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'ARRESTING PEOPLE FOR CHRIST' Baptists and the Oxford Group in the 1930s

On 7 October 1933 a congregation of over 6,000 people filled St Paul's Cathedral for a service during which a team of 500 'life-changers' was commissioned by the Bishop of London, A.F. Winnington-Ingram, for mission in London. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, received one hundred members of the team in Lambeth Palace.[1] They were all members of the Oxford Group, which at that time was making headlines in much of the religious press and was also being noticed by some of the daily newspapers. Hugh Redwood, deputy editor of the *News Chronicle*, had announced in 1932 at a large meeting in London: 'Life-changing on a massive scale is the only hope of the world today'.[2] The concept of life-changing was central to the vision of the Group's founder, an American Lutheran clergyman, Frank Buchman (1878-1961). While at a Lutheran theological seminary in Mount Airy, Pennsylvania, Buchman had attended the Northfield Student Conference in Massachusetts which owed its origin to the evangelist, D.L. Moody. Buchman reported that the visit 'completely changed' his life and from this point, in 1901, he dedicated himself to winning people for Christ. A year later Buchman started a new Lutheran congregation in one of Philadelphia's suburbs and until 1907 ran a hostel for young men in a poor part of the city. From 1909 until 1922 he held posts at Pennsylvania State College (as YMCA Secretary) and Hartford Theological Seminary, but he was increasingly drawn to international itinerant ministry.[3] It was in 1921 that Buchman began evangelistic work in Britain, initially in Cambridge but soon centred in Oxford, hence the name Oxford Group.

Buchman's aim, which involved drawing together a group of life-changers, was rather grandly set out in 1921, during this visit to Britain, when he told his embryonic Oxford team: 'We are few. But if we stick together and do only those things which, so far as God shows us, we believe He wants us to do, we shall be used together to remake the thinking and living of the world.'[4] In the following year Buchman founded the forerunner of the Oxford Group, the First Century Christian Fellowship, as 'a voice of protest against organized, committeeized and lifeless Christian work'.[5] Buchman asserted that early Fellowship members had read about the Holy Spirit's activity in the first century and had made that their goal.[6] As the Group's activities spread across Europe and elsewhere, this ethos prevailed. It was a time of cultural change. From 1906 the Bloomsbury Group had set the pace in Britain by defying conventions in such areas as art and literature in similar fashion. The Oxford Group played a crucial role in making the evangelical message relevant to those in tune with modern societal trends.[7] By 1938, however, in the light of the rise of Nazism and talk of re-arming, there was a discernible change of emphasis. The Group became committed to the message of 'Moral Re-Armament'. It saw its promulgation of 'absolute standards' of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love as a way of offering an ideology that was superior to fascism or communism. Gradually its earlier understanding of itself as a non-denominational movement for

personal evangelism became somewhat out of fashion.[8] But in the 1930s many Anglicans, Methodists and Congregationalists in Britain came to the conclusion that the Group could make the vibrant spirituality of the early church relevant to twentieth-century culture. Although Baptists did not feel the impact of the Group to the same extent as most other denominations, individual Baptists, as this study seeks to show, played a part in the development of the Group.

BAPTIST INFLUENCES ON THE GROUP

The most important Baptist influence on the Group was F.B. Meyer (1847-1929), whom Buchman heard at Northfield. Meyer's friendship with D.L. Moody dated from the former's pastorate at Priory Street Baptist Church in York, where in 1873 he had hosted Moody's first evangelistic meetings in Britain.[9] As a result, Meyer became a highly popular speaker in the 1890s at Northfield and in other parts of North America. As he travelled, Meyer was always on the look-out for those with potential as spiritual leaders, and he gave Buchman an inscribed copy of a book about his own mission endeavours in London, *Reveries and Realities*.[10] In 1908 Buchman visited the Keswick Convention, an annual event designed to spread the teaching of holiness by faith - often associated with the idea of full surrender to Christ - which attracted over 5,000 evangelicals. Buchman was hoping to encounter Meyer, who was Keswick's leading international representative, but he found that Meyer was not present. Feeling acutely disappointed, Buchman attended a local Primitive Methodist chapel where he listened to Jessie Penn-Lewis, a holiness teacher who had been closely associated with Meyer during the Welsh Revival of 1904-5, addressing a congregation of seventeen people on the subject of the cross. Buchman had what he described as 'a poignant vision of the Crucified' and he left the chapel determined to share his experience and to ask forgiveness from people he had wronged.[11]

Links between Meyer and Buchman continued. In 1912 Meyer was speaking at Pennsylvania State College - he was then minister of Regent's Park Chapel, London, but was travelling widely - and during his visit he advised the activist Buchman that he should set aside an hour a day to listen to God. The story of how Meyer found Buchman so busy that he was using two telephones was often retold. Meyer's point was that hearing the voice of God was more important than listening to human voices on two telephones.[12] Meyer also suggested to Buchman that he should make personal conversations the focus of his evangelism. Buchman's view was that in his 'personal work' (i.e. witness to individuals) he was a 'flat failure' before meeting Meyer.[13] As a result of Meyer's influence, according to Buchman, people became his priority and in addition he 'decided to devote an hour, from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. ... in a daily time of quiet'.[14] This procedure reflected standard evangelical devotion, which normally consisted of daily prayer and Bible study - the 'quiet time'. The distinctive practice adopted by the Group was of writing down specific points of guidance. In one of his last books, *Five 'Musts' of the Christian Life*, published in

America in 1927, at a time when Meyer and Buchman were still in correspondence, Meyer exhorted his readers to obey exactly and immediately what God said. 'Listen to that still small voice - the voice of the Spirit of God'.[15] When Buchman came to England at the beginning of the 1920s it was a result of such guidance leading him to relinquish his post at Hartford Seminary.[16]

