

# THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE THINKING OF FRANK BUCHMAN

## Abstract

The initiator of the Oxford Group and Moral Re-Armament, Frank Buchman (1878-1961) was one of the most original figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century religion. Initially influential as an evangelist, he was later a pioneer of religious approaches to reconciliation and inter-faith understanding, and his ideas permeated such groups as Alcoholics Anonymous. Yet he also attracted much controversy: for example he was accused of departing from traditional Christian doctrines; and of having authoritarian tendencies.

This study explores Buchman's religious experiences and ideas, specifically focussing on his thinking about the Holy Spirit, which it presents as giving an underlying spiritual unity to his thinking. Noting that his spirituality was derived from Lutheranism, the Keswick movement and the American YMCA, the article shows how his ideas about the Holy Spirit shaped his approaches to God's guidance, personal evangelism, theological and religious questions, strategy and politics. Over the course of half a century, his underlying vision changed little, but his perspective expanded and his vocabulary changed, as he sought to forge a world philosophy that could speak to different religious and cultural traditions, and the politics of his time.

## Sections

Introduction	2
Foundations of Buchman's spirituality	5
Guidance	11
Personal work	18
Theology	24
Strategy	30
Political Thought	38
Conclusion	46

## Introduction

‘Silence can be the regulator of men and nations’, declared the American religious leader Frank Buchman in November 1938.<sup>1</sup> The answer to the growing crisis in Europe, in Buchman’s view, was for people to listen in silence for the ‘guidance’ of God; the Holy Spirit had a plan and strategy for the world that could prevent war and bring about a new kind of international order. This was typical of Buchman; throughout his life he argued that the deepest problems in the world, at both a personal and an international level, were moral and spiritual in nature, and that the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit were the answer.

Frank Buchman (1878-1961) was one of the most original figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century religion. Ordained as a Lutheran pastor, and influenced by the American student Christian movement, he was by 1914 a successful evangelist with a reputation for ‘life-changing’. After World War I, his work grew into a larger movement that was known successively as the First Century Christian Fellowship, the Oxford Group (OG) and Moral Re-Armament (MRA).<sup>2</sup> The social impact of Buchman’s activity was considerable: for example, after World War II Buchman was decorated for his work of reconciliation by France, Germany, Japan and the Philippines; and MRA became known for its work in conflict resolution, and dialogue between the faiths.<sup>3</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous, which drew extensively on OG spirituality, was another part of Buchman’s legacy.<sup>4</sup> In 1954 one commentator called Buchman the ‘most successful evangelist of his age’;<sup>5</sup> and in the early 1980s a senior Cardinal went as far as to say that he had been ‘a turning-point in the history of the modern world’ through his ideas.<sup>6</sup> Yet he was also controversial: while his spirituality elicited support across the churches, there were some who doubted that it fitted into the mainstream Christian tradition at all; and in terms of his politics there were a variety of accusations, most notably that he was sympathetic to Nazism, but also that his work was pro-communist or anti-imperial. Even today, he is sometimes treated with sarcasm and scepticism.<sup>7</sup>

This article is a study of Buchman’s ideas. Buchman was not an abstract thinker, and he never intended to create a new theology or spirituality. At the same time, there was a ‘basic architecture’ to his thought.<sup>8</sup> If, as one scholar suggests, the

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Buchman, ‘Framework of a Might Answer’ (1938), in *Remaking the World* (London, 1961), revised edition, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Buchman used the term ‘First Century Christian Fellowship’ to describe his work in the 1920s; the Oxford Group was used increasingly after 1928; and MRA from 1938. MRA was initially conceived as a programme of the OG, but the work eventually came to be known under the title. See Garth Lean, *Frank Buchman: A Life* (London, 1985), pp. 97, 138, 261 ff.

<sup>3</sup> On MRA’s role in post-war reconciliation, see E.Luttwak, ‘Franco-German Reconciliation: the Overlooked Role of the Moral Re-Armament Movement’, in D.Johnston and C.Sampson (eds), *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York, 1994), pp. 37-63; Philip Boobbyer, ‘Moral Re-Armament in Africa in the Era of Decolonisation’, in B.Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003), pp. 212-236.

<sup>4</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous*, third edition (York, 1998), p. xvi. See also Linda A. Mercadante, *Victims and sinners: spiritual roots of addiction and recovery* (Louisville, 1995), chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Williamson, *Inside Buchmanism* (London, 1954), p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> Cardinal König of Vienna, cited in Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> For a recent attack on Buchman, see Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York, 2008), pp. 124-130. See also the depiction of Buchman in Denise Giardina’s historical novel about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Saints and Villains* (New York, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> B.Lund Yates, ‘Dr Frank N D Buchman’s Contribution to Religious Thought’, *The Hibbert Journal*, October 1958, offprint, p. 1.

OG and MRA had no specific creed or dogmas of their own,<sup>9</sup> they nevertheless deployed a cluster of spiritual practices that formed a distinctive tradition.<sup>10</sup> The particular focus of this piece is Buchman's thinking about the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit was arguably the unifying element in Buchman's philosophy,<sup>11</sup> and by focussing on this subject, it is possible to see the range and interconnectedness of his thinking.

Another reason for focussing on this theme is that it opens up discussion on some of the most controversial areas of Buchman's thought. For example, Buchman's understanding of the Holy Spirit informed his attitude to 'guidance'. The idea that people could be directly guided by God was given a central place in the OG and MRA; one commentator even argued that the level of emphasis given to the idea by the OG was unique in Christian history.<sup>12</sup> There were plenty of defenders of the doctrine, including some distinguished theologians,<sup>13</sup> but there were others who thought that it was given an exaggerated emphasis.<sup>14</sup> Buchman's attitude to the Holy Spirit also informed his approach to the relationship between Christianity and other faiths - another area of debate; some people thought that MRA promoted a theologically ambiguous mixture of Christian and syncretistic teachings.<sup>15</sup> His thinking about the Holy Spirit also shaped his thinking about the European dictatorships, the early Cold War, the nature of democracy and political leadership. For all these reasons, it is important to establish what Buchman really thought about the Holy Spirit, and how he experienced and interpreted God's action in his life and the world.

There is plenty of material on Buchman. As a comprehensive introduction to his thinking, the portrait by Garth Lean - the closest thing to an official biography<sup>16</sup> - is particularly good; and there is a useful recent account by T. Willard Hunter, who worked full-time with Buchman for many years.<sup>17</sup> These are sympathetic but not uncritical works. The portraits by the British journalist Peter Howard,<sup>18</sup> who became leader of MRA after Buchman's death, and Theophil Spoerri,<sup>19</sup> a Swiss professor and supporter of Buchman, were attempts to explain the essence of Buchman's spiritual vision. Henry Van Dusen, who worked with Buchman in the 1920s before later becoming President of Union Theological Seminary in New York, wrote a vivid

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<sup>9</sup> See Ron Kraybill, 'Transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: The Role of Religious Actors', in Johnson and Sampson (eds), *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, p. 224.

<sup>10</sup> Anders Jarlert, *The Oxford Group, Group Revivalism, and the Churches in Northern Europe 1930-1945, with Special Reference to Scandinavia and Germany* (Lund, 1995), p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Randall, 'Life-Changing: The Oxford Group as a Movement of Spiritual Renewal', *Christianity and History Newsletter*, No 16, 1996, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> J. Calvin Keene, 'The Doctrine of Guidance in the Oxford Group Movement', PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1937, pp. 120-121.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, B.H. Streeter's Warburton Lectures, *The God who Speaks* (London, 1936).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Herbert Hensley Henson, *The Group Movement* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 60-72; Marjorie Harrison, *Saints Run Mad* (London, 1934), pp. 53-68; Tom Driberg, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1964), pp. 192-199; Charles Raven, 'Paul Planted, Apollos Watered', F. Spencer (ed.) *The Meaning of the Groups* (London, 1934), pp. 28-31; Sir Arnold Lunn, *Enigma: A Study of Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1957), p. 181.

<sup>15</sup> For a recent comment on this, see William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> Buchman once hinted to Lean that he might write his biography: Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. xi.

<sup>17</sup> T. Willard Hunter, *World Changing Through Life Changing: The Frank Buchman Revolution* (Claremont, CA, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret* (London, 1961).

<sup>19</sup> Theophil Spoerri, *Dynamic out of Silence* (London, 1976).

account of Buchman's character and ideas;<sup>20</sup> and the memoirs of Morris Martin, Buchman's secretary from the late 1930s onwards, contain important details.<sup>21</sup> Of the many critics, the most influential was British Labour MP, Tom Driberg.<sup>22</sup> Amongst the main academic works, David Belden stresses Buchman's pietism,<sup>23</sup> Anders Jarlet his personalism,<sup>24</sup> and Daniel Sack the American origins of his movement;<sup>25</sup> and J. Calvin Keene has explored the roots of his concept of guidance.<sup>26</sup> Studies by David Bebbington and Ian Randall examine OG spirituality in the context of British evangelicalism.<sup>27</sup>

This article is original, however, for basing its analysis of Buchman on an extensive study of material in his own words. Sources include his many speeches. Although not a natural orator, his addresses at the Lily Valley missionary conference in Küling, China, in 1918 are a pointer to his early thinking;<sup>28</sup> and the speeches published in the collection *Remaking the World*, are a guide to his thought from the mid-1930s onwards - although his entourage increasingly had input into the speeches in later years. Buchman's voluminous correspondence is useful, although it should be noted that his letters were usually drafted by Martin in the last decades of his life.<sup>29</sup> The transcript of an early OG House Party, in which he was extensively quoted, is

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Van Dusen, 'Apostle to the Twentieth Century' and 'The Oxford Group Movement', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 154, 1, July 1934, pp. 1-16; and 154, 2, August 1934, pp. 1-13

<sup>21</sup> Morris Martin, *Always a Little Further* (Tuscon, 2001). Martin distanced himself from MRA some time after Buchman's death, and his memoir reflected that. An earlier, less critical biography of Buchman by him was unpublished: see MSS Biography, Oxford Group Archives UK, Dial House, Whitbourne, Worcestershire (henceforth OGAUK), File: 6.0876. Other memoirs and portraits include: H.W. 'Bunny' Austin, *Frank Buchman as I Knew Him* (London, 1975); Ray Purdy, 'My Friend Frank Buchman', OGAUK, File: 6.0978; and Signe Strong, 'Account of Working Beside Frank Buchman between 1938 and 1961', based on recordings made in 2006/2007, edited by Ailsa Hamilton, possession of author. See also Archie Mackenzie, 'Introduction', in Archie Mackenzie and David Young (comp.), *The Worldwide Legacy of Frank Buchman* (Caux 2008), pp. 7-37 for a helpful overview of Buchman's life and thought.

<sup>22</sup> See Driberg's *MRA – A Critical Examination* (London, 1962), and *Mystery*. For a rebuttal of the former see Julian Thornton Duesbury, *The Open Secret of MRA* (London, 1964). The reasons for Driberg's enduring hostility to Buchman were various. One of them may have been his ideological affiliations, for, according to recent evidence, he was recruited by the KGB in 1956; see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London, 1998), p. 523. An active homosexual, Driberg likely also disagreed with Buchman's emphasis on traditional Christianity morality.

<sup>23</sup> David Belden, 'The Origins and Development of the Oxford Group Movement (Moral Re-Armament)', D.Phil, Oxford University, 1976, pp. 30-35.

<sup>24</sup> Jarlet, *The Oxford Group*, p. 34 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Sack, *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement* (New York, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance'.

<sup>27</sup> David Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group Movement between the Wars', in W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds), *Voluntary Religion*, Studies in Church History 23, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 495-507. Ian Randall, *Evangelical Experiences* (Carlisle, 1999), chapter 9. Other studies include: A.W. Eister, *Drawing Room Conversion* (Durham, NC, 1950); and Walter Houston Clark, *The Oxford Group: Its History and Significance* (New York, 1951).

<sup>28</sup> Speeches at Lily Valley Conference near Küling, China, 1-13 August 1918, collected under the title 'Where Personal Work Begins' (henceforth 'WPWB'), edited by Lawson Wood, 1984; OGAUK, File: 3.500.2.

<sup>29</sup> Buchman's letters can be found in OGAUK, and the archives of Moral Re-Armament in the Library of Congress. According to Martin, Buchman collaborated with others in constructing his speeches until 1938, but nevertheless worked on every word; thereafter, he increasingly relied on others to draft his speeches. Martin began drafting Buchman's letters in 1939, although not always in his most private correspondence; Morris Martin to author, emails 8/4/2005 and 12/8/2005.

available.<sup>30</sup> The archives also contain some of Buchman's notebooks, as well as verbatim reports of comments he made to OG and MRA groups. These, as well as other sources, allow for a detailed study of his thinking.

### Foundations of Buchman's spirituality

Buchman was born in Pennsburg, USA to a Pennsylvania Dutch family; and his mother tongue was Pennsylvania German. An early influence on his spiritual outlook was likely his attendance from the age of eight at the local Perkiomen Seminary, a private school run by the Schwenkwelders, a German sect similar to the Quakers that stressed the importance of the 'inner light'.<sup>31</sup> His mother was an important spiritual influence too - more than his local Lutheran clergyman, who, he once said, 'missed the bus with him'.<sup>32</sup> In 1899, he graduated from the local Muhlenberg College and then proceeded to the Lutheran theological seminary in Mount Airy (1899-1902), after which took a job at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Overbrook, Philadelphia. His years of training gave him a typically Lutheran mixture of pessimism about un-regenerated human nature and optimism about the possibility of redemption.<sup>33</sup> Yet he likely also drew inspiration from German pietist spirituality, for echoes of Lutheran pietism are discernible in his later thinking - even if he rarely referred to his Lutheran heritage.<sup>34</sup> In general, Buchman's theological schooling was traditional; he himself said that he was 'the product of a mould, of a stereotyped education'.<sup>35</sup>

During the next decade Buchman had two key experiences that shaped his thinking about Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the years 1904-1907, Buchman ran a *hospiz* for under-privileged boys in Overbrook; but a clash with the Trustees of the project left him bitter and uncertain of his future. During a visit to Keswick, England, in 1908, at the time of the yearly Convention, Buchman heard a sermon by the holiness teacher Jessie Penn-Lewis that affected him deeply, and influenced his understanding of the Cross and the Holy Spirit. There are various, slightly different accounts of what happened at Keswick, most of them indicating that the doctrine of the atonement, hitherto something of a theory for Buchman, somehow became a reality.<sup>36</sup> According to one of them, Buchman 'saw suddenly as in a vision a cross shining before [him]' and a 'wide-deep gulf' lying between him and the 'Crucified'. He became conscious that only the Crucified Christ could bridge this gulf, and as he did so, the 'chaos in his mind' disappeared; and this led on to a 'complete surrender to the Divine Will'.<sup>37</sup> In another account, he recalled: 'I felt that [Christ] hung on the

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<sup>30</sup> Transcript of Putney Heath House Party, 1922, OGAUK, File: 3500.4.

<sup>31</sup> See Driberg, *Mystery*, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Van Dusen argues that Buchman's spirituality was rooted in 'conservative Lutheran pietism', and that the voice of Luther himself was present in some of his teaching; 'Apostle to the Twentieth Century', p. 4. Buchman once commended *True Christianity*, suggesting that it was superior to Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* on the grounds that it was less legal. He was likely referring to the book by Johann Arndt (1555-1621). See ALW (Lawson Wood), 'Verbatim Notes from Meetings 1937', UK OGAUK, File: 3.500.9, p. 15. Clark argues that there was a lot of similarity between Buchman's spirituality and that of Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705); see Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 118.

<sup>35</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 19, 512.

<sup>36</sup> For some of the different accounts, see Belden, 'Origins', p. 102-105.

<sup>37</sup> Account in J. Ferdinand Laun, *Unter Gottes Führung* (Gotha, 1931), pp. 189-192; cited in Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 42.

Cross for my sin'.<sup>38</sup> It seems that Penn-Lewis personalised Christ on the Cross in a particularly vivid way, for Buchman also talked of having had 'a poignant vision of the Crucified'.<sup>39</sup>

Buchman also said that some kind of powerful spiritual energy came into his life at Keswick. He said that it was as if a 'strong current of life' had suddenly been poured into him, and that afterwards he had had a 'dazed sense of a great spiritual shaking up'; the feeling of having had a 'divided will' disappeared. Towards the end of his life, in 1959, he used the metaphor of the 'wind' of the Spirit to describe the experience: '[The] speaker that day had the wind of the Spirit. ... [The wind of heaven] passed over me and through me, and I walked out of that place a different man.'<sup>40</sup>

Prior to the visit to Keswick, Buchman had considered writing to the *hospiz* Trustees to confess his ill-will towards them, but remained adamant that he could never forgive them. However, the experience in Keswick brought this idea back to him and he decided to write letters of apology to the Trustees, repenting of his anger. His bitterness had deprived him of spiritual power, he recalled, but writing the letters of apology meant that his life became 'different'.<sup>41</sup> The immediate upshot was a revitalisation of his evangelistic contact with others.<sup>42</sup> Some years later, seemingly referring to his experience at Keswick, Buchman stated: 'I had a Ministry without the Holy Spirit, and I know how futile it was, and unhappy it was; I know the Ministry with the power of the Holy Spirit, and I know it is sheer joy and fun and romance all the time.'<sup>43</sup>

The spiritual tradition associated with the Keswick Convention helped to shape Buchman's spiritual outlook. He worked with people connected with Keswick right into the 1920s.<sup>44</sup> The holiness movement associated with Keswick, with its emphasis on purity, holiness, and obedience following a 'second blessing', bore some similarity to what was to follow in the OG.<sup>45</sup> In addition, it should be noted that Keswick spirituality, although more Anglican than Methodist, had some roots in the Wesleyan tradition, and Wesley was also much admired in the OG. Ultimately, though, OG evangelism differed from the more conservative Keswick approach in emphasising testimony over teaching; the two were not easily compatible.<sup>46</sup>

The next turning-point in Buchman's spiritual evolution was his discovery of 'guidance'. This occurred while he was working as YMCA Secretary at Pennsylvania State University (1909-15), a post he took with the support of the YMCA leader John Mott.<sup>47</sup> The source for this was the well-known British Baptist minister, F.B.Meyer, the author of *The Secret of Guidance*, and one of Keswick's leading international

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<sup>38</sup> Frank Buchman, 'My Experience with the Cross', tape recording, Mackinac Island conference, dated either 1957 or 1958; OGAUK, File: 3.500.33.

<sup>39</sup> This account is in A.J.Russell, *For Sinners Only* (London, 1937), p. 58. For more on Penn-Lewis's spirituality, see her book *The Centrality of the Cross* (Poole, Dorest, n.d).

<sup>40</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 31, 512

<sup>41</sup> Frank Buchman, 'The Art of Listening', in 'WPWB', pp. 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> Specifically, he helped a Cambridge student to have a Christian experience. See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of Putney Heath House Party, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 240.

<sup>45</sup> Buchman often recommended Hannah Whitall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, an important text in the Keswick tradition. See Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 169.

<sup>46</sup> Ian Randall, *Transforming Keswick* (Carlisle, 2000), p. 121; *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 248.

<sup>47</sup> See Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 40. From 1901-1915, Mott was associate general secretary for the foreign department of the YMCA, before becoming general secretary.

speakers.<sup>48</sup> During his time at Penn State, Buchman grew frustrated with the fact that although he was extremely busy seeing students, few of them were changing at a deep level. Meyer, on a visit to Penn State in 1912, asked him if he allowed the Holy Spirit to guide him in all that he was doing. When Buchman commented that he was reading the Bible and praying in the morning, Meyer asked him whether he really gave God enough uninterrupted time to tell him what to do. The upshot of the conversation was that Buchman decided to spend at least an hour every morning to listen to God, initially from five o'clock to six-clock.<sup>49</sup> He would write his thoughts down in a notebook. It was a turning-point in Buchman's life: regular 'quiet times' to listen to God, became a permanent feature of Buchman's schedule.

Buchman's experience at Keswick and his discovery of guidance took place against the background of the wider influence on him of the American student Christian movement, and in particular the YMCA. Importantly, a visit to the Northfield Student Conference in Massachusetts in 1901 'completely changed' his life.<sup>50</sup> The Northfield conferences, first initiated by the preacher Dwight Moody, were then run by Mott. Mott himself, impressed by the Morning Watch Movement in Cambridge, was in the habit of spending the first half an hour or hour of the day alone with God.<sup>51</sup> Another key influence was the Yale University classicist and professor of Christian methods, Henry Wright (1877-1923). Wright's pedagogical book, *The Will of God and a Man's Lifework* (1909), was highly regarded by Buchman and was used by him as a training resource during his own work at Penn State; and Buchman also drew from Wright in his talks at the Lily Valley conference in 1918. Many of Buchman's ideas can be traced to Wright, and there is a strong case for calling Wright the 'father' of the OG.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of Buchman's understanding of the Holy Spirit and guidance, there were of course other spiritual influences, coming from both Protestant and Catholic traditions. Buchman was impressed by certain Quaker writers: he cited the diary of John Woolman in one of his Lily Valley speeches;<sup>53</sup> and used Biblical scholar, James Rendel Harris's *The Guiding Hand of God* in some of his courses at Hartford Theological Seminary, where he worked as a visiting lecturer in the years 1916-22.<sup>54</sup> In 1916-17 he also read, and later recommended, Andrew Murray's *The Secret of Inspiration*, an anthology of writings from William Law that focussed on the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>55</sup> He made use of St Augustine and the Christian mystics in his courses at Hartford, and knew of the spirituality of Brother Lawrence, the 17<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>48</sup> F.B.Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance* (New York, 1896).

<sup>49</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 35-36. See also Ian Randall, *Spirituality and Social Change: The Contribution of F.B.Meyer (1847-1929)* (Carlisle, 2003), p. 105.

