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• 'We All Need Constant Change': The Oxford Group and Mission in Europe in the 1930s
• *« Nous avons tous besoin de changement constant » : le Groupe d'Oxford et la mission en Europe dans les années trente*
• *'Wir brauchen alle regelmässig Veränderung': Die Oxford Bewegung und Mission in Europa in den dreissiger Jahren des 20 Jahrhunderts*

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RÉSUMÉ

Le Groupe d'Oxford, connu par la suite sous le nom de « réarmement moral », est un réseau évangélique informel qui est né en Angleterre dans les années vingt, et qui s'est rapidement répandu en Europe et au-delà dans les années trente. Le chef de file du groupe était Frank Buchman (1876–1961), et le groupe avait pour mot d'ordre ce que Buchman appelait le « changement de manière de vivre ». Le Groupe était un mouvement missionnaire, une expression nouvelle de la vieille tradition revivaliste. Il a eu une influence énorme dans les années trente, ce qui donne un exemple de la capacité du christianisme européen à s'engager de manière renouvelée dans l'entreprise missionnaire.

Au milieu des années trente, le Groupe s'est livré à une activité d'évangélisation qui, pour sa plus grande part, s'est déroulée à l'intérieur des dénominations existantes en Europe, plus particulièrement en Grande Bretagne, dans les pays scandinaves, en Allemagne et aux Pays Bas. Puis, en 1938, lorsque le mouvement a pris le nom de « réarmement moral », sa principale préoccupation est devenue la mise en cause des dictatures politiques en Europe, le national socialisme et le communisme, et l'objectif premier du mouvement, l'évangélisation personnelle, est alors largement passé de mode.

L'auteur étudie les causes du succès du groupe d'Oxford dans les années trente et s'efforce de montrer que sa croissance dans toute l'Europe a été due à son attachement à la tradition évangélique au sein de laquelle il était né, en même temps qu'à sa capacité d'adapter cette tradition à la lumière de la modernité. Le Groupe a associé les convictions évangéliques à un intérêt croissant pour les relations interpersonnelles, l'expression de soi, la thérapie et des styles de vie non institutionnels.

C'est à partir de 1920 que Buchman a commencé à mettre en avant son idée de vies changées en Angleterre. Il avait eu quelques contacts avec des étudiants évangéliques conservateurs de l'union chrétienne de l'université de Cambridge. La base s'est ensuite déplacée à Oxford, et c'est pourquoi le mouvement a été appelé le Groupe d'Oxford à partir de 1928. Il attirait les responsables d'église, les professeurs, les étudiants et d'autres personnes, à Oxford et ailleurs, qui étaient frustrés par certains aspects de la vie des églises et qui recherchaient une expérience spirituelle plus authentique.

Au début des années trente, dans le cadre des écoles d'Oxford, de grandes réunions du Groupe se tinrent dans les

maisons. En 1933, elles comptaient cinq mille participants. Parmi eux, beaucoup considéraient que leur temps à Oxford les préparaient à s'impliquer pour faire changer la vie en Europe et au-delà. Les membres du Groupe s'engageaient par exemple comme délégués aux rencontres de la Ligue des nations à Genève. C.J. Hambro, qui fut président du parlement de Norvège et deux fois président de l'assemblée de la Ligue des nations, était un partisan du Groupe.

Le Groupe a exercé une influence considérable dans les pays scandinaves. Frederik Ramm, un journaliste norvégien de réputation internationale, est passé par un changement profond et s'est ensuite impliqué dans des mouvements d'étudiants en Norvège, ainsi que dans des efforts de réconciliation entre la Norvège et le Danemark. Plusieurs haut responsables de l'Église luthérienne étaient des partisans du Groupe et se sont trouvés ainsi proches les uns des autres.

Le Groupe a affirmé et ré-interprété les implications, en terme de changement de manière de vivre, du message de la conversion, de la croix, de l'autorité de la Bible et de l'engagement dans le service. Buchman a volontairement façonné son mouvement de manière à ce qu'il soit en phase avec les orientations de l'époque. On s'y préoccupait de questions qui intéressaient beaucoup de gens: les besoins personnels profonds, la quête religieuse, l'intérêt pour les média, le chômage et le réarmement.

De diverses manières, le Groupe d'Oxford des années trente a préparé la voie aux évolutions du monde évangélique en Europe à partir des années soixante. Cela apparaît par exemple dans sa spiritualité charismatique, son désir d'œuvrer au sein de différentes dénominations, sa mobilisation de tous et sa promotion de chants nouveaux.

Lors d'une rencontre à Visby en 1938, Buchman insista sur le caractère insuffisant du réveil. Il appela les gens de divers pays qui se tenaient dans la cathédrale de cette cité ancienne à aller de l'avant, pour « bâtir une philosophie chrétienne qui transformera l'Europe » et à découvrir l'expérience de la croix. Cette expérience faite, affirma-t-il « vous ne reculerez devant rien ».

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Gegenstand dieses Beitrags ist die Oxford Bewegung (später bekannt als 'Moral Re-Armament', 'moralische Wiederaufrüstung'), ein informelles evangelikales Netzwerk, das in den zwanziger Jahren in England entstand und sich schnell in den dreissiger Jahren in Europa und anderswo verbreitete. Der Leiter der Gruppe war Frank Buchman (1878–1961), und die Gruppe fühlte sich dem verpflichtet, was Buchman als 'Lebens-Veränderung' bezeichnete. Die Gruppe war eine missionarische Bewegung, die einen zeitgenössischen Ausdruck einer älteren erwecklichen Tradition darstellte. Der beträchtliche Einfluss der Oxford Bewegung in den dreissiger Jahren ist ein Beispiel dafür, wie die europäische Christenheit zu einer Erneuerung ihrer Mission fähig gewesen ist.

