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B. H. Streeter and the Oxford Group

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This article examines the involvement of the prominent New Testament scholar, B. H. Streeter (1874–1937), in the Oxford Group, the movement founded by the American religious leader Frank Buchman. Streeter's mind was shaped by a liberal and modernist Anglicanism, while Buchman's ideas originated in a more Evangelical milieu; however, a common desire to do something about the international crisis of the 1930s brought them together. Streeter committed himself to Buchman's work in July 1934. In the next three years, influenced by Group teachings on the guidance of God, he concluded that his previous religious outlook had been too humanistic, and his faith became more experiential

On 11 July 1934, before an audience of 2,000 people in Oxford town hall, B. H. Streeter (1874–1937), Provost of The Queen's College and prominent New Testament scholar, stated that he was ceasing his attitude of 'benevolent neutrality' towards the movement known as the Oxford Group; he declared that he could not longer play the part of 'Gamaliel' and that it was now his duty to associate himself with the Group.[1] He was true to his word, remaining closely involved with the movement until his death three years later. It was a bold decision: Streeter's academic career had been devoted to the task of updating Christian theology, and his mind was shaped by liberal and modernising tendencies in Anglicanism; by contrast, the ideas of Frank Buchman (1878–1961), the American founder of the Oxford Group, originated in an Evangelical milieu, even if Buchman were not a typical Evangelical. Streeter and Buchman, although both in their

OG = Oxford Group; MRA = Moral Re-Armament

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[1] Typscript of speech, pp. 1–2, B. H. Streeter file (6.1072), Oxford Group UK Archives, Dial House, Whitbourne, Worcs. For a description of some of those who were at the meeting see Oxford international house party July 1934 file (4.3.1), ibid.

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ways unorthodox, came from different worlds and were unexpected allies. In addition, although the OG was very influential in inter-war Britain, its methods were controversial, and Streeter risked his international reputation by associating himself with it. So what did Streeter find attractive about the Group, and how radical a turning-point in his life and thinking was his decision?

This article, the first detailed analysis of the OG's influence on a major theologian, shows that Streeter was impressed by the Group's attempts to address the deteriorating international situation. It indicates that exposure to the OG led Streeter to conclude that much of his religion contained humanistic elements, and that there were more radical possibilities in Christianity. If, as John Court has suggested, Streeter's religious faith was always a quest,[2] a much more optimistic note came into his thinking through the Group. His actual theological views – as Anders Jarlert has noted – were relatively unaffected, except for the fact that his belief in the possibility of divine guidance was strengthened.[3] In part, the OG appealed to Streeter because it combined aspects of modernism with traditional Christianity, although at the same time modernism as an intellectual project became less important to him after 1934.[4] The Group also positively influenced Streeter's marriage and social life.

Streeter before 1934

Born in Croydon in 1874, Street was educated at King's College School, London, and went up to The Queen's College, Oxford, in 1893 with a classical scholarship. He subsequently graduated with a triple First, in Classical Moderations, Greats and Theology. The only son of a solicitor, he initially intended to become a lawyer, but then chose an academic career. He was ordained in 1899, becoming Fellow and dean of Pembroke College, Oxford (1899–1905), before returning to The Queen's College to be successively Fellow, dean, praelector, chaplain and then Provost in 1933.[5] He was well known in the college for an ability to inspire affection in students, and draw out what was in the minds of others; and he had a good sense of

[2] John Court, 'Burnett Hillman Streeter', *Expository Times* cxviii/1 (2006), 20. L. W. Grensted made the same point in 'Streeter, Burnett Hillman (1874–1937)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography, 1931–1940*, Oxford 1949, 837.

[3] Anders Jarlert, *The Oxford Group, group revivalism, and the Churches in northern Europe, 1930–1945, with special reference to Scandinavia and Germany*, Lund 1995, 65.

[4] On the OG's modernism see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain*, London 1989, 235–6.

[5] Details taken from Court, 'Streeter', 19. Streeter succeeded E. M. Walker as provost. On appointment, he was praised for his academic reputation and knowledge of the college, and for being a 'man of business': *The Queen's College Record* ii/1 (Nov. 1933), 9–10.

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humour, and a penchant for citing limericks. He was also in fragile health, and was sometimes shy and nervous.[6]

Streeter came to prominence as a biblical scholar for writing a series of essays in *Oxford studies in the synoptic problem* (1911), in which he emphasised the priority of the Gospel of Mark and the existence of 'Q' as a lost source for the Gospels. Later, in *The four Gospels: a study of origins* (1924), Streeter proposed what became known as the 'Four-document' theory of Gospel origins, in which he suggested that, as well as Mark and Q, there were traces of two other documents behind the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.[7] He was prepared to re-examine fundamental Christian doctrines. In the co-authored *Foundations* (1912), which he edited, he questioned naturalistic accounts of the resurrection,[8] and in *Restatement and reunion* (1914), he challenged the traditional interpretation of the Virgin Birth narrative and stated that little was satisfactory in contemporary Christianity.[9] In 1932–3 he was Dean Ireland's Professor of Exegesis at Oxford. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1925, and received honorary degrees from the universities of Edinburgh, Durham and Manchester.[10]

Streeter was involved in the modernist movement, even if his modernism was arguably less a theological tenet than a call for the rights of critical scholarship.[11] He was on the governing body of Ripon Hall, Oxford, a liberal theological college founded by H. D. A. Major in 1919, and regularly attended the Conferences of Modern Churchmen in the interwar period.[12] Seeking to update Christianity, Streeter collaborated in 1917–19 in producing a series of 'group books' that sought to relate theology to different branches of modern knowledge: *Concerning prayer*, *Immortality* and *The spirit*.[13] He was

[6] See *The Queen's College Record* xi/5 (Nov. 1937), 5–6; Alan Thornhill, *One fight more*, London 1943, 32.

[7] Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986*, Oxford 1988, 131–5; B. H. Streeter, essays in W. Sanday (ed.), *Oxford studies in the synoptic problem*, Oxford 1911, in particular 'On the original order of Q', at pp. 141–64; 'St Mark's knowledge and use of Q', at pp. 166–83; 'The original extent of Q', at pp. 185–208; and 'The literary evolution of the Gospels', at pp. 210–27, and *The four Gospels: a study of origins*, London 1924.

[8] See B. H. Streeter 'The historic Christ', in B. H. Streeter, R. Brook, W. H. Moberley, R. G. Parsons, A. E. J. Rawlinson, N. S. Talbot and W. Temple, *Foundations: a statement of Christian belief in terms of modern thought: by seven Oxford men*, London 1912, 132–3.

[9] Idem, *Restatement and reunion: a study in first principles*, London 1914, 79.

[10] Details taken from Court, 'Streeter', 19.

[11] This was the view of Michael Ramsay, as described ibid. 21. See also Grensted, 'Streeter', 838.

[12] A. M. G. Stephenson, *The rise and decline of English Modernism*, London 1984, 109, 212, 214, 218, 219.

[13] B. H. Streeter (ed.), *Concerning prayer: its nature, its difficulties and its value*, London 1916; B. H. Streeter, A. Clutton Brock, C. W. Emmett, J. A. Hadfield and the author of Pro Christi et Ecclesia, *Immortality: an essay in discovery co-ordinating scientific, psychical and biblical research*, London 1917; B. H. Streeter (ed.), *The spirit: God and his relation to man considered from the standpoint of philosophy, psychology and art*, London 1919. These works were the fruit of a circle organised by

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very interested in the relationship between religion and science, and in his widely-acclaimed *Reality* (1926), announced that to match the new philosophy of science, a new philosophy of religion had to be found;[14] indeed, Streeter's Oxford contemporary L. W. Grensted, a theologian also involved in the Oxford Group, even suggested that Streeter would have regarded philosophy of religion as his main interest.[15] Streeter's modernising ideas extended to his views on the role of women in the Church; he was a member of a group supporting women's ordination that presented a memorandum to the Lambeth Conference in 1930.[16] An interest in religion in Asia also resulted in a co-authored work on the Indian Christian mystic, Sadhu Sundar Singh, and a book on Buddhism and Christianity.[17]

Streeter's modernism made him a controversial figure in Anglican circles, and it was suggested after he died that it may have prevented him from becoming a bishop.[18] When he was made a canon of Hereford Cathedral in 1915, the bishop of Zanzibar, Frank Weston, complained in the *Church Times* that some of his views were incompatible with fundamental Christian truths.[19] Austin Farrer later suggested that his ideas emptied the Christian faith of the incarnation.[20] In his youth, Streeter was himself uncertain of his faith. He became an agnostic at Oxford while reading for Greats, but subsequently returned to religion through the gateway of T. H. Green's philosophy. He was ordained with the idea of passing on the truths he had seen, but even then remained full of doubts, and was only restrained from relinquishing his orders by the advice of a friend and the inspiration of the summer conferences of the Student Christian Movement.[21] His faith remained shaky; one of his students before 1914 recalled that he was torn by 'grave metaphysical anxieties'.[22]

Lily Dougall that met outside Oxford: B. H. Streeter, 'Biographical note', in Lily Dougall, *God's way with man*, London 1924, 14, 16. See also B. H. Streeter (ed.), *God and the struggle for existence*, London 1919.