Another way in which Meyer influenced the Group was through his known willingness to share openly about personal problems and failures. F.C. Spurr, who followed Meyer as minister of Regent's Park Chapel, then moved to Hamstead Road, Birmingham, recalled in 1935 how Meyer had opened up his heart in confession to other ministers. This had been a great help to Spurr and others, indicating to them the possibility of deeper reality in corporate spiritual life.[17] In the early 1920s Buchman attended the Keswick Convention and encouraged open sharing among groups which he drew together. Because the Group broadened beyond conservative evangelicalism the association with Keswick, as David Belden shows, was to a large extent written out of Group historiography.[18] But a letter from Eustace Wade, later Chaplain of Downing College, Cambridge, about a house-party at the 1922 Convention, illustrates the influence of Buchman's thinking on some who moved within Keswick circles. During the week, said Wade, the Holy Spirit began 'running the show' and men confessed 'self-abuse' (the term sometimes used for masturbation).[19] Another of Buchman's inner circle in Oxford, Loudon Hamilton, an ex-army officer, reported to Buchman in 1925 that Meyer, speaking to Oxford students, had argued that sin ('he mentioned impurity at some length') was keeping undergraduates from God. 'He left our Oxford pose', enthused Hamilton, without a leg to stand on.'[20]

A second Baptist to whom Buchman was particularly indebted was Oswald Chambers (1874-1917), son of Clarence Chambers who trained at Spurgeon's College and had pastorates at Romsey, Aberdeen, Fenton and Perth, as well as serving for two years as Secretary of the Baptist Total Abstinence Association. Oswald Chambers died from peritonitis while at the height of his creative powers as a thinker and speaker and after his death became most famous through the widely-used book of daily readings, *My utmost for his highest*.[21] In 1923 Buchman was struck by Chambers' view that God was not being heard 'because we are so full of noisy, introspective thoughts'.[22] It was a theme which placed Chambers in the Meyer tradition. In 1897 Chambers, when he was on the staff of a small Baptist Bible College in Dunoon, Scotland, heard Meyer speak about the Holy Spirit. Chambers recalled, 'I determined to have all that was going and went to my room and asked God simply and definitely for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, whatever that meant.' In fact he had an experience of 'the dark night of the soul' over the next four years. But in 1901, following an event sponsored by the Pentecostal League of Prayer, a movement espousing Wesleyan holiness teaching, Chambers claimed to be 'baptized with the Holy Ghost'.[23] It was the same year in which Buchman had one of his own decisive experiences, and Buchman was to follow

Chambers in embarking on an international ministry. In 1906-7 Chambers was travelling for almost a year in America and Japan in conjunction with Juji Nakada, who in 1917 became bishop of the Japan Holiness Church.[24]

In the 1920s Buchman was reading through all Chambers' books, most of which were derived from lectures Chambers had given to students and a number of which reflected Chambers' interest in the relationship between psychology, philosophy and spirituality. Chambers' *My utmost for his highest* was long regarded as *the* devotional manual of the Oxford Group.[25] With his brilliantly imaginative presentation of the theology of holiness, Chambers was the kind of thinker Buchman appreciated. Buchman, for his part, was to portray with the work of the Oxford Group the grander vision of spirituality conveyed by Chambers. Speaking of his experiences when in Scotland in 1908, Chambers commented: 'John Wesley's teaching has had no hold in Scotland in the past, but it seems now as if it is going to be grasped with a tenacious hold unequalled in the country'.[26] Although he was a Baptist, Oswald Chambers, like the Anglican Richard Reader Harris (founder of the League of Prayer), was captivated by the power of the older Wesleyan holiness tradition. As well as his public teaching on holiness issues, Chambers was to devote considerable energy to the kind of 'personal work' with individuals commended by Meyer. There was, however, for Chambers, a great danger in the narrowly pietistic, world-denying tendency within more recent holiness movements. 'The Higher Life movements', he argued, 'tend to develop a life along the lines of spiritual isolation'. Chambers was convinced of the need to engage with currents of intellectual thought and, although he criticized extreme liberalism, he appreciated T.R. Glover's widely-read *The Jesus of History*.[27] It was precisely the mixture of a deep inner experience and a determined engagement with the contemporary world, seen in Meyer and Chambers, that characterized the Oxford Group.

BAPTISTS, EVANGELICALISM AND THE GROUP

There was significant commonality between the Group's concept of life-changing and traditional Baptist evangelicalism. The evangelical distinctives outlined by David Bebbington - conversionism, crucicentrism, biblicism and activism - were all found in the Group and inevitably attracted Baptist attention.[28] T.R. Glover, a notable Baptist of a liberal evangelical theological hue and Public Orator of Cambridge University, first met Buchman in 1914 and followed his activities with interest. Despite his own broader views, Glover had affinities with Inter-Varsity Fellowship evangelical students in Cambridge, defending their adherence to the message: 'you must be born anew'.[29] Contact between Glover and Buchman continued during the 1920s. It seems that early in 1928 Glover was somewhat critical of Buchman, but on 3 August 1928 Glover wrote to suggest that they might meet since both were to be at Yale University later in the year. Glover described himself as a 'co-operative critic' and made a point of telling Buchman of men he knew in whose conversion Buchman had been a factor. Glover saw himself as an apologist for the Christian

faith, yet comparing himself with Buchman expressed the wish that he had more gift for 'arresting people for Christ'.[30] It was a phrase that summed up Buchman's skill in catching the attention of those whom he met. For Buchman, evangelistic gifts derived from spiritual experience. In 1920 he wrote to Jessie Penn-Lewis to tell her of the continuing impact on his life of her message at Keswick in 1908.[31] He carried with him the vivid memory of that Sunday afternoon when he 'experienced the atonement', an event he summed up in the words of an evangelical hymn: 'At the Cross, at the Cross, where I first saw the light'.[32] A *Baptist Times* correspondent, who spoke of how the Group had given him a new revelation of the cross of Christ, noted the way Meyer and Glover had contributed to the Group.[33] Baptists were attracted by the Group's conversionism, allied as it was in these early years to an experiential crucicentrism.