In der Mitte der dreissiger Jahre fand ein Grossteil der evangelistischen Aktivität der Bewegung innerhalb bestehenden denominationellen Lebens in Europa statt, besonders in England, Skandinavien, Deutschland und den Niederlanden. Spätestens seit 1938, als die Gruppe begann, für eine 'moralische Wiederaufrüstung' zu werben (der Begriff wurde in dem Jahr offiziell übernommen), konzentrierte sich die Gruppe primär auf die Herausforderung der politischen Diktatoren Europas – Nationalsozialismus und Kommunismus – und die frühere Identifikation als Bewegung für persönliche Evangelisation verschwand grösstenteils im Hintergrund.

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Gründe für den Erfolg der Oxford Bewegung in den dreissiger Jahren. Es wird argumentiert, dass ihr Wachstum quer

durch Europa auf ihrem Vermögen beruhte, mit der evangelikalen Tradition, aus der sie kam, verbunden zu bleiben, sowie diese Tradition im Lichte der Moderne zu bearbeiten.

Wie David Bebbington gezeigt hat, verband die Bewegung den Evangelikalismus mit dem wachsenden Interesse an interpersonellen Beziehungen, Ausdruck der eigenen Persönlichkeit, Therapie und nicht-institutionellen Lebensentwürfen.

Von 1920 an begann Buchman, sein Konzept von verändertem Leben in England umzusetzen. Er hatte seine ersten Kontakte in England zu konservativen evangelikalen Studenten in der College-übergreifenden christlichen Vereinigung der Universität Cambridge. Der Standort wurde dann nach Oxford verlegt, und seit 1928 wurde die Bewegung 'Oxford Group' genannt. Die Bewegung erwies sich als attraktiv für leitende kirchliche Mitarbeiter, Akademiker, Studenten und andere in Oxford und anderswo, die angesichts mancher Aspekte des bestehenden kirchlichen Lebens frustriert waren und nach authentischer geistlicher Erfahrung suchten.

Anfang der dreissiger Jahre gab die Bewegung in Oxfords Colleges grosse Hausfeste. 1933 kamen 5000 Teilnehmer. Viele der Anwesenden sahen ihre Zeit in Oxford als Vorbereitung für späteres Engagement für 'Lebens-Veränderung' in Europa und darüberhinaus. Gruppenmitglieder waren beispielsweise unter den Delegierten bei Treffen der Liga der Nationen in Genf aktiv. C. J. Hambro, Präsident des norwegischen Parlamentes und zweimal Präsident der Versammlung der Liga der Nationen, unterstützte die Gruppe. Das Leben in Skandinavien wurde von der Gruppe in nicht unwesentlichem Masse beeinflusst. Frederik Ramm, ein international angesehener norwegischer Journalist, erfuhr einschneidende Lebensveränderungen und engagierte sich besonders unter norwegischen Studenten und für die Versöhnung zwischen Norwegen und Dänemark. Mehrere Leiter der lutherischen Kirche unterstützten die Bewegung, was in engeren Kontakten zwischen ihnen resultierte. Die lebensverändernde Botschaft von Umkehr, des Kreuzes Christi, der Autorität der Bibel und des aktiven Dienstes wurde von der Gruppe gleichzeitig verteidigt als auch re-interpretiert. Buchman formte die Bewegung bewusst im Gespräch mit den Strömungen der Zeit. Die Gruppe befasste sich mit Angelegenheiten, die für viele Menschen von Interesse waren – tiefe persönliche Bedürfnisse, religiöse Suche, das Interesse an Massenmedien, Arbeitslosigkeit und 'moralische Wiederaufrüstung'. Auf verschiedene Weise nahm die Oxford Bewegung in den dreissiger Jahren evangelikale Entwicklungen in Europa in den sechziger Jahren und darüber hinaus vorweg. Dies ist beispielsweise in ihrer charismatischen Spiritualität, ihrer Bereitschaft, innerhalb verschiedener Denominationen zu arbeiten, ihrer Mobilisation der Laien und ihrer Förderung neuen Liedgutes sichtbar.

Auf einem Hausfest in Visby im Jahre 1938 bestand Buchman darauf, dass Erweckung nicht genug sei. Er forderte Teilnehmer aus verschiedenen Ländern bei einer Versammlung in der Kathedrale dieser alten Hansestadt heraus, 'eine christliche Philosophie zu entwerfen, die Europa bewegen wird,' und die Erfahrung des Kreuzez zu entdecken. Mit dieser Erfahrung, so Buchman, 'werdet ihr keiner Schwierigkeit ausweichen.'

