LETTERS TO MALCOLM:

TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES AND RELIGIOUS

CULTURE, C. 1966-1982

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ABSTRACT

Letters to Malcolm:
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One of the major themes of modern British history is the decline of Christianity as a force that influenced society. For most of his life, the journalist, author, and television personality Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990) was widely known as an agnostic, and thus appeared to be indicative of these historical developments. Yet, just as the decline of Christendom was becoming increasingly normative, Muggeridge converted in the early 1960s and dedicated the remaining years of his life to promoting Christianity, including authoring more than a dozen religious books. These writings provided partisan commentary on some of the most pressing religious questions of the late twentieth century. Between his conversion to Christianity and formal entry into the Roman Catholic Church in 1982, Muggeridge received nearly 2,000 letters from people in diverse religious and social settings. These readers used his books and the letters they wrote as a means to wrestle with their faith and doubt, the role of the institutional church and religious authority, permissiveness in society, the specter of decline and secularization, and the proper role of Christianity in social activism. This dissertation analyzes these letters in depth by placing them in to their social and religious context. It

illustrates how “ordinary” people constructed their identities in response to the religious and social dynamics of those years *through* the act of reading. Muggeridge’s fans saw him as a friend and kindred spirit whose religious development ran parallel to their own. He thereby became a surrogate cleric whom his readers looked to for guidance and help as they struggled to understand themselves as Christians in a world they increasingly took for granted as secular. Muggeridge’s reputation was deeply connected to his status as a symbol of anti-institutional Christianity. Once he finally converted to Roman Catholicism in 1982, this reputation that had helped to sustain his relationship with fans was redefined, thereby stripping him of his authentic spiritual status among a multitude of his readers who had believed he expressed their own spiritual identity.

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Introduction

Robin Slyfield could not sleep no matter how hard she tried. A severe head cold—or perhaps, she feared, the flu—was keeping her awake at an "unearthly hour" one Tuesday evening in November. She had been reading Malcolm Muggeridge's the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* over the past few days and, without any intention of wasting her own, decided to occupy the restless night with a letter to Malcolm recounting her busy thoughts:

> I have been reading your books…eating sleeping Muggeridge for the last few days and this night dreaming Muggeridge, your words and observations going over and over in my head. For a number of years now I have had imaginary conversations with you. Whenever I get a bee in my bonnet about something, I wonder what you would have to say about it—then off we go.[1]

Reading Muggeridge was different from her experience with other books. It did not matter that they were separated by more than thirty years in age and what she felt like was an equally wide cultural gap. Despite never having met him personally, Slyfield sensed that they were "alike in so many ways," and she wanted him to know why. In sixteen hand-written pages, Slyfield described her working-class upbringing outside Manchester as a mechanic's daughter, her experiences going to school after moving to Sheffield, her chosen career path as a nurse, her marriage, and her recent move to Toronto. She went on to describe in detail her current religious practices, how she had great difficulty finding a church she liked and, in particular, her most recent run-in with the local Baptist church. The preacher had given her the "heebie-jeebies," and emanated

[1] Robin J. Slyfield to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 November 1974, Box 95, Folder 13, Malcolm Muggeridge Papers (SC-4), Wheaton College Special Collections, Wheaton, Illinois. All future references will be shortened as follows: Robin J. Slyfield to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 November 1974, SC-4 95/13.

a stolid self-righteousness that felt altogether emotionless and divisive. She had been trying different religious denominations each week, but they always left her somehow unfulfilled. Her lack of spiritual contentment seemed to reflect her life in general, as she admitted to Muggeridge that "I have never felt that I belong anywhere always searching and wandering." No church gave her the same sense of spiritual fulfillment that reading Muggeridge did. It was he who crystalized her thoughts so well, and it was he who seemed to advocate for ideas she valued in the public sphere. Slyfield ended her letter with not just one "P.S.," but three. It must have taken her all night to write because by the last page she reported to half listening to a live morning show on the radio discuss Muggeridge's best-selling book, *Something Beautiful for God*, which she had every intention to purchase. Her only fear was that her letter would be lost among the multitude of others Muggeridge received, and would find its end swiftly in his waste-paper basket.[2]

Robin Slyfield's letter is not altogether unique among the 25,000 others that Muggeridge received throughout his career. The majority of these letters were inspired by his television and film appearances, but a sizeable number were written in response to his religious writings after his conversion to Christianity. Between 1966 and 1982, Muggeridge received just under 2,000 letters from people who described their reading experience. Slyfield's letter is rich because it highlights several themes that characterize this group of readers as a whole. Like so many others, Slyfield drew parallels between

[2] Ibid.

her life and Muggeridge's in the attempt to better understand herself. She found enough of a connection in this process of reading that she was *compelled* to share with him a narrative of her life, complete with its fears and anxieties, its joys and hopes. The emotional experience of reading, to borrow a phrase from Janice Radway, was like "a peculiar act of transubstantiation," where the reader became something different from before, and causing one to think thoughts never conceived. Reading was not a passive experience; on the contrary, as an active participant in the construction of her own identity, Slyfield used his books as she wrestled with matters of faith, doubt, and the changing society she inhabited.[3]

The purpose of this dissertation is to recover the lived experience of readers like Robin Slyfield. Much more than merely the trivial fawning of fans, these letters are a window into the first-hand experience of people as they lived through the religious crises that characterized "Western" societies during and after the 1960s. They offer us a keen sense of how ordinary people responded to, and came to terms with, the transformations of religious culture. That these readers looked to Muggeridge as a source of guidance should not be surprising. For most of his life, the famous journalist, author, and television personality Malcolm Muggeridge was widely known as an agnostic. His reputation was built on his ability to lampoon just about anything, especially the hypocrisy of the church and establishment. His attitudes towards institutional Christianity and religious belief thus appeared to confirm that the history of modern

[3] Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-class Desire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 13.

Britain was a tale of religious decline. Yet, it came as something of a surprise when he publically converted to Christianity in the middle of the 1960s. Just as the "decline of Christendom" was becoming increasingly normative, Muggeridge dedicated the last two decades of his life promoting the religion he often satirized. For nearly twenty years after his conversion, Muggeridge never joined a church. His newfound faith was expressed instead by writing religious books and articles, speaking on religious issues, and producing religious documentaries and programs. His work was consumed widely and reflects his popularity during the twentieth century. Indeed, he was a household name in Britain, and the same case can be made to a smaller degree in Europe, North America, and Australasia. Muggeridge received letters from people of all ages from a wide array of cultural settings, social classes, and geographic locations who responded to his work.[4]

This dissertation focuses on the years between c. 1966 (when he converted to Christianity) and 1982 (when he entered into the Roman Catholic Church). Before he joined the Roman Catholic Church, Muggeridge became a symbol of anti-institutional Christianity whom readers felt a deep affinity with as their trust in conventional religion declined. That close relationship—which normally characterized the ideal connection between a minister and parishioner—created the conditions for Muggeridge's writings to have a profound influence on the religious life of his readers. His writings inspired his readers to change, not only themselves and their own identity, but also the world around them. It shaped their understanding of ecclesiastical authority and the nature of the

[4] A detailed breakdown of this group of readers occurs in chapter one, "Muggeridge and His Readers."

church, informed their perception of the current and future health of Christianity, and even changed their patterns of religious behavior. In some cases this bred despair, but in others hopeful anticipation of how religion might itself be transformed by its interaction with a secular society.

This dissertation will reconstruct for the first time the central preoccupations of this group of readers. While on one level it is a reception history of Muggeridge's books, it seeks to do much more. Reading is an expression of lived experience, and so these fan letters should be considered in light of the social context in which they were written. Far from serving as a purely internal activity, reading forms a point of contact with the world a reader inhabits. For this reason, these letters provide a yet untapped angle into understanding how "ordinary" people engaged and interacted with the religious dynamics of the late 1960s through the early 1980s. These readers may not have known Muggeridge personally, but their letters are deeply affective accounts of religious emotion that eludes polls and surveys. His books were textual arenas where they expressed candidly their spiritual concerns, hopes, and anxieties, as well as how they dealt with the religious dynamics occurring throughout the world.

Literature Review

An analysis of this textual community makes an intervention into two areas of historical scholarship. First, it will address a general lack of attention to the significance of Malcolm Muggeridge as a historical figure. Literature on Muggeridge can be divided into three categories. In the first place, small religious presses have made something of a cottage industry out of reprinting Muggeridge's own religious writings for contemporary

devotional use. These include several small exposes and sketches of Muggeridge that frame him as a Christian example. Because the primary purpose of this literature is not historical, and verges towards the hagiographical, it is limited as a source for understanding the times in which Muggeridge lived. The second category includes a small number of concentrated studies on his long and illustrious career as an author, journalist, and television personality. The most important of these includes biographies written by Ian Hunter, Richard Ingrams, and Gregory Wolfe, as well as a recent chapter on Muggeridge's moral philosophy by Paul T. Philips.[5] Finally, Muggeridge occasionally receives brief mention within the broader study of twentieth-century Britain, usually as a wellspring of witty quips or snarky quotes. Indeed, precisely how he influenced people around the world has been a subject entirely ignored until now, and this despite his ubiquitous presence in the media during his career.[6] With the exception of a few (brief) mentions in studies such as Noell Annan's *Our Age* and Julia Stapleton's

[5] Paul T. Philips, *Contesting the Moral High Ground: Popular Moralists in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2013), 100-127. Ian Hunter, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980). Gregory Wolfe, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995). Richard Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995). Other examples include studies of the British Broadcasting Company. See Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961-95). Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997). See especially Myrna Grant, "An Historical Analysis of Biographical, Societal and Organizational Factors Shaping the Radio Career of Thomas Malcolm Muggeridge, 1948-1957," (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern, 1986).

[6] For example, he is not mentioned at all in either of Stefan Collini's penetrating studies of literary culture and critical debate in twentieth century Britain. See *Common Reading: Critics, Historians Publics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Political Intellectuals, Muggeridge has not been recognized as a public intellectual.[7] This lack of attention may be due to the fact that people today, if they remember him at all, see him primarily as a marginalized religious figure, and not as a serious thinker. For example, Dominc Sandbrook, in his massive study of post-war Britain, gives scant attention to Muggeridge, painting him as a somewhat solitary, idiosyncratic figure whose conversion was just the first step "on his long, lonely march towards greater conservatism and, eventually, Catholicism."[8] Such broad strokes miss the mark because his readers did not see him that way. For them he was a serious theologian and philosopher whose writings formed, in some cases, the single-most important source for their spiritual lives. Moreover, as this study shows, he was not only attractive to conservative Christians. On the contrary, he appealed to diverse group of people coming from a wide array of political, religious, and ideological perspectives. The present scholarly characterization of Muggeridge has ignored this dimension of his life and work.

Second, this dissertation aims to develop current trends in scholarship exploring the religious history of "Western" societies from the mid-1960s through the first years of the 1980s. There is scholarly consensus that these decades witnessed a fundamental restructuring of the religious climate in "Western" societies. Scholars have traditionally focused on a three-fold analytical framework of believing, behaving, and belonging.

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[7] Noel Annan, *Our Age: English Intellectuals between the Wars – A Group Portrait* (New York: Random House, 1990), 167. Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain Since 1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 166-168.

