deny this. Dr. Buchman himself admits that "thoughts might come from the sub-conscious self or from the evil one."<sup>115</sup>

Letters written to Frank Buchman allow an insight into what the practice of Listening to God looked like on paper. Margaret Nelson, who headed up a Malvern based branch of Moral Re-Armament with her husband in the 1950s, sent Frank a copy of her guidance for review: another way of testing guidance for those members closer to Frank (Figure Six). Margaret's guidance looks very similar to Frank's early 1927 guidance, which he sent in a letter to Hallen Viney. (Figure Seven) Nelson appears to receive guidance reading "you'll find the will stay"

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<sup>114</sup> P. Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage*, p. 18.

<sup>115</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 64.

“he will change during a night” and “make and keep the pure within”.<sup>116</sup> Some of Frank’s guidance reads “wait and redouble your decision. Clear guidance will come later. Let him go”.

Through this process of quiet time, and with the guidance received from God, Moral Re-Armers believed they could communicate directly with God about how to approach the

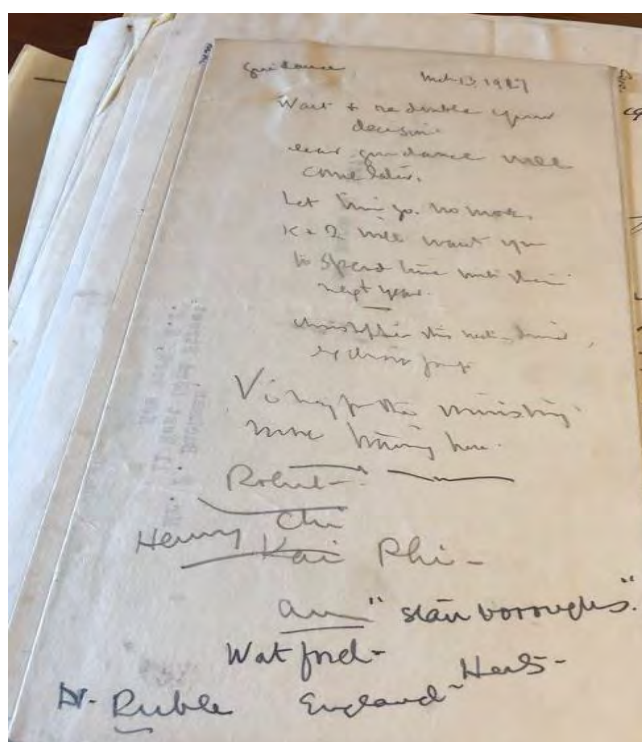
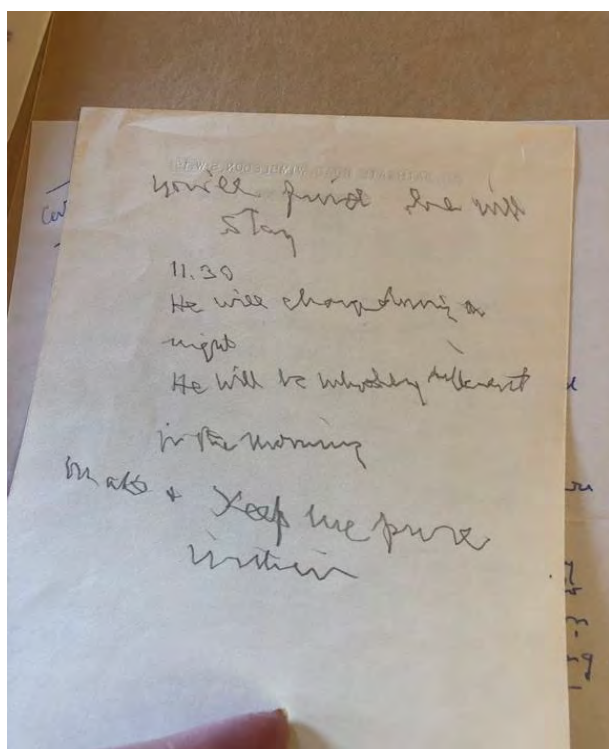


Figure Five: Margaret Nelson’s ‘guidance’, c.1955, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/110

Figure Six: Frank Buchman's 'guidance', March 1927, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/157

problems which surrounded them. It is understandable, then, why some Christians viewed this process as particularly appealing given the perceived inability of institutional religion to answer the world’s problems.

<sup>116</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/110, Margaret Nelson’s guidance, c. 1955; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/157, Frank Buchman’s guidance March 1927.

## The Four Absolutes

The Four Absolutes, inspired by the Presbyterian Robert Spear, were the moral signposts by which Moral Re-Armament members were expected to live.<sup>117</sup> There were no expectations that any member would ever fully achieve Absolute Honesty, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Love and Absolute Purity, but there were goalposts to aim for.<sup>118</sup> Just as Buddhists work their whole lives to achieve Enlightenment, Moral Re-Armers worked to fulfil the Four Absolutes. They were standards that infiltrated and influenced Moral Re-Armer's day to day lives, and were expected to have a real-world impact on how people conducted themselves. According to a Layman with a Notebook, the absolutes were based on biblical guidance, and were designed to ensure that "the nearer we live to the absolute in these four points the nearer we are to Christ".<sup>119</sup>

What did they refer to? As A Layman with a Notebook stated when discussing 'Absolute Honesty': "do we really practice on Monday what we have professed on Sunday? What about the layman's Absolute Honesty? If we expect the clergy to have a practise it, we must practise it ourselves".<sup>120</sup> On 'Absolute Purity', he states that 'purity' in this sense goes beyond a clean mind and body: "it embraces clean conduct in business, in work and play, interest in world affairs, our use of our possessions, our attitude towards relations, friends, and acquaintances."<sup>121</sup> He continues: Absolute Unselfishness removes "all egotistical or prideful mental reckoning of the services we give or receive; all personal interest directed towards family, national, or professional matters". Finally, Absolute Love "indicts all hatred, ill will

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<sup>117</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 42.

<sup>118</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group*, pp. 73-107.

<sup>119</sup> Bible passages cited as: Absolute Purity: Titus 1:15-16, Absolute Unselfishness: 2 Corinthians 9:7, Matthew 23:12, Absolute Love: 1 Corinthians XIII. 1-3, Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group* (New York, 1933), p. 8.

<sup>120</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group*, p. 50.

<sup>121</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group*, p. 52.

and contempt, all jealousy and fear, all irritation and indifference and all the difficulty we find in revealing ourselves to others”.<sup>122</sup>

Buchman was often naively optimistic about the level of change living by such absolutes could bring about. Stating that Moral Re-Armament “restores absolute standards in a day when selfishness and expediency are the common practice of men and nations”, Buchman told his audience of listeners about the potential effects of followings such standards, and the position the world found itself in due to society drifting from them.<sup>123</sup> Complaining that “people have written off the four standards as part of the horse-and-buggy days”,<sup>124</sup> Buchman blamed the “condition there is in the world” on the failure to live by Moral Re-Armament’s principles:<sup>125</sup>

Take honesty for a start. What do you find in the nation? What about men who have been dishonest, say in war contracts?

Take purity. You may say that it is just a personal matter. But what is happening to the nation? They know that when people’s morals are confused their thinking becomes confused. People say, “That’s too bad”, and keep on going to church on Sunday, but nothing happens. Too few try to bring a great, cleansing force to the nation.

As far as unselfishness and love go, people don’t pretend to be unselfish, and they don’t expect to be loving.<sup>126</sup>

Buchman’s absolute faith in the ability of the Four Absolutes to answer any of the world’s problems led to strong criticism from many over the perceived naivety of such a viewpoint, as will be explored in Chapter Four. However, Buchman’s talent lay in his ability to make these Four Absolutes relate to current conditions. The above quote, from during World War Two, highlights his linking of the standards with the threat of war and the ineffective nature

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<sup>122</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What Is The Oxford Group*, p. 62.

<sup>123</sup> F. Buchman, speech at Moral Re-Armament Training Centre, July 1943 in F. Buchman, *Remaking the World*, (London, 1947).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

of “going to church on Sunday” to try and fix things. On other occasions, Moral Re-Armament literature links these Four Absolutes to different political, social, and cultural contexts: for example in 1972, Moral Re-Armament published *The Black and White Book*, a “handbook of revolution”.<sup>127</sup> Within this, the importance of the Four Absolutes – this time, being presented as the cure for more modern concerns surrounding pornography, drugs, and racial tensions as opposed to Buchman’s 1940s concerns of war and Communist revolution - is covered:

With Absolute Honesty, what would happen to taxes? Or in industrial negotiations? Would absolute love make a difference to the treatment of the poor, the elderly, of immigrants? Absolute purity? What would it mean in the freeing of hospital beds, now filled by abortion cases? In saving broken homes and shattered lives? What about Absolute Unselfishness and the problem of pollution? Housing? Unemployment? The rich and poor nations?.<sup>128</sup>

Through these Four Absolutes, Moral Re-Armament was attempting to offer a timeless one-size-fits-all cure to any ill of modern society. These four standards are still followed today by Moral Re-Armament, under the new name of Initiatives of Change.<sup>129</sup>

## The 5 C’s

There was one more actionable set of steps for those members of Moral Re-Armament who were not just followers, but members actively involved in the process of converting others.

Anne Smith, who was involved with both Moral Re-Armament and the early Alcoholics

Anonymous movement, kept a journal outlining core Moral Re-Armament’s practices from

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<sup>127</sup> S. Cook and G. Lean, *The Black and White Book*, (London, 1972), blurb.

<sup>128</sup> S. Cook and G. Lean, *The Black and White Book*, (London, 1972), p. 68.

<sup>129</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘About Us’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://iofc.org.uk/about-us/> (April 2023).

1933 to 1939.<sup>130</sup> Through this journal, we can gain an understanding of the other instructions given to those members of Moral Re-Armament who wanted to be involved in its conversion efforts. These were the 5 C's: confidence, confession, conviction, conversion, and continuance.

The 5 C's were designed to guide members of Moral Re-Armament in their conversion efforts to ensure successful recruitment to the Moral Re-Armament way of life. Conversion of others was an essential expectation for Moral Re-Armament followers: the 5 C's made the process easy to learn, again without extensive training or theological understanding. Of course, conversion efforts went beyond their average man-on-the-ground converting others: Moral Re-Armament had advanced methods of conversion – from showing up on people's birthday's, writing songs, and performing plays – as will be explored in Chapter Three. However, during the early decades of the movement, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s (before the development of any significant media campaigns), the 5 C's were a main method of conversion.

Author of the ideological guide *Soul Surgery*, Walter, commented that it was through the first C – confidence – that members should win the friendship of a stranger, thus opening the door for the following 4 steps.<sup>131</sup> The second C, Confession, was the process through which a Moral Re-Armament member would encourage the potential convert to share and unburden his sins and worries: the member was also encouraged to share their own personal sins as a way of building trust. Walter wrote of Confession: “Through the avenue of confidence we win a man's friendship. Through confession we may win his soul—for Christ”.<sup>132</sup> Conviction followed Confession, and referred to the process of prompting the individual to see the wrongful

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<sup>130</sup> Dick B [pseud], *Anne Smith's Journal, 1933-1939: A.A's Principles of Success* (California, 1998)

<sup>131</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery*.

<sup>132</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery*, p. 21.

nature of the sins they had confessed, and to “surrender as much as himself as he knows to as much of God as he knows”.<sup>133</sup> Following Conviction came Conversion – the ultimate goal – “the turning to God, the decision, the surrender” to the Moral Re-Armament way of life as a solution to the problems previously confessed.<sup>134</sup> Walter puts it as such: the process of Conversion as “a transaction that takes place altogether between the soul and God”.<sup>135</sup> And finally, came Continuance: Anne Smith explains the importance of guiding the “newly surrendered person” through the early stages of becoming a life changer, to prevent what Walter refers to as “backsliding”.<sup>136</sup>

As Garth Lean highlights, Buchman was “interested, above all, in what he called “the how” – the way in which the life of faith, at its most demanding, could be grasped by the beginner as well as by the long-time believer”.<sup>137</sup> As has been established, with no joining process of membership fee, Moral Re-Armament was something which individuals could just begin. For those more involved workers, the 5 C’s were a relatively simple process to learn. Such a programme, infused with the influences of Buchman’s early religious encounters, combined both the ease and relevance to real-world issues which was introduced in the early evangelical campaigns he encountered. Crucially, this step-by-step faith was designed in such a way that it was, theoretically, timeless. By not committing to any theological stance, Moral Re-Armament was designed in such a way that with enough effort it could theoretically speak to any individual, country, or decade and present itself as a logical solution to the world’s

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<sup>133</sup> Dick B [pseud], *Anne Smith’s Journal*.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> A.J Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 39.

<sup>136</sup> H. A Walter, *Soul Surgery*, p. 44.

<sup>137</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 77.



problems. It is this clever process of redesign over the decades of the twentieth century which we will now turn our attention to.

### The phases of Moral Re-Armament

Moral Re-Armament's chameleon nature, and thus its ability to communicate faith in different times and to different groups, meant that it has remained operational from 1921 to present day. The longevity of Moral Re-Armament's campaign was intrinsic to meeting its goal. Whilst many moral groups fought single-issue campaigns with a start and end date – such as cleaning up British television or banning the contraceptive pill – Moral Re-Armament had the larger aspiration of the total transformation of every man, woman and child. This – as it was well aware – was a process that was likely to have no immediate end date. The ability to change was essential. David Bebbington notes that, even down to the smallest details:

Buchman was exceptionally sensitive to cultural variations. As an American, he would naturally use the word “elevator” when at home in America, but in Britain he was scrupulous to use the word “lift”. He wished to remove all cultural obstacles to evangelism, and so urged his agents and supporters to be similarly sensitive to linguistic nuances. He quite consciously discarded theological terminology because he was convinced it was superfluous for life changing. He deliberately adopted the latest fashion.<sup>138</sup>

Crucially, as this section will establish, despite this adopting of the “latest fashion”, Moral Re-Armament's message never changed: rather its chosen targets and methods of presentation repackaged the same message in different ways, thus returning to Boobbyer's argument that although Buchman's presentation may have changed, his core philosophy always remained consistent.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> D.W Bebbington 'Evangelical Christianity and Modernism', *Crux* 26:2 (1990), pp. 2-9, p. 4.

<sup>139</sup> P. Boobbyer, *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman*, (Pennsylvania, 2013).

Indeed, despite changing names, methods, personnel and targets, a revolution based on Christian principles remained Moral Re-Armament's core goal. Speaking in 1921, Buchman stated, "the Oxford Group is a Christian revolution, whose concern is vital Christianity", aimed at bringing men and women everywhere "back to the basic principles of Christian faith".<sup>140</sup> Speaking in 1932, Buchman stated "God control is our primary need".<sup>141</sup> In the face of World War Two, Buchman offered two options "collapse, or God-control".<sup>142</sup> When launching Moral Re-Armament, Buchman stated "God has a plan, and the combined moral and spiritual forces of the nation can find that plan".<sup>143</sup> Later, in 1953, Buchman remains just as clear about the Christian nature of Moral Re-Armament's quest: "make God the decisive authority".<sup>144</sup> Buchman's last speech, just before his death in 1961, ends: "if we go all out for God we will win".<sup>145</sup> Crucially, all the changes which Moral Re-Armament underwent never shook its Christian core.

As David Bebbington highlights, Moral Re-Armament "was rather like a chameleon taking colour from its environment".<sup>146</sup> The colour from its environment came in the form of cultural variations, different locations, different contexts and different perceived threats. Yet, as Bebbington highlights, "despite the cultural changes that we have looked at, there has been

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<sup>140</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> F. Buchman, 'Our Primary Need, speech delivered at Geneva, January 1932', in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>142</sup> F. Buchman, 'GUIDANCE OR GUNS?', speech delivered at Interlaken, 6 September 1938', in F. Buchman, *Remaking the World*, (London, 1961), p. 62.

<sup>143</sup> F. Buchman, 'Moral Re-Armament', speech delivered at East Ham Town Hall, June 1938', in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 10.

<sup>144</sup> F. Buchman, 'The new statesmanship to end confusion, speech delivered in London, June 1953', in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 51.

<sup>145</sup> F. Buchman, 'Brave Men Choose, speech delivered in Caux, June 1961', in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 64.

<sup>146</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (London, 1989), p. 430.

an unchanging core to evangelicalism ever since the eighteenth century”.<sup>147</sup> We can see this changing outer but consistent core in the phases of Moral Re-Armament.

Donald Veldt’s 1969 thesis examining the content of Frank Buchman’s speeches noted similar aspects of Moral Re-Armament’s chameleon characteristics. Veldt found that “key themes” from Buchman’s speeches “were dropped, picked up and introduced in line with cultural moments”. As such, Veldt summarises the tactics of Buchman in applying this ever-changing approach: “take an idea, establish its acceptability, make it memorable (sloganize), make it believable... appeal to fear and leave the audience no alternative and maintain rapport”.<sup>148</sup> By viewing the focus of Moral Re-Armament from the 1920s until the 1970s, we can see how such principles outlined above, simple to follow and applicable for all contexts, were applied to position Moral Re-Armament as central to the world’s problems and moving with the times.

Important to note is this study focuses on British context, but within an international study, these timelines and changes would look different. Moral Re-Armament had a habit of appearing all over the world wherever a crisis was unfolding, and presenting themselves as the solution. As Julius Gathogo has explored, Moral Re-Armament’s appearance during the Mau Mau rebellion in an effort to convert the Mau Mau rebels’ political advisor, Ngare Rukenya – an effort which Moral Re-Armament claim was successful and thus avoided a “civil war after colonialism in 1963”. Garth Mason has explored Moral Re-Armament’s efforts in South Africa during the 1950s, in influencing key activist Philip Vundla who had been involved in the school boycott of 1955 and the bus boycott of 1957.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, Reto Hofmann has explored how

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<sup>147</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to The 1980s*, p. 8.

<sup>148</sup> D. Veldt, ‘Content Analysis Study of Frank Buchman’s Published Speeches With Emphasis On Criticism of Major Themes and Persuasive Tactics’, (Doctoral of Philosophy Thesis, Purdue University, 1969), p. 297.

<sup>149</sup> G. Mason, ‘The Moral Rearmament Activist’.

Moral Re-Armament worked to influence three Japanese Prime Ministers' political thought throughout the 1940s and 1950s, during a period of uncertainty about Japan's political future post World War Two.<sup>150</sup> Nigel Cooper, too, has explored Moral Re-Armament's appearance at the Rorovana Land Crisis of 1969 - a dispute between a major Australian mining company and local inhabitants of the island of Bougainville – which Moral Re-Armament worked to resolve through a return to “elements of Christian faith”.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, as Austin Cross explores in *The Hidden History of LA County's Official Anthem*, Moral Re-Armament's American singing faction, *Up With People* arrived just after the Watts riots of 1965 “bringing with them a repertoire of bouncy tunes promoting peace and unity”, one of which, *Seventy Six Cities*, would become LA County's anthem.<sup>152</sup> As Daniel Sack notes, it was never a coincidence when Moral Re-Armament or UWP showed up after tensions were high: “whenever there were anti-American protests somewhere like in Japan, when the students there were protesting against American influence, all of the sudden the Up With People kids would appear and the Japanese students would say 'Oh, I love America, this is great.’”<sup>153</sup> *Up With People* appeared when a solution was needed most, and were prepared to present themselves in any way in order to appear as though Moral Re-Armament was the way to solve any given crisis. Thus, we can see a pattern of Moral Re-Armament engaging with whatever it needed to in order to present itself as the best solution to any given problem. The following section will explore how it did so during each decade of the twentieth century in Britain, thus demonstrating the adaptability of its faith, and its ability to speak to any given context.

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<sup>150</sup> R. Hofmann, ‘The conservative imaginary’.

<sup>151</sup> N. Cooper, *The Bougainville Land Crisis of 1969*, (Christchurch, 1992).

<sup>152</sup> A. Cross, ‘The Hidden History of LA County's Official Anthem’, *La-ist*, [https://laist.com/2018/09/20/la-county-has-an-official-song-with-a-deep-and-kooky-history.php](https://laist.com/2018/09/20/la-county-has-an-official-song-with-a-deep-and-kinda-kooky-history.php) (Accessed March 2020).

<sup>153</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 5.

1920s

As has been explored, it was the aftermath of World War One – with its perceived disruptive effect on the nation’s Christianity - which inspired Buchman to create the Oxford Group. Buchman went on to form The Oxford Group in 1921 as a response to “the social upheavals of the great war”, which had “changed the country’s economy, politics, religion and social relations”.<sup>154</sup> In Buchman’s eyes this “social change created a spiritual crisis” which needed addressing.<sup>155</sup> E.R Wickham argued that World War One had a “catastrophic impact on the churches and devastating effects on the religious life of the nation at large”.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, Callum Brown recognizes that World War One “was an exceptionally tough war to fight, especially in the remitting grime, discomfort, fear and high fatality of trench warfare... this was a profoundly challenging environment for religion”.<sup>157</sup> Yet, as Michael Snape points out, “more recent studies have begun to reveal a complex and multifaceted revival of religion in British society as a result of the conflict”.<sup>158</sup> Instead of being seemingly contradictory arguments, it can be seen that both positions can be true: whilst World War One was perceived by Christians such as Buchman to have posed a challenge to institutional Christianity, it simultaneously prompted Christians such as Buchman to create a new form religion to answer this perceived crisis. As David Nash outlines, the aftermath of World War One saw a rise in spiritualism and alternative religions, as some people turned away from the institutions they believed had failed to prevent the events of 1914 to 1918: this included the Church of England, and the Catholic

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<sup>154</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 29.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> M. Snape, *God and The British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (Oxford, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> C. Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 92.

<sup>158</sup> M. Snape, *God and The British Soldier*, p. 4.

Church.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, Matthew Shaw points out “often, the pain of war altered, but did not erase, faith”.<sup>160</sup> Although Simon Green argues that “very little contemporary evidence to suggest” that organisational religion suffered in such a way after World War One, as has been stated, it is not the task of this thesis to ascertain the true cause, or the validity, of such a crisis of religion in 1920s Britain: what was important was that Britons believed it to be happening, and responded accordingly.<sup>161</sup>

Marjorie Harrison summarised this mood of crisis and disillusionment with the Church in the aftermath of World War One. Harrison was brought up, according to her own account, as a religious woman with the “fear of God”, but had begun to lose faith in the Church in the aftermath of World War One.<sup>162</sup> Harrison remarked that there were thousands of men and women who have shared similar experiences of a shaken faith after the war:

They saw their generation tormented in the hell of war that easily outdid the worst fundamentalist version. They staggered out into a world, fit for heroes indeed, for none but the heroic could survive, and learned that if the battlefield could be the place of hell, then the post war world could be the state of hell... They found their governors were a laughing stock; and where were the spiritual pastors and masters of the post war world?<sup>163</sup>

This, Harrison remarks, made way for the appeal of alternative ways of practising faith, which saw people not going “to church much because the services of the church were somehow out of touch with their needs. But they said their prayers and tried to do their best”.<sup>164</sup> Whilst such a challenge saw “large numbers” giving up “bothering about religion”, Harrison claims

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<sup>159</sup> D. Nash, ‘The Rise of Spiritualism after WWI’, *History Extra*, (2020) <https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/rise-spiritualism-after-ww1-world-war-one/>, (Accessed September 2022)

<sup>160</sup> M. Shaw, ‘Faith, Belief and Superstition’, *British Library Online*, (2014), <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/faith-belief-and-superstition>, (Accessed: September 2022)

<sup>161</sup> S. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England*, p. 62.

<sup>162</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>164</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 12.

“far more evolved for themselves an unformulated and very simple way of life based upon the teachings of Christ”.<sup>165</sup> One such individual was Frank Buchman with “sound ideas on high pressure salesmanship and the advantage of advertising”, providing an answer for those at “a spiritual loose end”.<sup>166</sup>

Harrison and her peers were not alone in this perceived sense of a religious crisis. In 1922, the Archbishop of York noted “to put it bluntly, religion attracts: the church repels”.<sup>167</sup> Such a reality led to an increased popularity of smaller groups, who aimed to be innovative in their approach to faith.<sup>168</sup> Additionally, the Chairman of the Congregational Union which brought together churches in England and Wales stated in 1925 that:

The situation is this: the great mass of our people seem to be drifting away from religion; the habit of worship is falling into disuse... the church that has no message for the ordinary everyday man is no Church of Jesus Christ at all.<sup>169</sup>

By 1937, the Catholic Bishop of Salford found that “that it can no longer be taken for granted in England that one is talking to a Christian”.<sup>170</sup> Although the Oxford Group was just taking shape throughout the 1920s, with much of Buchman’s time spent travelling, the work that they did do spoke directly to this perceived crisis. As Daniel Sack highlights, Buchman also spent time in America in the 1920s, where its college campuses were reflecting the same post-war crisis of faith as in Britain.<sup>171</sup>

One of the other growing concerns which many Christians felt was the cause of crisis of Christian faith in Britain was the morality of the nation after the war, namely: “men and their

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<sup>165</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 13.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> C. Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 116.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>169</sup> *British Weekly*, 15 October 1925.

<sup>170</sup> *The Tablet*, 20 February 1937

<sup>171</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 30.

temptations and negligence”.<sup>172</sup> Callum Brown notes that "churchmen started to allege that declining sexual morality was undermining the religious condition of the nation. Sex before marriage became the new critical indicator of de-christianisation".<sup>173</sup> This saw evangelistic efforts to speak directly to this problem. As has been explored, The Oxford Group's 1920s efforts largely focused on building small groups, intimate soul surgery in the form of confessions, and largely University campus-based activities. This most likely stemmed from Buchman's desire to represent something new and modern, urging him to work with students – students at universities like Oxford with social connections – in order to shape the next generation of Christians: “it had an early focus in Oxford, among students who prized themselves on being thoroughly contemporary in their outlook”.<sup>174</sup> Additionally, with Buchman's background on campuses and with the YMCA, he was able to utilize existing links and networks.<sup>175</sup> Crucially, however, being with students gave Buchman the perfect stage upon which to target this perceived immorality amongst young men.

Indeed, there was a strong emphasis on sexual sin in these early efforts of the Oxford Group, at House Parties and during public confessions. As *Soul Surgery*, the manual for new and existing Moral Re-Armament members, instructs its readers: members must warn young men about “the terrible consequences of the sin that is not checked, perhaps through the medium of a painful surgical operation”.<sup>176</sup> Most likely, the surgical operation referred to here is one advocated by Dr Kellogg for treating masturbation: Kellogg recommended circumcision “without administering an anaesthetic as the brief pain attending the operation will have a

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<sup>172</sup> C. Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 116.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>174</sup> I. Randall, ‘We All Need Constant Change’, p. 175.

<sup>175</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 110.

<sup>176</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery: Some Thoughts On Incisive Personal Work*, (Oxford, 1919), p. 67.



salutary effect upon the mind”.<sup>177</sup> Buchman was not shy to tell students that he could tell they “were in the grip of an impure habit”, which he would encourage them to confess to.<sup>178</sup> As *Time* notes in 1927:

Mr. Buchman invented an evangelizing process that still is little understood. He uses the intimate interview, the personal exhortation. And he has been effective. His adepts stop at nothing in telling their experiences. It becomes a goal for them to reveal their sins, to bare their private pollutions.<sup>179</sup>

Buchman believed that a person burdened with sin is a person separated from God; the practice of asking for forgiveness for these sins was therefore essential in order to live a life close to God. The anonymous author, a Layman with a Notebook, comments on the logic behind confession in Moral Re-Armament: “To be spiritually reborn, and to live in the state in which these four points are the guides to our life in God, the Oxford Group advocate four practical spiritual activities”: one of the activities listed was “the Sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God, and to use Sharing as Witness to help others, still unchanged, to recognize and acknowledge their sins”.<sup>180</sup>

Through this focus on masturbation, Buchman and his associates believed they were dealing with an inherently modern problem. Indeed, Buchman’s associate Samuel Shoemaker defended the Oxford Group’s early focus on sexual sin, writing in 1928 that “we did not make modern conditions: we found them”.<sup>181</sup> Additionally, notes which Buchman made in 1919 after

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<sup>177</sup> J.H. Kellogg, *Plain Facts for Old and Young* (Iowa, 1879).

<sup>178</sup> H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery: Some Thoughts On Incisive Personal Work*, (Oxford, 1919), p. 67.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Buchman House Party’, *Time*, 18 July 1927.

<sup>180</sup> Anonymous, *What Is The Oxford Group?*, (New York, 1933), p. 8.

<sup>181</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 99.

attending lectures by “Dr Wooster of Boston” on the problem of sex and society demonstrate Buchman’s belief that this dealing with sexual sin represented a new focus for Christians:

Christianity in touch with the newer psychology. Their techniques, Psycho-neurosis and its treatment. Nine tenths of people suffer sexual maladjustment, incomplete sexual harmony. Unsatisfactory wives. The theatre, the dance and the novel as erotic stimuli. A sense of inferiority from earlier masturbation radiates over a whole emotional field. What a man needs is redirection and a religious faith.<sup>182</sup>

Harold Begbie’s 1923 book *More Twice Born Men* highlights that during the 1920s the emphasis on sin as a barrier to a true Christian experience dominated Buchman’s approach: “the exclusive and pathological emphasis he lays on the power of sin to rob a man’s soul of its natural health”.<sup>183</sup> Describing this process of confession for conversion, Begbie explains: a man goes to see Buchman and “usually begins by a statement of his theological difficulties... until the young man’s mind has emptied itself of all its intellectual objections to Christianity”.<sup>184</sup> Then, as Begbie states, Buchman replies: “it isn’t any intellectual difficult which is keeping you from God. It is sin. You are a –”.<sup>185</sup> The blank, Begbie states, is intentional: “it may be any [sin], from the very worst and most deadly order of sinners to the victim of a bad habit”.<sup>186</sup> The accounts in the book highlight the effect of Buchman’s style of religion on these young students; compelled to confess their sexual sins and viewing it as a route to a more authentic Christian experience.

Despite Buchman’s optimism that through an open discussion of sexual sin The Oxford Group would become a popular Christian force on all college campuses, this focus on sex was deemed so unacceptable by Princeton University that Buchman was permanently banned from

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<sup>182</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 100.

<sup>183</sup> H. Begbie, *More Twice-Born Men* (London, 1923), p. 19.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> H. Begbie, *More Twice-Born Men* (London, 1923), p. 4

the campus. A University representative stated that “Buchmanism surreptitiously practiced unwarranted inquisition into personal lives, was dangerous in its handling of sex, and was stimulating a most unhealthy interest in morbid sexual matters among the student body.”<sup>187</sup> After this, Buchman’s efforts increased in England from 1926 onwards.<sup>188</sup> However, the same criticism faced The Oxford Group there. As the Sunday newspaper, *John Bull*, reported in 1928, Moral Re-Armament meetings contained things discussed which “cannot be repeated in a family newspaper”, concerning “sins of the flesh”.<sup>189</sup> *John Bull* called for Buchman to be removed from Oxford and “when he does so, we shall see that this disgusting travesty of Christianity is not allowed to take root elsewhere in this country”.<sup>190</sup> The *Derby Daily Telegraph* also reported on the “new religious cult”, referring to it as “perverted religious mania”.<sup>191</sup>

Yet, the backlash which The Oxford Group faced in the 1920s showed just how unusual and innovative this openness towards sexual sin was. As Buchman’s private secretary Morris Martin recalls in his memoir, “Buchman had been ahead of his times in the twenties when he encouraged the practice of openness about the deeper human problems, many of which involved sex in and out of marriage”.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, Ian Randall notes that this focus on sexual sin was an example of the Oxford Group's “determination to face the issues of the time”.<sup>193</sup>

These confessions of a sexual nature would also happen during House Parties, which expanded the movement’s reach beyond campuses, and which were a prime focus of The

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<sup>187</sup> W.H Clark, *The Oxford Group; Its History and Significance*, (New York, 1951), p. 68.

<sup>188</sup> W.H Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 75.

<sup>189</sup> *John Bull*, 16 June 1928.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 May 1928.

<sup>192</sup> M. Martin, *Always a Little Further: Four Lives of a Luckie Felowe*, (Tuscon, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>193</sup> I. Randall, ‘We All Need Constant Change’, p. 179.

Oxford Group's 1920s campaigns. Describing a typical experience of an Oxford Group House Party in 1930, J Shradly Post – a journalist for the Catholic publication *Blackfriars* – noted that practices of sharing (confession) and Listening to God were taught to newcomers, who would be made to stay in a room with other, more experienced members.<sup>194</sup> Walter Houston Clark explains that “the nearest counterpart is what a Catholic would call a retreat” and a Protestant would call a “conference”, and points out that “originally they were held in a private home, hence the name”, but as the reach of movement expanded, they were held at hotels.<sup>195</sup> During these house parties, “the process of guidance, quiet times, sharing, fellowship and life-changing went forward under the sensitive and skilful direction of the leader”.<sup>196</sup> Crucially, as Clark highlights, “the object of the house-party is frankly to relate modern individuals to God in terms which they understand and in an environment which they find congenial”, meaning that there would often be discussion of various problems “connected with sex, or money, or life work”.<sup>197</sup>

It is worth noting that there was speculation about Buchman's own sexuality due to his focus on issues of sex and condemnation of homosexuality. Morris Martin, Buchman's private secretary, wrote in his memoir that “women, [Buchman felt], were liable to turn men from their chosen path in life, and to diminish, rather than develop, them. His own nature, as I later understood, played a large part in this concept”.<sup>198</sup> Martin continues, speculating that Buchman's focus on homosexuality may have been driven by the fact that “that he had a homosexual nature in an era when homosexuality was almost universally condemned as a sin”.<sup>199</sup> Additionally, Reverend Sherwood S. Day wrote after Buchman's death in a tribute to

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<sup>194</sup> J. Shradly Post, ‘What Happens at a Buchman House Party’, *Blackfriars*, 11:129 (1930), pp. 715-724.

<sup>195</sup> W.H Clark, *The Oxford Group; Its History and Significance*, (New York, 1951), p. 31.

<sup>196</sup> W.H Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 31.

<sup>197</sup> I. Menzies, ‘The Oxford Group and the International Situation’, *The Australian Quarterly* 7:28 (1935), pp. 74-80, p. 75.

<sup>198</sup> M. Martin, *Always a Little Further*, p. 81.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.190-191.

him that “a factor in [Frank’s] life proved to be a disability. That factor was homosexuality... I am sure of one thing – that the factor of homosexuality in Frank’s life warped his attitude in regard to marriage and sexual intercourse in marriage”.<sup>200</sup> As Martin highlights in the notes of his memoir, the tribute was never published but was “passed on to the author”.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, David Belden, son of prominent Moral Re-Armer Kenneth Belden, writes in the epilogue to his original thesis, “I can’t recall when I learned that many people considered Buchman to have been by nature homosexual” but speculates as to “how far MRA’s extreme puritanism may have arisen from Buchman’s own sexuality”.<sup>202</sup> There is little evidence beyond the aforementioned speculation surrounding Buchman’s sexuality, but it is interesting to note that for an individual so concerned with the sexual habits of others, encouraging them to be open, Buchman appeared relatively secretive and closed about his own.

Thus, through The Oxford Group’s focus on campus based and house-party based confessions regarding sexual sin, it viewed itself as speaking directly to the modern problems which it, and many other Christians, believed to be the underlying problem plaguing Christianity after World War One. As the 1930s emerged, they brought with them a change of focus.

1930s and 1940s

Ian Randall notes that “the success of the Oxford Group in the 1930s stemmed from its ability to remain connected to the evangelical tradition from which it arose while also adapting that tradition in the light of modernity”.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, looking at the Oxford Group in the 1930s reveals

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<sup>200</sup> M. Martin, *Always a Little Further*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>203</sup> I. Randall, ‘We All Need Constant Change’, p. 175.

the reinvention and refocussing of its efforts in order to speak to a drastically different society than the campus-based student world of the 1920s. Moving away from small-scale campus based action, the Oxford Group broadened its focus in the 1930s. As Moral Re-Armer Alan Thornhill noted, in the 1920s there was the House Party, “an informal gathering of friends”, whereas when the focus expanded, “there was the great national and world gatherings”.<sup>204</sup> This change in focus was in response to the changing political climate of the 1930s. No longer could Buchman and his followers appeal to individuals via matters of sexual sin: there were more pressing matters at hand.

The *Sunday Express* journalist AJ Russell, when interviewing Buchman in 1931 for his book on the Group, reported that: “he foresees the day when an army of five hundred or more consecrated life-changers may descend on a town or city and set to work winning it to Christ”.<sup>205</sup> Here, we can clearly see Buchman’s desire for a bigger campaign emerging. The 1930s saw this desire begin to come true: in 1931, about 700 attended a house party in Oxford, and two years later, 5000 attended.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, by the mid 1930s, The Oxford Group was growing in size as well as reputation: in 1935, Ivan Menzies, a British singer and actor, noted that whilst writer Beverley Nichols said “It seems to me, without exaggeration, one of the most important things that is happening in Europe today”, Menzies would “go further and say that it seems to me to be the most important thing that is happening in the world”.<sup>207</sup>

Buchman had been heavily inspired by the growth of Fascism in Italy and Germany during this decade as well as Communism in South America. Both powers, and their ability to

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<sup>204</sup> F. Buchman, *Remaking the World*, p. 7.

<sup>205</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 142.

<sup>206</sup> I. Randall, ‘We All Need Constant Change’, p. 177.

<sup>207</sup> I. Menzies, ‘The Oxford Group and the International Situation’, *The Australian Quarterly* 7:28 (1935), pp. 74-80.

influence the masses, sparked the idea of going bigger with the Oxford Group in Buchman. Having encountered the growing power of the ideology of Communism in 1931, during a visit to South America, Buchman returning saying "Communism is the most highly organised and effective leadership abroad today... What is needed is emboldened leadership to meet the present world crisis".<sup>208</sup> In Rio, Buchman asked himself "Have we a counter-propaganda?" to the communist threat.<sup>209</sup> During the same period of time, the fascist forces of Mussolini and Hitler were growing, and gaining mass popularity in Italy and Germany. This marked the beginning of the change in The Oxford Group's approach, as Buchman was inspired by the large-scale campaigns and ability to convert minds in fascist campaigns both at home (The British Union of Fascists) and abroad, in Germany. A Sunday newspaper article which quoted Mosley as saying that he had about 100,000 followers with 2 million more fascist-minded, impressed Buchman. "Have you got two million people in England who are Holy Spirit minded?" he asked his Moral Re-Armament team.<sup>210</sup> As David Belden points out, both realising the large scale threat of Communism, as well as Fascist abilities to convert minds on a larger scale "had thus persuaded Buchman and the Group leaders to organize on as large a scale as possible; to introduce emotive 'crowd' tactics of massed marches and singing; to stress the urgency of the situation and the need for divine dictatorship".<sup>211</sup> Thus, "the dictatorship of the Holy Spirit" became Buchman's favourite phrase during this period, from around 1934 onwards.<sup>212</sup>

There is a lot which Buchman could have learnt from the propaganda and crowd gathering techniques of fascist groups. Julie Gottlieb's work on development of political

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<sup>208</sup> D. Belden, 'The Oxford Group', p. 141.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>211</sup> D. Belden, 'The Oxford Group', p. 144.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

technology in the British Union of Fascists (BUF) points out that “interwar British fascism marketed itself and the ways in which it developed distinctive, and at times innovative political technology to convey propaganda”.<sup>213</sup> The BUF attempted “to overcome their political limitations through the shrewd manipulation of the media” and these “techniques and technologies were developed to suit national and local conditions”.<sup>214</sup> Music was a strong feature of BUF meetings, and there was an emphasis on visual media – photography, films, and posters, as well as newspaper articles, pamphlets and leaflets, and recordings of speeches. Summer camps were also recorded. Meetings “provided an aesthetic feast of limelight and sophisticated sound equipment, military bands and an orchestra, colourful flags and banners”.<sup>215</sup> Additionally, the BUF “was at pains to create its own material culture and its own information technology – or should we say misinformation technology – to channel its propaganda due to its marginalisation”.<sup>216</sup> There was a media blackout on the BUF so they started creating their own means of communicating: souvenirs of Mosley were also available – autographed photographs available for purchase.

