

MEETING PEOPLE

by

Professor J. Aquilina

IAN SCIORTINO

Discusses

MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

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341, St. Paul Street, Valletta, Malta.

FOREWORD

In reproducing this article from the Sunday Times of Malta my aim was to make available to our many friends here and perhaps to a wider circle, a simple statement of what Moral Re-Armament is and of my experience over many years working with it.

Since this interview was published in 1981 much has happened in the world to change the attitude and frame of mind of all who care about mankind and the future course of history. Today the talk is more of arms limitation than of re-armament; dictatorial nations talk of glasnost and perestroika; democracies find themselves constrained to use water cannon and riot police to control protesting crowds and football hooligans; scientists have come close to the ultimate limits of human understanding and begin again to postulate a Prime Mover and Creator to explain the mysteries of sub-atomic and astronomic phenomena; wealth has increased and with it, in shocking contrast, poverty, hunger and unemployment; technology has not only made possible total destruction, but has also rapidly accelerated the rate of erosion of the environment.

An increasing awareness of these factors in the past decade has deeply affected people's thinking; but one factor in the human equation remains the same, and that is human nature. It is clearer than ever that to make perestroika and glasnost, and democracy itself, function efficiently, a power greater than human wisdom will be needed. In that context the ideas of Moral Re-Armament that I tried to express in reply to Professor Aquilina's questions seem to me to be as valid today as they were then.

If the attitude and mentality of people has developed, so has the work and witness of Moral Re-Armament; it's growth across the continents continues with a steady and convincing rhythm. Methods of communication change but the truths, the facts, the ideas remain the same: Human nature can be changed;

anyone who gives his life unconditionally to God will be shown what to do to effect that change in himself and from that springboard to play a part in remaking the world.

I may instance the life of Mme. Irene Laure, well documented in the book "For the Love of Tomorrow" and on the film and video of the same title (see back cover).

Facing change herself, Mme. Laure asked forgiveness for her hatred of the Germans and so was able to forgive them for all that she had suffered during the war.

In many languages and in many places around the world this video has contributed to an understanding of that spirit of costly forgiveness which alone can make reconciliation possible.

One further observation: This is a strictly personal view and no one should think that, after reading it, they have plumbed Moral Re-Armament to the depth. The roots of Moral Re-Armament are Christian; its fruits may be seen in a new revolutionary society growing up amid the ruins of the old. There are books available; a selection is listed on the back cover, but in the end the only way to understand MRA is to try it.

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MEETING PEOPLE

Ian Sciortino

by Professor J. Aquilina

QUESTION: *Just what is the Moral Re-Armament movement, can you tell me briefly how it started and what it stands for?*

ANSWER: Yes, of course. Moral Re-Armament was originally known as Moral and Spiritual Re-Armament, but that's rather a mouthful so it usually gets shortened to Moral Re-Armament.

It started with Dr. Frank Buchman, an American of Swiss lineage, who had an experience of Christ which transformed his life. He began to pass this experience on to others and soon discovered that the changes in people which resulted made a great difference to the society in which they lived, even to solving most difficult and critical problems. He crystallised his ideas in the form of four absolute moral standards, which are: Absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love. These are standards, not rules or conditions. They serve to show where you stand and where you are heading.

Q: *When was this?*

A: In the thirties. As the world prepared for war to stop Hitler's evil schemes, everyone was concerned with re-armament, material and military re-armament. Frank Buchman launched the idea of a moral and spiritual re-armament to steady the world in its mad course. Everybody knew what we were fighting against but few had any clear idea of what we were fighting for; Moral Re-Armament, with a vision of a rebuilt world, filled this gap. There was an immediate response from all around the globe. Perhaps today, as the world turns again towards armaments, this time with nuclear warheads which could blow the world to pieces, we need again a moral re-armament.

But of course the real start of Moral Re-Armament is to be found in the Bible in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Chapter six.