<sup>50</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> C.Howard Hopkins, *John Mott 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979), p. 150.

<sup>52</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 74-78; Frank Buchman, 'Victory in Christ', in 'WPWB', p. 27. See Henry Burt Wright, *The Will of God and a Man's Lifework* (New York, 1909); George Stewart, *The Life of Henry B. Wright* (New York, 1925). Keene and Clark both suggested that Wright was the spiritual father of the OG; see Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 33, Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 129. See also D.C. Macintosh, *Personal Religion* (New York, 1942), pp. 378-395.

<sup>53</sup> Frank Buchman, 'Introduction' and 'The Art of Listening', in 'WPWB', pp. 1, 5.

<sup>54</sup> J. Rendel Harris, *The Guiding Hand of God* (London, 1905). See Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 55 n.

<sup>55</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 127. Buchman to Sam Shoemaker, 26 April 1920; OGAUK, File, 'Frank Buchman: Personal Work, 1917-1928', p. 2. See Andrew Murray, *The Secret of Inspiration* (CLC Press, 1998). Another text that Buchman admired, and was much used in the OG, was Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*; see Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 255.

author of *The Practice of the Presence of God*.<sup>56</sup> Later in life he noted that St Francis de Sales had recommended listening to the 'inner voice'.<sup>57</sup> As regards the Bible, Buchman was often drawn to the Book of Acts, and would recommend that people read the Whitsun story from Acts chapter 2,<sup>58</sup> indeed it was once suggested that the OG took Acts as its principle guide.<sup>59</sup>

Buchman also came to be an advocate of what he called 'absolute moral standards' as a necessary element in the Christian life. His understanding of morality was particularly derived from Wright and from the missionary and writer Robert Speer. In *The Principles of Jesus* (1902), Speer had distilled Jesus' moral teachings into four key principles – truth, unselfishness, purity and love - stating that Jesus, unlike the scribes of his time, was a teacher of 'absolute principles'.<sup>60</sup> Inspired by Speer's scheme, Wright wrote in *The Will of God* of the 'four touchstones' of Jesus' teaching, emphasising that by always doing things that pleased God, Jesus 'cleansed and strengthened his will to receive the compelling conviction from God', thus being sure of God's 'presence and guidance'. Adherence to moral standards and the reception of guidance were thus linked together. Wright emphasised the absoluteness of the standards, but noted that in 'doubtful pleasures' (smoking, drinking, theatre, dancing etc), it was a matter of personal conviction whether these actions matched up to the touchstones or not.<sup>61</sup> In time Buchman came to use these standards as a summary of Christian morality, and they became central to OG and MRA teaching (usually presented in the order of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love). Sin, in Buchman's view, was anything that separated a person from God; and the absolute standards were intended to be a tool for discerning what factors were preventing the full release of the Spirit into a person's life.

Like Wright and many of his contemporaries, Buchman emphasised the importance of living in 'spiritual power' and the way in which moral compromise blocked the flow of such power. His own experiences had reinforced this. At one point in Pennsylvania, he had owned up to the habit of using passes on the railway to which he was not entitled. Restitution led to restoration of contact with God, he said later: 'It was not until I decided to send a cheque that was adequate that peace came.'<sup>62</sup> Similarly, on a missionary visit to China in the period 1916-18, he told a lie to someone, and found that this resulted the following day in a barren quiet time in which he had no distinctive thoughts. It was only when he went to the person to whom he had lied, and confessed what he had done, that he felt the 'return of power.'<sup>63</sup> In China in 1918, talking of dishonesty in similar terms to Wright, Buchman said he knew hundreds of people who allowed little things to creep into their lives that robbed them of 'power';<sup>64</sup> he used the phrase 'sly foxes': 'a lie is a sly fox and sly foxes keep us from power'.<sup>65</sup> Restitution for sin, as a means for restoring contact with

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<sup>56</sup> Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 47. Frank Buchman, 'Introduction' in 'WPWB', p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Buchman, 'The Electronics of the Spirit' (1955), *RtW*, p. 225.

<sup>58</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 198.

<sup>59</sup> Van Dusen, 'The Oxford Group Movement', p. 248.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Speer, *The Principles of Jesus* (New York, 1902), pp. 33-36.

<sup>61</sup> Wright, *Will of God*, p. 167 ff. Wright normally described them in the following order: purity, honesty, unselfishness and love.

<sup>62</sup> Buchman, 'Victory in Christ', in 'WPWB', p. 26.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Buchman, 'The Key to People's Lives', in 'WPWG', p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Compare for example the forms of dishonesty listed in Wright, *The Will of God*, p. 191 and in Buchman, 'The "Sly Foxes"', in 'WPWB', p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> This phrase originated in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 15.



God, was to become a central element in the cluster of practices that made up OG spirituality.

If honesty was a key to spiritual power, so too was purity. At least from his time at Penn State onwards, Buchman took the view that there was a connection between sexual purity and the extent to which people were available to be used by the Holy Spirit. This belief possibly arose from personal experience, because Buchman once said that he himself could not listen to the 'slightest suggestive'.<sup>66</sup> Some critics thought Buchman over-emphasised sexual sin. Buchman, however, believed that the problem was widespread, and that many people wanted help in the area; talking of Princeton University, where he was active in the 1920s, Buchman said that 85 % of students were troubled by the subject of sex.<sup>67</sup> It was a matter of thoughts as well as actions.<sup>68</sup> Buchman was unusual in his readiness to broach such matters. 'What about the women you were with last night', he asked a couple of students who visited him to discuss their intellectual difficulties with Christianity; the pair apparently acknowledged some wrong-doing in this area.<sup>69</sup> Clearly, many young people decided to unburden themselves to Buchman about sexual problems.<sup>70</sup>

In general, Buchman thought sexual sin left a damaging imprint on the soul; it always left a person with a 'heavy thud' he said in the early 1950s. Freedom could be found through honesty and the cross of Christ.<sup>71</sup> 'First Corinthians 6, 9-11 can be a reality and people can not only forgive but forget', he said elsewhere, talking about homosexuality.<sup>72</sup> Sexual energy could be directed away from self-indulgence towards constructive care for the world; indeed sinful habits were inclined to disappear when people embraced a big enough aim in life.<sup>73</sup>

Buchman believed that purity was a matter for people who were married as well as single. It was important that married couples were living 'in power';<sup>74</sup> discipline was needed if couples were to have the moral energy to engage with the world's spiritual battles. Signe Strong, a Swedish artist who worked with MRA for some years, recalled that at a three-month MRA training session at Lake Tahoe, USA, in 1940, Buchman talked to both non-married and married about the importance of purity.<sup>75</sup> In this context, Buchman was critical of the growing use of contraceptives - calling them a 'cheap plaything'; he had said in 1937 that he had seen whole groups

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<sup>66</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 79-81, 473.

<sup>67</sup> See Clark, pp. 68, 107.

<sup>68</sup> Buchman, 'The Heart of Individual Work', in 'WPWB', p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Clark reports that the two got angry and left, only to return the day after to acknowledge Buchman's diagnosis, and commit themselves to the Christian life; Clark, *The Oxford Group*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>70</sup> The habit of masturbation was often mentioned by young men. For more detail on these issues, see Belden, 'Origins', p. 176 ff; Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 98-102; Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 43.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in a letter from Geoffrey Pugh to author, July 1 2009. In 1951, Buchman used the 'thud' metaphor to describe the effect of sin more generally: 'Sin leaves us with a dull, heavy thud. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." ... That is the answer.' See 'Turn on the Light' (1951), *RtW*, p. 195.

<sup>72</sup> See ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 13. Buchman seems to have linked homosexuality – on which he held traditional Biblical views – with what he called 'man-pleasing': the desire to please others rather than God; see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 469.

<sup>73</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, pp. 99-101.

<sup>74</sup> Buchman, 'My Experience with the Cross'.

<sup>75</sup> Signe Strong, 'Account of Working', p. 19.

of people lose their spiritual power ('slain') by using contraception.<sup>76</sup> So he said in 1940: 'Let the Holy Spirit be your birth control - and this is free!'<sup>77</sup>

In Buchman's view, the Holy Spirit played a central role in freeing people from their sins. 'May the Holy Spirit resurrect C. from the grave of compromise', he said of a former colleague in 1940.<sup>78</sup> He used various metaphors to illustrate what was needed. He once said that he had spent much of his life 'pulling the cork for bottled-up people'.<sup>79</sup> At the Putney Heath House Party, he used medical terminology: 'What people today want is the knife. [People] want soul surgery – a physician of souls. People today want you to get at their particular sin, and the trouble today is that we do not know the power of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>80</sup> In 1927, he wrote to Queen Marie of Romania that, although 'marvellous on a human basis', she lacked the 'maximum power'; moreover, the Holy Spirit had to convict her of her sins, rather than he.<sup>81</sup> By obeying the Spirit, he said a few decades later, people could stop being governed by unhealthy human feelings: 'If you cut the nerve of your instinctive actions and reactions by obeying the Spirit then you are on track.'<sup>82</sup>

Another central theme in Buchman's spirituality, that had roots in pietism, as well as early 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism, was 'surrender'. Van Dusen suggested that the secret of Buchman's spiritual power lay in the 'absolutely unqualified gift of himself to his God'.<sup>83</sup> Certainly Buchman believed that at Keswick he had surrendered his will to God, and he challenged others to do the same. So, for example, to one student at Hartford who told Buchman about his personal life and difficulties in detail, Buchman simply said: 'What you need is to surrender your life completely to Jesus Christ.'<sup>84</sup> Surrender of self to God, involving a definite decision of the will, became one of the central pillars of OG spirituality. In OG thinking, it was believed that the surrender of self led not to the deadening of a person's faculties, but to an awakening of them, 'with the infinite power of God behind them'.<sup>85</sup>

'Sharing' was another important element of OG and MRA practice. Buchman thought that people would find freedom from sin or answers to spiritual need through honesty; 'evil thoughts' would go from a person's life when that person had the courage to acknowledge their existence.<sup>86</sup> Many supporters of the OG and MRA claimed that it was through sharing their moral difficulties with others that they found release from them; and through the group therapy techniques used by Alcoholics Anonymous, this was one of the ways in which Buchman's thinking achieved its greatest influence.<sup>87</sup> However, like the idea of guidance, the concept of sharing caused controversy, some people claiming that the OG encouraged public confession or that

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<sup>76</sup> ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 15. See also Belden, 'Origins', p. 181.

<sup>77</sup> Signe Strong, 'Account of Working', p. 19. Some couples felt called to take a resolution of abstinence in marriage; see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 473-476; Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 99.

<sup>78</sup> Robin Mowat (ed.), 'Morris Martin: Day-book for 1940', OGAUK, File: 6.1197, Box 4, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> W.L.M.C. [William Conner], *Builder of a Global Force: Some remarks noted during meetings with Frank Buchman at Mackinac Island and Caux during the late Fifties* (n.d.), no page numbers.

<sup>80</sup> Transcript of Putney Heath House Party, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 130.

<sup>82</sup> Jim Baynard -Smith, 'Talk on Frank Buchman', October 2005, copy in possession of author, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Van Dusen, 'Apostle to the Twentieth Century', p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 85.

<sup>85</sup> Layman with a Notebook, *What is the Oxford Group?* (New York, 1937), pp. 41-51.

<sup>86</sup> Buchman, 'The Heart of Individual Work', and 'The Key to People's Lives', in 'WPWB', pp. 8, 12.

<sup>87</sup> According to the Swiss doctor, Paul Tournier, Buchman contributed to the growing use of group therapy; see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 153.

sharing could be misused by inexperienced people.<sup>88</sup> Buchman himself said in 1918 that he was not in favour of public confession, except where a sin itself had been public, in which case he thought a public acknowledgement was appropriate.<sup>89</sup> However, he often encouraged people to recount their stories of change in small groups or publicly, and in this sense he helped to forge a culture where people were very open about their inner lives; and in doing this he reflected an American cultural tradition running from the Puritans to modern-day confessional television.<sup>90</sup>

From the Anglo-American spiritual culture that he was shaped by, and from interpreting his own and other people's spiritual experiences, Buchman developed a sense of the patterns or rhythms by which people could rediscover the presence of God in their lives. There was a process that people could go through, he thought: listening to God: the acknowledgement or sharing of wrongs; restitution where appropriate; release from oppression; and the rediscovery of spiritual power. In addition, surrender of the will was a condition for getting guidance, as was obedience to God's leading, whenever it came; people who put their faith into action were most likely to retain a vital contact with God.<sup>91</sup> Once changed, a person needed to embark on trying to change others.<sup>92</sup>

In a general sense, there was a strong link in Buchman's mind between moral discipline and the experience of God's presence, between the moral and the spiritual. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Buchman did not like people to be obsessed with the outward observance of rules. Lean relates that he was inclined to say: 'Do anything God lets you'; and that he once observed: 'The Cross is an alternative to living by the book'.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, he consistently emphasised that moral discipline was a condition for experiencing the Holy Spirit.

## Guidance

Influenced by Meyer, Buchman came to believe that the Holy Spirit could guide him in great detail. Given a form in what was known as the 'quiet time', times of 'listening to God' became a central feature of OG spirituality.<sup>94</sup> In the OG and MRA, people were encouraged, even expected, to have regular morning quiet times, and to write down their thoughts. Frequently people sat in bed or in a chair to do so, sometimes with a cup of tea or coffee. Sometimes Buchman himself seems to have remained lying down – likely because he wanted to avoid waking roommates who might then prevent a quiet time taking place. As he explained in 1918/19, he would commence his quiet times by concentrating his thoughts in God. He would then ask God whether there was anything in his life that prevented him from experiencing God's presence,

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Henson, *The Group Movement*, p. 53-60; and Barbara Gwyer, 'Comments of an Educationalist', in R.H.S. Crossman (ed.), *Oxford and the Groups* (Oxford, 1934), p. 67.

<sup>89</sup> Buchman, 'The Heart of Individual Work', and 'The Key to People's Lives', in 'WPWB', pp. 8, 12.

<sup>90</sup> On this American tradition, see Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 5, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 139. Keene notes the similarity between Buchman's emphasis on 'surrender' and Henry Drummond's conception of obedience as the 'organ of spiritual knowledge', an idea that he (Drummond) derived from the English preacher F.W. Robertson. Keene also cites Phillips Brooks and Horace Bushnell as figures whose writings had a longer-term spiritual influence on Buchman; 'Doctrine of Guidance', pp. 2, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 45.

<sup>93</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 77. Buchman is also reported as saying that there was a difference between honesty and accuracy. Ken Noble to author (email), February 26 2010.

<sup>94</sup> For some early OG guides to the quiet time, see Howard J. Rose, *The Quiet Time* (nd – 1920s); Eleanor Napier Forde, *Guidance: What it Is and How To Get it* (New Haven, CT, 1927).

and seek God's mind on what He would have him do that day, in each case waiting for inspiration.<sup>95</sup> Quiet times involved a kind of spiritual planning for the day. 'The Holy Spirit will bring to your mind the Bible verse, or series of verses, that is to be your guide for that day', Buchman said at Lily Valley.<sup>96</sup>

Buchman once attributed the power that informed his work to these quiet times,<sup>97</sup> and for this reason it is important to explore how the voice of the Holy Spirit manifested itself to him in these meditations. In the first quiet time following his conversation with Meyer, the thought that came to Buchman was 'Tutz, Tutz, Tutz'. Tutz was the name of a student on the Penn State campus who was apparently keen on saying his prayers, while at the same time regularly getting drunk. Buchman felt what he called an 'insistent urge' that it was the right time to talk to Tutz about his spiritual life. When he approached Tutz, he suggested to him that he might talk with a friend of his about spiritual matters; Buchman often tried to connect people with others who he believed might be able to help them. The upshot in this case, according to Buchman, was that Tutz gave his life to Christ.<sup>98</sup> Buchman concluded that God could lead him very precisely to the people who were ready for spiritual help.

Buchman sometimes called this kind of specific guidance a 'luminous thought', a phrase that may have originated with Wright.<sup>99</sup> In describing the practice of the quiet time at Lily Valley, Buchman stated that a quiet time was an unhurried time where God could 'implant his thoughts' in a person's mind. Sometimes, it involved sensing the need to pray for particular people, and in others it meant resting in the presence of God. However, he also found that at times God would send a series of 'luminous thoughts' on things he wanted Buchman to do that day; God 'implants and rivets with luminous thoughts', he said.<sup>100</sup> Buchman described this kind of guidance over the years in various ways. He referred to the 'arresting tick' of God's guidance, and talked of people being 'prompted' by the Spirit;<sup>101</sup> and he also used the term 'hunches'.<sup>102</sup>

There is no sense that Buchman heard audible voices in these quiet times; rather his thoughts involved some kind of illumination, a sudden seeing or revealing of something. This was illustrated by the way in which he understood conviction of sin. 'If there has been some sin, the Holy Spirit just flashes a light on it, making it loom up in all its blackness,' was how one of his listeners reported his message.<sup>103</sup> The nature of Buchman's luminous thoughts is also illustrated by notes in his own guidance books. Sometimes, as the case of 'Tutz' indicates, he seems to have sensed a phrase or name repeatedly coming to him. The words often seem to have come in threes; his diary of 1921-22 contained phrases like 'Beware, beware, beware', or 'Stop, stop, stop'.<sup>104</sup> His guidance for Paul Campbell, a Canadian doctor who attended an MRA conference in Richmond, Virginia in 1942, was 'Stay, stay, stay'. Buchman meant by this that Campbell should stay and work with him; Campbell's

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<sup>95</sup> As recounted by Mrs C.S.Denning in 'Listening to God' (pamphlet, n.d.), attached to *The Letter*, 4, August 1928, pp. 5-6; Transcript of Putney Heath House Party, p. 80.

<sup>96</sup> Buchman, 'Victory in Christ', in 'WPWB', p. 27.

<sup>97</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>98</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 36.

<sup>99</sup> Stewart, *Life of Henry B. Wright*, p. 51. See also Mark Guldseth, *Streams* (Alaska, 1982), p. 90.

<sup>100</sup> Buchman, 'The Art of Listening', 'A Man who Understands', in 'WPWB', pp. 5, 21.

<sup>101</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 75.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Collis, *The Silver Fleece* (London, 1936), p. 106.

<sup>103</sup> See Mrs C.S.Denning, 'Listening to God', pp. 5-6.

<sup>104</sup> Buchman's Cambridge Pocket Diary 1921-1922, OGAUK, File 3.500.1., pp. 71. See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 99 and 102. Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 113.

own guidance, which initially differed from Buchman's, came round to coinciding with Buchman's, and he set aside his medical career for MRA work.<sup>105</sup>

The use of the adjective 'luminous' to describe the Holy Spirit's promptings indicates that Buchman and his contemporaries sometimes associated the promptings of the Holy Spirit with light. The idea that the Holy Spirit flashed a light onto a person's sins reflected the same idea. This association of the messages of God with the medium of light was also evident in Buchman's description of another of his experiences. When his mother died in May 1925, Buchman was travelling on a night train in India. He claimed that God had forewarned him of this at the time of death, and a day before he in fact heard the news; 'at the moment of death, the carriage suddenly seemed lit up, as bright as day,' he said.<sup>106</sup>

This was an unexpected experience; and clearly many of Buchman's thoughts were unpredicted. According to the memoirs of Ray Purdy, a Princeton student who went on to work with the OG, Buchman suddenly left a student camp meeting in 1919, stating that somebody nearby was very unwell; and indeed it turned out that there was student with an acute appendicitis who needed to be taken to hospital. However, even when these promptings were unexpected, they often made sense to Buchman in the context of what he was doing. So, according to another story recounted by Purdy, Buchman was once on a train from New York to Boston, and had a compelling thought to return to New York to talk with an anxious student with whom he had been talking about moral problems; and he arrived in time to prevent the young man from committing suicide. The thought to return to New York appeared in the context of his concern for the young man.<sup>107</sup>

Buchman's thoughts sometimes made sense in the context of the international situation; and in this sense his guidance can be interpreted as a kind of response to the issues and culture of the times. Riding a bicycle in Cambridge in May 1921, he had the dramatic thought that God would use him to play a part in changing the world. 'You will be used to remake the world', was the phrase that came to him, according to traditional MRA accounts. The idea kept returning to him, and he concluded that it was guidance from God.<sup>108</sup> Yet what at first glance might have seemed an unexpected thought, when examined more closely, was perhaps less out of the ordinary. The guidance came at a time when Buchman was very pre-occupied by the world's needs. Moreover, this kind of phraseology was widely deployed in Christian circles; for example, the American evangelist Billy Sunday, whom Buchman had worked with in 1917, talked in 1915 of the task of 'rebuilding the world' according to Christian ideas.<sup>109</sup>

The choice of the word 'Moral Re-Armament' to describe the OG's new campaign in 1938 seems to have reflected a similar pattern. According to Lean, the idea that the best response to the European military build-up would be a 'moral and spiritual rearmament' originated with the Swedish socialist author, Harry Blomberg;

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<sup>105</sup> Campbell never regretted the decision. See Paul Campbell, *A Dose of My Own Medicine* (London, 1992), pp. 33-34.

<sup>106</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 119.

<sup>107</sup> Purdy, 'My Friend Frank Buchman', p. 3, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 93; Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, p. 27. Whether this was Buchman's exact guidance is not fully clear. Corderoy cited an occasion when Buchman denied that this was his exact thought, but his evidence is not conclusive. See Oliver Corderoy, 28 April 1982, OGAUK, Box 3.9, File: 'Corderoy'.

<sup>109</sup> Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, p. 26; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 93.

and Pope Pius XI had talked in slightly similar terms.<sup>110</sup> The idea resonated with Buchman, and kept returning him in a vivid way, particularly during a visit to the German town of Freudenstadt in May 1938; so he interpreted it as guidance. Here, as in other episodes, it was the recurring nature of the thought, and its apparent relevance to the world's needs, that seems to have persuaded Buchman that the thought was from God.