The Bible was regarded as foundational in the life of the 'changed' person. Robert Collis, who as secretary of the University's Rugby Club was Buchman's first significant supporter in Cambridge, had no doubt that Buchman believed in the Bible as the Word of God. Collis described how, in a way reminiscent of simplistic evangelicalism, Buchman would open the Bible at random to receive direction from God. At one meeting in Cambridge, however, when T.R. Glover was present, Glover questioned the method of choosing random biblical passages. To discuss a chapter seemed to Glover to be preferable. Buchman's reply was: 'I prefer my mixed grill'.[34] Scholarly approaches to the Bible were not part of the early ethos of Buchman's fellowship. Rather, the conviction was that the Bible brought direct messages. The Group did not attempt to define a doctrine of biblical inspiration, a feature which was a sign of weakness in the eyes of some evangelicals but was welcomed by others. One conservative evangelical, brought up on the theory of the 'verbal inspiration' of the Bible, had discovered 'a new experience through the liberating Spirit of God working through the Oxford Groups'. For him the Bible was now more wonderful than when he believed in a verbal or mechanical type of inspiration.[35] F.C. Spurr, perhaps still smarting from vilification he had received in the 1920s from some of Keswick's Fundamentalist supporters, was glad to report that a Group house-party he had attended was quite unlike Keswick. He appreciated the testimonies from engineers, bank managers, financiers and teachers and hoped that those affected by the Group would not be drawn into Fundamentalism.[36]

Finally, Buchman and his followers were marked by energetic activism. Bill Jaeger, a Baptist who became prominent in the Group's mission to the East End of London in the 1930s, illustrated the way in which the Group encouraged activist endeavour. Born in Stockport in 1912, Jaeger was baptized at the age of thirteen by George Combe at Green Street Baptist Church, became a helper in the primary department of the Sunday School and began to preach at the age of sixteen.[37] In 1931 he entered Regent's Park College, London, to train for Baptist ministry. During his first week at college Jaeger met members of the Oxford Group and was challenged by their set of standards and by their determination to explore new ways

to 'remake the world'. Jaeger 'felt filled with a new energy and freedom' and saw this experience as equipping him to build a better society. For him this was not a new direction, but 'a development of the work he had felt called to do since his baptism'. Soon Jaeger's mother was similarly affected.[38] A fellow-student, Ben Baxter, with whom Jaeger had many conversations, was also involved with the Group while at Regent's Park College. Although the Principal, H. Wheeler Robinson, was at one stage concerned that Jaeger was spending too much time with the Group, Jaeger took seriously the responsibility of a two-year student pastorate in Leavesden, which was under the care of Beechen Grove Baptist Church, Watford. Congregations at Leavesden doubled during his period of leadership.[39]

At the end of the training at Regent's Park, Ben Baxter entered Baptist ministry. Jaeger, however, responded to an invitation from John Caulfeild, one of Buchman's aides, to work full-time within the Group. As the son of a general, Caulfeild was typical of the'up-and-ins' that Buchman attracted in significant numbers in England. The Group was described in the *British Weekly* as Moody and Sankey revivalism in evening dress.[40] But the Group was committed to taking its message to the working classes, and Jaeger became a full-time member of a team which in 1937 was working with Arthur Wallace, vicar of West Ham. Jaeger was joined by Geoffrey Gain, whom he had known at Regent's Park College. In 1933 sixty Group members (out of the London-wide team of 500 commissioned that year) had moved into the parish of St Mark's, Victoria Park, Poplar, described by the vicar, E.G. Legge, as one of the poorest parishes in England. Reports spoke of family prayers starting in many homes. Maxwell Berry, then studying for Baptist ministry at Regent's Park, wrote about 'the power of God at St Mark's'.[41] Although the Group's Anglican links in East London were crucial, Jaeger had contact with Baptist ministers such as Robert Rowntree Clifford of Barking Road Tabernacle (West Ham Central Mission), Plaistow. During the 1930s there were frequent and often extremely violent clashes in East London between fascists and communists. Jaeger became deeply involved in political and trade union issues (at international level) and it became a Group slogan that 'Labour led by God can lead the world'.[42] Active ministry to the world outside the church became a hallmark of the Group.

RENEWING LOCAL CHURCHES

The Group had an impact too on the inner life of congregations. Instances of renewal within Free Churches as a result of the Group's activity were to be found, although Group members were more evident in Anglican life, perhaps because Buchman saw the national church as having more potential to affect wider society. Some Baptist ministers reported that their own spirituality had been revitalized through the Group. Thus George Evans, minister of Oxford Road Baptist Church, Manchester, a church with over 300 members, spoke in 1932 of how he had been deeply concerned, over two decades, about how to see a release of God's power through his ministry. When he turned to the Group, he found fresh spiritual energy.

He claimed, in words that echoed Keswick language, that since his new surrender he had known God revealing himself in fresh ways.[43] In February 1933 a young Baptist minister described in the *Baptist Times* how he had been spiritually challenged at Keswick in the previous year. Group members had subsequently pinpointed wrongdoing in his life. His conservative background made him cautious about the Group, but he took a step of surrender, confessed his faults to a Baptist leader, and was now preaching the cross with new dynamism, according to his deacons, and seeing frequent conversions and baptisms.[44] H.C. Kemp, a Leeds University graduate who trained at Rawdon College and in 1929 became minister of Pellon Baptist Church, Halifax, was similarly aware of new power in his preaching and pastoral work through contact with the Group. He was sure that 'the revival for which all loyal Baptists are earnestly praying will come about if our churches will get in touch with the Group and then form a Group within their own fellowship'.[45] Perhaps a local Group could be the seed-bed for a new spiritual expression of the gathered church.