**The mainspring
is Christ**

Q: *So your movement attaches*

importance to the Gospel of Christ and His message of peace on earth to men of good will?

A: Yes, certainly, when men change nations change ...

Q: *To what extent, then, is your movement Christian? I know it is non-denominational.*

A: Moral Re-Armament is for all men everywhere. Its mainspring is Christian, is Jesus Christ. It is non-denominational. It keeps open house to men of all religions and no religion; but its mainspring is Christ. As long as its mainspring is Christ — and I am afraid I am mixing metaphors here — it will infect people with Christianity. I can open my heart to people of any religion or no religion and something of my faith will rub off onto them, if I have the reality of it in my heart and life.

Q: *How long has your movement been established in Malta?*

A: There were some beginnings before and during the war. Men like Engineer Jock Joughin who was a civilian engineer with the equivalent rank of rear-admiral, in charge of the Hull Repair Yard in the Naval Dockyard — he had a great deal to do with getting the "Illustrious" to sea again during the bombing — there may be people in Malta today who remember him. If so, I would much like to meet them. Then Stanley Barnes, who set up and was the first manager of the M.M.U. whom you interviewed in this same series when he visited here recently — he was another pioneer of Moral Re-Armament.

My knowledge of Moral Re-Armament in Malta began when we came here in 1971 with a musical play called "Anything to Declare?", which was performed at the Catholic Institute, in

Floriana, by a group of very dedicated young people from many nations. We were given the blessing and the full backing of His Grace Mgr. Gonzi. He said to me at that time "I will give you my blessing but I would not like your action to be a 'flash-in-the-pan'. I think you should come back and do something to follow up." At that time I told him that Moral Re-Armament sets up no organisations and has no membership. It simply sets out to deepen commitment and sharpen people's convictions.

Q: *I have always been puzzled by this question of not having members. I can't think of any organised body that does not have members — are you not a member?*

A: No — I am a member of my Church, the Anglican Church, into which I was born. As a young man I rejected my religion and Church and joined a leftist group. On meeting Moral Re-Armament I discovered that Christianity, rightly understood, is far more revolutionary than communism, so I returned to my Church, as does everyone who comes into Moral Re-Armament. That is the only formal membership I have. Moral Re-Armament for me is a passion and not an organisation. This was once expressed by a journalist who put it in a very apt little rhyme:

*"It's not an institution,
It's not a point of view —
It starts a revolution
By starting one in you"*

"Cabinet of conscience"

Q: *All right, I understand. But I am still puzzled — there must be some sort of organisation, to get anything done.*

A: Yes, of course there is, but organisation is kept to the minimum — just for meetings and conferences, the smallest part of the action of Moral Re-Armament. In countries where this idea has caught on, there may be, where necessary, an indigenous legal body for the purpose of owning property, for instance in Switzerland where there is an international conference centre at Caux, near Geneva. It is more of an organism than an organisation. It works on the basis of a supranational network of friendships among committed people.

One country formed recently what they called a "cabinet of conscience" and helped to solve a very serious civil war. This "cabinet of conscience" was an informal meeting of people of different parties, classes and races, who met together as occasion demanded, knowing that they did not, initially, agree with each other, but willing to listen to each other, think together and seek what action to take on a basis of "not who is right, but what is right". Time and again those people were able to find solutions to most critical and dangerous situations.

Q: These four absolute standards — I understand three of them, but 'absolute purity', what does it mean?

A: I think really that everyone knows in his heart what purity means for him. We may argue about this and that —

Q: But what sort of purity? Is it a monastic idea? Chastity?

A: I suppose for a monk, who has taken vows of chastity, purity must mean chastity. But, for myself as a married man, absolute purity means doing God's will

not my will and accepting the discipline necessary to discover what that will is. It means chastity before marriage, faithfulness, discipline and unselfishness within marriage. Whatever psychologists and some theologians may say I am convinced that anyone who wants to know what purity means will not have any difficulty in doing so. Incidentally purity brings rich gifts; for instance it is the key to passion and purpose in life. These moral standards are not just a personal matter, they are essential for survival in today's world.