On one occasion, Buchman's guidance seems to have been conveyed to him through the medium of natural surroundings. He was prompted to resign from Hartford Theological Seminary in 1922, while he was on a train journey, and when the wheels of the train seemed to say 'resign, resign, resign'. Buchman's emphasis on evangelism, and desire to help his students personally, had never fitted in easily at Hartford, even though he was backed by the Seminary's President, Douglas Mackenzie. Moreover, his activities often took him away from university.<sup>111</sup> In this context, his decision to resign was not surprising. Nevertheless, the decision itself seems to have been partly prompted by the sound of the train.<sup>112</sup>

From his own experience, Buchman concluded that guidance could be very accurate. The metaphor he used in later life was of picking up radio signals. In a speech of 1935, he said that anybody could pick up divine messages if his or her 'receiving set' was in order, and he later talked of the 'electronics of the spirit'. 'Definite, accurate, adequate information can come from the mind of God to the minds of men,' he said in 1935, adding that this was 'normal prayer'.<sup>113</sup> Buchman expected people to use guidance in planning for occasions. The Holy Spirit was 'intelligent enough' to tell people how many they should cater for, he said to a group of people preparing a conference in Holland in 1937.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, in listening to God, Buchman also expected people to use their minds. One of Buchman's early supporters, Geoffrey Allen, later the Bishop of Derby, observed in his OG-influenced book *He that Cometh* (1934) that in the fully-surrendered life what was right and what was reasonable coincided.<sup>115</sup> That would appear to have been Buchman's view, for he certainly expected people to use their minds. 'Let us have a hundred suggestions before we have a quiet time,' he said in Holland.<sup>116</sup> Evidently, he did not believe that guidance could take place in a vacuum. This is confirmed by other OG literature; an article in a Group newsletter of 1938 emphasised that guidance did not relieve people of the responsibility of thinking things through; it was not 'mechanical', but came through 'Reason, Evidence, Luminous Thinking'. Intriguingly, it was said in the same article that 'very clear leadings [came] seldom to most people', and that guidance was not so much a search for 'information' as 'illumination'.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 262. Spoerri, *Dynamic*, p. 122. Jarlert disputes Lean's account, downplaying the importance of Blomberg. See Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, p. 47. The key point, in this context, is that Buchman's guidance was shaped by contemporary culture and ideas.

<sup>111</sup> It was from his base at Hartford that Buchman did much of his evangelistic work in American colleges, as well as travelling abroad; Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', pp. 55-56.

<sup>112</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 96.

<sup>113</sup> Frank Buchman, 'God Calling the World' (1935), 'The Electronics of the Spirit' (1955), *RtW*, pp. 12, 219-225.

<sup>114</sup> See ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Geoffrey Allen, *He That Cometh*, p. 135; cited in Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 125.

<sup>116</sup> Cited in ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 5.

<sup>117</sup> Eister, *Drawing Room Conversion*, p. 165. 'Reason, Evidence, Luminous Thinking' was originally a phrase used by Russell; see *For Sinners Only*, p. 240.

The writer of this last article expressed himself more cautiously than Buchman sometimes did on the matter of guidance. This probably indicates that there were differences of emphasis in the OG fellowship about the matter. However, it may also indicate that Buchman's public statements about guidance should sometimes be seen more as 'sound-bites' designed to engage people's interest, than reflecting the full range of his thinking. Much of Buchman's guidance was in fact rather mundane. His guidance books often contained observations or commands of a general nature, such as 'Go in peace! All is well!', or 'Have no fear'.<sup>118</sup> 'A very great day' was often his guidance at the end of a day.<sup>119</sup> In addition, the actual content of the guidance people shared in the OG was often quite commonplace. Buchman would have concurred with the view of one of his supporters that guidance was a form of 'consecrated common sense';<sup>120</sup> indeed he once called MRA a 'hurricane of common sense' sweeping through the world, saying that the 'still small Voice of the living God' could be found in the midst of the hurricane.<sup>121</sup> The Scottish evangelist and scientist Henry Drummond, whom Buchman much admired, once said that God's light did not supersede, but illuminated men's thoughts,<sup>122</sup> and some of Buchman's experiences of guidance seem to have reflected that.

Buchman's luminous thoughts, then, did not seem unreasonable to him, even if sometimes they were unpredicted; indeed he once said that although faith transcended reason, it was not 'unreasonable'.<sup>123</sup> It also seems that although some thoughts came to his mind unexpectedly, they did not always appear in an obtrusive way. He once talked about guidance as 'something that descends', and referred to the 'quiet, modulated voice' of God.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps at times his guidance was little more than a 'becoming aware' of something. At Lily Valley, he referred to an occasion when he 'became conscious' that a certain person was in desperate need.<sup>125</sup> He certainly believed that thoughts from God often looked very ordinary. In a radio broadcast of 1936, he said: 'God can put thoughts into your mind. Have you ever listened for them? They may look like ordinary thoughts. But be honest about them. You might get a new picture of yourself.'<sup>126</sup>

Buchman evidently did not confine his quest for God's leading to quiet times. He was always seeking guidance in any situation, and he found God spoke to him 'constantly'.<sup>127</sup> At receptions and public occasions it seems he would wait for guidance as to what to do, sometimes giving the impression of being a little lost, before moving forward to meet people.<sup>128</sup> A Swedish reporter observed that he often

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<sup>118</sup> Buchman's guidance book September to November 1938, Geneva, OGAUK, File 6.0296, Box 8. 'How did Buchman become the man he was?', OGAUK, File 6.0785, Box 5.

<sup>119</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 405.

<sup>120</sup> Yates cited in Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, p. 55.

<sup>121</sup> Buchman, 'A Hurricane of Common Sense' (1960), pp. 260, 269.

<sup>122</sup> Henry Drummond, 'How to Know the Will of God', in *The Greatest Thing in the World and Other Essays* (Guildford, 1997), pp. 126-127.

<sup>123</sup> Martin, MSS Biography, chapter XI, p. 6. At Putney Heath, Buchman said he believed in knowing Plato, but that people had to know the Bible too. See Martin, MSS Biography, chapter XI, p. 8. See also Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 95.

<sup>124</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>125</sup> Buchman, 'A Man Who Understands', in 'WPWB', p. 18.

<sup>126</sup> Buchman, 'A Revolution to Cure a Revolution' (1936), *Remaking the World*, p. 40.

<sup>127</sup> 'With Woldemichael', in OGAUK, File 6.0785, Box 5; W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>128</sup> Jim Baynard-Smith, 'Notes of times with Frank Buchman 1952-56', copy in possession of author, Section 1, p. 3.

appeared to be ‘questing, at a loss, not to say helpless’.<sup>129</sup> It is also possible that Buchman had a private spiritual life that he said little about. Strong recalled that once in the early 1940s Buchman noted that he had been awake a lot during the night, saying: ‘You have no idea what goes on during those hours’. She thought the best way to describe Buchman’s relationship with God was ‘communing with the Spirit’.<sup>130</sup>

Listening to God sometimes simply involved a quest for guided thinking, rather than the production of clear ‘thoughts’. Reflecting on the abdication of Edward VIII in December 1936, Buchman wrote to Lean: ‘I am just writing to you as the spirit moves without, in any sense, feeling that it is a finished product, but sharing my mind with you.’<sup>131</sup> Moreover, Buchman did not attribute everything he did to guidance. Dining with A.J. Russell, author of *For Sinners Only* (1932), perhaps the most well-known book on the OG, Buchman observed that the second helping of food that he had just taken was not specifically guided: ‘I don’t pretend that every detail of my life is guided. For instance, I did not have guidance to take that asparagus. I was hungry, and I like asparagus. But if I am alert for guidance, it comes whenever I need it. And so it does to anybody.’<sup>132</sup> In addition, it seems that Buchman had lots of thoughts that never had a significant outcome. Van Dusen reported that he had heard Buchman claim 20-25 instances of guidance during a day, only a fourth or a fifth of which came to pass.<sup>133</sup>

It also seems that Buchman was sometimes less sure of what he should be doing than some accounts indicate. ‘I wish I knew what I ought to do’,<sup>134</sup> he wrote in his guidance in the late 1930s. In early 1940, he was somewhat depressed about the future of MRA, and where God wanted him to go. ‘I feel as if I were in a thick forest’, he said.<sup>135</sup> Some years later, he said that he could not get guidance as to how to reply to a letter from the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman: ‘What do I say to [S]chuman[?]. ... Have you any thoughts?’, he asked his friends.<sup>136</sup> ‘Buchman’s reality was that he wasn’t always orientated,’ recalled Oliver Corderoy, an aide to Buchman in the late 1940s.<sup>137</sup> Yet these occasions were probably rare. Lean recalled that he met Buchman in an anxious state only once in thirty years.<sup>138</sup>

Buchman’s critics pointed to the fact that the idea of guidance could easily be misinterpreted or misused; and there were plenty of cases of people who were influenced by the OG or MRA who concluded that they had made mistakes in this area.<sup>139</sup> For some, guidance may have become something of a ‘fetish’, even while others were enriched by the idea.<sup>140</sup> Popular guidance manuals, like Meyer’s *Secret of*

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<sup>129</sup> Herbert Grevenius, Swedish literary critic, cited in Garth Lean, *Good God it Works* (London, 1974), p. 63.

<sup>130</sup> Strong, ‘Account of Working’, p. 15.

<sup>131</sup> Buchman to Lean, December 11 1936, Library of Congress, Papers of Moral Re-Armament, Box 54, 1936-41.

<sup>132</sup> Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 112. Buchman nevertheless believed that there might be occasions when it did matter whether or not he had a second helping. He also said that he chose his postage stamps under guidance; Keene, ‘Doctrine of Guidance’, pp. 124, 145.

<sup>133</sup> Van Dusen, ‘Apostle to the Twentieth Century’, p. 15.

<sup>134</sup> Cited in Roly Wilson to Graham Turner, letter, 11 July 1976, OGAUK, Box 3.10, File: ‘W’.

<sup>135</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 174; Mowat (ed.), ‘Morris Martin’s Day-book for 1940’, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Oliver Corderoy, 28 April 1982, OGAUK, Box 3.9, File: ‘Corderoy’. Corderoy worked closely with Buchman from 1948-51, and for a time after 1956.

<sup>137</sup> Corderoy to Garth and Margot Lean, April 1982, letter, OGAUK, Box 3.9, File: ‘Corderoy’.

<sup>138</sup> Lean, *Good God*, p. 69.

<sup>139</sup> For examples of the impact of the OG on people, positive and negative, see Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 136 ff.

<sup>140</sup> Keene, ‘Doctrine of Guidance’, p. 122.



*Guidance*, warned of the problems. Buchman himself did not try to resolve such issues in a theological way, but he did propose various checks to ensure against self-deception. Writing in 1921 to Sam Shoemaker, a Princeton graduate and then Episcopalian minister who worked closely with him in the interwar period, he listed six tests of whether a person's guidance was genuinely from God or not: whether or not a person was unconditionally willing to obey God; the indication of circumstances; whether guidance was in keeping with absolute moral standards; the teachings of Scripture; the advice of friends who were also seeking guidance; and the teachings of the Church.<sup>141</sup>

Buchman was also not afraid to question people's guidance. To a woman who once approached him to say that she had had guidance to get married, he said abruptly: 'Stop having guidance'.<sup>142</sup> Sometimes, it was necessary to wait before following God's leading; using a maritime analogy, Buchman once said that just as a ship, on leaving harbour, had to wait for the removal not just of one, but of two warning signals before embarkation, so it was also necessary to wait for a second prompting before taking action.<sup>143</sup>

In general, it seems that Buchman used the term 'guidance' as an umbrella concept to refer to various kinds of spiritual experience and practice. In a helpful typology, Keene argued that people in the OG experienced guidance in four slightly different ways: the 'moral type' of guidance, which involved a person having a conviction of sin and then making restitution for it; the 'telepathic 'type'', which occurred when people had 'thoughts' that came unexpectedly; the 'right thing type', which involved a person finding the right thing to say or do to help another person; and the 'personal type', which occurred when someone had a personalised sense of direction about their lives that involved something that was not itself ethically right or wrong.<sup>144</sup> Buchman clearly had guidance that fitted all of these categories. The idea that the term 'guidance' was used to refer to various kinds of experience, and not just luminous thoughts, is reinforced by a First Century Christian Fellowship pamphlet of the 1920s which suggested that guidance came through the Holy Spirit by the following means: the Scriptures; Conscience; Luminous Thoughts; Cultivating the Mind of Christ; Bible reading and prayer; circumstances; reasons; and through Church, Group, or Fellowship.<sup>145</sup>

Some contemporary observers thought that OG theology was somewhat dualistic in that it seemed to assume a God that stood beyond the natural order, sending thoughts into people's minds from outside; and some of Buchman's own verbalisations of guidance perhaps reinforced this. Keene raised this issue in his doctoral thesis, noting the apparent dualism in some early OG texts, yet arguing that OG spirituality also contained a current of thinking in which both the transcendence and immanence of God were implied; and that this became more strongly emphasised during the middle of the 1930s.<sup>146</sup> Buchman's own experience of guidance, and the

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<sup>141</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 76. Also see Buchman, 'How to Listen' (1936), *RtW*, p. 36.

<sup>142</sup> See 'FNDB and how he dealt with people', OGAUK, File 6.0785, Box 5.

<sup>143</sup> Cited by Geoffrey Pugh in conversation with author, 13 November 2009.

<sup>144</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 155 ff. Keene used the word 'telepathy' in a metaphorical rather than a literal sense (p. 161).

<sup>145</sup> Howard Rose, *The Quiet Time*, p. 1. For the same list, see also Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 94.

<sup>146</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', pp. 79, 192, 305-324. Keene was countering the view expressed by Erdman Harris ('A Study of Three Contemporary Approaches to the Problem of Divine Guidance', Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1934), that OG spirituality was characterised by a sort of 'dualistic, evangelical, phenomenal supernaturalism'. According to Keene, Harris based his argument on early OG texts where God was depicted as sending messages into human minds from

fact that he received ‘luminous thoughts’ in the context of a larger background of regular prayer and communing with God, suggests that for Buchman himself God was both transcendent and immanent.

### Personal work

The focus of Buchman’s quiet times was often on how to help other people change and find a fresh experience of God. Buchman was always passionate about the subject of ‘personal work’, or ‘life-changing’, as he often called it in the earlier part of his life. It was here that the fourth of the ‘absolute standards’, love, found its focus.

Buchman’s interest in the subject was already evident when he was at Muhlenberg College;<sup>147</sup> and it was strengthened by his contact with the YMCA where the writings of Drummond, Mott, Wright and H. Clay Trumbull were particularly influential.<sup>148</sup> The first books inspired by Buchman’s work, Howard Walter’s *Soul Surgery* (1919) and Harold Begbie’s *Life-Changers* (1923), focussed particularly on this theme.<sup>149</sup>

Good examples of Buchman’s early thinking about personal work were some articles he published while doing missionary work in Asia (India, China, Korea and Japan) in the years 1915-1919. Writing in 1916 in the organ of the South India United Church, he emphasised that ‘individual work for individuals’ was Christ’s main method of work, and lamented that many Christian workers were so taken up with office and administrative duties that they had no time for personal contact with people. To ask people whether they were saved might help some people, but it would repel others; it was better to get a much more specific sense of a person’s needs.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, in an article that came out in China in 1918, Buchman drew attention to the way in which Jesus had crafted his message to meet the particular needs of individuals, and stated that the world was hungry for men and women who could understand others. What was needed was what he called ‘personalisation’ and ‘spiritualization’ in every department of Christian activity; he talked of a ‘personal work that leads to conversion’ and a ‘Spirit-directed contact of a live soul with a dead soul that opens the way for the living Christ to heal the sin-sick heart’. Too often Christian workers failed to diagnose the specific sin which kept a person from faith.<sup>151</sup> Buchman always thought that God could help people resolve very specific problems. ‘Don’t throw eye medicine out of a second-story window’ was a catch-phrase he sometimes used in emphasising the need for a more accurate diagnosis of a person’s troubles.<sup>152</sup> As the ‘Tutz’ episode at Penn State seemed to indicate, God could also reveal who might be most ready to respond. It was an idea that was central to Buchman’s spirituality until

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outside the natural order and human nature. This failed (according to Keene) to take into account the presence of another strain within the OG tradition, involving an acknowledgement of the immanence as well as transcendence of God, which was becoming more evident in the middle of the 1930s.

<sup>147</sup> See Buchman’s article in *The Muhlenberg*, November 1902; transcript in OGAUK, File:3.500.1.

<sup>148</sup> Daniel Sack, ‘Men Want Something Real: Frank Buchman and Anglo-American College Religion in the 1930s’, *Journal of Religious History*, 28, 3, 2004, p. 262. Henry Drummond, *The New Evangelism and Other Papers* (London, 1899); H.B.Wright, *The Practice of Friendship* (New York, 1918), and *Personal Evangelism Among Students* (New York, 1920); H.Clay Trumbull, *Individual Work for Individuals* (New York, 1901), and *Taking Men Alive* (New York, 1907).

<sup>149</sup> Howard Walter, *Soul Surgery* (Calcutta, 1919); Harold Begbie, *Life changers* (London, 1923).

<sup>150</sup> Buchman, ‘Personal Work’, *The United Church Herald*, February 1916, Vol VII, No. 11, p. 463.

<sup>151</sup> Buchman, ‘Personal Evangelism’, China Continuation Committee, *Bulletin*, 11, 30 April 1918, pp. 2-5, found in OGAUK, File: 3.500.1. The passages cited were Mark 8: 22-26 and John 4: 1-30.

<sup>152</sup> Van Dusen, ‘Apostle to the Twentieth Century’, p. 2.

the end of his life. 'I have been wonderfully led to those who were ready,' he said many years later.<sup>153</sup>

In this connection, Buchman seems to have had a very personal understanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit. He once said, in the late 1920s, that the Holy Spirit was not an 'electrical current' that could be tapped to work any machine a man wanted, but a Person working with other persons; a Person working in individuals as they faced up to absolute standards, and became sensitive to His action in the lives of others.<sup>154</sup> There was here a belief in the possibility of a relationship with the Holy Spirit; and Buchman evidently believed that he had such a relationship, for he once said that he came to know the Holy Spirit as 'light, guide, teacher and power'.<sup>155</sup> Such a connection with the Holy Spirit was, in Buchman's mind, essential if a person was to have the spiritual power to do individual work. There were plenty of people who did not have that power. Speaking at the Lily Valley conference, Buchman said that when he first arrived at Penn State, the Christians there had had the 'form of godliness but no power, like squirrels in a cage'.<sup>156</sup>

In his approach to personal work, Buchman strongly emphasised the importance of listening to the other person; talking too much was not the way to win people, he thought.<sup>157</sup> In addition, it was important not to approach people with pre-ordained ideas of how to help them. 'I have no method. With each person it is different. It is not really a method, it is a principle of life,' he once said.<sup>158</sup> Buchman also sought to avoid getting into doctrinal discussions. Wary of abstract questions, which he thought were often raised by people to cover up their real needs, Buchman generally avoided theology; it was suggested in OG teaching that it was better to let the Holy Spirit do the work in the other person than to get into arguments.<sup>159</sup> In this connection, Buchman encouraged people to try out the quiet time themselves. This was essential, because it gave people a practical opportunity for spiritual encounter - something for which rational argument was no substitute.

Buchman often told stories about people who had 'changed'; indeed Hunter argues that Buchman was a forerunner of the kind of 'story theology' advocated by Harvard theologian Harvey Cox.<sup>160</sup> Talking in 1922 of his influence among students in Oxford, where his work had begun to flourish, Buchman said: 'I didn't question their beliefs. I told them of the power of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>161</sup> He often related his own story of change at Keswick; and he cited other examples of where he had sinned and changed. He once said that he drove his own sins 'like a team of horses', because they provided entry points into the heart of the other person; honesty about himself could elicit honesty in the other person.<sup>162</sup>

Buchman once prayed to be 'super-sensitive' to people,<sup>163</sup> and he certainly seems to have had a gift for discerning people's needs or anxieties. Van Dusen even suggested that he was 'psychic' in diagnosing people's problems.<sup>164</sup> If this

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<sup>153</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 534.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in document starting 'In 1927 or thereabouts', in OGAUK, File 3.500 3/4.

<sup>155</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 171.

<sup>156</sup> Buchman, 'Interesting Sinners Make Interesting Saints', in 'WPWB', p. 15.

<sup>157</sup> Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, p. 100.

<sup>158</sup> Transcript of Putney Heath House Party, p. 49.

<sup>159</sup> Alan Thornhill, *Best of Friends* (London, 1986), p. 64; Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 39.

<sup>160</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 142.

<sup>161</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 101.

<sup>162</sup> Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, p. 91.

<sup>163</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 171.