On 8 December 1933 the London *Evening Standard* reported on an unusual meeting held in the House of Commons in London which had attracted so many MPs that it had 'emptied smoking rooms and the floor of the House alike'.[1] The subject of the meeting was the message of the Oxford Group (later known as Moral Re-Armament), an informal evangelical network which had emerged in England in

the 1920s and which spread rapidly throughout Europe and elsewhere in the 1930s. The main speaker on behalf of the Group was Carl Johan Hambro, President of the Norwegian Parliament and twice President of the League of Nations Assembly. Three months earlier, speaking to an audience in Geneva, Hambro had announced that he believed the vision of the Group's leader, Frank Buchman (1878–1961), for what Buchman termed 'life-changing', was more important than most of the subjects on the agenda of the League of Nations. Hambro's view was that 'we all need constant change', and he believed the Group helped to stimulate such change. Four years after the Commons gathering of 1933 the Group's magazine, *Rising Tide*, was being translated into nine languages, with over one and a half million copies being sold, mainly in Europe and America.[2] As he surveyed the religious scene of the 1930s, the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, who kept a watch on European developments, highlighted Frank Buchman's notable success as a revivalist.[3] The Oxford Group was a missionary movement, representing a contemporary expression of an older revivalist tradition.

The enormous impact made by the Oxford Group in the 1930s is an example of the way in which Christianity in Europe has been capable of renewed mission. The roots of the group were in mainstream evangelicalism, that form of Christianity which, as David Bebbington has shown, stresses conversion, the cross, the Bible and activist faith.[4] In 1901 Buchman, who was an American Lutheran and was then training for ordained ministry, attended the Northfield (Massachusetts) Student Conference, which owed its origin to the American evangelist D. L. Moody, known for his evangelistic enterprises in North America and Britain. What he experienced at Northfield, Buchman reported, 'completely changed' him.[5] It was language heavy with evangelical conversionism. In 1908 Buchman visited the British Keswick Convention, a week-long devotional gathering of about 5,000 evangelicals which was held annually in the English Lake District, hoping to meet F. B. Meyer, a Baptist internationalist who was one of the Convention's main speakers. Discovering Meyer was not there, Buchman rather disconsolately entered a local chapel where he heard Jessie Penn-Lewis, a powerful personality associated with the Welsh Revival, speaking on the subject of the cross. Buchman had what he described as 'a poignant vision of the Crucified'. He later wrote that the cross was 'an awesome and devastating confrontation with God's holiness which breaks but also remakes, which condemns but also cures.'[6] Buchman's crucicentric experience was quintessentially evangelical.

Biblicism and activism were also features of the Group's operations. A Report on the Group by the Social and Industrial Council of the Church of England's Church Assembly noted that within the movement the use of Moffat's modern translation of the Bible was encouraged. The Report was unhappy that 'no serious account appears to be taken of critical scholarship' and that isolated biblical passages were 'used out of context and with no necessary reference to their original and legitimate meaning', but it acknowledged that this was not uncommon among 'ordinary' church members.[7] It was often these 'ordinary' members who were inspired to follow Buchman in his 'life-changing' mission. The Group exhibited a determinedly activist spiritual ethos as it pursued this mission, a further expression of its evangelicalism. In the mid-1930s a good deal of evangelistic activity took place within existing European denominational life, especially in Britain, Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands.[8] But by 1938, when the Group began to call for 'moral rearmament' (the name it then officially adopted), its primary concerns had become the challenge of political dictatorships in Europe – National Socialism and Communism. From the 1940s the Group's earlier identification of itself as a movement for personal evangelism and to

an extent an arm of the churches was largely out of fashion.[9]

This study examines the reasons for the success of the Oxford Group in the 1930s, arguing that its growth throughout Europe stemmed from its ability to remain connected to the evangelical tradition from which it arose while also adapting that tradition in the light of modernity. The Group, as David Bebbington has shown, blended evangelicalism with the growing interest in exploring inter-personal relationships, self-expression, therapy and non-institutional modes of living.[10] In England, the Bloomsbury Group set the pace in a number of these areas. One Oxford Group member explicitly took up the theme of modernity, saying: 'We are Moderns'.[11] The Group's self-consciously progressive spirituality represented an attempt to understand and communicate Christian experience in terms of the contemporary context. Thus it had its early focus in Oxford, among students who prized themselves on being thoroughly contemporary in their outlook. It used the Keswick holiness network and other inter-denominational bodies, but reshaped traditional emphases. Group members made strenuous attempts to resonate with inter-war societal changes. Finally, the Group was able to adjust to different expressions of church life in Europe. As early as 1921 Buchman had the impression that God was going to use him to 'remake the world'.[12] The Group's vision was of engaging with and then changing the socio-cultural environment of the inter-war period through the transformation of individuals.

Oxford Connections

It was from 1920 that Buchman began to put his concept of changed lives into action in England. At this early stage the crucial elements in Buchman's approach to the reshaping of evangelical spirituality can be traced: life-changing at an individual level; the building of open relationships within teams; a community of people surrendered entirely to God; confession or 'sharing' of sins and failures, and direct divine guidance which opened up new dimensions of adventurous living. Buchman's initial English contacts were with conservative evangelical undergraduates in the Cambridge University Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU).[13] During the early 1920s Buchman was active in American college campuses, but a reaction against him took place in 1926 at Princeton University – his opponents alleged that he intruded into people's personal lives and stimulated a morbid interest in sexual matters – and this led to the centre of gravity of the movement shifting to England.[14] By the following year the 'First Century Christian Fellowship', as Buchman termed it at that time, was firmly based in Oxford, and from 1928 the movement was called the Oxford Group.