Q: Are you satisfied that your organism, to use your own word, is meeting the right response from people of influence, by which I mean people who hold the destiny of their nations in their hands?

A: No, of course not. Nobody could be satisfied with that — some respond and some do not. One has ups and downs, the tide of battle flows back and forth — but one must continue to work and above all to trust in God, for it is His work and not the work of man that will ultimately win.

Q: Public opinion everywhere is very disturbed about nuclear weapons, especially as we have many of these now based in Europe. The reason, we know, is self-defence; but this is a relative term and may be understood in different ways. What is the attitude of your movement to the deployment of these weapons?

A: I cannot speak of an attitude of the movement of Moral Re-Armament. I can only speak of my own sincere attitude, of what I feel from the bottom of my heart. I am not a pacifist. I fought against Hitler and all the beastly business of Nazism and fascism.

But of course then the weapons were different. Faced as I am to day with the whole spectrum of nuclear weapons and their modes of delivery, things look very different. The nuclear arms race has become an all-consuming vortex, which, if left unchecked, would ultimately consume the entire resources of the planet, even if no shot were ever fired. If, on the other hand, the starting button for a nuclear war were pressed it is unlikely that any of us would survive to count the cost. At the same time I am not willing to hand over the world to whoever happens to possess the biggest bomb, especially if it happened to be a monolithic atheist materialism.

I think that the only thing we can do is to press on with work at the grass-roots of ordinary people, and to create such a groundswell of positive Christian living that we get a climate in which it may be possible to deal with the problem at the level of governments — and I certainly look to Malta to play a significant part in this. Anyway I am convinced that the Creator has a plan and we must work for it, from the ground up and leave the result to Him.

Q: Have you succeeded in spreading your ideas in the communist countries?

A: It is well-known that there is a significant spiritual revival in Russia, Poland and other countries, in spite of 60 years of militant atheist propaganda and education. Many forces are at work for God; Moral Re-Armament is one of them. We know of a broadcast in Russian by the Soviet official radio, warning against Moral Re-Armament and describing it as "a worldwide

Faith: a

ideology with bridgeheads on every continent, capable of winning over radical, revolutionary minds."

I have always been fascinated by the prophecy that you find in one of Dostoevsky's novels, I think "The Brothers Karamazov", that Russia would be apostate and do the most terrible things, and then be converted and would save the world.

Q: Let us hope so. Do you hold meetings? And do Maltese come to them? In fact I have met Maltese people at meetings in your home.

A: Sometimes we hold meetings, when people want them; but we don't have to have meetings.

Q: But you have to meet people. We all have to meet, otherwise our ideas die with us. You have got to communicate.

A: Meeting people is important and takes place in many ways, not only in 'meetings'. We often use films, either in my home or we take our films out to other homes or retreats and discussion groups arranged by priests and others. Most of our films have been shown on Malta TV.

Q: How many people, do you think

A: I cannot give numbers — but if Christians lived their faith there would be no call for Moral Re-Armament! The late Cardinal Liénart of Lille once described Moral Re-Armament, which he knew well in the North of France, as "a valid alternative for the sincere communist and a crack of

challenge

the whip for armchair Christians who have lost their sense of calling". If Moral Re-Armament did its job properly in Malta, it would disappear in the flames of the Catholic Church, if you can understand me.

Q: Perhaps you would explain — a beautiful phrase, but what does it mean?

A: I am thinking of the Spanish civil war in the thirties, when we saw churches burned down by communist forces. In a world broadcast at that time Frank Buchman said "The answer to burning churches is the Church aflame" — he meant, of course, the fire of the spirit. He wanted to wake people up. That is what we want to do today.

Q: How do you see your task in Malta?