<sup>164</sup> Van Dusen, 'Apostle to the Twentieth Century', p. 8.

discernment was a spiritual gift, it was also the result of a careful attentiveness to people. Like Drummond before him,<sup>165</sup> Buchman thought that people's behaviour revealed much about their interior struggles. In 1918, he said that people revealed their moral weaknesses by their inefficiencies, forced activities, criticisms, refusals, silences and antipathies. Some people, he said, would try to 'throw dust in your eyes when they begin to feel that you are on their track'. He also said that the relationship between 'heart, face and bearing' was an interesting study.<sup>166</sup> He would sometimes discern the needs of people through their voice. He once said to Rajmohan Gandhi, the Mahatma's grandson, who started to work with MRA in the late 1950s: 'Something is wrong with you. I could feel it in your voice'. Gandhi confessed that he was not in his best form, and that he had been trying to please people too much.<sup>167</sup> Begbie claimed that Buchman knew the facial indications of particular sins.<sup>168</sup>

Buchman's capacity to discern people's needs and anxieties may have arisen out of some kind of self-knowledge. He once said: 'When I have a particular temptation I assume that the person I am going to meet today will have that temptation.'<sup>169</sup> According to the British tennis player, 'Bunny' Austin, Buchman thought that the best insurance against temptation was to assume that one day he would encounter someone with the same problem and would need to be able to meet the person's need.<sup>170</sup>

There are plenty of stories that reinforce the idea that Buchman had a gift for seeing into people's lives. Recounting the way in which he had helped a young soldier get out of moral difficulties in the early 1920s, Buchman said: 'I knew I had to see this man. I knew, too, directly I saw him what his trouble was. ... I helped him by telling him what his trouble was.'<sup>171</sup> The directness was characteristic; Buchman evidently believed that it was sometimes necessary to state a person's problem or trouble very specifically. His meeting with the American actress, Anne Buckles, in 1957, illustrated the same approach, Buckles, who was on the point of divorce, but had told no one about it, came to see Buchman, and was met with the unprompted comment, 'Divorce is old-fashioned'.<sup>172</sup>

Many of the stories told about Buchman involved people finding a healing or restoration of broken relationships through his influence; partly inspired by his experience at Keswick, Buchman strongly emphasised the importance of people becoming free of bitterness. Intriguingly, the outcome of these healed relationships often seems to have been a renewal or discovery of contact with God. On the other hand, physical healing was not something that was associated with Buchman; while there were some similarities between the OG and MRA and the emerging charismatic

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<sup>165</sup> See Drummond, 'Spiritual Diagnosis', in *The New Evangelism*, pp. 191-210; see also Walter, *Soul Surgery*, p. 31. Belden ('Origins', p. 169) sees Buchman as indebted to what he calls Drummond's 'school' of evangelism. Drummond's initial influence on Buchman possibly came through Wright's *Will of God*, where he was generously quoted. In 1916, Buchman called Drummond the 'prince of personal workers'; see 'Personal Evangelism', *The United Church Herald*, p. 463. However, he also once said that Drummond's influence on him came as a 'confirmation' after his second visit to China in 1918; at that time he read Drummond's 'Spiritual Diagnosis', and it confirmed what he had been doing. See Buchman to 'Zab', April 8 1924, in OGAUK, File: 3.500.5.

<sup>166</sup> Buchman, 'A Man who Understands', in WPWB', pp. 20-21.

<sup>167</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 469.

<sup>168</sup> Begbie, cited in Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 38.

<sup>169</sup> Buchman, 'A Man who Understands', in WPWB', pp. 18. He made a similar point in Holland in 1937; see ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 18.

<sup>170</sup> Austin, *Frank Buchman*, p. 81.

<sup>171</sup> Begbie, *Life changers*, p. 142.

<sup>172</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 498-499.

movement, it was not in this area.<sup>173</sup> However, there is at least one story of physical healing associated with Buchman. Following his stroke during World War Two, he was having his shoes cleaned by a shoeshine boy following a visit to the hairdresser's. Strong recalled that 'as the man worked he kept looking up into Frank [Buchman]'s face. ... When it was all finished and Frank had said goodbye, the man looked at Frank again and said, "I was blind, but while I was working on your shoes I could see again".' Buchman apparently replied: 'God hasn't done that for me yet'.<sup>174</sup>

Buchman's letters to people often contained phrases like 'I have a thought for you', which meant that he felt he had a message of guidance from God to convey to the person. These messages could be challenging. Martin recorded him as saying: 'Some of you have never graduated from the school of collision. You never collide. Remember our work is the collision of a living with a dead soul.'<sup>175</sup> OG and MRA events were supposed to have the same challenging quality. One of Buchman's aides, Lawson Wood, recorded Buchman as saying, after a weekend in the Hague in 1937: 'It is not enough to give [people] a nice weekend. We had a sticky weekend. The Holy Spirit got tired of it.'<sup>176</sup>

Possibly the most famous of Buchman's 'collisions' involved his relationship with Peter Howard, who first encountered MRA in the summer of 1940 after co-authoring the famous anti-appeasement text, *Guilty Men* (1940).<sup>177</sup> However in the late 1940s, his relationship with Buchman became very difficult. According to Howard himself, he (Howard) had had some challenging thoughts in his quiet time, which he was resisting; and Buchman, sensing this, refused to work closely with him for some years. Howard, who was pretty thick-skinned, eventually responded to the treatment, in the sense that he decided to make a fresh decision to surrender his life to God. After the relationship was restored, Buchman said to Howard that he always had to be ready to risk his relationships with people.<sup>178</sup>

Here and elsewhere 'Buchman's collisions' had a positive outcome, but there were other examples where people rejected Buchman's corrective and moved away from his work. For example, in the early 1920s, following a quiet time with Robert Collis, a Cambridge University student who had helped to organise one of the first house parties, Buchman told Collis that he had got a 'clear message from God' that he should give up smoking; unfortunately, Collis had had the opposite guidance, and the difference led to a rift between the two men.<sup>179</sup>

If Buchman could be abrasive (one colleague suggested that life around him was a mixture of Christmas Day and Judgment Day<sup>180</sup>), he could also be very encouraging. His challenges to people were often intended to give them a positive vision of their lives and potential. In 1940 Buchman suggested to the former Russian Prime Minister, Alexander Kerensky that, in contrast to Marx, who had preached a doctrine of hate, he might adopt a 'doctrine of love' that could rebuild 'whole

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<sup>173</sup> See Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, pp. 258-260, and Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 240-242. Keene observes that the OG used the Book of Acts somewhat selectively, emphasising the parts of it that suggested examples of guidance, but ignoring stories of physical healing and speaking in tongues; Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 73.

<sup>174</sup> Strong, 'Account of Working', pp. 17-18.

<sup>175</sup> Mowat (ed.) 'Morris Martin: Day-book for 1940', p. 9.

<sup>176</sup> ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 19.

<sup>177</sup> See Cato, *Guilty Men* (London, 1940). The other authors were Michael Foot and Frank Owen.

<sup>178</sup> Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, pp. 92-96.

<sup>179</sup> Collis, *Silver Fleece*, p. 117.

<sup>180</sup> Cited in AR.K..Mackenzie, *Faith in Diplomacy* (Caux 2003), p. 27.

nations'.<sup>181</sup> Whether this was realistic was probably not important to Buchman; the point was to enhance Kerensky's vision of how his life might be constructively used. 'The art is to enlarge people's viewpoint', he once said.<sup>182</sup> Meeting Saburo Chiba, Chairman of the Security Committee of the Japanese Diet, in Tuscon USA in 1959, he said: 'I had one thought for you early this morning .... The world will walk into your heart.' He evidently thought that Chiba could become a more open and generous person, and found a creative way to say so. Buchman wanted people to focus on their potential rather than their weakness. So, responding in 1951 to news of a moral lapse by a German miner's leader Max Bladeck, who was involved in MRA, Buchman sent him a cable stating that the biggest sinner could become the greatest saint, and that he had faith in the 'new Max.'<sup>183</sup> The emphasis was not on Bladeck's sin, but on the new person in Christ that he could become.<sup>184</sup>

Sometimes Buchman's advice was unexpected; although neither a smoker nor a drinker, Buchman told a Swiss cigar manufacturer who wondered if he should stop making cigars that he should be making the 'best cigars' in the country.<sup>185</sup> It was not just socially important people who benefited from his encouragement. Buchman wrote on his card for the lift-operator at his hotel in Berlin in 1936, 'To Max – friend and fellow-fighter'.<sup>186</sup> What was perhaps distinctive about Buchman's approach to issues of career and calling was his constant reference to the wider national context for each person's vocation; he often interpreted people's callings in terms of the destiny of their country.

While it would be easy to say that Buchman had a unique gift for personal work, it is worth noting that he expected others to do the same. 'If you listen to God he will give you the secrets of men's lives', he said in China.<sup>187</sup> In the 1950s he lamented that 'too few' of his colleagues had a 'strategy to win people', and advised them to 'go straight into the difficulties' of the people they met, while warning against salesmanship and pressure; he said people should act 'with conviction', and in unity with their colleagues.<sup>188</sup> Buchman once said that if people were not winning others to Christ, then they were sinning in some way.<sup>189</sup> Yet, he was also aware that people sometimes had mixed motives for wishing to do personal work, and that, for example, an unhealthy desire for spiritual success could easily come into play.<sup>190</sup>

Buchman consciously tried to train others to do personal work. For example, he wrote to the New Testament scholar and Anglican, B.H. Streeter, who got involved in the OG in the mid-1930s, encouraging him to talk to a well-known Danish journalist who he thought was self-righteous and, though outwardly friendly, undercutting the OG in private conversations: 'Draw him out, and then give him a daring challenge .... Lure him along, then at the right moment land the fish.'<sup>191</sup>

According to Buchman, people could not grow spiritually outside of fellowship with others. Indeed, the OG itself can be seen as belonging to the tradition

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<sup>181</sup> Cited in Mowat (ed.), 'Morris Martin Day-book 1940', p. 6.

<sup>182</sup> Spoerri, *Dynamic*, pp. 181-82, 193.

<sup>183</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 507, 367.

<sup>184</sup> See Lean, *Good God*, p. 73.

<sup>185</sup> Campbell, *Dose of My Own Medicine*, p. 42.

<sup>186</sup> Lean, *Good God*, p. 66.

<sup>187</sup> Buchman, 'A Man who Understands', 'WPWB', p. 20.

<sup>188</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>189</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 179.

<sup>190</sup> Lean, *Good God*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>191</sup> Buchman to Streeter, 6 April 1935, OGAUK, File: 3.2154. The journalist was Aage Falk Hansen, religious editor of *Berlingske Tidende*.

of religious groups in history that stressed ‘fellowship created by the Holy Spirit’.<sup>192</sup> Buchman believed that fellowship was a key means of realising the Christian life; and a loss of fellowship had a spiritual cost, summed up in one of Buchman’s maxims: ‘The banana that leaves the bunch gets skinned.’<sup>193</sup> The Group as a school for training, a means of nurture, and an organ of strategy, was a vital component in the spirituality that Buchman promoted.<sup>194</sup> Buchman felt that sometimes the best way to help people was to let them participate in one of his campaigns. Community living, often in large homes owned by MRA, was another way in which people participated in the life of the movement, especially after 1945.

People who were involved in the OG or MRA were expected to ‘check’ their guidance, and generally be in fellowship with the team. Individualism needed to be countered; get a ‘group mind’ in your community, state and nation, he said in July 1939, noting that MRA itself was a ‘group mind’.<sup>195</sup> This was sometimes a cause for tension. As Jarlert notes, there was a difference between simply applying OG principles in one’s personal life, and living in full fellowship with Buchman’s international team. Buchman could clash with people who he felt were just doing the former, without submitting to Group discipline, and was suspicious of people who worked on their own.<sup>196</sup> Critics saw an authoritarian tendency here, suggesting that in the OG and MRA Buchman’s guidance predominated over that of others. While there is no evidence to suggest, as Driberg did, that the phrase ‘Frank’s guidance is always right’ was commonly used in the OG and MRA,<sup>197</sup> it was nevertheless true that Buchman’s judgement was decisive while he was alive. The reasons for this were obvious: he was the initiator of the movement; and he had gained a reputation as someone who was close to God.<sup>198</sup>

Yet Buchman seems to have rarely given direct advice. There were many occasions when he insisted that people should get their own sense of God’s leading. When in October 1949, Schuman asked Buchman whether he ought to retire from politics and enter a monastery, Buchman countered: ‘What in your heart, Mr. Schuman, do you think you should do?’ Buchman subsequently helped Schuman meet some of the emerging leaders of Germany.<sup>199</sup> Buchman frequently declared that people should depend on God rather than him.<sup>200</sup> For example, according to Jim Baynard-Smith, a young British assistant to Buchman in the 1950s, Buchman thought that the British were man-pleasers, and that they needed an ‘independent touch with

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<sup>192</sup> R.H.Murray, *Group Movements through the Ages* (London, 1935), p. 16. Murray puts the OG into the company of the Montanists, Franciscans, Friends of God, Jansenists, Methodists and Tractarians. For a sceptical Catholic view, associating MRA with heresies associating themselves with the Holy Spirit, see Léon Joseph Suenens, *The Right View of Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1954), p. 36-37.

<sup>193</sup> Clark, *The Oxford Group*, pp. 110, 128.

<sup>194</sup> Van Dusen, ‘The Oxford Group Movement’, p. 245.

<sup>195</sup> Buchman speaking at an MRA National Assembly in the US, July 30 1939, cited in Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 114.

<sup>196</sup> See the discussion of the Norwegian writer, Ronald Fangen, in Jarlert, *The Oxford Group*, p. 144. See also Belden on the Methodist minister Frank Raynor, who started his own magazine, *Groups*, independently of the OG; ‘Origins’, p. 383 ff.

<sup>197</sup> Driberg argues this point, on evidence derived from Henson, in *Mystery*, p. 198. According to Thornton-Duesbery, Driberg based his argument on a source that was known to be unreliable. See Thornton-Duesbery, *Open Secret*, p. 32.

<sup>198</sup> Lean, for example, thought Buchman was ‘more sensitive to God’s direction’ than anyone else he had met; Lean, *Good God*, p. 63.

<sup>199</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 27.

<sup>200</sup> See, for example, Anne Wolrige Gordon’s account of Buchman’s relationship with Howard in *Peter Howard: Life and Letters* (London, 1970), p. 205. See also Lean, *Good God*, p. 64.

God's Holy Spirit' which meant they never needed to defer to any group; such a touch with God would release 'latent powers' which were hidden under the cover of false reserve and attributed to national character.<sup>201</sup>

Buchman also often said that others might see situations more clearly than he, and that members of his team should question him if their guidance differed from his;<sup>202</sup> 'I must have people's correction,' he once insisted to Corderoy.<sup>203</sup> However, it is doubtful that many people gave it to him.

## Theology

Buchman was not primarily a theologian. His core teachings were not complicated, for he wanted to express a message that could be understood by anyone. At the same time, he did have theological assumptions. At one level, these were quite traditional or conservative. This is illustrated by his attitude to Scripture. His approach to the Bible was essentially pre-critical in the sense that he generally used it in a literal way, subordinating it to his evangelistic purposes. In his courses at Hartford, in which the Bible was often quoted, he often emphasised the role of the Bible in learning how to deal with individuals. However, he did not, according to a critic of his time at Penn State, read what modern scholars were saying about it.<sup>204</sup> Biblical authority was important to him. 'Whenever I depart from Christ or Paul I go wrong,' he said in the early 1920s; and he responded to a student who claimed that Plato was superior to the Bible by declaring that he found his norm in the Bible rather than Plato's *Republic*.<sup>205</sup>

The Anglican modernist H.D.A. Major praised the OG for avoiding 'blood theology';<sup>206</sup> and it is true that the OG's emphasis on experience meant that it sometimes appealed to churchmen who were drawn to psychological explanations of the atonement. In reality, though, as his Keswick experience indicates, Buchman was rather traditional in his understanding of the atonement, and he consistently made mention of it throughout his life. He liked quoting the verse from the First Epistle of John, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin';<sup>207</sup> and insisted that MRA took the reality of sin, and Christ as the cure for it, seriously.<sup>208</sup> He also wanted people to be guided by Christ, stating a few months before he died that he lived to make Jesus Christ 'regnant' in the life of every person he met.<sup>209</sup> Buchman often talked of the possibility of people having a very personal relationship with Christ; and his own consciousness of Christ as a presence in his own life was reinforced by particular experiences. For example, following a stroke in November 1942 - from

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<sup>201</sup> Baynard-Smith, 'Notes of times with Frank Buchman', Section 1, p. 3.

<sup>202</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 185.

<sup>203</sup> Lean, *Good God*, p. 75. See also Howard, *Frank Buchman's Secret*, p. 95.

<sup>204</sup> Clark, *The Oxford Group*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>205</sup> Martin, MSS Biography, chapter XI, p. 6. At Putney Heath, Buchman said he believed in knowing Plato, but that people had to know the Bible too. See Martin, MSS Biography, chapter XI, p. 8. See also Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 95.

<sup>206</sup> H.D.A. Major, 'The Group Movement', in F. Spencer (ed.) *The Meaning of the Groups*, pp. 124-126.

<sup>207</sup> For example, he said in 1951: "The Blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin." I don't know how it happens, but it works.' See Mowat (ed.), 'Morris Martin's Year-book for 1951', OGAUK, File 6.1197, Box 4, p. 3. Buchman often referred to the verse, 1 John 1. 7. See also Klaus Bockmühl, *Frank Buchmans Botschaft und ihre Bedeutung für die protestantischen Kirchen* (Bern, 1963); references in this article are to a translation by Manfred W. Fleischmann, entitled 'Frank Buchman's message and its Significance for the Protestant Churches', p. 27 (possession of author). See also Klaus Bockmuehl, *Listening to the God who Speaks* (Colorado Springs, 1990), pp. 5-9.

<sup>208</sup> Buchman, 'The War of Ideas' (1943), 'Is there an answer? There is' (1948), *RtW*, pp. 142, 176.

<sup>209</sup> Thornhill, *Best of Friends*, pp. 134-35.



which he nearly died - he said that he had seen the 'glory' of the other world: 'I saw the outstretched arms of Christ, and they were marvellous.'<sup>210</sup>

Buchman did not shy away from bringing this focus on Christ into the wider MRA culture, in spite of the fact that the vocabulary of MRA was less overtly Christian than that of the OG. Members of the MRA team were encouraged to bring people to what Buchman called a 'mature experience of Jesus Christ'.<sup>211</sup> A team gathering of 1951 concluded with the singing of the traditional evangelical hymns 'Rock of Ages' and 'Jesus, Lover of My Soul'.<sup>212</sup>

In Buchman's mind, there was also a link between Christ and the Holy Spirit, which reflected traditional Christian theology. In a speech on the 'War of Ideas' in 1943, Buchman declared that when people faced their sin, and found new life through the saving power of Christ, they would then experience the 'dynamic' of the Holy Spirit. This combination of features was, in Buchman's view, the 'programme for the Church today'.<sup>213</sup> According to the German theologian Klaus Bockmuehl, who saw Buchman's theology as thoroughly mainstream, Buchman's essential teaching lay in these three things: acknowledgement of sin as revealed by absolute standards; regeneration of mankind and the world through the Cross of Christ; and guidance by the Holy Spirit.<sup>214</sup>

Alongside the traditional aspects of Buchman's theology, there were also more liberal elements. His approach to evangelism involved addressing the conditions of non-belief in people, rather than trying to change their beliefs; once people had been freed from sin, belief would follow. Experience rather than doctrine was emphasised. There was little room here for apologetics - although within the wider culture of the OG and MRA, people were encouraged to read the Bible and other devotional books. Buchman's liberal side was also evident in his attitude to other faiths. Whereas Buchman evidently assumed that the recovery of belief in people from Christian cultures would normally lead them to Christianity, he treated people from non-Christian cultures differently, not expecting them to convert to Christianity, but emphasising a reinforcement of primary loyalties. So, at the Congress of Faiths in London's City Temple in 1937, Buchman said that the OG was not itself a faith but a 'fire through all the faiths', and that it never took people 'from faith to faith'.<sup>215</sup> It was to be a 'common denominator' for everyone, regardless of party, race, class, creed, point of view or personal advantage.<sup>216</sup> Indeed, in order to distance themselves from any one particular creed, MRA workers sometimes insisted that MRA was not a religious organisation as such.<sup>217</sup>

This openness to other faith traditions was increasingly evident after 1945, as Buchman tried to make his message as universal as possible. So, speaking in California in 1948, Buchman described MRA as the 'good road of an ideology inspired by God' upon which all could unite, saying that Catholic, Jew, Protestant, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Confucianist could all travel on this good road together.<sup>218</sup> A deep spiritual experience was open to anyone. 'Whether it is Jew or Gentile, democratic or Communist, it is an experience all can have,' he said in

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<sup>210</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 313.

<sup>211</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>212</sup> Mowat (ed.), 'Morris Martin's Year-book for 1951', OGAUK, File 6.1197, Box 4.

<sup>213</sup> Buchman, 'The War of Ideas' (1943), *RtW*, p. 144.

<sup>214</sup> Bockmuehl, 'Frank Buchman's message', p. 17.

<sup>215</sup> Buchman, 7.7.37, 'FNDB 1936-37', OGAUK, File: 3.500.8.

<sup>216</sup> Buchman, 'MRA - A National Necessity' (1939), *RtW*, p. 85.

<sup>217</sup> See, for example, Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 152.

<sup>218</sup> Buchman, 'The Answer to any "ism" - Even Materialism' (1948), *RtW*, p. 166.