[8] Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus, 2006), 583. Interestingly, Sandbrook seems to ignore Muggeridge altogether after 1969 when, as this study shows, his importance as a religious thinker peaked.

Surveys have typically provided the most direct means of measuring these categories. During those years and more than any before them, church attendance plummeted, church membership rolls thinned, fewer people were married and baptized in churches, and there was a substantial decline in the number of clergy, both in Protestant and Catholic churches alike. At the same time, there was a noteworthy increase in the diversity of religious beliefs, and people became more vocal in their criticisms and rejections of religious dogma or ecclesiastical authority.[9] The statistics of these telltale signs of religious decline are not disputed. What have been contested, however, are the reasons behind this religious restructuring of society. What is the proper chronology? Is it best understood as a gradual evolution? Or were the changes of the 1960s revolutionary? What were the most important causes? Did the churches change from within? Or were these changes due to pressures from without? Just how wide-ranging were these changes? Were they global in scope? Or was it a provincial phenomenon of Western Europe? Were these changes a process of inexorable decline, or were they merely part of a general ebbing and flowing of religiosity?

Since the 1960s, scholars have most commonly invoked the secularization thesis to explain these changes, not only in Britain, but also in North America, Western Europe, and Australasia. In the classic formation, it links modernization (urbanization, class-consciousness, increasing rationality, political economy, and bureaucratization) with

[9] These statistics are commonly repeated. For two recent instances, see Clive D. Field, *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) and Ben Clements, *Surveying Christian Beliefs and Religious Debates in Post-War Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

religious decline. It characterizes this as so deeply entangled within the logic of modernity that it edges towards inevitability or, at the very least, a process unlikely to reverse. Statistics and substantial biographical evidence of the 19th and 20th centuries seemed to point to a common-sensical story of linear religious decline. Alan Gilbert's *The Making of Post Christian Britain* (1980), Bryan Wilson's *Religion in Secular Society* (1966), and Owen Chadwick's *The Victorian Church* (1972) are just three of the many examples that promote this general argument.[10] It has grown in sophistication and is still defended today by scholars like Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning.[11] Much of this literature shares a common preference for understanding religious change primarily through social class, which, in some cases, judges religious activity as a cloak over more fundamental structures of class-consciousness, or in other cases, as a force for social control.[12]

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[10] Alan Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of Secularization of Modern Society* (London: Longmans, 1980). Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: C.A. Watts & Co., 1966). Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972).

[11] Bruce and Glendinning have produced an impressive number of studies on this. For a good expression of their position, see Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning. "When was Secularization? Dating the Decline of British Churches and Locating its Cause." *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (March 2010): 107-126. See also Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2002). Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford; oxford University Press, 1996). Bruce, "Secularization and Church Growth in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6, no. 3 (2013): 273-296.; Bruce, *Secularisation: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also, "Varieties of Secularization Theories and Their Indispensable Core," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 1 (2015): 60-79.

[12] Many critics of secularization have made this observation. See J. C. D. Clark, "Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative,'" *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012): 161-194; esp. 180. Jeremy Morris, "Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012): 195-219; esp. 200.

By the 1980s, and especially after 2000, scholars became increasingly skeptical of the secularization thesis. In some ways, the decline of the secularization thesis as an explanatory model can be linked to scholars wishing to add texture to the statistics that at face value suggest an obvious story of decline. An early example of this is Grace Davie's landmark study, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, where she argued that despite the decline of religion indicated by statistics, spirituality was very much still an important part of British society. It was really a matter of "believing without belonging," as she put it.[13] Similarly, Callum Brown famously contended in *The Death of Christian Britain* that decline occurred rapidly in the 1960s largely because the discourse of Christianity was lost. As he saw it, women, who had traditionally been the ones to pass on Christianity to their children, found new meaning in the liberation and sexual revolution of the 1960s. His use of language and gender as primary categories of analysis was cutting-edge by showing that the story of religious decline was not neatly subject to particular classes or social strata.[14] There were cultural reasons, too. Hugh McLeod, who had been a stalwart proponent of the secularization thesis in the 1970s, altered his position later in his 2007 study *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, where he paid closer attention to oral histories and other genres of evidence that move beyond statistics.[15]

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[13] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[14] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[15] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Indeed, the past thirty-five years has witnessed so much revision of what actually constitutes "secularization" that just about all of the old indicators have been systematically problematized or outright disproved. Urbanization did not necessarily produce religious decline; the "Protestant Ethic" was not monolithic and, whatever it was, it did not end in Weber's "iron cage"; individualism was not necessarily a product of Protestantism, which eventually found its home in secularism; and on that note, egalitarianism was not contingent upon rational democracy; technology, which has often been interpreted as a distraction from traditional religious belief, has been shown to actually promote and disseminate religious teaching.[16] A growing list of scholars including Jeffrey Cox, Dominic Erdozain, J. C. D. Clark, and Hugh McLeod are all perfectly content to abandon it altogether and to search instead for alternative models that better explain the religious dynamics of those years.[17]

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[16] Listing the various ways secularization has been disproven as a viable theory has become standard fare in many recent studies. See Clark, "Modernization and Secularization" and Morris, "Secularization and Religious Experience" for the most succinct summaries of these findings. Callum Brown is best known for his gendered analysis of secularization and refocusing the key period of religious change to the 1960s, which he understood as a radical and abrupt. See Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*; *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2006); Callum Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012). Callum Brown, "The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s have done to the Study of Religious History," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe*," 29-46, Hugh McLeod and Wernert Ustord, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).; Callum Brown, "Secularization, the Growth of Militancy and the Spiritual Revolution: Religious Change and Gender Power in Britain, 1901-2001, *Historical Research* 80, no 209 (August 2007): 393-418. Callum Brown, "What was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?" *Journal of Religious History* 34, no. 4 (December 2010): 468-479.

[17] Peter Berger, ed. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1999).; Jeffrey Cox, "Toward Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation: A Progress Report," *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod*, Callum Brown and Michael Snape, eds. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 13-26.; Dominic Erdozain, "'Cause is not Quite what it Used to Be': The Return of Secularisation," *English Historical Review* 127, no. 525 (April 2012):377-400.; Clark, "Modernization and Secularization,"; McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*.

Scholars have also expressed dissatisfaction with the tendency of proponents of the secularization thesis to equate declining religious belief with indicators of declining religious practice. Presuppositions about what the cultural presence of religion looks like (i.e. statistical indicators of institutional Christianity) are thereby given preference at the expense of its quality or content. The time is ripe for closer analysis upon the actual religious experience of ordinary people, and to build a picture of religious diversity from the ground up, rather than to situate anecdotal evidence within a grandiose theoretical scheme. Dominic Erdozain, for instance, has chided proponents of secularization thesis as guilty of seeing religion as little more than a language of community that is passed on from one generation to the next. In so doing, he argues that they remain ignorant of what religion actually does and how it is actually expressed or felt by its practitioners. Their religious life is assumed rather than argued. In the end, what they have is a trend and not an explanation.[18] In short, scholars have, until recently, ignored the transformations and relocations of religious practice that elude statistical indicators. With this kind of criticism in mind, Hugh McLeod and Callum Brown have been commended for their cutting-edge use of oral histories to understand religion in the 1960s. The question is not whether oral histories are useful, but why it has taken so long for religious historians to take notice of them and similar genres of evidence. Additionally, and on a related note, these scholars are recognizing that while a great deal of attention has been paid to those people who lost their faith and thus fit the theory, those who remained unchanged in their

[18] Erdozain, "'Cause is not Quite what it Used to Be,'" 381, 388. See also his *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

beliefs and practice have largely gone unexplored. Thinking along these lines, Callum Brown motioned in 2010 that "the historian needs to put Christian conservatives back onto centre stage to better appreciate what the cultural revolution of the sixties was about and how religious history has evolved since then."[19]

Skepticism for the explanatory power of the secularization thesis and the recent interest in the religious experience of the historical agents themselves has opened up new territory for scholarly research. At this point, no alternative meta-narrative or theoretical model has replaced the secularization thesis. A particularly promising avenue resulting from these developments has been the call by J. C. D. Clark in 2012 to historicize the secularization thesis itself.[20] Its power as an explanatory concept for so many years, now increasingly rejected, invites scholars to ask just what role the thesis had as an agent within the events it purported to explain. Matthew Grimley, Alister Chapman, and Sam Brewitt-Taylor have been on the forefront of this relatively recent area of inquiry. Chapman considered how churchmen such as John Stott reacted once they became aware of Bryan Wilson's work on secularization. Wishing to "buck the trend," Chapman found that "the theory became a part of the story it was trying to tell."[21] Grimely's analysis of the 1957 Wolfenden Report makes a corollary argument to Chapman's when he found that the Church's changing position on homosexuality should be understood as a

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[19] Callum Brown, "What was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?" *Journal of Religious History* 34, 4 (December 2010): 468-479.

[20] Clark, "Modernization and Secularization," 190 ff.

[21] Alister Chapman, "Secularisation and the Ministry of John R. W. Stott at All Souls, Langham Place, 1950-1970," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56, no. 3 (July 2005): 496-513; here, 498.

conscious reaction to accommodate, and stay relevant for, an increasingly secular society. Grimley contended that even though "this wider secularisation was perhaps more imagined than real" it nevertheless "informed the clergy's decisions."[22] Finally, Brewitt-Taylor has produced the most far-reaching analysis of this trend to date, where he found that the idea of Britain being a "secular society" was invented and promulgated by the highbrow broadcasts of the BBC in the early 1960s. Taking their cue from the same types of worrisome clergyman explored by Grimley and Chapman, he argued that the BBC paved the way for "death of god" theologians and promoters of the secularization thesis to fundamentally shape the public conversation.[23] Hugh McLeod and Simon Green, though both focusing on other factors, both have recognized in their own research that there was a "revolution of people's perceptions of their society and the place of religion within it," and that this seemed to happen "almost overnight."[24] In sum, the religious history of "Western" societies would benefit from a socio-cultural analysis of the lived experience of the historical agents themselves.[25]

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[22] Matthew Grimley, "Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954-1967," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 4 (October 2009): 725-741; here, 739-740.

[23] Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "The Invention of a 'Secular Society'? Christianity and the Sudden Appearance of Secularization Discourses in the British National Media, 1961-4," *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 327-350.

[24] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s,* 240. S. J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 294.

[25] For the importance of focusing on culture for the study of religion in social research, see Gordon Lynch, "Living with Two Cultural Turns: The Case of the Study of Religion," in *Social Research after the Cultural Turn*, ed. S. Roseneil and S. Frosh (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 73-92.

Methodology

This dissertation seeks to make a meaningful contribution to these debates by employing tools from the history of reading to bear on religious history from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s. The central arguments will be based on evidence that moves beyond social statistics detailing "believing," "behaving," and "belonging," and will assert that fan mail to Muggeridge offers a window into the religious life of "ordinary" people. Those who wrote to Muggeridge included candid discussions of how his books gave them comfort, how they bore upon internal religious struggles, fears about the changing religious dynamics of society, and the future of Christianity in Britain and beyond. Muggeridge's books functioned as textual arenas where these emotions played out. The methods of book history and the history of reading offer a hitherto underused means of understanding the religious history of western societies after the Second World War.