[14] B. H. Streeter, *Reality: a new correlation of science and religion*, London 1926, 32.

[15] Grensted, 'Streeter ', 837. Grensted was Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of Christian Religion at Oxford from 1930 to 1950. See also n. 34 below.

[16] *The Times*, 1 June 1931.

[17] B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The sadhu: a study in mysticism and practical religion*, London 1922; B. H. Streeter, *The Buddha and the Christ*, London 1932.

[18] The bishop of Birmingham [E. W. Barnes], *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Sept. 1937.

[19] *Church Times*, 1 Apr. 1915; *The Times*, 1 Apr. 1915. For the reply of the bishop of Hereford [John Percival] see *The Times*, 7 Apr. 1915. Streeter was a canon at Hereford Cathedral from 1915 to 1934; it led to his writing *The chained library*, London 1931.

[20] Austin Farrer, 'A return to New Testament Christological categories', *Theology* xxvi (1933), 305–6. Farrer was referring to Streeter's argument in *Reality* that the passion and resurrection were best understood as a picture in human terms of the spirit of reality.

[21] Streeter, *Reality*, pp. vii–viii.

[22] Nicholas Davenport, *Memoirs of a city radical*, London 1974, 4.

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Streeter's decision to become involved in the OG

If Streeter's faith reflected aspects of liberal Anglicanism and English empiricism, the OG's teaching was very different. Buchman's thinking was shaped by a Lutheran Pietistic background, as well as by Evangelicals such as John R. Mott, Robert Speer and Henry B. Wright who were associated with the Northfield Student Conferences and the American YMCA. He was also influenced by figures in the Keswick movement: on a visit to Keswick in 1908 he was much affected by what he called an 'experience of the Cross' after hearing a sermon by Jessie Penn-Lewis; and his life-long stress on the practice of 'guidance' came from the Baptist minister, F. B. Meyer.[23] After working as YMCA secretary at Penn State University (1909–15), Buchman was a missionary in India and China (1915–18) and also lecturer in personal evangelism at Hartford Theological Seminary (1916–22). His work, which was non-denominational, grew in the UK from 1921 onwards; from 1928 it was known as the Oxford Group, and after 1938 as Moral Re-Armament.

Buchman always stressed the importance of 'personal work' with individuals, and early accounts of his work were full of stories of personal change.[24] OG teaching emphasised conviction of sin, sharing, surrender, restitution, guidance and absolute moral standards, and the calling to do God's will in the context of the needs of the world.[25] Buchman was suspicious of intellectualism, believing that it was sometimes a mask for moral weakness, and instead of trying to convert people's minds concentrated on a change of the will. Yet he was open to contemporary ideas too, once saying that 'Whatever you do, relate it to modern life.'[26] He always emphasised the social dimension of faith and in the 1930s his work increasingly moved towards endorsing what Anders Jarlert has called 'personalism on a national and international level'.[27] Buchman also believed that the Holy Spirit was at work in other faiths, and his work eventually expanded into non-Christian traditions.[28]

Streeter had known of the OG for a number of years before July 1934 and had met several of its leaders. It seems that as early as 1921, Buchman and Streeter knew each other through a common interest in Sadhu Sundar Singh,[29] and in the following years Streeter started to meet some of

[23] Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 30, 35–6. On the OG's links with Keswick spirituality see Ian Randall, *Evangelical experiences*, Carlisle 1999, 240–1.

[24] Harold Begbie, *Life changers*, London 1923; A. J. Russell, *For sinners only*, London 1932.

[25] See 'Layman with a notebook', *What is the Oxford Group?*, Oxford 1933.

[26] Ian Randall, '"We all need constant change": the Oxford Group and mission in Europe in the 1930s', *European Journal of Theology* ix/2 (2000), 179; Theophil Spoerri, *Dynamic out of silence*, London 1976, 108.

[27] Jarlert, *The Oxford Group*, 41.

[28] 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, MI 2003, 217.

[29] Spoerri, *Dynamic out of silence*, 181.

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Buchman's younger supporters. In early 1928 the *Church Times* announced that the university was being overrun with 'Buchmanism', and this was followed by attacks on the OG in the *Daily Express*. Against this, Streeter was himself quoted in the *Daily Express* as saying that the leaders of the group were 'absolutely sincere', and that many people who had been involved with the Group had been helped by it.[30] In 1932 he cautiously defended the OG in a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation*, stating that he had been trying to make a 'first hand study' of the OG, and expressing optimism that the movement would prove capable of overcoming the dangers that arose from its very vitality.[31] Streeter and his wife, Irene, hosted a tea party for the OG in January 1934.[32] In addition, Streeter's contact with the Group had led him to make 'some apologies and restitutions which were due'. At the same time, he regarded the Group as a 'well-meaning but unimportant activity'.[33]

The main source on Streeter's decision of July 1934 is a memoir, *One fight more* (1943), by Alan Thornhill, Fellow and chaplain of Hertford College, Oxford, from 1931 to 1936, who was a strong supporter of Buchman, and who helped to draw Streeter into the Group. According to Thornhill, in the early 1930s Streeter occasionally dropped in on the daily 1.30 p.m. meetings of the OG, and then began to attend an inner circle of Group leaders that met on Monday evenings. Thornhill suggests that he was impressed by the OG's emerging philosophy, its direct and colloquial language, its family atmosphere and the mixture of 'daring faith and shrewd common sense' that it exhibited. It was perhaps also reassuring that Grensted and another Oxford churchman, Julian Thornton-Duesbery, were also supporters of Buchman.[34]

In *One fight more*, Thornhill recounted an incident that played an important role in Streeter's decision. In April 1934 Thornhill returned to Britain from a visit to the USA on the steamship *Aquitania*; Streeter was on the same ship after giving some lectures in the USA. Thornhill upgraded his ticket to first class following a 'hunch' that he should spend some time with Streeter. On the voyage, Streeter told Thornhill that he felt that his 'main job in the world was now done', having in mind the work he had done to make the truths of religion understandable to contemporary audiences. Thornhill countered that Streeter's greatest task still lay ahead him: 'You've given your life to

[30] Quoted in Thornhill, *One fight more*, 17.

[31] B. H. Streeter, 'The new revivalism', *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 Dec. 1932, 724.

[32] Roland Wilson to Frank Buchman, 27 Jan. 1934, Streeter file (3.2154).

[33] Streeter, speech, 23 Sept. 1935, ibid. (6.1072).

[34] See L. W. Grensted, 'The Oxford Group: plans for the winter', *The Times*, 15 Sept. 1933; 'Guidance from God', *The Listener* (Mar. 1934), 396–9, and his conclusion to R. H. S. Crossman (ed.), *Oxford and the Groups*, Oxford 1934, 192–208. Grensted's involvement started to decline in the mid-1930s: Jarlert, *The Oxford Group*, 66–8; obituary, *The Times*, 19 Mar. 1964. Julian Thornton-Duesbery, chaplain and Fellow of Corpus Christi College, 1928–33, became headmaster of St George's School, Jerusalem, in 1933, returning as Principal of St Peter's Hall in 1940: obituary in *The Times* (8 Apr. 1985). See his *The open secret of MRA*, London 1964.

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make eternal truths plain to men's minds. Now you will make them effective in their lives.' Streeter was struck by the remark, and suggested that the two of them should pray together about the matter.[35]

Streeter was apparently still wrestling with his faith. Surveying the sea, he said to Thornhill: 'You know this kind of thing creates in me complete disbelief in God and the universe and everything else.'[36] Intellectual conviction mattered to him. In a lecture that he gave in the USA before the voyage, Streeter noted that few of his friends based their faith on religious experience.[37] The comment probably applied to him too, and it meant that when he had intellectual doubts, he had little to fall back on in terms of experience.

Another factor was Streeter's personal life. Streeter's marriage, in 1910, to the independent-minded Irene Louisa Rawlinson, had not been easy. According to Thornhill, Irene was 'rather a forbidding figure', a 'Puritan' in outlook who disapproved of her husband's unconventional religious views. They lived apart for much of their lives, with Streeter adopting a bachelor lifestyle. However, sometime in 1933/34, under the influence of the OG, Irene returned to live permanently with Streeter and became his hostess at The Queen's College after he became Provost; and she also asked his forgiveness for the way she had deprived him of warmth and affection and told him what to do.[38]

The OG's international outreach also appealed to Streeter. Streeter was always something of a public intellectual, and the OG appealed to his anxieties about the political tensions in the world. Indeed, in his announcement of July 1934 he referred to the worsening world situation, describing it as 'more and more one full of depression, full of despair'. A year later he said that it had been his duty to become active in the OG, rather than to be a sympathetic outsider, because the Group was a force capable of influencing humanity on something like a national scale, and affecting public opinion that in some nations functioned at too low a level.[39] Streeter wrote to Buchman in June 1937 that he was drawn to the OG not primarily by failure to meet personal or family problems (even if he had been helped in this area), but by concern about the world situation, and he suggested that the OG was recalling the Churches to their 'proper task of saving the souls of nations as well as individuals'.[40]

[35] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 5–10. For details of the visit to the US see B. H. Streeter, 'Modern criticism and the synoptic gospels', *Modern Churchman* xxiv (Aug., Sept., Oct 1934), 451. See also Alan Thornhill, *Best of friends*, Basingstoke 1986, chs vii, ix.