Interestingly, from around the 1930s onwards, Buchman was celebrated in very similar ways to fascist leaders, with calendars with pictures of him alongside his quotes being available for sale (Figure Eight), as well as countless celebrations of his life story, and public celebrations of his birthday, for which films and publications were made.<sup>217</sup> This is a curious yet revealing departure from his relatively low profile 1920s campaign, where he insisted Begbie not refer to

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<sup>213</sup> J. Gottlieb, ‘The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41:1 (2006), pp. 35-55, p. 35.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>216</sup> J. Gottlieb, ‘The Marketing of Megalomania’, p. 50.

<sup>217</sup> One of these films, available on Initiatives of Change film archive, for Buchman’s 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday: Initiatives of Change, *Frank Buchman’s 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (1938), <https://vimeo.com/164714795> (Accessed September 2022).



him by name in his book, calling him only F.B.<sup>218</sup> Bebbington notes that during this period “something verging on a personality cult was grafted onto the movement”.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> H. Begbie, *More Twice-Born Men* (London, 1923),

<sup>219</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 237.

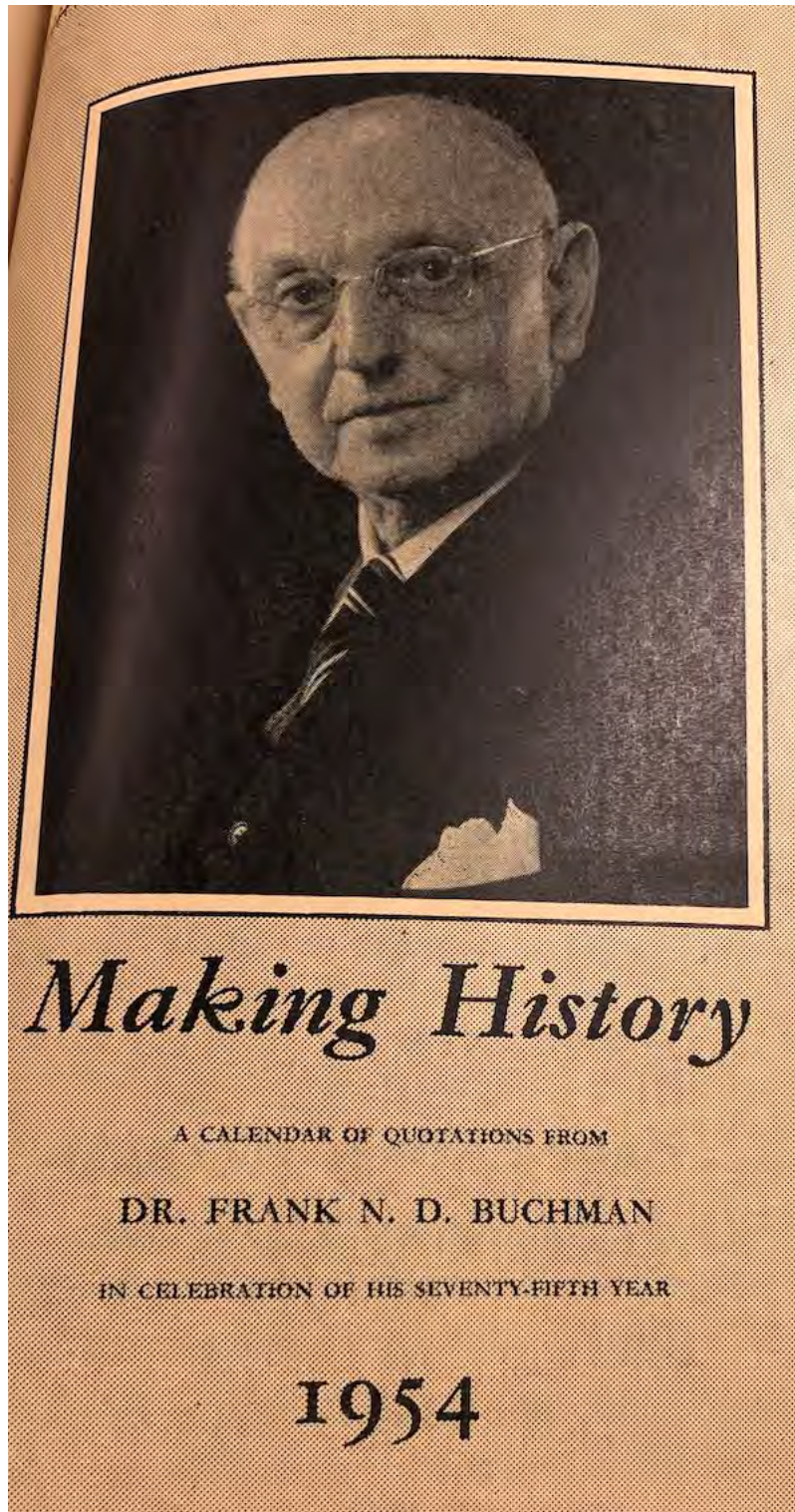


Figure Seven: 1954 Frank Buchman calendar with quotes, Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS.292B/806.1/5

Assemblies, as the House Parties were now called, were also scaled up. As Ian Randall highlights, “The Group began to arrange large camps and assemblies, the largest, as we have seen, attracting 25,000 to Birmingham for an event described as 'Enlistment in the moral equivalent of war'”.<sup>220</sup> Figures Nine and Ten, an assembly in Birmingham in 1937 and in Oxford in 1935 represents the change of this approach from small scale house parties (Figure Eleven) to national assemblies.<sup>221</sup> As David Bebbington notes, “Buchman started to pay more attention to Continental Europe and national flags were carried at rallies. The atmosphere became highly militaristic”.<sup>222</sup>



Figure Eight: The Oxford Group assembly at Birmingham, (1937)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-XdW0kV1ws>

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<sup>220</sup> I. Randall, 'We All Need Constant Change: The Oxford Group and Mission in Europe in the 1930s', *European Journal of Theology* 9:2 (2000) p. 180.

<sup>221</sup> Birthday tributes are housed in Bodleian Archives, and include: *Live Wires: A Tribute to Frank N. D. Buchman from his friends on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday* (London, 1938); *Victory Week: The Story of a Birthday* (London, 1946); *An Eightieth Birthday Tribute* (Oxford, 1958)

<sup>222</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 237.



Figure Nine: The Oxford Group assembly at Oxford, (1935), G. Lean, *Frank Buchman: A Life* (London, 1965), p. 161.



Figure Ten: Buchman amongst a selection of attendees at a 1931 House Party in USA, screenshot taken from <https://vimeo.com/420289052>

Whilst attempting to speak to the concerns of a nation on the brink of World War Two, such scaling up of operations makes sense. The advances in Moral Re-Armament's media campaign during this time will be explored in Chapter Three. As David Belden points out, Frank Buchman took great inspiration from the Nazi Party's ability to incite revolution: "just think if this revolution were under the direction of God's Holy Spirit, and was by consent rather than outward control".<sup>223</sup> Buchman was impressed by both the enthusiasm for renewal amongst the population, and the scale of the mass meetings, leading Belden to conclude that "the change in the Group's public style in the mid-1930s", where they switched to large conferences and parades rather than individual conversion experiences, "owed something to the impression that the Nazi rallies made on the Group's leaders".<sup>224</sup> It was this desire to speak directly to growing trends – when Buchman felt the Nazi party were the best answer to the problems facing Christianity - which saw Buchman face his first major public controversy after publicly defending Hitler.

After attending the infamous 1936 Berlin Olympic games, hosted by Nazi Germany, Buchman was interviewed by The New York World Telegram. He stated:

I thank Heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defence against the anti-Christ of Communism... of course, I don't condone everything the Nazis do. Anti-Semitism? Bad, naturally. I suppose Hitler sees a Karl Marx in every Jew. But think what it would mean to the world if Hitler surrendered to the control of God. Or Mussolini. Or any dictator. Through such a man God could control a nation overnight and solve every last, bewildering problem... Human problems aren't economic. They're moral and they can't be solved by immoral measures. They could be solved within a God-controlled democracy, or perhaps I should say a theocracy, and they could be solved through a God-controlled Fascist dictatorship.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> D. Belden, 'The Oxford Group', p. 144.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> W.A.H. Birnie, 'Hitler Or Any Fascist Leader Controlled By God Could Cure All Ills Of World, Buchman Believes', *New York World Telegram*, 26 August 1936.

Buchman had been invited in 1935, by Himmler, to attend the Nuremberg Nazi Party Rally: the rally, during which, Hitler introduced the “Nuremberg Laws”, which prevented marriage or extramarital intercourse between Germans and Jews, as well as stripping German Jews of their German citizenship.<sup>226</sup> Michael Burn, a reporter for *The Times*, recalls seeing Buchman there, sat next to renowned fascists Unity Mitford and Diana Mosley.<sup>227</sup> Another writer, Henry Williamson, noted that even Buchman, “after the first hour, was hailing Hitler, and shooting out right hand”.<sup>228</sup> Buchman’s desire to become acquaintances with anyone in positions of power is unsurprising here: again, he would do anything which would advance Moral Re-Armament’s campaign. When it appeared as though the popular, powerful tide was going with Hitler, Buchman followed. When the backlash from his *New York Times* interview ensued, from British Press and politicians, however, Buchman backed down and never publicly spoke about Hitler again.

Indeed, throughout the 1930s, then, we can see The Oxford Group scaling up its approaches in an effort to speak to the growing influence of extremist movements – both of which were viewed as a threat to Christianity, and to the nation on the brink of war. No longer was the primary concern regarding the sexual morality of the country, but instead the impending war. As John Carter Wood outlines:

Christians responded in contrasting ways: some showed sympathy for and fascination with Communism or Fascism, and others... developed a marked antipathy to what were seen as dangerous and inhumane ‘political religions’. Especially across the 1930s—with the rise of Nazism, the Spanish Civil War and the increasing likelihood of a new global conflict—Christians in Britain and Ireland were drawn into a more intense effort to consider more precisely not only how faith and the social order related but also how Christians could use their still considerable influence to bring ‘modern’ culture and society more in line with what they held to be the principles of their faith.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> G. Lean, *On the Tail of a Comet: The Life of Frank Buchman*, (Virginia, 1988) p. 236.

<sup>227</sup> D. Pryce-Jones Weidenfeld and Nicolson, *Unity Mitford: A Quest*, (London, 1976).

<sup>228</sup> H. Williamson, *Goodbye West Country*, (Boston, 1938), p. 247.

<sup>229</sup> J. Wood ‘Christian modernities’, p. 496.

It was such a desire to speak to the anxieties of Britons that prompted a name change in 1938 to Moral Re-Armament. During the speech that would officially launch Moral Re-Armament, Buchman noted that “the world’s condition cannot but cause disquiet and anxiety. Hostility piles up between nation and nation, labour and capital, class and class”.<sup>230</sup> Buchman diagnosed the crisis as “fundamentally a moral one”, meaning “the nations must re-arm morally”.<sup>231</sup> Aware that World War Two was imminent, Buchman positioned his group once again as the answer to the emerging problem. As Daniel Sack outlines “During World War II, Moral Re-Armament reinvented its work yet again, repackaging its message to fight that war. Movement leaders called that message an ideology, putting their preaching on par with rival ideologies and making evangelical Christianity relevant for hot and cold wars alike”.<sup>232</sup>

World War Two once again threw Christians another challenge and a fresh sense of crisis. Clive Field’s *Puzzled People Revisited* argues that some religious ground was “lost in terms of religious belief and practice especially during the first half of the war”, despite it not posing any serious threat to the long-term status of religion.<sup>233</sup> Moral Re-Armament’s 1940 publication, *Battle Together for Britain* shows its attempt to present itself as the solution. The publication emulates British war-time recruitment propaganda, in the style of the 1914 ‘Lord Kitchener Wants You’, but the content has an Moral Re-Armament spin (Figure Twelve).

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<sup>230</sup> F. Buchman, ‘Moral Re-Armament, speech delivered at East Ham Town Hall, June 1938’, in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 141.

<sup>233</sup> C. Field, ‘*Puzzled People Revisited: Religious Believing and Belonging in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945*’, *Twentieth Century British History* 19:4 (2008), pp. 446-479, p. 446.

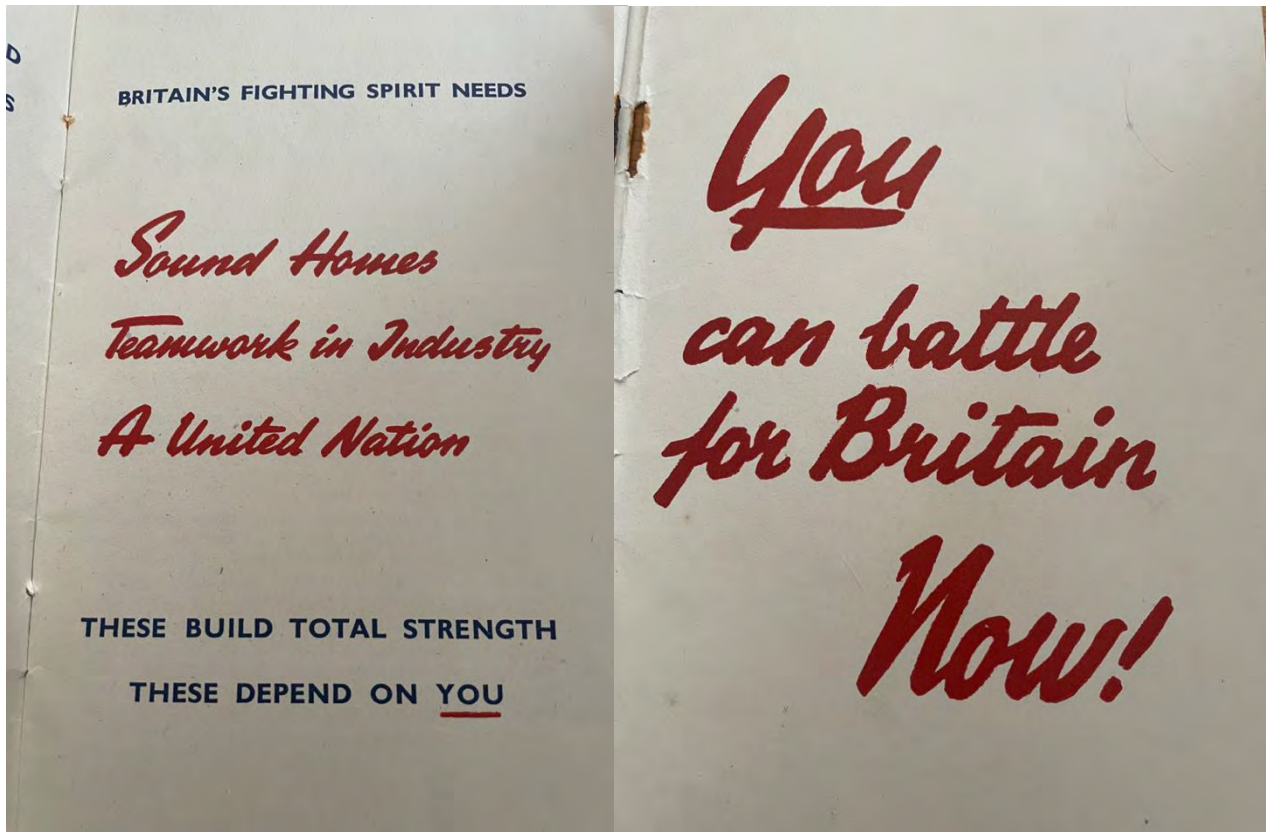


Figure Eleven: Battle Together for Britain, (London, 1940)

The book begins:

Today Britain fights... in a total war. Builds arms – ships, tanks, planes and guns. Puts millions of men in the field. Wins decisive battles. But is this enough? Our enemies fight with a force of arms, and with ideas. What is Britain's big idea? Has Britain the super-force of a fighting faith? Does she build character? Team work? The will to sacrifice? Forty-five million Britons ask, 'what more can I do about it?'.<sup>234</sup>

Moral Re-Armament offer the following solution: "Britain's fighting spirit needs sound homes, teamwork in industry, a united nation". By sound homes, Moral Re-Armament mean tackling the issue of "divorce rapidly becoming part of British life. And the birth rate going down".<sup>235</sup>

The book continues: "If homes crack, the nations crack.. homes that pull together will pull the

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<sup>234</sup> Moral Re-Armament, *Battle Together for Britain* (London, 1940).

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*



country through... [and] will produce the will power to win the war, secure the peace, and build the new world". Ultimately, the book concludes "Britain needs a change of heart. Britons are honest, unselfish, neighbourly, clean and free. Or are they? Always? Are you? All the time?", calling on the reader to look inward at their own spirit and soul. Monopolising on the fears and anxiety of a nation at war can be seen again as a longer trend of Moral Re-Armament mirroring whatever crisis it was seeking to present itself as the answer to.

Despite many members not initially serving in the war – applying for exemption which was later rejected, an issue which is explored further in Chapter Four – Moral Re-Armament still made a great effort to publicize its contribution to the war effort. As reported in a 1940 article *Moral Re-Armament: Its contribution in time of war*, Moral Re-Armament believed that it:

develop[s] morale, good leadership, a new sense of responsibility, mental and physical fitness, the ability to co-operate, resourcefulness and a new hope for world happiness. It removes fear of being hurt or killed, or taking the initiatives, and of things going wrong at home while we are away... All this results because Moral Re-Armament is the equipment for a life of the highest quality.<sup>236</sup>

Once the war had ended in 1945, Moral Re-Armament set upon the task of positioning itself as close to the centre of post-war reconciliation as possible in order to address wavering Christian belief in Britain. Alana Harris points out that a Mass Observation survey in 1947 found that:

All these symptoms point in much the same direction—religion with God relegated to the background, the stress on everyday actions . . . belief in standards of behaviour acquired through personal experience...a philosophy rather than a theology, a coherent way of life rather than a faith.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> *Kent Messenger*, 'Moral Re-Armament: Its contribution in time of war', 23 March 1940.

<sup>237</sup> A. Harris, 'Disturbing the Complacency of Religion?', p. 511.

Stating in 1947 that “until we deal with human nature thoroughly and drastically on a national scale, nations must still follow their historic road to violence and destruction” Buchman asked “what is the answer?”. Moral Re-Armament, Buchman stated was “the only possible hope for world reconstruction”.<sup>238</sup> In an international context, it focussed its attention on fostering post-war peace between Germany and France in the form of an assembly at Caux by inviting both German and French participants, as well as key individuals Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schuman to foster discussions which would eventually lead to the European Economic Community.<sup>239</sup> As Philip Boobbyer has highlighted, much of its focus was on post-war reconciliation, as well as its activities in Asia and Africa where it sought to introduce a Christian dynamic into the process of decolonisation.<sup>240</sup> In Britain, however, the focus was on industrial relations and Communism, a focus which continued into the 1950s.

1950s:

Mark Freeman explores an unpublished investigation by B. Seebohm Rowntree and G. Russell Lavers into the “spiritual life of the nation” which was carried out in the early 1950s: *Britain’s Spiritual Life: How Can It Be Deepened?*. Through this publication, Freeman argues, we can see the anxiety of Christians in the post-war years which framed the efforts of groups such as Moral Re-Armament. Christians were clearly concerned about the future: The Quakers held a conference Oxford in 1952 which explored “Christianity in a Revolutionary World”, focussing

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<sup>238</sup> F. Buchman, ‘The only hope for world reconstruction, speech delivered in Caux, 1947’, in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>239</sup> E. Luttwak, ‘Franco-German Reconciliation: The Overlooked Role of the Moral Re-Armament Movement’, in D. Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (eds.), *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 37-63.

<sup>240</sup> P. Boobbyer, ‘Moral Re-Armament in Africa in the Era of Decolonisation’, in B. Stanley, (ed.) *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Michigan, 2004), pp. 212-236.

on the position of Christianity with regard to Communism.<sup>241</sup> Whilst Rowntree and Lavers, after the latter's visit to Caux, found that Moral Re-Armament was (in their eyes) not the best solution to Communism because of its threat of "a new Dark Ages", Moral Re-Armament certainly saw itself as the only solution to Communism.<sup>242</sup> Additionally, through this investigation, we can see the "desire that religious influence be redirected through secular channels", something which Moral Re-Armament began to adopt due to the perceived failure of the way religion was being conducted already. *Britain's Spiritual Life* was not the only publication which demonstrates the concerned nature of British Christians in the years after World War Two: *Has the Church Failed?* (1947) and Mass Observation's *Puzzled People* (1948) represented this same anxiety.<sup>243</sup>

As Sam Brewitt-Taylor outlines, "throughout the Second World War and the early Cold War, for example, British newspapers routinely conceptualized Nazism and Communism as rival religions to Christianity, complete with their own mythologies, rituals, and cults of leadership."<sup>244</sup> This conceptualization landed with Moral Re-Armament, which was keen to present itself as the ideological answer to Communism. The Catholic Truth Society's investigation into Moral Re-Armament states that:

In a recent, widely circulated pamphlet, the movement known as Moral Re-Armament asserts: "there are two ideologies bidding for the world today. One is Moral Re-Armament, which believes that God's mind should control the world through human nature that has been changed; the other is Communism, which believes that man's mind

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<sup>241</sup> M. Freeman, 'Britain's Spiritual Life: How Can it be Deepened?: Seebohm Rowntree, Russell Lavers, and the "crisis of belief", ca. 1946-1954', *Journal of Religious History*, 29:1 (2005), pp. 25-42, p. 29.

<sup>242</sup> M. Freeman, 'Britain's Spiritual Life', p. 30.

<sup>243</sup> J. Marchant (ed), *Has the Church Failed?* (London, 1947); Mass- Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough, Prepared for the Ethical Union* (London, 1948).

<sup>244</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, 'Fallout from Books and Bombs: 1960s' Anglican Radicalism', *Church Times* (2019), <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/4-january/features/features/fallout-from-books-and-bombs-1960s-anglican-radicalism> (Accessed January 2023).

should control the world through human nature that has been exploited. One or the other must win.<sup>245</sup>

The Churches, in the eyes of Moral Re-Armament, were failing to meet the challenge of Communism by their inability to engage in the ‘real world’. As Thornton-Duesbury had remarked: “the Oxford Group, as I see it, is simply the Church at work, alive to the nature of the combat that is to come. As Communism plants "cells," so Christianity must plant its fellowships of vital witness”.<sup>246</sup>

Moral Re-Armament was not the only Christian group to concern itself with Communism. The Spanish Civil War – which was understood by many Britons as a fight between a right-wing Christian Rebel Crusade and the elected Communist government – “presented members of the Christian community in Britain with an opportunity and sometimes what they felt was an obligation to voice their broader anxieties”.<sup>247</sup> Ben Edwards highlights how, before the Spanish Civil War, Christians in Britain were already anxious about Christianity’s diminishing status: the ecumenical movement in the 1920s and 30s had been established to “combat perceived threats to Christianity’s importance”.<sup>248</sup> Edwards highlights how, alongside Britain’s anxieties about the diminishing status of Christianity, church attendance also dropped in inter-war Britain. Thus, by as early as the 1920s, Britons were keen to fight any perceived threat to Christianity; atheistic communism being high on their target list. Groups such as the Christian Protest Movement fought against the “godless campaign” of Communism in Britain. Thomas Linehan’s study of Fascist Clerics in 1930s Britain also explores several clerics operating amongst the British Union of Fascist’s ranks due to their

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<sup>245</sup> J. Christie, *Moral Re-Armament: The Catholic Viewpoint*, (London, 1960), p. 1.

<sup>246</sup> J. Thornton-Duesbury, ‘Dr Frank Buchman and the Group Movement’, paper presented at The Cheltenham and Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1932.

<sup>247</sup> B. Edwards, *With God on Our Side: British Christian responses to the Spanish Civil War* (Newcastle, 2013).

<sup>248</sup> B. Edwards, *With God on Our Side*, p. 6.

opposition to Communism.<sup>249</sup> Moral Re-Armament's efforts can be viewed as a continuation of these efforts and anxieties.

In the 1950s, Moral Re-Armament framed itself as engaged in the front line of ideological warfare. It was this ideological warfare which was the focus of the training sessions that Moral Re-Armament held at Caux for members of the military after World War Two, in 1950 where sessions on "the ideological aspects of national and international defence" were held.<sup>250</sup> Moral Re-Armament also rallied its politician member, John McGovern, to promote Moral Re-Armament as the solution to the political problems of the 1950s and the answer to Communism.<sup>251</sup> Writing in 1955, R.C Mowat explored the importance of Moral Re-Armament in the on-going ideological war between Communism and the West: he explored the need for the West to create an ideology which would not only unite its own peoples but appeal to non-Western masses to result in a common unity; an ideology which would reach the other side of the Iron Curtain – something which Christianity at the time was failing to do. Mowat turns to Buchman's utilisation of Christian values as a life changing and nation changing force, citing Buchman's alleged success record in solving problems in South Africa and Asia.<sup>252</sup>

At the same time, in the 1950s, Moral Re-Armament also turned its attention to industrial relations in an attempt to win influence amongst workers, as well as to counter a perceived communist threat. Moral Re-Armer Peter Howard explained Moral Re-Armament's focus on industry: "the docks are the arteries of the world. Through them pumps the lifeblood of nations. In this ideological age the dockers of the world have a mighty power... the work of

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<sup>249</sup> T. Linehan, 'On the Side of Christ': Fascist Clerics in 1930s Britain', *Totalitarian Movement and Political Religions* 8:2 (2007), pp. 287-301.

<sup>250</sup> General G. O. Channer, *Ideological offensive – a report on Moral Re-Armament and the armed forces* (London, 1951), p. 14.

<sup>251</sup> United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 535 (1954).

<sup>252</sup> R. C. Mowat, 'Moral Re-Armament in the Ideological War', *The Contemporary Review*, 97: 187 (1955).

Moral Re-Armament in the docks aims to win men to an ideology based on absolute moral standards and the guidance of God”.<sup>253</sup>

However, despite seemingly good intentions, Moral Re-Armament’s intrusion into trade union affairs rendered it “a highly controversial subject among trade unionists throughout the world”.<sup>254</sup> Kevin Grimm explores the battle between the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and Moral Re-Armament that waged during the 1950s.<sup>255</sup> In its simplest form, “the contest between the ICFTU and Moral Re-Armament was a widespread and significant clash over whose vision of international labour practices and norms would prevail in the early Cold War”.<sup>256</sup> Moral Re-Armament were attempting to become the new status quo solution for labour disputes, thus tapping into a wide pool of potential converts, in the form of workers and trade unionists. Moral Re-Armament and the ICFTU held fundamentally different views about how to solve labour disputes, which formed the basis for their friction. Moral Re-Armament, predictably, thought that following the Four Absolute standards would create peace between worker and employer thus solving issues, whereas Trade Unionists believed in the traditional use of strikes to negotiate power. As Grimm outlines, Moral Re-Armament’s insistence that it was personal growth and relationships which would solve disputes, as opposed to the widely held Trade Union belief in the power of collective bargaining, meant that Moral Re-Armament had positioned itself as a direct threat the Trade Unions everywhere they went. And, as Frank Hilson, a British communist, outlines, this really meant everywhere: “[Moral Re-Armament] appear whenever there’s a strike... [they] rush around England like a private flying squad”.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> P. Howard, *The World Rebuilt*, (London, 1951), p. 62.

<sup>254</sup> K.E Grimm, ‘Encroaching upon trade union preserves’: the 1950s fight over global labour norms between the International Confederations of Free Trade Unions and Moral Re-Armament’, *Labor History* 62:4 (2021), pp. 489-510, p. 489

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>257</sup> F. Hilson, *The Truth About Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1952), p. 3

Kevin Grimm traces issues back to 1952, when Moral Re-Armament caught the attention of the ICFTU after Frank Buchman toured India, winning the favour of some top labour officials there. The more sceptical trade unionists in India, however, approached the ICFTU for advice on how to regard an organisation like Moral Re-Armament, prompting the ICFTU to put together a report.<sup>258</sup> In this report, Buchman's alleged fascist links and his infamous 1936 pro-Hitler newspaper interview gave the ICFTU plenty of leverage to cast doubt on Moral Re-Armament's character. Then, in July 1953 at the Third World Congress of the ICFTU, a full report was presented, which condemned how "the activities of Moral Re-Armament have encroached upon the trade union field".<sup>259</sup> The report claims that Moral Re-Armament persuaded workers to "avoid strikes, reduce organizing efforts, agree to unpaid work hours, work more efficiently for their employers for the same pay".<sup>260</sup> The report also claims that Moral Re-Armament were attempting to form yellow unions which would work to benefit the employer, not the worker.

This report meant Moral Re-Armament were exposed as trying to undermine the ICFTU's efforts to create a better world for workers, by claiming that they had a 'better way'. Yet, this 'better way' fundamentally disagreed with the systematic approach Trade Unions everywhere were taking, and to many, was naïve. Frank Hilson was amongst the many critics of Moral Re-Armament's over simplistic view that their Four Absolutes would change "the whole system of Capitalism", calling it "nonsense": "however kind and generous the individual

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<sup>258</sup> Warwick Modern Records Centre, The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions 'Executive Board: Agenda Item 16, Report on Moral Re-Armament', Stockholm 1<sup>st</sup> July 1953 - MSS.292D/806.7/1

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

capitalist, he cannot help making profit from his workers”.<sup>261</sup> The solutions Moral Re-Armament offer to labour disputes, Hilson states, were “nothing but hot air”.<sup>262</sup>

Bad publicity did not stop its efforts, however. Moral Re-Armament had a thorough playbook which they went by in order to undermine strike efforts. Hilson explains that Moral Re-Armament “concentrates its aim on shop stewards and trade union organisers, Labour Councillors and MP’s” .<sup>263</sup> Hilson dissects exactly how Moral Re-Armament achieved this, shedding light on their questionable practices. In a process Hilson refers to as choosing their victim, he claims that Moral Re-Armament find out the names and addresses of key trade unionists in the area they are targeting.<sup>264</sup> They visit key players, often in “droves”.<sup>265</sup> Then, “once they are in, they are very friendly. After some pleasant chat, they get down to business. To a communist, they explain that they really believe in the communist idea, you know, but Moral Re-Armament takes Marx further. They they’ll be interested to read the communist point of view. They borrow some literature and then leave”.<sup>266</sup> Hilson claims that Moral Re-Armament are constantly adapting their approach to suit the audience: “To a labour man, of course, its labour they are in favour of”.<sup>267</sup> Then, Hilson outlines, they return for a second call to seal the deal. After this, ‘victims’ are invited to plays, then meetings, and then to Caux where you are “conquered”.<sup>268</sup> This play by play was sometimes carried out during a strike. For example, during the 1952 strike at Briggs Works, Dagenham, Hilson recalls that “half a dozen”

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<sup>261</sup> F. Hilson, *The Truth About Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1952), p. 4.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.



Moral Re-Armament workers visited “at least 40 to 100 shop stewards three or four times each in a couple of weeks”.<sup>269</sup>

Such an approach reflects the again changing tactics of Moral Re-Armament, who moved away from large political style-meetings and towards targeted conversion through pressure and, surprisingly, plays. The efforts of Moral Re-Armament with relation to its 1950 and 1960 Theatre campaigns will be explored extensively in Chapter Three. What is important to note here, however, is how Moral Re-Armament again adapted its efforts to suit the political and social mood of Britain. As Boobbyer highlights, the use of theatre in the postwar years again reflects the effort “to find innovative ways of communicating a spiritual message”.<sup>270</sup> David Belden reflects on the success of this tactic, noting that: “the Group’s new tactic of using theatrical revues and plays bore dividends in terms of contacting large total audiences. *The Forgotten Factor*, the Group’s most successful play, was said to have been seen by over a million people in seven years”.<sup>271</sup>

It must also be noted that this move away from large rallies hosted by Buchman with his public speeches can be attributed to his wartime stroke, which personal secretary Morris Martin noted rendered him a “vigorous invalid”, meaning that it was publications, plays and music which would now “reach the masses”.<sup>272</sup> Consequently, World Broadcasts and leaflets circulating speeches by Buchman increased in frequency in the aftermath of World War Two: Buchman was keen to present Moral Re-Armament as the answer to any question. Speeches such as *The Answer to Any ‘Ism’ Even Materialism* (1948), *The Good Road* (1948), *Is There An Answer? There Is* (1949), *What Are You Living For?* (1950), *The News With An Answer*

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<sup>269</sup> F. Hilson, *The Truth*, p. 11.

<sup>270</sup> P. Boobbyer, ‘The Cold War in the Plays of Peter Howard’, *Contemporary British History*, 19:2 (2005), pp. 205-222, p. 209.

<sup>271</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 154.

<sup>272</sup> M. Martin, *Always a Little Further*, p. 156.

(1950), *The Destiny of East and West* (1950), *Turn on the Light* (1951), *God is the Answer to the Modern Confusion That Dogs Us* (1958), *The Wrong Way and the Right Way* (1959).

Most of these speeches make reference to the threat of Communism, Trade Union strikes, and industry support for Moral Re-Armament, which reflects the focus of Moral Re-Armament in the 1950s. Whilst the focus of publications and speeches before during pre-war was on themes of Battle and re-arming – take, for example *The Battle for a New World* (1939), *Battle for Britain* (1940), the focus of publications after the war was offering ‘roads’, ‘answers’, insights on ‘destiny’, and a ‘light’ for the way forward. As Frank Buchman stated at the end of the 1940s:

There is a road, a good road among many false ways, a good road mankind must find and follow. It is a God constructed road. It is the great high road of God inspired democracy. It is valid for every nation. It is essential for world peace. Men today are being stretched consciously or unconsciously into new moulds of thinking. People everywhere ask, “have you the answer to Communism?”<sup>273</sup>

Within these publications, we can see Moral Re-Armament’s attempts to present itself as the solution to the modern problem of a nation lost after war, fearful of the Communist threat and uncertain about its future. Additionally, within these speeches we can see Buchman’s attempts to align directly with the ‘modern’: in *Turn on the Light*, Buchman quotes support from modern industrialist Henry Ford, as well as Thomas Edison’s wife: “this light”, meaning Moral Re-Armament’s message, “like my husband’s, must go into every home”.<sup>274</sup> Buchman makes clear “these men were pioneers of the new industrial age. That is why they understood Moral Re-Armament, the new spirit alight in the world”. In *The Answer To Every ‘Ism’ Even Materialism* (1948), Buchman clearly sets up this idea of Moral Re-Armament as the

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<sup>273</sup> Moral Re-Armament, *The Good Road: World Broadcast by Dr Frank N. D Buchman*, (Caux, 1948).

<sup>274</sup> Moral Re-Armament, *Turn on the Light, a speech by Dr Frank. N. D Buchman*, (Michigan, 1951).

enlightened future: “this the new pattern of freedom for all nations. Shall it be a new Dark Age for Europe and the World? Or shall it be a world-wide Renaissance of the moral and spiritual forces everywhere, bursting into life and bringing at the last moment a miracle to mankind?”. This emphasis on connections and light was not new: in *Revolution to Cure a Revolution* (1936), Buchman stated: “I knew the man who gave us electric light. Everyone can get light today provided he makes contact with the power station. And it is just as practical to make contact with God. God has illumination for us, if our contact is good”.<sup>275</sup>

Towards the end of the decade, we can see even more infusion of contemporary themes in Buchman’s speeches. Keen to jump on the space-race mood: in *The Wrong Way and the Right Way* (1959), Buchman begins: “we are not ready to life in the world that faces us”, The man who says this is a production genius in charge of 400 scientists and 35,000 men who launched Atlas in answer to Sputnik. There is a wrong way and a right way of launching a rocket into space. There is a wrong way and a right way of living on earth”.<sup>276</sup> Buchman continues “Dr Douglas Cornell, Executive Officer of the National Academy of Sciences, says, “science has made it possible for the world to be destroyed between lunch and the cocktail hour. But the problem does not lie in science, it lies in man. It is modern man who needs to be remade”.<sup>277</sup>

This attempt to align itself with the modern can also be seen in *God is the Answer to the Modern Confusion That Dogs Us* (1958).<sup>278</sup> Buchman claims to an American audience “Russia launches a dog-carrying satellite. The whole world tunes its ear to listen to a dog. That is

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<sup>275</sup> F. Buchman, ‘Revolution to Cure a Revolution, speech delivered in London, August 1936, in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 7.

<sup>276</sup> Moral Re-Armament, *Right Way and the Wrong Way, a speech by Dr Frank. N. D Buchman*, (Mackinac Island, 1959).

<sup>277</sup> Moral Re-Armament, *Right Way and the Wrong Way, a speech by Dr Frank. N. D Buchman*, (Mackinac Island, 1959).

<sup>278</sup> F. Buchman, ‘God is the answer to the Modern Confusion that Dogs Us’, speech delivered in Mackinac, June 1959, in: F. Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1955), p. 242.

important in our conquest of space. But it does not help us to settle our confusion on earth. If we were willing to tune our ears to God we could simply settle our earthly confusion and even perhaps more nearer our conquest of space”. Such an approach was typical of Moral Re-Armament: always avoidant of developing detailed theological responses to the changes in the world, but aligning itself on a surface level with popular cultural moods. During this period, whilst simultaneously using increasingly scientific language, we can also begin to note a secularisation of the language Moral Re-Armament were using in their publications, a trend which Chapter Three explores in detail.

## 1960s

As Sam Brewitt-Taylor has outlined, in the 1960s, British Christians were (once again) worried about the place of faith in a seemingly modernising world: “their fear was that the decline of British Christianity would cause the British to embrace some horrible totalitarian cult, to replace their lost sources of meaning and social unity, as had apparently happened in Russia and Germany”.<sup>279</sup> Additionally, as John Carter Wood argues, alongside the political questions regarding the threat of Communism, Christians in the 1960s were also concerned with “issues of family life” and sexuality. Moral Re-Armament’s efforts throughout the 1960s reflect this, with many more published speeches from Buchman published at the beginning of the decade: *For God’s Sake Wake Up: An Ideology for Britain* (1961), *All the Moral Fences are Down* (Caux, 1961), *For God’s Sake Wake Up!* (1961), *Labour Led by God Can Lead the World* (1961), *Moral Re-Armament or National Decay* (1961), *God’s Way, Not Man’s Way, For Britain*, (1961). These speeches dealt directly with issues of immorality and communism as

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<sup>279</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Fallout from Books and Bombs: 1960s’ Anglican Radicalism’, *Church Times* (2019), <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/4-january/features/features/fallout-from-books-and-bombs-1960s-anglican-radicalism> (Accessed January 2023).

dangers to the modern world. As Callum Brown points out, the focus of Moral Re-Armament in the 1950s and 1960s was to “fight communism and sexual immorality – the two being clearly aligned in Moral Re-Armament minds”. This was true. Moral Re-Armament treated sexual immorality as a weakening of strength which would let in things like communism. Speaking in 1961, Buchman reflects this attitude:

In Oxford, a few months ago, my old friend Sir Richard Livingstone said, ‘when you are I were young there were moral fences on the road of life. We did not always keep to them. But we always knew when we crossed them. But today all the moral fences are down, and look at the world. Your job is to build these fences anew.’<sup>280</sup>

Buchman continues: “in one country people shamelessly admit their leaders have their mistresses and are just not honest. That country is very close to Communist take-over. Today, whenever the moral fences are down, Communism walks in”. Indeed, when the “moral fences” were down, anything could be let in, in Moral Re-Armament’s eyes.

Another key change happened for Moral Re-Armament in the 1960s: Buchman’s death in 1961, and Peter Howard’s subsequent leadership. Whilst the campaign of Peter Howard with his focus on the media outputs of Moral Re-Armament as a vehicle to speak to the British people will be explored in Chapter Three, it is important to note that with Howard’s leadership, which coincided with the cultural changes of the 1960s, came a renewed focus on sexual immorality which had not been at the centre of Moral Re-Armament’s concern since the 1920s. In 1963, Peter Howard declared “we are no longer a Christian country... most people have rejected the yardstick of absolute moral standards”.<sup>281</sup> Based on these fears, Howard would go

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<sup>280</sup> F. Buchman, ‘All the Moral Fences are Down, speech delivered in Caux, April 1961’, in F. Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1955), p. 272.