1959.<sup>219</sup> He also stressed how different faith traditions could contribute to the world, citing verses from Isaiah and the Psalms to illustrate the ‘pristine contribution’ of the Jews,<sup>220</sup> and suggesting that the Moslem world could be a ‘girder of unity for all civilisation’.<sup>221</sup> From the Hindu tradition, he was an admirer of Gandhi, talking at one point in the 1920s of his ‘qualities of sainthood’.<sup>222</sup> Buchman also sometimes collaborated with people who had no religious affiliation. For example, in MRA’s work with industry after 1945, Buchman worked closely with the leader of the French textile unions, Maurice Mercier, who was outside any religious tradition.<sup>223</sup>

Buchman’s approach to other faiths was exemplified by an episode that was widely cited in MRA literature, involving the Muslim President of the Northern Territories Council of Ghana, the Tolon Na. Attending an MRA conference in 1956, the Ghanaian was asked by Buchman when he had last stolen something. He was so shaken by this direct question that he ‘prayed to Allah’ for help, and decided to put right as far as possible the dishonesties he had committed in his life since childhood.<sup>224</sup> In effect, the Tolon Na’s encounter with MRA encouraged him to take his Islamic faith more seriously. Buchman was certainly ready to draw inspiration from Islamic spirituality, where it seemed appropriate. This was evident in the way he cited a phrase from the Koran in his correspondence with the Muslim King Sa’ud of Saudi Arabia in the 1950s; Buchman wrote to Sa’ud in 1954, using the ‘good road’ metaphor which he had already used in the late 1940s, but which was also a widely-used image from the opening Sura of the Koran: ‘May your reign bring the unity and concord to nations that will remake the world, and may God guide us unitedly on the good road’.<sup>225</sup>

The roots of this open-minded attitude to other faiths partly lay in Buchman’s approach to personal work; his emphasis on spiritual practices rather than beliefs meant that his message could easily be adapted to non-Christians. Buchman also owed much to the attitudes and outreach of the YMCA, where Mott’s ecumenism was so influential; indeed Buchman’s work can arguably be interpreted as being an offshoot of the international ecumenism that Mott pioneered. There was considerable interest in Asian religion in the American YMCA;<sup>226</sup> and in its outreach into non-Christian cultures, the YMCA welcomed non-Christian participation, even if control remained in Christian hands.<sup>227</sup> Buchman built on, but went beyond this; and in places like India and Japan, MRA came to be run by non-Christians, even if there remained considerable European and American involvement.

Buchman’s openness to other faiths was arguably also the result of globalisation, both in the world and in the make-up of his work; indeed MRA itself can be seen as a kind of spiritual response to a more international society.<sup>228</sup> The

<sup>219</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 513.

<sup>220</sup> Buchman, ‘The Answer to any “ism” – Even Materialism’ (1948), *RtW*, p. 166.

<sup>221</sup> Buchman, ‘The Electronics of the Spirit’ (1955), *RtW*, p. 223.

<sup>222</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 120.

<sup>223</sup> Michel Sentis, ‘France and the Expansion of Buchman’s Faith’, in Mackenzie & Young (comp.), *Worldwide Legacy*, p. 63

<sup>224</sup> *Frank Buchman – Eighty* (London, 1958), pp. 113-114. See also Peter Hannon et al, ‘Seeds of Change for Africa’, in Mackenzie and Young (comp.), *Worldwide Legacy*, pp. 100-103.

<sup>225</sup> See Harry Almond, *An American in the Middle East* (Caux, 2009), pp. 106-107. Buddhists also grew interested in Buchman’s work. See Lean, *Good God*, p. 78.

<sup>226</sup> For example, Howard Walter was assigned to specialise in the study of Islam. See *Soul Surgery* (Oxford, 1932), p. 104.

<sup>227</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *World Service: A History of the Foreign Work and World Service of the Young Men’s Christian Associations of the United States and Canada* (New York, 1957), p. 432.

<sup>228</sup> Boobbyer, ‘Moral Re-Armament’, p. 234.

desire to appeal to as wide an audience as possible meant that from the 1930s onwards references to Christ became fewer in OG and MRA literature; and this was particularly true after 1945, as MRA expanded beyond its Christian heartlands.<sup>229</sup>

David Bebbington has argued that the OG's approach to evangelism was based on a strategy of 'maximum inculturation';<sup>230</sup> and it is true that the OG consistently sought to interpret Christianity in the light of contemporary culture. The same could be said of Buchman's attitude to non-Christian traditions: he wanted to re-express the heart of his own faith in language that could be understood by people from other religions. However, if 'inculturation' was here understood to have meant a tactic for the Christianisation of the non-Christian world, then Bebbington's interpretation would be wrong. There was an emphasis on Christ, certainly, but not on Christianity as such. There was also a sense in which Buchman believed Christians had something to learn from people with other beliefs. For example, talking about MRA's post-war outreach, he wondered if the Marxists, with their openness to new things and readiness to die for their beliefs, might be the ones to pave the way for a new dimension of moral and spiritual living.<sup>231</sup> What applied to the Marxists also applied to other faiths.

Buchman's spirituality sometimes aroused the suspicions of conservative evangelicals. He was accused, for example, for under-emphasising the doctrine of the atonement.<sup>232</sup> Some also thought that his ideas could be reduced to a kind of moralism, and that he promoted a natural theology.<sup>233</sup> From Buchman's point of view, however, there was a Christian logic to his thinking. The clue to his spirituality may perhaps be found in his experience at Keswick. In one of his accounts of the Keswick episode, Buchman described his experience of surrender by saying: 'I was the centre of my own life. That big "I" had to be crossed out.'<sup>234</sup> Buchman would often talk to his colleagues about the need for people to have an 'experience of the Cross', by which he meant something similar to what he had gone through: a 'crossing out' of the 'I' or ego, whereby God's will became paramount.<sup>235</sup> If the 'surrender' of self was taken as a central element in his Keswick experience, then it is possible to see how Buchman could view non-Christian faiths so generously; anyone could choose to surrender himself or herself to God, whatever their faith background.<sup>236</sup>

In one sense, MRA can be understood as Buchman's attempt to universalise his experience at Keswick. By talking of the Cross of Christ as an experience rather than a doctrine - the 'Cross of Christ lived in reality'<sup>237</sup> - he was stressing that it was not essential to be talking about Christ in order to be living in His power. During an OG campaign in Denmark in 1935, the Bishop of Copenhagen, Dr F.Fuglsang-Damgaard, questioned Buchman as to whether Christ had received sufficient

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<sup>229</sup> See on this Belden, 'Origins', pp. 307 ff.

<sup>230</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 235.

<sup>231</sup> Lean, *Good God*, p. 72.

<sup>232</sup> The Oxford Evangelical Fellowship, under the leadership of C.M.Chavasse, came down publicly against the Group in June 1932. See Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group Movement between the Wars', p. 501. Randall notes that the OG generally appealed more to liberal than conservative evangelicals in the inter-war period; see Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, chapter 8.

<sup>233</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London, 1986), p. 201. See also on this Bockmuehl, 'Frank Buchman's message', p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>235</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 111, 266, 388, 421, 448.

<sup>236</sup> Belden, 'Origins', p. 18.

<sup>237</sup> Buchman, 'The Wrong Way and the Right Way' (1959), in *RtW*, p. 257. See also Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 226 and Belden, 'Origins', p. 109.

emphasis in an OG meeting. Buchman responded by saying that when he had visited the Bishop the previous week, the Bishop had not told him that he loved his wife.<sup>238</sup> The message was that those who talked about Christ the most were not always those who loved him most.

Such episodes, and the examples of Buchman's engagement with other faiths, suggest that Buchman thought that a person could have an experience of the Spirit of Christ without converting to Christianity. The reach of the Kingdom of God was broader than the Christian Church as such, and was discernible by its fruits. Speaking to colleagues in the German city of Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the late 1940s, he said: 'The Kingdom of God is symbolic of a definiteness of experience directly observable by someone else, but not easily described. What is observable is a peace, a confidence, a recovery of freedom, and spontaneity of thought, of will and of nerve. It is not joinable. You have to experience it for yourself.'<sup>239</sup> Such an experience of the Kingdom of God, Buchman evidently thought, was something that could be had by non-Christians. Here Buchman's thinking was perhaps similar to that of the renowned Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, who talked of 'anonymous Christians' - although there is no evidence that Rahner and Buchman knew of each other. Buchman was implying that Christ's message could not be confined to Christianity, indeed that it could not be confined to formal religion.

Buchman's thinking on these matters was reflected in his attitude to the Christian churches. Buchman was sometimes uneasy with what he saw as the ecclesiastical priorities of the churches. In China in 1918, he clashed with the Western missionary community; and one reason for this was that he did not wish to work through exclusively ecclesiastical channels.<sup>240</sup> He probably thought that the Church in its traditional form was destined to pass away, for he had guidance in summer 1919 that a new order was coming in Christian work, the basis of which was to be a 'Holy Spirit directed life'.<sup>241</sup> He said in 1937 that the church of the future would be 'above confession'.<sup>242</sup> Attempts by the Church of England to draw the OG under its wing in the middle of the 1930s failed in part because Buchman did not want his work to become the property of only one group. The Holy Spirit could not be limited like that. To one proposal he objected that hitherto there had been no chairman except the Holy Spirit; indeed he once said that the Holy Spirit had been the founder of the OG.<sup>243</sup>

Although Buchman had a significant following in the Anglican Church, he also aroused considerable suspicion. This came into the open in 1955 when a working party of the Church of England's Social and Industrial Council reported that the movement was, amongst other things, weak in its theology, impervious to criticism, and utopian in its social vision.<sup>244</sup> It was a contentious document, though; the leadership of MRA thought that the working party had been prejudiced against MRA from the outset; and that it was given little chance to make its case.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> The Bishop was concerned that Christ had been mentioned only ten times. Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 226.

<sup>239</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 406-407.

<sup>240</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, chapter 7. See also Belden, 'Origins', p. 154.

<sup>241</sup> Cited in Belden, p. 257.

<sup>242</sup> Martin, MSS Biography, cited in Belden, 'Origins', p. 320.

<sup>243</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 184; Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 24.

<sup>244</sup> See *Moral Re-Armament: A Study of the Movement Prepared by the Social and Industrial Council of the Church Assembly*, 1955.

<sup>245</sup> See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 435-441. For Driberg's alternative view, see *Mystery*, chapter 13.

MRA's post-war relationship with Catholicism was also difficult, although the relationship improved during the pontificate of Pope John XXIII and the advent of Vatican II. Some Catholics saw MRA spirituality as at odds with Catholic teaching, often on the grounds that it was not rooted in the authority of the Church; there were fears that it was promoting religious indifferentism and syncretism.<sup>246</sup> At the same time, many Catholics came to, and were impressed by MRA conferences. During the war, Buchman said that the Catholic Church had the teachings of Christ in 'the fullest conception'; yet he said at the same time, 'Give the Catholics the Holy Spirit', perhaps believing that there was some lack of it there.<sup>247</sup> He probably became more attune to the importance of spiritual authority in the Catholic tradition over time.<sup>248</sup> Buchman was not insensitive to the sacraments of the Church, even if he did not emphasise them. To one supporter, who was seeking the kind of 'experience of the Cross' that he frequently emphasised, Buchman recommended Holy Communion.<sup>249</sup>

Buchman's later thought suggests that he was more concerned with the spiritual reconstruction of nations than the building up of the Church. Yet he certainly understood himself to be doing the work of the Church in the broadest sense; indeed Bockmuehl argued that his entire life consisted of 'dialogue with people within the Church'.<sup>250</sup> He was primarily interested in whether or not a particular church was in practice under the control of the Holy Spirit, whether or not it was spiritually alive. He sometimes felt that the 'Church was an enemy of the Church'.<sup>251</sup> The church was meant to be revolutionary; 'I believe with all my heart in the Church, the Church aflame, the Church on fire with revolution,' he said in 1943.<sup>252</sup>

Buchman often stressed that he did not wish the OG or MRA to compete with the Church; and many theologians and thinkers of different denominations found this convincing.<sup>253</sup> At the same time, there was a certain ambiguity in Buchman's thought here, for he once also said that the OG contained the spirit of the Church. Wood recorded him as saying: 'I believe in going to church on Sunday morning. That's what we want to bring back to Britain again.' Yet he said at the same time: 'The Oxford Group is the church.... The church fathers said that the church is where the Holy Spirit is. Don't let us lose that.'<sup>254</sup> Clearly from that perspective, Buchman's network was indeed the Church to the extent that it was a vehicle for the Holy Spirit. In practice, OG and MRA activities did for some people perform some of the functions

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<sup>246</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 435-445, 517-518. See Suenens, *Right View*; and Clair Dinger, 'Moral Re-Armament: A Study of its Technical and Religious Nature in the Light of Catholic Teaching', PhD (Washington, DC, 1961).

<sup>247</sup> Buchman, 'Sayings', in 'Material on FNDB', OGAUK, File: 6.0785. On Buchman's dealings with the Catholic Church, see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 441-445.

<sup>248</sup> Sentis, 'France and the Expansion of Buchman's Faith', p. 63.

<sup>249</sup> Cited in Strong, 'Account of working', p. 7. This was likely in 1940, at the Lake Tahoe retreat.

<sup>250</sup> Bockmuehl, 'Frank Buchman's message', p. 13.

<sup>251</sup> Mowat (ed.) 'Morris Martin: Day-book for 1940', p. 4.

<sup>252</sup> Buchman, 'The War of Ideas' (1943), *RtW*, p. 144.

<sup>253</sup> See, for example, B.H.Streeter, 'Professor Barth v. The Oxford Group', in *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, April 1937, p. 146; and the comments by Professors Karl Adam and Werner Schöllgen (both Catholics) cited in the 'Supplement' to *Remaking the World*, pp. 375, 378, 383. The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel stated that there was no attempt at conversion since MRA was not a religion or a sect; see his 'Letter of Personal Reassurance', in Gabriel Marcel (ed.), *Fresh Hope for the World* (London, 1960), p. 7.

<sup>254</sup> ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 13.

of a church.<sup>255</sup> On the other hand, Buchman's supporters continued to attend their own denominations, and in this sense the movement did not become sectarian.<sup>256</sup>

As regards the discipline of theology, Buchman took the view that theologians needed the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives if their theology was to be right. In 1932, in a letter to the Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, who was involved in the OG in the 1930s, Buchman said: '[I]f the Holy Spirit is once in control of our thinking as well as of our lives, it is remarkable how intelligent He is in giving our theology its correct perspective.'<sup>257</sup> He evidently believed that Brunner's spiritual experience lagged behind his thinking; for a couple of years later he suggested to him that he had given people a 'safe theology' as a compensation for a lack of 'victorious personal faith' in his own life. He wrote – referring to his own experience at Keswick – that it was only a deeper experience of the Cross that had healed his own resentment; 'a correct theology [had been] of no avail'.<sup>258</sup>

Buchman thought the best way to help theologians was to avoid getting drawn into theological discussions with them, but to get them into action. For example, when he took Streeter - whose theology was more liberal than his - with him on a tour of Denmark and Sweden in 1935, but paid little attention to the pamphlets the scholar offered him, concentrating instead - according to their chauffeur - on the 'inspiration of the new Streeter' than his academic theories.<sup>259</sup> Buchman thought people's thinking evolved as their perspective expanded. He once wrote to Theophil Spoerri that there was a hesitancy in his spiritual life arising out of a lack of exposure to people who controlled world situations.<sup>260</sup>

Hunter, with justification, called Buchman a 'mystical pragmatist'.<sup>261</sup> The first issue for Buchman was whether people had a living experience of God, rather than whether their thinking was theologically correct; thus theology was for him an instrument in the service of individuals rather than the measure of action.<sup>262</sup> This did not mean dispensing with traditional doctrine, but rather crafting its expression to meet the particular needs of individuals and groups; as Buchman wrote to Spoerri: 'I think it is a question of what a person can swallow. That does not minimise the full value of food.'<sup>263</sup> In spite of the presence of clearly conservative features in Buchman's outlook, it was not surprising that a theologian such as Karl Barth, with his emphasis on an objective theology, was suspicious of the OG.<sup>264</sup>

## Strategy

Buchman's concept of guidance, and how the Holy Spirit worked, involved an emphasis on strategic outreach. In OG and MRA spirituality, the quiet time was not

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<sup>255</sup> See on this Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, pp. 104-107.

<sup>256</sup> See on this Belden, 'Origins', chapter xiv.

<sup>257</sup> Buchman to Emil Brunner, October 14 1932, cited in Jarlert, p. 73.

<sup>258</sup> Buchman to Brunner, 31 August 1934, OGAUK, File: 3.0282. Pierre Spoerri (son of Theophil) has suggested that Buchman did not fully understand Brunner's theology, and that the differences between the men arose out of a misunderstanding. Pierre Spoerri to author (email), March 19 2010.

<sup>259</sup> Kenaston Twitchell, 'Oxford', in OGAUK, File: UK 4.3.1., pp. 8-9

<sup>260</sup> Buchman to Theophil Spoerri, December 11 1936, OGAUK, File: 3.2012.

<sup>261</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 92.

<sup>262</sup> See on this Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, pp. 73, 94.

<sup>263</sup> Buchman to Spoerri, December 11 1936, OGAUK, File: 3.2012.

<sup>264</sup> Karl Barth, 'Church or Group Movement?', *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, January 1937, pp. 1-9. For more on Barth's and Brunner's views of the OG, see Karl Barth, *Karl Barth-Emil Brunner: Briefswechsel; 1916-1966* (Zurich, 2000). See also Brunner, *The Church and the Oxford Group* (London, 1937).

supposed to be focussed exclusively on personal concerns, but was meant also to be a gateway into looking at the needs of people and the world from the Holy Spirit's perspective. Buchman believed that believers should have a strategy, or more correctly that the Holy Spirit had a strategy that they should cooperate with. So, in the 1930s, he regretted that certain church leaders seemed to lack a sense of the 'strategy of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>265</sup> Such a strategy would certainly have a national impact. 'Tolerate no activity that does not have national significance', he said to his team in 1937.<sup>266</sup> To stop at the level of personal revival was 'inferior thinking'.<sup>267</sup>

A central question for Buchman and his team was where God wanted them to concentrate their forces in order to have maximum global impact.<sup>268</sup> The fellowship of the OG and MRA was thus itself understood to be an instrument in a Spirit-led strategy. MRA was meant to be a 'force' that was 'trained and on the march', that had the answer to 'individual and national selfishness,' he said in 1947.<sup>269</sup> Buchman also called it a 'super-force', by which he meant the 'force of an all-powerful God working through men'.<sup>270</sup> The kind of organisation that Buchman had in mind was evident in a trans-Atlantic broadcast that he gave a decade earlier, where he talked of a 'supernational network of live wires across the world to every last man, in every last place, in every last situation'. Leadership would be given 'not through one person, but through groups of people who [had] learned to work together under the guidance of God'.<sup>271</sup> As Theophil Spoerri noted, Buchman foresaw small teams of people living under the guidance of God, and acting as 'formative cells of history'.<sup>272</sup>

The strategic outreach of the OG and MRA was thus to be characterized by small teams of people operating under God's guidance in each individual country, as well as in collaboration with other national teams across the world in a more international endeavour. The OG was to be a 'world organism' that took the needs of nations and answered them with 'men'.<sup>273</sup> Buchman also wanted his fellowship to have the 'leisure to do the thinking adequate for nations', and to be 'apostles of a new world order'.<sup>274</sup> In what was a hugely-ambitious project, 'vast armies' of people who were conscious of God's direction for their life and country needed to be mobilised.<sup>275</sup> In this connection, Buchman sometimes launched campaigns to bring a moral and spiritual message into the heart of particular countries, with an international team brought in for the purpose, notable examples being those in Norway and Denmark in the mid-1930s, Germany in the late 1940s, and India in 1952-53.<sup>276</sup>

Buchman also saw the family unit as a potential weapon in this task. He thought that an effective marriage should be a creative partnership, and that husbands and wives should ideally embrace the same calling, even if their roles were different. People in his work believed that God could guide them as to whom they should marry,

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<sup>265</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 244.

<sup>266</sup> ALW, 'Verbatim Notes', p. 19.

<sup>267</sup> Buchman, 'Revival, Revolution, Renaissance' (1938), *RtW*, p. 54.

<sup>268</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 24.

<sup>269</sup> Buchman, 'God is the Answer to the Modern Confusion that Dogs us' (1958), *RtW*, p. 157.

<sup>270</sup> Buchman, 'Moral Re-Armament and National Defence' (1940), *RtW*, p. 129.

<sup>271</sup> Buchman, 'A Revolution to Cure Revolution' (1936), *RtW*, p. 40.

<sup>272</sup> Spoerri, *Dynamic*, pp. 175 ff.

<sup>273</sup> Buchman, 'Humanity at the Crossroads' (1938), *RtW*, p. 66.

<sup>274</sup> Mowat (ed.) 'Morris Martin: Day-book for 1940', p. 11.

<sup>275</sup> Buchman, 'Listening Millions' (1939), *RtW*, p. 120.

<sup>276</sup> See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, chapters 20, 32, 36. For an account of the tour of India, see Michael Henderson, *Ice in Every Carriage* (Caux, 2010).

and they often sought Buchman's advice on this and related issues.<sup>277</sup> In his work with individuals, Buchman often tried to address difficulties in family relationships. He warned that disunity in the home was a source for disunity in the nation; but a new home, rooted in a unity under God, could be a source of inspiration to many. 'Out of one new home can come a hundred new homes', he suggested in 1938; every home could be a centre for 'life-changing'.<sup>278</sup> Couples who worked full-time with MRA were often expected to be as mobile as single people. This was a practice that was important for the spread of MRA, but which sometimes led to difficult choices for parents with children.<sup>279</sup>

The practice of hospitality, something that Buchman was always enthusiastic about, also had a strategic role. Buchman's father had run a hotel in Pennsburg, and Buchman inherited from him the instincts of an hotelier. When Buchman gave parties, they were always personalised in the sense that the food and entertainment were carefully prepared in the light of who had been invited. According to Alan Thornhill, an Anglican chaplain who worked with Buchman in Sarasota, Florida in the winter of 1943-44, each party had a distinctive purpose: 'The arrangement of the room, the seating of the guests, the special food, the special song, the last arrival from an army camp or from Canada, all had their part in the total impact.' Parties were as 'carefully planned as an invasion', while being 'free and flexible'; and the aim was that people would leave with their spirits lifted, and experiencing a 'new freedom'. Impressed by what he saw, Thornhill talked of how a community might be 'wakened' and a nation 'touched' simply through the impact of a tea-party.<sup>280</sup> Buchman once said that the secret of his success was 'a tremendous attention to detail';<sup>281</sup> and certainly his approach to hospitality illustrated his emphasis on getting little things right.