[36] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 6.

[37] B. H. Streeter, *The Church and modern psychology*, Evanston, Ill 1934, 14.

[38] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 26–7.

[39] B. H. Streeter, speech, 23 Sept. 1935, Streeter file (6.1072).

[40] Streeter to Buchman, 30 June 1937, ibid. (3.2154).

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When Streeter told Irene that he wanted to speak at one of the public meetings of the 1934 house party, he was risking his academic and ecclesiastical reputation.[41] In the university as a whole, the Group was perhaps rivalled only by the Communist October Club in the controversy it aroused.[42] Its profile was such as to provoke two collections of essays in 1934 by prominent scholars and churchmen, *Oxford and the Groups* and *The meaning of the Groups*, which included strong criticism of Group methods, as well as positive assessments.[43] The Anglican hierarchy, Archbishop Lang included, was at the time cautiously supportive of the OG, for it had brought new vitality to many parishes across the UK in the early 1930s.[44] However, critics thought that the practices of guidance and sharing could be misused, and charged it with being untheological, elitist and authoritarian.[45]

It was thus an effort for Streeter to stand up and associate himself publicly with the Group. A year later he could still see 'the faces of certain learned and cultured friends' when he did so.[46] He wrote, ironically, to Buchman in 1936: 'If I had not met the Group, I might have died a distinguished theologian.'[47] He feared harming his college by identifying with the Group, but was spurred on by the thought that if there was another war, then there might no longer be a college.[48]

One prominent critic of the OG, Hensley Henson, bishop of Durham, wrote that Streeter's involvement in the OG was a characteristic example of him going along with the latest religious craze.[49] When preaching on the OG in Hereford Cathedral shortly after his Oxford declaration,[50] Streeter used

[41] Streeter's speech came before that of a London telegraph boy: Thornhill, *One fight more*, 26–8; Revd Sam Shoemaker, in *The New Witness* (Montreal), 12 Oct. 1937.

[42] Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 154. For a recent study see Daniel Suck, 'Men want something real: Frank Buchman and Anglo-American college religion in the 1920s', *JTS* xxviii (2004), 260–75.

[43] Crossman, *Oxford and the Groups*, appeared in January 1934: *The Times*, 26 Jan. 1934. Its contributors, all associated with the University of Oxford, included G. F. Allen (chaplain, Lincoln College), W. H. Auden, Grensted, B. E. Gwyer (Principal, St Hugh's), L. P. Jones (former Principal, Manchester) and Martin D'Arcy (Master, Campion Hall). Contributors to F. A. M. Spencer (ed.), *The meaning of the Groups* (London 1934) included William Brown (Wilde Professor of Mental Health at Oxford), H. D. A Major (modernist theologian: see n. 110 below), Ronald Knox, Charles Raven (Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge: see n. 140 below) and Evelyn Underhill.

[44] Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 179. On later Anglican criticism of MRA see pp. 436–41.

[45] See David Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group movement between the wars', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds), *Voluntary religion* (Studies in Church History xxiii, 1986), 500 ff.

[46] B. H. Streeter, speech, 23 Sept. 1935, Streeter file (6.1072).

[47] Streeter to Buchman, 6 Apr. 1936, cited in Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 256.

[48] *The New Witness* (Montreal), 12 Oct. 1937.

[49] Herbert Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, ii, London 1946, 328. For Henson's account of the OG see *The Group movement*, Oxford 1933.

[50] Hereford Cathedral preacher's book, 15 July 1934, Hereford Cathedral archives. Streeter returned in August with a team of speakers: *Hereford Diocesan Messenger* xxxvii/5 (Nov 1934), 916.

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personal testimony, and Henson reported that this caused indignation and amazement in the congregation.[51] However, Henson's hostility to the OG was too deep for him to offer an objective appraisal of its work.[52] Certainly, in the diocese of Hereford at least, Streeter found much support. At a diocesan conference in November 1934, a resolution recommending serious consideration of the Group, to which Streeter and Thornhill both spoke, was passed with only one dissentient.[53]

Streeter's involvement in the OG

Streeter's continued to pursue his academic interests after July 1934, although he wrote comparatively little in the last three years of his life. He gave a talk at the Conference of Modern Churchmen in September 1934,[54] and continued to teach his special class on the Gospels.[55] He was also conscious that he could not use his position as provost to publicise the work of the OG. When on one occasion it was suggested that he invite people to an OG event, he replied that 'what Canon Streeter might like to do, the Provost of Queen's must be more careful over'.[56] Nevertheless, the OG became a central focus of Streeter's energies over the next three years, and at times his home at Queen's was the centre of its operations. He took full responsibility for the OG's work in the UK, impressing its leading organiser, Roland Wilson, with his enthusiasm and commitment.[57]

Thornhill wrote that involvement in the OG meant that a new 'family life' opened up for Streeter: 'He was no longer Professor Streeter, the patron, the spectator, the distinguished visitor. He was B.H., the loved and lovable father of a big family – the whole Group in Oxford.'[58] Buchman wrote to him in 1935 that he could be an example of 'a professor really changed, who is different, who has an answer to our loneliness, who has fellowship with youth because he understands them'.[59] The word 'loneliness' may be pertinent. The OG offered Streeter the opportunity of being part of a friendly as well as lively religious community.

As regards 'personal work', Streeter had always believed in the possibility of people changing. As early as 1915 he wrote that human nature could be

[51] Henson, *Unimportant life*, ii. 349. Henson's tenure as bishop of Hereford (1917–20) overlapped with Streeter's years as an honorary canon at the cathedral.

[52] Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson*, Oxford 1983, 214.

[53] *Hereford Diocesan Messenger* xxxvii/6 (Jan. 1935), 935–7.

[54] Stephenson, *English Modernism*, 219.

[55] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 31.

[56] Alan Thornhill to Buchman, handwritten letter, n.d., Alan Thornhill file (3.2214), Oxford Group UK archives.

[57] See, for example, Roland Wilson to Buchman, 19 Nov. 1935, and 21 Jan. 1936, Roland Wilson 1934–36 file (3.2304), ibid.

[58] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 34.

[59] Buchman to Streeter, 19 Sept. 1935, Streeter file (3.2154).

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changed, stating that this was what Christianity existed to do – although he also added that this change would 'not be soon'.[60] He was concerned about the moral state of his students. One of them, who was at Queen's from 1921 to 1924, recalled that Streeter held meetings with undergraduates who had sexual problems,[61] and another, who was there in the mid-1930s, reported that when he was dean Streeter used to note the names of students who had got drunk at college booze-ups.[62]

Streeter's experience of 'life-changing' was mixed. On one occasion in 1935 he suggested to a young man, V. J. Wrigley, who was in the college Student Christian Movement, that they have a 'quiet time'. Wrigley understood this to mean that they write down their sins on a piece of paper and share them, and after a period of silence he mentioned some minor things. However, Streeter was not impressed by Wrigley's thoughts, and left without sharing his own sins. Wrigley recalled it as an 'embarrassing but memorable encounter'.[63] However, in a letter to Buchman in May 1935, Thornhill recounted a more fruitful episode: '[Streeter] was used to win a pagan Canadian undergraduate in Keble the other day. He said to me over the 'phone "I rather feel I have half saved half a soul".' Streeter asked Thornhill to help, but Thornhill urged him to finish the job himself, later recalling, 'Next day a new recruit was to be seen at the 1.30 meeting. The change had taken place.'[64] Streeter brought three undergraduates with him to a house party in Malvern in February 1935,[65] and some months later the Streeters were hosts to twelve students at a meeting in their house, where one topic of conversation was how to read the Bible.[66] Irene seems to have had more success at life-changing than her husband. At an Oxford house party in July 1937 she declared that her cook and three maids were 'all changed', and that they were all having morning quiet times and sharing their 'guidance' after breakfast.[67]

As well as becoming closely involved in the OG's work in the UK, Streeter was drawn into Buchman's wider European work. Notably, he made three visits to Scandinavia, mainly to Denmark, but also to Sweden. The first of them, a three-week visit to Denmark in April 1935 for a major OG campaign,

[60] B. H. Streeter, *War, this war and the sermon on the mount*, Oxford 1915, 12.

[61] John Jevons to Brian Harrison, 1 Apr. 1989 (material gathered by Harrison containing recollections of Oxford college life before 1950), The Queen's College archives. Jevons thought that the sin in question was masturbation, although he later wondered whether it was homosexuality.

[62] V. J. Wrigley, 'Queen's in mid 1930s', pt II, ibid.

[63] Idem, 'A quiet time with the provost: in 1935', *The Queen's College Record* vii/5 (Dec. 1999), 31.

[64] Thornhill to Buchman, 30 May 1935, Thornhill file (3.2214); Thornhill, *One fight more*, 33.

[65] See Kenaston Twitchell to Buchman, 4 Feb. 1935, Kenaston Twitchell file (3.2263), Oxford Group UK archives.