<sup>281</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Christianity and the invention of the sexual revolution in Britain, 1963-1967’, *The Historical Journal*, 60:2 (2017), pp. 519-546, p. 535.

on to focus on issues of immorality both in the nation's homes and on the nation's screens, through the BBC: an issue was explored earlier in the thesis. Again, Moral Re-Armament was hopping on the cultural mood of anxiety over changing sexual morals. As Sam Brewitt-Taylor highlights "From 1965, 'the so-called sexual revolution of our times' was widely discussed in the mainstream press, and by 1967 its inevitability had entered conventional media wisdom. In 1970, no less than 80 per cent of National Opinion Poll's (NOP) respondents agreed that 'people's attitudes towards sex in the last ten years have changed a lot'".<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, "In 1968, Gallup found that 49 per cent of its respondents disapproved of unmarried couples even using contraceptives, outnumbering the 37 per cent who did approve".<sup>283</sup> Peter Howard was vocal in his attempts to speak to this anxiety: in a 1964 interview, Howard bemoaned "Bishops standing up in Britain and stating that pre-marital infidelity is normal", alongside those who "try and keep up with the times by cutting Christ down to human size", and think it "best not to mention God".<sup>284</sup> Here, we can assume Howard is referring to the Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, who in the year before had published the controversial *Honest to God*, which had criticised traditional Christian theology.

Whilst Buchman was no stranger to adapting to meet the changing demands of society, Peter Howard, his successor from 1961 onwards, seemed to have a more agile approach to communicating faith to new people, and in new spaces – but still insisted that what Moral Re-Armament was asking of people was to live as "sons and daughters of God", a "passionate pursuit of good to match a passionate pursuit of evil" of communism.<sup>285</sup> This heightened

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<sup>282</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, 'Christianity and the invention of the sexual revolution in Britain, 1963-1967', *The Historical Journal*, 60:2 (2017), pp. 519-546, p. 520.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Viewpoint*, 'Peter Howard', (KNXT Public Affairs, 1964).

<sup>285</sup> N. Straller, 'An interview with Peter Howard', (n.d), <https://vimeo.com/420648150> (Accessed May 2020)

awareness of a more universal appeal perhaps had something to do with Howard's atheism upon joining Moral Re-Armament in the 1940s, before his ultimate conversion to Christianity.<sup>286</sup> Howard had rewritten the group's manual *Soul Surgery* in 1954 – and renamed it *Remaking Men*. Whereas *Soul Surgery* was explicitly written for Christians, *Remaking Man* was written for “everyone everywhere”, and whilst there was ample reference to God and God-guidance, there was minimal reference to Jesus Christ.<sup>287</sup> However, as David Belden highlights, “the power of God to guide, strengthen and change individuals was as central to Campbell's Moral Re-Armament manual of 1970 as it had been to Walter's of 1919”.<sup>288</sup>

Crucially, Howard – an ex Fleet-Street Journalist and Playwright – brought with him ideas for Moral Re-Armament's future media campaign, which would see it publish more, stage plays and create films to promote its ideology and speak to modern issues. Whilst Chapter Three deals with the 1960s media campaigns of Moral Re-Armament in detail, what is worth highlighting here is once again Moral Re-Armament's turn towards focus to the seemingly pressing issues worrying British Christians: immorality and communism. This focus on immorality continued into the 1970s, after Peter Howard's death, as Chapter Three sheds more light on.

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<sup>286</sup> P. Howard, ‘A Revolution That Works’, speech delivered at Mackinac Conference 1964, <https://vimeo.com/168772666> (Accessed May 2020),

<sup>287</sup> P. Campbell and P. Howard, *Remaking Men*, (London, 1954).

<sup>288</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 168.

## Conclusions

What has been demonstrated is both the deep-rooted history of Moral Re-Armament's methods - which found its origins in existing Christian and Evangelical traditions – alongside the distinctive nature of Moral Re-Armament's faith and ideology. Moral Re-Armament's way of 'doing' religion aimed to reinvigorate Christianity's old truths, and make them newly applicable to the ever changing world. It was the practical, real-life-applicable nature of Moral Re-Armament's ideology which meant, in theory, anyone could follow it. As has been demonstrated, Moral Re-Armament's style of Christianity was free from dogma, internal disputes, and institutional rules, and was therefore experienced by members as a relatively new, energetic style of Christianity with a more universal appeal and practical potential. Moral Re-Armament's Christianity aimed to permeate the daily lives of its members – by informing their daily actions through Listening to God for guidance, and living their life according to the 'Four Absolute' standards - and encouraged its members to convert others to live the same way through the process of the 5 C's. Such a format meant that throughout the decades, Moral Re-Armament aimed to tackle the bigger problems of Communism, whilst also focussing on the personal problems of marriage, love and sex. With a focus on both the personal, the political, and the world-wide, it had ambitions which reached far beyond the revival of Christianity or a return to something which had already been established: Moral Re-Armament wanted to start a revolution. Such an attitude is captured in the rhyme which became popular amongst Moral Re-Armers:

It's not an institution  
It's not a point of view  
It starts a revolution  
By starting one in you.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> F. Buchman, 'Revolution to Cure a Revolution, speech delivered in London, August 1936, in K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path* (London, 1975), p. 6.



Additionally, upon reviewing each decade of the Oxford Group and then Moral Re-Armament, what is striking is the amount of “turning points” it has positioned itself within. At each decade, Moral Re-Armament has stated, “humanity has reached a turning-point”: after World War One, in the eve of World War Two, Post-World War Two, the Communist Threat and the Cold War, and 1960s immorality. At each moment, Moral Re-Armament offered whoever would listen an option: at these supposed forks in the road, there were two routes: Moral Re-Armament or the given unthinkable alternative of that decade.

Given the design of its faith – with easy to follow steps of the Four Absolutes, Listening to God, and the 5 C’s, largely borrowed from Baptist and evangelical traditions Buchman had encountered during his early days – Moral Re-Armament was uniquely positioned to adapt to these changing contexts. By not committing to any strict dogma or theology, Moral Re-Armament could remain flexible in its delivery of faith: adapting to the modern world in a way which directly contradicts those who had argued that religion was incompatible with modernity.

## CHAPTER TWO: MORAL RE-ARMAMENT'S MEMBERS

When Moral Re-Armament member Charles Burns proposed to his then girlfriend, but soon to be wife, Barbara Macmillan in December 1948, we can assume that he was grateful that he had been allowed to do so. The relationship between Charles and Barbara had somewhat of a third member, one who influenced Burns' life decisions both big and small. The physically absent but simultaneously very psychologically present figure who loomed large over the couple's relationship was Moral Re-Armament leader, Frank Buchman. Before proposing, Burns wrote to Buchman: "My dear Frank. Yes, I expect you have guessed already – I have fallen in love and want to write to tell you about it".<sup>1</sup> In a practice resembling the tradition of asking a father for his daughters' hand in marriage, Burns wrote fondly of his newfound love for fellow Moral Re-Armament member, Barbara - whom he had met during a stay at Moral Re-Armament's Caux Headquarters - before asking Buchman's permission to propose. Once granted, in a letter from Buchman shortly thereafter, Charles asked Barbara to marry him. Buchman was amongst the first informed of the happy news, via telegram (Figure Thirteen).

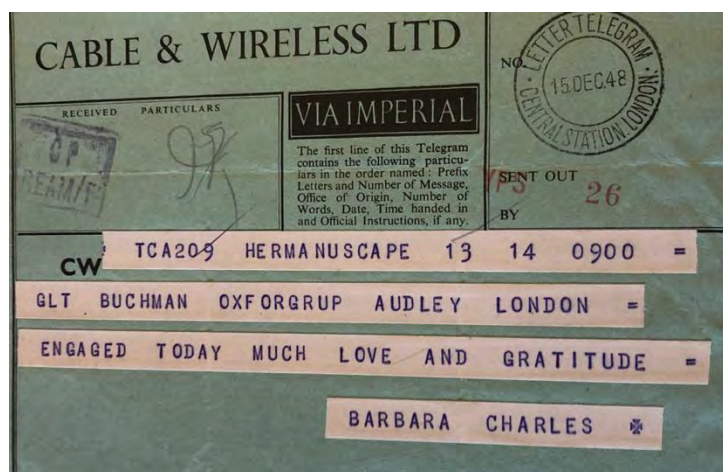


Figure Twelve: Telegram to Frank Buchman from Charles Burns, December 1948, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/0296-0322.

<sup>1</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296/0322, Charles Burns letter to Frank Buchman, 24 August 1948.

Charles Burns was born in 1912 to a wealthy family: his father Alan was a lawyer, whilst his mother stayed at home to raise him and his three siblings.<sup>2</sup> After being educated at Eton College, and subsequently Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, Burns joined the army at the rank of officer in the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles.<sup>3</sup> One of Charles' fellow officers had taken the Moral Re-Armament publication *For Sinners Only* out of the library, expecting a 'racy book', and, unsurprisingly disappointed, had left it on the side. Charles read the book, sparking his interest in Moral Re-Armament's ideology.<sup>4</sup> Upon his return to London after two years with the Army in India, Burns met up with Miles Phillimore – a Moral Re-Armer – to learn more about the group.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after this, Charles broke his neck whilst on a Lauderdale Hunt when he was thrown off his horse.<sup>6</sup> These injuries, Burns' son Geoffrey recalls, ultimately saved his father's life, as it rendered him unable to serve in World War Two, during which his entire corps, the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles, were "wiped out".<sup>7</sup> It was during this downtime, on bedrest, that Burns began reading more about Moral Re-Armament. Once recovered and mobile, Burns became full-time Moral Re-Armament worker, selling his family estate Cumbernauld House, and purchasing a home in London to be used as a base for Moral Re-Armament members. Despite having a vaguely religious background, with Protestant parents who took the family to Church every Sunday, Burns' involvement with a group like Moral Re-Armament came as a surprise to his fellow family members, who found the sudden devotion to Christ abnormal.<sup>8</sup>

Barbara, on the other hand, was 'born in' to the Moral Re-Armament life. Barbara's father, Reverend Dr Ebenezer Macmillan, was a member of Moral Re-Armament, and a

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<sup>2</sup> B. Burns, *On Borrowed Time: The Story of Charles Burns* (Self published, n.d), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 'Charles Hope Burns', *The Peerage*, <http://www.thepeerage.com/p48099.htm#i480990> (Accessed April 2021).

<sup>4</sup> B. Burns, *On Borrowed Time*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Southern Reporter*, 7 February 1935.

<sup>7</sup> Grace France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25 February 2021.

<sup>8</sup> B. Burns, *On Borrowed Time*, p. 47.

Minister of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Pretoria, South Africa, where he also taught Theology at the Transvaal University College. Dr Macmillan – a clearly passionate follower of Moral Re-Armament - wrote many articles promoting its ideology, and preached its message in his sermons.<sup>9</sup> Born in Ullapool in 1881, Ebenezer went on to become a moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> He became involved with Moral Re-Armament in 1929, and raised his children Barbara, and her brother Rob, to also become members. Barbara recalls briefly “trying out” Moral Re-Armament to please her father, but losing her way after his sudden passing from a stroke: it wasn't until she met Charles that her faith in Moral Re-Armament was restored.<sup>11</sup>

Once married, Charles and Barbara's lives were devoted to Moral Re-Armament: a devotion which saw them travelling around the world, living in communal homes with other Moral Re-Armament members, and eventually sending their children Geoffrey and Delscey to Moral Re-Armament's boarding school in Caux and raising them to be Moral Re-Armament members. Their son, Geoffrey, would write to his “Uncle Frank” Buchman in 1961 expressing his desire to be a “fighter” for Moral Re-Armament's World Mission.<sup>12</sup>

Charles and Barbara had met at the heart of Moral Re-Armament's operations in Caux, had sought Moral Re-Armament's permission to marry, heralded Buchman's speech as the high point of their own wedding, raised their children in Moral Re-Armament's teachings, and educated them in Moral Re-Armament's school. Barbara even put Charles' death down to the

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<sup>9</sup> E. Macmillan, ‘Christianity in action: The Church and the Oxford Group’, *The Expository Times*, 1 April 1938 ; E. Macmillan, ‘The Danger of a Great Experience’, Sermon delivered in South Africa, <https://stepstudy.org/2008/09/01/the-danger-of-a-great-experience-by-ebenezer-macmillan/> (Accessed April 2021)

<sup>10</sup> *The Scotsman*, 31 October 1944

<sup>11</sup> B. Burns, *On Borrowed Time*, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296-0322, Letter from Geoffrey Burns to Frank Buchman (n.d).

fact that she hadn't asked for Buchman's guidance regarding Charles' upcoming operation.<sup>13</sup> Even more surprising, upon reflecting on whether she would want to have Charles back, or have the "experience of the Cross which [she] had" in Moral Re-Armament, she would "choose the cross".<sup>14</sup>

The Burns' story can be found unfolding in the letters they wrote to Frank Buchman from the 1930s onwards.<sup>15</sup> These letters reveal the lived experience of being a Moral Re-Armer, casting light onto lives so intensely intertwined with Moral Re-Armament, and so intensely devoted to its cause. Crucially, however, The Burns' story is not unique: many similar experiences can be found alongside Charles and Barbara's correspondence.

This chapter will use these letters to Frank Buchman to demonstrate who Moral Re-Armament's members were, reveal the intensity of their devotion to Buchman and Moral Re-Armament, and understand why these individuals were drawn to Moral Re-Armament in the first place. Doing so allows us to understand Moral Re-Armament's all-encompassing nature, which consumed every element of its members lives: from what they smoked, drank, who they married, if they had children, where they travelled, and where they spent their money. Consequently, we can see the deep impact Moral Re-Armament had on thousands of British people's lives throughout the twentieth century, further shedding light on the success of Moral Re-Armament's ability to spread its alternative faith amongst Britons. Indeed, through these letters we get the sense that people believed, and believed deeply, in Moral Re-Armament, demonstrating the urge within some British Christians to seek an alternative and meaningful

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<sup>13</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296-0322, Letter from Charles Burns to Frank Buchman, 7 July, 1949; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296-0322, Letter from Barbara Burns to Frank Buchman, 22 July 1961.

<sup>14</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296-0322, Letter from Barbara Burns to Frank Buchman, 29 October 1958.

<sup>15</sup> The letters are located in the Archive of the Oxford Group collection at the Bodleian Library under various correspondence 1901-1980, MS. Oxford Group 3/1-174.

Christianity outside of the Church. Crucially, these letters therefore reveal how, why, and how deeply some British Christians engaged with this non-conventional form of faith throughout the twentieth century, adding further strength to the argument that meaningful forms of faith existed outside of institutional religion. This further contests Steve Bruce's claim that the change-not-decline argument of religious change had no real meaningful evidence to support it.<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, we can see whole lives devoted to this alternative faith: arguably, then, meaningful evidence of change not decline. As David Nash has stated, comments such as Bruce's come from a place of being "wedded to an ideal type of vision of institutionalised Christianity as the only touch stone of religiosity".<sup>17</sup>

#### Letters as historical sources

In Moral Re-Armament's main British-based archive collection – located at the Bodleian Library – there is correspondence from around 2,372 individuals to Frank Buchman; spanning from 1908 to his death in 1961. Due to the large amount of correspondence, a sample selection was taken of around 50 individuals, both male and female, from across the time period of 1920 to 1960.<sup>18</sup> The time period was selected to cover the whole range of material available from the decade in which Moral Re-Armament was founded (1920s) until Buchman's death. When

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<sup>16</sup> S. Bruce, 'Appendix Two: Fifty Years On', p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> D. Nash, *Christian Ideas in British Culture: Stories of Belief in the Twentieth Century*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Individuals include: Marianne Peterkin, Elizabeth Peterkin, Janet Peterkin, Amy Peterkin, Norah Bigland, Basil Entwistle, Hallen Viney, Phyllis and Harold Grotrian, Stephen Foot, Adeline Wykes, Hilda Pocock, Nell Glover, Irene Prestwich, Ray and Margaret Nelson, Stuart and Bina Sanderson, Harold and Marie Sack, Alma Ballinger, Harold and Ursula Taylor, Peter Howard, Ernest Claxton, Daisy Layard, Dudley and Edith Leacock, Mrs A.A Buchanan, Paul Campbell, Peter Orglmeister, Gil Harris, Charles and Barbara Burns, Fred Young, Harold Begbie, Mrs KD Belgrave, Blanton Belk Snr, Blanton Belk Jr, Kenneth Belden, Stella Belden, David Belden, Edward Bell, John Caulfield, Elizabeth Majoribanks, Mary Cole, Reverend Geoffrey Allen, King Micheal and Queen Anne of Romania, Princess Irena and Princess Margaret of Romania.

selecting individuals, effort was made to select a mixture of male and female names, including both ordinary individuals without titles, alongside members of royal families worldwide, to ensure a sample which covered a range of social standings and gendered experiences. Outside of this selection, additional letters from key, high-profile Moral Re-Armers such as Peter Howard, were also consulted and sought out specifically. Correspondence between the likes of Howard and Buchman, as well as other key players such as Paul Campbell and Basil Entwistle, spanned decades and thousands of pages of writing. These letters specifically allowed a valuable insight into how Moral Re-Armament worked, the thinking behind a lot of the decisions made by followers of Buchman, as well as a look into their relationship with him.

Once selected, all correspondence from these individuals to Buchman was reviewed. The majority of letters fell into four main categories: letters written to send money for the campaign, letters written to provide updates on the campaign from around the world, letters written to update Frank about their personal life, and letters asking Frank for guidance. For the majority of letter writers, the conversations were sustained over long periods of time, with Frank often writing back. The length of correspondence from most individuals – whose letters span over decades - demonstrates that these were not one-off passionate moments or impulsive moments of devotion, but instead were sustained periods of interest often passing down through generations of families. For example: the Peterkin family wrote to Buchman from 1936 to 1961, when Buchman died; the Belden family wrote from 1931 to 1960, with their son David eventually growing up to write to Frank. Basil Entwistle and his wife Jean were in constant contact with Buchman from 1936 onwards. Norah Bigland wrote consistently for ten years from 1950 onwards. Ernest Claxton, holding the spot as the shortest correspondence, wrote from 1936 to 1938: all other letter writers reviewed in this chapter sustained contact with Buchman, for at least three to thirty years.

What became clear was the usefulness of the letters to understand why Moral Re-Armers subscribed to Moral Re-Armament's ideology – what they were interested in, anxious about, or expressing in their letters – as well as to understand what Moral Re-Armers did in a practical, day-to-day sense. Important to note is that due to the nature of the letters containing consistent themes throughout, these letters can be considered largely representative of the general nature of most correspondence written to Frank Buchman from his followers.<sup>19</sup>

There are, in theory, many ways to 'get to know' Moral Re-Armament members' thoughts and actions: their enormous creative output of books, films, plays and albums over the decades make for a rich deposit of material through which we can begin to understand its ideologies and inner workings. However, as will be explored in Chapter Three, Moral Re-Armament's media campaign was a carefully crafted propaganda machine, aimed at converting minds whatever way possible. Indeed, the content of the letters themselves – often detailing the careful planning and editing of books and pamphlets - reveal the calculated way in which Moral Re-Armament crafted its public facing campaign to suit specific audiences; omitting what did not suit and adding what would. Thus, the overriding problem with understanding Moral Re-Armament through the majority of its material outputs is the element of it telling the reader what it wanted them to hear. The letters provide something different: rather than showing us the carefully crafted public image accessible through the aforementioned media formats, they allow insight into the thoughts and feelings of the individuals involved.

However, it is worth briefly exploring the methodological issues at play here. Letters cannot be treated, to borrow Matt Houlbrook's phrase, as "an unproblematic window" into the subject's interior world.<sup>20</sup> Letter writers are not merely writing a stream of consciousness, of

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<sup>20</sup> M. Houlbrook, "A Pin to See the Peepshow": Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922', *Past & Present* 207 (1), 2010, pp. 215-249, p. 226.



true, unfiltered thoughts: rather, there are a series of other processes going on when pen meets paper. As Matt Houlbrook outlines in his study of Edith Thompson's letters, "Letter writing is both a performance and a dialogue between correspondents".<sup>21</sup> An awareness of who the author is writing to, why they are writing, and what they want to get out of the process infiltrates into the content and tone of their letters: the "performance" is played out on the page of the letters, and the writer chooses the character they want to be that day. Similarly, Janet Gurkin Altman explores the idea of letters not being born merely "out of a desire to express oneself without regard to the eventual reader", but instead must be "the result of a union of writer and reader".<sup>22</sup>

The back and forth between Frank Buchman and his followers would have involved a certain amount of performance on the Moral Re-Armer's behalf. Buchman was an intimidating, "awe inspiring" figure in these individuals' lives: the founder of their new religion, their-role model, their leader.<sup>23</sup> This admiration of Buchman as a beloved leader is palpable when reading the intense words of loving members in the letters, as well as the warm messages to Buchman every year on his birthday – which was treated as an annual celebration for all members, who would write to Buchman from around the world, sending money and love – all of which was collated into an annual report for Buchman's records.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, throughout the 1950s, Buchman was repeatedly nominated for consideration of a Nobel Peace Prize by his followers.<sup>25</sup> Even as many Moral Re-Armers wrote their letters, their revered leader's image would have been overlooking them: all members received an annual Frank Buchman 'quote' calendar, with

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<sup>21</sup> M. Houlbrook, "A Pin to See the Peepshow": Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922', *Past & Present* 207 (1), 2010, pp. 215-249, p. 226.

<sup>22</sup> D. Gerber, Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal identity and Self-Presentation in Personal Correspondence, *Journal of Social History*, 39:2 (2005), pp. 315–330, p. 320

<sup>23</sup> Grace France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25 February 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3-50, 26-28, Cables for Frank Buchman's Birthday, various years.

<sup>25</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/500/ 21-24, Nobel Peace Prize nominations, various years.

words from and pictures of Buchman.<sup>26</sup> Thus, although the letters to Buchman were technically private in the sense that they were intended for his eyes only, it would be amiss to assume that this automatically meant that the letters were unfiltered. Buchman was enough of a daunting figure to influence the content and tone of the letter writers' words, as well as the intensity of their statements of devotion and love.<sup>27</sup> That being considered, however, the loving and devoted words of Moral Re-Armers were more often than not backed up by tangible actions: including financial donations and donations of their time and work. Thus, potentially empty words of support become measurable expressions of devotion, which can be used to explore just how important Moral Re-Armament was to these British people's lives.

Turning briefly to the final methodological concern, that is, gauging the 'lived experience' of Moral Re-Armers from the letters. Michael Roper usefully explores how "writing takes place in a context moved from the 'real existent present'", making accounts memories of events rather than reliable snapshots. It would also be naïve to believe that all letter writers adopted the process of "Absolute Honesty" when retelling their successes to Buchman: Moral Re-Armament, as already explored, have habit of exaggerating successes and downplaying failures. But the value of the letters lies in the constant travelling of its members around the world on behalf of Moral Re-Armament, as well as in the measurable ways in which they donated their time – be it by leading groups, publishing books, or hosting conferences - something not worth fabricating on the letter writer's behalf as Buchman would have prior knowledge of their activities and thus any false claims would fall flat. The letters therefore provide valuable insight into what Moral Re-Armers actually did, in a practical sense, in their day to day lives as followers of Frank Buchman.

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<sup>26</sup> Frank sends them one of his calendars every year, for example see: MS Oxford Group 3/1651-1672, letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman 5<sup>th</sup> January 1956.

<sup>27</sup> Grace France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25 February 2021.

The chapter will also be utilising letters written by children, which, when used as historical sources, present slightly different challenges. As Hester Barron and Claire Langhammer argue, children may alter their behaviours in different contexts, specifically, the “space of a school can be characterized as an emotional formation within which particular emotional styles were demanded”.<sup>28</sup> Barron and Langhammer demonstrate how some children adapted their writing, “reflecting the norms and emotional expectations of the social context”.<sup>29</sup> Norms and emotional expectations were strongly at play in letters written by Moral Re-Armament children; the pressure to conform would be intense for these children, due to the fact that they were writing to a very well respected figure. As Geoffrey Burns, a child-member of Moral Re-Armament puts it, Buchman was an “awe inspiring” figure: one who had been in their lives since birth, and one who their own parents also admired.<sup>30</sup>

How, then, can we know that the intense devotion to Moral Re-Armament felt through these letters at such a young age were authentic experiences? We cannot. And they likely were not kept promises. Geoffrey Burns never did become a fighter: after studying Politics at University, he went on to a career, first in finance, and then in industry. Despite growing up surrounded by Moral Re-Armament, Burns remarks that it failed to have the desired lasting spiritual effect on him, a conclusion he feels is supported by the contrast of his very real spiritual experiences after becoming a dedicated member of the Church of Scotland.<sup>31</sup> But Burns’ sentiments in 1961 – despite retrospectively disagreeing with them now – are still useful when understanding the firm place of Moral Re-Armament in family lives. The fact that children had been placed into an environment where they would pledge to be a “fighter” for a moral

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<sup>28</sup> H. Barron and C. Langhammer, ‘Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children’s Writing’, *Journal of Social History*, 51:1 (2017), pp. 101–123, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> H. Barron and C. Langhammer, ‘Feeling through Practice’, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Grace France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25 February 2021.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

organisation at the age of 6 – whether or not this was followed up on – speaks to the intense, Moral Re-Armament focussed upbringings of these children.

The hope and belief in Moral Re-Armament’s cause displayed in the letters written to Buchman cannot always be attributed to the children’s genuine feelings: for example, a letter written in 1953 to Buchman, was signed in children’s handwriting from “Hilary Belden, Frederic Jaeger, Geoffrey Lean, Katrina Lindsay, Janet Nelson, Kenny Stollery, Ingrid Strong, and Margaret Wilson”, but had clearly been written by an adult, likely a teacher at the school.

The letter stated:

Dear Uncle Frank,

We want you to know that we have decided to play together and not divide; not to quarrel and fight, and to listen and change and do what God wants and not what ‘gimme’ wants. Will you tell that to all the children too so that we change the world? If we tell people they tell more and more and the news spreads and there comes a new world.<sup>32</sup>

It is not unusual for young children writing from school – for example, cards and class projects which are produced by the teacher and simply signed by the child if they are too young. But it does mean that in some instances, we cannot consider the statements made as reflective of authentic experiences. As discussed, however, these instances still allow great insight into the type of information the children of Moral Re-Armament were being taught – an education which their parents had chosen for them due to their intense belief in Moral Re-Armament.

Who were the members?

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<sup>32</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter to Frank Buchman from Caux School children, 1953.

How did you join Moral Re-Armament in the first place? “You cannot join it, you cannot resign”; that was Moral Re-Armament’s approach to membership.<sup>33</sup> As explored, you were a member simply by following the Four Absolutes of Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness and Absolute Love: as Buchman stated “you are in or out according to the quality of life you lead”.<sup>34</sup> In 1934, a group member wrote “this is probably the only world-wide group there is which is not an organization in the usual sense of the word. I speak of ‘members’ of the group but it has no members”.<sup>35</sup> There was no official, clear organisation of Moral Re-Armament, beyond the knowledge that Frank Buchman, and subsequently Peter Howard, were unofficially in charge. As Buchman’s private secretary Morris Martin remarked, there was a:

lack of clear assignment of responsibilities endemic in Moral Re-Armament. What was everybody’s business was nobody’s business. Whose sense of the guidance of God was superior to anyone else’s? Decisions tended to drift back to Buchman or those who were thought to know his mind. Too bad if you got it wrong.<sup>36</sup>

As has been alluded to when exploring the finances of Moral Re-Armament, there were some full-time workers who would live and travel with Moral Re-Armament teams but received no salary.<sup>37</sup> These individuals stand in contrast with the ordinary, everyday members of Moral Re-Armament who followed its principles but within the confines of their normal lives. As this chapter will reveal, following Moral Re-Armament could be as involved or uninvolved as a member wanted it to be: some casually followed the standards of the movement from the perimeters, whilst others lived their whole lives in it. In 1954, Geoffrey Williamson asked Moral Re-Armer Garth Lean how people became full-time workers. Lean explained that

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<sup>33</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/204, *Time and Tide* Investigation into Moral Re-Armament, September 1965.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> V.C. Kitchen, *I Was A Pagan* (New York, 1934), pp. 130-131.

<sup>36</sup> M. Martin, *Always a Little Further*, p. 164.

<sup>37</sup> Anonymous, *The Oxford Group and its work of Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1954), pp. 56-57.

“before any decision could be taken, the applicant’s suitability for the work would have to be carefully considered by the Council of Management. If they were satisfied that he had a true “call” he would be accepted gladly”.<sup>38</sup>

David Belden stated that full-time workers were necessary in the 1920s because of the need to communicate between locally based groups, travelling teams, Oxford Group headquarters and Buchman himself.<sup>39</sup> With a movement which had an international focus, and a perpetually travelling leader, such a decision makes sense. The full-time workers’ job in the 1920s, on a voluntary unpaid basis, was to convert more people to Moral Re-Armament and host house-parties. However, this focus expanded in the 1930s, when full-time workers also concentrated their efforts on generating publicity for Moral Re-Armament, writing books for it, as well as staffing Moral Re-Armament’s conference centres such as Caux and Mackinac Island. These workers would arrange the houseparties as well as any upcoming international campaigns.<sup>40</sup> As Belden notes, with the scaling up of activities in the 1930s, more full-time workers were needed “to cope with the main functions of the Group’s campaigns”.<sup>41</sup> There were also mobile teams, who “provided training both in awareness of the movement’s national and worldwide mission, and in more intensive evangelism and teamwork than was usually possible in a local situation”.<sup>42</sup>

It is worth considering exactly who we are talking about – what type of people, what jobs they had, what sort of life they led - when we talk about Moral Re-Armers. Belden noted that “information on the Group’s adherents is difficult to gather owing to its own lack of records. The Group has no official membership or dues, nor therefore lists of members... the

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<sup>38</sup> G. Williamson, *Inside Buchmanism; an independent inquiry into the Oxford Group Movement and Moral Re-Armament* (New York, 1954), pp. 164-165.

<sup>39</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, pp. 184-195.

<sup>40</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 184.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

researcher must depend on sorting out from the large number of published descriptions of the Group's work what indications he can of its social composition".<sup>43</sup> This was true, until the deposit of the letters which make up this chapter to the Bodleian Library. Through these, we can learn more about the types of people who became Moral Re-Armers.

Belden's findings, however, are worth noting, as they reach the same conclusions about the types of Moral Re-Armament's members as this chapter. Using a 1939 list titled "Whole Time Oxford Group Workers in London", Belden explains that there were three main categories of Moral Re-Armers: full-time Moral Re-Armers who pursued no other career, Part Time Moral Re-Armers who pursued a career elsewhere simultaneously as a means of income, and those 'lacking full employment', be it because they were wealthy individuals living off of private family savings, unemployment seekers, or retired individuals.<sup>44</sup> Amongst these sections were individuals from various backgrounds and careers – teachers, scientists, business owners - but the overall impression was that Moral Re-Armament was mostly made up of "middle or upper class members" of society in the 1930s.<sup>45</sup> Belden rightfully points out that this social composition began to change in the 1930s – just as it had changed from the 1920s when most of its members were undergraduates as this was Buchman's main recruiting pool – when Buchman turned his attention to working class areas and industrial disputes. However, the majority of full-time workers and those in decision making positions were largely unaffected by these changes, and continued to be recruited from positions of wealth and power. This finding is largely unsurprising: as stated, full-time Moral Re-Armers devoted their lives to travelling on behalf of Moral Re-Armament in voluntary, unpaid positions. They were thus,

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<sup>43</sup> D. Belden, 'The Oxford Group', p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> D. Belden, 'The Oxford Group', p. 202.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

more often than not, people who could afford to work for free, and had no ties financial or otherwise to one particular place.

The selection of individuals used in this chapter largely reflect Belden's findings, further supporting the idea that generally, Moral Re-Armers were wealthy, middle to upper class individuals – a fact that is given more strength when considering that this sample, as has been explored, was taken randomly. Moral Re-Armers were business owners, individuals from a long line of wealth, or well-educated Oxford and Cambridge graduates. This, however, cannot be wholly attributed to Moral Re-Armament being more appealing to the wealthy and powerful, than to the more average citizen. The sway towards affluent members can be seen as a direct result of Moral Re-Armament's purposeful targeting of these groups of society – the wealthy elites – as a way to achieve both funding and influence amongst societies. Thus, Moral Re-Armers' background and standing in society is perhaps less indicative of how appealing Moral Re-Armament was to the middle and upper classes, and more indicative instead of Moral Re-Armament's purposeful and carefully crafted recruitment.

When we are talking about a Moral Re-Armer, then, we are usually talking about an educated, well-connected individual, with some level of wealth or family status behind them. Crucially, this is an individual who had the time to live a life all-consumed by Moral Re-Armament. Even though Moral Re-Armament wanted to brand itself as a group accessible to all, the factors described above meant that it generally found its potential converts amongst those financially better off.

Motivations for being a Moral Re-Armer



In 1920, 252 Anglican Bishops attended the Lambeth Conference, during which they reviewed increasingly popular movements such as Spiritualism, Christian Science and Theosophy. The Bishops concluded that:

Each of the three movements claims to supply something which the teaching and practice of the Church fail to give, whether in directness and correspondence with human needs of to-day or in comprehensiveness. Here they make their appeal to professed members of the Church who, for whatever reason, are left unsatisfied by the normal teaching and discipline offered to them.<sup>46</sup>

The same trend identified here by the Bishops, of Christians looking beyond the Church to fulfil their spiritual needs, can be identified in the followers of Moral Re-Armament, who for various reasons which will be explored, sought what was missing in their faith in Moral Re-Armament.

What becomes visible when looking at the letters members of Moral Re-Armament wrote to Frank Buchman, is British Christians who were hungry for more than what their institutional religions were offering. Additionally, the intense belief of the Burns family and many others, and their willingness to uproot their lives to fight for Moral Re-Armament's cause, demonstrates the feeling of a pressing need for a deeper experience of Christianity, due to the perceived pitfalls of the institutional Church failing to meet the demands of a changing world. As Chapter One outlined, Moral Re-Armament wanted to re-establish Christianity as the dominant force in the lives and decision making of British people, yet was aware that the Church was failing to achieve this revival from the pulpit. Institutional religion was not enough for Moral Re-Armers – not practical enough, not effective enough, not well-equipped to deal with pressing real-world issues. Marianne Peterkin, when writing to Buchman in the 1950s, expressed her frustration at the lukewarm Christianity she was still experiencing from those not

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<sup>46</sup> Conference of Bishops, *Encyclical Letter*, as referenced in: A. Lockhart, 'Religious and Spiritual Mobility in Britain: The Panacea Society and Other Movements in the Twentieth Century', *Contemporary British History*, 29:2 (2015), pp. 155-178, p. 168.

converted to the Moral Re-Armament way: “here in Lossiemouth we are surrounded by kindly, very complacent, respectable Christians – but nothing revolutionary!”.<sup>47</sup>

The letters shed light on the different motivations for following a group like Moral Re-Armament. Writing in 1938, a loyal follower of Buchman, Marianne Peterkin, stated: “more than ever, I am convinced that the Oxford Group has the answer to all problems”.<sup>48</sup> A decade later, Marianne’s opinion had not changed: Moral Re-Armament “stands the test in every emergency”.<sup>49</sup> Marianne was not alone in the belief that Moral Re-Armament was a cure-all to the world’s ills. Stuart Sanderson, a Scottish tweed manufacturer, also believed that Moral Re-Armament held the answer, regardless of the question: “Britain has gone blind in her old age”.<sup>50</sup> For Sanderson, the diagnosis was multi-faceted: declining economy, loss of Empire, laxing moral standards a wavering Christian faith.<sup>51</sup> “Ideological spectacles”, in the form of Moral Re-Armament, were the prescribed treatment.<sup>52</sup>

There was no singular reason a person would follow Moral Re-Armament. The motivations for joining Moral Re-Armament found in the letters to Buchman vary from writer to writer, with some consistencies, such as concern over the decline of Christianity or the rise of Communism. Generally, Moral Re-Armament meant something slightly different to each writer: they saw the value in Moral Re-Armament based on their own personal fears, wants and

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<sup>47</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 26 January 1954.

<sup>48</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 24 August 1938.

<sup>49</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 1 January 1949.

<sup>50</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/136, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1955

<sup>51</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/136, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1955

<sup>52</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/136, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1955; ‘Stuart Sanderson’, *For a New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.info/people/stuart-sanderson> (Accessed April 2021)

desires. Whether it was concern over sexual immorality, world peace, Communism, Fascism, eugenics, or physical fitness, the writers to Buchman saw their personal ideologies as compatible with Moral Re-Armament's mission. This was largely a product of, as the previous chapter explored, Moral Re-Armament's deliberate evasion of theology, and its move towards a more accessible and open-ended faith. With the only rules of the group being the importance of the Four Absolutes and Listening to God, there was a more universal potential for application to any situation that arose as the decades unfolded. As already established, Moral Re-Armament was a Christian chameleon: one which was theoretically able to adapt, and speak to any issues that arose. We can see this flexibility in the reasons behind each of the letter writer's devotion to Moral Re-Armament. As the decades unfolded, Moral Re-Armament and its followers concerned themselves with the new challenges the twentieth century was presenting to Christians.

Despite these differences in reasoning, a commonality which can be drawn between the motivations of Moral Re-Armers is their desire for a solution to what they perceived to be the most pressing problem facing Britain, or their respective countries. Through Moral Re-Armament, these individuals found hope for change.

#### The Peterkins and World Peace

The Peterkin Sisters – Amy, Marianne, Elizabeth and Janet – were frequent writers to Frank from 1935 onwards, and were active members of Moral Re-Armament in both Scotland and England from the mid 1920s until at least the 1960s when the correspondence ceased after Buchman's death. The Peterkin family owned a successful ropemaking business in Lossiemouth, but the Peterkin sisters strayed from the family business to pursue further education and careers. Janet received an MA in French, Elizabeth received MA in English, and

Marianne Peterkin was teacher of modern languages at Mackie Academy from 1919 to 1940.<sup>53</sup>

By the time they encountered Moral Re-Armament in 1935, Marianne was 60.

The Peterkin sisters had lived through World War One, and had encountered Moral Re-Armament just as tensions were rising and threatening a second war. In their letters to Buchman, we can see how, through Moral Re-Armament, the Peterkin sisters hoped to see world-peace come to fruition. For the Peterkin sisters, Moral Re-Armament was working mainly “towards World Peace and reconciliation all over the world”, by promoting unity between countries, a goal which Marianne hoped would be achieved by the end of 1956.<sup>54</sup>

The creation of, and upholding of, peace in the world was the central concern of the Peterkin sisters, as expressed throughout the decades in their letters to Frank. In 1948, Marianne wrote to Frank, expressing her joy about the spreading of Moral Re-Armament to “so many different countries and from so many influential leaders”:

We pray that a great awakening may come all over the world – leading to an era of peace and good will. There is such need in almost every country in the world for a changed outlook – for each individual and each nation to realise where they have gone wrong – to make amends and to turn to the good road and find peace, harmony and happiness.<sup>55</sup>

They were so inspired in Moral Re-Armament’s potential for world-peace that they worked in their own communities to spread the message. Marianne, for example, ran a Bible study group for “a class of 38 girls aged from 15 to 20 years”, during which she hoped to pass on the message of Moral Re-Armament, and “turn out a hand of young revolutionaries by the

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<sup>53</sup> *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 30 May 1940.

<sup>54</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Elizabeth, Marianne, Amy and Janet Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 26 March 1955; Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, December 1955.

<sup>55</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 24 July 1948.

end of the session”.<sup>56</sup> The sisters devoted their lives to travelling around converting minds. Marianne, in particular, toured around bible study groups in an effort to convert minds to Christian thinking.<sup>57</sup> Each year, in June, they would celebrate their anniversary of becoming Moral Re-Armers with a letter to Frank: shortly before Frank’s death, they celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> Moral Re-Armament anniversary.<sup>58</sup>

This focus on the spread of world-peace seemed to remain the focus for the Peterkin sisters, even as Moral Re-Armament expanded its efforts to tackle wider issues such as Communism, and its efforts to secure peace before the outbreak of World War Two had quite obviously failed. The Peterkins seemed unwavering in their focus despite this challenge. Writing in 1954, Marianne expresses her joy to Frank about the ever-expanding “fellowship” which brings “the Gospel message” to “various lands”.<sup>59</sup> Writing later in the year, in May, Marianne expresses her belief in the importance of Moral Re-Armament:

M.R.A seems the great hope for our world at the present time – possibly the only hope. The Conference at Geneva is dragging on from day to day, from week to week with little result. It should heed the guidance of God to unite the aims of the members for World Peace.<sup>60</sup>

Marianne’s optimism that Moral Re-Armament’s principles of unity and “no lone-wolfing” could directly translate into countries looking beyond their own national interests and towards the interest of world peace in general, is palpable in the letter. This logic – of personal change influencing worldwide change – is consistent throughout the Peterkin’s letters. In 1955,

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<sup>56</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 28 August 1937.