Yet, with a few important exceptions, historians of reading have passed over fan mail in favor of other entry points into studying reading experience.[26] Scholars like Richard Altick, Kate Flint, David Vincent and Jonathan Rose have rightly prioritized

[26] Some important studies using fan mail include Daniel Cavicchi, "Fandom Before 'Fan': Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences," *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 6 (2014): 52-72. Kristine M. McCusker, "'Dear Radio Friend': Listener Mail and the *National Barn Dance*, 1931-1941," *American Studies* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 173-195. Jessamyn Neuhaus, "'Is it Ridiculous for me to Say I Want to Write?': Domestic Humor and Redefining the 1950s Housewife Writer in Fan Mail to Shirley Jackson," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 115-137.; Kim Sawchuk, "C Wright Mills: A Political Writer and his Fan Mail," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 26, no. 2/3 (2001): 231-253. Charlene Simmons, "Dear Radio Broadcaster: Fan Mail as a Form of Perceived Interactivity," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53, no. 3 (2009): 444-459.; Robert Towler, *The Need for Certainty: A Sociological Study of Conventional Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

autobiographies for understanding the rich textual culture of ordinary readers.[27] Typically, the genre of autobiography allows us to see the context in which books are read, and to judge with a reasonable degree of certainty how texts shaped how a readers constructed the narratives of their lives. Yet, writing an autobiography was a decidedly uncommon project among common people. And that was *if* they managed to finish it. Writing an autobiography, even those that fail to receive an editor's approval, takes discipline and perseverance. How many tattered manuscripts, scraps of paper with scribbled outlines, and undeveloped notes of a reader's life lie forgotten or destroyed in the heaps of the past? Most readers never wrote an autobiography. Autobiographies have told us a great deal, but they also are limited by virtue of the types of people who have the ability and desire to leave such a thorough record of their life.

Writing fan mail does not require nearly the amount of time, dedication, and persistence that does writing an autobiography. In any case, longer does not necessarily mean better. Though fan mail certainly has no maximum word count—Robin Slyfield's letter is about as long as some of the shorter autobiographies available—a great deal can be said in only a few words. Sometimes a few lines is all a reader had to say, and that does not make them any less worthy of scholarly attention. Those who might have felt their innermost thoughts too personal would have avoided publishing them for the world to see. A private letter is more discrete. For these reasons, fan mail likely gives us

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[27] Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader 1800-1900*, 2nd edn. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998). Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1982). Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

access to the reading experience of a much larger, and much more diverse, group of people. Compared with available autobiographies, Muggeridge's fan mail is more numerically balanced between men and women, and even includes several teenagers and children.[28] Muggeridge was of the unusual combination of being both anti-establishment as well as socially conservative, who nevertheless insisted that he was a "man of the left."[29] He thus attracted letters from a wide spectrum of political, religious, social and cultural perspectives, as well as those who were not quite sure where they stood on any of these issues.

Using fan mail in the history of reading has been known to pose some methodological hazards.[30] In the first case, authors often times did not bother to keep fan mail (especially if it was hate mail), and if they did, they might be selective of what letters they kept. In these cases, archival collections say more about the personal preferences of authors than about their readership generally. In the second case, the fan mail that does exist normally over represents the more passionate of readers, while underrepresenting those who were apathetic or hostile. Muggeridge's fan mail, while certainly possessing its own limitations, does not have some of the more damning hazards of using fan mail as a worthwhile source. Muggeridge kept most, if not all, of the letters

[28] See the following chapter for a detailed breakdown of Muggeridge's readers.

[29] Muggeridge made this claim on many occasions, but for just one example see William Buckley, Interview with Malcolm Muggeridge, *Firing Line*, accessed 23 December 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__nHqyLfeFE.

[30] Jonathan Rose, "The History of Education as the History of Reading," *History of Education* 36, no. 4-5 (July-September 2007): 598.

he received. In the first case, it is unlikely that Muggeridge personally selected the over 25,000 letters that sit in his personal papers. Moreover, the letters were not just from fawning fans, but also exhibit disagreement, correction, or outright contempt. He even bothered to keep ephemera that might have otherwise been thrown away, like advertisements or flyers. The cache available thus represents a rich diversity of responses that allows for a more accurate representation of how people in general actually read Muggeridge's books.

There are a number of theoretical models for interpreting fan mail and the history of reading, but, following Christine Pawley, it is important to recognize that no model will have "universal application."[31] When it comes to fan mail, which is as varied as the author, readers, and texts they read, the epistemological boundaries of any study will need to derive from the sources themselves. One of the presuppositions of this study is that these letters tell us a great deal more than just the reading experience of a disparate group of people. Muggeridge and his readers were embedded in the same religious context, shared many of the same concerns, and they addressed these concerns both directly and indirectly in their writings. And since these religious dynamics were a global phenomenon—at least in "Western" societies—the broad scope of fan letters offers an exceptionally rich body of sources to compare and contrast how people interacted with these changes however they were perceived or actually occurred.

[31] Christine Pawley, "Beyond Market Models and Resistance: Organizations as a Middle Layer in the History of Reading," *Library Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2009): 73-93.

The reading experiences are thus reflective of the broader social contexts in which the readers lived. They engaged with Muggeridge's religious books autobiographically, and transform the letters into something more than merely fan mail. Muggeridge was not there just "to listen," as was the case with the editors David Paul Nord studied in *Communities of Journalism*. Rather, these readers were joint-participants within a textual community whose members were unaware of each other's existence. They did not treat Muggeridge as an abstraction, and so neither should their fan letters be seen as place-holders for lost social space in the public sphere, as Barbara Ryan has recently suggested.[32] They saw Muggeridge as someone they knew on a personal level. This was more real than imagined too, because Muggeridge often responded personally to those who sent him mail.[33] In this way, the correspondence Muggeridge received from his fans should be understood in the same way that letter-writing, generally speaking, has been understood as a social practice. David Barton and Nigel Hall recognized the amazing flexibility of the genre. It is hardly a static or mono-directional process. Muggeridge's fans used letters to "narrate experiences, dispute points, describe situations, offer explanations, give instructions and so on."[34] More than this, they used them as a place of

[32] See David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 250. See also Barbara Ryan, "One Reader, Two Votes: Retooling Fan Mail Scholarship," in Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed, eds. *The History of Reading Volume 3: Methods, Strategies, Tactics* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 72.

[33] Muggeridge's habit of responding to his fans will be discussed with more detail in the following chapter.

[34] David Barton and Nigel Hall, eds. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 2. See also Rebecca Earle, ed. *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

prayer, exhortation, benediction, poetry and hymn writing. All of these activities were prompted by the experience of reading Muggeridge's books.

One of the limitations of this study is that it is not possible to take Muggeridge's readers as representative of religious culture at large. Not everyone who professed religious faith read religious books in their free time or felt the need to write letters detailing religious struggles, spiritual affinity, or theological disagreements. Yet, this also provides a significant opportunity because this is exactly what has been lacking in the historiography of religious history of societies since the late 1960s. A thorough analysis of Muggeridge's fan mail, interpreted as a forked-road both into "ordinary" religious experience as well as personal reading experience, will supplement well the type of oral history work conducted by McLeod and the gendered analysis performed by Brown. In so doing, this dissertation will provide a further answer to Clark's call that more attention needs to be paid to the religious experience of the "ordinary" historical agents living during these decades.

With very few exceptions, the thoughts of Muggeridge's readers never made their way into an autobiography. The medium, we are told, is the message, and a letter is no exception. The sense of urgency, immediacy, and personal trust that characterizes Slyfield's letter is a common feature in Muggeridge's fan mail. But why did Slyfield write to Muggeridge, of all people? Why did anyone? What was it about him that led tens of thousands of people to pick up a pen and write?

Structure and Scope

This dissertation includes an introduction, six central chapters, a conclusion and an appendix. The project is organized thematically so as to tease out better the types of response Muggeridge's books elicited. Chapter one offers a broad overview of Muggeridge's readers, as well as the priority Muggeridge gave to forming a personal relationship with his fans. It discusses the number of letters he received, the geographic distribution of his fans, their gender, age, religious worldview, and occupations. It considers the frequency at which he received letters, as well as demonstrates which books inspired the most fan mail. The next four chapters engage the most prevalent themes that pre-occupied fans as they wrote. Chapter two describes and explains the personal connection that readers formed with Muggeridge. It interprets their reading of Muggeridge—and the deep emotional connection they formed as a result—as an important source as they searched for meaning and purpose in their own lives. This discussion foregrounds the argument of chapter three, which shows that Muggeridge became a surrogate cleric for his readers as their trust in conventional sources of religious authority declined. Fans would often explain how reading a particular book shaped their spiritual beliefs, they sent him requests for advice, or simply used their fan letter to unload whatever religious dilemma they were currently dealing with. The fourth chapter takes this relationship as a starting point to explain a common anxiety among Muggeridge's fans: their belief that Christianity was in a period of rapid decline and at threat of extinction. It will situate this analysis within a budding area of scholarship on religious change in Britain, which historicizes the "secularization thesis" itself. It argues

that Muggeridge promoted a popularized version of the secularization thesis in his religious writings, and that his fans were not only receptive to this argument, but often made their anxiety about the future prospects of Christianity a main reason for writing him in the first place.

But Muggeridge's readers did not only respond to his writings with a general sense of despair about Christianity, their faith in it, and its future role in society. Reading Muggeridge also inspired ways to change the world. The fifth chapter will explore this theme with particular focus on the publication and reception of *Something Beautiful for God*. It considers the role of Muggeridge and his readers within the broader context of the rise of the welfare state and the concomitant decline of Christian voluntarism. The outcome of this chapter is to recognize the role of Muggeridge's books as a source that revitalized Christian voluntarism. Finally, the sixth chapter analyzes a smaller, albeit substantial, amount of mail that Muggeridge received from non-Christian readers, including Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Christians, and atheists alike. Though we might be tempted to assume that these readers likely had significant qualms with the theological vision Muggeridge promoted, this was not at all the case. Like his Christian readers, Muggeridge's non-Christian readers also saw him as a guide that they could tap for questions as they, too, wrestled with spiritual issues in their lives.

Chapter 1: Muggeridge and His Readers

"I have also received a very large number of letters, many of them of quite overwhelming sweetness and charity…I have put all these letters—some thousands of them in a large metal box in the hope that after I am dead someone may go through them. They reveal, I think more fully than any public opinion poll or other so-called scientific investigation, the extraordinary spiritual hunger which prevails today among all classes and conditions of people, from the most illiterate to the most educated, from the most lowly to the most eminent."

Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*, 1969

"Despite the warnings that you have thousands of letters in a large metal box, perhaps, you may find room for one more."

- John Milson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 8 September 1969

"You can blame yourself for this letter, I quote from Jesus Rediscovered 'You jump on your mail…especially the fan letters.'"

P. G. Allen to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 July 1971

Charles Dickens burned thousands that he received.[35] Willa Cather saved only the ones she liked the best.[36] The great horror-writer Shirely Jackson described them as "about the most irrational and annoying aspect of the outside world that is always infringing on a writer's life."[37] Others have followed suit, seeing them as something of an odd "curiosity"[38] of marginal value, or as providing perhaps little more than a "weak

[35] See Robert McParland, *Charles Dickens's American Audience* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 64.

[36] See Courtney A. Bates, "The fan letter correspondence of Willa Cather: Challenging the divide between professional and common reader," *Transformative Works and Cultures* Vol. 6 (2011). Accessed 5 December 5, 2017. http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/221.