[66] Irene Streeter to Buchman, 11 May 1935, Streeter file (3.2154).

[67] Irene Streeter statement at houseparty, 7 July 1937, ibid.

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was especially influential. In the winter of 1934–5 Buchman had led a campaign in Norway that had aroused great public interest.[68] A campaign in Denmark followed, with a similar intention to influence national life. Up to 500 foreign visitors participated in all or part of the event, including both Streeter and Grensted from Oxford.[69] Streeter was particularly impressed by a house party at Haslev, an educational centre outside Copenhagen, at which 2,000–3,000 people were present for the final weekend, including people from all walks of Danish life.[70] Throughout his visit Streeter had a high profile. Nicknamed the 'flying professor' on his arrival in Copenhagen by the Danish daily *Berlingske Tidende*,[71] he was then one of a team of speakers who spoke at some large Group meetings in Aarhus. He also met, and made a lasting impression on some of Denmark's most senior clerics.[72]

Streeter's thinking at the time was evident in a sermon that he gave in Copenhagen on Palm Sunday. He suggested that by failing to respond to Christ's teachings, the Jewish Church of Jesus' time lost its chance of becoming the home base for world missionary activity and the regeneration of the Roman empire. He stated that the threat to civilisation in his day was even greater than it had been at that time, and that only a fundamental moral change could avert war or revolution. With this in mind, he stated that the New Testament books of John and the Acts witnessed to the idea that Christ, after his death, continued to make himself effective through 'a divine indwelling', and that this Spirit could be discerned in such episodes as the Fransiscan revival and the Reformation. Noting that when people changed, it could affect the politics of nations, he suggested that anyone who might like to begin the 'necessary moral revolution' in their own lives, talk to a member of the Group.[73]

The OG's influence in Denmark following this and later visits was considerable; there was evidence that it led to a rise in the standard of commercial honesty, conscience money being paid to customs officers, and a reduction in the statistics of divorce.[74] Streeter was so impressed by the 1935 campaign that he wrote to *The Times* about it, stating that it had exceeded anything he could have believed possible, and that the OG could provide the 'moral impetus' needed for the world to find a way out of the present crisis;

[68] For details of the Norway visit see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 215ff.

[69] Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 225–6.

[70] 'The Oxford Group in Denmark', 12 May 1935, in 'Denmark/Press material, 1935–59', Moral Re-Armament papers, Library of Congress, box 300. See also Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 226.

[71] *Berlingske Tidende*, 2 Apr. 1935.

[72] Ronald Allen, in *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Sept. 1937. See also the tribute by the bishop (Dr H. Fuglsang-Damgaard) and dean (Paul Broderson) of Copenhagen: *The Times*, 30 Sept. 1937.

[73] B. H. Streeter, text of sermon, 14 Apr. 1935, pp. 1–8 (p. 6 missing), Streeter file (6.1072).

[74] For details of the campaign in Denmark see Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 225–32; Streeter to Buchman, 30 June 1937, Streeter file (3.2154).

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he said that 'a race which has grown up intellectually must grow up morally – or perish'.[75] Streeter was evidently impressed by the OG's belief that nations could be called by God. Speaking at a house party in Oxford in July, he drew attention to the way in which during the Danish campaign people came to believe that their country had received a call from God, and applying this to his audience, suggested that each person at the house party should consider what his own and what his country's calling might be.[76]

Streeter's support gave Buchman the legitimacy he needed amongst clergy who were suspicious of his methods and tendency to work outside ecclesiastical channels. Streeter accompanied Buchman on visits to bishops during the April 1935 visit to Denmark,[77] and also joined him on a trip to Karlstad in August 1935 for a meeting with the archbishop of Sweden, Dr E. Eidem, at a time when he was exploring the possibility of arranging an OG campaign in Sweden.[78] Streeter's writings were also helpful: a thousand copies of his *Times* article were reprinted for distribution;[79] and an article he wrote for the *Spectator* in September 1935, 'Luther, Erasmus and the Oxford Group', was also widely distributed and reproduced in German.[80]

On returning to Oxford after the visit to Copenhagen, Streeter declared at the OG 'team meeting' (which took place in his rooms in The Queen's College) that he had 'learned a lot about himself' in Denmark, although he was not specific. He also remarked that, after becoming involved with the OG, he had found that he could do three hours work in two, and produce material at a moment's notice that previously would have taken a long time.[81] Irene certainly saw a change in him, writing to Buchman that 'The change in him is I think apparent to all, and I myself feel very different – full of new life and hope and a happiness that is I believe God-given.'[82]

As with many of his closest supporters, Buchman sought to develop in Streeter an awareness of the character and needs of particular individuals, and the importance of life-changing for national life. An example of this occurred in Denmark the following April. One of those interested in the OG was the religious editor of *Berlingske Tidende* and leader of the Danish YMCA,

[75] B. H. Streeter, 'Moral aspects of world crisis', *The Times*, 10 May 1935; draft letter, 25 Apr. 1935, Streeter file (6.1072).

[76] Oxford Group Weekly supplement, *Montreal Witness and Canadian Homestead*, 7 Aug. 1935.

[77] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 37.

[78] The campaign did not materialise: Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 303–4.

[79] Twitchell to Buchman, 16 May 1935, Twitchell file (3.2263), p. 3.

[80] B. H. Streeter, 'Luther, Erasmus and the Oxford Group', *Spectator*, 6 Sept. 1935, 348–9. See also Buchman to Bishop Dr Fuglsang-Damgaard, 3 Oct. 1935, Bishop Dr Fuglsang-Damgaard file (3.1757), Oxford Group UK archives, and B. H. Streeter, *Luther, Erasmus und die Oxford-Gruppe*, Gotha 1935.

[81] Loudon Hamilton to Buchman, 29 Apr. 1935, Loudon Hamilton file (3.0924), Oxford Group UK archives.

[82] Irene Streeter to Buchman, 25 Apr. 1935, Streeter file (3.2154).

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Aage Falk Hansen.[83] Although Hansen was friendly to the OG, Buchman believed he had been 'undercutting' the Group in his conversations with a local bishop.[84] Buchman wanted Streeter, who knew Hansen, to talk to him. However, he warned him that Hansen's relationship with him had been affected by a desire to prove his theological credentials: 'He made up to you because you were the theologian, and he felt he had a good theology. There is a note of self-importance.' Buchman challenged Streeter: 'Draw him out, and then give him a daring challenge .... Ask whether he has any doubts, and what they are. Lure him along, then at the right moment land the fish.'[85]

Streeter met Hansen a few days later, and shared with him his spiritual autobiography, explaining why he had joined the Group. Hansen was worried that he might be pressured into joining the Group and thus become subject to Buchman's authority. Streeter stressed the 'Gamaliel point', noting that if Gamaliel had identified fully with the disciples, he could have brought the best elements of the Pharisees into Christianity, thus affecting the evolution of Christianity. He also invited Hansen and his wife to Oxford. Streeter reported all this to Buchman[86], who in reply suggested that Hansen's doubts about his authority stemmed from an unwillingness to let the Holy Spirit be the arbiter; men like him depended more on their own power, and that only as men like Streeter were faithful with them over a longer period, would they begin to understand that. He mentioned that one of their main opponents from a year before was now leading meetings in their support.[87]

It is important to understand that from the OG's point of view Streeter, for all his academic expertise, was a man in training. Indeed, Buchman's distinctive approach to training individuals was very much evident in his relationship with Streeter. As was customary, Buchman avoided theological arguments. Kenaston Twitchell, who helped to co-ordinate OG activities in Oxford, recalled that while Buchman's theology was 'conservative to a degree', and Streeter's was 'liberal to several degrees', they never got into an argument. Twitchell drove Buchman and Streeter around Denmark and Sweden, and recalled that during their journeys Streeter regularly offered Buchman pamphlets he had written, thinking that they might be useful to the OG, and that Buchman usually responded by saying, 'Fine, fine', while never making use of them. Buchman, he said, 'was more interested in the inspiration of the new Streeter than the academic theories of the old'.[88] That being said, Buchman suggested that Streeter revise 'Christ the constructive

[83] See Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 227.
[84] This was probably the bishop of Copenhagen, Hans Fuglsang-Damgaard.
[85] Buchman to Streeter, 6 Apr. 1935, Streeter file (3.2154).
[86] Streeter to Buchman, Copenhagen, 15 Apr. 1936, ibid; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 255.
[87] Buchman to Streeter, 20 Apr. 1936, Streeter file (3.2154).
[88] Kenaston Twitchell, 'Oxford', in Oxford 1928–61, UK file (4.3.1.), Oxford Group UK archives, 8–9.