<sup>57</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 28 August 1937.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example: Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 12 July 1955.

<sup>59</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, , Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 26 January 1954.

<sup>60</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, , Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 26 May 1955.

Marianne wrote to Frank explaining “for if I personally am not at peace with God, at peace with myself, at peace with my neighbours, how can I pray for or work for world peace”.<sup>61</sup>

A desire for peace drove the Peterkins’ commitment to Moral Re-Armament from 1935 until the 1960s, when Amy passed away first in 1957, followed by the rest of the sisters throughout the following decade. The Peterkin sisters lived out their last years fully committed and inspired by the idea that through Moral Re-Armament, they would live to see a world at peace.

### Ernest Claxton and sexual immorality

Dr Ernest Claxton, Secretary of the British Medical Association (1946-1965) was involved with Moral Re-Armament for many decades – publishing pro-Moral Re-Armament material, such as the 1976 *Tomorrow’s Parents* - and wrote to Buchman many times over a 25 year period. In July 1936, Claxton wrote to Buchman explaining that “I have been absolutely polarised but am willing for God to show me how he wants me to be remade so that his revolutionary life can operate in me”.<sup>62</sup> Claxton’s wife, Muriel, also wrote to Frank the same year: “I am perfectly willing now to be a revolutionary for God, though the cost is terrific. I was not willing until late last night”.<sup>63</sup> Ernest’s desire to allow God to operate through him, and Muriel’s statement of willingness despite being aware of the “terrific” cost, had a very different motivating factor than Peterkin sisters. Claxton wanted to work through Moral Re-Armament to promote a distinctly Christian sexual morality through the means of medical propaganda.

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<sup>61</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, , Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 12 July 1955.

<sup>62</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3.0449, Letter from Ernest Claxton to Frank Buchman, 18 July 1936.

<sup>63</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3.0449, Letter from Muriel Claxton to Frank Buchman, 13 July 1936.

In 1938, Claxton sent Buchman a “suggested medical manifesto” for his approval before he forwarded it on to “leaders of the profession”: the manifesto, *Medicine and the Present Emergency*, encouraged doctors to practice medicine as well as a programme of Moral Re-Armament to “bring a new spirit to mankind”.<sup>64</sup> Claxton states: “we must ask ourselves if it is enough to deal with the casualties of life and make preparation for the casualties of another war”.<sup>65</sup> Rather than focussing on medical advancements, Claxton suggests, “the next great advance will be in the realm of the spirit”. Claxton seems to be urging medical professionals to turn their attention away from scientific cures, and move towards spiritual ones. Paul Campbell – a high profile Moral Re-Armament member who published several books and worked closely with Frank – wrote to Buchman in 1947 explaining that “through Ernest Claxton we are having the opportunity to help frame a charter for medicine for the World Medical Association, which will have coverage throughout the medical press of the world. It is the first step in training the doctors of the world in answering ideology”.<sup>66</sup>

Claxton’s views on sexual morality are made clear in his other publications and conference speeches. In his 1976 book *Tomorrow’s Parents*, Claxton (through the character of Frank Buchman) expresses the dangers of pornography and masturbation as distorting the human mind and undermining national spirit. Additionally, Claxton often spoke at Moral Re-Armament conferences, such as in 1963, where he delivered an address in London calling for “chastity as a source of strength for the nations... [which] would remove the fear of mixed marriages resulting in children of mixed blood that are becoming an increasing problem”.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3.0449, Letter from Ernest Claxton to Frank Buchman, 17 December 1938.

<sup>65</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3.0449, Letter from Ernest Claxton to Frank Buchman, 17 December 1938

<sup>66</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3.0364.1, Letter from Paul Campbell to Frank Buchman 6 February 1947.

<sup>67</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 August 1963

Claxton's obituary in the *British Medical Journal* allows an insight into how he viewed medicine and religion as forces which should work together in the modern world. Talking about his work in the medical field, it states: "Ernest's aim was to make medicine relevant to the task of reshaping the destiny of nations. His outlook was global, based on a sense of morality and a dependence on God's guidance to put his beliefs into practice".<sup>68</sup> During his time as secretary for the British Medical Association, Claxton worked closely with the Public Morality Council (PMC) - a group who focussed on enforcing the law against obscene material. Notably, Claxton was responsible for the British Medical Association's report on *Homosexuality and Prostitution*, which, through a series of essays and diagrams, attempts to scientifically explain why individuals become homosexuals. The work also includes statements such as "a senior prison medical officer informed the committee that he believes that if homosexuals can be brought into communion with a fixed body of normal people such as one meets in the Christian community, a very great step in overcoming their sense of inadequacy and inferiority will be taken".<sup>69</sup> As Paul Rock in his study of criminal justice in England and Wales highlights, the British Medical Association displayed "persistent judgemental and condemnatory stress on the deviant, and, indeed, on the moral dimensions of homosexuality" which was "coaxed continually into being by the committee's secretary, Ernest Claxton".<sup>70</sup> Rock explores Claxton's background in the Churches Council on Health and Healing after World War Two with its focus on "unifying the churches and the medical profession".<sup>71</sup>

Claxton was not alone in seeing in Moral Re-Armament the potential to campaign against growing sexual immorality. The previous chapter explored Moral Re-Armament's 1920s focus on sexual sin, something which was reemphasised in its 1960s efforts on a public

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<sup>68</sup> British Medical Journal, 'E. E. Claxton Obituary', *British Medical Journal* 296 (1988).

<sup>69</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, A/PMC/80, Booklet on homosexuality and prostitution, 1955.

<sup>70</sup> P. Rock, *The Official History of Criminal Justice in England and Wales* (London, 2019).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



scale. Claxton went on to become a vice chair of Mary Whitehouse's Clean Up TV campaign, which focussed on purging British TV from content which was considered to be 'filth' – whether it be foul language or sexually explicit.

How two members – Marianne Peterkin and Ernest Claxton - writing in the same era, could focus themselves on entirely different things under the umbrella of the same group, shows the diversity of Moral Re-Armament's appeal. Whilst Claxton was concerned with sexual morality, the Peterkin sisters were concerned with world peace, and the Moral Re-Armers of the following section were concerned with the political affairs elsewhere in the world.

### International concerns

Fears over Communism dominated the thoughts of many Moral Re-Armament members writing to Buchman: anti-communism was the focus of much of Moral Re-Armament's attention throughout the twentieth century. Although the focus of this thesis is on the British element of Moral Re-Armament, the individuals referred to in this section found their commitment to Moral Re-Armament take them overseas in their efforts.

Moral Re-Armament member Hallen Viney was so intensely concerned with the rise of Communism that he found himself looking towards the Nazi Party for inspiration on how to change the course of Communism's advance.<sup>72</sup> Viney - a Cambridge and Oxford Graduate in Theology - had been a Midshipman in the Royal Navy before joining the Air Service in 1917.<sup>73</sup> After his death, friend and fellow Moral Re-Armer Alan Thornhill recalled how after World War One, Viney had become an electrical engineer and moved to New York at the age of 25,

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<sup>72</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement* (New York, 2009), p. 92

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

where he first encountered Moral Re-Armament.<sup>74</sup> In 1934, Viney wrote that Hitler was “the first man in history to raise a voluntary army under quiet military discipline for peaceful reconstruction; to use uniforms as a symbol of social equality rather than of military servitude; to mobilize for peace instead of war”.<sup>75</sup> It was the Nazi’s desire for ‘change’ which Viney found appealing, as well as their demonstrable power for implementing it.<sup>76</sup>

For Viney, like many Christians, promoting Christian faith and fighting against Communism were inextricably linked. We can see this through his letters to Buchman. In his 1930s letters to Frank, Viney explores the possibility for opening up a “School for Leaders” in London, which would train future Christian, Moral Re-Armament leaders to further spread the faith in an otherwise wavering world.<sup>77</sup> Viney also had aspirations to publish *The Letter*, a semi-regular Moral Re-Armament newsletter which would be a “present day version of the acts of the apostles”.<sup>78</sup> Viney’s biggest contribution to Moral Re-Armament’s cause, however, was his promotional literature for the then Oxford Group in the 1930s, including *How Do I Start?* a sort of beginner’s guide to Moral Re-Armament, which promoted the idea of a God controlled nation.<sup>79</sup> The years of effort, time, and money poured into Moral Re-Armament by Viney are indicative of both the level of devotion to Moral Re-Armament and the fear of the alternative.

Basil Entwistle, too, concerned himself with the practical ways which Moral Re-Armament could resist growing communist forces, reflecting this desire in his letters to

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Caux Meeting, recording from 31 December 1967’, <https://www.foranewworld.org/material/talks/meetings/caux-meeting-recording-31-december-1967-eng> (Accessed 29 March 2022).

<sup>75</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement* (New York, 2009), p. 92

<sup>76</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement* (New York, 2009), p. 92

<sup>77</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/157, Letter from HallenViney to Frank Buchman 10 March 1930.

<sup>78</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group, 1/39, Newsletter ‘The Letter’, written by Hallen Viney, 27 July 1927.

<sup>79</sup> H. Viney, *How Do I Begin?*, (New York, 1930).

Buchman.<sup>80</sup> Entwistle wrote hundreds of letters to Buchman from 1937 until Buchman's death in 1961, and continued publishing books and working on behalf of Moral Re-Armament until at least 1993.<sup>81</sup> He had encountered Moral Re-Armament after graduating from Oxford University with a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics.<sup>82</sup> Entwistle was a teacher, before he left his career to travel and work for Moral Re-Armament, converting minds mainly in Japan in the 1950s, alongside his wife and two children whom he brought with him.<sup>83</sup> In a letter to Buchman, Entwistle urged him to edit his speech to directly address directly how Moral Re-Armament is "clearly more revolutionary and more effective than the professed aims of Marxists":

For example, in Moral Re-Armament: everyone works and all enjoy the fruits of each one's labour. The wealth and work of each is available under God for the benefit of all. Everyone is the privileged class.<sup>84</sup>

Such attitudes informed his work for Moral Re-Armament in Japan from 1952 onwards, where Entwistle focussed on suppressing strikes in the coal industry and investigating the threat of socialism amongst the industry ranks.<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, Stuart Sanderson wrote to Buchman in 1952 suggesting a change of approach for Moral Re-Armament in order to speak more directly to the Communist threat:

so far we have been building on a negative foundation of fear of Russia and we need a new positive foundation based on God's Plan... Unless God is the architect of the new Europe it will be jerry-built and won't last. Europe cannot be rebuilt to a pre-fab specification but needs spiritual craftsmanship corresponding to that of the men who

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<sup>80</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Letter from Basil Entwistle to Frank Buchman, 15 May 1947.

<sup>81</sup> Entwistle's last publication for Moral Re-Armament was 1993: B. Entwistle, *A Step Ahead of Disaster* (1993)

<sup>82</sup> 'Basil Entwistle', *For a New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.org/people/basil-entwistle> (Accessed 29 March 2022).

<sup>83</sup> 'Basil Entwistle', *For a New World* (n.d), <https://www.foranewworld.org/people/basil-entwistle> (Accessed 29 March 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Letter from Basil Entwistle to Frank Buchman 15 May 1947.

<sup>85</sup> Entwistle details these efforts in his letters to Buchman during this time: Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Various letters from Entwistle to Buchman.

built the cathedrals and the abbeys who did their work in the glory of god and for the love of him.<sup>86</sup>

Stuart Sanderson's concerns about growing communism led him to get involved in Britain's industrial affairs, hosting a Lunch in April 1950 with attendees from London Master Stevedores' Association, Antwerp Steamship Company, London Dock Labour Board, London Master Lightermen's Association, London Wharfingers Association and Plymouth Wharf.<sup>87</sup> During the lunch, Sanderson told Buchman, he expressed the ways in which workers needed to 'swing' back to religion to prevent Communism in the workplace. Sanderson would continue to be involved in Britain's industrial affairs on Moral Re-Armament's behalf, closely monitoring the threat of Communism.<sup>88</sup>

While the likes of Sanderson spread the message of Moral Re-Armament in Britain, Charles Burns joined a team of Moral Re-Armers in South Africa in 1947. Burns was motivated to do so because of the need for "an inspired ideology for democracy".<sup>89</sup> As Garth Mason explores, Moral Re-Armament had first visited South Africa in 1929 to "build trust between English and Afrikaans speakers by holding house parties", before its attention turned to "the racial tension between black and white communities".<sup>90</sup> Burns spent most of the 1940s in South Africa working for Moral Re-Armament in an effort to "change" its peoples, efforts which Burns claims in letters to Buchman, were successful: "a team is growing of people deeply

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<sup>86</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1863-1876, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 16 December 1952.

<sup>87</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1863-1876, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 21 March 1950.

<sup>88</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/136, various letters from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman.

<sup>89</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296/0322, Letter from Charles Burns to Mike Barrett, 13 July 1947.

<sup>90</sup> G. Mason, 'The Moral Rearmament Activist', p. 172.

committed to each other and to God's plan for South Africa. Moral Re-Armament is slowly being put on the map". Geoffrey Burns, Charles' son, recalls how Moral Re-Armament bought his parents a house in Johannesburg which they stayed in during their work in South Africa, along with many other members who would come and go.<sup>91</sup> Like Burns, Basil Entwistle's work with Moral Re-Armament took him far away from home. Entwistle spent his 1930s recruiting converts in China for Moral Re-Armament, as well as organising Moral Re-Armament publications such as its short-lived magazine *Rising Tide*, and contacting advertising agencies and cinemas to screen Moral Re-Armament's short promotional films.<sup>92</sup>

As has been demonstrated, individuals were followers of Moral Re-Armament for various reasons: they saw in Moral Re-Armament the solution to their own personal wants and fears. The chameleon nature of Moral Re-Armament – its ability to theoretically be applied to any social, religious or political context – meant that this flexibility was possible. Indeed, returning to Marianne Peterkin's remark that Moral Re-Armament "has the answer to all problems", we can see that regardless of the chosen issue, Moral Re-Armament would work to present itself as the solution.<sup>93</sup>

"I have surrendered all to God": the devotion of Moral Re-Armers.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296/0322, Letter from Charles Burns to Mike Barrett 13 July 1947 ; G. France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25 February 2021, Bodleian Library.

<sup>92</sup> Entwistle details these efforts in his letters to Buchman during this time: Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Various letters from Entwistle to Buchman.

<sup>93</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 3/117, Letter from Marianne Peterkin to Frank Buchman, 24 August 1938.

<sup>94</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1651-1672, Contract from Peterkin sisters to Frank Buchman, c. 1930.

To become a Moral Re-Armer was to leave your lukewarm Christianity – or as Buchman termed it, your “nice armchair religion” – behind.<sup>95</sup> The majority of letters written to Frank Buchman from Moral Re-Armers demonstrate an intense devotion to Buchman specifically, and Moral Re-Armament generally, thus demonstrating the need for a deeper experience of faith amongst these individuals. As explored in the introduction to this thesis, David Martin’s 1965 work *Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation* argued that “human societies *always* depend on ideological systems because ideology is required by social cohesion”.<sup>96</sup> This desire to belong to something, and thus the need to create an imagined sense of family and community for those who feel they do not belong, is a strong feature of many of the letters written to Buchman.

The Peterkin sisters, for example, cemented their devotion to Moral Re-Armament within a make-shift contract, made in the mid 1930s, signed by the sisters, stating: “I have surrendered all to God and am willing to be used in His service at all times” (Figure Fourteen).<sup>97</sup> Other writers also stated their devotion to Moral Re-Armament via make-shift contracts: a 1926 letter from a “27 year old social worker” stated “Dear Frank. I surrender my life, all I have, to God, and I trust that he will lead my life to realise his Kingdom”.<sup>98</sup> An unidentifiable Mrs – name signed but not printed - wrote in July 1936 “I have surrendered my all to God. I am willing to become a soldier in the Christian revolutionary army”.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> K.D Belden, *The Revolutionary Path*, (London, 1975), p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, ‘David Martin’s *The Religious and the Secular* (1969): an Underestimated Masterwork in the Study of Western Secularization’, *Society*, 57 (2020), pp. 132-139, p. 136.

<sup>97</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1651-1672, Contract from Peterkin sisters to Frank Buchman, c. 1930.

<sup>98</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0762, Letter from ‘27 year old’ to Frank Buchman, c. 1926.

<sup>99</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/55, anonymous letter to Frank Buchman, July 1936.

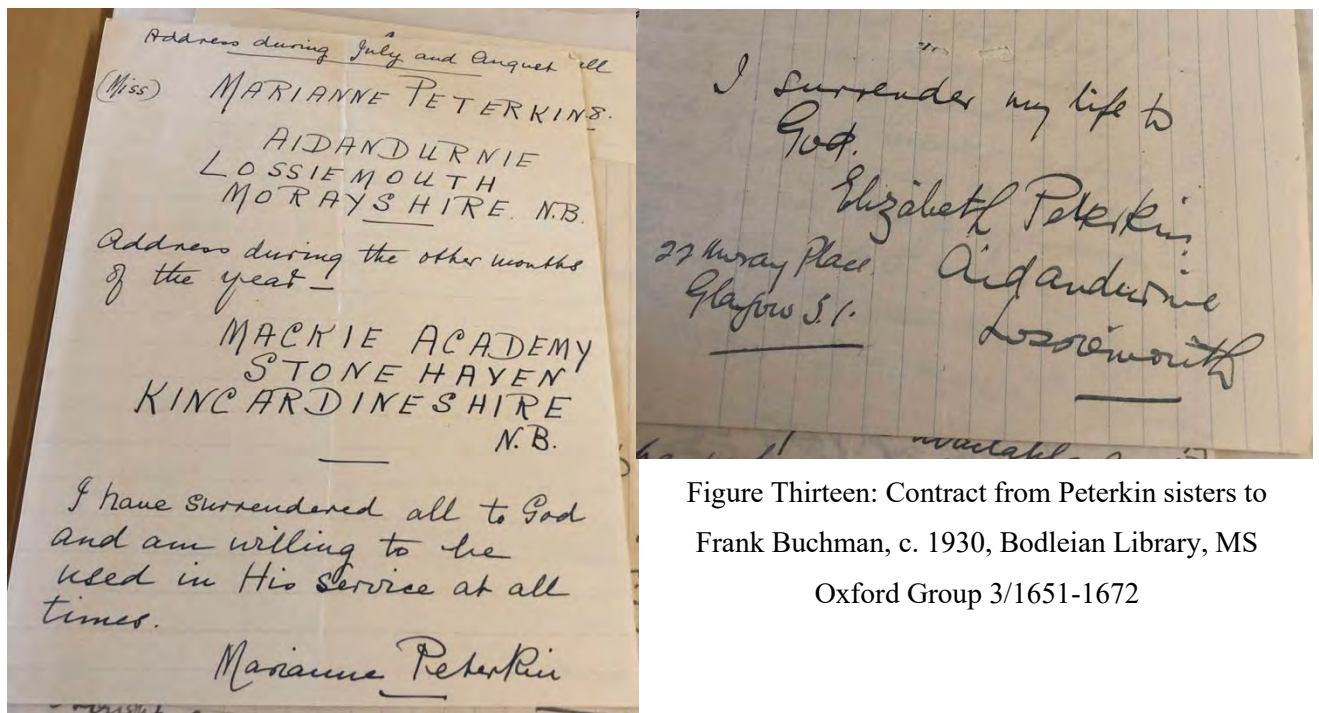


Figure Thirteen: Contract from Peterkin sisters to Frank Buchman, c. 1930, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/1651-1672

The contracts seem to fulfil a sort of ritualistic entry into Moral Re-Armament’s brand of religion, bearing similarity to the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Catholic religion, which also involves signing a symbolic contract to enter into the Christian faith. The contracts represent a clear desire for a type of permanent devotion – one which Moral Re-Armament did not already offer, as stated, because you became a member simply by following the rules. Basil’s sister, Margaret Entwistle, summarises the motivation behind Moral Re-Armers wanting to devote themselves in a more permanent way when writing to Frank stating “for myself, I want and need [Moral Re-Armament] to be a deep experience that becomes permanent in my life”.<sup>100</sup>

We have already been introduced to the Burns family – whose intimate relationship with Buchman resulted in him having to grant permission for Charles to propose opened this chapter.

<sup>100</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Letter from Margaret Entwistle to Frank Buchman, 14 December 1952.

However, The Burns family were not unique in this level of intimacy with Buchman and devotion to Moral Re-Armament. Many other Moral Re-Armament individuals went on to forge imagined familial ties to Buchman, as a way of forging bonds and feeling a part of something bigger.

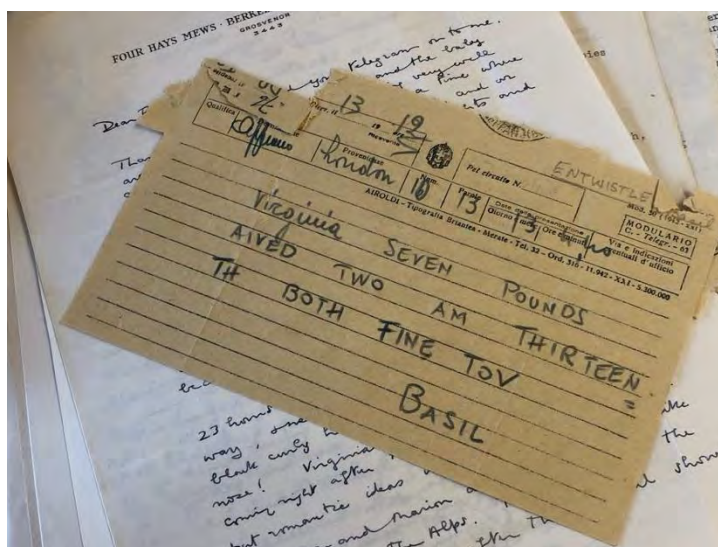


Figure Fourteen: Telegram to Buchman from Entwistle informing him of the birth of their child, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657

For example, Buchman was involved in the Entwistle’s family life in a very similar way to his involvement with the Burns family. Buchman was invited to Basil’s wedding to Jean Owen, and was amongst the first to be informed via telegram of the birth of their first child (Figure Fifteen). Writing from hospital shortly after giving birth, Jean Entwistle refers to Frank as “dearest Poppa” – establishing Buchman’s imagined familial role as a sort of Grandfather figure to the newly born baby girl, Virginia.<sup>101</sup> Frank’s and Moral Re-Armament’s role in Virginia Entwistle’s life was clearly strong, as thirteen years later, Virginia would write to her

<sup>101</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Letter from Jean Entwistle to Frank Buchman, 20 March 1947.



“Uncle Frank” saying that she wanted to donate her savings, \$500, to Moral Re-Armament.<sup>102</sup>

The Belden family, too, established Buchman as a family member in similar ways. Kenneth Belden – husband of Stella and father of David, whose thesis on Moral Re-Armament was referenced earlier – was a dedicated member of Moral Re-Armament from 1931 onwards, using his artistic skills to design book covers for them, and eventually being involved in the purchase of the Westminster Theatre on Moral Re-Armament’s behalf, where they would stage their Christian plays.<sup>103</sup> When Kenneth and his wife Stella welcomed their first child, Buchman became “poppa”, with the couple heralding him as “the most wonderful poppa” who had given them all so much.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Ray Nelson, who was in charge of Moral Re-Armament’s first travel department, which arranged travel and finances for group members, wrote to Frank informing him of his wife’s recent pregnancy, stating “we wanted his grand-poppa to be amongst the first to know of this possibility”.<sup>105</sup> Buchman was in the Nelson’s thoughts even on the most intimate of days: Margaret Nelson wrote to Frank, “this is our wedding anniversary, and Ray and I wanted to share with you a gift of money we have just received”.<sup>106</sup> For Moral Re-Armament members and their children, therefore, we can see Buchman assuming an important role in their families – whether it be termed “poppa” or “Uncle”.

Although the children’s experience will be considered in more detail later in the chapter, letters written from children to Frank Buchman further evidence the familial role he played in

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<sup>102</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0644-0657, Letter from Virginia Entwistle to Frank Buchman, 26 April 1960.

<sup>103</sup> M. Smith, ‘Kenneth Belden’, *For a New World* (2002), <https://www.foranewworld.org/material/articles/kenneth-belden-1912-2002> (Accessed 8 August 2022)

<sup>104</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter from Kenneth Belden to Frank Buchman, 19 July 1946.

<sup>105</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1543-1555, Letter from Ray Nelson to Frank Buchman, 26 March 1947.

<sup>106</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1543-1555, Letter from Margaret Nelson to Frank Buchman, 5 December 1950.

their lives. In 1955, Janet Nelson and Rosemary Phelps wrote to their “Uncle Frank”, stating: “Dear Uncle Frank, We are sending this money to you to help you with the world mission. It is what we got for our dolls. Love from Janet Nelson Rosemary Phelps”.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, in April, 1961, Geoffrey Burns wrote to his “Uncle Frank”, thanking him for the recent birthday gift, and pledging his desire to be a “fighter” for the World Mission.<sup>108</sup> Figures Sixteen to Nineteen demonstrate further examples of Buchman’s strong influence in family life amongst Moral Re-Armament members. Figure Sixteen is a letter from Margaret of Romania – whose parent, King Michael I of Romania, was a member of Moral Re-Armament. In it, Margaret writes to her “Uncle Frank” inviting him to a party. Additionally, Figure Seventeen shows a handmade birthday card for Vernonia and Rosemary’s “Uncle Frank”. Even before the children could write, as Figure Eighteen demonstrates, “Uncle Frank” was receiving drawings from them.

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<sup>107</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1543-1555, Letter from Janet Nelson and Rosemary Phelps to Frank Buchman, 20 July 1955.

<sup>108</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0296-0322, Letter from Geoffrey Burns to Frank Buchman (n.d).

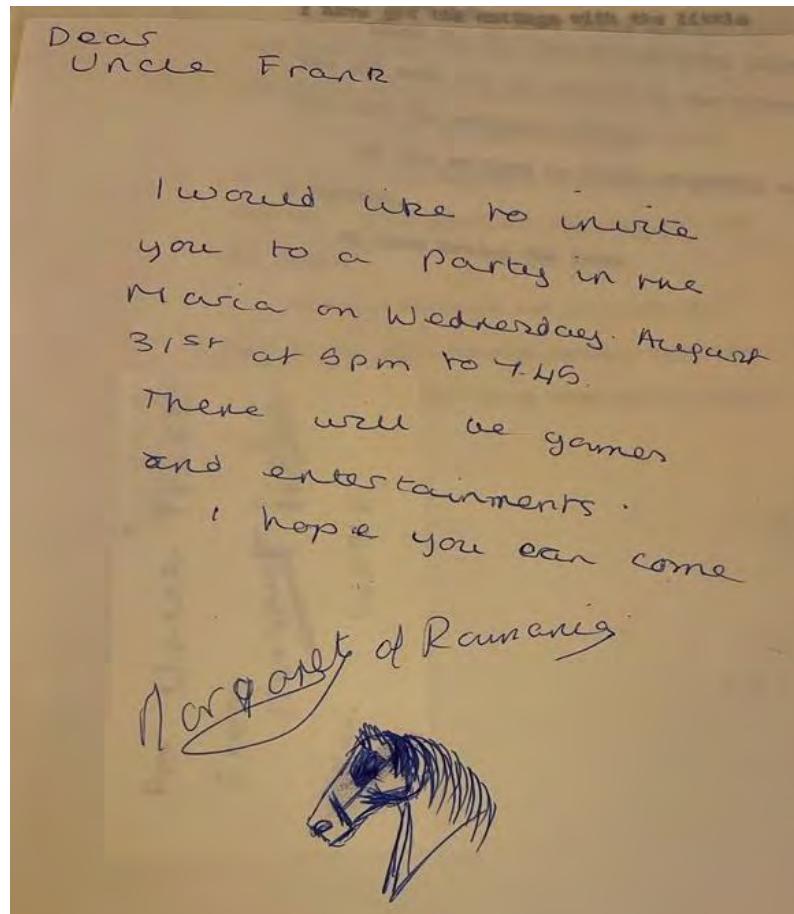


Figure Fifteen: Letter from Princess Margaret of Romania, inviting Frank Buchman to her party, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/1828-1833

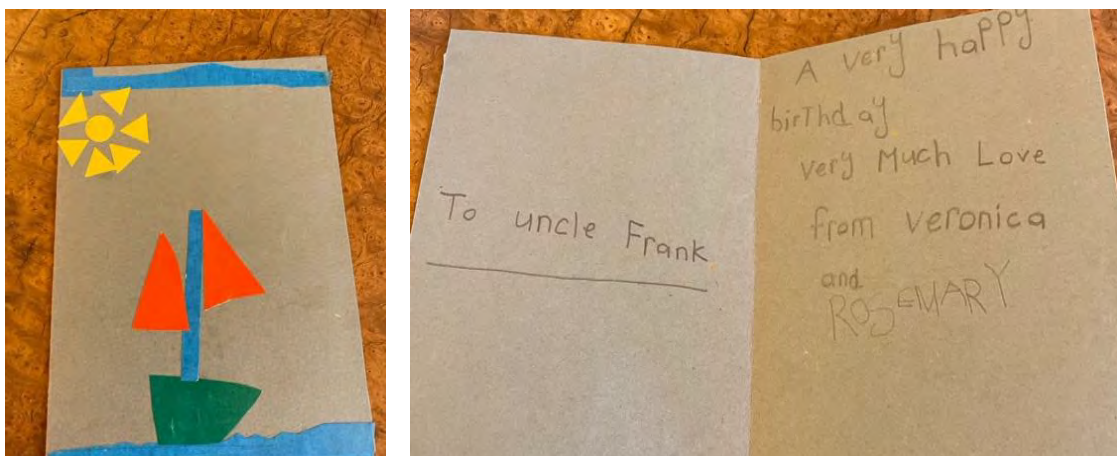


Figure Sixteen: Card from 'Veronica and Rosemary' to Frank Buchman, n.d, Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/500/25

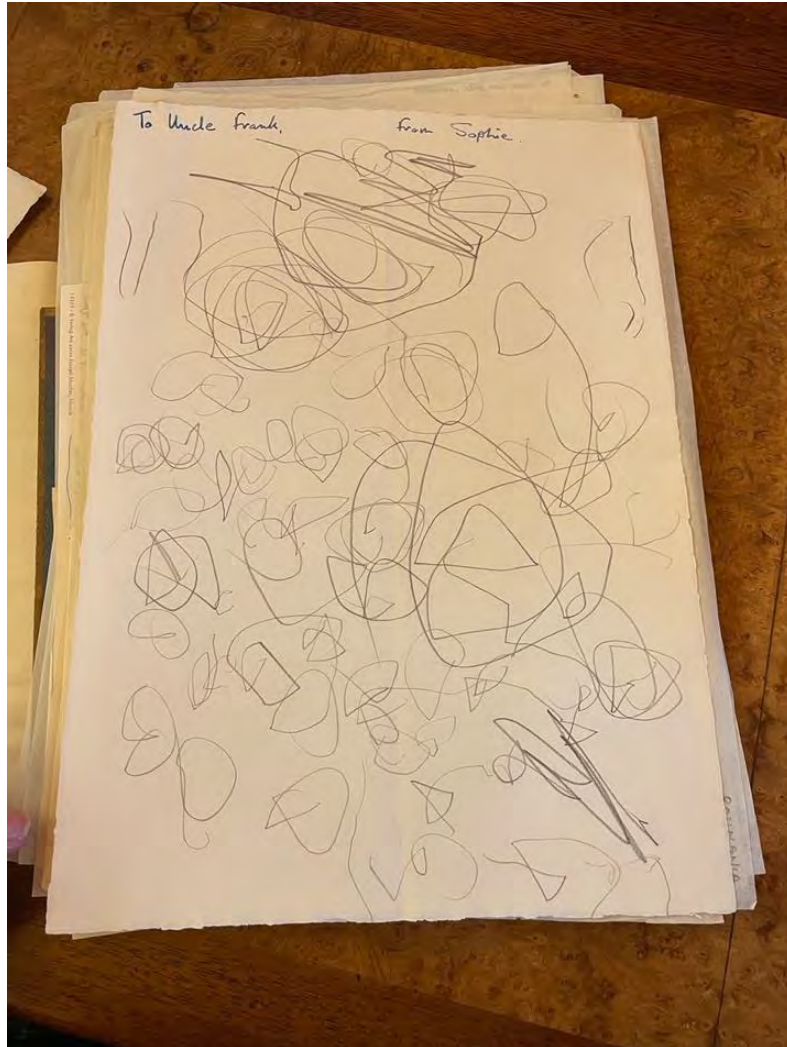


Figure Seventeen: Drawing from Princess Sophie of Romania, n.d,  
Bodleian Library, MS Oxford Group 3/1828-1833

In addition to this affection for Buchman as a familial figure, personal devotion to, and admiration of, Buchman is tangible in the letters written to him. A notable example comes from Edward Bell, who had been a Master at Eton and Headmaster at St Bees School in Cumbria, before being dismissed for attempting to hold Moral Re-Armament house parties on the

school's premises in 1935.<sup>109</sup> Edward did not begrudge this loss of a position, but instead saw it as the beginning of the next stage of his life:

I have lost my position and cannot expect at my age to ever again be made head master of any school. I am not terrified. The Oxford Group is more than a local religious revival; its aim is nothing less than to bring the Kingdom of God on earth in our own time and day.<sup>110</sup>

Bell would spend the rest of his life devoted to working for Moral Re-Armament, and was especially affectionate towards Buchman. Writing in 1951, Edward stated: “my dearly beloved Frank. I have nothing in my hand to give you. Your love is all I have to give. I leave everything to you. My beloved Frank. I love you. You have been a father and a mother to me”.<sup>111</sup> Here, we can see the pure, passionate affection held for Buchman, alongside a clear expression of the importance of Buchman in his life. Upon his death in 1953, Edward, true to his word, left everything to Frank and Moral Re-Armament.<sup>112</sup>

Devotion came in material form too, with individuals devoting their lives to working for and funding Moral Re-Armament. Stephen Foot, for example, wrote and published books promoting Moral Re-Armament, such as *Life Began Yesterday*. Foot, an engineer and Cambridge graduate, originally managed various oil companies in Mexico and Singapore, before becoming a house master at his old school, Eastbourne College.<sup>113</sup> During this time, he

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<sup>109</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter from Edward Bell to Frank Buchman, 2 November 1935; I. Gates and A. Tooker, *A Warrior's Triumph*, (privately printed), [https://fanw-1762d.kxcdn.com/sites/default/files/2019-06/LoganRoots\\_WarriorsTestamentFull.pdf](https://fanw-1762d.kxcdn.com/sites/default/files/2019-06/LoganRoots_WarriorsTestamentFull.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter from Edward Bell to Frank Buchman, November 1935.

<sup>111</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter from Edward Bell to Frank Buchman, 3 November 1935.

<sup>112</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter from Lloyds Bank to Frank Buchman, 1 June 1960.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Stephen Foot’, *For a New World*, <https://www.foranewworld.org/people/stephen-foot> (Accessed 9 August 2022).

got involved with the Freemasons, and was subsequently introduced to Moral Re-Armament.<sup>114</sup>

The careful process Foot embarks on is made clear in his letters to Frank throughout the 1930s:

About the book. It seems clear that it should not be a church book but one that is aimed at the intelligent public (pagan at heart but an occasional church goer) the kind of person who reads the Daily Telegraph. Special attention should be directed to family life and problems.<sup>115</sup>

Foot goes on to discuss the ideal length to capture readers attention, as well as appropriate publishing houses to reach as wide an audience as possible. Paul Campbell, too, donated his time in the form of writing. Campbell - Buchman's personal doctor and son of a Scottish pastor - published four books promoting Moral Re-Armament during his lifetime.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, Nell Glover, a retired seamstress and retired fashion columnist from the Yorkshire Post, also donated her time in the form of decorating Moral Re-Armament's various properties around England so that they would be suitable for entertaining. Her last letter to Frank before her death, in shaky handwriting, stated: "humbly I offer my small contribution. My mind does not remember as actively as before but my heart is still alive to do what God directs".<sup>117</sup>

The level of financial support Moral Re-Armers gave, something explored in the introduction to the thesis, becomes even clearer through the letters. Stuart Sanderson, after sending £1000 to Moral Re-Armament in 1955, and being involved in the purchase of the Westminster Theatre to give to Moral Re-Armament, left everything in his will to Moral Re-

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<sup>114</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Edward De Santis, 'MAJOR STEPHEN HENRY FOOT, D.S.O', (2017), <https://www.reubique.com/foot.htm>, (Accessed April 2021) ; *Halifax Evening Courier*, 21 November 1938

<sup>115</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/53, Letter from Stephen Foot to Frank Buchman, 15 September 1934.

<sup>116</sup> *The Independent*, 24 February 1995.

<sup>117</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0810-0828, Letter from Nell Glover to Frank Buchman, 25 May 1960.

Armament.<sup>118</sup> In 1960, Geoff Sanders sold his house and gave the proceeds to fund the Moral Re-Armament play *The Crowning Experience*.<sup>119</sup> Irene Prestwich, another frequent writer to Buchman, donated her family estate Tirley Garth to Moral Re-Armament, where Moral Re-Armament workers would go on to live and entertain. Tirley Garth would become a keystone property for Moral Re-Armament, a venue for Moral Re-Armament conferences and welcoming guests. Florence Bigland, too, sent £500 in 1960.<sup>120</sup> As explored earlier in the thesis, there are hundreds more.

As demonstrated, therefore, a life in Moral Re-Armament usually meant a life of either travelling for, writing for, or giving money for its mission; and what becomes clear from the letters to Buchman, is that these individuals did so happily and willingly, a desire which was borne from total devotion to both Buchman and his cause.

### The children of Moral Re-Armament

As established, uprooting lives and travelling on behalf of Moral Re-Armament, like Burns and Entwistle, was a common feature in the lives of Moral Re-Armers: but nowhere is the cost of being a Moral Re-Armer more visible than when looking at the lives of the children of Moral Re-Armament. Reverend Monsignor Leon-Joseph Suenens, in his 1954 exploration of Moral Re-Armament points out the formed teams which were expected to be able to travel around the world at an instant:

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<sup>118</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1863-1876, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 15 June 1955; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1863-1876, Letter from Stuart Sanderson to Frank Buchman, 14 October 1960.

<sup>119</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/1863-1876, Letter from Geoff Sanders to Frank Buchman, 24 December 1960.

<sup>120</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3.017, Letter from Florence Bigland to Frank Buchman, 8 July 1960.

A transatlantic cable is enough to set in motion this standing army of all races and tongues, and to disperse them from LA to Brazil, from Italy to Finland. No sooner is the signal received than you see a husband start for Australia, his wife for Norway; separation if accepted with uncommon abnegation, and family life is sacrificed to a higher ideal.<sup>121</sup>

This sacrifice of family life will be the focus of this section – demonstrating just how devoted Moral Re-Armers were, and what they were willing to sacrifice for its mission. These Moral Re-Armers believed in its cause so much that they raised and educated their children in Moral Re-Armament’s ideology, meaning that “many of the children did not see their parents for months or even years at a time”.<sup>122</sup> Exploring the children’s experience of Moral Re-Armament not only allows us to understand the impact of Moral Re-Armament on young lives, it also demonstrates how all-consuming an Moral Re-Armament way of life was for adult members, who would often choose Moral Re-Armament’s world mission over spending time with their own children. Such experiences allow us to further support the level of devotion Moral Re-Armers had to the cause – to pursue a life so busy, and so full of travel, that they were unable to raise their own children. As parents of Angela Cook, who was raised and educated at Caux School from 1958-1962, explained, they had “lived through two world wars, and there was a real fear of the third”. Cook’s parents believed “their work could help to avert another war”.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> L.J Suenens, *The Right View of Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1954)

<sup>122</sup> A. Elliott, ‘At School in Caux’, *Initiatives of Change* (2021), <https://www.iofc.ch/stories/1958-angela-elliott> (Accessed 2 April 2021).

<sup>123</sup> A. Elliott, ‘At School in Caux’, *Initiatives of Change* (2021), <https://www.iofc.ch/stories/1958-angela-elliott> (Accessed 2 April 2021).