There were also testimonies from individual church members who were brought to deeper spiritual commitment through local Groups. A member of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, Ada Brooks, after two years associated with the Group, expressed the hope in 1933 that she would now be a better church member, and on a wider front would be able to help in the denominational Discipleship Campaign being promoted by M.E. Aubrey, Secretary of the Baptist Union. She claimed she had gained a deeper knowledge of the Bible through the Group quiet time.[46] One young man in Kemp's church in Halifax had been a Sunday School teacher but had drifted away from the church when - like many others in the north of England in that period - he became unemployed. As a result of hearing the challenge brought by the Group he had found new spiritual power. He had also broken off his engagement to a non-Christian girl.[47] It was a classic evangelical tale of backsliding and restoration, although older terminology, for example about being 'saved', was generally eschewed by the Group. *The Life of Faith*, Keswick's semi-official mouthpiece, which was read by many Baptists, suggested in October 1933 that the Group had renounced the scriptural phraseology to which evangelicals were accustomed.[48] But in a story from Pellon, Halifax, traditional language surfaced. A middle-aged man who had been in prison for embezzlement had, through Loudon Hamilton, found joy and peace 'at the foot of the Cross'.[49]

Yet local Baptist churches could be wary of the Group. In a response that conveyed the hostility felt by some Baptists, the *Gospel Standard* (representing an explicitly high Calvinist strand of Strict Baptist life) saw the Group as a 'poisonous frog' and certainly not from the Holy Spirit.[50] Admittedly Strict Baptists stood apart from many aspects of evangelical life, but some conservative evangelicals within the Baptist Union were also worried about Group ideas. Direct guidance was criticized for having the potential to undermine scripture. 'God told me so' was, it was claimed, said too frequently. Ministers taking this view sought to discourage

their members from Group involvement. An example is the case of Eric Worstead. In 1934 Worstead, then a student at Spurgeon's College, was introduced to the Group by Dorothy Evans, the wife of Percy Evans, the college Principal. Dorothy was deeply involved in the Group and when one of her daughters, Muriel, went to Froebel College in 1933 to train as a teacher she linked up with four other students who were Group members.[51] Eric Worstead found in the Group quiet time something 'much more specific than I had heard mentioned in my local church'. This led to a closer reading of the Bible and, in addition, 'the attempt to write down my thoughts, leaving nothing out'. But Worstead's minister, Alan Sears, at George Lane Baptist Church, South Woodford, was so disturbed that he warned Worstead to give up his involvement in the Group or risk suspension from church membership.[52] In fact, Worstead's interest in the Group and later in Moral Re-Armament deepened, a development which was to have profound consequences.

A few Baptists and Free Church leaders with influence on English Baptist life were openly supportive of the Group in the 1930s. At the 1933 Group house-party in Oxford, which attracted 5,000 people and filled six Oxford colleges, J.C. Carlile, editor of the *Baptist Times*, was impressed by the joy, informality and lack of rigidity that he encountered. Carlile met Buchman and felt that he was pioneering a return to the experience of the early church. Compared to the overall numbers at this massive house-party, the Baptist contingent was relatively small. Carlile led a camp of ten lay people and about forty Baptist ministers and students. Ministers at the house-party related how they had 'grown stale in their pulpit work because they had lost the wonder of Christ's love to them individually'.[53] Another newspaper editor with whom Carlile had close contact, Herbert Upward, editor of the *Church of England Newspaper*, had discovered through the Group 'a twentieth-century demonstration of the Acts of the Apostles'. He believed he had seen the gospel worked out in practice as people at house-parties lived as brothers and sisters in Christ. 'This', he considered, 'is that for which we have been searching for many years'.[54] For Carlile, the experience of fellowship was genuinely baptistic, although he had some reservations about the idea of Group 'sharing'. When he put these to Buchman he received the reply, 'A live faith takes risks'.[55] It seems that many church leaders accepted Buchman's challenge. F.C. Spurr noted that at the 1933 house-party 1,000 ministers were present, including some of the most scholarly Free Church leaders.[56]

Group activity did, however, create tensions for Baptist and other Free Church ministers of the progressive as well as conservative variety. Some felt that the presence of a Group within a local church was divisive. Peter Fletcher, a Methodist with experience of the Group, wrote in 1934 of the way he had seen Groups operate locally. 'Often', he suggested, 'the Group consists of a few self-conscious young people associated with a church. They meet in one of the vestries, an exclusive little coterie.'[57] John Morton, minister of St John's Presbyterian Church, Orpington, who had spoken enthusiastically of Buchan when he first encountered him, had by

1935 become disillusioned with the 'Groupers', complaining that they offered little to wider church life.[58] In other case, however, loyalty to the Group was seen as consonant with commitment to denominational renewal. In 1935 W.B. Selbie, former Principal of Congregationalism's Mansfield College, Oxford, was sanguine. His perspective probably had influence on some Baptists. On the basis that Christ was present where two or three were gathered in his name, the meetings of the Group in the early 1930s seemed to Selbie to be pointing the way 'back to gathered churches and the priesthood of all believers'.[59] William Taylor Bowie, a Baptist student at Mansfield under Selbie in the 1920s, who went on to a significant ministry in Church Road Baptist Church, Acton, found through the Group (in the words of his friend, Ernest Payne) 'a wider releasing of his effectiveness and a more outspoken evangelistic zeal'.[60]