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revolutionary', his contribution to *The spirit*, for Group use, although nothing came of it.[89] Twitchell certainly believed that Streeter was changing a lot. In May 1935 he reported to one colleague that the 'development in individuals' had been very striking in Denmark, and that Streeter and others had 'grown out of all recognition'.[90]

Scandinavia was not the only focus of Streeter's European activity. In September 1935 the Streeters were part of a group of several hundred OG supporters who went to Geneva at the start of an ambitious campaign in Switzerland similar to the previous ones in Norway and Denmark. In Geneva itself, Buchman made a concerted effort to present his philosophy at the League of Nations, which was then trying to resolve the Abyssinian crisis. At the invitation of Eduard Benes, president of the League, a lunch was arranged for League of Nations delegates to hear about the OG on 23 September. The Streeters were amongst the almost 500 people who were there.[91] Speeches were given testifying to the reality of personal change, and its relevance for national life. The dinner and general outreach impressed some observers. For example, the journalist Sisley Huddleston wrote in his memoirs that Buchman, Streeter and others seemed to be doing more for peace than the foreign secretaries and League officials.[92]

Streeter did not see the OG as a rival to the mainstream Churches. In a sermon in Geneva Cathedral, he stated that the OG did not offer a new religion but encouraged people to take the religion of Christ seriously.[93] A few months later, in December 1935, he described the Oxford Group as 'a kind of synthesis of the Evangelical insistence on a definite re-orientation of the personality with the Roman Catholic, Anglican or Presbyterian insistence on the necessity of continuous discipline and training'; he also said that it synthesised tendencies in Christianity that had a personal and a social focus. He emphasised that the aim of the group was not to found a new sect, but to revive religion within the existing Churches, and to bring religion to those outside the Churches, and he likened its aims to those of Wesley.[94]

Streeter made similar points in 1937 in the *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, responding to an attack on the OG by Karl Barth. Barth was an opponent of Buchman's work, believing that ultimately it substituted humanity and morality for the mystery and grace of God,[95] and in the *London Quarterly* he suggested that it placed excessive emphasis on results, declaring that religious or moral experience could not be the ultimate test of the truth

[89] Streeter to Twitchell, 25 May 1935, Streeter file (3.2154).

[90] Twitchell to Ray Purdy, 17 May 1935, 'T, 1932–35', file, Moral Re-Armament papers, Library of Congress, box 221.

[91] Spoerri, *Dynamic out of silence*, 89.

[92] Sisley Huddleston, *In my time*, London 1938, 397.

[93] B. H. Streeter, 'God's plan for men', address in Geneva Cathedral, Streeter file (6.1072).

[94] Idem, 'Some principles of the Oxford Group', 11 pp, ibid.

[95] Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth*, London 1976, 276.

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of God's revelation in Christ.[96] Encouraged by Barth's Swiss contemporary, Emil Brunner, who was an admirer of the OG's pastoral work, Streeter replied, stressing the Group's outreach to the unchurched and its wide influence. He emphasised that the Group did not have a theology of its own, but encouraged people to go to their own churches for that; and he cited Buchman as saying that the object of the Group should be to render itself unnecessary by bringing new life into existing churches.[97]

Streeter was also keenly interested in Buchman's attempts to influence events in Germany. Much of Buchman's work in the 1930s was built around attempts to bring a life-changing current into German life. During the visit to Geneva in 1935, Buchman took Streeter with him to Nuremberg, where, at a party, Streeter met Ribbentrop. In August the following year, Streeter wrote to Buchman suggesting that he (Streeter) contact Ribbentrop once he had taken up residence as ambassador in London, an idea to which Buchman responded warmly.[98] A month later, while in hospital with blood poisoning arising out of an infection in his foot, he sent Buchman some ideas about a possible meeting with Hitler himself. He suggested that Hitler invite the OG to Germany and that a series of small-scale meetings take place, especially for members of the Hitler Youth. He also suggested that members of the Hitler Youth should be invited to an OG rally in the UK, similar to a large one that had recently taken place in Birmingham,[99] where they could be the first detachment in a pageant of marching youth. Streeter argued that the impression produced in England by such a march would be enormous, and back in Germany it would counteract any impression that the OG was Anglo-Saxon. Obviously believing that Hitler himself could change, he concluded by suggesting that, if the Fuhrer invited the OG to Germany, he could perhaps explain in an interview why he had never been against religion, and that only reliance on God had pulled him through the difficulties of his own life.[100]

[96] Karl Barth, 'Church or Group movement?', *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (Jan. 1937), 1, 9, 4.

[97] B. H. Streeter, 'Professor Barth v. The Oxford Group', ibid. (Apr. 1937), 145, 146–7. Brunner considered writing a reply to Barth's article, but had 'clear guidance' not to, and passed on some ideas to Streeter instead: Emil Brunner to Buchman, 10 Feb. 1937, Emil Brunner file (3.0282), Oxford Group UK archives. For more on the views of Barth and Brunner on the OG see Karl Barth, *Karl Barth-Emil Brunner: Briefswechsel: 1916–1966*, Zurich 2000, and Emil Brunner, *The Church and the Oxford Group*, London 1937.

[98] Nothing seems to have come of this idea: Streeter to Buchman, 13 Aug. 1936, Streeter file (3.2154). See also John Roots to Roland Wilson, 12 Sept. 1935, Wilson 1934–6 file (3.2304); Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 406–7; Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 236–7.

[99] See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 248.

[100] Detail derived from research notes compiled by Morris Martin and cited in Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 42.

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Streeter was generally well-informed and perceptive about European political life, but in this case his comments look very naïve. However, they should not be interpreted as indicating Nazi sympathies on his part. Rather they reflected the OG's confidence that anybody could change, Nazi leaders included, and Buchman's tendency to try to reach people by articulating Christian truths in language to which they could relate. It was an example of what David Bebbington has called the OG's strategy of 'maximum inculturation',[101] a strategy that Streeter clearly endorsed. Buchman hoped that his outreach into Scandinavia would affect the whole of Europe, including Germany and Britain. Streeter was apparently impressed by the way he had been 'led' into powerful campaigns in the countries bordering on Germany.[102]

While Streeter supported Buchman's approach wholeheartedly, there is evidence to suggest that he and Buchman differed on which of the European dictatorships posed the greater threat. Buchman was particularly exercised by the threat of Communism, and the moral relativism – what he called 'moral Bolshevism' – that lay behind it. In 1936 he was accused of being a Nazi sympathiser after an interview with the *New York World-Telegram* (25 August) in which he was quoted as saying 'Thank God for Hitler'. However, Buchman was certainly not pro-Nazi. The tenor of the interview, and his ideas of the period, indicate that he saw National Socialism as a possible bulwark against Communism, not an ideology to recommend. In 1936 the Gestapo described the OG as a 'dangerous opponent'.[103]

If Buchman were particularly concerned about Communism, Streeter was more worried by the extreme Right. His views on the dictatorships were already evident in a lecture of 1933 in which he favourably compared the English education system, which he saw as based on the development of character, with the systems in Italy, Germany and Russia, which he said were ethical and spiritual reactions against individualistic and rationalistic systems of education, and the association of Christianity either with intellectually impossible beliefs or with political conservatism.[104] Then, in a university sermon of June 1936, speaking in the light of events in Abyssinia, Streeter compared Mussolini to Lenin, saying that both men promoted an ethic that was contrary to Christ's, but stating that in his public utterances Mussolini's principles were even further away from the ethic of Christ than Lenin's.[105] On 4 August 1936, he wrote to Buchman saying that Fascism was in the long run more dangerous than Communism because the very aim of

[101] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 235.
[102] K. D. Belden, *The hour of the helicopter*, Yeovil 1992, 41.
[103] Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 214, 147, 238–40.
[104] Streeter, 'Education', in Kenneth Kirk (ed.), *Personal ethics*, Oxford 1934, 12, 6. See also speech in Oxford, 22 Jan. 1935, Streeter file (6.1072).
[105] University sermon, 21 June 1936, Streeter file, ibid. 7.

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Fascism was immoral, whereas Communism's aims (a fairer distribution of goods) were good, even if the methods used to achieve them were bad. At the same time, he emphasised the importance of the OG staying above the 'Communism-Fascism antithesis'.[106]

Continuity and change in Streeter's ideas

Many of the OG's ideas were already present in Streeter's thinking prior to 1934. For example, his religion had always had an inter-denominational emphasis. During the war Streeter complained about the failure of Christians to resolve their internal divisions,[107] and in services at Queen's he emphasised that all members of the college were welcome as communicants.[108] He was also relaxed about what forms the Church should take, writing in *The primitive Church* (1929) that Christians should imitate the spirit, not the form of the early Church.[109]

There was also some common ground between Anglican modernism and some of the ideas of the OG. H. D. A. Major himself saw the OG as an advance on old revivalist teaching in that it did not refer to hell-fire or use blood theology, and did not take a fundamentalist view of Scripture.[110] There was possibly a misunderstanding of Buchman's theology here, for Buchman did refer to the blood of Christ,[111] and although not a typical Evangelical always retained elements of the Keswick outlook.[112] At the same time Buchman sometimes used the kind of psychological language that appealed to modernists and liberals.[113] For example, he emphasised the importance of having an 'experience' of the Cross of Christ, by which he meant an experience of the cross's transforming power.[114] Streeter was himself drawn to a psychological interpretation of the atonement. In his essay 'The defeat of pain' (1919), he described forgiveness of sins as meaning that the naturally evil consequences of sin could be transmuted by a change in people's

[106] Streeter to Buchman, 4 Aug. ibid. (3.2154).