## Caux School



Figure Eighteen: Pupils of the Caux School, 1961. Source: Mary Lean and Elisabeth Peters, *Stories of the Caux School*, (2009, Caux)

Initiatives of Change – the name which Moral Re-Armament adopted in 2001 – entered a period of self-reflection in more recent decades. A statement issued in 2012 remarked that:

There was over-intrusiveness in people's personal lives. A balance was not struck between the needs of the world and the needs of families and children. The best of our message and practice, such as inner listening, honest sharing and the four moral standards as guides to our living, has been and still is both liberating and inspired – but also has been and can still be misused out of fear or in the interests of control.<sup>124</sup>

The 2009 book, *Stories from Caux School*, is a clear reflection of this mood: “It is equally important for movements like Initiatives of Change to re-visit [the past], and to attempt to tell their own history honestly, warts and all, trying to understand the context within which

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<sup>124</sup> O. Marzouk, ‘Learning from the Past’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://www.iofc.org/learning-past> (Accessed April 2021)

individuals lived and thought and acted, without judging them”. Andrew Stallybrass, whose statement opens the book, was at the time creating an exhibition on Moral Re-Armament at Caux, when he opened the visitors book at Caux where a returning pupil of the Caux school had noted her thoughts in 2006: Marion Manson Porteous had written “in spite of the wonderful work of reconciliation, the children suffered. Perhaps our story may be heard one day”.<sup>125</sup> The book shares this story.

Moral Re-Armament members were aware of the power of education in creating the next generation of Moral Re-Armers. Edward Bell, in an undated document titled “The secret of Education”, wrote: “education claims the power to remake the world.... [but] education has failed. We educationalists have a tremendous responsibility, for our position as teachers compels us to give a challenge to youth”.<sup>126</sup> Following on from this, in a letter, Bell states: “a team of teachers, living on the basis of prayer and faith, and submitting every problem to the guidance of the holy spirit, will not only produce the best education that the world has seen but will also justify itself on the most revolutionary level”.<sup>127</sup> It was this energy that was carried forward into the creation of Caux School in 1955.

To alleviate some of the key members’ stress of having to raise children whilst simultaneously spreading Moral Re-Armament’s ideology around the world, Moral Re-Armament set up Caux School: a boarding school for children of Moral Re-Armament families, where they could be left for the extended periods of time whilst their parents travelled with various teams. Between 1955 and 1965 the school was attended by around 40 children. As Laura Tisdall’s work on children’s education in mid twentieth century England and Wales

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<sup>125</sup> M. Lean and E. Peters, *Stories of the Caux School*, (Caux, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/11, undated document from Edward Bell to Frank Buchman.

<sup>127</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/0138-0150, Letter from Edward Bell to Frank Buchman, 18 June 1936.

explores, pioneers of “progressive education” began to set up their own schools in the 1920s and 30s – such as Bertrand Russell’s Beacon Hill in 1927 – in an effort to “free the child from outside interference”, and provide an alternative form of education. Each progressive school differed, but as a general rule wanted to offer something different from “traditional education”; the importance of children who would become well developed, responsible individuals for the future, was the emphasis of such schools.<sup>128</sup> Caux School created a space which was certainly different from “traditional education”, and placed its emphasis on producing well developed Moral Re-Armers.

The usual curriculum, such as Mathematics and English, was taught to the children, but the days were also infused with Moral Re-Armament practices, such as prayer, Listening to God, and sharing. Geoffrey Burns recalls how the school was just as “boring” as the average experience for a child, except the mountains surrounding the school made for enjoyable skiing during the snowy months.<sup>129</sup> Despite the pleasant setting and adequate education, the experience of being educated away from home still proved disruptive to many children. Catherine Hutchinson, who attended the school for three years in the early 1960s, recalls how until she was 10, her “mother, father and I never lived in the same place for more than a few months at a time”. Delscey Burns remembers first living in a communal Moral Re-Armament house in Johannesburg with her parents Charles and Barbara and her brother Geoffrey: when their mother and father travelled to England for Charles’ medical needs, Geoffrey was taken to be looked after by a full-time carer whilst she went with a different carer. Such an experience means that “from the age of three’ Delscey had “worked out that [she] was on [her] own, and

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<sup>128</sup> L. Tisdall, *A Progressive Education? How childhood changed in mid-Twentieth Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester, 2020).

<sup>129</sup> G. France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021

that the world was a very unreliable place”.<sup>130</sup> After their Father Charles had died, Delscey and Geoffrey spent more time at Caux School.

Many children also recall feeling abandoned, leading to problems with their mental wellbeing in later life. Jean Simpson attributes her struggle with depression in later life to her time at Caux School.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps such negative experiences could be partly attributed to the lonely experience of Caux: despite being surrounded constantly by other children, “special relationships” were discouraged.<sup>132</sup> Children were not allowed to have best friends: those who seemed to be getting on too well, giggling too much, or forming too strong a bond were separated in the interest of inclusivity and a group atmosphere.<sup>133</sup>

More concerning, however, is how other children recall feeling indoctrinated. Delscey Burns recalls:

An adult can think consciously about something which is being put forward and make choices. Whereas if a child is getting exactly the same message at school as they are in the rest of the community, it doesn’t allow them to think for themselves. Caux was a seamless experience. I certainly didn’t think for myself until I went to boarding school in Britain and was suddenly confronted by an alternative world view.<sup>134</sup>

Margaret Cook, too, recalls feelings of “humiliation and helplessness” when teachers urged her to “look at [her] nature and see where it was going wrong”.<sup>135</sup> The urge for children to ‘change’ themselves led to Cook feeling as though she had to “fit into other people’s boxes”.<sup>136</sup> This process also affected Judi Conner, who remembers “a relentless quest for what was wrong inside [her]”. Seumas Mackay remembers having struggled with the four absolute standards making him feel inadequate.<sup>137</sup> It seems that whilst less time with, and an

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<sup>130</sup> M. Lean and E. Peters, *Stories of the Caux School*.

<sup>131</sup> M. Lean and E. Peters, *Stories of the Caux School*, (Caux, 2009).

<sup>132</sup> M. Lean and E. Peters, *Stories of the Caux School*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

unconventional education for, their children was a price Moral Re-Armament members were willing to pay, those decisions had lasting impacts on the children themselves: feeding even more into the image of the lengths Moral Re-Armament members were willing to go to fulfil its ideology.

## Conclusions

The chapter has revealed the intense, all-consuming experience of a life following Moral Re-Armament, and has thus further supported the image outlined in Chapter One, and expanded on in the following chapters, of Moral Re-Armament as a practical and chameleon Christianity. In light of this, Steve Bruce's comment that:

Change-not-decline is obviously possible, but to date the evidence for it is unimpressive. ...Although the decline of the once-dominant Christian churches has made it easier (both in the availability and the plausibility of alternatives) for people to 'freestyle', there is little evidence that many do so.<sup>138</sup>

On the contrary, this chapter has given evidence that many did "freestyle" their faith outside of institutional religions.<sup>139</sup> The letters used have demonstrated the desire amongst Moral Re-Armers to pursue a more practical and all-encompassing faith, due to the perceived pitfalls of the institutional Church and its failure to meet the demands of a changing world: be it, to oppose growing communism, speak out against perceived sexual immorality, or to fight for world peace. The Moral Re-Armers gave their money and time, their skills and expertise, wielded their power and influence, sacrificed their family time and left their home countries, because they truly believed in Moral Re-Armament's world mission and its ability to answer the challenges of the modern world – challenges which the institutional church was perceived to

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<sup>138</sup> S. Bruce, 'Appendix Two: Fifty Years On', p. 244.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

be failing to meet. This speaks directly to the continued importance of religion in British peoples lives, and their ability to seek out and embrace religion outside of the traditional formats in a meaningful and important way, thus further strengthening the case for historians to look carefully for expressions of religion outside of the established churches. Whilst no longer attending Church, these individuals were pursuing Christianity in a practical and pro-active way all throughout the decades typically characterised as those of declining religious importance. Instead of experiencing a declining faith and shying away from the changes around them, these individuals were – quite oppositely – finding an invigorating, fresh and all-encompassing way of practicing Christianity to meet the changes of the modern world.

Having explored what Moral Re-Armament meant to its members, this thesis will now explore how it recruited them, via its mass media campaign.

### CHAPTER THREE: MORAL RE-ARMAMENT'S MASS MEDIA MOVEMENT.

In 1939, Moral Re-Armament captured the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), prompting an investigation into its recent activities.<sup>1</sup> The FBI's suspicion did not arise from Moral Re-Armament's alleged links to the Nazi Party, nor its seemingly unexplainable wealth and outwardly lavish lifestyle: what concerned them was Moral Re-Armament's logo appearing on the top of five million milk bottles around Britain.<sup>2</sup> Moral Re-Armament's persistent advertising tactics – posters appearing around towns, Moral Re-Armament branded milk bottle lids, car stickers, bus advertisements and promotional films – was a cause of concern for security service workers at both Britain's M15 and the USA's FBI, who both wanted to get more of a sense of what Moral Re-Armament was doing.<sup>3</sup> No conclusion was drawn from the investigation, just a statement that Moral Re-Armament would remain on their watchlist.<sup>4</sup> Such an incident reveals Moral Re-Armament's ability to capture the attention of the nation through these unexpected avenues; to deliver a religiously charged message straight into the homes of Britons via their morning milk delivery.

The Moral Re-Armament branded milk bottle lids were a part of a much larger trend, whereby Moral Re-Armament would promote its faith in seemingly non-religious spaces – such as in national newspapers, in the theatre, and on LP records - as opposed to the approach of pulpits, preaching, and prayer as the main routes of communication and conversion. As Chapter

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives, KV 5/66, Memo on Dr Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group extracted from F.B.I Quarterly Intelligence Summary, 15 November 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Enquiries into Moral Re-Armament were also made by British Security Service, M15: National Archives, KV 5/67, Security Service Report on Moral Re-Armament, no date.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

One established, Moral Re-Armament wanted to operate outside of the Church in an effort to speak to real world issues. As David Bebbington has explored, Moral Re-Armament believed that it was “false to contrast the sacred and secular”, stating that “religion is not “a separate compartment of life” distinct from ordinary experience”.<sup>5</sup> In order to speak to these ordinary experiences – the supposed concerns of the everyday man – Moral Re-Armament operated in spaces which were not traditionally religious. As such, it chose advertisement spaces in the likes of *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Herald* as opposed to the *Church Times* or *The Catholic Herald*.<sup>6</sup> As this chapter will demonstrate, Moral Re-Armament’s Christianity was circulated outside of conventional Christian spaces, by utilising popular forms of media to spread its message throughout the twentieth century.

It was not the first to do this, however. As Joseph Stubenrauch explores, evangelicals had been using developments in print from as early as the Nineteenth Century.<sup>7</sup> Stubenrauch contests the idea that modernity and religion were incompatible forces, arguing that rather than resisting societal changes, evangelicals “sought to capitalise on them and contribute to them”, using developments in print, commerce, and urbanization as a means through which to spread faith, as opposed to viewing these factors as hinderances.<sup>8</sup> These new developments were viewed as “means”, which God had placed in their path in order to help them advance their journey of spreading faith. As early as 1801, evangelicals such as Hannah Kilham were considering how to utilise outward stimuli in the most effective way in order to spread religion.<sup>9</sup> Evangelicals in the long nineteenth century produced puzzles with religious imagery, portable miniature books referred to as “pocket companions” by religious publishing societies, framed

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<sup>5</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> J. Stubenrauch, *The Evangelical Age of Ingenuity in Industrial Britain* (Oxford, 2016), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.



Christian hymn sheet music, and created widescale circulation of religious literature via the Religious Tract Society. Additionally, Kim Knott and Jolyon Mitchell's exploration of *The Changing Faces of Media and Religion in Britain since 1945*, highlights that, with "communication being at the heart of religion" there has been a necessity for religious groups to utilize new forms of media in order to communicate with its potential followers.<sup>10</sup> Knott and Mitchell argue that "as traditional forms of worship declined in post-war Britain, the relationship between religion and popular culture found new avenues for expression".<sup>11</sup> This was not something which was exclusive to the post-war period, however: "since the nineteenth century, for example, evangelical Christians have found a variety of means of expressing and widely circulating their beliefs, from popular posters and handbills, to pamphlets, religious novels...".<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, as Panacea Society utilised advertisements around London in 1924, The Salvation Army adopted elements of popular culture to spread its message.<sup>13</sup> As Diane Winston's exploration of The Salvation Army's activities shows, "Salvationists sought to saturate the secular with the sacred", and did so adapting two elements of culture: entertainment and material goods – by performing plays, shows and pageants, as well as "investing ordinary objects with religious meaning" the Salvation Army attempted to "transform consumption into consecration".<sup>14</sup> All space was God's space; the imagined lines between secular and the sacred were blurred. Winston concludes that there is a temptation to:

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<sup>10</sup> K. Knott and J Mitchell, 'The Changing Faces of Media and Religion in Britain since 1945', in: L. Woodhead and R. Catto (eds.), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, (Oxford, 2012), pp. 243-272, p. 247.

<sup>11</sup> K. Knott and J Mitchell, 'The Changing Faces of Media and Religion in Britain since 1945', p. 265.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> A. Lockhart, 'Religious and Spiritual Mobility in Britain', p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> D. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, p. 4.

frame discussions about religion in terms of growth and decline, secularisation or fundamentalism, rather than change, shifts, and transformation. I hope I have illustrated Leigh Eric Schmidt's apt observation "that the sacred and the secular have been ceaselessly combined and recombined, that these categories have regularly dissolved in lived experience".<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, as Alana Harris's work on the revival campaigns of Billy Graham and Father Patrick Peyton has explored, by utilising new technologies to convey their message – such as radio, film, newspapers, bill boards and bus tickets – Graham sold "prayer just like Lever brothers sell soap", and did so outside of the four walls of a Church.<sup>16</sup> It was Graham and Peyton's ability to utilise new media formats, as well as their ability to draw on the nations contemporary anxieties, which led to their success – just as it was Moral Re-Armament's ability to utilise new media formats, as well as drawing on the nation's contemporary anxieties, which led also led to its success. Crucially, Harris points out, the men's "success was not simply attributable to a re-presentation of old-fashioned verities, nor the reinvigoration of latent faith. Rather, a good measure of the crusaders' success was because they intuitively articulated, through their increasing emphasis on a faith personally experienced and authentically practised, messages which resonated with the shifting social and spiritual currents of the moment".<sup>17</sup>

Although not the first or last to utilise modern media as a means to disseminate faith, as Bebbington notes, Moral Re-Armament "had led the way in absorbing elements of Modernist culture into the Evangelical bloodstream".<sup>18</sup> As this chapter will demonstrate, Moral Re-Armament, by creating their own publishing house, recording studio, and Theatre in London, was able to operate with an air of legitimacy outside of the mainstream media, as well as outside

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<sup>15</sup> D. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, p. 247.

<sup>16</sup> A. Harris, 'Disturbing the Complacency of Religion?', p. 491.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511.

<sup>18</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 238.

of the Church.<sup>19</sup> Moral Re-Armament desired to create a Christianity which would reach further and wider than its institutional counterpart, and did so by forging a religion which could penetrate everyday lives, absorb and utilise change, and move with modernity. As Chapter One explored, Moral Re-Armament's core aims never changed: rather its chosen targets and methods of presentation repackaged the same message in different ways. Therefore, whether it was denouncing Communism through one of its publications, or warning against sexual immorality through one of its plays, the intended outcome was the same: conversion to Moral Re-Armament. The target and method were transient hooks to hang this conversion on. This chapter explores Moral Re-Armament's widespread efforts to convert through mainstream media: the full-time workers who were explored in Chapter Two were an intrinsic part of this method, as will become clear when exploring the books and plays authored by them.

As the former Archbishop of Sao Paulo, Cardinal Agenelo Rossi noted in 1965:

there is no doubt that Moral Re-Armament has sought out a language in which to talk to the people and to implant in them the need for moral change. Here is an immense field – radio, cinema, theatre, and television – for Moral Re-Armament to work in, to inculcate human dignity and of God in other men.<sup>20</sup>

This chapter will therefore explore Moral Re-Armament's use of literature, newspapers, and plays.

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<sup>19</sup> As Julie Gottlieb has explored in: J. Gottlieb, 'The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41:1 (2006), pp. 35-55, the British Union of Fascists also faced a media blackout, so they started creating their own means of communicating through alternative medias and newspaper advertisements, including materials which they could sell independently such as signed photographs; the chapter identifies a similar pattern in Moral Re-Armament's communication methods.

<sup>20</sup> P. Orglmeister, *The Battle for Modern Man* (London, 1965), preface.

## Moral Re-Armament's Literature

As Chapter One has established, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Moral Re-Armament's main method of advertisement was via house parties, whereby Moral Re-Armers would gather prospective members, and spend a weekend sharing stories praising the work of Moral Re-Armament, as well as engaging in activities such as to introduce converts to the Four Absolutes and the practice of Listening to God. As Moral Re-Armament grew in size, its ambitions grew beyond localised change into a world-wide revolution, thus a more transportable and widely accessible method of conversion was necessary. Paperback books, published by its in-house publishers *Grosvenor Books* as well as by *Blandford Press*, took the place of house parties as one of Moral Re-Armament main method of communicating with the people of the world.<sup>21</sup>

By doing so, Moral Re-Armament was utilising a growing consumer culture of book buying: as the twentieth century unfolded, more people were buying and reading books, relying on them as sources of information and an opportunity to learn. Such a trend was particularly rife in Christian communities. Peter Mandler's work on the "paperback revolution" in the mid-twentieth century, explores how "paperbacks were the principal vehicle (alongside magazines) for expert management of daily life through self help and advice manuals".<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Matthew Hedstrom's exploration of the rise of religious liberalism posits that "religious liberalism happened largely in and through books", pointing out that "as modern life challenged

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<sup>21</sup>The majority of Moral Re-Armament's texts were published by Grosvenor Books – which lists its address on the back of the publications as 54 Lyford Road. A search on Companies House reveals that 54 Lyford Road was also a correspondence address for Moral Re-Armament, meaning that Grosvenor Books was Moral Re-Armament's own private publishing house. Some of Moral Re-Armament's texts are published by Blandford Press – which was incorporated in 1977 – however, Blandford Press seem to publish on a wide variety of topics, and there is no explicit link to Moral Re-Armament.

<sup>22</sup> P. Mandler, 'Good Reading for the Million: The 'Paperback Revolution' and the Co-Production of Academic Knowledge in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain and America', *Past & Present*, 244:1, (2019), pp. 235-269, p. 237.

previously held assumptions about faith, character, personality, and the self, readers turned to inspirational literature for guidance”.<sup>23</sup>

Moral Re-Armament’s literature was far-reaching; the Moral Re-Armament booklet *Ideology and Co-Existence* was allegedly distributed to 50 million homes in America, 75 million homes across Europe, as well as to Africa and Asia, and was printed in 24 languages.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Moral Re-Armament’s publications – alongside supporting materials such as Frank Buchman quote calendars – made up a large proportion of their income as an organisation on a world-wide scale. For example, in Moral Re Armament’s “Statement of Financial Condition”, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1953, the sale of books and literature amounted to \$39,879.17.<sup>25</sup>

Moral Re-Armament published hundreds of books from 1938 onwards, ranging from member’s testimonials, biographies, histories of the movement, prayer books, children’s books, and manifesto-style pamphlets. From children, to trade unionists, to stay-at-home moms, Moral Re-Armament had a book for them: one which carefully and craftily delivered Moral Re-Armament’s message of the Four Absolutes, Listening to God, and living a life led by Christian principles. Reviewing Moral Re-Armament’s literature reveals two main tactics: its attempt to align itself with the modern and speak to real-world issues, and its attempt to speak to an increasingly non-religious or religiously plural audience.

### Speaking directly to modern problems

Moral Re-Armament’s literature marks its first real attempt to relate faith to real-world problems of family troubles, workplace disputes, worldwide political strife and sexual sin on a

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<sup>23</sup> M. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> National Archives, FO 1110/1331, Information Research Department Report on ‘World Distribution of Ideology and Co-Existence’, (n.d).

<sup>25</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folder unsorted.

mass scale. The books frequently used terms such as “common-sense”, “ordinary people”, and the “silent majority”, as a way of giving readers the impression of Moral Re-Armament as the obvious answer to real world problems. Noting the way in which each book is carefully tailored to its desired audience highlights the sophisticated way in which Moral Re-Armament operated, further fleshing out this image of it as a Christian chameleon.

In 1938, Basil Entwistle wrote to Buchman expressing his concern that Moral Re-Armament were not producing enough written materials: Entwistle highlights the fact that it had got the meeting and house party format down to a fine art, but were lacking in widespread written material. Entwistle references Nazi Germany’s Propaganda Secretary, Joseph Goebbels, as inspiration; saying that Goebbels had found the same problem in Germany but “quickly did something about it”.<sup>1</sup> In the same letter, Entwistle proposes that Moral Re-Armament capitalises on the twentieth anniversary of the end of World War One, using the occasion to:

call to the making of a new Britain... we could produce a picture magazine tracing dramatically the history of the nation since the war – the lowering of standards in daily life, the negative forces, dramatic points such as the general strike and then go on to use all our rich material of changed lives to show the building of a new Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Such an approach is indicative of Moral Re-Armament’s purposeful attempts to align itself with the modern moment, as well as its deliberate attempts to monopolise on current events in the national consciousness as a way to promote its own ideology.

*Life Began Yesterday: A New Book on The Oxford Group* (1935) by Stephen Foot provides an early example of Moral Re-Armament’s attempts to relate faith to problems existing in the homes of Britons, as opposed to strictly theological or faith-based issues. It delivered a “new message of hope for those worried by the problems which beset hundreds of thousands. It is a book which will help the man who cannot get on with his son, or a husband

and wife who are drifting apart”.<sup>26</sup> Speaking to the concerns of the decade, the book talks of economic depression, unemployment, rising communism, and impending war. Riding on the anxiety of the nation as the threat of World War Two was looming, Foot calls for people to follow the principles of Moral Re-Armament to avoid another war. God is even presented as the solution to unemployment: “full-time employment can be found when God is guiding because all the hours you are awake you are looking for someone to help”.<sup>27</sup> The book also shares success stories of Moral Re-Armament in action in the average man’s life:

here is one man who used to lie in bed until ten o’clock and kick his wife out to get his breakfast; he now gets up at six to light the fire and give her a cup of tea before meeting with his friends to listen to God.<sup>28</sup>

This practice of relating Moral Re-Armament to the everyday was a central tactic of Moral Re-Armament which it used throughout the decades. For example, *The Black and White Book*, published in 1972 by Sydney Cook and Garth Lean, also presents Moral Re-Armament as the solution to modern problems. The book speaks to modern concerns which are bound to grip the reader – relatable issues such as race, unemployment and homelessness, communism, drugs, drink, pornography and sex.<sup>29</sup> The book goes on to offer a practical guide of when and how to listen to the inner voice – in the mornings, for 15 minutes – and the inner voice will offer advice on how to change the world around.<sup>30</sup> Testimonials were also a central approach, as a way to evidence the alleged transformative power of Moral Re-Armament. For example, *Listen to the Children*, written in 1979 by Annejet Campbell, is compiled of many individual stories about how Moral Re-Armament helped improve family life, ranging from disputes with children to marital problems.<sup>31</sup> *Tomorrow’s Parents*, published in 1977, has similar examples:

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<sup>26</sup> S. Foot, *Life Began Yesterday: A New Book on The Oxford Group*, (Surrey, 1935), blurb.

<sup>27</sup> S. Foot, *Life Began Yesterday*, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> S. Cook and G. Lean, *The Black and White Book*, (London, 1972), p. 21

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>31</sup> A. Campbell, *Listen to the Children*, (London, 1979).

a fictional “Uncle Frank” (an obvious reference to Frank Buchman) advises his niece and nephew on how to avoid sexual sin by following Moral Re-Armament’s guidelines. Additionally, *Listen for a Change* by Annejet Campbell, published in 1986, runs through the various problems encountered between married couples and how to solve them, having just celebrated her own Silver Wedding anniversary.<sup>32</sup> Just like *Listen to the Children*, the book is full of testimonials from individuals around the world, explaining problems they encountered and how following tactics like listening to the ‘inner voice’ helped them to reach resolutions. This style of book directly highlighted the alleged measurable benefits that subscribing to a Moral Re-Armament way of life could bring.

Moral Re-Armament would also often frame their faith as the solution to industrial and work-place disputes. The 1979 text *Britain Works – Ok*, published during a decade famous for strikes, industrial strife, and the infamous Winter of Discontent, provides examples of:

men and women who have some share in the manufacturing process - on the factory floor, in the shop steward's office or at the manager's desk... they know what hard work means. They are concerned about inflation, unemployment, doubtful prospects for young workers, mistrust, bitterness and widening divisions.<sup>33</sup>

The book provides first-hand experiences of how Moral Re-Armament has helped them in their working lives: for example, how Moral Re-Armament saved factory worker Bert Allen from becoming a “communist troublemaker” by getting involved with trade unions.<sup>34</sup> There are several similar examples, which aim to portray ordinary working men and women as hugely benefitting from the work of Moral Re-Armament. The text concludes: “we face a crisis, we are up against it. The ordinary man knows it too. Britain will become an industrial museum

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<sup>32</sup> A. Campbell, *Listen for a Change*, (London, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> G. Gain, *Britain Works – Ok*, (London, 1979), blurb.

<sup>34</sup> G. Gain, *Britain Works – Ok*, (London, 1979).



unless management can find ways of ending 30 years of industrial decline... the ordinary man may ask himself ‘what can I do?’<sup>35</sup> The recipe for success involves living “outside of yourself”, to stop looking for others to blame, and to pay attention to the “inner voice” of God.<sup>36</sup>

In a similar way, 1960s Moral Re-Armament publications used the growing anxieties over sexual change in Britain – after the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1961, and the failure to prosecute Lady Chatterley’s Lover as an obscene publication representing for many an uncomfortable and unwelcome shift in moral values – as another way in which to promote Moral Re-Armament. Its publication *The New Morality* (1964) utilised these fears.<sup>37</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* wrote in 1963 that there was a “new morality” – one which promoted slackening moral standards and ignored Christian codes – society, “despairing of persuading men to act morally, seeks rather to base morality on the way men act”.<sup>38</sup> Ernest Claxton spoke at a Moral Re-Armament assembly in London in August 1963, warning of the dangers which this “new morality” posed to the nation’s health, with “certain doctors advocating a new teaching on sex”.<sup>39</sup> Shortly after, in 1964, Moral Re-Armament published *A New Morality*, which warned of the erosive effect of the new morality on the traditional values of Christendom. Rather than offering Moral Re-Armament as a solution, which was the usual format for this type of Moral Re-Armament text, the whole text is concerned with the problem at hand rather than a solution – or as the authors put it “the book contains a diagnosis of a patient in decline rather than a description of a particular remedy”.<sup>40</sup> The text reads as one which whips up existing anxieties

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<sup>35</sup> G. Gain, *Britain Works – Ok*, (London, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> G. Gain, *Britain Works – Ok*, (London, 1979).

<sup>37</sup> A. Lunn and G. Lean, *The New Morality*, (London, 1964).

<sup>38</sup> ‘The New Morality’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 8th August 1963.

<sup>39</sup> ‘New Morality Danger to Nation’s Health’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 7th August 1963.

<sup>40</sup> A. Lunn and G. Lean, *The New Morality*, (London, 1964), p. 1.

surrounding moral and religious decline, whilst also restating its confidence in the return of Christian morality:

those who are depressed by the apparent weakening of institutional Christianity in modern England may find it reassuring to compare the position of the Church of England in the 18th and 19th centuries... as Samuel Wesley said ‘be steady. The Christian Faith will surely revive in this Kingdom. You shall see it though I shall not’.<sup>41</sup>

In a similar way to *Tomorrow’s Parents*, the book warns against lapsing sexual regulations and restraint, and its effects on energy and productivity: “any human society is free to choose either to display great energy or to enjoy sexual freedom; the evidence is that it cannot do both for more than one generation... if a man gives himself entirely over to a life of sexual pleasure, he does so only by repressing other instincts, such as those of ambition”.<sup>42</sup> The book also refers to medical professionals to support their argument: for example, this statement by Dr Doris Odlum:

It is somewhat curious that people have failed to understand that a completely selfish and irresponsible attitude in relation to the fulfilling of our sexual demands damages our personality as well as being anti-social and disruptive to the community. From the psychological point of view it is accepted that self indulgence and irresponsibility in regard to any aspect of our lives tends to corrupt us and leads to a lowering of self respect and our standards of integrity in every other aspect.<sup>43</sup>

This inclusion of support from medical professionals was part of a wider trend in Moral Re-Armament’s literature, whereby we can begin to see its attempts to align itself with the modern and present its faith as the solution to modern issues in increasingly scientific ways from the 1960s onwards. As alluded to in Chapter One, through Moral Re-Armament’s literature we can see an increased emphasis on scientific themes in an effort to speak to modern

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<sup>41</sup> A. Lunn and G. Lean, *The New Morality*, (London, 1964), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

audiences. This perception within Moral Re-Armament of science and medical professionals being viewed as having more standing in modern society over religious figures meant that Moral Re-Armament texts began to be written by people such as Ernest Claxton and Dr John Lester who had authoritative positions in the medical community: Claxton, who we met in Chapter Two, was the head of the British Medical Association. *The Care and Cure of Modern Man and Society*, by Dr John Lester, published in 1979 explores the personal views of medical professionals from around the world – views which were gathered at a 1978 Moral Re-Armament conference – with regard to topics ranging from medical ethics to the meaning of life and death.<sup>44</sup> The text reads as a clever promotion of Moral Re-Armament values which are given all the more weight because it is a medical professional promoting them. Dr John Lester writes of how smokers can be considered personally responsible for costing the country more money for specialist heart clinics, urging them to stop smoking (anti-smoking and anti-drinking were Moral Re-Armament ways of life. Members were forbidden).<sup>45</sup> Lester calls for a total “reassessment of our values” to address the pitfalls of modern health care.<sup>46</sup> On the topic of euthanasia, the view is: “opting out is a selfish, soft and permissive aim and a destroyer of democracy”.<sup>47</sup> Once the reader is hooked by the legitimacy of such scientific arguments, the text moves beyond medical problems, with one Moral Re-Armament supporter stating: “it is not always the sick in hospital beds who make a sick society. I was and still am self-willed, quick-tempered, and ambitious, and therefore part of a sickness in society”; the “strong medicine” to cure such selfish ways, was Moral Re-Armament and listening to the inner voice.

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<sup>44</sup> J. Lester, *The Care and Cure of Modern Man and Society*, (London, 1979).

<sup>45</sup> J. Lester, *The Care*, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Similarly, *Modernising Man* by Dr Paul Campbell (Buchman's private doctor) written in 1968, features "a forecast of man's future based on the hard facts of human nature and the most recent knowledge of how the human brain works. The more we unravel the mysteries of brain and body function, the more evident it becomes that we are built for moral evolution".<sup>48</sup> Campbell is presented as a scientific expert on how to face and overcome the challenges of the modern world, and Moral Re-Armament is presented as the solution and way of "modernising our seeing, thinking, living, hearing, feelings, striving, and world".<sup>49</sup> True to form, it is Moral Re-Armament which is presented as the modernising force which society needs:

a new type of family life, a new type of industrial, social and political life can be ours. A new growth in freedom, righteousness, judgement and equity for the millions of the earth can be the heritage of our children.<sup>50</sup>

Moral Re-Armament's 1965 work, *The Battle For Modern Man*, also presents Moral Re-Armament as a necessary supplement to a modernising world, beginning: people "are looking for new ways to confront the trends of our times".<sup>51</sup> These trends, Orglmeister states, include declining Christianity, communism, and sexual immorality, and crucially, according to Orglmeister, the Church was not capable of handling such issues.<sup>52</sup> The core challenge when trying to tackle the arising problems was that humanity, in Moral Re-Armament's eyes, with advancing technologies and opportunities, were newly wrapped up in "the transformation of this world to the exclusion of the next".<sup>53</sup> The solution involves creating "a new type of man

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<sup>48</sup> P. Campbell, *Modernising Man*, (London, 1968), blurb.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, contents page.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

who is honest, clean, and incorruptible”.<sup>54</sup> After outlining the alleged problems of the world in 1965 for 23 pages, Orglmeister introduces Moral Re-Armament as the answer, noting its successes in “over a hundred nations”.<sup>55</sup>

David Belden, in his 1976 thesis, explains how Moral Re-Armament’s target demographic of middle to upper class individuals were more concerned with their quality of life in this world rather than the next: as such, Moral Re-Armament’s transformative power would have to have demonstrable effects on immediate surroundings. Such benefits could range from “peace of mind, a sense of closeness to the supernatural, the power to live a moral or successful life, or the hope of improving society as a whole through conversions”.<sup>56</sup> As we can see through Moral Re-Armament’s literature, the immediate benefits of Moral Re-Armament which were advertised depended on the desired audience, but there was always an explicit way in which Moral Re-Armament could benefit the reader in their everyday life. As Moral Re-Armament note:

religious truths and theological jargon fail to penetrate the hearts of pseudo-Christians and non-Christians who are this-world minded. What we need as well as our doctrine is some way of confronting men of every race and religion with the basic choice of their lives – whether to take the road towards God or the road towards the beast.<sup>57</sup>

Bryan Wilson argued that growing Western affluence, which had made the “elaborate compensatory system” of an afterlife – the idea of working on earth now to reap the benefits in heaven – largely redundant.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, as Wilson outlines, developing technologies and consumer cultures meant that people could create a better life for themselves in the “here and

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<sup>54</sup> P. Orglmeister, *The Battle for Modern Man* (Oxford, 1965), p. 21

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>56</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> P. Orglmeister, *Modern Man*, p. 16

<sup>58</sup> B. Wilson and D. Ikeda, *Human Values in a Changing World: A Dialogue*, trans and eds R. L. Gage and I.B Taurus (London, 2008), p. 136.

now”.<sup>59</sup> Here, we can see Moral Re-Armament confronting such a trend directly, positioning itself to speak to those who were “this-world minded”, and therefore frame its potential in how it could transform the lives of its followers in the more immediate sense than promising a better afterlife. Thus, instead of – as Wilson suggests – faltering in the face of this change, Moral Re-Armament again tackled it head-on. Indeed, this awareness of the need to speak to “men of every race and religion”, and use language which is free from “theological jargon” in order to speak to these “this-world minded” individuals is also visible in Moral Re-Armament’s literature, as the next section will explore.

#### Speaking to a non-religious, or religiously plural, audience

There were two motivating factors for the secularisation of Moral Re-Armament’s image throughout the twentieth century. The first, which Sam Brewitt-Taylor’s work on the Student Christian Movement explores, was this awareness amongst Christians in the 1960s of an increasing need to “retranslate their Christianity into secular concepts, and redirect their energies into the secular world”.<sup>60</sup> This idea of “subjective secularisation” (as explored in the introduction) motivated Christians to adapt their practices to speak to a broader audience.<sup>61</sup> As an analysis of the work of Moral Re-Armament throughout the twentieth century has demonstrated, this need to readapt to external societal factors was not unique to the 1960s: in fact, Moral Re-Armament had been continuously reinventing the way in which it expressed its faith since the 1920s, in an effort to continue to remain relevant in the lives of twentieth century Britons. The second factor which influenced Moral Re-Armament’s softening of its explicitly

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<sup>59</sup> B. Wilson and D. Ikeda, *Human Values in a Changing World: A Dialogue*, trans and eds R. L. Gage and I.B Taurus (London, 2008), p. 136.

<sup>60</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, ‘From Religion to Revolution: Theologies of Secularisation in the British Student Christian Movement, 1963-1973’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 66:4 (2015), pp. 792-811, p. 794.

<sup>61</sup> J. Wood, ‘Going ‘part of the way together’: Christian Intellectuals, Modernity, and the Secular in 1930s and 1940s Britain, *Contemporary British History* 34:4 (2020), pp. 580-602, p. 580.

Christian language was the increasingly diverse religious nature of Britain, with the number of participants in the non-Christian faiths of Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism growing in Britain.<sup>62</sup> Moral Re-Armament, David Belden notes, consequently embarked on a process of “the secularisation of the Group's self-presentation or in other words its public disassociation from its connections with evangelical or any kind of organised Christianity” in its later texts, explaining that “the object of this was to emphasise the universality of Buchman’s message, in the end not merely for all Christians as in the 1930s, or for all religions as in the 1950s, but for all well-meaning people”.<sup>63</sup>

Crucially, however Moral Re-Armament’s “self-presentation was only secularised in leaving out localising references that tied [Moral Re-Armament] to particular Christian organisations, or, later, to the Christian religion”.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, whilst – as we will see – Moral Re-Armament became less explicitly Christian in their image, its belief in God still remained strong. As David Belden points out, Moral Re-Armament’s “parent group”, the Young Men’s Christian Association, had undergone a similar transformation, and had also made the shift from “evangelical crusade” to a “recreational, welfare, and character building programme... as a response to the changing demands of its clientele”.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, this process of moving away from explicitly Christian language had been ongoing since at least the 1950s. For example, *The Art of Remaking Man* published in 1954 by Peter Howard and Paul Campbell, when compared with the previous 1919 manual *Soul Surgery* (both of which were viewed as central texts exploring the key themes of the movement), what

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<sup>62</sup> C. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 291-297.

<sup>63</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 168.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

becomes clear is the change of language. As David Belden points out, *Soul Surgery* used words and phrases such as:

‘personal evangelism’; ‘conversion’; ‘the forces of the Christian Church’; ‘bearing personal witness to what Christ had done for them’; ‘prayer and Bible study’; ‘sin’; ‘we of Christ’s army’; ‘backsliders’; ‘the onslaught of temptation’; ‘the mysterious ‘leadings’ of God’s Spirit’; ‘the healing power of Christ’; and ‘salvation’.<sup>66</sup>

However, there are differences in language in *The Art of Remaking Man*. For example, *The Art of Remaking Men*, instead:

Talked of ‘changing’ not ‘conversion’; ‘Changed’ people became ‘revolutionaries’ not ‘evangelists’. There was much mention of God, and His ability to direct and empower those who are committed to Him, but little mention of Christ. A hymn on the Cross was introduced in terms of being a favourite of Mahatma Gandhi’s, who was of course not a Christian – such an introduction thus legitimating the inclusion of the hymn to Indian Hindus and other non-Christians.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, Belden notes, the description of Frank Buchman in the 1919 versus the 1954 manual were also different. Whilst the 1919 work “described Buchman’s involvement in evangelical circles, such as his YMCA and missionary connections and his work with Billy Sunday and Sherwood Eddy, and his Lutheran ministry”, the 1954 work “referred to [Buchman’s] Lutheran Inner Mission work as if it were secular social work; to his Hartford Seminary post as resident evangelist merely as a ‘salaried position... at a college’; and to his Asian visits without reference to missions or Christianity”.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, whilst a commitment to God was a requirement, there was technically no stipulation that this needed to be a Christian God. Such a side-step around a potential problem was typical of Moral Re-Armament. When pressed on this issue in a 1964 interview by John

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<sup>66</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Oxford Group’, p. 164.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.



Hart, Howard gave a vague answer: “I am a Christian... but in a world which is not universally of that opinion I think that absolute moral standards are a basis on which all men can stand”.<sup>69</sup> When pressed further, and asked if members were expected to believe in a Christian God, Howard replied that there was only “one God... Christian certainly... but you don’t have to answer theological questions to be in [Moral Re-Armament]. You just say to a fellow you are going to be honest”.<sup>70</sup>

Contemporary commentators noted this shift in Moral Re-Armament’s approach. A 1950s journalist, Geoffrey Williamson, distinguished between the "Oxford Group, a Christian movement supported by many respectable Christians, and Moral Re-Armament, an increasingly political movement veering perilously far from the stated purpose of the advancement of the Christian religion”.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, whereas Horton Davies wrote in 1954 that “the group advocates the following of religious discipline”, by 1963 commentators such as G.W Kirby were noting that “it would seem that the distinctively Christian emphasis has steadily weakened in the Movement”.<sup>72</sup> Yet this shift should not be misunderstood as a genuine move away from Christianity: as Kirby notes “when questioned about the lack of distinctively Christian doctrine, the reply is usually given that a genuine effort to keep the Four Absolutes will eventually lead men to seek the help of Christ”.<sup>73</sup>

*The Battle for Modern Man* (1965) continually nods towards Moral Re-Armament’s future move towards a more subtle Christianity. For example, the text shows an awareness that

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<sup>69</sup> *Viewpoint*, ‘Peter Howard’, (KNXT Public Affairs, 1964).