NON-DENOMINATIONAL TENDENCIES

There was a tendency, nonetheless, for Group involvement to dilute denominational loyalty. In his earlier period Taylor Bowie was what Payne termed 'a fellow conspirator in denominational affairs', particularly as a member of the Baptist Union's Young People's Committee. From 1932 Payne was the Baptist Missionary Society's Young People's Secretary. But for Taylor Bowie commitment to the Group later took the place of wider denominational involvement.[61] In 1944 Taylor Bowie began to work full-time within Moral Re-Armament (MRA), particularly in the political sphere. Bowie, a powerful personality who used his abilities to press the needs of the disadvantaged, became well known to many Members of Parliament. Don Simpson, who entered the Scottish Baptist College in Glasgow in 1935, took a similar route out of pastoral ministry. It was through a lecturer at the college that Simpson identified with the Group. Following his college training, when he became pastor of Rosyth Baptist Church, Fife, Simpson made it a priority to communicate with shop stewards in the local dockyards. Gradually he became frustrated that too many members of the church were content simply to attend Sunday services and were not orientated to the world outside. Compared to the opportunities offered by the Group, local church ministry appeared too restrictive.[62] Like Jaeger, Simpson was to give the whole of the rest of his life to the international activities of Moral Re-Armament.

Related to this view that the churches were rather limited in their vision for socio-political change was a belief that traditional denominational structures were somewhat irrelevant. In 1894 Meyer had written that through Moody he saw 'a wider, larger life, in which mere denominationalism could have no place'.[63] Although Buchman worked with denominational leaders, he was coming to the conclusion in the later 1920s that a fresh approach was needed. At house-parties any heavy sermonizing was excluded, and brevity, sincerity and hilarity were extolled. 'A genial humour pervades the house gatherings', Buchman explained, 'and the sound of merry laughter is never long absent.'[64] Buchman was privately urging that

old ecclesiastical moulds be broken, a philosophy which repelled Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham, who wrote derisively of house-parties 'blending pietism and joviality'.[65] In 1935 Nathaniel Micklem, the astute Principal of Mansfield College, urged adherents of the Group to co-operate with all those who were 'regenerate by the Holy Ghost'. His hope was that Group members might find mysteries of grace they had not yet encountered.[66] Christian tradition offered stability and power. But services organized by the Group reflected the movement's untraditional spirituality. At one morning service in 1935, held in a theatre, a film was shown.[67] A year later there was talk of London being 'honeycombed with cells of living Christianity'.[68] It seems that the 'fun' (a common word) enjoyed in such 'cells' provided an alternative to stuffy churches. In December 1936 it was reported to Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, that in the diocese of Ripon a Group team, led by a clergyman who wore 'lay clothes', had ignored the services at the parish church and held meetings in a hotel.[69] The Group's instincts lay with a growing anti-organizationalism which found institutional worship somewhat unsatisfying.

Ambivalence about sacramental observance also characterized the Group. In the context of an Oxford house-party C.F. Andrews, an outstanding missionary to India, led a communion for 500 people. The Prayer Book was used, although the event was, in the style with which the Group was comfortable, held in the open air.[70] An Anglo-Catholic, W.S.A. Robertson of St Ives, Huntingdonshire, could claim that in his parish the Group had produced more confessions.[71] It is possible to see the way in which the Group encouraged sharing as an attempt to put in place a sacrament of confession and there was general agreement that Group meetings at which experiences were shared were freer versions of Methodist class meetings. In the mid-1930s Micklem was delighted to report on a revival of sacramentalism among Methodists and Congregationalists and Presbyterians.[72] Micklem was less enthusiastic about Baptist views, but Wheeler Robinson was one prominent Baptist who was drawn towards higher sacramentalism. Taylor Bowie, influenced by the Group and by Robinson, was known at Acton not only for his striking guest services but also for the way in which he led communion. One Acton church member, S.J. Price, a former President of the Baptist Union, recalled this aspect. At the Lord's Table 'Mr Bowie was at his best', and the 'simple ritual, the absence of display, the remembering of the poor and needy, all combined to make it a perfect act of worship'.[73] But this emphasis on communion seems to have been somewhat unusual in Group circles. Bertram Pollock, Bishop of Norwich, commented in 1932 that at a house-party he attended there was no reference to the sacraments.[74] Later in the year an evangelical minister complained that Groupers were irregular churchgoers and were seldom at communion, preferring their own meetings and even 'desecrating' Sundays by trips to the seaside.[75]

The determinedly modern ethos of the Group meant that for many of its members denominational debates were arcane. It was of far greater importance to address such issues as industrial conflict than to resolve internal church disputes. Charles

Raven, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, argued in 1934 that the theologically diverse Student Christian Movement had misguidedly made religion a matter for debate. Although T.R. Glover was a major SCM speaker, the SCM as a whole, according to Raven, lacked evangelistic thrust. Buchman, Raven considered, provided the missing evangelistic energy.[76] From a more conservative theological perspective Lionel Fletcher, an evangelist who spoke at Keswick, agreed, calling for Christians to spend 'less time criticizing other people whom they do not agree with' and instead to catch 'some of the passion and wisdom of the Groupers in seeking the pagans and laying hold of them for Christ'.[77] As an example of Group outreach in 1935 an interdenominational team of 250, which included unemployed people from the East End of London, a farm labourer, typists, commercial travellers, social workers, doctors, teachers, businessmen and an Admiral, came together in Penge, London, and visited 10,000 homes.[78] Buchman's visits to Germany in the 1930s raised for him the issue of whether there could be a 'God-controlled dictator', a 'spiritual dictatorship' in which the voice of God was heard and obeyed. Partly in response, the Group began to arrange youth camps and assemblies throughout England. The largest, in July 1936, attracted an estimated 25,000 to Birmingham for a two-day event, which Jaeger helped to organize, described as 'Enlistment in the moral equivalent of war'.[79] Although the concept of spiritual dictatorship was highly controversial, British politicians such as Ernest Brown, a Baptist who was Minister of Labour, believed that the Group's message had potential for influencing the nation.[80]