[37] Shirley Jackson, "On Fans and Fan Mail," *The New Yorker* (1 August 2015). Accessed 15 November 2017. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/on-fan-and-fan-mail.

[38] Bernard R. Jerman, "Disraeli's Fan Mail: A Curiosity Item," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9, no. 1 (June 1954): 61-71.

feedback loop" between author and reader.[39] Fan mail, for some authors, was not worth its postage. The same could not be said about Malcolm Muggeridge. They were objects he treasured. The letters show the residue of Muggeridge's engagement: coffee stains, underlined words and sections, date stamps, check marks, exclamation points, question marks, carbon copies of his responses, follow-up letters from fans, and occasional references to his fan mail throughout his published writings all testify to his love for fan mail. When Muggeridge received fan mail while traveling, he would make sure to save it so that he could file it away in his "large metal box" back at Robertsbridge. He even glued some of his fan letters into his personal diary.[40] When fans asked if they could visit his personal residence, he would oblige so long as he had an open schedule. A quick cross-reference between fan letters and his date book reveals instances where he penciled in visits from people he only knew from the interaction of ink and paper. In some cases, it was *he* who was the first to offer an invitation to his fans for tea. These are not the behaviors of someone who cared little for his fans or fan mail.

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[39] Pawley, "Beyond Market Models," 75.

[40] See "A Connecticut Fan" to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 April 1981, SC-4 124/4. The fact that this was from an anonymous fan suggests that he saved it because of his general love for fan letters, and not because he knew this fan personally. Compared with the other thousands of letters he received, this one is not altogether remarkable from a researcher's perspective. It reads: "Dear sir, A few days ago I sent my respect + admiration for you on a card to Wm Morrow Co after reading your 2 vol. autobiography which I enjoyed so very much. Now I have just finished your splendid tribute to the saintly Mother Theresa of Calcutta...which is so lovely. You are a noble gentleman, sir! At daily mass, I ask God to bless you + your loved ones abundantly! A Connecticut fan." It is perhaps possible that Muggeridge was beginning to feel the draw of the Roman Catholic Church, and this letter arrived at a crucial moment, but we cannot know for sure.

Who were these readers? Nearly every letter included basic information that we might expect, such as date of letter, their name, and return address, so it is possible to reconstruct a great deal about them. But Muggeridge's readers often used their letters as autobiographical documents where, in the context of their reading experience, they shared how the narrative of their life interacted with the text. For that reason, we also know a great deal about which books they read, their occupations, religious worldviews, and ages. What follows in this chapter is an overview of the "who," "what," "where," and "when" questions that Robert Darnton outlined in his foundational article, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading."[41] These letters also gave detailed explanations of the more difficult questions for the history of reading: why and how they read the books they did. These more elusive questions will form the central preoccupation for chapters two through six.

Who were Muggeridge's Readers?

Between 1966 and 1982, Malcolm Muggeridge received 1,935 letters from people who specifically detailed their reading experience. This is a conservative figure from the over 25,000 letters Muggeridge received throughout his entire career. Many of those fans might have read his books and been deeply shaped by them, but, if they did not use their letter to discuss their reading experience, they were excluded from this study. The number of fan letters does not indicate exactly how many people in total actually read Muggeridge's books, but they nonetheless tell us a good deal about the kinds of people

[41] Robert Darnton, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23, no. 1 (1986): 5-30.

who did. Seventy-eight people sent more than one letter, usually after receiving a response from Muggeridge who encouraged them to continue writing. This amounted to 127 letters, or a little over 6%. Thus, 1,808 letters (94%) were from unique fans. Most of those who wrote a follow-up letter only did so once or twice, but several readers maintained correspondence over several years. John M. Raby sent eleven letters over the course of a decade. None of his letters was very long, and most of them did not go into a great amount of detail about precisely how Muggeridge's books shaped his life. But they must have, because he mentioned having read *Jesus Rediscovered* ten separate times, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* six times, and the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, *A Third Testament*, and *Things Past* each once.[42] Historians of reading sometimes can reconstruct the emotional life of readers, but most often, the feelings animated by reading are beyond the epistemological scope of historical practice. Historians depend entirely on the self-description of readers' inner lives as they go about reconstructing the lived past. That said, John Raby's letters, limited as they are in this regard, nonetheless suggest a deep emotional connection with Muggeridge's person and writings. An inability or lack of desire to communicate precision of feeling from ones reading experience in no way should be equated with an absence of emotional intensity. Behind the raw statistics of readership reside a profound array of complex emotional responses, and this was no less

[42] John M. Raby to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 August 1972, SC-4 88/6; 10 December 1974, SC-4 95/16; 4 February 1976, SC-4 98/9; 4 January 1978, SC-4 103/2; 29 January 1979, SC-4 102/1; 16 January 1980, SC-4 88/2; 26 May 1980, SC-4 105/5; 3 September 1980, SC-4 105/9; 21 February 1982 SC-4 109/5.

true when that reading became entangled with the religious dynamics of the 1960s and 1970s.

These readers hailed from forty-seven different countries across six continents. However, a closer look at the geographic breakdown of his fans shows that his readership was not nearly as global as that first figure suggests. The vast majority of letters were sent from those residing in English-speaking societies, including the United Kingdom and Ireland (1003),[43] the United States (298), Canada (129), Australia (119), and New Zealand (47). Together readers from Anglophone societies made up over 88% of all the fan mail he received. Another 105 readers did not include a return address, but since each of these were written in English, it is probable they mostly came from one of these settings. Muggeridge's books were translated into other languages, and he did receive several letters from people whose first language was not English. This was the case with nearly every reader living in continental Europe. From all of Africa, South America, and Asia (representing twenty different countries), Muggeridge received letters from a total of seventy-five readers. This included thirty-two letters from both India and South Africa where there remained substantial English-speaking populations as part of Britain's old imperial possessions. This also include a single letter from a Roman Catholic convent in Singapore with the signatures of eleven Sisters. The majority of these readers in non-Western contexts were British citizens who were traveling abroad, living as expats, or working as Christian missionaries.

[43] This includes 870 readers from England, 59 from Scotland, 32 from Wales, 13 from Northern Ireland, and 39 from the Republic of Ireland.

Most of Muggeridge's readers shared a common background in that they experienced many of the fundamental transformations that characterized "Western" societies in the 1960s and after. With few exceptions, Muggeridge's readers either lived in those settings or originated from them. Thus, while we can say that Muggeridge's readers were global in their scope, they were overwhelmingly from "Western" settings. Of course, this should not be all that surprising. Muggeridge's fame as a Christian author was tied to his familiarity on television and radio outlets that were mostly accessible in places like the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It was in these locations that Muggeridge also went on his many speaking tours or lived for extended periods of time. That Muggeridge had readers in parts of Africa, Asia, and South America was largely due to individuals arriving in those settings who already knew who Muggeridge was from their exposure to English-language media. Indeed, it is telling that often Muggeridge's bilingual fans wrote to offer their translating services *so that* his books would reach a wider audience.[44]

The religious breakdown of Muggeridge's fans is similarly diverse. Together they represented at least fifty-four distinct religious persuasions or worldviews. By far the largest category included those who identified generally as a Christian, or were identifiable as a Christian. One thousand seventy-seven of Muggeridge's unique fans fell into this category. Substantial numbers of these readers were likely members of various Christian denominations, but they chose not to disclose that information in their letters.

[44] For more on these fans who offered to translate Muggeridge's books, see Chapter five, below.

Significantly, some of these readers consciously understood themselves as Christians *outside of* institutional Christianity. The next largest group comprised the 282 Roman Catholic fans followed by just 101 readers who identified as part of the global Anglican Communion. In both of these categories, a substantial number of them also happened to be clergy or church workers. Another 237 Christian readers came from no less than twenty-five different denominations.[45] Additionally, there were 104 readers who did not specifically address either religious issues or their own religious background in their letters. Muggeridge also received eighty-four letters from unique readers who were not Christian. Altogether, Muggeridge's non-Christian readers represented eighteen different religious backgrounds or alternative worldviews. These readers included nineteen agnostics, thirteen atheists, and nineteen readers who thought of themselves as spiritual, but who had rejected Christianity.[46]

There was not any significant gender imbalance among Muggeridge's readers: 928 men and 905 women decided to write a fan letter. Twenty-four letters were written by more than one person; some only by men, others by only women, but most by both. Twenty-two of these readers were couples who admitted to have read the book together.

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[45] The breakdown of this number is as follow: twelve Methodists, eleven Presbyterians, nine Baptists, seven Swedenborgians, seven Evangelical Christians, four Christian Fundamentalists, four Pentecostal Christians, three Episcopalian, three Quakers, three Christian scientists, two each from Jehovah Witnesses, Christian spiritualism, the Salvation Army, Lutheranism, Christedelphianism, the United Church of Christ, and one each from Unitarianism, Christian Universalism, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Christian (Open) Brethren, Plymouth Brethren, Russian Orthodox-in-Exile, Christian Mysticism, the Order of the Cross, and the Jesus Freaks.

[46] This includes those who self-identified as spiritual, a seeker, or as a theist. Additionally, there were eight Jews, seven followers of the Baha'i faith, three practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, three Hindus, two Buddhists, one Muslim, one Sikh, one Psychic, one Scientologist, one spiritualist, one follower of Meher Baba, one follower of Raja Yoga, one Deist, and one self-identified gnostic

One hundred fourteen letters were from people whose gender was not possible to discern. Readers often signed with their initials or provided only their last names. Within the context of Muggeridge's fans, it was normally not possible to conclude anything concrete about their reading experience based on their gender or, contrariwise, anything about their gender based solely upon the content of their reading experience. As will be argued in several places in the following chapters, there were not obvious categorical differences between how men and women interacted with Muggeridge's texts. This in no way refutes or compromises the many innovative gendered analyses of post-war British religious history.[47] It simply means that these developments, while widespread and pervasive, did not appear to have made a significant impact on how Muggeridge's readers engaged his writings.

We know the age of 244 fans at the time of their letters. Of these, the youngest was eleven years old; the oldest was ninety-three. The average and median age was forty-nine years old. Another 175 readers gave enough evidence to deduce an approximate age, based on if they self-identified as a college student, a retired person, a person with small children, or someone with children in adulthood. Three of these readers could be described as children or adolescent. Forty-three others were in their late teens or early twenties. These included those who described themselves as "one of the youths of Britain" or of the "younger generation."[48] Another sixty-nine of these readers

[47] See, most importantly, Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain* and *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan, eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[48] Ramsey Lingard to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 June 1980, SC-4 105/6; J. Colin Caskie to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 March 1978, SC-4 104/4.

were "middle-aged" (including all of those who said they were in their "thirties," "forties," or "fifties"). The remaining sixty might be described as "elder," including all those describing themselves as being in their "sixties," "seventies," or "eighties." Like gender, age also did not appear to have been a major factor in determining the type of reading experience a fan had.

Five hundred forty-three fans gave some detail about their occupations. It may not come as a surprise that the most commonly occurring occupation were religious ones. Nearly 40% (214) of his fans who shared their occupation were religious workers. The market for religious books included a higher concentration of church workers than other markets, so there was a higher likelihood that people in those vocations would be drawn to Muggeridge's publications. Moreover, since most of the letters Muggeridge received engaged religious issues, these fans likely felt it was relevant to display their experience as a church worker. Of these, there were 104 clergy from at least nine different denominations,[49] thirty-three nuns, eleven missionaries, seven monks, four canons, three rectors, three bishops, two curates, a monsignor, and a prioress. The remaining forty-five were those who worked on church staffs or for various parachurch organizations.