<sup>70</sup> *Viewpoint*, ‘Peter Howard’, (KNXT Public Affairs, 1964).

<sup>71</sup> G. Williamson, *Inside Buchmanism; an independent inquiry into the Oxford Group Movement and Moral Re-Armament* (New York, 1954).

<sup>72</sup> H. Davies, *Christian Deviations* (London, 1954), p. 98; G.W Kirby, *Moral Re-Armament – A Crusade Reprint*, (London, 1963).

<sup>73</sup> G.W Kirby, *Moral Re-Armament – A Crusade Reprint*, (London, 1963).

it needed to present its message in a way appealing to the increasingly secular man: “to present the ideology of God’s cause we need to tackle modern man where he is – that is to say, through his interest in the present world”.<sup>74</sup> The text concludes by spelling out this universal approach; they will firstly “amplify the still small voice of conscience in an unchristian heart” and promote the principles of Absolute Honesty, purity, and love which are “a good yardstick to help even the weakest conscience”.<sup>75</sup> Moral Re-Armament were thus not ignorant of the changing world around them. Thus, *The Battle for Modern Man* marks the increasing awareness amongst Moral Re-Armament members of the need to present faith in terms of real-world problems, because this is a ‘common language’ for believers and non-believers alike. As such, the ideology presented “is not a philosophical system; it is not a religion. It is not a doctrine. It is a programme of action, so simple, logical, and immediate that it can reach the masses and whole nations in time”.<sup>76</sup> Its future literature also reflected this awareness of the need to change their approach.

*Education for Tomorrow’s World*, written in 1970, evidences this shift in tone that Moral Re-Armament were beginning to consider in *The Battle for Modern Man*.<sup>77</sup> The book takes a more detached approach to Moral Re-Armament’s Christianity, shifting the focus to an inclusive fight against the dangerous advancements in the scientific world. It begins: “man is a technological giant, but has remained a moral and spiritual dwarf”.<sup>78</sup> The book warns how “the advance of science could lead to a de-humanised society, making man a robot run by others” stressing the need for a “new type of man” who can simultaneously deal with the technological advances of society whilst remaining deeply moral and spiritual, and not forsaking these values

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<sup>74</sup> P. Orglmeister, *Modern Man*, p. 16

<sup>75</sup> P. Orglmeister, *Modern Man*, p. 16

<sup>76</sup> P. Orglmeister, *Modern Man*, p. 22

<sup>77</sup> J. Henden, E. Forland, S. Fraenki, *Education for Tomorrow’s World*, (London, 1970).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

for material gain.<sup>79</sup> Crucially, the book presents a more inclusive fight, stating that “to be morally right or morally wrong does not depend on my being Christian or Hindu, black or white. The standard on which a new world is to be built must be above such dividing lines”.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, whilst the book does make references to a god, it switches the terminology of “god listening”, to listening to the “inner voice”, stating that if you do not believe in God, you should still try and listen to your inner conscience.<sup>81</sup> The author notes that “all this about moral standards is OK... but why must we drag in all this stuff about God?... everyone can be encouraged to begin where he is. If he cannot accept God, he can begin by listening to his conscience and taking absolute moral standards seriously”.<sup>82</sup> The revolution in *Education for Tomorrow's World* is comparatively more inclusive than the strictly Christian, God-driven one promoted in the aforementioned texts.

*The Black and White Book* also provides a good example of Moral Re-Armament's subtle shift towards more inclusive practices as their way of continuing to do God's work under the guise of secular language with its references to the “inner voice”, as opposed to Listening to God. It is also important to note that there is no reference to Moral Re-Armament – except for in small print on the very last page which lists a correspondence address – within the whole book. Just as in Moral Re-Armament's 1977 book *Tomorrow's Parents*, Moral Re-Armament ideas are referred to without explicitly mentioning Moral Re-Armament. By the 1970s, after controversies and criticism which Chapter Four explores, Moral Re-Armament had many negative connotations attached to it. For example, President Eisenhower encouraged the leader of Moral Re-Armament's singing group Up With People to formally split from the “dreary

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<sup>79</sup> J. Henden, E. Forland, S. Fraenki, *Education for Tomorrow's World*, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24

image” of Moral Re-Armament in the late 1960s.<sup>83</sup> Beyond this, the name Moral Re-Armament had clear Christian connotations, an image which they were steering clear of. By the 1970s, we can see an awareness of this in the literature they are producing: they no longer led with their name, but attempted to hide it.

*Listen to the Children*, written in 1979 by Annejet Campbell, is another example of playing down both the Moral Re-Armament name and the religious nature of the books.<sup>84</sup> It is compiled of many individual stories about how Moral Re-Armament helped improve family life. Except, explicit references to Moral Re-Armament are limited. Instead, the ideological tactics of Moral Re-Armament, such as God-listening, paying back debts, attending Moral Re-Armament conferences, and letting God guide daily actions, are subtly promoted in a sort of self-help format. Moral Re-Armament is presented as the solution for family problems without Moral Re-Armament having being explicitly mentioned. *Tomorrow's Parents* has similar examples: Uncle Frank recommends a book by “a teacher friend”, Norah Cook, but does not mention that this book was written by Norah Cook for Moral Re-Armament.<sup>85</sup> Again, explicitly Christian language is not used, terms like Listening to God replaced with inner voice, and reference to Moral Re-Armament is avoided.

Through an analysis of some Moral Re-Armament’s vast literature – with 608 titles being held in the Oxford Group archival collection in the Bodleian Library alone, of which this section has explored ones relating to the British context and representing a span over the decades - we can see the early attempts to communicate faith outside of the church, by utilising

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<sup>83</sup> L. Storey, ‘Smile Til It Hurts: The Up With People Story’, *Vimeo*, (2015), <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/smiletilithurts> (Accessed March 2020).

<sup>84</sup> A. Campbell, *Listen to the Children*, (London, 1979).

<sup>85</sup> E. Claxton and J. Fry, *Tomorrow's Parents*, (London, 1977), p. 18.

the popular medium of paperback books, as well as writing on relatable, real-world problems within these books.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Moral Re-Armament's attempts to move with advancements in science and technology, and publish works written by figures of authority within the medical field, shows an acute awareness of its own attempts to continue to communicate its message to a changing world. Its gradual abandonment of explicitly Christian language also demonstrates this awareness of the need to reinvent its image in order to continue to speak to the modern world.

### Moral Re-Armament & British Newspapers

In 1961, *The Daily Mail* published a column about Moral Re-Armament. It began, "Moral Re-Armament. The name is familiar. It certainly should be, for in the last few weeks, 66 full page advertisements have appeared on its behalf, from papers ranging to the *Nursing Mirror* to the national press".<sup>87</sup> Newspaper coverage – and more specifically, full page newspaper advertisements – were a central way in which Moral Re-Armament spread its message outside of traditional Church channels, using changing presentation and language to continue to speak to a changing Britain. Crucially, their focus was on non-religious newspapers such as *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Herald*, and *The Daily Express*, as opposed to popular religious newspapers *Church Times* or *The Catholic Herald*: it is clear that Moral Re-Armament were trying to reach the lay public.

Historians have been keen to explore the importance of newspaper coverage in influencing opinions in mid-twentieth century Britain. Laura Beers, for example, explores the relationship between *The Daily Herald* and the dissemination of Labour's message to wide

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<sup>86</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, M.S Oxford Group 1/1-69 and M.S Oxford Group 1/70-90, Publications 1919-2013.

<sup>87</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 March 1961.

range of audiences, thus leading to their electoral success in 1945.<sup>88</sup> Here, we can see similar tactics used by Moral Re-Armament. By utilising contacts within Fleet Street, Moral Re-Armament managed to launch a nationwide publicity campaign which would be read at breakfast tables all over Britain. As Adrian Bingham highlights “no other daily papers around the globe could match the circulations of *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Express*, both of which sold well over 4 million copies per day. In all, some 85% of the population read a paper every day”.<sup>89</sup> Receiving such extensive coverage in such newspapers – whether bought or gained - was therefore very beneficial for the spread of Moral Re-Armament’s message.

Moral Re-Armament bought the majority of their newspaper coverage, just as it set up its own theatre, recording studio, and publishing house in order to bypass the hurdle of gaining the favour of those in control of Britain’s mass media. Although a controversial organisation, periodically warranting short articles concerning a new book or play, the vast majority of national newspaper coverage regarding Moral Re-Armament was made up of purchased advertisement space. Thus, we can see its newspaper presence as a deliberate attempt to utilise the cultural medium of newspapers in its campaign.<sup>90</sup> Moral Re-Armament would go one step further with their newspaper campaign, often boasting to members about the coverage they were receiving despite having paid for it themselves, in a sort of morale-boosting attempt. They would write to their members excitedly, revealing that they had been featured on a full page spread in mainstream newspapers, not disclosing that this space was bought, and filled by Moral Re-Armament themselves. Vocal critic Tom Driberg recalls instances where Moral Re-Armament deliberately misled followers about the amount of newspaper coverage it was receiving: they would often boast about major papers carrying “a full page” on Moral Re-

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<sup>88</sup> L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Massachusetts, 2010).

<sup>89</sup> A. Bingham, ‘Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain’, *History Compass* 10:2 (2012), p. 141.

Armament's work, without disclosing the fact that these full pages were paid advertisement spaces.<sup>91</sup>

Before Peter Howard's takeover in 1961, coverage in *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail* often came in the form of published Frank Buchman speeches – they would appear in the format of a 'reprinted message', the space of which had been paid for by "a number of British businessmen" (Figures Twenty and Twenty-One). For example, in 1939, Buchman's "The Answer to Crisis" speech, which outlined the need for the world to "surrender to God" to address the looming threat of a second world war, was reprinted in *The Daily Herald*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Daily Mail*.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, p. 230.

<sup>92</sup> *Daily Mail*, 9 August 1961.





benefit from changing to follow Moral Re-Armament's way of life.<sup>93</sup> This is exactly what Peter Howard did.

Upon becoming leader, Howard began to use political cartoons, often of a satirical nature, to advertise Moral Re-Armament, thus translating Briton's political woes or distrust for politicians into a problem which Moral Re-Armament could be the solution to. Such a tactic simplifies Briton's problems as caused by those in charge and solvable by those in Moral Re-Armament. As Adrian Bingham explores, political cartoons were a useful vehicle for communicating messages, as "many writers and cartoonists were able to convey complex political messages in an accessible format".<sup>94</sup>

*The Lion Who Lost His Teeth – a fable for modern man* (1963) represents this shift (Figure Twenty-Two). Breaking into the world of political cartoons – the advert makes reference to Lord Beaverbrook – owner of *The Daily Express*, and Quintin Hogg, supporter of Moral Re-Armament, who were friends to the 'Lion' (Britain), and urged it to fight against the evil Red Bear, a clear reference to Communist forces. The advert makes reference to World War Two, the ongoing Cold War, Hitler's desire to destroy every "red bear in sight", and the consistent threat of Communism to Lions (Britain), Eagles (America), and all other good willing 'animals'. The solution – of course – was Old Lion's decision to stand up against the Red Bears, and live a life lived by God. Here, Moral Re-Armament are drawing on modern concerns surrounding the Cold War and the Communist threat, presenting Moral Re-Armament as the solution to modern woes.

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<sup>93</sup> *The Daily Express*, 1 December 1938.

<sup>94</sup> A. Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain', *History Compass* 10:2 (2012), p. 145.

# THE LION WHO LOS HIS TEETH

## A fable for modern man

**M**ANY YEARS AGO, Best Beloved, before man became clever enough to blow everything to nothing, before space-ships were threading their ways among the stars, Red, White and Blue Lions ruled the Jungle.

They ruled with growls that were often heard, with teeth and claws that were kept sharp but seldom needed. Not everybody loved the Lions. But it was wiser to seem to do so. Peace was in the Jungle.

When Old Lion and his cubs gathered together, all animals came to celebrate with them. It was a party such as had never been seen before and may never be seen again. Everyone praised the wisdom and strength and character of Red, White and Blue Lions except one who wrote, in 1897:—

"The tumult and the shouting dies—  
The captains and the kings depart—  
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart.  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget!"

But the writer, Best Beloved, was not only a prophet but a poet and every lion who has been to the right school knows it is not done to pay much attention to prophets or God. So they honoured the writer and forgot him.

Trouble began when Geese started marching. They were jealous creatures. They thought Lion had had more than his share of glory and power. They began to practise the Goose step, millions of them. Lions, rooks, hogs, ruffed until the whole jungle started trembling. Lion and his cubs were lay. They did not want a fuss. They growled. They bared their teeth. Geese went on stopping. But when they stopped on some smaller animals who were friends of the Lions, there was a roar that still echoes down history, and the carriage began. Heaven alone can yet tell the cost of that carriage. The best of Lions, yes, the best of Geese, the best of a generation of Jungle animals lay with their blood shed and their heads beneath the claws before Geese stopped marching, and Lions and their friends sat down together to make the Jungle fit for heroes (by which they meant themselves) to live in.

They muzzled it. Eagles, who had come flying from afar towards the end of the struggle to help Lions destroy Geese, preferred Eagle law to Lion's law, and wanted everyone else to prefer it likewise.

A new arrival, Red Bear, had appeared in the Jungle after the slaughter. He said his law was the only right law, and that soon he was going to run the whole show with it. Nobody took Red Bear seriously. Nobody liked him much.

So they all went home again and began to enjoy Peace. It was troubled Peace. Some of the animals had too much fat on them. Many were hungry. They scratched and bit and hated.

Old Lion's growls did not count so much as they had. He kept a stiff upper lip and often stayed silent when he should have opened his mouth, because he did not want the other animals to see his teeth were not properly looked after. He hated paying dentists' bills. So the teeth were decayed and gappy.

Suddenly the Jungle started quarrelling again. There was Mad Gander, who fed on cream buns and said Geese had never lost the war, that White Geese were Master Geese, and that he was going to destroy every Red Bear in sight. To be honest, Old Lion did not mind too much if Geese destroyed Red Bears. Nor if Red Bears destroyed Geese. All he wanted was a place in the sun and a quiet life.

But Mad Gander began to trample on the weak and torture the innocent. Worse than this, he often made loud, rude noises at the Old Lion and all the silly Geese besides. "Hill! Gander, hill! Gander!" the Jungle shook with the sound. When Old Lion, who pretended to be doing (though if Mad Gander had had sense he would have seen the tail twitching and one eye open just enough to see if Geese came too close) heard some Eagles joining in the noise and other animals thinking he was afraid, once more with a roar he sprang.

The battle very nearly killed him. You see, his teeth were blunt. His claws were worn. And, of course, as in the first war, Eagles did

not come to help him at the start. Worse than that, Red Bear, whom Old Lion had often insulted and scorned, did a deal with Mad Gander and sat back with a grin to watch Geese and Lions destroy each other.

In the end they were all in it, peak, bite, hug and claw. Mad Gander was done for. Geese were picked alive. But Red Bear was the winner. You see, Best Beloved, he had always meant to run the whole Jungle. He wanted to win a war and to get home again as soon as they would. So they did not understand what Red Bear had in mind, and agreed to all sorts of foolish things which later they regretted.

Then real trouble in the Jungle began. Red Bear and Eagle disliked each other. Though at first it was thought polite not to mention it, both of them had become stronger than Old Lion. Both could blow him to atoms without blinking. Both felt that Red Bear or Eagle would one day have to run things. Poor Old Lion thought both of them needed education. He was afraid of being too pro-Eagle or too anti-Eagle, too pro-Bear or too anti-Bear. So he just felt himself superior to both—and concentrated on his stomach. "I never had it so good," he rambled happily as he snoozed in the sunshine of an unreal world.

Two animals disturbed his slumbers. One was Beaver. He was old-fashioned enough to be strongly pro-Lion. He felt that Lion should not be bossed by Eagle or bullied by Bear but, unafraid, go his way with his Red, White and Blue cubs, some of whom had started nasty and bitten Old Lion in places where it hurt, but most of whom still needed his friendship. You would think pro-Lionism would have made him popular with all the Lions. It did not. The Beaver had three disadvantages. He was rich and nobody would touch that. He had been more often right than wrong and that is hard to bear. Worst of all, he told everyone so frequently and with the loudest voice in the Jungle, reaching nearly fifteen million animals every day. This, of course, was thought vulgar by upper-crust Liondom.

The other disturbing animal was Hog, who galloped up and down the Jungle ringing a bell, wearing a coronet usually on his brow, and cheerfully granting that Lion still had a future to match the glory of the past. He had something to say which made some senior Lions, with nothing much in mind, try to keep him silent.

It is not for nothing, Best Beloved, that Lions in company are called a pride of Lions. And one day Old Lion got angry. An Eagle said out loud what most of the Jungle (and some young Lions too) had long been thinking—that Lion was no longer a real Lion, but only a stuffed and mangy Lion, with neither muscle nor backbone, which had no role in Jungle affairs. Another Eagle said that the bit of fat and sharp teeth which had been primed to Lion for years was not in fact going to be delivered. This was a skybolt from the blue for poor Old Lion.

He snarled and he snarled as he lay at the mouth of his cave. "Lots of people have said that sort of thing about me, but I never look how wrong they were," he roared.

At that moment, two young Lions pranced by, paw in paw, their tails raised and scented, tails entwined, the sort that need more than one look to decide whether they are Lions or Lionesses. Many senior Lions looked at their writhing tails and clasped them as they did their mock-courting. Old Lion watched them.

"Ah, well," he rumbled to himself. "I suppose boys will be boys—if they are boys. All the same, that sort of thing would have been thought wrong when I was younger. Right and wrong don't seem to mean much nowadays."

Then he lay down at the mouth of his lair, Best Beloved, and began to do something rare and painful in Liondom. He began to think, to take an honest look at the Jungle.

He thought that Old Lion would probably never be so strong again as Eagle or Red Bear. He could not force his way on people any longer. He thought that a Lion without a backbone soon became a hearthrug. He thought that unless something happened to Red Bear and to Eagle, the Jungle might soon be destroyed. He thought that the problem of the Jungle was the character of the animals, not the wealth, strength, law or appearance of Bears, Eagles, Geese, Lions and the rest. He thought that unless someone dealt thoroughly and drastically with animal nature on a colossal scale, the Beasts must follow their historic path to violence and to slaughter.

Then he thought of something he had read about Britain in an article by James Morris published in *Life* on December 17, 1962. The British have, he had read, "have diminished their morals to the lowest levels—low capitals are more flaring, vulgar and uninhabited than London today, with the couples huggly contorting in the jowly parks, the strip shows flourishing in Soho, and the illegitimacy rates rising... the very notion of patriotism has lost its assurance in Britain... Fossilism has become, if not communism, a still too regular phenomenon... Nothing in life or politics, the British like to say, is jet black or pure white, and in the resultant twilight

of certainty, Major Thompson (the image of God's Englishman) often removes his bowler, unbuttons his vest and picks up a painted whore."

Old Lion did not want such things to be said of Liondom. "How can Lions that have yielded a sense of right and wrong do anything to help Eagle or Red Bear?" he thought. "Unless animals change, nothing will touch the root of the problem. Lions could change, I suppose. We need far less change than anybody else, of course. But that may make it easier for us to start changing."

Old Lion began to count the cost of putting right what was wrong all over the Jungle. He thought of the secret, strong hatred of some in and out of the Establishment of Liondom, who while smiling to their face, would try to destroy all who fought for absolute standards of purity, unselfishness, honesty and love, because of the dirt in their own backyard.

He thought of those who for years had used their brains to justify their own competence and destroy the competence of a nation. He thought of the selfish silence of millions of Lions who stood aside from anything controversial, even if they knew it was right, for fear of their own skins. Lions who valued what other animals thought of them more than what God wanted of them. He counted the pain and sweat and the anger and the misunderstanding of it.

Then he thought of Liondom once more a leader to live the way that all animals, in the depths of their hearts, wanted every animal to live. "It would be a struggle," Old Lion rambled in his guts. "Yes, it would cost me pride, habits, compromise, greed and laziness. But if Old Lion chose to be governed by God, he yet might save the animal world from condemning itself to be ruled by tyrants or destroyed by force. It would be the Cross, I guess."

Old Lion stretched out in the setting sun, to ponder what the next new day might bring forth. Other animals passed to and fro, glancing at him with affection, dislike or pity according to their several moods. Some thought he was still that he was dead.

But Beaver, Hog and other allies noticed one old eye still a quarter open, one inch of the old tail still a-twitch from time to time. Would Old Lion arise and go forth to fight a new fight, the battle of his lifetime?

His foes feared. His friends hoped.

1963 would show the world whether or not Old Lion could sling once more with a new meaning: "God that made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet."



LION



GOOSE



HOGG



MAD GANDER

ride noises and other animals thinking he was afraid, once more with a roar he sprang. The battle very nearly killed him. You see, his teeth were blunt. His claws were worn. And, of course, as in the first war, Eagles did



EAGLE



RED BEAR



BEAVER

for modern man and modern families

A MUSICAL FANTASY

by Peter & Anthony Howard

Zippy new musical!

EVERING STANDARD

The glorious music, dancing, twist, squat, space-ships and international cast sure a joy to the audience.

ASAHU, TOKYO

**SPACE IS SO STARTLING**

**WESTMINSTER THEATRE**

EVENINGS 7.45 PM

MATINEES WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY 2.45 PM Telephone VIC 0282

PRODUCED BY WESTMINSTER THEATRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE BEEHIVE

This is one of a series of pages. Like all the world-wide advance of Moral Re-Armament they are paid for by thousands of men and women who give from conviction and sacrifice. Contributions and enquiries may be sent to Moral Re-Armament, 4 Hays News, London, W.1.

Figure Twenty-One: The Daily Express, 1 January 1963

Another commonly deployed tactic within Moral Re-Armament advertisements was to present themselves as a vocal truth-seeking force – calling out the powers that be and holding them accountable. For example, they did so by publishing advertisements boldly titled DEAR PRIME MINISTER and DEAR MR BROOKE in which they would question recent political actions and urge readers to cure their political woes by joining Moral Re-Armament.<sup>95</sup> These types of articles were often undersigned by a variety of Moral Re-Armament members to give the impression of overwhelming support and popularity.

*Quiz for All*, published in 1963, presents Moral Re-Armament as the solution the reader needs whilst giving them an impression of having free will for coming to this answer (Figure Twenty-Three). The quiz asks readers to choose from opinions such as ‘A man who can be blackmailed into selling his country’s plans is (a) a traitor, (b) unlucky and (c) right?’. A scoring system is published at the bottom. The advertisement states:

if your score is 180 or above, you are, whether you know it or not, part of the Moral Re-Armament of Britain and the world. If your score is between 100 and 180 you are, whether you know it or not, a security risk and liable to be used by the type of men who exploited Vassall and his ilk. If your score is below 100 you are part of decadence in this nation or Britain’s conscious enemy.

John Vassall was a clerk in the British Embassy in Moscow in 1955, whose case captured the attention of the nation, when the Soviet Secret Service blackmailed him with exposing his homosexuality into spying against Britain.<sup>96</sup> Having been exposed and arrested in 1962, here, Moral Re-Armament is drawing on a recent scandal as a way to warn against a non-Moral Re-Armament way of life. Such an approach presents Moral Re-Armament as the common sense solution for all good-willing members of British society. It presents belief in God and a life led

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<sup>95</sup> *The Daily Express*, 22 December 1964; *The Daily Express*, 14 May 1964.

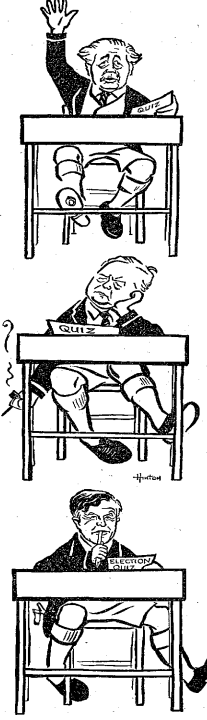
<sup>96</sup> ‘The scandalous case of John Vassall’, *The National Archives* (2019), <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/scandalous-case-john-vassall/> (Accessed 16 April 2023).

by faith as the answer to questions not pertaining to faith or Christianity – demonstrating the supposed practicality, and universality, of Moral Re-Armament's message.

# QUIZ FOR ALL

**T**HIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR, SOMETIME, Britain will have a General Election. Its result may decide the future for our children. Here is a questionnaire that should be put to Parliamentary candidates of all parties. Each elector should also answer the questions for himself as an aid to casting his vote. At the bottom of the page will be found how to decide where each candidate and yourself stands in the fight for the future of Britain.

- 1 Do you believe the character of Cabinet Ministers affects the character of our nation? (a) Yes. (b) No.
- 2 Do you believe the character of Cabinet Ministers affects the policy of our nation? (a) Yes. (b) No.
- 3 Do you believe the character of diplomats and public servants affects our national security? (a) Yes. (b) No.
- 4 Do you believe the difficulties of Britain are at root (a) economic, (b) moral?
- 5 Which do you feel is more important to defend: (a) free Press; (b) free love?
- 6 The world knows what Britain is living for and loves what it knows. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 7 Which will help Britain's economy most: (a) less work for higher wages; (b) abolish profit and increase wages; (c) abolish wages and increase profit; (d) ban strikes; (e) encourage unofficial stoppages; (f) more welfare and less work; (g) a fair day's work for a fair day's wage?
- 8 Men of power have a right to standards of private conduct less demanding than those they demand in public from the public. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 9 Changing times demand: (a) a change in conditions; (b) a change in men; (c) both?
- 10 Do you believe (a) Fascism is more Christian than Communism; (b) Communism is more Christian than Fascism; (c) Pacifism is more Christian than patriotism; (d) squatting is more Christian than standing up for what is right?
- 11 Britain should take colour from (a) the Red Square; (b) the White House; (c) the conscience of her people before God?
- 12 Fiddling the Income Tax and cheating the Customs is (a) natural; (b) fair if you don't get caught; (c) decadent; (d) democratic?



- 13 A Master Class is more democratic than a Master Race. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 14 If you stand for absolute moral standards in private and in public, you are (a) a pacifist; (b) a Fascist; (c) a Communist; (d) a patriot?
- 15 A man who can be blackmailed into selling his country's plans is (a) a traitor; (b) unlucky; (c) right?
- 16 Do you believe (a) everyone Right is right; (b) everyone Left is right; (c) everyone Right is wrong; (d) right or wrong is more important than Left or Right?
- 17 Education should be mainly for (a) money-making; (b) creation of character; (c) destruction of faith; (d) sexual know-how?
- 18 Servicemen will know what to train and fight for in a nation that knows what it is living for. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 19 Either men sacrifice their selfishness for their nation or they sacrifice their nation for their selfishness. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 20 Private life is wholly a man's own affair when he is (i) a diplomat; (ii) a scientist; (iii) a politician; (iv) a parson; (v) a pressman; (vi) a schoolmaster. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 21 Chastity, sobriety, fidelity are (a) liabilities; (b) assets; (c) irrelevant in national life?
- 22 A patriot (a) lives in the past; (b) decries the present; (c) builds the future?
- 23 The United Kingdom with divorce in the home and war in industry can unite a divided world. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.
- 24 Men must choose to be governed by God or they condemn themselves to be ruled by tyrants. This statement is (a) true, (b) false.

**I**F YOUR SCORE is 180 or above you are, whether you know it or not, part of the Moral Re-Armament of Britain and the world.

If your score is between 100 and 180 you are, whether you know it or not, a security risk and liable to be used by the type of men who exploited Vassall and his ilk.

If your score is below 100 you are part of decadence in this nation or Britain's conscious enemy.

Whatever the result of the coming election, we believe the party in power must make a main aim the re-creation of character in the home life, industrial life and political life of Britain. That is our urgent need and without it our energies will be drained by licence and our liberty will be in danger. For that, example is better than exhortation. With Moral Re-Armament, our energies

will be redoubled, our productivity increased, our real greatness will be restored and our future will be assured. We want to see Britain governed by men governed by God. We want to see a Britain where honesty, purity, unselfishness and love are the normal of public men and the accepted standards of the whole nation.

Moral Re-Armament was not, is not and never will be pacifist. We want to see the fools who spread that lie begin to recognise the knaves who invented it, and understand their motives as betrayers and corruptors of our country.

Moral Re-Armament is the greatest battle of all time whereby men have sweated in peace and bled in war, and are ready to do the same again if necessary, to see God restored to leadership in this and every country.

PHYLLIS KONSTAM OLIVER JOHNSTON  
RICHARD WARNER BRYAN COLEMAN  
in  
**through the garden wall**  
A NEW COMEDY BY PETER HOWARD  
with VIC WISE DAVID COLE ANGELA HALLEY  
and ANTHONY DAWES  
**WESTMINSTER THEATRE**

Striking and original  
EVENING STANDARD  
The acting gave point  
to it at every turn  
THE TIMES  
Sparklingly witty.  
Unusually funny.  
MIDDLESEX  
COUNTY TIMES  
BOX OFFICE  
VIC 0283

**YOUR SCORE**

..... 21, b, score: 10  
each: ..... 22, c: 10  
..... 23, b: 10  
..... 24, a: 10  
17, b: 10  
18, a: 10  
19, b: 10  
20, b: 10  
12, c: 10  
13, b: 10  
14, d: 10  
15, a: 10  
16, d: 10  
b: 10  
10, a, b, c, or d, for each: 10  
11, c: score: 10  
5, a: 10  
6, b: 10  
7, c: 10  
8, b: 10  
9, c: 10  
10, a, b, or c: 10  
If you answer 1, a, score: 10  
2, a: 10  
3, a: 10  
4, b: 10

This is one of a series of pages. Like all the world-wide advance of Moral Re-Armament they are paid for by thousands of men and women who give from conviction and sacrifice. Contributions and enquiries may be sent to Moral Re-Armament, 4 Hays Mews, London, W.1.

Figure Twenty-Two: The Daily Express, 28 May 1963

Additionally, advertisements designed to evoke emotions in the reader were also utilised. These styles of advertisements clearly draw on the style adopted by charities such as Christian Aid and Oxfam, who had been advertising using images of famine, poverty, and unwell children in order to gain support for many years (Figures Twenty-Five, Twenty-Six and Twenty-Seven). The success of these advertisements likely made Moral Re-Armament feel as though they should also try such an approach. Except, Moral Re-Armament were not trying to solve world hunger or poverty, were not donating money or aid, but simply were trying to fulfil their own ideological desires, something which generated a lot of criticism, as Chapter Four will explore.

‘Our Sad Children’, begins “they are sad children. Perhaps the saddest in the world”. Why are they sad? The reader naturally asks. Poverty? Homelessness? A broken family? No: they are sad because they are being raised in Communist China, where they are “trained with a hatred of God and man in their hearts” (Figure Twenty-Four). What is the solution? Moral Re-Armament. Even more emotion is evoked by the advertisement as it opens referencing President Kennedy’s recent assassination, stating that “this page is inserted in honour of the late President Kennedy’s policies of peace. All who support these policies are invited to contribute to its cost. Donations may be sent to Moral Re-Armament”. By utilising cold-war fears, current tragic events, emotional imagery and language, Moral Re-Armament again presents itself as the solution for all woes, making world peace and making sad children happy again the overriding ‘aim’ of Moral Re-Armament in this advertisement means that God takes a backseat.



These efforts continued throughout the 1970s, with advertisements running in *The Times* to promote the latest publication, the aforementioned *Black and White Book* (1972), from different topical perspectives. The first, *Who Changes Hate Changes History*, promotes the book on the basis that it has the potential to solve racial tensions in Britain: “Race is a fact of life, writes Conrad Hunte, former West Indian cricketer who has given his life to answer race hatred and build a multi-racial society in Britain that works”.<sup>97</sup>

In the midst of the Three Day Week – a policy introduced by Edward Heath’s Conservative Government in 1973-74, to conserve electricity as a result of strikes and called into serious question Heath’s ability to govern the country – Moral Re-Armament launched an advertising campaign in *The Times* titled *Who is to Govern Britain?*. In this, it capitalises on the unease surrounding Heath’s Government’s handling of the strikes, as well as the infamous U-Turn on economic policy two years prior, by framing Moral Re-Armament as a way to achieve:

Leaders whose lives match their words and thereby earn the trust of ordinary man...  
[and] trade unionists whose aim to a thriving Britain which will help feed, clothe and house people everywhere

The advertisement ends: “why not a Britain governed by men governed by God”, echoing Buchman’s final words before his death.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, what becomes visible when surveying Moral Re-Armament’s newspaper advertisements over the decades, is its ability to draw on current events, political discontent and the consciences of British people. Current events, politics, emotive imagery and common-sense style quizzes made up the style of Moral Re-Armament advertisement. Once the advertisement caught the attention of the reader, there was always an option to get involved or view their latest

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<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 3 October 1972, also see: *The Times* 2 October 1972 and *The Times* 4 October 1972.

<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 10 April 1974.

play: one consistent feature on most Moral Re-Armament advertisements is the donation form attached to the bottom, and the additional promotion of the current Moral Re-Armament play or publication (Figure Twenty-Eight). All advertisements were stated as being paid for by “thousands of men and women” who had donated their money and time to Moral Re-Armament; the reader too, could be one of these men and women, if they agree with the contents of the advertisement.

**Many people ask what they can do. You can:**  
 Send in the coupon for further information about MRA. Make a contribution towards Moral Re-Armament, which is a recognised Charity. MRA, like these pages, is financed by thousands of men and women who give from conviction and sacrifice.

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**To: Moral Re-Armament, 4 Hays Mews, London, W.1.**

1. Please send me further information about  
 Books    Periodicals    Plays    Films    Discs

2. I enclose a donation of.....

3. I will contribute ..... each month  
 A form for seven-year covenant available on request.

Name (capitals) .....

Address .....

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Figure Twenty-Seven: Moral Re-Armament’s donation form, *The Daily Express*, 6 February 1964

### Moral Re-Armament’s Theatre

As David Bebbington points out, Moral Re-Armament differed from its Fundamentalist counterparts who opposed the use of things like theatre. It believed that “art could be God-controlled. In any and every sphere the changed life should reveal itself”. This belief meant that as well as mobilizing music as a message spreading medium, with its 1979 LP *The Best I Know*, and its American musical counterpart *Up With People*, Moral Re-Armament broke into the growing popularity of theatre by opening its own Westminster Theatre and staging its own plays. Thus, Moral Re-Armament’s theatre played a large role in the promotion of its ideals,



and converting of potential members, and did so by speaking directly to the interests and anxieties of a changing Britain. As Richard Palmer notes: “the Moral Re-Armament theatre existed to make a life led by moral principles attractive to an audience and to demonstrate the way in which moral conversion could solve personal and social problems”.<sup>99</sup>

Moral Re-Armament owned the Westminster Theatre in London from 1946 until 1997, where they staged their “own controversial plays” which “promoted an ideology of living by Four Absolute moral standards: honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love”.<sup>100</sup> Peter Howard, who wrote the majority of Moral Re-Armament’s plays, made clear the purpose of the Westminster Theatre:

I write to preach. I write for the sake of propaganda. I write with a message and for no other reason. My plays are propaganda plays. I write them to give people a purpose. The purpose is clear. The aim is simple. It is to encourage men to accept the growth in character that is essential if civilisation is to survive. It is to end the censorship of virtue which creates a vicious society. It is to enlist everybody, everywhere in a revolution to remake the world.<sup>101</sup>

Although not explicitly marketed as a Christian theatre which was staging Christian plays, Kenneth Belden, who was chairman of the Westminster Theatre, believed that the Westminster was “meant to stand in the front line of the battle between Christ and anti-Christ in the modern world”.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, the majority of Moral Re-Armament’s plays were moralistic tales whereby the main characters would find resolution through Moral Re-Armament’s ideology. As Palmer highlights, whatever the genre of the chosen play, it always centred around “dramatic parable where a character is converted to a more wholesome life, triggering a similar

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<sup>99</sup> R. Palmer, ‘Moral Re-Armament Drama: Right Wing Theatre in America’, *Theatre Journal* 31:2 (1979), pp. 172-185, p. 174.

<sup>100</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama: Moral Re-Armament at the Westminster Theatre*, (Crediton, 2013), p. ix.

<sup>101</sup> P. Howard, *Mr Brown Comes Down the Hill* (London, 1964), pp. 15-16.

<sup>102</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 153

turnabout by the antagonists and a final general reconciliation”.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, as David Belden notes: “Moral Re-Armament plays typically presented a before-and-after picture of change in a situation familiar to the audience – family life, industry, office – or in national affairs”.<sup>104</sup> They thus operated in a way similar to its publications, which dealt with modern problems and offered Moral Re-Armament solutions.

Pamela Jenner’s 2018 work *Changing Society Through Drama*, analyses Moral Re-Armament’s plays and their propaganda power; the work runs through the different styles adopted by Peter Howard, Alan Thornhill and other Moral Re-Armament playwrights, from Kitchen-Sink to Pantomime, as a way to move with the mood of the nation’s theatre tastes.<sup>105</sup> However, the aim of Moral Re-Armament’s plays – as with their musical and literary endeavours – was not to produce quality art, but to convert minds, hence why Moral Re-Armament didn’t seem to pay much mind to their frequent bad reviews in *The Stage*.<sup>106</sup> Such a focus on the audience’s reaction rather than the quality of the work also explains why Buchman is reported as watching the audience’s faces instead of the play during 1946’s showings of *The Forgotten Factor*.<sup>107</sup> As Palmer concluded: “the raison d’etre for the Moral Re-Armament plays is the conversion of audience members to the principles of Moral Re-Armament”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> R. Palmer, ‘Moral Re-Armament Drama: Right Wing Theatre in America’, *Theatre Journal* 31:2 (1979), pp. 172-185, p. 183

<sup>104</sup> D. Belden, ‘The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group’, (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), p. 194.

<sup>105</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 47

<sup>106</sup> *The Stage*, 9 November 1978, *The Stage* 11 January 1973; *The Stage*, 13 March 1969; *The Stage*, 3 August 1967; *The Stage*, 4 June 1964; *The Stage*, 28 March 1963; *The Stage*, 3 Jan 1963; *The Stage*, 10 May 1962; *The Stage*, 2 November 1961; *The Stage*, 26 November 1959; *The Stage*, 31 May 1956; *The Stage*, 10 May 1956

<sup>107</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman: A Life*, p. 342.

<sup>108</sup> R. Palmer, ‘Moral Re-Armament Drama: Right Wing Theatre in America’, *Theatre Journal* 31:2 (1979), pp. 172-185, p. 173.

Moral Re-Armament's plays were also part of its mobile campaigns. As David Belden explores, from 1940, Moral Re-Armament's Theatre was "the central focus of its mobile campaigns over the next three decades". Belden states "the attraction of theatre as a method was similar to that of the original house party: it had normal social rather than religious connotations".<sup>109</sup> *The Times* reported that in 1955 a Moral Re-Armament mission which left from Mackinaw Island and ended in Caux, saw 250 members touring 18 countries and 30,000 miles.<sup>110</sup> During this tour, Moral Re-Armament were guests of the Government in 11 of the countries: in fact, The Shah of Teheran lent a royal palace for performances of Howard's play *The Vanishing Island* (which was performed 76 times on the tour).<sup>111</sup>

Additionally, the way in which Moral Re-Armament promoted their plays, drew in audiences, and used the power of the theatre as an ideological tool, again demonstrates the apt ability of Moral Re-Armament to speak to modern concerns. In order to make the plays both effective and accessible, the plots related to British people via current events and relevant anxieties – such as family problems, workplace disputes, or economic issues – and not through a simple promotion of Christian ideals. As Philip Boobbyer explores, the "key to [Moral Re-Armament's] effectiveness, was its attempt to promote traditional Christian insights in contemporary language and form. The use of theatre, from the early years of the Second World War onwards, was part of this attempt to find innovative ways of communicating a spiritual message".<sup>112</sup> Boobbyer also points out that, "there were often speeches before and after performances. Real-life examples of the kind of change that the plays promoted were presented

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<sup>109</sup> D. Belden, 'The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group', (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), p. 194.

<sup>110</sup> National Archives, KV 5/68, Cutting from *The Times* 'Moral Re Armament Mission Ended', 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1955.