Buchman took the view that believers could be led by God to 'key people' in any given situation. Already at Penn State, Buchman felt that God had guided him to three people who helped to move the college in a Godly direction; recalling his years at Penn State, Buchman said: 'What a strategy God gave – it was people, people, people.'<sup>282</sup> A similar approach was deployed in China, where Buchman had been engaged by Mott and Sherwood Eddy to do personal work amongst the ruling elite as part of a wider YMCA strategy to reach Asia.<sup>283</sup> The 'key person' strategy then became central to OG and MRA ways of working. The underlying philosophy was summed up in a sentence that Buchman used at the launching of MRA in 1938: 'When man listens, God speaks, when man obeys, God acts, when men change,

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<sup>277</sup> Russell, *For Sinners Only*, pp. 275-276; see also Campbell, *A Dose of My Own Medicine*, pp. 67-69.

<sup>278</sup> Buchman, 'Chaos against God' (1938), 'A Birthday Talk to East London Families' (1938), in *RtW*, pp. 79, 77, 50.

<sup>279</sup> Some families who worked outside of their own country, or travelled with MRA campaigns, left children in the specially-created Caux School. For a discussion of some of the issues arising see Mary Lean and Elisabeth Peters, *Stories from the Caux School* (Caux, 2009).

<sup>280</sup> Alan Thornhill, 'Statesmanship Home-Made', in File 'Alan Thornhill 1942-52', Moral Re-Armament Papers, Library of Congress, Box 349, p. 2. Thornhill was fellow and chaplain of Hertford College, Oxford from 1931 to 1936. See also Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 322-323, 505, 508. For more of Thornhill's views on Buchman, see his pamphlet, *The Significance of the Life of Frank Buchman* (London, 1952).

<sup>281</sup> See Alan Thornhill, *The Significance of the Life of Frank Buchman* (London, 1952), p. 13.

<sup>282</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 36, 510.

<sup>283</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 123; Belden, 'Origins', p. 155; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 50. Keene stresses the importance to Buchman of his work with Eddy. In China he was specifically tasked with trying to do personal work among the elites; see Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 48.



nations change.’<sup>284</sup> Jarlert called it ‘social personalism on a national and supranational level’. It was a way of working that could be adapted to any situation.<sup>285</sup>

In this context, Buchman did not formally campaign on issues, but rather sought to release spiritual power in particular people in the belief that their new creativity could influence society; the challenge was to find ‘convinced personalities’ and ‘men of conviction’ in each situation.<sup>286</sup> ‘God-prepared instruments are there. One step enough for me’, Buchman once said.<sup>287</sup> These instruments were likely to be people, so the aim was to discern who specifically they might be. For example, visiting Morocco in 1954 at a time of rising nationalism, Buchman talked of ‘mining for men’ and ‘quarrying for leadership’.<sup>288</sup> He would always prepare carefully for his meetings with people; and try to get guidance beforehand regarding how he should approach them, and what, if anything, he should say that could help or inspire the other person.

There are many examples of Buchman trying to influence situations through the agency of changed individuals. In 1935 he made a concerted attempt to bring a spiritual dimension to the League of Nations (which he complained was not ‘God-arched’<sup>289</sup>) through the Norwegian parliamentarian, Carl Hambro, who was twice President of the League of Nations Assembly. In Britain the Conservative peer Lord Salisbury was the focus of some of Buchman’s initiatives; and Buchman was also in contact with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, hoping that he might become ‘the authoritative voice for the spiritual rebirth of the Empire’.<sup>290</sup> During the Norwegian-Danish dispute over Greenland in 1935, Buchman worked closely with the Norwegian journalist Fredrik Ramm. Later, in promoting Franco-German reconciliation after 1945, Buchman worked closely with the former French resistance leader, Irène Laure.<sup>291</sup> The same approach was applied, less successfully, in Nazi Germany. Attempts to meet Hitler failed; but Buchman met Himmler on a couple of occasions through the influence of a woman involved with the OG, evidently hoping that a ‘change’ in Himmler might affect the politics of the country.<sup>292</sup>

After 1945, much of MRA’s strategy was devoted to bringing a moral and spiritual component to the reconstruction of Europe. Buchman developed good connections with the leadership of Germany and France, notably Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schuman, and MRA played a not insignificant role in post-war trust-building through the MRA conference centre in Caux, Switzerland.<sup>293</sup> It was not individuals on their own that Buchman was interested in. He wanted to see people working together. In 1949, he wrote to Minister-President of Germany, Karl Arnold, stating that if the leaders could gather and get a ‘common mind under God’, then He could bring answers to the intractable problems the country faced.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Buchman, ‘Moral Re-Armament’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 46.

<sup>285</sup> Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, pp. 65, 37-39.

<sup>286</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>287</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>288</sup> Mowat (ed.), ‘Morris Martin: Brown File, Travels from 1948’, OGAUK, File 6.1197, Box 4. p. 1

<sup>289</sup> Buchman, ‘The War of Ideas’ (1943), *RtW*, p. 144

<sup>290</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 246, 249 ff, 236. On Baldwin’s links with the OG, see Philip Williamson, ‘Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933-40’, *English Historical Review*, 115, 462, 2000, p. 619 ff.

<sup>291</sup> Mackenzie, ‘Introduction’, p. 34.

<sup>292</sup> See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 238.

<sup>293</sup> See Luttwak, ‘Franco-German Reconciliation’, pp. 37-63; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, chapter 33.

<sup>294</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 377.

With his focus on individuals and their potential to change countries, Buchman spent a lot of time simply trying to meet the right people. He was always grateful for new opportunities for outreach. After attending a funeral in 1951, his guidance was: ‘You were right in going to the funeral. It let loose a host of openings. God be praised.’<sup>295</sup> On some occasions, he even encouraged his team to travel First Class in order to maximise opportunities for networking - although that was not typical, because Buchman was generally very careful with money.<sup>296</sup>

Buchman also sought to be in the right place at the right time. During the UN conference in San Francisco in 1945, Buchman took a table near the door of the restaurant of the Fairmont Hotel, where many delegates were staying, and met people over lunch or in passing. In the course of time, friends at the conference arranged for an MRA play about industrial relations, *The Forgotten Factor*, to be put on as part of the diary of events.<sup>297</sup> The strategy at the conference thus evolved out of a fluid social situation, where Buchman could follow the leading of the Holy Spirit – as he interpreted it. Good timing and obedience to the Spirit were linked, in Buchman’s mind. In January 1956, following mass at Milan Cathedral with his team (350 of them), and a visit with Archbishop Montini (the future Paul VI), Buchman declared: ‘The God-timed plan of the Holy Spirit is always effective.’<sup>298</sup>

Some have suggested that Buchman was too strongly impressed by social status, and had a tendency to name-drop or exaggerate the importance of his contacts.<sup>299</sup> However, while Buchman was clearly interested in reaching influential people, it is doubtful that engaging with the rich and famous was itself a primary aim. His purpose, as he saw it at least, was to be led by the Spirit to the people God wanted him to meet. He often stressed that very ‘ordinary’ people could have a part in changing the world; and indeed his outreach sometimes came through the conviction of people with no particular social standing. For example, the OG’s work at the League of Nations, which culminated in campaigns in Geneva in 1935 and 1938, originated in the conviction and initiative of an elderly Scottish widow in 1931.<sup>300</sup>

Buchman also sought to challenge people in authority in a way that runs counter to the idea that he was trying to curry favour with them: for example, in 1918, in a conversation with the Chinese nationalist leader, Sun Yat-Sen, he directly challenged Sun over his recent divorce and relations with women; ‘[Buchman] was the only man who told me the truth about myself’, Sun is once supposed to have said.<sup>301</sup> Similarly, in 1935, following an OG campaign in Norway, Buchman wrote to Hambro, suggesting that he made a deeper commitment of his life to God.<sup>302</sup>

There were leaders whom Buchman showed no desire to meet. For example, he responded to a suggestion that he should meet British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden by stating: ‘It is not our job to help lame dogs over styles’. Before the outbreak

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<sup>295</sup> Buchman ‘Guidance’, 21 April 1951, OGAUK, file: 6.0785.

<sup>296</sup> Van Dusen, ‘Apostle to the Twentieth Century’, p. 13.

<sup>297</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 328; Mackenzie, *Faith*, pp. 49-55; A.R.K.Mackenzie, transcript of speech at Caux, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, possession of author. Mackenzie was a member of the British delegation in San Francisco. Alan Thornhill, *The Forgotten Factor* (London, 1954). During negotiations over Trusteeships, *The Forgotten Factor* impressed the Philippino delegate, General Carlos Romulo.

<sup>298</sup> Baynard-Smith, ‘Notes of times with Frank Buchman’, Section 3, p. 1.

<sup>299</sup> Driberg, *Mystery*, pp. 42, 181. For a recent discussion (from a Dutch perspective) of the problem of exaggeration and the issue of reaching ‘key people’, see Hennie de Pous, *Reaching for a New World* (Caux, 2009), pp. 46, 49.

<sup>300</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 215-216.

<sup>301</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 57; Howard, *Frank Buchman’s Secret*, p. 32.

<sup>302</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 224.

of the Suez Crisis in 1956, he warned that the inability of Eden and others to ‘handle people’ was inflaming Middle Eastern politics. He evidently thought that a character weakness was the underlying problem, for he called him a ‘defeated man’.<sup>303</sup> Whether this view was based on some information about Eden’s life, or simply on the basis of an instinct about him is not clear. He sometimes reacted to people at a gut level. At the San Francisco conference in 1945, he passed Alger Hiss in the corridor, and told his team to avoid him; Hiss was then general secretary of the UN Conference on International Organisations and later convicted of being a Soviet spy.<sup>304</sup>

Buchman emphasised to his colleagues that what he saw as the forces of evil had a strategy too. Concerted opposition on a world scale could be expected, he said in 1956, as MRA’s work had a global outreach; it reflected the ‘effectiveness of the working of the Holy Spirit’. For example, he thought - rightly - that Driberg was often instrumental in mobilising hostility to MRA. So, he thought, probably on the basis of instinct rather than direct evidence, that Driberg was in some way responsible for the Social and Industrial Council Report on MRA of 1955. Driberg was a ‘clever article’, he said privately in the run-up to the publication of the report; Church people were ‘duped’ by him. However, he added that he would be ‘confounded’ by the working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>305</sup>

In Buchman’s view, a strategy was not something that could be exactly mapped out in advance. He once said to a woman whose life was planned out months ahead: ‘How can you say you’re a Christian and know in advance exactly what you are going to do? Where is the opportunity for the leading of the Holy Spirit?’<sup>306</sup> The challenge was to let God run things rather than to be in control oneself. It was also a matter of drawing on God’s strength rather than one’s own. He told a young Swedish woman who was spiritually exhausted that her feeling of emptiness gave Jesus an opportunity to act in her life.<sup>307</sup> Buchman once said that great advances were often preceded by a feeling of helplessness: ‘Again and again before a great advance I have found that God makes me feel [helpless], so that I never forget he does everything, and I do nothing.’<sup>308</sup>

Dependence on God also related to questions of financial security. Like some other evangelists, Buchman took the view that ‘where God guides, He provides’;<sup>309</sup> and after his resignation from Hartford in 1922, he lived without a salary, depending mainly on gifts from individuals, some of them wealthy, to do his work. If an initiative was of God, he thought that money would be given to support it; and he sometimes embarked on a journey or project without knowing where all the money would come from to support it. Talking of one of the OG trips to South Africa in the late 1920s, he said that although the team had booked their passages, there was no money to pay for them until twenty-four hours before the ship set sail, and that the money had then come in as a ‘spontaneous gift’.<sup>310</sup> Buchman wanted people to engage in actions that would throw them into dependence on God, rather than aim at what seemed humanly achievable. Writing in 1955 to MRA’s assistant treasurer in the US, Gilbert Harris, who advised stopping construction work at MRA’s conference centre

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<sup>303</sup> Baynard-Smith, ‘Talk on Frank Buchman’, p. 5; ‘Notes of times with Frank Buchman’, Section 1, p. 6; Section 3, p. 5.

<sup>304</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 178; Archie Mackenzie to author, February 2010.

<sup>305</sup> Baynard-Smith, ‘Notes of times with Frank Buchman’, Section 2, pp. 2-3.

<sup>306</sup> Austin, *Frank Buchman*, p. 68.

<sup>307</sup> Lines from Tolpady’s ‘Rock of Ages’; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 472.

<sup>308</sup> Cited in Howard, *Frank Buchman’s Secret*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>309</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 21.

<sup>310</sup> Cited in Lunn, *Enigma*, p. 24.

on Mackinac Island, Michigan, on the grounds that the money had run out, Buchman suggested that he lived in the dimension of what needed to be done, rather than what could be done: 'I want you always to help me live at the place where I rely not on what I have but on what God gives.'<sup>311</sup>

In some ways, the OG and MRA reflected the 'faith missions' tradition in missionary history, in that they were inter-denominational organisations which did not make public appeals for money.<sup>312</sup> At the same time, Buchman developed a network of friends who could be called on to give money when needed, thereby constructing what was effectively - according to Sack - a parachurch institution. Solicitations for money, mainly to the wider MRA fellowship, became more organised after 1945.<sup>313</sup>

Buchman's strategies often evolved from one event to another in an unplanned kind of way. Episodes that began in a small way sometimes spiralled into something larger. For example, a three-month long training exercise at Lake Tahoe in 1940, which turned out to be important in fostering of an American and worldwide MRA network, began when Buchman was offered a five-room cottage to have a break; others joined him, staying in near-by accommodation, and soon a few hundred people were involved.<sup>314</sup> MRA outreach was often the result of Buchman's friendships with people rather than planning as such. For example, it was out of Buchman's good relationship with Schuman that the MRA work emerged in Morocco in the 1950s.<sup>315</sup>

There was often a sense of urgency in Buchman's thinking. This was very strong in the late 1930s. In 1938, in a famous speech in Visby, on the Swedish Island of Gotland, he said that he was interested in how to save a 'crumbling civilisation'.<sup>316</sup> He had guidance in late 1940 that the next six months were going to be critical for the history of the world. At the same time, he also sensed that many of his team lacked the same sense of concern, warning them: 'You don't get the urgency of world events - they don't move you.'<sup>317</sup>

Alongside the urgency, Buchman had enormous confidence in what God wanted him or MRA to do. 'Denmark will be shaken' was his concept for the work in the country in 1935.<sup>318</sup> 'You will change the tide of the thinking of the world', was his thought in March 1951. A few months later, in the run-up to the year's conferences in Caux, he had guidance that God would use him 'mightily' and envisaged a 'mighty movement of God's Holy Spirit'. He felt God saying to him: 'The statesmen will come to you. Adenauer, Schuman, Kraft, the President of Switzerland, Marazza, de Gasperi. You will have a gathering [at Caux] where they can guidedly find the answer to Europe.'<sup>319</sup> It did not exactly work out that way: for example, Schuman did not come to Caux until 1953; and Alcide de Gasperi, Italian Prime Minister 1945-53,

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<sup>311</sup> Buchman to Gilbert Harris, December 15 1955, cited in Hunter, pp. 150-151. Also on finance, see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 98, 197, 341, 425.

<sup>312</sup> A tradition often associated with the missionary to China, Hudson Taylor. I am indebted to Ian Randall for this insight. See Randall, *Transforming Keswick*, p. 106.

<sup>313</sup> See Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, pp. 58-61, 132-133.

<sup>314</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 202.

<sup>315</sup> Boobbyer, 'Moral Re-Armament in Africa', pp. 230-232.

<sup>316</sup> Buchman, 'Revival, Revolution, Renaissance' (1938), *RtW*, p. 53.

<sup>317</sup> Mowat (ed.) 'Morris Martin: Day-book for 1940', p. 11, 1.

<sup>318</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 226.

<sup>319</sup> Buchman 'Guidance', in OGAUK, File: 6.0785, 7 and 8 June, 1951.

never came to Caux while in office.<sup>320</sup> Nevertheless, it reflected Buchman's sense of expectation about how God might use the MRA work; and Buchman's touches with the leadership of Europe were indeed impressive.

The same kind of confidence can also be found in Buchman's guidance during the MRA tour of India in 1952/3, and in particular regarding the Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru, whom Buchman first met during a world tour in 1924. Buchman thought God had a specific role for his work in India, and in his quiet time felt Him giving him ideas about what strategy to adopt, and how to reach Nehru: 'I will lead you forth in Delhi as I led you years ago, and I will work through you mightily. . . . [Nehru] will commit to you his strong right arm. . . . Build up constructive personalities who can handle the situation everywhere.'<sup>321</sup> Here, as Lean notes, there was little direct correlation between Buchman's guidance about Nehru and what actually happened to Nehru – even if there is modest evidence that at the end of his life Nehru talked more about the need for moral and spiritual standards in the country.<sup>322</sup>

The fact that Buchman's guidance was often not borne out in practice reinforces the sense that Buchman did not always understand guidance as a set of precise instructions to be carried out – even if at times he stressed the possibility of very accurate guidance. One of Buchman's aides, Michael Barrett, suggested that the underlying role of Buchman's guidance in these situations was to provide a sense of God's 'assurance'; and they also reflected his optimism about what God could do.<sup>323</sup>

Another side of Buchman's sense of strategy was his adaptability. This, of course, applied in his work with individuals, where he was always seeking to adapt his message to the person he was talking to. However, it also applied to his more public statements. Buchman believed in being alert to the mood of the time, and coming up with ideas or slogans which spoke to it; Martin suggests that although Buchman was no speaker, he had a gift for coming up with memorable phrases.<sup>324</sup> It also applied to his understanding of the tasks of MRA itself, which evolved over time. For example, Buchman called for 'moral re-armament' because he felt that the concept offered an alternative to war; after the outbreak of war, he presented MRA as a vital component in national defence;<sup>325</sup> and in 1943, he described it as an ideology; and this can be seen as a response to the ideological war of that decade.

MRA's methods of working also evolved. As Sack observes, MRA 'regularly recreated itself' in response to changing circumstances.<sup>326</sup> The OG initially spread through small groups and house parties (some of them very large). In 1940, Buchman turned to the mass meeting as a way of publicising his message in the USA, still hoping that there might be an alternative to a world war. When that failed, he turned

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<sup>320</sup> Ole Bjørn Kraft, the Foreign Minister of Denmark, was an admirer of MRA; the President of the Swiss Confederation in 1951 was Eduard von Steiger; Achille Marazza, prominent Italian Christian democrat. See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 443.

<sup>321</sup> Baynard-Smith, 'Notes of times with Buchman', Section 1, pp. 2, 5. For details of Nehru's tea with Buchman at Jaipur House, illustrating Buchman's approach to hospitality, see Henderson, *Ice*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>322</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 416, 424.

<sup>323</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 423.

<sup>324</sup> Martin to author, April 4 2005.

<sup>325</sup> Buchman, 'Moral Re-Armament and National Defence' (1940), *RtW*, pp. 124-132.

<sup>326</sup> Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 54.

away from large-scale initiatives, and sought to build-up his own network.<sup>327</sup> The conference centres on Mackinac Island and at Caux, founded in 1942 and 1946, became centres for a larger international work after the war ended. After 1945, theatre, often in the form of travelling musical shows - a kind of story-telling to large numbers - became a central weapon of outreach; and those who responded were then invited to attend conferences. The medium was constantly being adjusted to the message.

The expansion of MRA brought with it new organisational challenges. Buchman's attitude to organisation was perhaps not unlike his attitude to doctrine; he thought it could easily become restrictive, if it was not rooted in spiritual life. 'Growing life will burst the bonds of organisation. Life can't be poured into old bottles,' he once said.<sup>328</sup> This likely went back to his experience of the *hospiz* at Overbrook, where he sensed that the trustees of the charity failed to engage with human need in their endeavour to make their venture economically viable.<sup>329</sup> In 1919, he warned people against becoming 'job-centric' rather than 'man-centric', saying that organisation made people like 'white mice in a whirling cage'.<sup>330</sup> He said in the early 1940s that he wanted to create a movement that was the 'outcome of changed lives, not the means of changing them';<sup>331</sup> and at the end of his life, he tried to engender a fresh experience of the Holy Spirit in colleagues who he felt had become movement-minded and encased by ideological form.<sup>332</sup> Sometimes, perhaps, Buchman's suspicion of organisation was a worry about a certain kind of mentality, rather than organisation as such, for MRA's larger campaigns could not have been run without an element of administration.

From an organisational point of view, the OG and MRA were indeed unusual in that they operated without statutory obligations, regulations and membership fees. In practice, however, the OG and MRA did develop more typical organisational features, as people gave the movement money or property that had to be managed. In different countries the organisation was registered slightly differently according to local charity laws. Buchman was uneasy with this process. Perhaps he did not foresee some of the administrative challenges that running a large movement would entail.<sup>333</sup> Buchman's actual leadership style changed over time too. This was partly for health reasons; his stroke in 1942 left him very dependent on others, and his views of the work and the world were increasingly mediated by his entourage. In addition, the expansion of the movement made it more difficult for him to be involved in all aspects of decision-making.<sup>334</sup>

The tension between people being free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and the institutionalisation of the work was not fully resolved by the time Buchman died in 1961, and it was a dilemma for his successors. Thornhill suggested that MRA

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<sup>327</sup> Martin, *Always*, pp. 91-95. For a photographic and documentary account of Buchman's wartime work in the US, see Arthur Strong, *Preview of a New World: How Frank Buchman helped his country move from isolation to world responsibility* (Arvika, Sweden, 1994).

<sup>328</sup> Spoerri, *Dynamic*, p. 104.

<sup>329</sup> See also Buchman, 'My Experience with the Cross'.

<sup>330</sup> Buchman writing in *Korea Mission Field*, March 1919, cited in Belden, 'Origins', p. 255-256.