Besides the regularity of religious occupations among Muggeridge's fans, there were a few other occupations that were frequently represented. Seventy-eight fans identified as a university student. There were also twenty-one professors at colleges and

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[49] These included Roman Catholic, Church of England, United Church of Christ, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and the Reformed Episcopal Church. It also included those who identified as "Christian" without naming their particular denominational affiliation.

universities in Britain and the United States, including three others who worked as university administrators. Thus, readers connected to higher education made up over 5% of Muggeridge's fans. Perhaps Muggeridge's small stint as Rector of the University of Edinburgh had something to do with this. Other teachers outside of higher education number at thirty. There were also forty fans who described themselves as journalists, copywriters, editors, and authors or writers, which is perhaps not surprising given that was Muggeridge's profession. But there were also nineteen medical doctors or scientists, which perhaps can be explained, at least in part, by Muggeridge's preoccupation with medical issues such as reproductive rights and the ethics of organ transplants.

Not all of Muggeridge's fans were white-collar workers. He also received fan letters from readers who were construction workers, auto mechanics, homemakers, farmers, factory workers, bar tenders, lawn mower contractors, soldiers, manufacturers, painters, and transit workers. Some readers opted instead for general descriptions like "ordinary working man,"[50] "owner of a modest business,"[51] or "office clerk."[52] But most fans did not divulge their exact occupation. Perhaps it did not matter to them at the time, or they did not think it was worth sharing. Self-identification provides a solid picture of the range of occupations among Muggeridge's readers, but higher frequency of one occupation over another probably does not tell us all that much about the approximately 1,400 fans who chose *not* to share what they did for a living. It is also likely that readers

[50] William Barry Willis to Malcolm Muggeridge, 10 January 1973, SC-4 91/3.

[51] Ronald Eastley to Malcolm Muggeridge, 8 March 1982, SC-4 109/8.

[52] Mary Hines to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 March 1972, SC-4 87/8.

in certain occupations were more likely to share that information in a fan letter, as was the case those in religious vocations. Ultimately, however, there was not a significant difference in the reading experience among readers in these different occupations. Certainly, some might articulate their thoughts better than others, but there was remarkable consistency in the commonest themes that characterized Muggeridge's fan mail as a whole.

Between 1966 and 1982, fans wrote about their experience of reading *Jesus Rediscovered* more than any other book. It was mentioned by name 640 times in all of the 1935 letters. As Muggeridge's first major book-length religious work, it remained widely available throughout the period of this study. Readers simply had more time to get their hands on it than those books he published later, such as *The End of Christendom* (1978) or *Like it Was* (1982). The other three books that attracted the most fan mail were *Something Beautiful for God* (373 mentions), *The Chronicles of Wasted Time* (288 mentions), and *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* (201 mentions). Muggeridge's fans wrote to him about ten of his other works as well, but all together, these attracted a total of 241 mentions.[53] There were 244 letters that did not mention any specific book by name, but there is enough intertextual evidence to demonstrate the fan letter was prompted by reading. It was common for fans to say things like "having read your many

[53] The breakdown of these are: *Tread Softly* thirty-six times, *End of Christendom* fifteen times, *Christ and the Media* twenty-five times, *A Twentieth Century Testimony* and *Things Past* thirty-six times each, *Like it Was* eight times, *A Third Testament* forty-eight times, *The Thirties* twelve times, *In A Valley of a Restless Mind* seven times, *Muggeridge: Ancient and Modern* thirteen times, *Muggeridge Through the Microphone* seven times, *Winter in Moscow* three times, *Paul: Envoy Extraordinary* thirty-four times, *Affairs of the Heart* two times, *Three Flats* two times, and ninety mentions of various articles, some of which were reconstituted for later publication in one of his books.

publications,"[54] "I have most of your books,"[55] "recently I read some of your writings"[56] or to reference in general "all those books of yours that I have read."[57] In these cases, it is rather difficult to tell exactly which writings or books they were talking about. Muggeridge often wrote about the same themes in different publications, so even a detailed cross reference between the date of their letters and Muggeridge's various publications would not necessarily make us any wiser about what they were precisely reading.

For that matter, what is popular is not necessarily meaningful. Every fan who was inspired to write a letter was moved in some way by the books they read. But that does not mean that we can place *Jesus Rediscovered* on a hierarchy and conclude that it was Muggeridge's most important book. The meaning of a text to particular readers was determined less by the value innate within Muggeridge's books themselves, and more by the circumstances in which those books were read. *Things Past*, for example, was mentioned by name only thirty-six times, making it among Muggeridge's less popular books. Yet, Rick Nathan, a sixty-year old from Queensland, Australia, wrote a fan letter to express just how much the book meant to him:

> This book, now read, is beside me, and I know quite positively, that it will be till I die…and…if I thought there were a purpose to do so, it would be buried or burned with me…this copy, given to me with love, will remain in my mind and

[54] Anonymous to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 April 1979, SC-4 104/4.

[55] Geoffrey M. Officer to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 March 1973, SC-4 91/14.

[56] Anonymous to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 March 1974, SC-4 91/14.

[57] Anonymous to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 January 1981, SC-4 106/1.

> heart and back and forth between hand and shelf in the same as, and beside, the Gospels.[58]

One senses from Nathan's letter that yes, the text was deeply important, but its significance was entwined with the fact that he received it from a loved one. Nathan is a good reminder that statistics from book sales or even the frequency that a book is read do nothing to determine the specific meanings that books have for readers.

How often did fans send letters? Did it all come in all at once? Or was it more gradual? Depending on how one looks at it, we could say both. On average, Muggeridge received 114 letters per year that detailed their reading experience. If we expand this to include *every* letter he received (including, for example, those letters inspired by a television or film appearance), the number jumps to approximately 1,250 per year. So, between 1966 and 1982, just under one out of every ten letters was prompted by reading. The lowest number of letters on record was 1968 when he received only fifty-four fan letters; the highest was 1981 when he received 165. The consistency at which he received letters, however, was not necessarily due to steady book sales, but to Muggeridge's prolific productivity during the 1970s. Not only was he ubiquitous on television, Muggeridge published a book almost every year during the 1970s. Muggeridge's books followed what was likely a typical market pattern for books generally in that they generated significantly higher interest (and therefore fan mail) in the first years following publication, and slowly tapered off afterwards as the buzz died down. Yet, as soon as one of his books began to lose popularity, another would hit the

[58] Rick Nathan to Malcolm Muggeridge, 24 April 1974, SC-4 104/ 4.

shelves. Let us consider, for example, fan mail that mentioned *Jesus Rediscovered*. Of the 640 letters that discuss it specifically, 255 of them arrived within the first two years of its publication. After that initial push, he received on average thirty-two letters each year between 1971 and 1982 where fans described their reading experience. But just as fan mail that mentioned *Jesus Rediscovered* began to dip, he released what ended up becoming another best-selling book, *Something Beautiful for God*, which was hot off the press in 1971. His other books followed a similar pattern. Of the 201 letters that mentioned *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*, eighty-nine of them arrived during the first two years, with an average of about nineteen coming in each year after that. Again, just as fan mail mentioning *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* began to slow to a trickle, Muggeridge published both *A Third Testament* and *Christ in the Media.* The rate of new publications appearing in the 1960s and 1970s also had the simultaneous effect of inspiring new fans to search his corpus for other reading material. Therefore, it was not uncommon for someone to learn of Muggeridge for the first time in the late 1970s by seeing him on shows such as William Buckley's *The Firing Line*, only then to seek out and read for the first time books that he had published years and perhaps decades before.

We therefore can make at least a few statistical generalizations about Muggeridge's readers. We can say that they tended to be English, Christian, middle-aged, and were probably reading *Jesus Rediscovered*. This should therefore revise Richard Ingram's assumption that Muggeridge's theological tone "did not endear him to British audiences" while it was "more appreciated on the other side of the Atlantic—in

the USA and Canada."[59] The fact that the vast majority of his fan mail was written by British Christians who did appreciate his theology may perhaps instead indicate that British audiences liked it every bit as much as Americans, but that they chose to express their appreciation in more subdued form—in some cases, through a private letter. His readers represented a wide range of occupational backgrounds, and there was not significant gender imbalance among this community of readers. However, what does appear remarkably consistent is the degree to which these readers' letters gravitated towards a number of similar themes: they were unsatisfied with institutional Christianity, they saw Muggeridge as a spiritual guide, were concerned about declinism, and were inspired towards social activism.

Receiving and Responding to Fan Mail

Muggeridge claimed to love receiving fan letters, and we know that some fans even sent him letters in the first place *because* they thought that was true. But how often did he actually respond? How do we know if he did not just throw them away and use the sentiment to produce good will among his customers? For that matter, how could he have possibly tended to each of the tens of thousands of letters he received? It would seem Muggeridge cared enough about his fans that he made sure that one of the jobs of his personal assistant, Marian E. Williams, was to receive the letters and make sure they were accounted for. None of Muggeridge's biographers mentions her. Unfortunately, she did not leave any memoirs, and the textual evidence she left behind is scant.

[59] Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography*, 225.

However, it is possible to partially reconstruct her important role for the study of Muggeridge's fan mail.

It would seem he hired her to care for his letters mostly while he was away traveling. She indicates as much in at least a couple of responses that she sent to admiring fans. But there is evidence that she also helped him stay organized even while he was at home. The system they used to keep track of letters was simple, but irregular. Depending on who opened the envelope, either she or Muggeridge would indicate on the letter whether a response had been sent. This would vary from a check mark with a date or a note saying something like "Replied on" followed by the date. Most of these were written in Marian Williams' hand, but there are a few in the scrawly chicken-scratch that was Muggeridge's. If we count *just* the letters with the indications that a response was sent, then replies were sent to just over half of all the letters he received. That is a conservative estimate, however. Some letters without marginalia still have textual evidence of responses. For example, no marginalia appears on the six letters Muggeridge received from Ellen Wilson over the course of about four years, but we know that he *did* respond from the fact that she quoted from letters she had received from him.[60] Most fans, as we have seen, did not send follow-up letters. It is entirely possible that fans received a response without Muggeridge or Williams leaving any record of it happening.

[60] Ellen Wilson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 June 1978, SC-4 103/9; 1 July 1979, SC-4 104/7; 10 November 1979, SC-4 104/11; 31 January 1980, SC-4 105/1; 9 April 1980, SC-4 105/4; 23 April 1982, SC-4 109/15.