A: Don't forget that I am in my retirement years — 68, only two more to go to 70! Still, even the old-age pensioners have a useful task to fulfil. I see my task, and one of the tasks of everyone, young and old, who is gripped by the idea of Moral Re-Armament, as bridge-building. "Division is the mark of our age; union is our instant need." So said Frank Buchman in 1948. Today more than ever we need to bridge the yawning chasms that have appeared in our national life and social structures, due perhaps to the excessive political polarisation which seems to be afflicting the world everywhere.

What Moral Re-Armament has been trying to do over the past ten years, here in Malta, quietly and

without fanfare of trumpets, has been to build bridges and to strengthen the bridge which is Malta.

Q: May I ask one or two personal questions? You spoke about rejecting religion and joining a leftist group and then being converted — when did this happen?

A: When I went up to university in 1932 —

Q: Ah — the revolutionary age.

A: Perhaps, but don't take it too lightly — maybe it's the age when one thinks? Don't forget that this was in the thirties when we were faced with the deepest recession of history, massive unemployment, the hunger-marchers, the red-shirts, the black-shirts and the rise of Hitler. This is what I was facing as a young man. I was living, as I said, a rather wild life but I still wanted to do something about the mess around me.

Q: You are a born idealist —

A: Not at all — I am a realist, a protester, a revolutionary. That to me is not an idealist — I want to do something about what is wrong.

Q: Whether you protest or agitate against wrong, injustice, you do it for an ideal.

A: Yes, I agree there, but the word 'idealist' conjures up the picture of a man with his head in the clouds. My idea at that time, when I joined the many people who were swinging to the left, towards the communist group, was that it offered a way of doing something about the mess in the world, without doing anything about myself and the mess I was in. I could point my finger at some other fellow or some other class, even if it was my own class,

which I had reneged and criticised. Very soon after that I met the people of Moral Re-Armament who presented me with the Christian faith as a challenge to a revolution that is not satisfied with blaming someone else but as a revolution which must start in my own heart.

Q: Your conversion from communism to Christianity reminds me of the conversion of a famous communist, Douglas Hyde. Do you know him?

A: Yes, I remember Douglas Hyde. I have read his articles and books. He is one of many radical revolutionary minds who have finally recognised the potential of the inner revolution which would transform society if we take Jesus Christ seriously.

Q: My next personal question — How do you happen to have a Maltese surname?

A: I am very proud to have several pints of Maltese blood flowing around my body — my father was Maltese and all his ancestors on both sides as far back as records disclose.

Q: And the rest of your blood is what — English?

A: My mother was a Scot, —

Q: Maltese and Scotch, a good mixture —

A: Like Scotch and soda!

MRA funds

Q: Where does Moral Re-Armament get its money? And, if you don't mind my asking, how do you personally finance yourself?

A: I don't mind at all — money is always an interesting subject to talk about.

Q: Money is the root of all evil —

A: I am rather shocked at such a

misquotation from you, Professor! The Good Book says, if I am not mistaken, that the love of money is the root of all evil!

Q: Quite right, I accept the correction.

A: Money for the work of Moral Re-Armament comes from sacrifice, from the giving of people who believe in it. There are no big funds, no large reserves, no government subsidies and very few industries have contributed. The greatest part by far comes from the sacrificial giving of individual people. That is the way the great Conference Centre at Caux, Switzerland, is run.

For myself, when I first began to work full-time with Moral Re-Armament, as I came out of the Army at the end of the war, I had no income at all, save a small war-injury pension, barely enough to keep me in shoes at today's prices! I also had a war service gratuity from a grateful government, amounting to £400. Together with many other servicemen I gave that in its entirety towards the purchase of the Westminster Theatre, next door to Buckingham Palace, which is now the Headquarters of Moral Re-Armament in London. For the rest I had to rely on Providence. Now I am drawing my British Old Age Pension, and very grateful for it. When my parents died a small amount of capital came to me, the income from which helps — all the rest must come from Faith and Prayer and does come from many sources. No full-time worker for Moral Re-Armament receives a penny of salary, so I can say from personal experience that where God guides He also provides.