SPIRITUAL DIRECTIONS

For the Group to engage with society it had to be in tune with changes in the cultural mood. Self-expression, for example, was becoming evident within sections of European culture. Sharing, as a way to communicate spiritual experience, was therefore a powerful weapon. Indeed, A.J. Russell, in *For Sinners Only* (1932), a book about the Group which went through seventeen editions in two years, promulgated the philosophy that 'sharing' personal experiences was more powerful than preaching.[81] In the same year a *Baptist Times* correspondent, who had worked with the Methodist evangelist, Gipsy Rodney Smith, suggested that Baptist churches should have monthly Group-like testimony meetings.[82] Yet such testimonies could create problems for the Group. In 1928, in the *Daily Express*, the MP and journalist, Tom Driberg, first highlighted what he was to describe as the Group's crude invasions of physical and spiritual privacy.[83] No doubt Driberg's own promiscuous homosexuality was a factor in his aversion to the Group, but T.R. Glover told Buchman in 1928 that he believed Buchman over-emphasized sexual temptations.[84] Glover was concerned about unwise confessions,[85] as was Leslie Weatherhead, minister of the City Temple, London, who despite his enthusiasm for the Group admitted in July 1932 that a recent house-party had seen 'a morbid display of minds preoccupied with sexual temptations'. Micklem had simply found

the event boring.[86] One participant, Beverley Nichols, described how a pimply young man spoke of peculiar sensations he had felt during a recent visit to the Folies Bergères, but at that point Buchman rang a bell and someone else began to speak.[87] Many Group members believed they must be relevant to a culture in which those who regarded themselves as modern talked openly about their 'sex-life'.[88]

It was a further fundamental conviction within the Group that direct guidance from God was being received. When someone remarked that the Spirit was at work in the Group but that careful guidance was required, B.H. Streeter, a respected New Testament scholar and Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, who associated himself with the Group from 1934, retorted: 'Who are you to guide the Spirit of God? When are you going to let the Spirit of God guide you?'[89] Such a view of divine activity could have serious implications. Eric Worstead, who left Spurgeon's College in 1939 and had two local church ministries, returned to the college as a tutor and in 1955 became Principal, at which point he was guided during his 'quiet time' to make adjustments in some of his attitudes. A few students guessed that Worstead had experienced inner renewal and asked him about it. Although Worstead's intention was to keep his views private, knowing that Moral Re-Armament was controversial, the question of his involvement with MRA was raised by Geoffrey King, minister of West Croydon Tabernacle, at the College Council on 18 June 1957. Five meetings of the Council's executive or the Council itself to discuss the issue were held over the next three months. The Council ultimately concluded that it was 'contrary to the well-being of the College that its Principal should be associated with M.R.A.' At the executive committee of 30 September 1957 it was reported that Worstead had resigned.[90] Worstead's personal assessment was that what had happened in his own spiritual life had given him a closer attachment to the Bible and to the Church's wider witness.[91] Indeed, in the 1930s it was felt by those within the Group that the Church at large was experiencing one of the periodic 'times of refreshing' which marked church history.[92]

Such statements suggest that the Group embodied a form of 'proto-charismatic Christianity'. When an evangelical Anglican clergyman, Howard Rose, who had introduced the spirituality of the Group to his parish - Christ Church, Penge - in 1932, wrote about the Group in the *Baptist Times*, one venerable Baptist, William Olney, complained that Rose had not mentioned the Holy Spirit.[93] Over against such considerations, the Group was keen to stress the role of the Spirit in its meetings. A participant in a house-party arranged in London in 1933, which attracted - at a mere three days' notice - 600 people from the world of politics, business, education and social work, described how the Holy Spirit was 'poured out' in a way he had never before experienced.[94] Micklem, a penetrating observer of the spiritual scene in the 1930s, commented after attending one Group meeting: 'There was the air of Pentecost about it'.[95] Similar pneumatological terminology was to be employed to describe the charismatic movement in the 1960s and there was some, albeit limited, continuity of personnel between the Group and later

charismatic renewal. Bebbington suggests that Cuthbert Bardsley was unusual in this respect,[96] but George West, Bishop of Rangoon, drawn into the Group in 1935 through Foss Westcott, became an ardent charismatic in the 1970s.[97] John Tyndale-Biscoe, West's chaplain, was one of a circle of Group members subsequently involved in the charismatic movement. By contrast, Eric Worstead, although a friend of West and Tyndale-Biscoe, was unhappy about aspects of charismatic phenomena. For Tyndale-Biscoe, however, the Group exhibited 'an enthusiasm, expectancy and unity which we find in the Charismatic Renewal'.[98]

Specific features of charismatic renewal in the 1960s were present in the Group in the 1930s. Like much of the later renewal movement, the Group was transdenominational. A second parallel was that there was a stress in the Group on what might be termed 'prophetic knowledge'. There were many accounts of Buchman's insights, of his going to the right place at the right time, and of his knowing what was happening elsewhere or what would happen in the future.[99] In addition the Group explored fresh directions in the use of drama and songs, another characteristic of later charismatic worship. Don Simpson was to be much involved in plays staged at the MRA's Westminster Theatre. From 1935 Group members began to compose songs, the first being the rhythmic 'Bridgebuilders', written by George Fraser, a former church organist in Edinburgh, whom Simpson knew during his Scottish ministry. Fraser wrote over 1,000 songs. One Group-produced record, 'The Drums of Peace', which had sophisticated orchestration, sold 75,000 copies.[100] Songs sung by the Group called rather triumphalistically for 'God-confident armies' to mobilize and march 'with banners unfurled'.[101] A final feature, with some disturbing overtones, was that some joining the Group became subject to a system of detailed checking of guidance by the Group's leadership. Someone at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, from where a number of full-time Group personnel were recruited, wrote to *The Times* about Group 'infallibility' the pope would envy.[102] *Groups*, a magazine launched by a Methodist minister, Frank Raynor, voiced anxieties about this checking, suggesting that guidance should be assessed by experienced ministers rather than by an 'inner group' operating, in pseudo-episcopal fashion, like 'a new Lambeth'.[103] From the 1970s a number of Baptist churches were to be affected by leaders of Restorationist fellowships who sought to institute somewhat similar methods of shepherding.[104]