The First Century Fellowship was, Buchman had asserted in 1922, a protest against 'committeeized and lifeless Christian work'.[15] As such it appealed to some Free Church leaders who were frustrated by aspects of existing church life and were looking for renewal. In Oxford theological circles, for example, Nathaniel Micklem, principal of Congregationalism's Mansfield College, and someone who was deeply concerned about the church in Europe, followed the Group's activities with interest. In 1932 he commented that while he admired the Group's 'apostolic fervour' he wondered if it generated a real sense of God.[16] After attending one Group meeting in 1935, however, he went so far as to say: 'There was the air of Pentecost about it.'[17] There was wide agreement that informal Group meetings, with their testimonies, fellowship and prayer, were contemporary versions of Methodism's class meetings.[18] A best-selling book about the Group by a journalist, A. J. Russell, *For Sinners Only* (1932), spoke about Group activities developing and growing in Germany, Switzerland and Holland, as well as elsewhere in the world. Group members, said Russell, 'were urging Christians, congregations and clergy alike, to expel sin from their midst, as the Apostles did too, stressing the need to

surrender entirely to God'.[19] When 1,600 people attending a Group meeting packed the Town Hall in Bournemouth, England, in 1936, comparisons were being made with the impact of John Wesley and George Whitefield – who also came together initially in Oxford, as members of the 'Holy Club'. It is significant, however, that the central feature of the Bournemouth event was not preaching but was personal testimony from (twenty-four) Group members.[20] Older evangelistic approaches were being adapted to a modern context.

Group influence among progressive Oxford Anglicans was even more evident. L. W. Grensted, Chaplain of University College and later professor of the Philosophy of Religion, who was also a psychologist, was a prominent recruit in the mid-1920s and was to remain heavily involved in the Group for a decade. He gave talks on the psychology of life-changing and Christian experience.[21] Grensted used depth psychology as a framework for his thinking. Alan Thornhill, chaplain of Hertford College, Oxford, described Group gatherings in Oxford as having as their aim 'to build a new world'. They combined 'intense spiritual training' with 'complete informality'.[22] Thornhill became a leading Group spokesman and activist, emphasising that 'a personal knowledge of Christ ... is to be put to work for others'.[23] Another Oxford college chaplain, Geoffrey Allen, at Lincoln College, who later became bishop of Derby, was impressed by an occasion in autumn 1926 when Buchman drew together his Oxford circle and 'shared with them his guidance' about the effect he believed they could have.[24] The Group believed that such guided 'thoughts', to which considerable significance was attached, should be written down and put into practice. It was in the same year that Buchman, at the invitation of Archbishop Nathan Soderblom of Uppsala, Sweden, who was one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement and who worked closely with Anglican leaders, attended the opening session of the League of Nations in Geneva. Soderblom saw Buchman as someone who fostered deeper Christian unity.[25] Buchman's vision was calculated to appeal to those looking for a relevant approach to Christian witness.

Although Buchman attracted some known Oxford academic figures, his greatest success was with the university's undergraduates. Loudon Hamilton, a former army officer, who was the Fellowship's first student convert in Oxford and who travelled with Buchman in Europe, recalled that undergraduates would queue for hours to obtain an interview with Buchman.[26] Hamilton himself had a profound influence on Eric Liddell, the Scots Olympic gold medallist and later a missionary in China. Liddell described in 1932 how eight years previously, in a conversation with Hamilton, his heart had 'burned within him'.[27] One flamboyant Oxford student, Marie Clarkson, was typical of those to whom the Group proved irresistible. She described how she had revelled in driving spectacular sports cars and frequenting cocktail parties. The Group's freshness, however, had made her feel so 'dull and dissipated' that she gave her life to Christ.[28] The Group also attracted students with a more serious inclination, such as John Morrison, who had studied theology at New College, Edinburgh, and in Germany under Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. In one Oxford college a sweepstake was held as to who would be the next student to be 'changed'.[29] The contrast with more traditional evangelism was marked.

The Group's practice of openly sharing personal failures in group settings was part of its commitment to freedom and to deeper inter-personal relationships. It also proved highly controversial, with sex being the main problem. In 1928, writing in the *Daily Express* about what was taking place in Oxford, the British MP and journalist Tom Driberg first highlighted what (he claimed) a college head had described as 'morbid sensualism masquerading under the guise of religion', and which Driberg saw as crude invasions of physical and spiritual privacy.[30] T. R. Glover, a Baptist layman and Public

Orator of Cambridge University, although a Group sympathiser, believed that Buchman over-emphasised sexual matters.[31] In the face of criticisms over sexual sins being shared in the Group's conferences or 'house-parties' (a term which was deliberately non-religious), Buchman claimed in 1930 that 'it is the rarest thing in the world for irrelevant or foolish talk to be heard on such occasions'.[32] One Group supporter, Leslie Weatherhead, the highly popular author and minister of the City Temple, London, admitted in July 1932 that at one recent house-party he had encountered 'rather a morbid display of minds preoccupied with sexual temptations'.[33] Nathaniel Micklem, writing two weeks later, had simply found the event boring.[34]

In the early 1930s Oxford's colleges became the setting for very large Group house-parties, a name which was retained even when the size of the gatherings meant that the original sense of intimacy had gone. In 1931 about 700 Groupers filled the three women's colleges in Oxford. Two years later a huge summer event was convened, again in Oxford, with 5,000 people attending. Many of those present considered that their time in Oxford trained them for engagement in life-changing in Europe and beyond. Group members were active in 1933 among the delegates to meetings of the League of Nations in Geneva. At the end of 1933, as we have seen, one of the League's most prominent figures, C. J. Hambro, was one of several speakers associated with the Group who addressed over one hundred British MPs.[35] In 1934, Hambro and his wife organised the first Group house-party in Norway, and in the same year B. H. Streeter, a respected New Testament scholar and provost of Queen's College, Oxford, who had an interest in the place of intuition and of divine guidance, came to see the Group as offering spiritual hope for Europe. He told an audience in the Oxford Town Hall that he was associating himself with the movement.[36] The many social and theological connections which Oxford offered ensured that it was a fertile seed-bed for the growth of the Group. At a time when much European church life was flagging, here was an expression of contemporary mission.