[107] B. H. Streeter, 'The Church and the woman movement', in B. H. Streeter and E. P. Picton-Turbervill, *Woman and the Church*, London 1917, 5.

[108] J. C. Culshaw, 'Queen's 1929–33', typescript (Harrison material), 10.

[109] B. H. Streeter, *The primitive Church*, London 1929, 262.

[110] H. D. A. Major, 'The Group movement', in Spencer, *The meaning of the Groups*, 124–6.

[111] See, for example, Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 367, 388.

[112] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 237.

[113] Grensted and the Methodist Leslie Weatherhead, both of whom could be called modernists, were amongst other admirers of the OG who were interested in the psychology of the religion: ibid. 237. On the OG and psychotherapy see also Alison Falby, 'The modern confessional: Anglo-American religious groups and the emergence of lay psychotherapy', *Journal of History of the Behavioral Sciences* xxxix/3 (2003), 256–9.

[114] See Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 31, 111, 239, 266, and Boobbyer, 'Moral re-armament in Africa', 216.

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attitudes towards theirs sins and God. He also said that this was what the traditional doctrine of forgiveness had been driving at, even though it had been obscured by language derived from the 'Jewish sacrificial system' and an 'obsolete psychology'.

Streeter certainly found in OG teaching confirmation of ideas about psychology that he had held for some time. Also in 'The defeat of pain', Streeter observed that shell-shock hospitals had shown that people who talked openly about repressed or buried memories often found 'relief'.[115] Streeter understood the OG concept of 'sharing' in a similar way. Speaking on 'Pyschological aspects of the Oxford Group', Streeter distinguished it from the Catholic conception of confession, which as a preliminary to absolution he understood to be a juristic rather than a therapeutic act, and analysis by psychotherapists, which he believed was not essentially concerned with moral values; sharing he saw as something conducive to psychological health in that the expression of moral conflicts, resentments or phobias was likely to result in the relief of psychological tension, leading to an end to misery in the present and sometimes nervous trouble in the long term.[116] Streeter also stressed that, contrary to rumour, confession of sin was not meant to be public in the OG, although personal 'testimony' designed to encourage others, if it were discreet and not breaking confidences, was a good thing.[117]

There was also common ground between the OG's approach to morality and Streeter's ethical ideas. Streeter believed that the Church needed to re-express its moral philosophy to a sceptical younger generation.[118] In 'Moral adventure' (1927), an attempt to re-examine Christian morality in the light of the teachings of Nietzsche and Havelock Ellis, he called for a new moral vision rather than a new code, and a morality that was not based on fear: 'Though renunciation for the sake of principle is morally creative, renunciation for fear of consequences is not.'[119] In his 1933 lecture on education, he differentiated repression from self-control, noting that the most successful educational systems encouraged a 'sublimation' of inhibited instinct. In the same paper he contrasted Freud's belief that morality was a set of rules imposed by society with St Paul's vision of 'liberation from an ethic based upon inhibitions'.[120]

[115] Streeter, 'The defeat of pain', in *God and the struggle for existence*, 174, 182–3, 195.

[116] Idem, 'Psychological aspects of the Oxford Group', n.d., Streeter file, Moral Re-Armament records, Library of Congress, box 345, 9–10.

[117] Idem, 'Some principles of the Oxford Group', 6–7.

[118] Idem, 'Need of moral guidance', *The Times*, 19 Oct. 1927.

[119] Idem, 'Moral adventure', in B. H. Streeter (ed.), *Moral adventure: the faith of science and the science of faith*, London 1927, 120, 76, 126.

[120] Idem, 'Education', in Kirk, *Personal ethics*, 19–20, 24. See also *The Church and modern psychology*, 28–31.

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Many of these ideas were expressed in OG teaching as Streeter understood it. Speaking in Oxford in January 1935, Streeter stated that, unlike the older Puritan ethic, the OG did not stress the negative side – the responsibility for what people did wrong – so much as the necessity for a person to hand over the direction of his life to God, to be an instrument for creating good.[121] Later the same year Streeter distinguished the OG from Puritanism by noting that it did not fear pleasure as such; it did not actually forbid smoking or drinking, although most of its leaders avoided those things. There were no rules of that kind, and individuals were permitted to continue doing those things unless God, speaking through conscience and in quiet times, told them to renounce them.[122]

The idea of listening to God was also not new to Streeter: in *Foundations*, he stated that the great prophets sometimes followed the leading of 'an inner voice';[123] he once quoted Lily Dougall as saying, 'Give yourself a short time every day just to enjoy God';[124] and he had witnessed at a meeting of an obscure modern sect the phenomena of 'speaking with tongues' and 'prophecy'.[125] At the same time, contact with the OG prompted Streeter to take the idea of guidance more seriously. Writing in *Berlingske Tidende* in 1935, he stated that an unexpected result of his involvement with the Group had been the light it shed on aspects of his research. He had written a draft chapter on the rise of Christianity for the *Cambridge ancient history*, but seeing the Group from within gave an 'entirely new meaning' to the language used in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St Paul regarding the Spirit. He had, he said, 'seen the Spirit as a living power in actual everyday life'; the Holy Spirit was no longer a dogmatic conception or an interesting phenomenon in religious history, but the 'Divine actually at work in human lives'. Consequently, he rewrote the central section of the chapter.[126] Streeter was likely referring to section IV, 'Fire from heaven', which contained a number of statements suggesting an OG influence. For example, Streeter noted that possession by the Spirit, as St Paul understood it, produced an 'internal revolution' in the outlook of the individual, and that 'spirit-possession' brought with it the reappearance of the prophet; and he also said that in the early Church it was an everyday event for Christians to stand forth in the community as prophets.[127]

Another work that bore the mark of OG influences, especially in its emphasis on 'surrender' to God, was Streeter's pamphlet, *The indwelling of God in man*, first published in 1924, and reissued in 1935. Under OG influence,

[121] Idem, 22 Jan. 1935, Streeter file (6.1072).
[122] Idem, 'Some principles of the Oxford Group', 1.
[123] Idem, 'The historic Christ', 123. [124] Idem, 'Biographical note', 21.
[125] The sect is not named: idem, 'Poems of Jesus', *Hibbert Journal* (Oct. 1933), 14.
[126] Idem, *Berlingske Tidende* (15 Apr. 1935); English transcript in Streeter file (3.2154).
[127] Idem, 'The rise of Christianity', in S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock and M. P. Charlesworth (eds), *The Cambridge ancient history*, IX: *The imperial peace, AD 70 –192*, Cambridge 1936, 266–7.

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Streeter added a section to the new booklet, entitled 'Vitality', in which he noted that weakness and egoism often caused people to make mistakes at critical points in their lives, but that these could often be avoided by people who had found the 'enhanced vitality' that came when they had completely given themselves over to doing God's will; Paul's adventures, and his words in 2 Cor. xi. 23–33, testified to this. Such people, he said, were 'masters of circumstance'.[128]

The main work that Streeter wrote under OG influence was *The God who speaks* (1936), a revised version of the Warburton Lectures that he gave for Lincoln's Inn in 1933–5 under the original heading of 'God and the Bible'.[129] Streeter consulted a group of young men about the new title, and it came, according to one of them, 'through the united guidance of all who were present'.[130] Two of the lectures were first written after Streeter joined the OG.[131] When he showed the lectures to Twitchell, he commented that of the six lectures the two written after joining the Group were the most accessible, while the others were 'rather of the nature of academic lectures'. Streeter wrote to Buchman that he was 're-writing these – to good effect'.[132] The very fact that Streeter rewrote the more academic lectures was an indication of how his academic priorities were being challenged by the OG. When the book appeared, Streeter wrote in a copy for Buchman: 'To Frank Buchman – apart from you, much herein would be written otherwise.'[133]

A central theme of *The God who speaks* was the idea that God had a plan for the world. While warning against the doctrine of predestination taught by Augustine and Calvin, Streeter declared that religion would not again be potent in the life of Europe until the belief was revitalised that God had a purpose for individuals and the world. For those who wished to do God's will, and were ready to confess and make restitution for things that they had done wrong, that plan would be revealed step by step through the still small voice. The early books of the Old Testament contained examples of prophets who had made 'epochs in human history' by listening to the inner voice. These prophetic individuals were still subject to the limitations of their times, so God's influence was understood as stimulating rather than superseding their highest powers. The same belief in the possibility of receiving divine guidance was a feature of primitive Christianity. Streeter understood guidance to be

[128] Idem, *The indwelling of God in man* (1924), London 1935, 15.2 Cor. xi. 23–33 refers to the difficulties Paul faced on some of his journeys.

[129] *The Times*, 27 Nov. 1933.

[130] J. C. M. Fairlie, writing in *Church of England Newspaper*, 17 Sept. 1937.

[131] These were probably lecture 5, 'Lord and giver of life', and lecture 6, 'To the rescue of reason', in B. H. Streeter, *The God who speaks*, London 1936, 149–78, 179–92. Lecture 1, 'God's plan', reproduces parts of a speech that Streeter gave in Geneva in September 1935: 'God's plan for men', Streeter file (6.1072).