CONCLUSION

Although Baptist such as Meyer and Oswald Chambers had a considerable influence on the shaping of the Oxford Group, relatively few leading Baptists of the 1930s, when the Group was at its height, threw in their lot with the new movement. The Group, with its evangelical roots but relatively undogmatic theological stance, appealed particularly to liberal evangelicals in Anglicanism, Methodism and Congregationalism. But the Group also had an impact on grass-roots Baptist life. Ministers, students and church members found their spiritual experience renewed.

In some cases this new energy was channelled into denominational mission. For example, in 1932 Ernest Payne had discussions on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society with two Regent's Park College students who were BMS missionary candidates and who were at that point involved with the Group. Both went on to give distinguished service to the Society.[105] In the case of other Group members, however, denominational loyalty waned. Indeed, by the late 1930s Buchman had largely abandoned the courting of church leaders.[106] Through its sense of freedom from denominational restraints and its emphasis on immediate encounters with God and new directions in spirituality, the Group anticipated the renewal movements of the 1950s and beyond. By then the freer cultural mood with which the Group had connected in the 1930s had spread much more widely in British society. The charismatic movement flourished in this environment. Baptist links with the Group continued into the post-war years. Thus in the 1950s Ken Belden, who had been commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1933 and became one of the Group's leaders, sought support from Townley Lord, minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Church, London, who spoke reassuringly - if rather optimistically - to Belden about twenty million Baptists who would 'look after you'.[107] By this stage the Group/MRA was no longer seen as primarily an evangelistic agency, and it attracted fewer new Baptist supporters. In the 1930s, however, the Group had offered Baptists, among others, a contemporary spirituality that was effective in arresting people for Christ.

NOTES

1 *The Times*, 9 October 1933, p.19; *Church of England Newspaper (CEN)*, 13 October 1933, p.9; G. Lean, *Frank Buchman: A Life*, 1985, p.186.
2 *CEN*, 29 January 1932, p.6.
3 Lean, *op.cit.*, chapters 3-9.
4 P. Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, 1961, p.27.
5 F. Buchman to Mrs J.F. Shepard, 24 November 1922, Morris Martin Files, Moral Re-Armament Archives, Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA.
6 *CEN* 29 January 1932, p.10.
7 For a discussion, see D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, 1989, pp.233-40; cf. D.W. Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group Movement between the Wars', in W.J. Sheils and D. Wood, eds, *Studies in Church History*, Vol.23, Oxford 1986.
8 D.C. Belden, 'The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group (Moral Re-Armament)', University of Oxford DPhil dissertation, 1976, p.317.
9 See I.M. Randall, 'Mere Denominationalism: F.B. Meyer and Baptist Life', *BQ* 35, No.1, 1933, pp.19-34.
10 F.B. Meyer, *Reveries and Realities: Or life and work in London*, 1896. The copy of this book is in the Buchman home in Allentown, PA, USA. See M. Guldseth, *Streams*, Alaska 1982, pp.90, 142.
11 T. Spoerri, *Dynamic out of silence*, 1976, pp.24-5.
12 Guldseth, *Streams*, pp.98-9; K.D. Belden, *Reflections on Moral Re-Armament*, 1983, p.38.
13 Draft biography, chapter 2, Morris Martin Files, MRA Archives.
14 Spoerri, *op.cit.*, p.30.
15 F.B. Meyer, *Five 'Musts' of the Christian Life*, Chicago 1927, p.107; published in London in 1928.
16 A. Thornhill in F.N.D. Buchman, *Remaking the world*, 1947, p.xxiii.
17 *Baptist Times (BT)*, 14 February 1935, pp.134-7.
18 Belden, *op.cit.*, pp.310-7.