New Evangelical Initiatives

The Group sought to base itself on principles derived from older evangelicalism while ensuring their modern acceptability in order to make mission effective. Conversionism underwent crucial reshaping. In 1921 Murray Webb-Peploe and Godfrey Buxton, both from leading Anglican evangelical families with Keswick Convention connections, spent three months with Buchman in America and were impressed by his unconventional evangelism.[37] The Group's association with Keswick, as David Belden shows, was to a large extent written out of later Group historiography. Yet it was Keswick speakers such as F. B. Meyer, as well as missionary statesman such as John Mott and outstanding lecturers such as Henry Wright of Yale and Henry Drummond of Edinburgh, who influenced Buchman's ideas about personal witness.[38] Buchman's emphasis, like that of Drummond, was on the relevance to the contemporary setting. Older evangelical language such as 'Are you saved?' was rejected by the Group. Instead, converts spoke of discovering the 'adventure and romance which I looked for in my pagan days'.[39] Churches were fired by the new mood. Howard Rose, an evangelical Anglican clergyman deeply affected by the Group, moved in 1932 from Oxford to Christ Church, Penge, in south-east London, determined to show his new parish that the Group was relevant. In August 1933 Rose wrote in his parish newsletter about his vision of God speaking directly through 'a spiritual receiving set in every home in our parish'. By autumn of the following year he could report that many who had drifted from faith were now joining Christ Church, finding there 'new reality and joy'.[40]

Conversion was seen as a miracle in which a person was transformed and through which he or she found new

personal potential being realised. An example was Fredrik Ramm, a Norwegian journalist with an international reputation. Ramm had represented the world's press on Amundsen's flight across the North Pole in an airship. In 1934 Hambro invited Ramm to a house-party at Hosbjor, and as Ramm was travelling to the mountain hotel where the gathering was to take place he enquired, with evident cynicism, what was going to happen. 'Miracles', his enthusiastic Group companions replied, 'and you'll be one of them'. Later Ramm spoke of how, at that house-party, 'the ice in my heart melted and a new and unknown feeling began to grow'. He apologised to Group members that his opinion of himself had been too big. 'Not too big', was the response, 'too small.' This was a clear change of emphasis when compared to some traditional evangelical thinking about pride, although Group members argued that the perspective that was being talked about was a divine rather than a human one. Buchman encouraged Ramm to see his potential for achieving change in Norway and Ramm became particularly involved in movements among Norwegian students as well as in crucial moves towards reconciliation between Norway and Denmark over fishing rights. Previously Ramm had bitterly opposed Denmark's claims. At the Norwegian national students' conference of 1935 the press noted that 'the Oxford spirit' was dominant.[41]

The Group both asserted and re-interpreted the life-changing relevance of the message of the cross of Christ. Buchman summed up his experience in 1908 at Keswick with the words of an evangelical hymn – 'At the Cross, at the Cross, where I first saw the light' – and he wrote to Jessie Penn-Lewis in 1920 to say that he seldom spoke at meetings without mentioning that event.[42] Julian Thornton-Duesbery, who later became principal of the evangelical Anglican Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, gained an 'apprehension of what Christ did on Calvary' at a house-party.[43] Replying in 1933 to criticisms that the Group had been moving away from traditional teaching on the atonement, Buchman asserted that it was a personal experience of the atonement, not a theory about it, to which the Group was committed.[44] Thus for the Group it was possible for Christians who took different theological positions over the interpretation of the cross to experience unity and to engage in mission together. In Norway there were considerable theological tensions between liberals and conservatives within the Lutheran Church in the 1920s, but the influence of the Group helped to bring a measure of peace in the mid-1930s. One of those affected by the Group was Eivind Berggrav, who represented the more liberal theological tradition. By the end of the decade Berggrav, by then the Bishop of Oslo, was making common cause with Professor Ole Hallesby, the leader of the conservative evangelicals in Norway. The coming together through the Group, said Bishop Arne Fjellbu of Trondheim in 1945, was an essential foundation for the united witness given by the Norwegian church during the Nazi occupation.[45]

Many of those who were attracted to the Group espoused a position on the authority of the Bible which stressed its practical relevance. For some it was like a new Reformation, indeed bishop Berggrav commented: 'What is now happening in Norway is the biggest spiritual movement since the Reformation.'[46] What the Group offered was an approach to the biblical text that majored on its spiritual significance. In 1935, when Buchman visited Geneva and spoke at a luncheon for 500 guests hosted by Edvard Beneš, President of Czechlosovakia and President of the Leage of Nations Assembly that year, there was comment on the Group's use of the Bible. The Group was seen as accepting the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount and seeking to see the effect of the Word in personal and public life. As Theophil Spoerri, professor of French and Italian Literature at Zurich University, put it, Buchman's reading of a text such as Ephesians 3 verses 20 and 21 transformed it into 'something moving, moving more and more urgently towards the *one* point – the overflowing abundance of

God's effective action, beyond all the bounds of our understanding and longing'.[47] For the Group the authority of the Bible was not to be defined in terms of theological propositions. Rather the Bible was understood as offering direct guidance to anyone who sought help with the everyday decisions which were necessary in contemporary life.

