

Dr. W. J. Bolt interviews Peter Howard

QUESTIONS ON M.R.A.

Good afternoon, Mr. Howard. I come as devil's advocate to draw your comments on some objections I hear expressed to the Moral Re-Armament movement by orthodox people of many denominations.

They all agree that the Christian approach to problems of conduct must be radically different from other approaches. We all, like you, bewail the moral disorders of today; but the non-Christian will see the remedy in the propagation of loftier ideals and a closer control of behaviour through personal will-power.

The Christian cannot think of the problem except in the light of Christian revelation—the facts of the Fall, Original Sin, and in Redemption by the Atonement of Christ. Which of these two approaches is yours?

We do believe in Original Sin, and in the necessity of Christ's Redemption. Let me recount my own history.

I was once a man without faith, and when people talked to me about Jesus Christ, I would never listen—perhaps through the blindness of my own sin. But when others talked to me about absolute moral standards, and told me that God would show me where to start, I made the experiment of listening to God—in Whom I did not then confidently believe.

I saw certain moral faults which of my own will I could change, but I saw also many points at which I was helpless. For the first time, a sense of my own need, in the clear and simple terms that a man like me could understand, was brought home to my heart. It was then that I turned to Christ and found that He could and would—and did—meet my need.

What do the phrases "need of grace" and "means of grace" convey to you?

First, my own everlasting need of grace, my total need of it. If ever I lose that sense, of my need of grace, then I am lost. The phrase "means of grace" connotes many things—personal prayer, corporate worship, Bible reading and, above all, a constant turning to and returning to the presence of God, if I find that I have slipped away.

Sacraments, of course, are a means of grace, the nearest that a man like myself can get to a sharing in the physical presence of Christ, the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

Multitudes maintain that your principles are a foreshortening of full Christian doctrine. The Christian life entails not only behaving, but also a special pattern of believing, and a belonging, an identification with a particular fellowship. How far do you accept this criticism?

Our movement is a net thrown out across the face of the earth, to catch every man, woman, and child; and that net is, we believe, held in the Hand of Christ. MRA is certainly not a new denomination, a rival church. I myself was led through MRA to return to the church of my fathers, the Church of England, and all my children have now been confirmed. I want to see MRA doing the same for many others.

How far does your propaganda stress that Christianity is a corporate religion, that true believers must be by obligation worshipping and propagating members of the Church?

MRA is outward-looking, directed towards the unbelieving

world. Our avowed task is to win all mankind to the allegiance of Our Lord Jesus Christ. But I don't think that, the first time that you meet Him, you realise all the things that lie deepest in your heart. There are other ways of catching a fish than jumping into a river with an axe in your hand. That method will scare away a lot of fish which, with Christ's leading, could be caught. I hold this conviction because I have seen so many outsiders won to Christianity through MRA.

To me, it is an extraordinary philosophy that Christians must consort only with Christians. That may be the reason why a Communist has a plan for every Christian he meets, whereas the Western Christian, if you ask him, has no plan for Communists.

What has MRA to say to the more pressing needs of today?

If you are thinking of the widespread demoralisation caused by sexual vice, drink,

and gambling—we affirm that God Who gave man his body, mind, and will, can guide and assist man to control them. We Christians must be eager and alert to demonstrate, to others who lack our experience and our enlightenment, that we can live full and happy lives without indulgences which, to others, seem indispensable necessities.

Thus, on the drink question: I myself am an abstainer. First, because MRA is a charity and dependent on money given sacrificially, and such money should not be wasted unprofitably; and second, although drink is not a problem to me, yet to many others it is, and I must be careful that my example does not cause my weaker brother to stumble.

How do you view MRA in the context of existing Christian denominations?

We are more concerned over our principles than over our organisation. Our principles

should win recognition as the true and traditional property of every Christian denomination—and every member. I do not at all regard MRA as a separate entity from the Churches. Its way and outlook should be the normal life of every Christian. I want to see the Churches living triumphantly once more, and drawing all the people. Every Christian church that is true to its vocation, should be far more revolutionary than any Communist cell.

Do you consider that MRA has made any substantial impression on the Christian churches, or on the outside world?

I cannot measure the success of a spiritual plan by statistics, or by the amount of outside publicity it attracts. As long as we are bringing Christ's Life and His standards into deeper observance in the life of the world, we do not care whether or not our organisation is a numerical or financial success.

Thank you, Mr. Howard.