<sup>111</sup> National Archives, KV 5/68, Cutting from *The Times* 'Moral Re Armament Mission Ended', 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1955.

<sup>112</sup> P. Boobbyer, 'The Cold War', p. 209.

to audiences, thus reinforcing the idea that the ideas of the plays were not just based on theory. In this there was a certain attempt to break down the barrier between art and life”.<sup>113</sup>

In order to change minds, Moral Re-Armament’s plays needed to attract an audience. In Pamela Jenner’s 2012 interview with Louis Fleming, he states that “we realised people were not going to come to the theatre of their own accord. We had to fight to attract audiences”.<sup>114</sup> Moral Re-Armament was not afraid to compromise its own absolute of Absolute Honesty in order to draw in a crowd. For example, a *Reynolds News* article *Free Shows ‘hit’ is all hot air*, sheds light on the sometimes underhanded tactics Moral Re-Armament used to spread their message: “one minute [the audience] were in the foyer of the London Hippodrome, the next minute they were packed into another theatre listening to a lecture on Moral Re-Armament. No hit tunes, no funny men, just half a dozen African and Asiatic converts to Moral Re-Armament excitedly selling the cause and a 28 minute propaganda film”.<sup>115</sup> The writer explains that although free tickets had been sent out for a Moral Re-Armament play at the Hippodrome, “thousands more” tickets than what the theatre held had been sent out.<sup>116</sup> The overspill crowd were “ushered” instead to the Westminster Theatre where they “had to listen to a load of boring propaganda”.<sup>117</sup> Presumably, because of the nature in which Moral Re-Armament sent out its tickets – to everyone and anyone in relevant positions willing to come for no charge – on this occasion they did not expect such an uptake. In any case, Moral Re-Armament saw such an opportunity – as usual – as the perfect chance to convert new members. Thus, using the popular cultural medium of theatre as a way of gathering crowds, and subsequently bombarding them

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<sup>113</sup> P. Boobbyer, ‘The Cold War’, p. 216.

<sup>114</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, Appendix Eight – Interview with Louis Fleming 25<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

<sup>115</sup> National Archives, KV 5/69, Cutting from Reynolds News, 28 April 1956.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

with a faith-based message, was a Moral Re-Armament's clever way of drawing in unsuspecting crowds and turning them into potential converts.

The audience which Moral Re-Armament wanted to attract was a similar to those it tried to target with its literature, though they also wanted its plays to speak to politicians. As Peter Howard stated in 1964, the goal of Moral Re-Armament was to “see men governed by men governed by God”.<sup>118</sup> Pamela Jenner points out that “Moral Re-Armament knew, when it launched the Westminster Theatre, that in order to have a major impact on society it needed to have the support of the working, middle and upper classes, the armed forces and politicians”.<sup>119</sup>

Indeed, Moral Re-Armament's plays aimed to reach all ranks of society, but had a specific desire for the powerful individuals with national or local influence in Britain to attend. Robert Miller's *Crusade or Circus* talks about Moral Re-Armament's *The Vanishing Island* (1956) production on at the Hippodrome – which offered free tickets by invite.<sup>120</sup> Peter Howard bragged: “There are twenty-eight casts all over the world presenting our plays...we could fill the London Hippodrome for nine months even if we charged admission, but we don't want just anybody to come to our shows”.<sup>121</sup> Such comments make clear that Moral Re-Armament were targeting the more ‘powerful’ and high profile individuals with their message.

Additionally, as explored in Chapter One, from the 1950s onwards Trade Union members were members of the society which Moral Re-Armament wanted to convert, as in Moral Re-Armament's eyes they were seen as at high risk for conversion to Communism. For its chargeable ticket productions, Moral Re-Armament would offer discounted rates for

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<sup>118</sup> *Viewpoint*, ‘Peter Howard’, (KNXT Public Affairs, 1964).

<sup>119</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 43

<sup>120</sup> National Archives, KV 5/69, Cutting of article by Robert Miller, *The Picture Post*, 9 June 1956

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

workers. As a letter from Moral Re-Armament member Gordon Wise to the Secretary of the TUC states: "during the months of August and September we are offering members of Trade Unions a very special rate at theatre. On production of a union card at the box office members will be able to buy two seats for the price of one".<sup>122</sup> Another example comes from a letter from Sidney Hoskins, "an active Trade Union minor", openly addressed to "sirs and brothers", in which he is:

unhesitatingly asking [them] to accept the enclosed invitation to the film *The Crowning Experience*. If we really care for humanity and burn with the conviction to build the kind of world we all desire, this film points the way. The need is urgent; the hour is late. Please come and I shall be glad to arrange seats for you any evening.<sup>123</sup>

The purpose of Moral Re-Armament targeting specific, working groups was clear: within these groups, they could claim real-world results had been achieved after people had witnessed its plays. For example, Mahala Menzies, who toured with the theatre company, states "in the Midlands in the coal fields, where the battle for communism was taking place, we put on the play and it did change the atmosphere in the mines".<sup>124</sup> Some attendees of the plays themselves admitted that Moral Re-Armament's philosophy had changed their lives for the better. Peggy Buckman stated that: "my introduction to Moral Re-Armament was an invitation to a play. At that time in the mid-fifties I was training as a midwife in East London. The show enlarged my world view as nothing else had ever done. It was a life changing experience".<sup>125</sup>

Peggy Buckman was not on her own in finding a transformative experience in Moral Re-Armament. As Eric Dent and Craig Randall find in their exploration of Moral Re-

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<sup>122</sup> Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS292B/806.1/5, Various materials relating to Moral Re-Armament (1960-1969), Letter from Gordon Wise to the Secretary of the TUC, 11 August 1967.

<sup>123</sup> Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS292B/806.1/5, Various materials relating to Moral Re-Armament (1960-1969), open letter from Sidney Hoskins.

<sup>124</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 58.

<sup>125</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, Appendix Two – Edited email from Peggy Buckman to Pamela Jenner, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

Armament's work in the business world: "It would be impossible to overemphasize the significance of these plays because there are scores of people who provided testimony that the viewing of the plays alone caused them to make dramatic changes in their lives". Dent and Randall cite the example of Spencer Hughes, a "manager of one of the largest coal mines in England", who reported that the weekly output in his mine rose to 17,000 tons/week from 13,000, something which he credited to watching *The Forgotten Factor*, "which taught him to apologize and conceive of his entire approach to the workplace differently".<sup>126</sup>

Moral Re-Armament also worked to convert young minds by delivering their religious message via child-friendly performances. Crucially, Moral Re-Armament developed the *Day of London Theatre* for schools in 1967 which aimed to give children an insight into how theatres worked by spending the full day there. As Pamela Jenner observes "one of the highlights of the day-long event, for MRA at least, was the discussion that took place after the matinee performance between the audience members and the cast. Here was a change for the movement to emphasise its ideology".<sup>127</sup> Its pantomime, *Give a Dog a Bone*, according to a 1960s audience member "changed the whole pantomime scene in London. It meant you could take children to the theatre. 'Give a Dog a Bone was good fun. It did make a lot of difference to people at it had packed audiences".<sup>128</sup> As Jenner notes, "Moral Re-Armament theatre's greatest success during its fifty year history at the Westminster was in its innovative work with children, which received consistent praise from the media, schools, education authorities and the young people themselves".<sup>129</sup> The main character – a dog called Ringo (a clear attempt to draw on popular culture with the success of *The Beatles*) meets a spaceman, and Ringo proceeds to deliver the

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<sup>126</sup> E. Dent and C. Randall, 'Moral Re-Armament: Toward a Better Understanding of the Society-Corporation Relationship Before the Emergence of "Corporate Social Responsibility"', *Journal of Management History* 27:3 (2020).

<sup>127</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 181.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

Moral Re-Armament message to him. The message featured so strongly throughout the play that a critic noted “sugaring the rather heavy moral pill are the colourful and zestful productions and catchy tunes”.<sup>130</sup> Thus we can see how Moral Re-Armament utilised plays, and targeted specific groups of society, in order to convert the mind of theatre goers through shows which tackled real world issues and spoke directly to the audience’s interests and anxieties.

When Peter Howard died in 1965, Moral Re-Armament found itself in a difficult position: Howard had been the writer of many of its plays, and seemed to possess an ability to capture contemporary issues in a way which no other member could. Still, Moral Re-Armament continued to stage plays there until 1997. After Howard’s death, the Westminster Theatre Arts Centre – a remodelling of the original Theatre – was opened, which states Howard’s original aims in slightly subtler ways: “the Westminster looks ahead to the next fifty years. It offers a relevant theatre that equips men to deal with modern society”, by offering “plays that fire them with fresh hope and with the faith and standards needed for their countries”.<sup>131</sup> However, after 1997, the theatre became too expensive to run and was sold.<sup>132</sup> Whilst members tried to qualify the decision to sell as another movement with the times, with Howard’s daughter, Anne Wolrige Gordon, stating “theatre is no longer the top means of communication in our age and my father would have moved on, probably to television”, it is more likely that the decision was driven by these struggling finances, as Moral Re-Armament never pursued a television campaign after this.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *The Stage*, 14 January 1971.

<sup>131</sup> Programme for the Opening of the Westminster Theatre Arts Centre, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://www.foranewworld.info/material/publications/westminster-theatre-arts-centre-programme-opening> (Accessed March 2023).

<sup>132</sup> P. Jenner, *Changing Society Through Drama*, p. 247.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*



## Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated exactly how Moral Re-Armament attempted to morally re-arm a nation through the cultural medium of books, newspapers and plays. By doing so, it has made visible Moral Re-Armament's alternative way of communicating faith in the mid-twentieth century. Moral Re-Armament's ability to utilize cultural mediums, and within these mediums, speak to the real-life concerns of Britons, lent itself to the longevity and success of its campaign, which is still operational today.

Importantly, some of its media conquests were more successful than others, and it is important to stipulate that whilst this chapter has argued for innovation in faith communication, it is not arguing that Moral Re-Armament was at the cutting edge of modern media. For example, its 1978 LP record *The Best I Know* could hardly be described as a success – with its niche, near impossible to locate existence, and (of course, subjectively) badly written and performed songs. This effort was a pale imitation of Moral Re-Armament's largely successful American musical faction, *Up With People*, whom Sack covers comprehensively.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, whilst Moral Re-Armament communicated faith in alternative and interesting ways which spoke to current debates, it was not breaking new ground in cultural mediums.

From their milk bottle lids, to their morning newspapers, to their theatre trips, Moral Re-Armament managed to penetrate the lives of thousands of British people and communicate their faith-based message outside of the four walls of the Church. This chapter has shed light on Moral Re-Armament's attempts to jump on popular cultural mediums and speaking to relevant issues. Crucially, Moral Re-Armament's efforts with its mass media campaign reflects its embrace of the modern. As David Bebbington states: "Far from shrinking from the world,

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<sup>134</sup> D. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, pp. 174-182.

they were out to conquer it".<sup>135</sup> This further demonstrates the assertion that through Moral Re-Armament we can see the ability of religion to adapt to the modern world, thus directly contradicting and disrupting the secularisation narrative which assumes that a modernising world equals a world inhospitable to religion. Quite conversely, a modernising world offered Moral Re-Armament the exact material conditions it needed to spread its message and thrive, through the emerging and existing cultural mediums which meant people's eyes and ears were more readily available for conversion through newspapers, radio, film and theatre.

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<sup>135</sup> D. Bebbington p. 236.

## CHAPTER FOUR: MORAL RE-ARMAMENT'S CRITICS.

In 1963, *The Daily Herald* hailed Moral Re-Armament as “one of the world’s most controversial movements”.<sup>1</sup> What was it about Moral Re-Armament that people did not like? The answer to that question would depend on who you asked, and when you asked it. As has been established, the Moral Re-Armament of 1920s Britain looked, on its surface, very different to the Moral Re-Armament of 1960s Britain. Over the course of the twentieth century, Moral Re-Armament tackled issues ranging from masturbation, to communism, to trade unionism – all in an effort to speak to the changing anxieties of the British peoples. But, by doing so, Moral Re-Armament received a new audience of critics at each turn.

Moral Re-Armament stated in 1954 that the criticisms it faced largely rested on the fact that “all new manifestations of God’s living spirit” are “inevitably attacked, assailed and criticised”.<sup>2</sup> This was, in part, true: it was the new, unfamiliar nature of Moral Re-Armament’s Christianity which provoked unease in people. As this chapter will demonstrate, two types of criticism transcended the boundaries of Moral Re-Armament’s changing phases, and followed Moral Re-Armament from its inception in the 1920s. The first surrounded Moral Re-Armament’s lack of charitable work. As will be explored in this chapter, critics throughout the twentieth century questioned Moral Re-Armament’s Christianity because of its members seemingly self-involved and luxury lifestyle, which subverted the norm of its humanitarian Christian counterparts that society was used to seeing. Secondly, Christians themselves questioned the Christian nature of Moral Re-Armament because its theology, or lack thereof, fundamentally jarred with existing religious doctrine. Crucially, these criticisms – which

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily Herald*, 28 October 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, *The Oxford Group and its work of Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1954).

followed Moral Re-Armament throughout the twentieth century and made up the most vocal and visible opposition to its efforts - were rarely to do with Moral Re-Armament being too Christian for a modern, changing Britain: for its critics, it was not Christian enough.

Indeed, it would be easy to assume that Moral Re-Armament faced criticism because its Christian viewpoint was incompatible with the society it was speaking to. As Sam Brewitt-Taylor has outlined, and has been explored throughout this thesis, there has been an assumption amongst historians and sociologists alike that a state of modernity, and subsequently post-modernity, naturally favours secularity; meaning, once society became 'modern', Christianity was no longer compatible.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the criticisms which Moral Re-Armament received do not match this narrative. British people were not concerned about Moral Re-Armament's Christian nature being out of touch with the modern world. Rather, the unease surrounding Moral Re-Armament often lay in the fact that it was not Christian *enough*, in the expected sense. As has been demonstrated, Moral Re-Armament purposefully kept their ideological and theological parameters vague in an effort to continuously adapt to changing contexts. Yet, it was this vagueness which largely sparked unease amongst contemporary observers who were mainly concerned with Moral Re-Armament's subverting of typical Christian values of charity and doctrine, as will be explored.

Of course, as had already been explored throughout the previous chapters, some criticisms did emerge regarding Moral Re-Armament's sometimes shockingly conservative views towards sex. Peter Howard's assertion that "indulgence by the married, while having the cloak of legitimacy, may nevertheless be the source of irritable tempers... a union which could otherwise be powerful for remaking the nation thus remains a soft and uninspired association",

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<sup>3</sup> S. Brewitt-Taylor, "Christian civilisation".

was certainly extreme.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, whilst criticisms like these emerged at flashpoints, sporadically throughout the decades, such criticisms were not the main driving force behind the backlash Moral Re-Armament faced. This is partially because, as has been demonstrated, Moral Re-Armament purposefully led with what it knew would ensure the best path to converting members. It therefore often sidestepped issues which it knew would bring it into extreme opposition with popular discourse.

Most of the criticism waged against Moral Re-Armament over the decades relates to it not behaving in a Christian way: many questioned if it was even Christian at all, because they could not comprehend what its aims or ideology even were. This was largely a symptom of the purposefully vague nature of Moral Re-Armament's ideological parameters, as has been repeatedly established throughout this thesis. Tom Driberg, one of Moral Re-Armament's harshest and most outspoken critics, summarised the problem of trying to 'know' Moral Re-Armament:

most people seem to have only a vague idea of what the movement actually is and what it stands for: this may be partly because, in some respects, its character is nebulous; partly because its name has twice been changed and, over the years, its objects and strategy have seemed to vary; and partly because its spokesmen have consistently shunned public oral debate.<sup>5</sup>

Driberg's personal distaste for Moral Re-Armament is understandable: a homosexual, a member of the Communist party, and alleged soviet spy, Driberg was everything that Moral Re-Armament spoke out against. But, Driberg was not alone in the above concerns, he was instead tapping into a wider feeling of confusion: as Shaw Desmond, a journalist for the *Daily Mirror*, wrote in 1933: "what we want is more definition and less vagueness".<sup>6</sup> So, as previous chapters have explored, whilst this shifting, chameleon-like nature often served Moral Re-

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<sup>4</sup> T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1964), p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 6 October 1933.

Armament well by allowing them to speak to different issues and areas of society as the decades advanced, it was this same vagueness that ultimately undermined its efforts.

Additionally, this chapter also allows us a glimpse into how the Christian churches received these new styles of faith, thus supporting Callum Brown's interpretation in *The Battle for Christian Britain* that, on the whole, the established Churches viewed such (as Brown terms) "privatised" Christian groups with general distaste. Specifically, Brown notes, it is "difficult to trace any fulsome acceptance of Moral Re-Armament by these mainstream Christian churches": this chapter will explore that the reason for this was, largely, because there was very little support for Moral Re-Armament within the churches.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to explore the criticisms waged against Moral Re-Armament in order to understand how it was received by those individuals who were not Moral Re-Armers. Indeed, there must be a reason why Moral Re-Armament never achieved its goal of every man, woman and child being converted. However, to argue that Moral Re-Armament did not meet its original goal is not to argue that it failed. The continued existence of Moral Re-Armament and the relative prominence of its offshoot campaigns of the National Viewers and Listeners Association, the Nationwide Festival of Light, as well as Alcoholics Anonymous, speak to some of the successes of Moral Re-Armament. This was, of course, not exactly the outcome Frank Buchman had dreamt up in the 1920s: total world transformation, where all men and women around the world had been converted to Moral Re-Armament's lifestyle. Thus whilst Frank Buchman's original intention for total world transformation - with all men, women and children following the Four Absolutes, Listening to God each morning, and becoming a fully-fledged Moral Re-Armer - never came to fruition, factors of the

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<sup>7</sup> C. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, p. 172.

original vision still exist in various offshoot groups. This chapter will shed light on why this original vision never came to life.

### The non-appeal of Moral Re-Armament for British people

I'm told that there's a Group meets in the St. K.— hotel in the West End — a rather “posh” sort of place. Well, every time I go up to town I have to go thro' Bow and Bethnal Green, and some folk I know are doing a top-hole work down there, spending their time trying to get a little extra milk for tuberculous children, getting boots and shoes for them, trying to help folk to eke out their unemployment pay. Now when a Group leader in a boiled shirt starts talking in the hotel about absolute love, I can't help thinking of it in the context of those other people and — God knows it's not pernickety criticism — I can't help wanting to know when he and the Groups are going to get busy on this business of absolute love. It's sheer self-delusion to talk about absolute love when you spend as much on a dinner as would keep a child in Bethnal Green for a week, sometimes more.<sup>8</sup>

Bernard Plowright was secretary of Life and Work Committee of the Congregational Union of England and Wales Church, which focussed on addressing social issues from a Christian – specifically a Presbyterian and Protestant - perspective.<sup>9</sup> His above comments, then, come from a place of being aware of the duty of, and need for, Christians to help those in need. Moral Re-Armament's lack of charitable work was a point of contention for its contemporary observers: how could a group preach absolute love and unselfishness, whilst seemingly living lives of luxury but sharing none of the wealth? Plowright's comments shed light on such a thought: spending “as much on a dinner” as “would keep a child in Bethnal Green for a week”, was to ignore Britain's societal need for charity. As this section will explore, it was this wealthy yet uncharitable image which prompted a large amount of criticism from British people throughout

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<sup>8</sup> B. Plowright, *For Groupers Only: Being a judgement concerning the Oxford Groups*, (London, 1932).

<sup>9</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 15 May 1952.

the twentieth century. From the 1920s onwards, Moral Re-Armament's finances – where the money came from and what it did with it – was the consistent focus of public scrutiny. As will be explored, we can understand this scrutiny as a symptom of the confusion surrounding Moral Re-Armament's operation and aims.

Moral Re-Armament subverted typical expectations of a Christian organisation in many ways. One of these ways was its lack of charitable activity throughout the twentieth century. The general *modus operandi* for Christian groups operating outside of the Church was some form of participation in charitable acts. As Doug Bandon points out:

Biblical theology clearly emphasizes the importance of voluntary, non-political action. Christians are commanded to help the needy. Believers should demonstrate the same passion as did Jesus in reaching out to the poor, hungry, and homeless.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, as various authors of an American based study, *Who Gives to the Poor?* have highlighted “each of the major religions of the world speaks to the issue of responsibility toward the poor”.<sup>11</sup> Many Christian Churches and organisations took up this task: as Matthew Hilton explores, charitable Christian organisations had been in operation since at least the late Nineteenth Century, namely: the Quaker Friends War Victims Relief Committee (1870), the Methodist Salvation Army (1864) and the British Red Cross (1870).<sup>12</sup> After World War Two, organisations such as Oxfam, War on Want and Christian Aid joined the humanitarian efforts: Christian Aid's director Janet Lacey called on Christians to be “at the forefront of the fight for a hungry world” in 1961.<sup>13</sup> Moral Re-Armament's absence of charitable activities throughout

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<sup>10</sup> D. Bandon, ‘Capitalism and Christianity: The Uneasy Partnership?’, *International Journal on World Peace* 19:3 (2002), pp. 39-55, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> D. Regnerus and D. Sikkink, ‘Who Gives to the Poor? The Influence of Religious Tradition and Political Location on the Personal Generosity of Americans toward the Poor’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37:3 (1998), pp. 481-493.

<sup>12</sup> M. Hilton, ‘Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: Humanitarianism, Imperialism, and the Changing Role of Charity in Postwar Britain’, *The Journal of Modern History* 87:2 (2015), pp. 357-394, p. 363.

<sup>13</sup> M. Hilton, ‘Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film’, p. 380.



this time period – from the early twentieth century onwards - stands out from this trend of Charitable Christians.

Based on this, Marjorie Harrison - the potential convert turned critic whom we met in Chapter One - summarises the differences between Moral Re-Armament and its contemporary counterpart, The Salvation Army:

The Salvation Army concerns itself with the upbringing of destitute children, the provision of homes for aged people, the aftercare of prisoners, the well being of emigrants: with unemployment and its trail of tragedies: with healing of body as well of spirit. Dr Buchman has been severely criticised, both in Britain and in America, for his concentration on the souls of the well fed.<sup>14</sup>

Moral Re-Armament was aware of the charitable expectation that came with its Christianity – both because of contemporary criticism and the fact that it was registered as a Charity in Britain - and can often be observed performing intellectual somersaults to appear more giving than it perhaps was.<sup>15</sup> When recounting its founding story, Moral Re-Armament leaned heavily into the charitable Christian image. As summarised in the introduction of this thesis, many Moral Re-Armament publications recall the tale of Buchman quitting the Home for Working Boys after arguments broke out with the Board over him wanting to spend more on food for the children. When hearing this story familiar images of the hospitable Christian, the good-Samaritan, the do-gooder, flood the mind. However, it was the denial of extra holidays and a salary raise which also strongly factored into Buchman’s decision to quit the home. Such an example summarises the tone of the criticisms waged against Moral Re-Armament: whilst wanting to appear as a Christian organisation enacting positive change, people still saw its

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<sup>14</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> As a 1953 statement outlines: “In Britain Moral Re-Armament is incorporated under the name of the Oxford Group as a charitable association under the Board of Trade and is recognised by the Inland Revenue for tax exemption purposes”: Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS.292B/806.1/5, Moral Re-Armament: ‘Notes on the accounts of Moral Re-Armament’, October 1953.

members as self-interested and money orientated. So, whilst speeches made by Buchman were made up of punchy sayings giving the air of caring, such as “there’s enough in the world for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed”, the criticism naturally followed that Buchman and his followers were not necessarily practicing what they preached.<sup>16</sup> Such criticisms followed Moral Re-Armament throughout each decade of the twentieth century, with claims of both its uncharitable nature and its alleged snobbery being waged by various critics, both religious and not.

A prominent Moral Re-Armer Sam Shoemaker - who was head of Moral Re-Armament’s U.S operations from 1927 until 1941, before leaving altogether in 1941 in protest over Buchman’s early support of Adolf Hitler, which led Shoemaker to state that Moral Re-Armament was “a religious counterpart of the totalitarian movements” – bemoaned Buchman’s lack of charity in 1922:

You have very little feeling for social justice. You *say* you think reform is wanted but you see it all in terms of personal sin. I do not believe the anomaly of your rich friends being rich ever strikes you much. Hungry Coxe thinks you are a fearful snob... Frank, there is danger in too much hob-nobbing with the well-favoured classes of society.<sup>17</sup>

Buchman clearly did not take heed of Shoemaker’s warning, as in the 1950s Geoffrey Williamson, an investigator into Moral Re-Armament, noted the contradiction in its lack of charitable work: “The whole movement is supported by charitable gifts. But when I asked at headquarters whether it dispensed any charity, the reply was a frank and emphatic: “No.””.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, some critics also alleged that Buchman would discourage his followers from

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<sup>16</sup> F. Buchman, *Is There An Answer? There Is*, (London, 1949)

<sup>17</sup> J. Woolverton, ‘Evangelical Protestantism and Alcoholism 1933-1962: Episcopalian Samuel Shoemaker, The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous’, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 52:1 (1983), pp. 53-65, p. 57 ; Letter from Shoemaker to Buchman, 16 March 1922, as cited in: G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> G. Williamson, *Inside Buchmanism; an independent inquiry into the Oxford Group Movement and Moral Re-Armament* (New York, 1954), pp. 220-221.

diverting their money away from the cause and towards the needy. The account of A.J Russell, a supporter of Buchman and Moral Re-Armament, recalls:

One of the stiffest letters Frank permitted himself to write was to some persons who were refusing to support him in a certain courageous action for the help of someone in need. Frank said their refusal to extend the help where greatly needed might involve them in a crop of cares they did not foresee at the moment.<sup>19</sup>

A veiled threat, certainly: but a threat nonetheless.

Additionally, although generous with his own comforts, Buchman was mean with those of his followers. Letters written to members show evidence of Buchman's stern financial rules. Writing to 'Ken T' in 1931, Buchman scolds him for his failure to change his American currency into British at the correct place, thus ensuring maximum income. Buchman also berates Ken for his failure to bargain successfully with hotels, something Frank did consistently, asking hotel Managers such as that of Browns London for "special rates" for his friends.<sup>20</sup>

Buchman had his reasons for such attitudes: he believed that without the transformation of human nature itself, any charity or material help was "likely to be superficial".<sup>21</sup> A 1921 observer noted that Buchman felt as though he needed to change those in positions of power in society to effect any real change, stating that Buchman "felt the leadership must come from the top" if any lasting change was to occur.<sup>22</sup> As the previous chapter demonstrated, Buchman was also concerned with conversion of the masses, but this did not necessarily translate into being concerned about their material conditions, a decision which generated much criticism against the group.

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<sup>19</sup> A.J. Russell, *For Sinners Only* (New York, 1932), p. 200.

<sup>20</sup> Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance Folders Unsorted, Letter from Frank Buchman to Ken T, 30 October 1931; Bodleian Library, Archive of the Oxford Group, MS. Oxford Group 3/50, Finance folders unsorted, Letter from the Manager of Browns hotel to Frank Buchman, 11 July 1931.

<sup>21</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 99.

This is not to say that these criticisms were totally fair. Moral Re-Armament did view itself as attempting to tackle the problems of the world: it just did not take the traditional charitable approach. It saw its purpose, naïve or not, as bigger than fundraising. Moral Re-Armament viewed its Four Absolutes as the essential route towards a better society. A quote which Buchman repeated on numerous occasions, and which became a sort of slogan for the group, epitomises this: expressing that surely by promoting Absolute Unselfishness, Honesty, Love and Purity: “if everybody cared enough and everybody shared enough, wouldn’t everybody have enough?”.<sup>23</sup> Britain, which had experienced a dramatic dip in employment levels at the start of the 1950s after World War Two, and was gradually working its employment rates back up to ‘normal levels’, would likely not have appreciated Buchman’s 1959 statement that, through Moral Re-Armament “empty hands will be filled with work, empty stomachs with food and empty hearts with an idea that really satisfied”.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Moral Re-Armament’s arguably naïve approach to the lives of the poor and unemployed in Britain are evidenced throughout its existence, with Buchman’s 1938 speech discussing: “an East London woman, unemployed, but fully employed, because she is bringing a religious experience to others”.<sup>25</sup>

In America, too, criticisms were made against Moral Re-Armament’s naïve approach. John Haynes Holmes, a Unitarian minister and co-founder of the NACCP, wrote in *The New York Times* that Moral Re-Armament was “revivalism for the rich and respectable”. Holmes

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<sup>23</sup> F. Buchman, ‘Chaos Against God’, BBC Broadcast 27 November 1938, in: F. Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1955), p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> Office for National Statistics, ‘Long-term trends in UK Employment: 1861-2018’, *Office for National Statistics* (2019), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/april2019/longtermtrendsinukemployment1861to2018> (Accessed April 2023) ; F. Buchman, ‘God is the answer to the Modern Confusion that Dogs Us’, speech delivered in Mackinac, June 1959, in: F. Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1955), p. 242.

<sup>25</sup> F. Buchman, ‘Chaos Against God’, BBC Broadcast 27 November 1938, in: F. Buchman, *Remaking the World* (London, 1955), p. 74.

criticised Buchman for his alleged ignorance regarding the social problems facing America in 1934: stating that Moral Re-Armament “seems oblivious to the fact that our spiritual problems in this terrific age are fundamentally social problems and that the sin of the individual almost invariably carries back to the evils and injustices of our economic and political society. There can be no saving of the individual until society is saved”.<sup>26</sup> During the Great Depression, in 1932, Frank Buchman stated that “what hunger marchers need is to be changed”.<sup>27</sup>

But, this idea of a higher purpose - changing the systems from above and not concerning itself with the poor and destitute - was the nature of Moral Re-Armament’s “trickle down” approach<sup>28</sup>. In the view of Moral Re-Armament, whilst the East London woman might not have had a job in the traditional sense, her work was serving this higher purpose. As vocal critic and protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (who, ironically, wrote the *Serenity Prayer* which the Moral Re-Armament inspired Alcoholics Anonymous would go on to use) pointed out in 1940, in America (as in Britain) Moral Re-Armament targeted people in positions of wealth and power, in the hopes that it was converting those who had the power, money and influence to enact the change Buchman wanted to see. If positions of power were changed, Buchman believed, the change would begin to filter down through the levels of society over which they had influence. Niebuhr puts it as such:

The idea is that if the man of power can be converted, God will be able to control a larger area of human life through his power than if a little man were converted. This is the logic which has filled the Buchmanites with touching solicitude for the souls of such men as Henry Ford or Harvey Firestone. It is this strategy which prompts or justifies the first-class travel of all the Oxford teams. They hope to make contact with big men in the luxurious first-class quarters of ocean liners.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The New York Times*, 16 July 1934, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Literary Digest*, ‘The Oxford Group — Genuine or a Mockery?’, 28 January 1933, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> M. Martin, *Always a Little Further: Four Lives of a Luckie Felowe*, (Tuscon, 2001), p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> R. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, (Virginia, 1969), p. 160.

Niebuhr's last claim was evidenced elsewhere: speaking about Buchman's preference for luxury travel, not through a critical lens but rather a celebratory one about the scale of Moral Re-Armament's operations, B.W Smith stated that Buchman did "not believe in traveling second class. One time, when some of his followers booked a second-class passage, he told them rather sharply that he had been guided that they should change to first class to form more significant contacts".<sup>30</sup> Moral Re-Armament, then, were trying to speak to a different class altogether: it was not interested in helping the poor in any material sense.

Samuel Shoemaker stated that Moral Re-Armament "does for educated people what the Salvation Army does for the down-and-out".<sup>31</sup> Yet, it was this reputation of a focus on 'educated' people, those not needy in any material sense, which generated further criticisms, even beyond Britain, in America. Indeed, during Buchman's time at Penn State as a YMCA secretary in 1915, criticisms waged against him were those of "snobbery and ambition", and "always talking about important men and women he knew".<sup>32</sup> One of Buchman's former associates recalls his "desire to hob-nob with the nabobs – with those in positions of social prestige".<sup>33</sup> A 1930 account of a Moral Re-Armament House Party concluded that "it is, in brief, an evangelical campaign whose appeal is definitely to "a class little reached by other agencies", and this it sets out to do by reason of its exclusive and snobbish character".<sup>34</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>30</sup> B.W Smith, 'Buchman — Surgeon of Souls', *American Magazine*, November 1936, p. 151.

<sup>31</sup> C. Ferguson, *The Confusion of Tongues; A Review of Modernisms* (New York, 1928), p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> D. Veldt, 'Content Analysis Study of Frank Buchman's Published Speeches With Emphasis On Criticism of Major Themes and Persuasive Tactics', (Doctoral of Philosophy Thesis, Purdue University, 1969), p. 301.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> J. Shrady Post, 'What Happens at a Buchman House Party', *Blackfriars*, 11:129 (1930), pp. 715-724.

the very nature of the early Oxford Group efforts meant that it could only appeal to a certain group of society, as only they could afford it. As Harrison noted in 1934:

No one who has not at least some spare money and leisure can take part in the Group's real activities. House Parties cost participants between eleven and fifteen shillings a day. The Headquarters of the Group in London are at the Metropole Hotel. Those anxious to learn what they have to teach are invited to call there. Would anyone poverty-stricken to the extent of threadbare or shabby clothes be likely to face a West End hotel? Dr. Buchman has evolved a technique of evangelism that is acceptable to Mayfair.<sup>35</sup>

This approach of spiritual, not material welfare, did not change throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, Moral Re-Armament's supporters echoed this belief, even after Buchman's death. One Swedish supporter commented in 1971 that:

the message that God has a plan and a marvellous destiny for every man is good news which gives democratic equality a wholly different dimension of reality from the one it has in a materialistic welfare state, however well developed its social services may be. A physically or socially handicapped person cannot be given a feeling of equality merely by a social policy or by material compensation.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to its focus on the elite members of society, and relative ignorance regarding those in need, criticisms were amplified by the obvious wealth of Moral Re-Armers. It was the fact that Moral Re-Armers had observable wealth and lives of luxury, as our opening statement by Bernard Plowright highlighted. Such a criticism can also be witnessed in an account of a 1933 House Party. In it, Harrison recalls:

a young girl stood up to testify to her surrender to God. She was an exceptional young woman, because she was one of the few people who did not use the opportunity to tell everyone about herself. She had the courage to beg a well-fed and well-dressed audience to consider the needs of the poor. "When I see so many fur coats," she said, "I cannot help thinking of all those who have no warm clothing in this bitter winter. I think we ought to consider whether we have the right to so many comforts when there are others who have so little."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> N. Ekman, *Experiment with God: Frank Buchman Reconsidered* (London, 1971), p. 47.

<sup>37</sup> M. Harrison, *Saints Run Mad*, p. 29.

Similar criticism faced Buchman beyond Britain. In America, Moral Re-Armament's reputation as a group for those with a taste for luxury preceded it, prompting the following limerick to appear in 1933 in the popular magazine *Newsweek*:

There was a young man from Peorier  
Whose sins grew gorier and gorier  
He found that by prayer  
And slight saviour faire  
He could live at the Walford Astorier<sup>38</sup>

In light of this, the amount of scrutiny that Moral Re-Armament's finances and motivations received make sense. Here was a somewhat paradoxical Christian organisation: one which alleged to live by the principles of Christ, had obvious and demonstrable access to wealth, yet made no effort to conduct charitable work. The contrast between the work of Moral Re-Armament and groups such as Save the Children, OXFAM, and others, is therefore striking, as seen in the difference between the advertisements in the previous chapter. Whilst others were dealing with the issues of starving children, Moral Re-Armament were more concerned with the morally and spiritually starved.

James Nash's work establishes how the concept of frugality was central to Christian norms: through Moral Re-Armament, these norms were subverted.<sup>39</sup> There was plenty of evidence regarding Moral Re-Armers' lavish lifestyles: from Buchman's permanent residence at London's 5\* Browns Hotel, the lavish properties dotted around the world – including headquarters in Switzerland, Mackinac Island and London. Such a reputation was made worse by Buchman's replies to any accusation of luxury, for example his comment in *TIME* (1936):

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<sup>38</sup> A.H Forster, *News Week*, 4 March 1933, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> J. Nash, 'Toward the Revival and Reform of the Subversive Virtue: Frugality', *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 15 (1995), pp. 137-160.



"Why shouldn't we stay in 'posh' hotels? Isn't God a millionaire?", which led to him been branded as a 'Cultist' (Figure Twenty-Nine).<sup>40</sup>

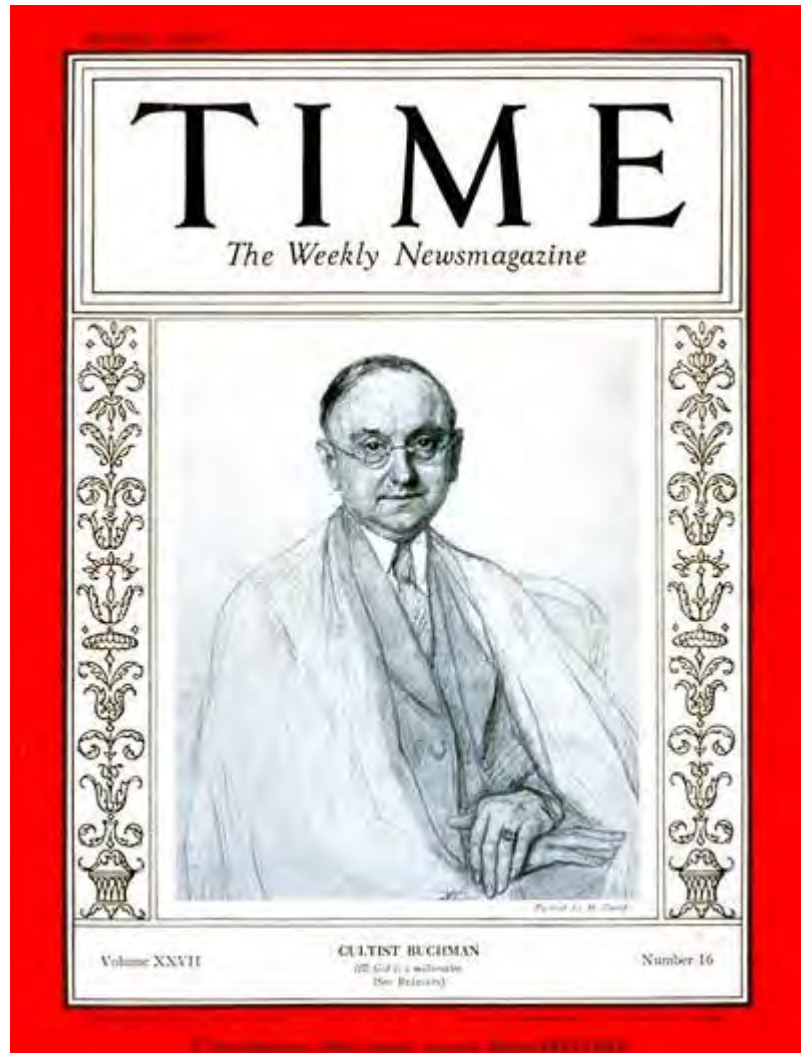


Figure Twenty-Eight: 'Cultist Buchman', *Time*, 20 April 1936.

Additionally, Moral Re-Armament subverted the expectation of the friendly, approachable and relatable Christian. Even those who, in theory, aligned with Moral Re-Armament's ideology found its reputation to be off-putting. In an interview with Leo Ormston, a Newcastle based *Youth Watch Committee* leader – a group which protested against perceived

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<sup>40</sup> *Time*, 20 April 1936.

moral decay and a straying from Christian values during the 1960s – Ormston revealed that he and his fellow members had been approached multiple times by Moral Re-Armament, but all resisted such invitations because for them, Moral Re-Armament were too “pretentious” and “squeaky clean”.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Moral Re-Armament’s reputation contrasted sharply with the giving image of the likes of evangelist Billy Graham, who constantly highlighted his charitable giving, and Father Patrick Peyton’s image which emphasised “the simplicity and sincerity” of an “ordinary lad”.<sup>42</sup> As Alana Harris has highlighted, the campaigns of both Graham and Peyton had a “ring of authenticity” to them, with their informal approach, “unpretentious” dress and relatable persona.<sup>43</sup>

Critics were therefore left with a question: if Moral Re-Armament, with its demonstrable access to large amounts of funds, were not conducting charitable works, then what was it doing with the money? Further, who was giving this money to it, knowing its uncharitable reputation? How were Moral Re-Armers affording such a lavish lifestyle? In his 1963 investigation into Moral Re-Armament, Journalist Myles Hall tackled various questions: “Has Moral Re-Armament got a real message? Is it just an anti-communist front? Why is it so deeply concerned about sexual morality?”. The most pressing question, however, was “where did they get their money?”.<sup>44</sup> Who felt compelled enough, or backed Moral Re-Armament’s

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<sup>41</sup> G. France, Interview with Leo Ormston, February 2019.