19 E. Wade to F. Buchman, 8 September 1922, Box 101, MRA Archives. Wade was the father of Virginia Wade, the tennis champion.
20 L. Hamilton to F. Buchman, 3 November 1925, Box 40, MRA Archives.
21 D. McCasland, *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God*, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1993, chapter 13.
22 F. Buchman to Mary Borden, 6 October 1923, Box 14, MRA Archives.
23 *Oswald Chambers: His life and work*, 1933, pp.28, 78-9; D.W. Lambert, *Oswald Chambers*, n.d., p.23. For the League of Prayer see I.M. Randall, 'The Pentecostal League of Prayer: A transdenominational British Wesleyan-Holiness Movement', *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Spring 1998, pp.185-200.
24 McCasland, *Abandoned to God*, p.106; R.D. Wood, *In these mortal hands*, Greenwood, Ind., 1983, pp.61-2, 71-2.
25 A. Jarlert, *The Oxford Group, Group revivalism and the churches in Northern Europe, 1930-1945*, Lund, Sweden, 1995, p.60.
26 *Chambers: His life and work*, p.156.
27 *ibid.*, pp.141, 221, 331.
28 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp.2-17.
29 D. Johnson, *Contending for the Faith*, Leicester 1979, p.154.
30 T.R. Glover to F. Buchman, 3 August 1928, Box 35, MRA Archives.
31 F. Buchman to J. Penn-Lewis, 23 September 1920, Box 68, MRA Archives.
32 Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, p.20.
33 *BT*, 21 June 1928, p.460 (name not given).
34 R. Collis, *The Silver Fleece: An autobiography*, 1936, pp.111, 114.
35 *British Weekly (BW)*, 18 August 1932, p.382.
36 *Christian World (CW)*, 13 July 1933, p.5; 20 July 1933, p.13. For Spurr and Keswick, see I.M. Randall, 'Capturing Keswick: Baptists and the changing spirituality of the Keswick Convention in the 1920s', *BQ* 36, No.7, 1996, pp.331-48.
37 *Greek Street Baptist Church, Stockport, Manual*, Stockport 1930, p.28; C. Jaeger, *Never to lose my vision: The story of Bill Jaeger*, 1995, p.21.
38 *ibid.*, pp.25-9.
39 Interview with Bill Jaeger, 9 May 1997; Jaeger, *op.cit.*, p.32. I am most grateful for help from Bill Jaeger, Ken Belden and Don Simpson, whose experiences with the Group date from the 1930s.
40 *BW*, 9 July 1931, p.289.
41 *BT*, 11 January 1934; Lean, *op.cit.*, p.187; *CEN*, 26 January 1934, p.13.
42 Spoerri, *op.cit.*, p.123.
43 *CW*, 11 August 1932, p.7.
44 *BT*, 16 February 1933, p.108 ('Young Minister').
45 *BT*, 6 July 1933, p.461.
46 *BT*, 9 February 1933, p.92.
47 *BT*, 6 July 1933, p.461.
48 *The Life of Faith*, 11 October 1933, p.1135.
49 *BT*, 6 July 1933, p.461.
50 *Gospel Standard*, January 1938, p.12.
51 Muriel Price to the author, 24 June 1995. Muriel Price, with her husband, has had a lifetime of involvement in the Group and Moral Re-Armament.
52 Eric Worstead to the author, 10 June 1995 and 8 July 1995.
53 *BT*, 13 July 1933, p.477.
54 *CEN*, 12 July 1933, p.9.
55 *BT*, 20 July 1933, p.493.
56 *BW*, 13 July 1933, p.295; *CW*, 20 July 1933, p.13.
57 *Groups*, July 1934, p.67.
58 *CW*, 28 November 1935, p.7.
59 *CW*, 21 November 1935, p.2.
60 *William Taylor Bowie, 1902-1952*, n.p., 1952.
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66 *BW*, 31 January 1935, p.365.
67 *CEN*, 26 July 1935, p.9.
68 *BW*, 11 June 1936, p.220; 2 July 1936, p.280.
69 The Bishop of Ripon to Cosmo Lang, 16 December 1936, Lang Papers, 136/263-4, Lambeth Palace Archives.
70 *CEN*, 17 July 1931, p.11.
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72 *BW*, 3 December 1936, p.235.
73 *William Taylor Bowie*, p.13; cf. E.A. Payne, *Henry Wheeler Robinson*, 1946, pp.59-60; *BT*, 18 November 1926, p.832.
74 *CEN*, 22 April 1932, p.1.
75 *The Record*, 16 December 1932, p.766 ('Observer').
76 C. Raven, 'A Theologian's Appreciation', in F.A.M. Spencer, ed., *The Meaning of the Groups*, 1934, pp.12, 26, 27.
77 *The Christian*, 19 March 1936, p.19.

78 *BW*, 7 March 1935, p.476.
79 *CEN*, 24 July 1936, p.9; 31 July 1936, p.9; *BW*, 23 July 1936, p.340; 30 July 1938, p.136; Jarlert, *op.cit.*, pp.114-20.
80 *The Times*, 28 July 1937, p.11.
81 A.J. Russell, *For Sinners Only*, 1932, pp.30, 346.
82 *BT*, 28 July 1932, p.520.
83 *Daily Express*, 28 February 1928, p.1; T. Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, 1964, p.61. For Driberg, see F. Wheen, *Tom Driberg: His life and indiscretions*, 1990.
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85 H.G. Wood, *Terrot Reaveley Glover*, Cambridge, 1953, pp.180-2.
86 *BW*, 14 July 1932, p.288; 28 July 1932, p.323.
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91 Eric Worstead to the author, 10 June 1995.
92 *BW*, 12 June 1930, p.214.
93 *BT*, 15 June 1933, p.409; 22 June 1933, p.420.
94 Report by K.D. Belden in *BW*, 21 December 1933, p.268.
95 *BW*, 31 January 1935, p.365.
96 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p.240.
97 J. Tyndale-Biscoe, *For God Alone: The life of George West, Bishop of Rangoon*, Oxford 1984, chapters 7 and 25.
98 J. Tyndale-Biscoe to the author, 19 August 1995 and 23 July 1998; J. Tyndale-Biscoe, *Behind the Rectory Door*, 1995; I am indebted also to Joy Worstead for her help. Tyndale-Biscoe speaks of the 'wind of the Spirit' that Buchman felt.
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ADHSCL CONFERENCE 2000

The Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries plans a conference 26-29 July 2000 at Westhill College, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, on 'Protestant Nonconformity in England and Wales in the Twentieth Century: A Retrospect'. Speakers include Professor John Tudno Williams, Principal David Cornick, Dr D. Densil Morgan, Professor Alan P.F. Sell, Revd Norman Wallwork, Dr Clyde Binfield, Dr David Bebbington, Professor Andrew Walls, Professor Keith Robbins, Dr Leonard Smith, Professor David Jeremy, Dr Hugh Boudin, Revd David Butler. Approximate cost: £172. For more details, contact the secretary, Mr Howard F. Gregg, 44 Seymour Road, London SW 18 5JA, Tel: 0181 874 7727.