Q: Are there any books for those who are interested?

A: Yes, one of the best has just been re-printed in Paper Back. This is "Frank Buchman, A Life" by G.D. Lean. This received an excellent review of the Hard Back edition written by Fr. Salvino Galea, S.J. There are several other books and a selection is listed on the back cover.

Besides books there is also a monthly magazine published by Moral Re-Armament in full colour with feature articles on many of the most important problems facing us all today. This magazine is entitled "FOR A CHANGE".

These books and the magazine may be obtained from me or direct from the publisher and distributor, Grosvenor Books of 54 Lyford Road, London, SW18 3JJ.

Malta's Role

Q: *I wonder if you have any final word for us in Malta?*

A: I think the task before us all in this final quarter of the twentieth century must be to make the wealth and work of the world available for all and for the exploitation of none — that and the establishment of a *modus vivendi* for peace. Malta has a special part to play in this, standing, as she does, mid-way between the rich and poor worlds, central in the North-South dialogue, as she is in the East-West confrontation.

Malta's natural role is that of "Bridge-builder". She may have to learn this art first at home, and for this she will need to draw on all the resources of her rich Christian heritage.



Beyond the end of the road

by Ian Sciortino

THERE is a farm at the end of the road, at the end of a road that seems to go nowhere. There are a few buildings of the usual butter-coloured Maltese stone and when you have passed these and answered the bleated greeting of a few sheep and goats there is a track leading down the hill and then a footpath winding round terraced fields which in spring are green with standing corn and lush clover, but now are brown and dusty under the dry Mediterranean sun. You cross a stone irrigation channel laboriously carved, who knows how many centuries ago — and on.

This particular afternoon, though the sun's rays were already aslant it was still hot and we headed thankfully for the shade of the olive grove, plunged down a steep bank and stopped, transfixed, all of us. We catch our breath and all chatter subsides, mastered by the majestic, silent size of those trees.

There flashes through my mind a line from James Elroy Flecker's poem — "*And all those ships were certainly so old — who knows — ?*" And all those trees are certainly so old, who knows? They might be, as local tradition has it, two thousand years old at least, their huge trunks gnarled and twisted, some fallen and growing new

strong branches from the fallen trunk, others arching overhead, a great silent cathedral in the open air.

I glance up at the hillside, more olives and then broken weathered and eroded rocks gleaming gold in the evening sun. Across that hill I know lie the foundations of a Roman villa. Tradition — that tantalising old lady, mother of history — has it that this was the villa of a certain Publius, "Chief man of the island" whose father Paul healed of dysentery. Time suddenly stood still — those trees, were they? Could they have been young saplings when Paul's Lord and Master was crucified? and a vigorous, fruit-bearing olive grove some thirty years later when Luke and Paul were washed up, gasping and sodden on the shore nearby? — Yes, I could glimpse the sea in the distance.

As we all looked at each other in wonder, they began to arrive — streaming over the fields and along the path we had travelled — young and old, the farmer and his family, his cousin who worked the next fields, a nun over 80 years old being helped down the bank, a tough young building worker, a nurse, students, a teacher.

Suddenly, a simple table appeared, covered with a white

cloth, a Franciscan priest, bread, wine — there were now more than one hundred people gathered in that enchanted spot and we were caught up in the ancient ritual, spoken softly in Maltese, so close to the Aramaic spoken by Christ Himself two thousand years ago, or was it yesterday? — the breaking of the Bread.

Some naughty boys up in the bushes, laughing and making faces — are they children of today or the ghosts of the Phoenician or perhaps Roman children who laughed at funny old Paul and his doctor Luke? Maria, one of the daughters of the farmer, slipped up the bank and took them by the hand and led them gently into the circle.