<sup>42</sup> E. Fiske, ‘Graham Says He Gives 10 to 15% of His Gross Income to Charity’, *The New York Times*, 23 December 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/12/23/archives/graham-says-he-gives-10-to-15-of-his-gross-income-to-charity.html> (Accessed April 2023); Y. Shimron, ‘Billy Graham made sure his integrity was never in question’, *Religion News Service*, 23 February 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/02/23/billy-graham-made-sure-integrity-never-question> (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>43</sup> A. Harris, ‘Disturbing the Complacency of Religion’? The Evangelical Crusades of Dr Billy Graham and Father Patrick Peyton in Britain, 1951–54’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 18:4 (2007), pp. 481-513, p. 494.

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Herald*, 28 October 1963.

message so much, that they donated large sums of money? It seemed too idealistic that this money came from well-intentioned Christian Britons.

Newspapers around the country were the loudest and most frequent to speculate about where the money came from. In 1943, following the usual bombardment of Moral Re-Armament pamphlets to the British peoples, the *Daily Herald* asked “who is it that finds the money for these elaborate booklets?”.<sup>45</sup> Questions like this were understandable and generally reflected the tone of the scepticism surrounding Moral Re-Armament’s money. What sort of group or individuals would have the finances to support Moral Re-Armament’s multiple publication runs, most of which operated on a national scale, posting leaflets through the doors of the majority of British homes.

*Daily Mail* journalist Charles Graves also took particular issue with the sources of Moral Re-Armament’s finances, launching a sort of mini investigate series in 1938 under his *I See Life* column. “Who pays for the general expenses of the organisation?”, Graves asked his readers.<sup>46</sup> Unsurprisingly, Graves did not find the responses of the likes of Moral Re-Armer Reggie Holme, who stated that they “prayed” for the money they were given, very satisfactory: “well, who prays for a permanent suite at the Browns hotel?”, Graves jested.<sup>47</sup> More articles came in the following weeks, with readers responding the Graves series of questions about Moral Re-Armament’s finances. One response which Graves featured – written by the wife of a Moral Re-Armer - explained how Moral Re-Armament got their money “from weak minded people like my husband”. She explains: “Here I am with my in-laws, staying in the home and

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<sup>45</sup> *Daily Herald*, 21 October 1943.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Mail*, 13 April 1938.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Mail*, 13 April 1938.

no money for easter”, she explained, “my husband having given a cheque of £100 to [Moral Re-Armament] – all our savings”.<sup>48</sup>

As the articles continued, Moral Re-Armament’s public image continued to worsen. Mr Gerald Elwell, a motor car factory worker, wrote to Graves explaining how it had roped him into a fraudulent business under the guise of better financial opportunities. This was sold as a God-guided investment opportunity.<sup>49</sup> When business went bad, and Elwell found himself £100 in debt, he was told at a Moral Re-Armament intervention business meeting that God would continue to guide him, and that “it might be that God wanted my wife and myself even to go into the workhouse and change people”.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, if the debt got Elwell into legal trouble, Moral Re-Armament reassured him that perhaps “God may want [him] to go to prison to change people inside”.<sup>51</sup> At the end of the encounter, Elwell found himself unemployed, his wife had to take up a job in a factory.

What does all this reveal? It reveals that a large portion of the criticism faced by Moral Re-Armament throughout the twentieth century surrounded its lack of charitable deeds, as well as its luxury, unrelatable lifestyle. For Britons, it seemed, this was an inherent contradiction: a group that had the means to be charitable but chose not to, and repeatedly justified this decision in public. Thus, Moral Re-Armament, a supposed Christian organisation, was not Christian enough in the expected sense: it subverted the expectations of the ‘usual’ evangelical group which Britons were used to seeing. It is understandable, then, that critics generally felt that Moral Re-Armament were tackling the wrong type of social ill: as a 1936 observer noted: "there

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<sup>48</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 April 1938.

<sup>49</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 April 1938.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 April 1938.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 April 1938.

is no divine plan for keeping children in poverty and misery until the hour when all undergraduates confess their sins and stop casting lustful glances on barmaids".<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, whilst, as Matthew Hilton highlights, World War Two prompted an increase in humanitarian action from the likes of OXFAM and Christian Aid, Moral Re-Armament's wartime record is fraught with controversies and trouble.<sup>53</sup> Not only was its uncharitable reputation further bolstered during this period due to its failure to follow in the footsteps of the aforementioned wartime humanitarians, it also faced criticism because of its application for military exemption.

This criticism which Moral Re-Armament faced during World War Two can also be understood as a manifestation of British people questioning its Christian credentials: whilst some viewed its tax registration as a Charity with scepticism, others viewed its status as an official religious group deserving of military exemption with the same doubt. Important to note is that whilst the popular, public discourse surrounding Moral Re-Armament's exemption followed similar lines of argument which were waged against other conscientious objectors, such as the Quakers, private parliamentary debates focussed instead of whether Moral Re-Armament even qualified for exemption because its Christianity was questionable. Moral Re-Armament applied for 29 of its full-time workers to be considered exempt from being enlisted – something which caught the attention of the British press.<sup>54</sup> Yet, the debate which ensued in Parliament surrounding Moral Re-Armament's military exemption is most illuminating. Individuals could be considered be exempt from military service if they belonged to a religious

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<sup>52</sup> B.W Smith, 'Buchman — Surgeon of Souls', *American Magazine*, November 1936, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> M. Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save The Children Film: Humanitarianism, Imperialism, and the Changing Role of Charity in Post-War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 86:2 (2015), pp. 357-394.

<sup>54</sup> *Sunday Mirror*, 23 February 1941.

denomination – specifically, someone who had “since before September, 1939, been engaged whole time by a recognised religious body in religious work”.<sup>55</sup> Importantly, Ernest Bevin made the decision, under the National Service Act, to reverse the decision that Moral Re-Armament members could be considered exempt because they could not be considered as engaged in religious work from a recognised religious body.<sup>56</sup> Drawing on the account of an assistant Bishop who had wrote into the Daily Telegraph, Bevin pointed out that Moral Re-Armament themselves denied being a religious body:

A few years ago I was present at a meeting attended by Dr. Buchman, who was good enough to answer certain questions I ventured to put to him. These are the questions: 'Is it your intention that the outcome of your evangelistic work should be the formation of a new religious body?'. The answer was 'No.' 'Have you or do you intend to have paid evangelists?' The answer was 'No.'

Crucially, then, we can partially attribute the limited success (not failure) of Moral Re-Armament to its failure to operate in a recognisably Christian way. If not a charity, then what? If the money was not going to alleviating material conditions, then where? If not a new religious body, then what? And crucially, if Moral Re-Armament was so uncharitable, with such a seemingly dismissive attitude to those not in the upper classes, then was it even Christian? As British Catholic scholar and priest, Father Hilary Carpenter commented in 1939, in his eyes it was simply not possible that Moral Re-Armament were truly Christian because of this lack of charity: “No one knows the meaning of Christianity until, very humbly, he has knelt beside the poor as with childlike hearts they poured out their simple prayers to God”.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 374 (1941).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> H. Carpenter, ‘Moral Re-Armament’, *Blackfriars* 20: 229 (1939), pp. 248-262.

“Anti-biblical and anti-Christian”: Christian critiques of Moral Re-Armament.<sup>58</sup>

The previous section established the doubt surrounding Moral Re-Armament’s truly Christian nature which existed amongst public commentators, clergymen, and politicians alike, which was based in unease surrounding its uncharitable nature. This section will focus on the doubt surrounding its Christian nature which existed amongst the religious individuals and institutions in Britain throughout the twentieth century. Thus, this section will further emphasise that it was Moral Re-Armament’s inability to be Christian enough – in an accepted sense – which limited its success.

Whereas this thesis has explored the very real Christian core of Moral Re-Armament, contemporary critics would have been less sure: Robert Rhodes-James of Worcester College, Oxford, wrote into the *Daily Telegraph* in 1954, stating that “the movement may or may not be anti Christian”.<sup>59</sup> For some, it had no Christian principles at all. For others, it committed to such outlandish principles that it was a heretic, not Christian, group. The problem was, Moral Re-Armament was too vague in its aims and theological parameters to be accepted. And on the points it did commit to – that of having a direct line to God himself – it outed itself as theologically flawed and incompatible with the Church’s teachings. Such tensions can be seen in the debates which occurred in both the Catholic Church and the Church of England regarding Moral Re-Armament.

In response to the uncertainty amongst Christians about whether Moral Re-Armament was compatible with their existing faiths, both the Church of England and the Catholic Church put out several official statements during the mid Twentieth-Century, in order to guide its

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<sup>58</sup> J.C. Brown, *The Oxford Group movement: is it of God or of Satan*, (Glasgow, 1933), p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> R. James, ‘Debating Moral Re-Armament’, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 January 1954.

uncertain followers. Both concluded that its followers should not associate with Moral Re-Armament, for reasons similar to those outlined above: it was simultaneously too vague about what exactly it was trying to achieve, yet too specific with its practices of sharing and Listening to God which made it fundamentally incompatible with the teachings of both the Bible and the Church.

It was 1938 when a member of the Catholic Church issued their first public statement: Cardinal Hinsley, the Archbishop of Westminster, stated that no Catholic should take any part of Moral Re-Armament or even cooperate with it.<sup>60</sup> This instruction was made clearer, when in 1946, The Vatican issued its first public statement:

Moral Re-Armament is so tainted with indifferentism that no Catholic may take any active part in such a movement or formally co-operate. Catholics should be warned not to attend its meetings or gatherings even as spectators.<sup>61</sup>

This declaration that Catholics should not even attend meetings as spectators – yet alone as formal participants – made clear what lay Catholics had been uncertain about. Moral Re-Armament was now officially deemed incompatible with Catholicism. The Vatican thought its previous instruction not clear enough, as in 1951, and again in 1957, the Vatican issued further guidance for Catholics. Firstly, in 1951, it sent instruction to Bishops throughout the world that it was not appropriate for priests or nuns to be part of Moral Re-Armament.<sup>62</sup> Then, in 1957, the Vatican stated that, whilst it was “in sympathy” with the aims of Moral Re-Armament, it could not allow Catholics – either clergy members or lay followers - to become members due to Moral Re-Armament’s fundamentally different “religious ideology” which conflicted with

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<sup>60</sup> D. Burns, *Good Morning! Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.*, (Hawaii, 1996)

<sup>61</sup> J. Christie, *Moral Re-Armament The Catholic Viewpoint*, p.4

<sup>62</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 442.



that of the Catholic Church.<sup>63</sup> For the Vatican, Moral Re-Armament posed a “danger” to the “integrity and purity” of the Catholic faith.<sup>64</sup> Here, we can see the progression of the Catholic Church, from warning its followers of Moral Re-Armament’s vagueness and indifferentism, to warning them about specific flaws in its “religious ideology”.<sup>65</sup>

It was not necessarily Moral Re-Armament’s core aims of fighting “Godless materialism” and moral decay that Catholics took issue with: in fact, as Joseph Christie, a writer for the Catholic Truth Society, outlines, many Catholics were “impressed by the aims and success of the movement... [and] the goodness and generosity of its adherents”.<sup>66</sup> Instead, as Christie points out, the “heart of the problem [was] whether Moral Re-Armament [was] a religious movement or not. If it is a religious movement, then it is clear that Catholics cannot join it”.<sup>67</sup> Despite Moral Re-Armament’s own assertions that it was not a religion, but was instead a sort of ideology compatible with existing Churches, the Catholic Church did not find this to be true, due to the fact that “it is clearly stated that the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is at work in the souls of those engaged in the work of Moral Re-Armament from which it must be inferred that it is a religious movement”.<sup>68</sup> Thus, despite actively resisting being identified as a religious movement in order to avoid such disputes, Moral Re-Armament were identified as such by the Catholic Church, deeming them incompatible. Crucially, the Church were not identifying Moral Re-Armament as a Christian movement: it was simply ‘religious’, as it found its version of faith impossible to define.

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<sup>63</sup> *The New York Times*, 10 December 1957, p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *The New York Times*, 10 December 1957, p. 21

<sup>66</sup> J. Christie, *Moral Re-Armament: The Catholic Viewpoint*, p.2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

It was Moral Re-Armament's indifference to the boundaries which separated different sects of Christianity, and indeed, different religions outside of Christianity, which also contributed to its incompatibility with the Catholic Church: as the Catholic Church believed itself to be "the sole depository of the revealed truth".<sup>69</sup> This abandonment of religious difference and dogma was a sticking issue for the Catholics, as Catholic Joseph Christie outlines:

Acceptance of the opinion that the revelation of God is scattered equally amongst the various Christian sects must in the long run lead the person to believe that one religion is as good as another and that faithful adherence to the life of the Church is not a matter of primary importance. In the long run, this means an attempt to set up in the world a new, universal, dynamic moral force without dogma or sacraments.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, Monsignor Suenens also found that Moral Re-Armament's "religious indifferentism... constitutes a real danger" because of its ability to deem official religions unimportant, and its positioning itself as the true way to salvation.<sup>71</sup> The Catholic Church was therefore quite clear in its guidance about Moral Re-Armament: it was too indifferent to the boundaries which separated different religions, and too untrustworthy in its assertion that it was not a new religion. Additionally, another major problem that Catholics encountered was that Moral Re-Armament was too theologically incompatible with the Church.

The Church of England's official investigation into Moral Re-Armament came in the 1950s, when the Social and Industrial Council of the Church Assembly published their findings after months of researching.<sup>72</sup> The report opens by acknowledging that there had been a demand for such an investigation from both clergymen and laymen. The issues that the Church of England took with Moral Re-Armament were similar to the Catholic Church's: it was

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<sup>69</sup> J. Christie, *Moral Re-Armament*, p.11.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>71</sup> L.J Suenens, *The Right View of Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1954), p. 53.

<sup>72</sup> Church Assembly, *Moral Re-Armament: A study of the movement prepared by the Social and Industrial Council of the Church Assembly* (Westminster, 1955).

simultaneously too vague in its Christianity - too lacking in dogma and doctrine - whilst at the same time being too specific in some of its outlandish practices to be rendered compatible with the existing Church. As the report states:

The written evidence is far too slight and ambiguous for prophecy, but one cannot help considering whether, if Moral Re-Armament found that it could interest and include in its practical programme large numbers of men of goodwill with no religious affiliations at all, the religious element in it might not become, for practical purposes, so minimal as almost to disappear altogether.<sup>73</sup>

Here, we can see the Church expressing what many others had also said: the concern over the lack of a solid Christian core in Moral Re-Armament. Its decision to open itself up to all types of faith and non-believers rattled some Christians, as for them, it undermined the sanctity and truth of the Church of England being the true Church. Offering a route to God through any other channel and to any type of faith, as Moral Re-Armament were doing, undermined the Church's efforts.

The Church of England also took issue with Moral Re-Armament's idealistic approach to world issues, and their claims to hold the solution to any and all issues facing humanity. As the report stated, Moral Re-Armament "fail[ed] to take the nature of politics seriously", by offering naïve advice that diverted people "from the hard, day to day, intractable problems of politics and of industry".<sup>74</sup> Similar to the Catholic Church, The Church of England did, however, see some value in Moral Re-Armament, in that it served as a warning to existing religions that they were not meeting the demands of their followers: "the movement is one sign amongst many that there are large numbers of people in the contemporary world, whose needs have thus been left unmet".<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Church Assembly, *Moral Re-Armament: A study of the movement prepared by the Social and Industrial Council of the Church Assembly* (Westminster, 1955), p. 18

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, conclusion.

Christian individuals - both Catholic and Church of England – had the same issue with Moral Re-Armament’s Christian nature. Catholic author, John C Brown, opened his exploration of Moral Re-Armament with the parenthesis “(please pray before reading this that God will bless what is of Him)”.<sup>76</sup> This warning to his readers to protect themselves with prayer sets the tone for Brown’s scathing piece on Moral Re-Armament, in which he concludes that it is the work of Satan. Moral Re-Armament’s followers, according to Brown, had been “blinded by Satan”.<sup>77</sup> Buchman, too, was a “false prophet who has been seduced by a false Christ”.<sup>78</sup> For Brown, it was not Moral Re-Armament’s vague theological nature which was alarming: it was the practices that Moral Re-Armament carried out. Brown, like many others, felt Moral Re-Armament represented an impure and demonic deviation away from the Christian faith.

It was Moral Re-Armament’s deviations from true Christian practices which Brown saw as demonic. For example, Moral Re-Armament’s failure to recognise the importance of the “atoning blood of Christ” in their central doctrine.<sup>79</sup> Recognition of the atonement – meaning, the reconciliation between sinful man and the Holy God, only possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ - was and is a central Christian belief. Any claims to salvation or forgiveness which sidesteps this crucial facet of Christian belief – such as, the idea that man could achieve forgiveness or enlightenment through quiet time or through following the Four Absolutes – were seen as pure heresy. Brown tells his readers that, if they had experienced the “real thing”, in terms of Christianity, then Moral Re-Armament’s practices would make for a “sickening read”.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> J.C. Brown, *The Oxford Group movement: is it of God or of Satan*, (Glasgow, 1933), p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> J.C. Brown, *The Oxford Group movement: is it of God or of Satan*, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Moral Re-Armament's deviation from the traditional Catholic practice of confession – which typically took place in private, between a Priest and layman – was also a sticking point for Brown. This was because of its potential to 'taint' pure minds with its public descriptions of sins amongst crowds of, mostly young, Christians.<sup>81</sup> These "young and innocent people are opened to gross sexual sins of which they had no knowledge, and so doing incalculable harm to those whom in their blindness they thought they were helping".<sup>82</sup> Giving examples which he had witnessed, Brown recalls a married man confessing to a "mixed audience that, without his wife's knowledge, he had been unfaithful to her".<sup>83</sup> Brown accuses Moral Re-Armament of being "sex obsessed" and its public practice of confession as being gravely damaging.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, "another harmful practice which they teach is to call each other by their own Christian names, irrespective of age or sex, and thus an undue familiarity is promoted between the two sexes and a sinful lack of respect between youth and age indulged in and encouraged".<sup>85</sup>

Ultimately, it was the lack of vigorous biblical practice and traditional doctrine, lack of the mention of Christ and his atoning blood, and twists on traditional practices, that Brown disagreed with, such as the emphasis placed on Frank as the converting force instead of God.<sup>86</sup> For Brown, and many others, Moral Re-Armament was not Christian enough to be accepted: Moral Re-Armament's faith was too watered down.

Brown was not alone. Moral Re-Armament's distance from Dogma and official practices, from Church services and Sunday schools – which was, for many, the appeal – was for some Christians an issue from its inception in the 1920s onwards. As the *Belfast Telegraph*

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<sup>81</sup> J.C. Brown, *The Oxford Group movement: is it of God or of Satan*, p. 46.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

stated when reporting on a 1928 meeting held in Grosvenor Square: “no one prayed or read the Bible or preached. Religion was discussed as if it were cricket”.<sup>87</sup> Religious individuals took these doubts further. Father John Hardon, a priest in the Catholic Church, wrote to his fellow Catholics in his *Evaluation of Moral Rearmament*, expressing the view that to subscribe to Moral Re-Armament was to commit the heresy of illuminism.<sup>88</sup> Illuminism means to claim a personal enlightenment which is not accessible to mankind: for Moral Re-Armament, this was their claim that all humans can have a direct line to God’s voice, and had the ability to receive immediate guidance from him, “independently of the Church’s authority”.<sup>89</sup> As Father Hardon points out:

But there is no need to prove that Moral Re-Armament is a religion to find reasons why participation in it is at least dangerous.... If each member of society is allowed to hear the voice of God through personal revelation, the variety of interpretations of the divine will becomes infinite. With no governing code of tradition, Moral Re-Armament would present a truth varying according to the whims of each individual.<sup>90</sup>

Writing about Moral Re-Armament in 1943, Harry Ironside, an American preacher and theologian involved with the Moody Church – another form of Evangelical Christianity circulating in the twentieth century - quoted Luke's Gospel, verse 39: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better."<sup>91</sup> This new wine, here referring to Moral Re-Armament, was theologically unsound due to its failure to spread the gospel through preaching, instead opting for “religious house parties” which Ironside refers to, sarcastically, as “remarkable innovations”.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *The Belfast Telegraph*, 6 June 1928.

<sup>88</sup> J. Hardon, ‘An Evaluation of Moral Re-Armament’, *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 135 (1956), pp. 217-226, p. 224.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> H. A Ironside, *The Oxford Group Movement: Is It Scriptural?*, (New York, 1943), p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Ironside also joined Brown in his concerns over Moral Re-Armament's way of running confession. The Catholic practice of confession – which usually took place between one Priest and one lay person, in confidence, with a wall in-between for anonymity – was also 'distorted' by Moral Re-Armament, according to its critics. Ironside, for example, remarked:

When I was in Boston, I found a good deal of scandal had been occasioned by mixed companies holding these parties and confessing their sins. You can understand that the result was anything but helpful. Where do you find anything in the Word of God that suggests this kind of confession of sin?... I want you to notice the kind of sins that were confessed: envy, pride, censoriousness, cowardice, sloth, un-charitableness and insincerity... Some of these sins confessed were very vile, very vulgar, and it is hardly the thing to confess them in public, but they did no harm because they were confessed in such a ludicrous way that the cleansing laughter washed away all the filth! That is something new in theology.<sup>93</sup>

Ironside concludes: "Oh, the folly of the intoxication that comes from this new wine. No, no; the old is better. We have tasted it, we have tried it, we have seen people saved all down through the years because of it. Changed lives? Oh, yes; we have seen changed lives. And today we still rely upon the old gospel; we are not interested in a new movement."<sup>94</sup>

In 1952, the Archbishop of Milan denounced Moral Re-Armament as "morality without dogma", which endangered both Catholics and non-Catholics.<sup>95</sup> He described the movement as heterodoxic — at variance with the teachings of the Catholic church — in a warning note to the clergy and Catholic faithful of his Archdiocese. Cardinal Schuster attacked Moral Rearmament as a movement "of Protestant origin and system, outside the guidance and control of the Catholic church".<sup>96</sup> He called the movement dangerous for non-Catholics because it presents a "form of religion cut in half and suggestive, morality without dogma, without the principle of authority, without a supremely revealed faith — in a word, an arbitrary religion, and therefore,

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<sup>93</sup> H. A Ironside, *The Oxford Group Movement*, p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>95</sup> *New York Times*, 18 June 1952.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

one full of errors."<sup>97</sup> Similarly, G.W Kirby, an American Christian, stated: "We repeat that the chief deficiency of the movement lies in its lack of positive doctrinal content. Too little is said about the great objective facts in the Gospel".<sup>98</sup> Kirby continues, "it is hardly surprising that some critics of Moral Re-Armament have dubbed the system 'pelagian'. The emphasis does tend to be on the response of men rather than the revelation of God, on reformation rather than regeneration".<sup>99</sup> Additionally, Monsignor Brown, Bishop of Galway, had this to say about the Group:

To recapitulate our review, we think it certain that the Oxford Group forms a heretical sect.... It follows that no Catholic can become a member without rejecting the teaching of the Church. To become a member of the movement and to accept all its opinions would be for a Catholic the equivalent of apostasy.<sup>100</sup>

The opinion that Moral Re-Armament was too vague in its theological parameters to safely co-exist with the Churches was also widely felt amongst Christian individuals. Thus, it was partially the inability to define Moral Re-Armament which undermined its efforts to convert Christian minds: if Christians could not define Moral Re-Armament, then they could not deem it 'safe' or compatible with their existing religions, due to the core belief in both the Church of England and the Catholic Church that its' members should not subscribe to more than one Church.

As stated, keeping their theological parameters vague served to benefit Moral Re-Armament because it meant that it was not defining itself as an official religious movement. Most religious groups, however, saw through this attempted side-step. As Ironside outlines, Moral Re-Armament pitched itself in such a way that it said a lot whilst also saying nothing:

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<sup>97</sup> *New York Times*, 18 June 1952.

<sup>98</sup> G. W Kirby, *Moral Re-Armament – A Crusade Reprint*, (London, 1963), p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> G. W Kirby, *Moral Re-Armament – A Crusade Reprint*, (London, 1963), p. 9

<sup>100</sup> L.J Suenens, *The Right View of Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1954), pp 81-82.



This movement appeals to people who reject the inspiration of this Book as well as to those who profess to believe it; it appeals to people who deny the Deity of Christ as well as to those who acknowledge it; to those who deny the eternal punishment of sin as well as to those who believe in it.<sup>101</sup>

Additionally, *The Right View of Moral Re-Armament* by Monsignor Suenens, took issue with the vague non-committal nature of Moral Re-Armament, who refused to formally align themselves politically – despite having right-leaning tendencies – and who refused to recognise themselves as a Christian movement – despite it referring to itself as such.<sup>102</sup> The individual tasked with defining what Moral Re-Armament was, and what they were trying to do, is tasked with something impossible. As he outlines: “an agnostic, who was a member of Moral Re-Armament, wrote these very pertinent lines of warning to his friends”, which summarise the tone of most criticism waged against Moral Re-Armament from Christians who felt that it stood for something when it suited, but dropped this stance when it suited:

Alas, I see in this fine building a serious crack which, in the more or less distant future, may cause its collapse, or at least arrest the progress of building. I refer to the political and religious attitudes taken up by Moral Re-Armament... We should note only that at the very moment when it denied being a movement, the founder himself employed the word and also gave the widest publicity to an article congratulating it on being a “genuine Christian movement”. The rejection of the word when it proves inconvenient, and its adoption when it suits the purpose in hand, shows the small importance attached to the correct use of words. Yet words ought always to convey the basic truth of things, and this inconsistency shows how greatly utilitarianism predominates over respect for ontological truth.<sup>103</sup>

This vagueness bothered some. As Ironside outlines, asking about specific theological issues rarely got specific theological answers. When asked about the place of Christ’s atonement in their teaching, the following reply was received: “Oh, we are not a doctrinal movement, we are not advocating any view of the atonement, we are simply out to change the lives of people. It

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<sup>101</sup> H. A Ironside, *The Oxford Group Movement*, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> L.J Suenens, *The Right View of Moral Re-Armament*, (London, 1954).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

does not make any difference to us what they believe theologically as long as their lives are changed. If their lives are not changed, theological differences are of very small moment."<sup>104</sup> This unwillingness to be specific about its theology, and even more so, its statements that theological differences were seemingly insignificant in the world of Moral Re-Armament, flew directly in the face of the core values many Christians held dear: that they followed strict dogma, and took theological differences very seriously.

As explored, for many Christian critics, Moral Re-Armament lacked the theology, rules and regulations that were central to other Christian organisations. These critics felt that groups like Moral Re-Armament undermined the true meaning of Christianity. A follower of Moral Re-Armament, in their eyes, would thus be the follower of a false faith. Here, we see Moral Re-Armament's attempts to be a religious chameleon, a one-size-fits-all faith, and a group that directly dodged definition, backfire: causing more people to be speculative of them and their nature, rather than become true followers of this new faith.

## Conclusions

The temptation to find an end-point, or a reason for failure, is a symptom of the secularisation thesis which must be resisted, particularly in the case of Moral Re-Armament. Moral Re-Armament were, and are, still very much active, under a guise of a new name and multiple offshoot campaigns.

Aside from the NFOL and NVALA, there exist many other groups under Moral Re-Armament's umbrella which are still in operation today. These groups include: Caux Initiatives for Business which "aims to engage business-people and decision-influencers in honest conversations on the broad issues associated with globalization and the human face of

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<sup>104</sup> H. A Ironside, *The Oxford Group Movement*, p. 9.

economics”.<sup>105</sup> Another group, Foundations for Freedom, “is an international NGO registered in Ukraine. It was initiated in 1993 as a programme of Initiatives of Change in the UK and works in Eastern Europe... it aims to foster the development of truly free, democratic and just society, where people live in commitment to the values where freedom thrives, in particular honesty and personal responsibility”.<sup>106</sup> Another, Creators of Peace, “transforms, empowers and engages women in peace creation”.<sup>107</sup> There are many more: Action for Life aims “to develop a new generation of change-makers, equipped with integrity and faith who are committed to bringing transformation in the world, starting with themselves”. Agenda for Reconciliation “aims to share IofC’s approach to, and methodologies for contributing to nation-building as developed by Frank Buchman after the First and Second World Wars, and by many others since. It focuses on resourcing settled refugees who wish to contribute to rebuilding their countries of origin through the means mentioned above”. The Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism is an “international network of principled business leaders working to promote a moral capitalism”.<sup>108</sup> The International Communications Forum, “is a growing world-wide network of media people who recognise that they have the power to influence society for good or ill and who want to play their part in building a less corrupt, less grubby-minded and infinitely more compassionate world. In this way, the Forum believes it can help to create the moral basis of society without which democracy cannot flourish”. The Caux Scholars programme “teaches students to identify and analyse conflicts, to understand the factors that create and sustain conflicts, and to use practical methods to diffuse conflicts through

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<sup>105</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Caux Foundation’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://icb.international/about-us/caux-foundation/> (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>106</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Caux Initiatives for Business’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://www.iofc.org/caux-initiatives-for-business> (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>107</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Creators of Peace’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://iofc.org.uk/initiatives/creators-of-peace/> (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>108</sup> ‘Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism’, <https://www.cauxroundtable.org> (Accessed April 2023)

global disciplines in conflict prevention, negotiation, development studies, international relations, legislation and policy, and transitional justice”.<sup>109</sup> Though long, this list is not exhaustive: Initiatives of Change have many active groups operating around the world. In this sense, therefore, Moral Re-Armament has not completely failed. In 2021, Initiatives of Change’s UK branch had a total value of just over 32 million pounds.<sup>110</sup> For the purposes of comparison, in 2021 The Salvation Army UK had a total value of just over £700,000.<sup>111</sup>

Through the factors outlined in this chapter, we can begin to understand why Moral Re-Armament’s success was limited. Crucially, this limited success cannot be attributed to Moral Re-Armament being too Christian for a modern, changing Britain: for its critics – both lay and clergy - it was not Christian enough. This directly opposes the assumption that a group like Moral Re-Armament were pre-supposed to fail because of an assumed secularisation.

In an interview with Geoffrey Burns, whom we met in Chapter Two, he remarked that he left Moral Re-Armament because it was not Christian enough for his spiritual needs.<sup>112</sup> For Burns, it was too far removed from faith: as such, he left a movement which he grew up in, in order to follow the teachings of the Church of Scotland. This, alongside the material explored in the chapter, reveals that we cannot attribute Moral Re-Armament’s limited success to its incompatibility with the modern world which no longer had space for Christianity. Callum Brown characterises Moral Re-Armament’s failure as due to the dissolution of the “atmosphere

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<sup>109</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘Caux Scholars Program’, *Initiatives of Change*, <https://www.iofc.ch/caux-scholars-program> (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>110</sup> Initiatives of Change, ‘The Oxford Group Annual Report’, (2021), *Initiatives of Change*, <https://iofc.org.uk/uploads/2023/03/The-Oxford-Group-Annual-Report-2021-1899.pdf> (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>111</sup> The Salvation Army, ‘Report and Financial Statements for the United Kingdom’ (2021), *The Salvation Army*, [https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/2022-02/SA\\_Trust\\_Report\\_year\\_end\\_31Mar21.pdf](https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/2022-02/SA_Trust_Report_year_end_31Mar21.pdf) (Accessed April 2023)

<sup>112</sup> Grace France, Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Burns, 25 February 2021.

of moral austerity” in which it was allegedly formed.<sup>113</sup> In other words, Brown argues, as Britons no longer yearned for Christian morality (due to the process of secularisation), they turned away from Moral Re-Armament. Elsewhere, Brown also attributes its failures to the death of Buchman in 1961, “leaving the organisation bereft of new ideas with which to confront the rapidly changing taste and technology of the 1960s”, a conclusion which ignores the ongoing efforts of Moral Re-Armament to adapt, as the previous chapter explored.<sup>114</sup> Thus, through the lens of the secularisation thesis, the failure of Moral Re-Armament has largely been understood as a symptom of a secular society’s alleged move away from Christian morality or modernising technologies. Indeed, it would be too easy to argue that Moral Re-Armament did not reach its intended goals because society was no longer interested in its Christian ethos. Through this interpretation, the valid and nuanced criticisms which actually limited Moral Re-Armament’s success would be lost.

This chapter has demonstrated that it was actually Moral Re-Armament’s failure to comply with existing Christian norms which turned both lay and clergy members against it. This is important because it offers an alternative explanation for the limited success of Moral Re-Armament, which meant that it never achieved Buchman’s original goal of total world transformation. It is too tempting to attribute such limitations to existing secularisation narratives; to the idea that a group like Moral Re-Armament would inevitably fail in a modernising world. However, this chapter has presented a more nuanced account of the difficulties Moral Re-Armament faced, difficulties which did not emerge from people’s resistance to Christianity, but rather their yearning for a more charitable and theologically sound version of what Moral Re-Armament were offering.

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<sup>113</sup> C. Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 201.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

## CONCLUSION

“This is a story of a man who set out to remake the world”.<sup>1</sup> That is how Garth Lean, a dedicated member of Moral Re-Armament, opened its founder Frank Buchman’s biography.<sup>2</sup> Continuing, Lean remarks:

No sane person looking round the world of 1961, when Buchman died at the age of 83, would have described that bid as successful. On the other hand, it would be equally hard to judge his life a failure. Some remarkable streams of events sprang from his initiatives; others are still breaking surface today.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, as Chapter Four has explored, Moral Re-Armament was not a success when measured against its original aims. Equally, it was not a total failure, as can be seen when looking at the remaining fruits of its labour. The factors which allowed for its successes, and the limitations that led to its failures, have been a focus of this thesis. Ultimately, however, what has been most valuable is shedding light on Moral Re-Armament’s continued existence, and persistence, in the face of an ever-changing world, by using previously unused archival material to do so. This thesis thus provides an invaluable example of a faith group adapting to the modern world in a way which ensured its continued survival.

This thesis had two aims: to address the lack of historical attention paid to Moral Re-Armament, which included addressing the disproportionate amount of internally written Moral Re-Armament histories, as well as to reveal the value of Moral Re-Armament in providing an example of a shifting, adaptable Christian group which moved with the modern world. It has thus intervened both in the historical field of Moral Re-Armament specifically, and Christianity in Modern Britain more generally.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Lean, *Frank Buchman – A Life* (London, 1985), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Turning first to the intervention this thesis has made in the historiographical field of Moral Re-Armament. It has utilised previously unused archival material in order to address the lack of historical attention paid to Moral Re-Armament. Taking inspiration from Daniel Sack's informative work *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement*, which explores Moral Re-Armament's changing phases and tactics in its American context as the twentieth century unfolded, this thesis has explored Moral Re-Armament's changing tactics and phases in its British context. By doing so, it represents the first expansive study of Moral Re-Armament's British-based ideology, members, tactics and critics written by an individual not directly involved with Moral Re-Armament. As the introduction to this thesis highlighted, certain limitations have come with such lack of exclusive access: namely, the lack of direct access to private materials or existing Moral Re-Armament members. Equally, a weighty benefit comes with personal distance from Moral Re-Armament: with no agenda, predispositions, expectations or reputation to uphold, this thesis was able to explore Moral Re-Armament with no preconceived notions. Whilst other historians, such as Garth Mason, Nigel Cooper, and a handful of others have worked to restore Moral Re-Armament's role in existing historical narratives, such as its role in various industrial disputes or international negotiations, this thesis has used Moral Re-Armament to join in conversation with those historians exploring changing expressions of faith throughout the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> It thus explored both the importance of the telling the story of Moral Re-Armament – its ideology, members, tactics and

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<sup>4</sup> I. Milford, 'A New World in the Swiss Alps: Moral Re-Armament, Religious Internationalism and African Decolonisation', *Cultural and Social History*, online, (August 2022); G. Mason, 'The Moral Rearmament Activist', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 28:2 (2015), pp. 154-180; N. Cooper, *The Bougainville Land Crisis of 1969, The role of Moral Re-Armament* (Canterbury, 1992); J. Gathogo, 'Nahashon Ngare Rukenya and the Moral Re-Armament in Kenya: The Turning Point and the Post Mau-Mau War Reconstruction (1959–1970)', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 44:2 (2018); R. Hofmann, 'The conservative imaginary: Moral Re-Armament and the internationalism of the Japanese right, 1945–1962', *Japan Forum*, 33:1, (2021), pp. 77-102.

critics – as well as what this story can reveal about faith in twentieth century Britain in a wider sense.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the story of Moral Re-Armament is one of changing religion rather than declining religion. Exactly how faith persisted and transformed, and what this looked like, has been the focus of this thesis. Chapter One demonstrated Moral Re-Armament's various influences from Christian and Evangelical traditions, alongside the distinctive nature of Moral Re-Armament's faith and ideology. It revealed how Moral Re-Armament's way of 'doing' religion aimed to reinvigorate Christianity's old truths, and make them newly applicable to the ever changing world: it was the practical, real-life-applicable nature of Moral Re-Armament's ideology which meant, in theory, anyone could follow it. Moral Re-Armament's Christianity aimed to permeate the daily lives of its members – by informing their daily actions through Listening to God for guidance, and living their life according to the 'Four Absolute' standards - and encouraged its members to convert others to live the same way through the process of the 5 C's. It was with this flexible design of faith that Moral Re-Armament was able to speak to the changing concerns of Britons throughout the twentieth century, as Chapter One established.

Building on this, Chapter Two demonstrated the intense, all-consuming experience of a life following Moral Re-Armament – revealing a faith which went above and beyond the Church on Sunday experience - and thus further supported the image outlined in Chapter One, and expanded on in the following chapters, of Moral Re-Armament as a practical and chameleon Christianity. By using letters written to Frank Buchman to explore why individuals became Moral Re-Armers, this chapter revealed that Moral Re-Armers gave their money and time, their skills and expertise, wielded their power and influence, sacrificed their family time and left their home countries, because they truly believed in Moral Re-Armament's world



mission and its ability to answer the challenges of the modern world – challenges which the institutional church was perceived to be failing at meeting. This chapter therefore spoke directly to Steve Bruce’s claim that any alternative forms of religion had limited evidence to show that they were in any way meaningful.

Chapter Three turned its attention to exactly how Moral Re-Armament executed its practical style of faith through the cultural medium of books, newspapers, and plays thus shedding light on an alternative way of communicating faith unfolding in the mid-twentieth century, and joining other, earlier Evangelical groups who had been operating in this way for many decades. From their milk bottle lids, to their morning newspapers, to their theatre trips, Moral Re-Armament managed to penetrate the lives of thousands of British people, and communicate their faith-based message outside of the four walls of the Church. Rather than religion existing solely in nightly prayers and Sunday church visits, Moral Re-Armament promoted a faith which could be lived and acted upon in everyday life.

Finally, Chapter Four explored how despite efforts to move with modernity and adapt as the decades unfolded, Moral Re-Armament’s initial aim of every man, woman and child converted never came to fruition. It explored how two types of criticism transcended the boundaries of Moral Re-Armament’s changing phases, and followed Moral Re-Armament from its inception in the 1920s. The first surrounded Moral Re-Armament’s lack of charitable work which subverted the charitable image which Britons had come to expect from Christian groups. The second criticism came from Christians themselves, who for various reasons questioned the Christian nature of Moral Re-Armament because its theology, or lack thereof. Crucially, these criticisms – which followed Moral Re-Armament throughout the twentieth century and made up the most vocal and visible opposition to its efforts - were rarely to do with Moral Re-Armament

being too Christian for a modern, changing Britain: for its critics, it was not Christian enough.

Frank Buchman and his group Moral Re-Armament did not remake the world, and Buchman never created “a new world spelt out in new men”. However, its success in creating a Christian campaign, with a lifespan of over 100 years and counting – one which adapted with changing cultural, social, and political concerns – provides an invaluable example of the persistence of faith for historians of modern Britain.

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