Frank Buchman and his colleagues were also marked by energetic evangelical activism. Buchman's vision was always of an active church. In an address in Zurich in October 1935, which formed the climax of a visit in which Buchman had spoken at many business and governmental receptions, Buchman set out an agenda for Switzerland. 'I can see the Church in Switzerland', he announced, 'in such power that she sends out a mission to Christians in many lands. I can see Swiss business men showing the leaders of the world's commerce how faith in God is the only security. I can see Swiss statesmen demonstrating that divine guidance is the only practical politics.'[48] A few months later Buchman considered that his vision for a Europe mobilised for spiritual action was being fulfilled. Twenty-five thousand people gathered in the British Industries Fair building, Birmingham, the largest covered hall in Europe. There were contingents from thirty-five countries, five hundred from Holland alone. International sportspersons speaking about life-changing included Marjorie Saunders, who had played hockey for England, and Henry Poulson, a Scottish rugby and cricket international. Broadcasting from England in August 1936 Buchman asked his listeners to picture the vast Birmingham audience responding to more than a thousand young people from many nations, 'marching together in a new enlistment'.[49] Active engagement in bringing about change was paramount.

Social and Political Dimensions of Mission

What was also evident by the mid-1930s was that Buchman was consciously shaping his movement so that it resonated with the currents of the time. The most notable achievement of the Group had always been its ability to adapt to a changing cultural context. One observer, Marjorie Harrison, voiced the widespread belief that the Group's promises of joy and thrills fascinated 'a post-War generation, lonely in the midst of crowds, hungry in the midst of plenty, with neither standards nor stable background'.[50] The attention given to themes connected with overcoming sexual temptation was – as we have seen – an example of the Group's determination to face the issues of the time, although Beverley Nichols, a British journalist and sought-after Group speaker in the mid-1930s, complained that 'the real stuff, raw and naked' was not publicly shared. He recalled that when a pimply young man had described at one house-party sensations he had felt during a visit to the Folies Bergères, Buchman had rung a bell and stopped him.[51] Yet the focus on frank revelations about personal longings and failures, which represented a thoroughly modern instinct, was integral to the Group's success.

The Group also mirrored the fascination in the period with the paranormal. There were many stories of Buchman's going, seemingly for no reason, to the right place at the right time, of his ability to discern the thoughts of others, and of his knowing events elsewhere or what would transpire in the future.[52] Interest in the supernatural dimension of life gave the Group a ready audience. Healing, too, was explained by the Group in a way which capitalised on the rapidly growing field, initially a specialist one but increasingly picked up by society at large, of psycho-analysis and psychology.[53] There were reports within the Group of inner healing of sexual complexes, healing of relationships and even physical healings. L. W. Grensted, whose interest in this area was considerable, described a case in which tubercular destruction of a person's lung, clearly shown by X-ray, cleared up within a month.[54] He argued that prayer, psychotherapy and drugs were

all ways by which God's love could cure physical and emotional disorders.[55] The claim was being made that the experience of surrender as explained by the Group offered a direct experience of God and resulted in personal wholeness.

The increasing interest in mass media was another feature exploited by the Group. Modern methods of communication were used to spread the Group's message. Ivan Menzies, a performer with the D'Oyly Carte company, became an active Group member and began to investigate communicating Christianity through drama.[56] At one Sunday morning service, held in a theatre in Oxford, Groupers showed a film.[57] One British journalist, Hugh Redwood, deputy editor of the *News Chronicle*, was one of a number of journalists across Europe attracted by the Group. The British media had a field day in 1937, however, when, at a Foyle's Literary Lunch featuring Group apologists, Margaret Rawlings, an actress, pronounced to the audience of 2,500 that exposure of one's soul in public was like undressing in Piccadilly.[58] The Group was defended by its supporters in Scandinavia, as well as in Britain by Wilson Carlile, the founder of the Church Army. Although the statement by Rawlings embarrassed the Group, her perspective could be seen as a logical extension of the Group's desire to connect with a world that increasingly revelled in the sensational.

There was, however, a more sombre aspect to the society of the 1930s, with economic depression and rising unemployment a feature of the lives of many communities. The Group tried to address the situation of those who found their way of life collapsing. In order to tackle this issue, George Light, chairman of the Unemployed Workers' Association of Warwickshire, in England, was used as a prominent speaker at Group events in Britain. He also spoke to workers and intellectuals in Denmark.[59] In the later 1930s a student for the Baptist ministry at Regent's Park College, Bill Jaeger, led teams of Groupers who worked in poor areas in the East End of London, often on a cross-denominational basis. Jaeger, who never entered Baptist ministry, was to devote much of his life to the labour movement throughout the world.[60] Bill Rowell, who was to represent 250,000 unemployed people in 1936 at the Trades Union Congress, was one of those recruited by a member of Jaeger's team – who was himself the son of a peer. It appeared that through the efforts of Group members such as Jaeger women and men from all sections of inter-war society were beginning to be affected. Increasingly, with the idea of social revolution in the air, Buchman saw the Group as a revolution aimed at bringing in a new social order.