The sun continued to sink, the rocks turned to flame and the wind was cooler — a shiver ran through the crowd "Christ has died!" they said — yesterday? thirty years ago? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? — "Christ is risen!" we all affirmed, "Christ will come again!" crescendoed through the trees. Time stood still.

Mass among those trees that were putting deep their roots then, sucking up the sap for their leaves and the oil for their fruits and still are silently, faithfully, joyfully standing and doing their work, yes, the Mass brought us very, very close. There was a feeling of the reality of the Spirit, of forgiving and being forgiven, of oneness, of love in that little crowd. Paul, Luke, Peter, James, John, Philip, all must have felt the same and more so, with the knowledge of that happening, so recent in time, so vivid in themselves, so real in us all now and in a dozen, perhaps a

hundred more such groups all over the island of St. Paul.

The sun was red now, the shadows long, everything was either aflame or in black shadow, fire or darkness. I found myself helping the old nun up the bank, almost carrying her back to the farm where a bus was waiting for her and the others. "God is so good to me", she kept repeating.

Suddenly the truth stabbed my heart, a flaming sword striking through the trees and tearing into me.

The faith, the feeling, the forgiveness, the love, the reality of the Spirit, yes, it is the same yesterday, today and for ever — but where is the fire? Where is the passion that led those first ones to be known as "Those who have turned the world upside-down," that led Peter to the Cross and Paul to the block, that converted an empire and built a civilisation, a Christendom — where is the fire?

If only the feeling is left, not the fire, not the commitment, not the passion, not the fight, then we are like a melon ripe to be eaten or left to rot. It is a joy and a gift to feel, but to the feeling must be added the works of repentance, change and restoration; the works of charity, which are the fruits of the spirit; and the pure passion of evangelism, the fight to win men and nations.

How can these people, I thought, find the purity and the passion? Again the sword of truth stabbed my heart — I must find again the purity and the passion.

Later that evening it came to me that I and anyone and everyone has only to seek it and they will find it — but it must be sought daily, in the early, early morning — and it is always given.

**PROFESSOR JOSEPH AQUILINA, B.A., LL.D.,
Ph.D. (LONDON), F.R.A.S.**

Professor Aquilina needs no introduction in Malta. He has held the chair of Maltese and Oriental Languages in the University of Malta and has a world-wide reputation in his special field. Among the many books he has published perhaps best known is his Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs.

In Malta his articles on many subjects, both scientific and contemporary, are widely read; among these is his series on "MEETING PEOPLE", eventually to be published in book form.

He has kindly given permission for this article to anticipate its appearance.

BOOKS ABOUT MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

FRANK BUCHMAN, A LIFE 590 pages

A well-documented and objective life of the initiator of Moral Re-Armament complete with many photographs and a good index.

By G.D. Lean, published by Collins Fount (obtainable from good bookshops in Malta).

Price Lm4.50

GOOD GOD, IT WORKS! 215 pages

An experiment in faith by G.D. Lean

Published by Blandford Press and distributed by Grosvenor Books.

Price Lm1.00

THE REVOLUTIONARY PATH 71 pages

Extracts from the speeches of Frank Buchman to illustrate the thinking of this original and practical-minded contemporary revolutionary.

Published by Grosvenor Books

Price 40 cents

FOR THE LOVE OF TOMORROW 135 pages

The Irene Laure Story by Jacqueline Piguët

Translated from the French by Joanna Sciortino

Published by Grosvenor Books, with many photographs

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By Norwegian political commentator Jens Willhelmsen
"Politicians, journalists and all influencing public opinion should read this" wrote Oslo newspaper Vaartland.

Published by Grosvenor Books

Price 75 cents

IL-KTIEB L-ISWED U L-ABJAD 76 pages

By Sidney Cook & Garth Lean

Published by Union Press, the Maltese version of THE BLACK & WHITE BOOK (Grosvenor)

Kif nistghu nghixu fid-dinja u kif nistghu nbiddluha

Price 20 cents