[132] Streeter to Buchman, 8 Nov. 1935, Streeter file (3.2154). The book also contained (pp. 195–216) a supplementary lecture on 'Christianity and other religions'. See also *The Times*, 23 Jan. 1934.

[133] Lean, *Frank Buchman*, 171.

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linked to what he called 'the intuitional element in ethics', and distinguished it from conscience by suggesting that whereas conscience pointed to the difference between right and wrong, guidance indicated which of two right things ought to be done.[134]

The OG's emphasis on guidance was controversial, and a number of churchmen warned of its possible misuse.[135] Streeter conceded that there were potential pitfalls in applying the idea, writing that guidance always needed to be subject to some checking mechanism, notably the Bible. The OG was like the Society of Friends in its stress on this point, and St Teresa's practice of submitting her visions to a priest before deciding on their spiritual origin reflected the same concerns.[136]

Streeter had long held the view that reason alone was insufficient for spiritual understanding: in *Restatement and reunion*, he said that men who believed in reason should learn to practise prayer;[137] and in *The sadhu*, he emphasised that the highest kind of spiritual knowledge was not attained by the mere exercise of the intellect, but by the 'strengthening and illumining of the intellect by Christ'.[138] Awareness of the limitations of reason was also evident in *The God who speaks*. In his sixth lecture, 'To the rescue of reason', Streeter described the present time as 'an age of Unreason' and talked of the 'modern revolt from reason'. At the same time, he noted that according to modern psychology reason was often subject to unhealthy desires, phobias and resentments in people. Liberation from these things was vital, since reason and liberty only flourished where most people behaved as reasonable beings. Religion had a vital role in bringing this about. As in *The sadhu*, Streeter also stated that there was a higher form of reason that came with an awareness of God: he said that the right functioning of reason depended on gaining the kind of higher wisdom that came with and from a 'religious apprehension of the divine personality'.[139]

The Oxford Group was sometimes accused of lacking intellectual rigour.[140] However, Streeter argued that its teaching was in keeping with contemporary thinking about the way the mind worked. To a friend who expressed disappointment that a person of his intelligence should have

[134] Streeter, *The God who speaks*, 10, 21, 67, 3–4, 57–60, 159, 164. In a positive review of the book, Henry van Dusen, later head of Union Theological Seminary, wrote that the link between guidance and conscience should be elaborated further: *Journal of Religion* xvii/2 (1937), 224.

[135] On this see Randall, *Evangelical experiences*, 256–7.

[136] Streeter, *The God who speaks*, 165, 169. Elsewhere, Streeter mentioned the value of having 'quiet times' with other people in the fellowship: 'Some principles', 3.

[137] Idem, *Restatement and reunion*, 80.

[138] Idem, *The sadhu*, 184.

[139] Idem, *The God who speaks*, 180–1, 186–91.

[140] See, for example, Charles Raven, 'Paul planted, Apollos watered', in Spencer, *The meaning of the Groups*, 28–31. Raven accused Grensted of abandoning the task of wrestling intellectually with issues in his book, *The person of Christ* (London 1933), which was written under OG influence.

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associated himself with the Group, Streeter replied that his concept of intellectuality was out of date. The OG was right to believe that ideas and emotions were often rooted in the will, and the dedication of the will to God invariably led on to a redirection of the emotions and the liberation of the intellect.[141]

If Streeter's writings about the nature of reason in *The God who speaks* reflected longstanding views, his attitude to academic knowledge and the intellectual life was also changing. In the prologue to *The God who speaks* he wrote that during the previous two years he had come to see more clearly than before the limitations inherent in any purely intellectual approach to religion.[142] Perhaps he was partly influenced by the fact that the OG was suspicious of academic language, and encouraged people to express themselves in a universal way. Thornhill recalled that at one OG meeting Streeter described guidance as 'supra-rational contact with the great Over-Soul', and this excessively abstract formulation was not well received.[143] More importantly, however, Streeter's theology was becoming more experiential.

The evolution of his thinking on these matters owed something to the Haslev house party in Denmark in 1935. During the house party, Streeter said that only since coming to Haslev had he begun to understand Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. He had expounded it before, and partly understood it, but only now had he begun to feel what he called 'the spirit expressed in these ideas'. Talking of how the spirit of God could transform a person, he declared that 'I have only just seen how it is something which gives new life – a release from fear and bondage, like the spring buds opening at this Easter time. Perhaps I do not yet understand all of what Luther meant, but I am sure he meant at least this. It is renewal of life.'[144]

These points were developed further in his *Spectator* article later in the year. Here Streeter suggested that he and many of his colleagues were like Erasmus, in that their main work had been focused on relating Christianity to modern knowledge; yet something more was needed, something akin to the work of Luther, that had made Christianity accessible to large numbers, and changed many lives. Streeter saw the OG doing this. Many people, he noted, found the OG's informal methods undignified, and he himself had felt that way, being drawn to the 'great traditions of the past and the cultural value of venerable institutions'. But these values, he said, belonged to humanism more than Christianity; they appealed to the Erasmus in him. 'Humanism *is* good', he said, 'so long as it is given second place, and not the first.'[145]

[141] Streeter, 'Psychological aspects', 2.
[142] Idem, *The God who speaks*, 2.
[143] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 36.
[144] B. H. Streeter, Haslev, 22 Apr. 1935, Streeter file (3.2154).
[145] Idem, 'Luther, Erasmus and the Oxford Group', 348–9.

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This statement about Erasmus' Christianity was in some ways a statement about Anglicanism as well. In *Restatement and reunion*, Streeter, using a formulation originating with Matthew Arnold, described the Church of England as a mixture of Hebraism and Hellenism.[146] In a lecture of 1933, he commented that Erasmus stood for a fusion of Hebraism and Hellenism.[147] Implicitly, Streeter was suggesting in his *Spectator* article that the Anglican Church had too much of a humanistic spirit in it. In an article of April 1935, Streeter stated that the Church was failing because it relied too much on theological and intellectual arguments and forms, and that what the world needed was not more knowledge, but more goodwill to use the knowledge that it already had.[148] In many ways, this criticism of the Church was a comment on his own religious ideas.

Last weeks of life

In the summer of 1936 Streeter became very ill when the infection he had in his feet spread to his whole body. Still recovering, he spent eight weeks in Switzerland the following summer, where he was joined by Irene and some friends who had just attended the Oxford house party.[149] At the end of the visit Streeter pronounced himself 'cured'. However, he and Irene were killed in an air crash in Switzerland on their return flight on 10 September. The funeral was held in Basle on 14 September.

These weeks in Switzerland were very important for the Streeters spiritually. Those around them evidently saw their role as trying to prepare them for their next phase of life. It was an example of the way in which the OG tried to provide focussed care for individuals, and how it functioned as a close-knit spiritual community. Some of the party, for example the recent Oxford student Harry Addison and English tutor Christine Morrison, were much younger than the Streeters, a fact itself illustrative of the relatively youthful profile of the OG at the time.[150] The Streeters were clearly happy to receive spiritual care from the younger group, although there was also a sense that the younger people were like children to the couple.

One issue that was discussed was the Streeters' marriage, for there were still tensions, and unity in the family was always much stressed in the OG. In June 1937 Irene wrote to Buchman saying that she felt a 'conflict of loyalties' about being the wife of a man whose position was not based on 'the real

[146] Idem, *Restatement and reunion*, 111. See also Mathew Arnold, *Culture and anarchy*, ed. and intro. J. Dover Wilson, Cambridge 1932, ch. iv. [147] Streeter, 'Education', 5.

[148] Idem, *Berlingske Tidende*, 2 Apr. 1935, quoted in *Supplement to the British Weekly*, 25 Apr. 1935. [149] The holiday took place in the Alpine village of Lauenen.

[150] Addison went on to work full-time with the OG and MRA; Morrison taught at the Society of Oxford Home Students which became St Anne's College in 1952.

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implications of the spiritual revolution'. Perhaps she still did not fully approve of her husband's academic career. She added that the two of them had not yet discovered a 'true basis of cooperation of action' and that during Streeter's recent illness they had 'not really shared'.[151] She subsequently wrote again, saying that much depended on Streeter recovering, 'not only physically but mentally & spiritually', so that they could go forward as 'a united team with but one aim in Oxford'.[152]

There seems to have been some breakthrough, for Addison recalled that before the air crash the Streeters had been looking forward to the next days together as a 'second honeymoon, during which they might find new unity'.[153] The details are not clear, but some discussion about painful incidents in the past seems to have taken place, for Morrison subsequently wrote: 'We got to know in those days so much that lay far back in the lives of them both and hurts that needed curing.'[154]

Addison and Morrison both believed that Streeter's faith became more personal during these weeks in Switzerland. Addison stated that Streeter found a 'very real and simple faith in Christ' at the time, and that it became natural for him to 'thank God for the weather, the beautiful scenery and the fellowship which surrounded him'. Morrison wrote that he had been kindled into a 'new seeking for God as a God of love to whom he could make a personal response'.[155] If true, this was clearly an important development in Streeter's faith. Certainly, Streeter's confidence in his religion had grown considerably since his voyage home on the *Aquitania* in 1934.