The idea began to emerge of mobilising an international spiritual army, a Group manifesto speaking of fighting a greater war than any known before.[61] Political figures could be utilised. The influence of supportive figures such as Carl Johan Hambro, or in England Sir Lynden Macassey, Leader of the Parliamentary Bar, and Ernest Brown (a Baptist), who was Minister of Labour, was significant.[62] Buchman's frequent visits to Germany in the period in which Nazi influence was growing included a meeting in 1932 with 150 church leaders at Bad Homburg. In the same year a body called the 'German Christians' was organised by the Nazis and one bishop from the German Christians, after attending the 1933 Oxford house-party, preached against the expulsion of Jewish Christians from the churches. He left the German Christians. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as part of the Confessing Church that opposed Hitler, deprecated the Group's efforts to gain a hearing in Nazi circles, efforts that in any case failed.[63] Buchman's contact with Germany highlighted for him the importance of what he called 'spiritual dictatorship'. The Group began to arrange large camps and assemblies, the largest, as we have seen, attracting 25,000 to Birmingham for an event described as 'Enlistment in the moral equivalent of war'.[64] Buchman incurred severe censure for his apparent appreciation, in what was perhaps a throwaway comment, of Hitler's

role as a possible bulwark against Communism.[65] There was certainly never any common ground between the Group and Fascism. An SS Central Security Office document of 1936 saw in the Group a 'dangerous opponent for National Socialism'.[66] By 1938 Buchman's belief in God-control, and his sensitivity to political developments, had led to a new thought: 'Britain and the world must re-arm morally.'[67] The early evangelistic outlook that marked the Group gave way to a more general campaign for Moral Re-Armament.

Renewal and Revival

In a number of ways, however, the Oxford Group in the 1930s anticipated evangelical developments in Europe in the 1960s and subsequently. Group belief in fresh operations of the Holy Spirit in human experience, David Bebbington argues, anticipated the influential charismatic renewal movement of the 1960s.[68] The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner frequently spoke of his debt to the Group and suggested that it offered a form of 'renewal ... by the power of the Holy Spirit'.[69] The British Methodist leader, W. E. Sangster, agreed, and took strong objection to Karl Barth's assertion that the Group was destructive of mystery and spirituality.[70] As with the later charismatic movement, the Group offered a stimulus to existing, rather lack-lustre expressions of religion. Indeed there was some continuity of personnel between the Group and charismatic renewal. Bebbington notes the example of Cuthbert Bardsley, later the bishop of Coventry.[71] George West, Bishop of Rangoon, who was drawn into the Group in 1935, also became an ardent charismatic in the 1970s.[72] John Tyndale-Biscoe, West's chaplain, was one of a circle of early Groupers who subsequently embraced charismatic spirituality, and for him the Group exhibited 'an enthusiasm, expectancy and unity which we find in the Charismatic Renewal'.[73] The Group's strategy was to promote renewal that promoted mission.

Like many of the leaders of spiritual renewal from the 1960s, the Group's leaders wanted to work within existing denominations. Lord Salisbury, Leader of the House of Lords and a senior Conservative, was a Group sympathiser, and encouraged Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, to favour the Group.[74] On 7 October 1933 a congregation of over 6,000 filled St Paul's Cathedral for a service in which the bishop of London, A. F. Winnington-Ingram, used a specially constructed liturgy to authorise 500 life-changers for mission in London.[75] Four German Church leaders attended this ceremony and one of them brought back the Nazi Bishop Hossenfelder to London to meet Buchman and to seek to improve the image of the German Church. Hossenfelder reported back that he did not understand 'all they kept saying about change'.[76] Norway and Finland, through Lutheran Church leaders, experienced the impact of the Group on national life in the mid-1930s. In Oslo the notable Lutheran scholar Sigmund Mowinckel gave support to the Group. Up to 14,000 people attended Group meetings in this period, and communicants in the Oslo diocese grew by nearly a quarter over the following two years.[77] The Group enjoyed widespread acceptance in part because it worked with clerical leaders and did not seek to create separatist churches.

In many situations, however, the Group was prepared to take advantage of extra-ecclesiastical networks and it was also committed to the mobilisation of lay people. These were also emphases that would characterise many more churches in Europe in subsequent decades. The Group's campaign in Denmark in 1935, when team members who had been part of a house-party of 10,000 people in Oxford moved on to Copenhagen, relied heavily on international, non-denominational contacts. These were often made through the YMCA and also through the Keswick Convention, which had links with holiness conventions throughout Europe. For a week the biggest hall in Copenhagen was filled every night. At an

all-Scandinavian demonstration in Hamlet's Castle at Elinsore 10,000 people crowded into the castle courtyard. The chief editor of *Dagens Nyheter* spoke of how all ages and classes were represented.[78] An important factor in the Group's advance was its ability to foster lay leadership. In Norway the two most outstanding Group leaders were probably Ronald Fangen, President of the Norwegian Authors' Association, and Fredrik Ramm. In Denmark, in 1935, a well-known High Court Advocate, Valdemar Hvidt, was convinced by the message of the Group and threw his energies into its activities. Out of the team of 210 which formed the core of the group in Denmark, only seven or eight were clergy. Buchman encouraged them to see Jesus Christ as the answer to human need and to look for 'a mighty awakening of the living Spirit of God'.[79] Lay women and men were given the freedom by the Group to explore new ways of spreading this message across Europe.