Is it possible to know if the only response they received was from Muggeridge's personal assistant, Marian Williams? Not entirely, but some clues are available. Since Muggeridge was oftentimes pre-occupied with writing, appearing on television, giving public lectures, producing documentaries, and traveling abroad, it was more often than not she who first received the letters. But if we consider those letters Muggeridge received while was aboard, Williams does not appear to have sent responses in his name. What she did instead was send a short note to fans explaining his absence, and that Muggeridge would read it once he returned. We know that Muggeridge followed through on her promise, even if it was months afterwards. Harry Fern sent his fan letter about having read the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* on 18 December 1972.[61] The margin of the letter includes two dates. The first says "Keep, Forward 21.12.72," which may indicate that she forwarded Muggeridge's fan mail to wherever his current address was while traveling. It might also mean that she saved it for him to peruse once he got back home. The latter is probably more likely, because the letter's second time stamp, "20.4.73," was also written in Williams' hand.[62] In either case, it likely indicates that Muggeridge did, in fact, read it and send a personal response to letters he had received months before. This example, at least, suggests that Williams' main role was logistical in that she was tasked with receiving, organizing, and keeping track of the hundreds of letters that Muggeridge would receive during the time he was away from home. It would seem that they even had

[61] Harry Fern to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 December 1972, SC-4 90/13.

[62] Ibid.

conversations with each other on the letters themselves regarding logistical issues. When a fan living in a Sydney suburb asked when *Jesus Rediscovered* would finally appear on Australian shelves, Muggeridge wrote in the margin: "?When will Jesus Rediscovered be on sale in Aust?" Williams wrote back in the margin: "on sale now Fontana books."[63] Evidently, Muggeridge had every intention of responding to a fan halfway around the world, took the time to get the information, and depended on his personal assistant for it.

That said Williams occasionally provided some kind of screening process for the letters. For example, we do not have the exact response(s) that David L. B. Howell received after sending his fan letter, but Williams jotted down in the margin a note explaining how she had handled it: "A friendly, quite interesting letter, but long! I've just thanked, said how M'd read with much interest."[64] Likewise, when Connie Lake sent her letter, Williams affirmed in the margin: "M will be interested."[65] Was there a third person involved in this fan-mail response system? The fact that she was writing about Muggeridge in the third person may suggest as much. Perhaps Kitty, Malcolm's wife? In any case, it is impossible to discern whether Muggeridge actually read each letter, responded to each one individually, or whether he was satisfied enough knowing that Williams had at least acknowledged them. Any of these scenarios underscore Muggeridge's love for fan mail.

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[63] Anita Troia to Malcolm Muggeridge, January 1970, SC-4 74/9.

[64] David L. B. Howell to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 May 1970, SC-4 22/14.

[65] Connie Lake to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 July 1969, SC-4 22/15.

In some cases, Williams took the liberty of filing the letter away without responding. Thirty-four letters have "No Reply" written at the top. This might have been due to letters that neglected to include a return address, but sometimes not responding was deliberate. When Kathleen Downes sent one of her letters in November of 1972, Williams noted on the margin (in annoyance?), "No Reply She Writes Every Other Week."[66] Again, it was possible that Muggeridge still read these, but without marginalia, carbon copy of responses, or follow-up letters from fans, we can only guess. But, given what we know about what Muggeridge thought about his fan mail, it is very likely that he did glance through them, even if a reply was not sent.

One gets the sense that she became quite invested in the problems fans shared as she organized the letters for Muggeridge's later view. When one anonymous fan wrote a four-page letter without an address in handwriting that was, frankly, almost illegible, Williams took the time to decipher each word by re-writing the letter between the lines. She included a note for Muggeridge: "Do Read This."[67] These letters were an end in-and-of themselves, even when they were difficult to read or when it would have been impossible to send a reply. After twenty-four year old Ronald Stark, who read *Jesus Rediscovered* three times, wrote for advice on whether or not he should enter the priesthood, Williams included a special plea for Muggeridge, "Can you help this eager beaver?"[68] On this letter (as many others), there are two time-stamps ten days apart. The

[66] Kathleen Downes to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 November 1972, SC-4 89/15.

[67] Anonymous to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 January 1971, SC-4 80/8.

[68] Ronald Stark to Malcolm Muggeridge, 7 July 1973, SC-4 92/6.

first probably refers to when Williams acknowledged receipt of the letter while the second was the record of Muggeridge's personal reply. Examples like these seem to confirm that she probably did not ghostwrite his responses, but did take it upon herself to nudge him when the letters she screened touched her emotionally.

There are a small number of letters which show a little more editorial freedom on Williams' part. One Australian fan, Alec Crawford, had read *Jesus Rediscovered*, which inspired him to send a fan letter to Muggeridge as he struggled with the classic philosophical problem of the existence of evil. Muggeridge was traveling when the letter arrived, so Williams took it upon herself to send him a two-page letter with a long quotation of something Muggeridge had said about suffering in a recent BBC program "The Question Why: Why Suffering." After mailing the response, she then wrote a little note for Muggeridge on the top of Crawford's letter, "hope this is okay," with the carbon copy attached.[69] Here, then, is another component of their system. Muggeridge would trust Williams to respond on his behalf, even to the point of editing a reply of what she thought Muggeridge would say in regards to whatever issue a fan was writing about. The note on the letter itself indicates that Muggeridge not only took the time to read the stack of letters that piled up while traveling, it shows that he was invested enough that Williams knew he would want to know exactly what she was communicating to his fans, perhaps especially if it was constructed from Muggeridge's own words. In another case, after reading a six-page letter, Williams wrote, "lots of questions" in the margin. Her initial reply suggested that he purchase *Jesus Rediscovered* because she believed it would

[69] Alec Crawford to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 November 1970, SC-4 78/5.

serve to answer his questions with as much success as a personal reply from Muggeridge would. Muggeridge often sent his books to fans for free if he felt they would benefit from them and faced financial hardship. Williams evidently knew this, so she included a note on the carbon copy of her reply saying, "He trains horses so he can afford to buy it."[70] Whether she was right to assume a necessary connection between horse training and financial stability is a matter of debate, but this short note sheds some additional light on the system that Muggeridge and Williams had for responding to fans.

Fans relished the opportunity to point out factual, grammatical, and even stylistic errors in Muggeridge's writing. There was Mima Robertson who could not stand Muggeridge's "inordinate affection for the semi-colon, which you scatter through the pages like confetti, without rhyme or reason where a comma, a full stop or even a dash would be more acceptable."[71] Or there was John Hutchinson who joked that Muggeridge's overuse of commas ruined his month: "I ought to sue. Scrubs, Wormwood, is, undoubtedly, the, security-wise, best, hairshirtedly, place, for, atonement-wise, you…. Deadly serious about the punctuation. Shape up."[72] But did Muggeridge really care? The answer is important because it tells us how he interacted with the more persnickety of his readers. Did he just ignore them as most authors probably have when random fans criticized their work? He at least did not throw them away, but neither did always take them seriously. When a fan tried to correct a minor fact in the first volume of the

[70] R. Renton to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 January 1971, SC-4 80/8.

[71] Mima Robertson to Malcolm Muggeridge 10 April 1974, SC-4 94/16.

[72] John Hutchinson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 February 1974, SC-4 10/26.

Chronicles of Wasted Time, Williams wrote in the margin, "Does this need correcting in the next impression of your book?"[73] Even though subsequent editions remain unchanged from the one the fan thought was in error, there is here the indication that he at least read the criticisms. That he did not correct the minor mistake (assuming the fan was right) should not surprise us. Muggeridge was notorious, in the words of Richard Ingrams, for expressing "a contempt for facts, records, information of any kind."[74] But that did not stop him from fighting back on occasion when his fans criticized him. One reader, while watching Muggeridge on television, complained that he was crass and used impious language, which he believed was a disservice to the fight against permissiveness in society. We have Muggeridge's reply in the margin: "Proud to be a defender of Xian morals but not at the cost of becoming a prig. Others on Programme in question friends of mine + though some of it rather juvenile, I thought, by + large funny and harmless."[75]

In contrast to authors like Shirley Jackon, Muggeridge evidently did not think fan mail was "irrational," "annoying," or "always infringing" on his life. Quite the opposite, they were a deeply important to him. He read, saved interacted with, responded to, and looked forward to reading his letters—so much so that he hired an assistant to help him

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[73] M. Sinclair to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 December 1972, SC-4 90/13. Sinclair wrote: "I wonder, however, if I would be so bold as to point to a matter of fact on p. 45 [might be 245 or even 145] in your second paragraph you refer twice to MINCHINHAMPSON where you, obviously, meant MISERDEN. Minchinhampson is some twelve miles…Our only meeting was in Luiseeden Church year. You were, I think, doing a B.B.C Broadcast on your early life and were being interviewed in the Churchyard. I was doing a job for my wife—in fact I ws refurbishing the flowers on the grave of…Lord Wills. We really exchanged a word."

[74] Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography*, 219.

[75] John Crowley to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 January 1970, SC-4 74/1.

do it. There are some who would make the case that Muggeridge "was not a theologian and certainly not an intellectual."[76] This is only true if such monikers are determined by academics. The fact is that his fans saw him as both of those things and more. He may not have been a public intellectual, but he was *their* intellectual. But to those who wrote fan letters he became so much more. Whether by phone calls, written replies, or welcoming personal visits, Muggeridge went to great lengths to meet his fans. That unique personal connection that he formed with individual readers around the world gave him a special status in the hearts and minds of his readers. In this way, he became not just a public intellectual that pontificated from the airwaves, but also a personal intellectual who took the time to respond to readers' letters on any variety of issues they felt they needed help with. It was because of these personal relationships Muggeridge formed with his readers that fans like Mary Elliott felt her letter was like "a handshake" the formed a personal connection across vast distances, in her case, half-way around the world.

[76] Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography*, 228.

Chapter 2: Reading and Writing as Self-Discovery

"You have compelled me to recognise the religious, mystical and philosophical impulses in myself and also to attempt to act on them. Don't consider me a 'fan' or a disciple—maybe a 'kindred spirit'"

Fleur Butt to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 June 1982

Arthur Marwick has contended that "the long 1960s" (1958-1974) should be understood as a self-contained period that was radically distinct from what had gone on before. The cultural mainstream of the decade following the Second World War is often characterized as a time of rigid hierarchies, separate spheres, privacy of sexuality, formalism in language and etiquette, and unquestioning respect for institutions like the family, the church, and government. Culture may not perfectly mirror politics, but Dwight Eisenhower, Robert Menzies, and Winston Churchill were each aging symbols of allied victory that could confirm with comfortable complacency traditional social mores. By contrast, the social foment of the 1960s—sustained by unprecedented improvements in living standards—was defined primarily by declining trust in traditional practices and institutions, as well as by expanding tolerance for plural moral frameworks. It ushered in a more permissive environment with a newfound allowance for sexuality in the public sphere, a thirst for cultural exchange with other nations, a preoccupation with cutting-edge fashions, and intellectual originality in religion and philosophy.[77] Ideas and

[77] See also Trevor Harris and Monia O'Brien Castro, eds. *Preserving the Sixties: Britain and the "Decade of Protest*" (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, *The Decline of Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). It should be noted that while postmodern theory was of vital importance to the intellectual development of Western societies, Marwick notes that it *did not* have a significant impact on Britain during the 1960s and 1970s. Marwick, *The Sixties*, 290 ff.

movements from the forties and fifties may well have affected the sixties, but following Marwick, they were "rather insignificant" and "intangible" in their own time. The sixties were much more the result of a "vast number of innovative activates taking place simultaneously, by unprecedented interaction and acceleration."[78] These innovations were disseminated by advancements in media and transportation technology that popularized the values and ideas of youth sub-cultures that might have otherwise fizzled out of existence in regional locales like the Cavern Club in Liverpool or the Crawdaddy Club in London.[79]

The beating heart of these dynamics was the emergence of a "popular individualism" that caused pervasive "dealignment" along traditional categories of class, gender, and religious persuasion. It was characterized chiefly by the desire for "greater personal autonomy and self-determination" that was expressed by an unprecedented movement *away* from inherited attitudes, customs, habits, and cultural meanings.[80] It

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[78] Marwick, *The Sixties*, 7. For a discussion on the expansion of sexual discourse in the press, see Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[79] A relatively recent historiographical trend has been to downplay the revolutionary scope of the 1960s and 1970s. This position is best represented by Dominic Sandbrook in his multi-volume history of post-war Britain. See *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2005). *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus, 2007). *State of Emergency: The Way We Were, 1970-1974* (London: Penguin, 2011). *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain*, 1974-1979 (London: Allen Lane, 2012). Sandbrook emphasizes that for most people, life did not exhibit the stereotypical trends associated with the "swinging sixties." He is right to correct the assumption that there was "a single national experience" and that it "was much more complicated, diverse and contradictory than it has often been credit for." However, as an analysis of Muggeridge's fan mail shows, many of these readers' actions were shaped by the idea of a widespread cultural revolution, whether or not they experienced it for themselves.