The Streeters were nervous about possible opposition to the OG in Oxford. According to Addison, Streeter did not look forward 'with unmixed pleasure' to returning to Oxford, and was expecting opposition and persecution.[156] Irene was even uncertain about the framework of their lives in Oxford, because she mentioned to Buchman that if they failed to make good progress against the 'negative front' [against the OG] in the coming year, they would have seriously to consider whether they were in the best position 'to be maximum in this spiritual warfare'.[157]

In spite of this, Streeter had lots of ideas for the future of the university. According to Thornhill, he was depressed by the narrowness of its religious societies, its lack of independent thinking and genuine culture, and the growing appeal of Communism.[158] In addition, he may have been dissatisfied

[151] Irene Streeter to Buchman, 18 June 1937, Streeter file (3.2154).
[152] Irene Streeter to Buchman, 15 Aug. 1937, ibid.
[153] H. S. A. [Harry Addison], 19 May 1941, 'Suggestions for section on B. H. and Irene', ibid. (6.1072).
[154] C. L. Morrison to Buchman, 12 Sept. 1937, C. L. Morrison file (3.1508), Oxford Group UK archives.
[155] Ibid.
[156] H. S. A., 'Suggestions'.
[157] Irene Streeter to Buchman, 15 Aug. 1937, Streeter file (3.2154).
[158] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 23.

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with the fact that the Oxford Theology School was becoming increasingly separated from personal devotional life.[159] One morning in Switzerland, he and Irene shared their 'vision' for the university, and the part Oxford might play in bringing 'true illumination' to the world.[160] Streeter saw a 'changed Oxford University'.[161] According to Morrison, Streeter especially valued three things about Oxford: the tradition of co-operation in college and university life; the friendly relationships between tutors and undergraduates; and the free search for truth; and she suggested that he wanted these things to be lifted onto a new level.[162]

Streeter was also thinking about the nature of democracy. He stated that the struggles for freedom which had laid the foundations of British democracy were struggles for the freedom of the individual to do what he felt God wanted him to do, not what he wanted to do; and he was convinced that the only hope for democracy in Britain lay in a return to 'God-control' in the life of the individual and the nation.[163] These ideas were clearly inspired by Buchman, for 'God-control' was a phrase he used a lot in the 1930s.[164] In general, Streeter seems to have been optimistic about Britain for, in his final letter to Buchman, he stated that what he had seen happening in Denmark could happen in Britain: 'It *will* happen, if those who lead Britain learn to find in God their inspiration and direction. And Britain, thus led, would save the world. But the opportunity must be seized during the period of uneasy respite from major calamity which at the moment appears to lie ahead.'[165] Just before his death, his mind was on Asia; he wrote to *The Times*, suggesting that Japanese and Chinese troops refrained from using the neighbourhood of Peking for military purposes during hostilities, out of respect for the cultural history of China.[166]

Streeter continued to consider possible writing projects. He wanted to explore the theme of God-control in a book that made available 'experiences of God's control in business, education, and politics'. Morrison reports that Streeter and Irene were planning this book together.[167] At the same time, Streeter had not abandoned his more academic pursuits. In some notes that

[159] On this theme see F. M. Turner, 'Religion', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The history of the University of Oxford*, VIII: *The twentieth century*, Oxford 1994, 309. For Streeter on the intellectual merits of the Oxford Theology School see *Oxford Magazine*, 12 June 1930, 850–4.

[160] H. S. A., 'Suggestions'.

[161] Harry Addison, 'An appreciation of B. H. Streeter', Streeter file (6.1072).

[162] C. L. M. [Christine Latto Morrison], 'Dr and Mrs Streeter', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Sept. 1937.

[163] Addison, 'Appreciation', 2.

[164] Frank Buchman, *Remaking the world*, London 1961, 3.

[165] Streeter to Buchman, 30 June 1937.

[166] B. H. Streeter, 'What of Peking?', published posthumously in *The Times*, 30 Sept. 1937. Streeter visited China and Japan in 1929 and 1931: Bishop Logan Roots, 'Burnett Hillman Streeter', Streeter file (3.2154).

[167] C. L. M., 'Dr and Mrs Streeter'; Thornhill, *One fight more*, 58; H. S. A. 'Suggestions'.

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he wrote just before he died, there is evidence that he was thinking of writing a book exploring evidence for the life of Christ, and outlining a vision of God that could be verified in real life.[168]

Streeter's death was widely reported in the press. Outside the OG commentators emphasised his contribution to theology.[169] OG supporters often stressed what they saw as the wider relevance of Streeter's life, clearly having in mind his last three years; for example, at one memorial service the Streeters were described as 'spiritual statesmen'.[170] Streeter became something of a role model in the OG and its successor MRA. *One fight more*, in which Thornhill described Streeter as a 'modern Amos', played an important role in presenting him as an iconic figure.[171] The OG understood its work to be a kind of battle, so the title of Thornhill's memoir was in itself a mark of honour, designed to herald Streeter's battling qualities. Later, Thornhill wrote a play based around Streeter's experience, *Bump supper night*, which portrayed an academic emerging from his study into the light of real religious experience and relationships in the context of wider ideological struggles.[172] An abridged version of *The God who speaks* was published by the OG in 1971.[173]

The OG's attempts to re-interpret the Christian life for the contemporary world appealed to Streeter's modernism. Indeed, Streeter once said that the religious insight of the OG was 'merely a modernisation of that of the New Testament'.[174] At the same time, his involvement in the OG was not simply an expression of his modernist instincts. Streeter never abandoned scholarship, but under OG influence he came to place less emphasis on the importance of relating religion to modern knowledge. He once said that the academic work he and others had done would be useful to the Churches revived by the OG, even if its importance was in the second place and not in the first.[175]

More personally, the OG gave Streeter a greater sense of the experiential side of religion. His new emphasis on guidance reflected this. In *Restatement and reunion*, he stated that Anglicanism was pre-eminent in three things: 'charity, sanity and the love of truth'.[176] If this was a good summary of his own early beliefs, his religion of 1934–7 contained a new emphasis on the

[168] Memo book, 8 Sept. 1937, Streeter papers, The Queen's College archives.
[169] See, for example, *The Times*, 13 Sept. 1937; *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Sept. 1937.
[170] Revd Sam Shoemaker, 19 Sept. 1937, quoted in *The New Witness* (Montreal), 12 Oct. 1937.
[171] Thornhill, *One fight more*, 40.
[172] Idem, *Bump supper night*, n.d., Alan Thornhill papers (SC-100), Wheaton College archives, Wheaton College, Illinois.
[173] Streeter, *The God who speaks*, abridged Roger Hicks, London 1971.
[174] Idem, 'Psychological aspects', 5.
[175] Idem, 'Luther, Erasmus and the Oxford Group', 348.
[176] Idem, *Restatement and Reunion*, 118.

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Holy Spirit; indeed, suggestions that there were proto-charismatic elements in the OG are born out in his experience.[177] In addition, if Addison and Morrison were right, Streeter also had a stronger sense of a personal God at the end of his life.

The OG also affected Streeter's relationships. His marriage improved, and his life became less solitary. It has been suggested that Streeter before 1914 perfectly exemplified the kind of intellectual person for whom the key events of life take place in the mind.[178] This intellectualism was challenged by the personalist and relational emphasis of OG spirituality.[179] People in the OG were not shy of talking openly and easily about personal spiritual questions, and Streeter readily entered into this more confessional spiritual culture.

Jarlert has suggested that the OG presented a utopian alternative to National Socialism and Communism, and while the term 'utopian' is perhaps too strong – Buchman always assumed the doctrine of the 'fall' of man – his thinking certainly contained a revolutionary dimension. Streeter came to share his radical optimism. Always concerned with public issues as well as matters of scholarship, he was drawn to the OG by despair at the world situation and a desire to do something about it. The campaigns in Scandinavia and Switzerland impressed him, and led him to believe that deep change was possible in the life of nations as well as individuals.

Jarlert also argues that Streeter's experience in the OG illustrated the idea that the Group offered a 'practical theology of action' somewhat independent of traditional Christian doctrine.[180] There is truth in this; with the exception of the new emphasis on guidance, little changed in Streeter's theology after 1934, and he never saw the OG as an alternative to the Church. On the other hand, it does not embrace the fact that Streeter also saw the OG as bringing Christianity to non-believers. This mixture of a non-dogmatic spirituality with evangelicalism was in fact a typical feature of the Oxford Group. It was a combination made possible, as Ian Randall notes, by the language of the Holy Spirit.[181] Certainly, the idea of guidance was the unifying element in Streeter's new outlook.

[177] See Randall, *Evangelical experiences*, 258–60, and Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 240–2.

[178] Peter Hinchliff, *God and history: aspects of British theology, 1875–1914*, Oxford 1992, 224.

[179] On the OG's 'relational' spirituality see Randall, *Evangelical experiences*, 245–8. Paul Tournier, the Swiss 'personalist' psychiatrist, was another academic whose marriage was positively affected by the OG: *A listening ear*, Caux 1998, 107.

[180] Jarlert, *Oxford Group*, 65.

[181] Ian Randall, 'Life-changing: the Oxford Group as a movement of spiritual renewal', *Christianity and History Newsletter*, no 16 (1996), 37.

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