Although the Group seemed to offer freedom to individuals, some observers nevertheless detected an underlying authoritarianism in its operations. It became the practice that each person who joined the Group became subject to a system of detailed checking of guidance by someone in the Group's chain of leadership.[80] By 1936 Buchman's view, which reflected ideas of discipline becoming popular in Europe, was that no-one could be 'wholly God-controlled who works alone'.[81] A magazine entitled *Groups*, launched in 1933 by a British Methodist minister, Frank Raynor, voiced anxieties about the system of checking, however, suggesting that personal guidance should be assessed by experienced clergy rather than by an 'inner group' operating, as he put it, in Episcopal fashion, from Brown's Hotel in London, where Buchman often stayed.[82] Raynor was determined to oppose tyranny and compulsion, having himself once been told by the inner Group: 'You have not checked your guidance with us.'[83] God-control was through guidance checked by the Group. This was a symptom of the authoritarianism of the time and also foreshadowed some of the authoritarian charismatic groups that would emerge, for example within British evangelicalism.

Styles of worship within the Group were also designed to convey more modern ideas. Complaints in the 1930s of lack of hymn-singing at Group meetings indicate that the Group was not convinced that existing hymnody was culturally relevant.[84] Neither was the spirituality of the Group sacramental in the traditional churchly sense. Swedish observers spoke of the experience of fellowship itself being the sacrament of the Group.[85] At large Group events in Scandinavia traditional hymns such as 'A Mighty Fortress is our God', might be used, but attention was paid to less familiar features such as visual displays and the vibrant accompaniment of bugles and drums.[86] From 1935, Group members began to compose their own songs, the first – which was written in Denmark in 1935 – being the rhythmic 'Bridgebuilders', composed by George Fraser, a former church organist in Edinburgh. Fraser went on to write over 1,000 songs. A Group-produced record, 'The Drums of Peace', which had sophisticated orchestration, sold 75,000 copies.[87] At a significant house-party at Visby, on the island of Gottland in Sweden, in 1938 when Buchman spoke on progressing through 'Revival' to 'Revolution' and 'Renaissance', a special collection of songs was published. Some of these songs emphasised the creation of a new Nordic spirit which could help to solve world problems.[88] New hymnody was to become increasingly popular in many churches from the 1960s, to a large extent through the charismatic movement.

The Visby house-party was important because Buchman was to insist more and more that revival was not enough. During the Danish campaign in 1935 Buchman clashed with those who he saw as promoting 'over-personal, revivalist-type Christianity' and he was especially annoyed that some local groups organised a prayer meeting to which they invited the press. By the later 1930s he was seeing

traditional revivalism as a kind of 'spiritual deformity'.[89] In some areas of Europe the Group did continue to provide inspiration for local revivals. The renewal in Howard Rose's parish in Penge, London, for example, attracted attention in Sweden. One Swede, Erik Palin, visited Penge in 1934 and took back to Sweden a vision of local parish revivalism. Sweden was to experience the impact of the Group much more through these kinds of personal contacts and also through literature than through large Group rallies of the kind found elsewhere in Europe. Buchman's call at Visby in 1938, however, was of a different order. He challenged people from various countries meeting in the cathedral of this old Hanseatic city to look forward, to 'build a Christian philosophy that will move Europe' and to discover the experience of the cross. With this experience, he asserted, 'you would not shrink from anything'.[90]

Conclusion

This study has sought to examine a remarkable movement which emphasised the possibility of life-changing experience. The first phase of the Oxford Group, beginning in the 1920s, owed a great deal to aspects of the evangelical tradition in America and Britain. Buchman was, however, dissatisfied with the status quo, and his concern was to promote a message which would attract people for whom the traditional evangelical approach was irrelevant. The Group's informal and undoctrinal meetings, house-parties and larger events, centred initially on Oxford, were part of a strategy designed to adapt evangelical mission to modernity, in particular to cultural trends in Europe in the 1930s. Spiritual experience involved life-changing, forging deeper relationships, sharing and guidance. The lack of a theological framework was a serious weakness, but some European church leaders saw in the Group a contemporary, non-clerical form of Christianity that could bring together those from different traditions. New evangelical initiatives were being taken. The Group sought to be relevant to the social and political environment. Although Buchman became wary about ideas of revival, the Group presaged later movements of renewal. Buchman's ideas were always changing, and the Group's mission emphases, so clearly evident in the inter-war period, gave way to a wider moral campaign. But the spiritual changes that had been felt in the 1930s continued to have an effect. Fredrik Ramm, who had seen his life dramatically altered through contact with the Group (and who was referred to by Norway's foreign minister as 'one of Norway's greatest heroes'), as he was dying in a Gestapo prison during the Second World War said: 'All I learned in the Oxford Group remains true. I would rather be in prison with God than outside without Him.'[91]

NOTES

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18 *BW*, 14 July 1932, p. 288.
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20 *BW*, 16 January 1936, p. 332.
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22 A. Thornhill, *One Fight More* (London, 1943), p. 20; *The Record* (*R*), 7 October 1932, p. 601.
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27 Lean, *Buchman*, pp. 144–5.
28 *BW*, 6 July 1933, p. 273.
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30 *Daily Express*, 28 February 1928, p. 1; Driberg, *Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*, p. 61.
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