<sup>331</sup> Following his stroke in 1942, Buchman felt Jesus showing him that he been going wrong by 'organising a movement'. However, his approach to organisation had always been unconventional. See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 313. The OG was sometimes presented as an 'organism' rather than an organisation; see Spoerri, *Dynamic*, p. 92.

<sup>332</sup> As reported by Garrett Stearly in Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 526.

<sup>333</sup> Martin, *Always*, p. 102-103.

<sup>334</sup> Campbell, *Dose of My Own Medicine*, p. 64.

was comparable to a Catholic order like the Jesuits (although mixed);<sup>335</sup> and certainly Buchman had sought to create a more fluid, fellowship-based network - arguably like a kind of far-flung monastic community - than a formal organisation as such.

## Political Thought

If, in Buchman's mind, MRA was a vehicle for changing the world, it was also an idea; in fact there was sometimes a blurring of the distinction between moral re-  
armament as an idea and MRA as a movement in his thinking.<sup>336</sup> In 1943, at a time when Buchman was searching to articulate his message as a 'world philosophy', he started to call MRA an 'ideology'. Initially sceptical about the term 'ideology', he came round to it on the grounds that it implied a comprehensiveness of commitment that the word 'religion' had lost. From this point on, he started to present MRA as an ideological alternative to fascism and communism; there is that 'great other ideology which is the centre of Christian democracy - Moral Re-Armament', he said in 1945.<sup>337</sup> MRA was to be 'democracy's inspired ideology'.<sup>338</sup> He had in mind a 'moral ideology' in which God's will was the ultimate authority and the basis for change was consent; and he contrasted this with a 'materialistic ideology', in which a man, party line, or human will predominated, and where force was the foundation for change.<sup>339</sup>

Although Buchman started to use the word 'ideology' in the early 1940s, it did not really reflect a change in his underlying message. As one commentator noted, when Buchman used the term ideology he simply meant a faith that could inform the whole thinking and living of a man or a people.<sup>340</sup> Buchman talked of ideology as meaning the Holy Spirit ruling the 'hearts and lives of men';<sup>341</sup> and he also said that people needed to make 'Jesus Christ' their ideology.<sup>342</sup> 'Ideology' was thus essentially a new metaphor for ideas that Buchman had always promoted.<sup>343</sup> Not all Buchman's team were enthusiastic about the term, but it had the advantage of emphasising MRA's global agenda, and readiness to compete in the world's battle of ideas.

The larger political and international elements in Buchman's vision were already evident in 1915, when he was encouraging people to 'think in continents',<sup>344</sup> and again while working with the YMCA to reach the Chinese leadership. A concern for nations was also evident in 1921, when he said the Treaty of Versailles had been too drastic, and talked of the need to bring a moral and spiritual dimension to the reconstruction of Germany.<sup>345</sup> The global concern grew stronger in the late 1920s, when OG initiatives in South Africa had an impact on ethnic divisions in the country, and during a visit to South America in 1931, when Buchman became increasingly

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<sup>335</sup> Recollections of Alan Thornhill (yellow paper), July 1976, p. 14, OGAUK, Box 3.10, File: 'T'. Martin suggests that if it had grown from Catholic roots, MRA would likely have become institutionalised as a lay order. See Martin, *Always*, p. 189.

<sup>336</sup> Martin, *Always*, p. 109-110.

<sup>337</sup> Buchman, 'The World Philosophy' (1945), *RtW*, p. 146.

<sup>338</sup> Buchman, 'The Good Road' (1946), *RtW*, pp. 150, 155.

<sup>339</sup> Henderson, *Ice in Every Carriage*, p. 74.

<sup>340</sup> Yates, 'Dr Frank N.D. Buchman's Contribution', p. 7.

<sup>341</sup> Buchman, 'The World Philosophy', (1945), *RtW*, p. 146.

<sup>342</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>343</sup> See Martin, *Always*, p. 110.

<sup>344</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 44.

<sup>345</sup> Buchman to Gerhard Heine, 14 December 1921, cited in Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, p. 45.

concerned about the growing appeal of communism.<sup>346</sup> Subsequently, this national and international focus became Buchman's central concern. Unconvinced, for example, that Alcoholics Anonymous was meant to be his sphere of operation, he once told Shoemaker, that his (Buchman's) task was to deal with drunken nations not drunken individuals.<sup>347</sup> Buchman wanted to apply his interpretation of the drama of the individual soul to the life of nations as a whole: nations, like individuals, could be freed from their 'prison cells of doubt and defeat.'<sup>348</sup>

Buchman probably had a natural instinct for politics; otherwise it is hard to comprehend his influence and connections in the political arena.<sup>349</sup> Yet he did not have a political programme as such, and described MRA as non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-political, and beyond geographical division, racial distinction, party differences and class conflict.<sup>350</sup> In fact, the OG was in many ways 'anti-political' in the sense that it was looking for a non-political way of addressing policy issues.<sup>351</sup> Buchman's work was political only in the sense that it aimed to bring change to politicians; it was not so much about solving problems as changing lives.<sup>352</sup> This is illustrated by the fact that, although the OG and MRA became known for their work towards reconciliation, Buchman denied that this was their formal aim; he said in 1933 that the OG's aim was 'never to mediate' but to 'change lives and unite them by making them life-changers'.<sup>353</sup>

Buchman thought any political system could be used for good or ill; the leader of a dictatorship as well as a democracy, if he turned to God and obeyed Him, might also have a healthy impact on his country; and that is what Buchman hoped might happen to the fascist dictators.<sup>354</sup> Buchman thus saw the origins of evil at a personal rather than a systemic level. It would be wrong to assume from this that Buchman thought that all political systems were of equal merit. During the Abdication crisis in Britain in 1936, he wrote to a Swiss friend that the King's advisers supported an 'archaic' system.<sup>355</sup> However, he did not see systemic change as his priority, believing that changes in individuals were more important. It was an outlook that led some commentators to believe that the OG lacked a social philosophy and failed to engage seriously with social evil.<sup>356</sup>

The controversy surrounding Buchman's attitude to Nazism arose in particular from an interview he gave with William Birnie of the *New York-World Telegram* in August 1936, in which he stated: 'I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defence against the anti-Christ of Communism'.<sup>357</sup> Buchman's critics accused him of sympathy with Nazism; for example, Driberg and George Seldes, the editor of the American leftist newsletter *In Fact*, condensed the statement into the phrases 'Thank Heaven for Hitler' and 'Thank God for Hitler', which

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<sup>346</sup> See on this Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 132 ff.

<sup>347</sup> Martin, *Always*, p. 103.

<sup>348</sup> Buchman, 'Pattern for Statesmanship' (1938), *RtW*, p. 60.

<sup>349</sup> Clark argues for Buchman having 'political ability' in the sense that he had traits that would have made him a good politician, organiser and strategist. Clark, *The Oxford Group*, p. 98.

<sup>350</sup> Buchman, 'A Trained Force' (1941), 'Moral Re-Armament and National Defence' (1940), *RtW*, pp. 133, 132.

<sup>351</sup> A point made by Sack; see *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 89.

<sup>352</sup> Eister, *Drawing Room Conversion*, p. 13; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 269.

<sup>353</sup> Buchman to Brunner, 23 December 1933; cited in Pierre Spoerri, 'Reconciliation comes from Change', in Mackenzie and Young (comp.), *Worldwide Legacy*, p. 305.

<sup>354</sup> See Belden, 'Origins', p. 275, and Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. p. 239.

<sup>355</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 255.

<sup>356</sup> John C. Bennett, *Social Salvation* (New York, 1935), pp. 53-59.

<sup>357</sup> Driberg, *Mystery*, p. 68; Hunter, *World-Changing*, p. 51-52.



Buchman thereafter became associated with.<sup>358</sup> Buchman never repudiated the interview, even though the press reports of it were apparently out of keeping with its real tone. However, if Hunter is right, his aim was not to express any sympathy with Nazism, but to reach out to Hitler in order to try to change him - and this would have been consistent with his approach to other world leaders. Anybody could change, he thought, Hitler not excluded, and with that in mind he wanted to say something positive about him. He was wary of the communist threat, and thus picked on Hitler's anti-communism as something to build on.<sup>359</sup> He also seems to have thought that a humbler tone from the West, indicating that Western countries also needed to change, might help to disarm Hitler.<sup>360</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr, a strong critic of the OG, thought Buchman was naïve about the Nazi regime;<sup>361</sup> and Buchman himself said in 1940 that Hitler had 'fooled' him - mentioning in particular the fact that he had hoped Nazi Germany would be a bulwark against communism.<sup>362</sup> There is a case for saying that he was 'somewhat intrigued' by Nazism in the mid 1930s,<sup>363</sup> but he never endorsed Nazi ideology. While fascism's call for an organic and unified society might have appealed to him, his social vision was not nationalistic, anti-semitic or violent.<sup>364</sup> Moreover, he was not as naïve as it first appeared. Prior to one of his meetings with Himmler, at the time of the Berlin Olympics, he told a Danish journalist that Germany had come under the influence of a 'terrible, demoniac force' and that an urgent challenge to it was needed; and he mentioned in particular the need for an 'anti-demoniac counter-action' in the countries surrounding Germany.<sup>365</sup>

In general, Buchman thought or concluded that the European dictatorships exploited the worst tendencies in people. 'Communism and fascism are built on a *negative* something, on divisive materialism and confusion,' he said in 1943; and materialism was the 'spirit of anti-Christ' breeding anarchy, corruption and revolution.<sup>366</sup> In his view, their essence lay in their materialism and relativism. Communism, he thought, was rooted in what he called 'moral Bolshevism', which he understood to mean materialism and a revolt against God and absolute moral standards. In the 1950s, responding to a woman who said that the bad moods and moral compromises that were a feature of her marriage were as bad as communism, Buchman replied, 'As bad as Communism? They are Communism.'<sup>367</sup> In this sense, Buchman interpreted communism as a moral condition rather than as a political creed as such; it was an idea that advanced by exploiting people's moral weaknesses.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Driberg, *Mystery*, chapter 4; *In Fact*, September 4 1944, p. 3.

<sup>359</sup> Hunter, *World-Changing*, p. 59.

<sup>360</sup> Hunter states: 'Buchman's aim was not appeasement but genuine change on both sides'; Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 45.

<sup>361</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York, 1940), p. 162.

<sup>362</sup> Mowat (ed.) 'Morris Martin: Day-book for 1940', p. 4.

<sup>363</sup> On some occasions, Buchman apparently drew attention to some positive aspects of the German regime; Hunter, *World Changing*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>364</sup> See Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 94.

<sup>365</sup> See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 238. The OG campaigns in Norway and Denmark in 1935 can be interpreted as being part of such a strategy.

<sup>366</sup> Buchman, 'The War of Ideas' (1943), *RtW*, p. 141; see also 'All the Moral Fences are Down' (1961), *RtW*, p. 277.

<sup>367</sup> Peter Howard, 'Buchman, Eisenhower, Khrushchev', in *Gazette de Lausanne* Special Supplement, OGAUK, 'File: 'PDH up to 1959'.

<sup>368</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 238, 148; Buchman, 'All the Moral Fences are Down' (1961), *RtW*, p. 277.

At the same time, Buchman was often very critical of the West. Howard's satire on the Cold War, *The Vanishing Island*, which was the instrument for an international MRA mission in 1955-56, presented the West as corrupt and in need of change; and it led to rumours in Washington that MRA was somehow pro-communist and anti-American.<sup>369</sup> Although this was far-fetched, Buchman felt the democracies were prone to the same materialism - he called materialism the 'mother of all "isms"'<sup>370</sup> - which beset the dictatorships. The US, he thought, was destroying herself with materialism.<sup>371</sup> He also thought that sexual immorality was laying the basis for revolution in the country in the form of broken homes and the decay of culture; indeed, he warned that impurity was a weapon in the hands of subversive groups.<sup>372</sup> The importance of purity for national life was always a central theme in Buchman's thought.

Britain, too, came in for criticism. For example, Buchman was worried by what he saw as British imperial arrogance.<sup>373</sup> MRA's message on decolonisation was that all sides, including the old imperial powers, needed to change; and the lively presentation of this in film, theatre and personal testimony prompted some concerns in places like Kenya that MRA was anti-imperial.<sup>374</sup> This was an exaggeration, but Buchman and his team certainly expected the British, as well as African nationalists to change. In 1956, in comments that revealed a strong visual sense,<sup>375</sup> Buchman compared Britain to a lake with 'pure, spring water' in the middle, but 'dead wood' around the edge. The country needed a 'drastic farmyard cleanup', he said; and God was giving her a 'last chance to choose the right road'.<sup>376</sup>

Buchman wanted to see democracy permeated by the kind of spiritual values promoted by MRA; indeed it needed a spiritual dimension if it was to be viable at all.<sup>377</sup> 'Inspired democracy' was what was needed.<sup>378</sup> At Visby Buchman suggested that the 'popular practice of democracy' - which he described as people doing whatever they liked in the way they liked - was not true democracy at all. A growing number of people were unwilling to acknowledge the 'inner authorities' on which democracy depended, he said. The OG was a better pattern of democracy: 'There you have true democracy. You don't do as you please; you do as God guides.'<sup>379</sup> 'Theocracy' was another term Buchman seems to have used, if very infrequently, to describe what he was seeking after.<sup>380</sup> However, his vision was not theocratic in the sense that he saw a role for the Church in decision-making; it was more that he believed in individuals and groups seeking God's wisdom in an informal way.

Buchman also emphasised the relevance of guidance to the political world. The Holy Spirit had the answer to 'every problem', he said.<sup>381</sup> 'Can the "still, small

<sup>369</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 480-481.

<sup>370</sup> Buchman, 'Moral Re-Armament and National Defence' (1940), *RtW*, p. 126.

<sup>371</sup> Buchman, 'The Answer to Any 'Ism' - Even Materialism' (1948), *RtW*, p. 168.

<sup>372</sup> Buchman, 'The War of Ideas' (1943), *RtW*, p. 143.

<sup>373</sup> See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 251.

<sup>374</sup> See Boobbyer, 'Moral Re-Armament', p. 226.

<sup>375</sup> Buchman took painting lessons in his youth, and had strong opinions about art; see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 8, 173.

<sup>376</sup> Baynard-Smith, 'Notes of times with Frank Buchman', Section 3, p. 5.

<sup>377</sup> Buchman, 'The Good Road' (1946), *RtW*, pp. 150, 155.

<sup>378</sup> See Robin Mowat, *The Message of Frank Buchman* (London, 1953), revised edition, pp. 13-15.

<sup>379</sup> Buchman, 'Revival, Revolution, Renaissance' (1938), *RtW*, p. 56.

<sup>380</sup> There were no references to 'theocracy' in *Remaking the World*, but Buchman was quoted as talking of 'theocracy' in his interview with the *New York World-Telegram* in 1936; see Driberg, *Mystery*, p. 69.

<sup>381</sup> Buchman, 'God Calling the World' (1935), *RtW*, p. 12.

voice” be the deciding factor in political situations?’, he asked in 1927.<sup>382</sup> Divine guidance was the ‘only practical politics’, he said a few years later.<sup>383</sup> Buchman wanted to turn this idea into a principle of government. One of his pet phrases in the 1930s was ‘God-control’, which he understood to mean ‘asking for guidance’.<sup>384</sup> It was a matter of nations coming under the government of God. On the last day of his life, in August 1961, he said he wanted both Britain and the world to be governed by men governed by God; and he said: ‘Why not let God run the whole world?’<sup>385</sup> It was a vision for society as well as government. In a manifesto published in the OG’s pictorial review, *Rising Tide* (1937), Buchman stated that a ‘God-guided public opinion’ would be a source of strength to leadership, and that this meant the ‘dictatorship of the living Spirit of God’ giving each man the ‘inner discipline’ he needed and the ‘inner liberty’ he desired.<sup>386</sup>

In this context, Buchman suggested that international conferences needed a spiritual dimension if they were to be effective. ‘We must listen to guidance or we shall listen to guns’, he said in September 1938, just before the Munich crisis came to a head.<sup>387</sup> Calling for the ‘dictatorship of the Holy Spirit’, he suggested that only a ‘great spiritual experience’ in national leaderships would make any world conference or League of Nations effective.<sup>388</sup> Man without God could not make peace.<sup>389</sup> The Holy Spirit was ‘uniting humanity’ through men who listen to and obeyed Him.<sup>390</sup> According to one of his supporters, the British diplomat Archie Mackenzie, who was present at some of the founding sessions of the UN, Buchman always expressed an interest in developments in the UN Security Council and General Assembly, but thought the organisation needed to focus more attention on the ‘human factor’ in politics if it was to be effective.<sup>391</sup>

Buchman’s strategic instincts also led him to place a lot of emphasis on industry. ‘God-control’ could bring industrial harmony and efficiency, he thought; and capital and labour could work together ‘like fingers on the hand’.<sup>392</sup> At the launch of MRA in London’s East Ham Town Hall in 1938, he said that when Labour, Management and Capital became ‘partners under God’s guidance’, industry would take its true place in national life.<sup>393</sup> ‘Labour led by God will lead the world’, he also said at the National Trade Union Club a few months later, evidently trying to formulate a vision for the working class.<sup>394</sup> If it did not, he wrote in his guidance in March 1946, Marxist materialism would take over.<sup>395</sup> Much of MRA’s wartime energy was devoted to fostering good industrial relations in the US, in the belief that they would contribute to national defence.<sup>396</sup> After the war, Buchman suggested that

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<sup>382</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 130.

<sup>383</sup> Buchman, ‘One Heart, One Will, One Goal’ (1935), *RtW*, pp. 18.

<sup>384</sup> Buchman, ‘Guidance or Guns?’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 63.

<sup>385</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 529.

<sup>386</sup> Buchman, ‘The Destiny of Nations’ (1937), *RtW*, p. 42.

<sup>387</sup> Buchman, ‘Guidance or Guns’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 62.

<sup>388</sup> Buchman, ‘Chaos Against God’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 78.

<sup>389</sup> Buchman, ‘A World Philosophy for World Crisis’ (1939), *RtW*, p. 110.

<sup>390</sup> Buchman, ‘What We Need is Something Electric’ (1952), *RtW*, p. 202.

<sup>391</sup> Mackenzie, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

<sup>392</sup> Buchman, ‘Humanity at the Crossroads’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 65.

<sup>393</sup> Buchman, ‘Moral Re-Armament’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 47.

<sup>394</sup> Buchman, ‘Labour’s Spiritual Heritage’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 84.

<sup>395</sup> Buchman, ‘Guidance’, March 1946, OGAUK, File, 6.0785.

<sup>396</sup> Buchman, ‘Moral Re-Armament and National Defence’ (1940), p. 129. Truman, amongst others, was impressed; see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 324 and also pp. 195, 285, 288, 310, 329 for some of Truman’s links with MRA.

miners trained at Caux had improved their production of coal.<sup>397</sup> Class war was being ‘superseded’.<sup>398</sup>

More generally, Buchman placed great stress on national unity. Unity was important because it was the ‘combined moral and spiritual forces of a nation’ that could find God’s plan.<sup>399</sup> Clearly, as Buchman’s theological assumptions indicated, these forces did not have to be formally Christian groups or movements, although they might well be involved. In a sense, in his ‘battle’ for renewal at a national level, Buchman was seeking to build coalitions of people who had a commitment to God’s guidance and absolute moral standards. Common ground might be found with non-believers too, where they countered the moral relativism of the age.<sup>400</sup>

This was not intended to be a left- or a right-wing message. Speaking on Mackinac Island in 1943, Buchman stated that God could not be boxed into a left or right-wing politics: ‘People get confused as to whether it is a question of being Rightist or Leftist. But the one thing we really need is to be guided by God’s Holy Spirit. That is the force we ought to study.’<sup>401</sup> Buchman was clearly at a certain level impatient with party politics, believing that it concealed a deeper spiritual battle taking place in the heart of national and international life. Of American political life, he once said: ‘After a while we’ll have no party lines in America. The lines will be drawn between Christ and anti-Christ. It’s coming already in Britain.’<sup>402</sup> It was in the context of this spiritual struggle within people and countries, that Buchman frequently described his work as a ‘battle’. He thought there was a constant struggle going on for the ‘wills of men’.<sup>403</sup>

An essential feature of Buchman’s political thinking was the idea that people could change. Indeed, he saw MRA as a ‘superior’ ideology, on the grounds that it was based on this idea.<sup>404</sup> ‘Apart from changed lives no civilisation can endure,’<sup>405</sup> he asserted in 1934; and declared that a revolution in human nature was the ‘only hope’, a couple of years later.<sup>406</sup> On the BBC in 1938, he linked change individuals with change in the world: ‘New men – new homes – new industry – new nations – a new world.’<sup>407</sup> The key to new statesmanship was ‘new statesmen’;<sup>408</sup> Buchman wanted to see ‘inspired statesmen’, and ‘super-statesmen’ who would make ‘God-control’ their programme.<sup>409</sup> It was in this context that he commended the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Amos, and suggested that figures like Joan of Arc, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln had played a crucial role in their countries’ histories because they had listened to God.<sup>410</sup> He also lauded Nicholas von der Flüe,

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<sup>397</sup> Buchman, ‘The Answer to Crisis’ (1947), *RtW*, p. 158.

<sup>398</sup> Buchman, ‘The Destiny of East and West’ (1950), *RtW*, p. 177.

<sup>399</sup> Buchman, ‘Moral Re-Armament’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 48.

<sup>400</sup> See on this Philip Boobbyer, ‘Faith for an Ideological Age: The Moral and Religious Ideas of Semyon Frank and Frank Buchman’, *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 3/4, 2009, p. 283.

<sup>401</sup> Buchman, ‘The War of Ideas’ (1943), *RtW*, p. 145.

<sup>402</sup> Buchman, ‘Sayings’, p. 2.