[80] Emily Robinson et al., "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s," *Twentieth Century Britain* Vol. 28, no. 2 (2017): 268.

first emerged during the 1960s and flowered during the 1970s. People used the growing freedom they experienced from rising affluence, the welfare state, and the expansion of educational opportunities to redefine themselves in new and creative ways. Anthony Giddens has described this context—that of "late modernity"—as one in which self-identity exists as a "reflexive project."[81] Individuals made and remade themselves as they faced the myriad of choices that comprise the conditions of their experience. Without the traditions and cycles to define the practices of everyday life, self-identity needed to be "routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" in order to negotiate a sustainable "biographical narrative" in response to a society and culture in constant flux. The reflexive project functions as a means to thrive within a society that is understood as ultimately contingent and unpredictable. As Giddens describes this project,

> The narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale. The individual must integrate information deriving from a diversity of mediated experiences with local involvements in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences in a reasonably coherent fashion.[82]

According to Giddens, what we would call "popular individualism" was therefore not merely one choice among many in post-war society; it was the existential response to *restructured* conditions of experience, which sought to mirror personal refiguration with

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[81] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 5.

[82] Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 215.

the perception of social change.[83] This is why television and print media play a central role in late-modernity. They link the local and the global, which then serves to mediate *a* vision of social change as the self is reflexively made in response.

It is no coincidence that popular individualism emerged as a definitive characteristic of late-modernity just as churches witnessed declining numbers and dwindling social influence. Indeed, the problem of identity and "popular individualism" was deeply entangled with the religious crises of the 1960s and 1970s.[84] As traditional frameworks that gave cohesion to British (and by extension, western) societies diminished, people had to carry out the reflexive project to make sense of their religious identities as distinct from inherited institutional frameworks. The result was, in the words of Hugh McLeod, "a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation."[85] For many this amounted to personal empowerment where sexual liberation, rising affluence, and expanding education made the reflexive project a positive and liberating experience. However, for those who wished to remain faithful Christians, these conditions put them in a quandary. Christians were not immune or inherently resilient to the popular individualism that characterized society in general. Many shared

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[83] See Kang Zhao and Gert Biesta, "Lifelong Learning, Identity and the Moral Dimension: The 'Reflexive Project of the Self' revisited," Paper presented at the 38th Annual SCUTREA Conference, 2-4 July 2008, University of Edinburgh.

[84] Callum Brown has emphasized external causes for the religious dynamics of those years, paying special attention to the sexual revolution and discourse. He sees the dynamics as a sharp and violent revolution that occurred quite unexpectedly. See Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2009). By contrast, Hugh McLeod has emphasized a more gradual decline, and pays special attention to internal dynamics within the churches themselves. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*.

[85] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 1.

the distrust of inherited traditions and sought to redefine themselves in response. Numerical growth of mainline denominational churches depended on passing theology and practice from one generation to the next, but popular individualism served to undermine that as a feasible rationale for one's beliefs.

Was the self-reflexive project ultimately random with so many choices available? According to Giddens, it is the principle of "authenticity" that gives shape and direction to the self-reflexive project at an individual level. Authenticity is a tricky concept to categorize precisely because what counts as such became amorphous during the 1960s and 1970s. Cultural authority was democratized by consumer practice and so the recognition of what counted as "authentic" was likewise fragmented to suit individual preference. This process mirrored politics, which witnessed a decline in class identities determining voting choice. People "made up their minds for themselves more often, changed their views more frequently, and weighed issues more carefully."[86] Authenticity is much more than "being true to oneself," it is defined by the trust fostered within human relationships. People who wished to remain Christian, but whose popular individualism led them to leave institutional Christianity, began to seek out alternative sources of "authenticity" as they carried out their self-reflexive projects. The popular individualism of the 1960s and 1970s that was expressed in "multiple valences," included some who exhibited serious doubt and uncertainty. Those who had anxiety and uncertainty about their identity—religious or otherwise—*vis-à-vis* social change sought out guides who had

[86] Robinson et al., "Popular Individualism in the 1970s," 273.

achieved, in Giddens' term, "self-mastery" of who they were. Self-mastery is, in effect, successfully overcoming the "doubt" that "permeates into everyday life…and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary world."[87]

Malcolm Muggeridge's readers recognized him as possessing both the authenticity and self-mastery that would help them to carry out their self-reflexive projects. He earned this status with his readers because he had so successfully worked through the problem of individualism that proved to be such an ongoing challenge for them. Even though he converted to Christianity, he remained *outside* of its traditional structures. Instead, he turned to a mystically informed Christianity inspired by personal devotions, private contemplation, and moral activism. He thereby served as a public and outspoken counterpoint to the perception of religious decline. Muggeridge modeled how his readers could maintain Christianity as an essential component of their "biographical narrative" without remaining committed to inherited structures like the institutional churches. Muggeridge's conversion to Christianity came across as less an atavistic reaction to the popular individualism of the 1960s and 1970s than it was a religiously defined *expression* of it. This helps to explain why fan letters to Muggeridge were so autobiographical in their scope and content. His readers often included those who were seeking guidance as they wrestled with cultural and religious revolutions taking place around them. The dual processes of reading and writing served as an exercise to come to

[87] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 3.

terms with those challenges.[88] Reading Muggeridge's books, writing him fan letters, and sometimes receiving personalized responses helped to foster trust, which established the conditions for the self-reflexive project to take place. His readers appropriated refined, and in some cases even entirely refigured, understandings of the self. Muggeridge's fans, from a wide variety of social settings and emotional states, saw him as a friend and kindred spirit who crystalized even their most nebulous thoughts, and whose life they saw as a mirror image of their own.

Kindred Spirits

This kind of relationship emerged despite geographic, social, cultural, religious, and in some cases even linguistic distances. Vittorio Gargano, a Franciscan monk on Lake Como, must have been among the first to read *Christos Riscoperto* because his letter was sent mere months after *Jesus Rediscovered* was first translated into Italian.[89] He felt enough "affinity with [Muggeridge's] spirit" after reading it that he opened the

[88] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. I, 54-71. The three-fold mimesis Ricoeur develops at length in *Time and Narrative* refers to the action when readers with prefigured notions about the world ($Mimesis_1$) interact with an already configured reality in the world of the text ($Mimesis_2$). The application of the text has the potential to refigure the world of reader ($Mimesis_3$). Ricoeur does not suggest that it is primarily the text that has effective power upon the reader—a reader's rejection of a text can be applied just as much as acceptance of it.

[89] Indeed, not only was he among the first, he was among the few. The Italian translation did not sell very well. Only partial sales figures are available, but they are enough to extrapolate a general trend. One hundred seven copies sold in the first six months of 1973; forty copies in all of 1975; nine copies in the first six months of 1978; seven copies in the first six months of 1979; and eighteen copies in all of 1981. It is probably safe to assume that the Italian translation sold somewhere between 500 and 1000 copies in its first ten years. Of course, sales figures do not tell us whether a book was even read, or how much it might have moved people when it was, but letters from monks like Vittorio Gargano do. See Muggeridge's records from his literary agents, David Higham Associates in SC-4 19/4, 6, 10, 11, and 15. See also "Appendix A: Editions of Malcolm Muggeridge's Books, 1969-1990."

letter with "Dear Friend and brother."[90] Londoner Victoria Ingrams felt the same. After receiving a previous letter from her some months earlier, Muggeridge decided to give her a copy of *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*. Her thank-you letter expressed a desire for genuine friendship when she addressed him as "Dear Malcolm," because it made her "somehow feel nearer…than Mr. Muggeridge."[91] Thirty-two year old Ginny Flax would have agreed. She was a busy mother of three young boys who stopped reading *Jesus Rediscovered* "reluctantly, on page 50 in order to get on with my day's work."[92] Like Muggeridge, she was a recent convert herself who felt somewhat alone because her husband did not share her newfound convictions. Moreover, she evidently was not taken all that seriously when she became a Christian because, as she described it, her friends wrote it off as her "merely off on another kick, much like trying a new hair style." For that reason, she felt a special connection to a fellow convert who, at least from his books, seemed like he would understand where she was coming from. Reading Muggeridge's books came into her life "as an introduction to a friend, and now a brother."[93] She hoped that one day she could meet him and discuss more fully all the ideas flooding her mind. Until then, her daily prayers at such sacred altars as the "sink or the stack of diapers" would include a supplication or two on Muggeridge's behalf.

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[90] Vittorio Gargano to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 April 1971, SC-4 81/8.

[91] Victoria Ingrams to Malcolm Muggeridge, 4 September 1975, SC-4 97/6.

[92] Ginny Flax to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 June 1973, SC-4 92/3.

[93] Ibid., SC-4 92/3.

What was it about his books that so often inspired his readers to see him as a friend or kindred spirit? The most common reason his readers indicated was his blunt and genuine openness. Readers saw Muggeridge's typical candor—so often expressed in the form of derisive satire—transform into honest, if hesitant, reflection in his Christian writings. It seemed as if they were granted special access to his real personality, and not some manufactured product for consumption. In Gidden's definition of the term, Muggeridge had "authenticity."[94] This was the thought of Roger Groening, a university student at Winnipeg, double majoring in history and theology. His interest in those subjects likely stimulated his summer reading of the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. Groening was deeply touched when he finished volume 1: "You shared yourself so openly and completely that you reached your hand across the ocean and gave a bit of yourself to everyone."[95] It was a combination of Muggeridge's "strength of personality" and willingness to reveal his true self that made the autobiography come across as so real, and it was what made the characters appear so "mortal and prone to error."[96] So many other autobiographies, in the words of Aldo Corbascio, "turn out to be inevitably an 'apologia sui.'" Muggeridge's, on the other hand, "is the divine comedy of the most serious minds of our time."[97]

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[94] See Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 78-79, 96, 186-187, and 215.

[95] Roger Groening to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 June 1977, SC-4 101/5.

[96] Ibid., SC-4 101/5.

[97] Aldo Corbascio to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 March 1978, SC-4 103/4.