<sup>403</sup> Buchman, ‘What We Need is Something Electric’ (1952), *RtW*, p. 202.

<sup>404</sup> Buchman, ‘Nations that Will not Think’ (1956), *RtW*, p.

<sup>405</sup> Buchman, ‘A New Illumination’ (1934), *RtW*, p. 5.

<sup>406</sup> Buchman, ‘God Calling the World’ (1935), ‘A Revolution to Cure Revolution’ (1936), *RtW*, pp. 12, 37.

<sup>407</sup> Buchman, ‘Chaos Against God’ (1938), *RtW*, p. 80.

<sup>408</sup> Buchman, ‘The New Statesmanship to End Confusion’ (1953), *RtW*, p. 211.

<sup>409</sup> Buchman, ‘Pattern for Statesmanship’ (1938), ‘One Thing Can Swing the Balance’ (1938), *RtW*, pp. 61, 69.

<sup>410</sup> Buchman, ‘Norway Ablaze’ (1935), ‘A World Philosophy for World Crisis’ (1939), ‘Guidance or Guns?’ (1938), ‘Listening Millions’ (1939), *RtW*, pp. 8, 112, 63, 121.

the Swiss saint who had helped prevent Civil War in his country, for his gifts for his 'gift of divine direction', calling him a 'model for the United Nations'.<sup>411</sup>

Buchman assumed, of course, that the morality of individual leaders would ultimately affect their judgement and ability to govern. There was a tendency in the OG and MRA to connect adherence to absolute moral standards to clarity of thinking. In a speech of 1953 calling for a new kind of leadership in the world, Buchman declared: 'Confusion comes from compromise, clarity comes from change', saying that absolute moral standards were the 'well-spring of inspired statesmanship'.<sup>412</sup> This was an area where Buchman stressed the importance of purity; for example, talking about the Pasha of Marrakesh, El Glaoui, and his family, whom he knew in the 1950s, he said that only the 'radical and cleansing factor of absolute purity' could give them the power to give the right kind of leadership.<sup>413</sup> He also thought that it was important that leaders surrounded themselves with morally sound people; he once warned the Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, of the moral weaknesses in some of his team.<sup>414</sup>

Buchman often tried to express a vision of how nationalism could be a positive force. Some of his speeches of the 1930s seem to have been an attempt to inject positive religious content into the idea of nationalism in such a way that it would deflect the fascist dictators down a peaceful road. Speaking in 1935 at a League of Nations dinner organised by the OG, Buchman noted that nationalism could unite a country. However, he also saw the need for some kind of supra-national idea, for he said that 'supernationalism' (an idea originating with the Swedish Archbishop and ecumenist, Nathan Söderblom<sup>415</sup>) could unite the world; 'God-controlled supernationalism' was the only foundation for world peace.<sup>416</sup> In Buchman's mind, the key to a healthy patriotism was for God's guidance to be central in a country's life. Through obedience to God, Buchman said in 1939, nations would find their 'true destiny'.<sup>417</sup> Patriotism was interpreted in this context; 'the true patriot gives his life to bring his nation under God's control', he said some years earlier.<sup>418</sup>

Buchman strongly believed that God had a plan for nations, a conviction that likely owed something to the Calvinist and Puritan strains of American religion. He certainly emphasised and tried to give expression to the distinctiveness of individual national callings. After 1945, for example, Buchman declared that Japan could be 'the lighthouse of Asia', and Nigeria a 'pilot nation for the world'; and he said that Cyprus had a destiny to 'demonstrate unity' to the divided nations of the world, and America could give a 'whole new pattern' to civilisation. Kashmir could give an 'answer to the world' if it applied nationally the 'ancient truths of simple honesty'.<sup>419</sup> The point of these visions was, as was the case with Buchman's more personal thoughts for people,

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<sup>411</sup> Buchman, 'The Good Road' (1946), *RtW*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>412</sup> Buchman, 'The New Statesmanship to End Confusion' (1953), *RtW*, p. 211.

<sup>413</sup> Baynard-Smith, 'Notes of times with Frank Buchman', Section 2, p. 4. For details of MRA's outreach in Morocco, see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 38.

<sup>414</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 507. Mackenzie, *Faith*, p. 107. Buchman once connected this ability to read people with knowledge of the Bible; see Martin, *MSS Biography*, chapter XI, p. 8.

Buchman's links with the Burmese leadership were partly facilitated by the Anglican Bishop of Rangoon, George West; see Mackenzie, *Faith*, p. 103.

<sup>415</sup> Jarlert, *The Oxford Group*, p. 40. For Buchman's links with Söderblom, see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 121, 179, 416.

<sup>416</sup> Buchman, 'One Heart, One Will, One Goal' (1935), *RtW*, p. 18.

<sup>417</sup> Buchman, 'The Forgotten Factor' (1939), in *RtW*, p. 105

<sup>418</sup> Buchman, 'The Place to Start' (1936), in *RtW*, p. 25.

<sup>419</sup> Buchman, 'The Electronics of the Spirit' (1955), 'A Message to Nigeria' (1960), 'A Message to Cyprus' (1960), 'An Illumined America' (1939), 'The New Statesmanship to End Confusion' (1953), *RtW*, pp. 223, 271, 270, 94, 208.

not so much that they were realistic, but that they might lift the perspective of communities and countries as to what they might achieve. Buchman would also pray for particular countries or situations. For example, at the end of the Second World War, he prayed for future years to be ‘undimmed in God’s Holy Spirit in Germany’, and that the allies would be kept ‘pure and unsullied’ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>420</sup>

Hunter argues that, for all his focus on personal change, Buchman always had the ultimate goal of achieving a complete transformation of social structures.<sup>421</sup> This is hard to prove one way or the other. Buchman’s thought was clearly radical. If it is difficult to call him utopian, in the sense that he remained very conscious of the reality of sin,<sup>422</sup> he nevertheless, seems to have envisaged a different kind of international order. There was a millennialism about Buchman’s vision in the sense that he believed in the possibility of building the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>423</sup> He once said he wanted to ‘change the age of gold into the Golden Age’,<sup>424</sup> and in his final will talked about bringing the nations into a ‘long-looked-for Golden Age’, enabled by the Cross of Christ.<sup>425</sup> He also believed that he was co-operating with a larger divine plan for the world. The miracle of people being led by God was, he said, ‘the divinely appointed destiny of mankind’.<sup>426</sup> In this sense, he had a sense that history was on the side of MRA.

At the same time, Buchman did not think in practical terms about what a different kind of political order might look like. On one occasion, he talked with Corderoy about ‘remaking the world’ in terms simply of helping people to make decisions; he wanted to see the ‘cure of hate – by decisions’.<sup>427</sup> This was a more modest aspiration; and, alongside Buchman’s statements on the non-political nature of MRA, it suggests that his hopes for a different form of international order may not have been political as such. The historian Robin Mowat interpreted the concept of ‘inspired democracy’ to mean that the last word in political decision-making would be reached not through discussion or a majority vote, but ‘through God’s guidance or inspiration’.<sup>428</sup> Whatever the structures, Buchman wanted people to listen to God. That, in his view, already meant a different order of things.<sup>429</sup>

## Conclusion

The Russian philosopher Grigorii Pomerants, who started to attend the Caux conferences in the early 1990s, suggested that Buchman’s legacy was not an orthodoxy or a set of easily recited principles, but a ‘practice or “orthopractrice” found in dozens of scattered examples’; it was a ‘fellowship of the Holy Spirit which blows everyone’. It is a good description of what it was intended to be. At the same

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<sup>420</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 331.

<sup>421</sup> Hunter, *World Changing*, p. 91.

<sup>422</sup> Jarlert and Driberg suggest that Buchman was utopian; see Jarlert, *The Oxford Group*, p. 65; Driberg, *MRA: A Critical Examination*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>423</sup> Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 145.

<sup>424</sup> Buchman, ‘Report to the National Press Club’ (1939), *RtW*, p. 87.

<sup>425</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 531.

<sup>426</sup> Buchman, ‘A World Philosophy for World Crisis’ (1939), *RtW*, p. 111.

<sup>427</sup> Cited in Oliver Corderoy, 28 April 1982, OGAUK, Box 3.9, File ‘Corderoy’.

<sup>428</sup> Mowat, *Message*, p. 13. Mowat was a supporter of Buchman.

<sup>429</sup> For a study of how MRA’s concept of the ‘quiet time’ informed decision-making, see the analysis of Senator Alexander H. Smith in Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, chapter 5. Inboden suggests that such an approach to decision-making was ‘unusual’, but that Smith’s guidance led to ‘relatively mainstream, rational decisions’; Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, p. 224.

time, Pomerants noted - rightly - that Buchman's thinking did have a 'religious sub-text'.<sup>430</sup> While Buchman did not want to box his work into a neatly-packaged intellectual system, and was happy living with paradoxes, he did have some underlying assumptions. One of Buchman's supporters described these as consisting of an emphasis on three elements: the moral underpinnings of faith; obedience to the Holy Spirit; and the normality of God working in the human heart. More generally, he argued that Buchman sought to 'remould the whole machinery of life under the categories of faith'.<sup>431</sup> It was a fair description.

Belden argued that Buchman's spirituality was a twentieth century manifestation of pietism; and that is surely right.<sup>432</sup> The traditions of pietism and holiness teaching, as conveyed to him by Lutheranism, the American student Christian movement and YMCA and the Keswick Convention, were clearly evident in his thought. At one level, the secret of Buchman's influence lay not in his coming up with new ideas, but in his repackaging of older ones.<sup>433</sup> He wanted to re-express and normalise the concept of the Holy Spirit, thus making spiritual experience accessible and comprehensible. This meant giving the idea of guidance a more modern feel. So he emphasised that guidance was something that anyone, from any faith background and even without any faith, could receive; it was not necessary to be in a church to get it – indeed a person could have guidance while lying in bed; listening to God was as simple as turning on the radio and thoughts from God could be very practical; and the Spirit's promptings could be written down in notebooks and talked about in ordinary conversation with people in the form of sharing. As Lean notes, even the very idea of a relationship with God was re-expressed in the simple terms of a conversation between 'Speaker and listener'.<sup>434</sup>

At the same time, if Buchman is compared to his immediate contemporaries, it was true that his approach to the Holy Spirit was somehow different. Indeed, Van Dusen argued that the only element of OG theology that departed from the 'catholic Protestant conservatism' of the time was its doctrine of guidance.<sup>435</sup> The newness was not so much in the existence of any new teaching about guidance, as in the ambition with which it was applied; Buchman emphasised the practical possibility of bringing all aspects of life, personal and political, under the control of guidance. The idea that God had a plan for the world was not itself original; it was the practical attempt to make that vision a reality without operating through formal theocratic structures that was distinctive to Buchman.

Much of the evidence surrounding Buchman suggests that he had what some would call charismatic spiritual gifts. He clearly believed in a 'supernatural God' who could communicate with people directly.<sup>436</sup> He also seems to have had an unusual ability to see into people's lives; Keene likened Buchman to the Quaker leader, George Fox, in this respect.<sup>437</sup> Buchman's comment that when he felt tempted to commit a particular sin, he assumed that the next person he met would be prey to the

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<sup>430</sup> Grigorii Pomerants, *The Spiritual Movement from the West* (Caux, 2004), p. 37.

<sup>431</sup> Yates, 'Dr Frank N.D. Buchman's Contribution', p. 3-5.

<sup>432</sup> Belden, 'Origins', pp. 30-35.

<sup>433</sup> Sack uses the term 'bricolage' to describe Buchman's method, meaning that Buchman constructed and adapted his system from whatever ideas or practices were at hand in order to address particular needs. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 3. There is merit in this, but it does not fully explain the existence of an enduring core of ideas in Buchman's vision.

<sup>434</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 171.

<sup>435</sup> Van Dusen, 'The Oxford Group Movement', p. 248.

<sup>436</sup> W.L.M.C., *Builder*.

<sup>437</sup> Keene, 'Doctrine of Guidance', p. 63.

same sin, suggests that he saw discernment and spiritual self-awareness as intimately linked. This was possibly unusual, but it was not unique. The charismatic leader, John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship that emerged some decades after Buchman's death, believed that he could sometimes discern people's specific physical ailments through what he was experiencing in his own body. Other comparisons with charismatic spirituality are pertinent. For example, what Wright and Buchman called 'luminous thoughts' were likely similar to what modern charismatics have called 'words of knowledge'.<sup>438</sup> Buchman's emphasis on the Holy Spirit arguably also had something in common with the modern Alpha courses used by some evangelists.<sup>439</sup> Overlaps between the OG and Pentecostalism might partly be accounted for by the fact that the two movements had a common respect both for the Keswick tradition and Wesleyan spirituality.<sup>440</sup>

At the same time, as Lean emphasised, Buchman's guidance was often of a very general nature. Indeed, at times it seems to have functioned as a kind of spiritual re-assurance. Furthermore, there was sometimes a sense in which what he called guidance was in fact simply a heightened form of thinking in which the Spirit of God was present; Buchman took the view that in the fully-surrendered life the capacities of human nature functioned in the right way. Again, such an approach was not unusual in the history of spirituality; for example the Jesuit tradition of discernment arguably had something in common with the MRA approach in this respect.<sup>441</sup> It is also clear that in Buchman's experience, God's will was not just revealed through the medium of unexpected thoughts received in quiet times, but continually - through events and through people. The evidence suggests a man who sought constantly to be in the presence of God. In this area Buchman's underlying message was not unlike that of such American contemporaries as the Quaker writer Thomas Kelly and the missionary Frank Laubach, whose works emphasised the possibility of a more constant communion with God.<sup>442</sup>

This is important. Buchman's actual experience of guidance did not conform to the somewhat mechanistic process which was depicted in caricature.<sup>443</sup> Taken out of context, some of Buchman's descriptions of guidance reinforced the impression that his underlying theology was dualistic, involving a belief in a transcendent God and a sharp separation of man and God. However, a study of Buchman's ideas and experiences over time suggests that his God was both transcendent and immanent; guidance as specific thoughts from God emerged in the context of what Buchman experienced as a more permanent communion with God.

Although Buchman's early spirituality remained at the core of all his subsequent work, his vision evolved in important ways. Notably, there were marked differences in the way he expressed himself in the Lily Valley speeches or the Putney Heath house party, with their more evangelical terminology, and his speeches of the 1930s and after, which reflected a desire to articulate a more global vision. Buchman's sense of the Holy Spirit's strategic and international relevance also grew

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<sup>438</sup> John Wimber (1934-1997), co-author (with Kevin Springer) of *Power Healing* (San Francisco, 1987), pp. 192, 204.

<sup>439</sup> Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p. 193.

<sup>440</sup> See on this Jarlert, *The Oxford Group*, p. 35.

<sup>441</sup> Jesuit priest, Father Trösch, chaplain at Basel University in the 1950s, suggested that the MRA and Ignatian traditions of guidance were similar, although he was also concerned that 'less advanced' members of MRA might interpret guidance in an unreasonable way; cited in Lunn, *Enigma*, p. 181.

<sup>442</sup> Thomas Kelly (1893-1941), author of *A Testament of Devotion* (New York, 1941); Frank Laubach (1884-1970), author of *Letters by a Modern Mystic* (London, 1950).

<sup>443</sup> See Driberg, *Mystery*, p. 192 ff.



over time; indeed he saw the Holy Spirit itself as having global concerns. The launch of MRA reflected this expansion of perspective.<sup>444</sup> The evolution in Buchman's thinking did involve a growing appreciation of cultural difference. For example, there is a case for saying that Buchman moved away from Anglo-American Protestantism in a narrower sense in his later years. Michel Sentis, a Frenchman who was Buchman's link with the Catholic hierarchy in the 1950s, suggested that although Buchman's mentality was initially 'Anglo-Saxon', he grew better attuned over time to the Latin mind.<sup>445</sup> This expansion of perspective nevertheless remained in the spirit of the American YMCA.<sup>446</sup> It also reflected an internationalist tendency in American society more generally, for Woodrow Wilson, as well as John Mott, had been seeking something similar. It should also be seen as part of a wider trend in 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity to engage with different faiths and the concerns of a global society.

In theological terms, Buchman's thinking cannot be easily defined as either conservative or liberal. He simply avoided the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.<sup>447</sup> On the one hand, he never questioned traditional Christian theology, and he used the Bible in a pre-critical way.<sup>448</sup> He was not the promoter of natural religion, as some thought. A study of his statements and sayings shows clearly that the atonement was central to his thinking; and the Holy Spirit was not detached from Christ in his mind, or a substitute for him (although he sometimes used these terms interchangeably). Furthermore, he was a strong adherent of Christianity's traditional moral teachings, believing them to be an essential component of the life of faith. In these senses, Buchman was conservative.

However, his thinking also contained more liberal elements. He had little time for denominational divisions. His primary purpose was not to get people to believe in Christian doctrines, but to have an experience of Christ or the Holy Spirit. As the French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, who got involved in MRA in the 1950s, said, MRA was 'not a theology, and still less a philosophy', but an 'experience'.<sup>449</sup> Although many thousands came to Christianity through Buchman's work, especially in the interwar era, Buchman did not require or indeed expect people to convert to Christianity from other faiths, and he seems to have believed that it was possible to have an experience of Christ without naming it as such. Buchman's interest in people from non-Christian cultures was clearly genuine; it is hard to imagine his friendships with leaders from countries as diverse as India, Burma, Japan and Morocco if it were not so. His outreach into the non-Christian world should thus not be seen as a form of evangelism in any traditional sense. The fact that aspects of OG spirituality could be repackaged as the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous was also illustrative of this.

As in AA, the distinction between the religious and the secular was sometimes blurred in the OG and MRA.<sup>450</sup> This was implicit in their understanding of guidance. Streeter, in his OG-inspired lectures, *The God who Speaks* (1936), noted that although guidance and conscience were different from one another, they were still related to each other, and shaded off into one another.<sup>451</sup> While there was nothing controversial about this, such a perspective, when detached from a theological framework, could

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<sup>444</sup> See on this Belden, 'Origins', p. 56; Martin, *Always*, p. 189.

<sup>445</sup> Sentis, 'France and the Expansion of Buchman's Faith', p. 54.

<sup>446</sup> Latourette, *World Service*, p. 431 ff.

<sup>447</sup> Belden, 'Origins', p. 13.

<sup>448</sup> See Kenaston Twitchell, 'Oxford', OGAUK, File: 4.3.1, pp. 8-9.

<sup>449</sup> Marcel, 'A Letter of Personal Reassurance', p. 6.

<sup>450</sup> On AA, see David R. Rudy and Arthur L. Greil, 'Is Alcoholics Anonymous a Religious Organisation?: Meditations on Marginality', *Sociological Analysis*, 50, 1, 1989, pp. 43-44.

<sup>451</sup> Streeter, *The God who Speaks*, p. 167.

allow non-believers to use the word ‘conscience’ rather than ‘guidance’ to describe the promptings of an ‘inner voice’, so avoiding any mention of the Divine. Of course, secularisation was not Buchman’s intent (nor Streeter’s), and Buchman pointed to Scripture, the teachings of the Church and Group fellowship as checks on guidance. Buchman was simply seeking to expand the boundaries of traditional pietism beyond Christianity itself. Some admired him for this, while others thought he risked emptying the religion of its essentials.

In emphasising that anybody could hear the voice of God if they fulfilled the right conditions, and in creating a fellowship outside an ecclesiastical framework, Buchman implicitly challenged narrower conceptions of religious authority. In spite of the presence of ordained clerics in the OG/MRA, Buchman included, it was a movement of the laity. Buchman did not generally work through the channel of the Church as an institution. Indeed, the Church could not be institutionalised, he thought, but was rather characterised by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Buchman’s focus was increasingly on the spiritual re-construction of nations rather than the building up of the Church in an institutional sense. In his foreword to the French edition of *Remaking the World*, Schuman – a Catholic – commended Buchman’s work for providing ‘teams of trained people, ready for the service of the state’. It was a good summary of Buchman’s later social vision.<sup>452</sup>

The mixture of conservative and liberal features that was present in Buchman’s theology was also evident in Buchman’s political thought. At a certain level, Buchman believed that any political system could be made to work, as long as its leadership turned to God for answers. Democracy itself would be preserved not so much by institutions as by individuals living good lives. This reflected a conservative tendency to stress personal morality, rather than institutions, as the key to good government. At the same time, Buchman was liberal, if not radical, in his belief that anybody could get wisdom from God, and that change and the creation of a new world order was genuinely possible. In general, he sought to make the practice of guidance a central feature of politics; turning to God in disciplined silence was for him a condition of good government.

In the end, it is important not to try to force Buchman’s thinking into a system. Although he clearly had distinctive ways of seeing and doing things, his vision of the world was more spiritual and personalistic than ideological; he saw his work in terms of the ‘propagation of life rather than the propagation of a plan’.<sup>453</sup> Some of the things he said should be seen not so much as theological statements, as responses to particular people or situations. Buchman’s own personality probably played a role in this. He could be unpredictable - although according to Corderoy this was more down to mischief than caprice. ‘No one can guess which way the live cat on the hearthrug will jump’ (as opposed to the dead one on the mantelpiece), Buchman once observed.<sup>454</sup> He might accurately have said the same about himself. Yet was this unpredictable quality a character trait, or the mark of a man close to God? Buchman’s supporters certainly thought the latter was part of it. According to one of them, there was about him an ‘unexpectedness of the Holy Spirit’.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Cited in Lean, *Frank Buchman*, p. 377.

<sup>453</sup> Cited in Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, p 21. In a similar vein, Meyer saw Christianity as ‘not a creed, but a life’; see Randall, *Spirituality and Social Change*, p. 35.

<sup>454</sup> Lean, *Frank Buchman*, pp. 403, 179.

<sup>455</sup> Austin, *Frank Buchman*, p. 60.