For many of Muggeridge's readers, the "mental contact"[98] that had given them the sense, however imagined, that they were kindred spirits became validated when he responded with a personal note. It was common for Muggeridge to send something along the lines of a common template that was cordial, yet formulaic. His letter to Roger Groening is typical: "What a very nice letter you have written me. Letters like that cheer me up more than you know and I thank you for it with all my heart."[99] The added touch of his signature might confirm at least that the letter was not the absent-minded busywork of his secretary, Marian Williams. Of course, even a short reply can mean a great deal to the unsuspecting fan. Stephen Miles is a case in point. He wrote a letter to Muggeridge to explain how much *Jesus Rediscovered* meant to him. Muggeridge responded with a very brief reply:

> Dear Mr Miles
>
> Thank you for writing kindly about Jesus Rediscovered. I am cheerd and encouraged by your remarks.
>
> With all good wishes.
>
> MM

The note probably took less than a minute of Muggeridge's time, but the short letter was part of an influence that would shape the course that Miles' life would take. Reflecting on the role of Muggeridge on his life forty-seven years later, Miles wrote to describe how

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[98] Jenny Ford to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[99] Malcolm Muggeridge to Roger Groening, 6 October 1977, SC-4 101/5.

He was amongst the few most influential people in my journey in the Christian faith. I have not read Jesus Rediscovered since 1970, the year after it was published, but I know that on me it made a tremendous impact. As did all Muggeridge's books.

I was 26 years of age, a young schoolteacher, when I wrote to M thanking him for Jesus Rediscovered. I had long been a fan of M mainly for his ironic if not cynical regard of politics, politicians and political ideology, his loathing of vain and pompous public figures, and for his own honest self-criticism borne out in his autobiographies in which he showed he was a man capable of self-examination and change…

As a young man and practicing Christian, I wasn't much bothered that Muggeridge was an atheist, because I so delighted in his urbane and witty writing, and I loved his exposure of cant and hypocrisy. It was when he started to admit ever so slowly that he was becoming agnostic, as testified in his television documentaries on Mother Theresa, St Paul and Jesus, that I became fascinated by the gradual metamorphosis of this man who had become for me a soul mate: That one of my secular intellectual heroes should be coming around to faith in Christ, was for me encouraging beyond words, confirmation that I was not just imagining Christ to be the Way, the Truth and the Life but that I was almost certainly on the right track.

It was however not only the fact that this hero of mine whose views and outlook on life I shared was becoming a Christian, but because I identified with his own profligate experience of life. Muggeridge had been everything I was as a young man—smoker, drinker, sexually promiscuous and generally self interested. As much as I was enjoying myself in my twenties I knew at the very time of writing to Muggeridge that pleasures of the flesh alone were finally unsatisfying and no way to fulfilment. Again, M provided the confirmation I needed because he had enjoyed the same hedonistic life I was leading at the time and ultimately found such a lifestyle wanting. I could not have listened to anyone for advice who had not lived life as I was leading and enjoying it. C. S. Lewis, for example, has never spoken to my condition as Muggeridge has because his life was relatively sheltered and ivory towered. At the end of the day, Malcolm Muggeridge had a huge spiritual influence on me because I could identify with his profane life as well as I could his sacred journey. He was, in my book, qualified to speak!...Muggeridge—urbane, sophisticated, intelligent, skeptical—so impressed me by his journey in faith that he, in a sense, helped me to see that my own journey was valid. Encouragement indeed![100]

[100] Stephen Miles, email message to author, January 6, 2018.

This memory is a rich expression of what readers all around the world experienced. It was Muggeridge's presentation of himself as a man who struggled with the same sins and vices, all the while remaining in a constant state of self-examination that appealed to readers. He was living proof that one could make an honest change in their lives. Miles is also a good example showing the continued influence books and reading can have on people's lives. As Mile's remembers it, the most important interaction he had with Muggeridge and his books was during his twenties. Yet, here he is decades later reflecting on the central importance of that experience for the trajectory of his life—and this even with a response that was, for all intents and purposes, pithy and formulaic.

For a great many others, however, Muggeridge's response was quite personal. For those that touched him deeply or perhaps simply those that he had more time for, he responded with some thoughtfulness to issues raised or the questions asked. Jenny Ford, for example, felt Muggeridge was her "spiritual friend" and that she agreed with "practically every one" of his "feelings and reactions."[101] That said she took serious issues with his overtly conservative stance on contraception and overpopulation. When she was reading *Jesus Rediscovered*, she must have come across the half-dozen times where Muggeridge condemned contraception and wrote-off related fears concerning overpopulation. Though Muggeridge did not appear to make any actual argument about legislating morality through the apparatus of the state or church, Ford nevertheless suspected that was what he really meant. As she saw it, external restraints on sexual

[101] Jenny Ford to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

behavior were counter-productive. Not only were state-backed abstinence policies impractical, she felt they were down-right "anti-life" by preventing individuals from learning through their sexual experimentation why such self-control was important and necessary. Repressing those desires would only make matters worse. She implored Muggeridge to look to William Blake as an authority on the matter, and recognize that the "Garden of Love" was spoiled when authorities like the church tried to bind with shackles of briar individual freedom and happiness.[102] Muggeridge appears to have felt that Ford misunderstood his meaning, and so jotted down his thoughts in the margin of her February letter:

> I loved your letter. It's the greatest comfort to me to know that my words reach someone like you. I don't regard abstinence, any more than contraception, as the answer to the so-called population explosion. What's needed is to see that we have such abundance now that, if we truly loved our neighbour, there cd never be too many people in the world. Regarding abstinence—it's something each individual has to work out. Only, I utterly disbelieve the contemporary notion that satiety is the answer. No one wd suggest one cd eat one's way out of gluttony. No more can one fornicate one's way out of lechery.[103]

A typed out response was mailed to Ford within the week.

However wrongly Ford read *Jesus Rediscovered*, or whatever wishful thinking Muggeridge may have had on the subject, the exchange nevertheless illustrates the kind of relationship that often emerged between Muggeridge and his fans. The author was most certainly not dead, and there was a great deal outside the text. Fans would express sincere attachment to him after reading his books, imagining him as a friend and kindred

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[102] Ibid., SC-4 22/13.

[103] Ibid., SC-4 22/13.

spirit, even in the face of quite contentious disagreements about human freedom and social goods. Sometimes he would rifle out a standard template that, for all intents and purposes, could have been written by his personal assistant, Marian Williams. But in many cases, Muggeridge took the extra time to send his readers a copy of one of his books, honor requests for an autograph or personal photo, or even invite them into his home.

This was Glynis Evans' experience. Not much is known about her other than she was from London, enjoyed reading Muggeridge's books, and sent him a letter on 25 July 1977 asking to meet in person when she would be near Robertsbridge at the end of August.[104] Muggeridge sent a prompt reply four days later, obliging her request with a date for afternoon tea when she came to the area.[105] Muggeridge appears to have intended to keep the meeting: his calendar for 23 August 1977 has "Tea Time, 400, Glynis Evans" penned in as the only appointment.[106] This clearly was not an isolated incident. One week after Evans had sent her letter, Desmond Baker, a young Roman Catholic priest working in the Hertford Parish also sent Muggeridge a request to visit him. He learned that "many visitors often call upon you at Robertsbridge, and I wondered if I might do so at some date convenient to you."[107] He had read *Jesus*

[104] Glynis Evans to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 July 1977, SC-4 101/8.

[105] Malcolm Muggeridge to Glynis Evans, 29 July 1977, SC-4 101/8.

[106] Malcolm Muggeridge, Entry for 23 August 1977, "'Data Day Diary' – 1977; Weekly Appointments – 1979," SC-4 135/5.

[107] Rev. Desmond Baker to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 August 1977, SC-4 101/9.

Rediscovered, the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, and *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*, but a fan letter did not seem like enough. He preferred to share his reactions with Muggeridge in person. Muggeridge responded two days later much as he had to Glynis Evans, asking that he would contact him via his unlisted number to confirm before arriving.[108] His name was recorded in his datebook, too. Like most readers, Baker and Evans found they would rather talk about what they read and, for that reason, their fan letters were more like a prelude to a conversation that reverberated into silence at Robertsbridge. It is impossible to discern just how many of his fans who wanted to meet actually did. His datebooks are riddled with similar-looking entries, with just a name and time. Given the regular responses Muggeridge's readers received from him, combined with the cross-referenced examples of Glynis Evans and Desmond Baker, there is good reason to think it was not uncommon.[109]

Others were quite happy pouring out in almost diary-like form unfiltered thoughts as they entered the mind while reading. This was what Diane Murphy did. Her 1977 letter includes three separately dated sections that spanned the course of twelve days. Her letter structure provides a glimpse into her immediate reaction, and how she thought about the text at other points in time. It was written at a theater in Muskegon, Michigan, and drips with emotion:

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[108] Malcolm Muggeridge to Rev. Desmond Baker, 4 August 1977, SC-4 101/9.

[109] Muggeridge's biographers make casual reference to the high number of visitors Muggeridge received in his home at Robertsbridge. Many of these were other journalists, friends, or professionals who met with him for work-related reasons. We know that at least some of them were his fans, too. See Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography*, 223.

> Just now, I have finished reading, for the first time, your book, Jesus Rediscovered. If you were here right now, I would run to you, and embrace you to say, "Oh, thank you for sharing so much of yourself so honestly!"…Sitting here, with your book in my lap, I feel almost suspended in time….Your book has given me tears, and goose-bumps, and skips in the heart. Please, I don't want to take away from the depth of your insights and experiences, but everything there, in some very real way, I too am groping-with. It means so very, very much to be able to reach out to someone else who has gone through this…. Just WHY, when wandering into the bookstore at the corner, looking for something to read, my glance should meet your photo and then the title and then your name. … [It] was enough to urge buying the book.[110]

Reading Muggeridge inspired her to pick up Leo Tolstoy's works. She began with *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* and spent the next two pages comparing Tolstoy with Muggeridge. On her reading, they were the same, really, both epitomizing an internal conflict between the "Puritan and Epicurean." The conflict between pursuing moral rectitude and physical pleasures was one she saw in herself, too. Recognizing a common struggle in people like Muggeridge gave her confidence to stay the course on her own religious journey.

The final section of her diary-like letter is considerably less animated largely because, as she described it, "Your book has settled more within me."[111] Reading, as this letter shows all too clearly, is subject to temporal mediation that often eludes the researcher's grandest attempts to pinpoint a singular "reading experience." For reading, as Paul Ricoeur argues, is a point of contact where preconceived notions enter into negotiation with unfamiliar textual terrains, which then can serve to mediate a

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[110] Diane Murphy to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 October 1969, SC-4 22/11.

[111] Ibid., SC-4 22/11.

reconfiguration of how reality and self-identity are understood.[112] For Diane Murphy this process was ongoing for weeks after finishing *Jesus Rediscovered*, and was further mediated by the other books she read. Thus, she thought about Muggeridge in conjunction with Tolstoy's quasi-autobiographical work, and even imagined them as experiencing the same struggle—a struggle she also described having. When she continued the letter twelve days later and realized *Jesus Rediscovered* had "settled" in her, it can be seen as a way of admitting a full internalization of the text. She was then ready to move on to Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and, since her exposure was shaped by her interaction with Muggeridge's writings, it is probable that those two would continue to be indelibly linked in her mind. Muggeridge never responded to Diane Murphy because she did not leave a return address. She feared that if her letter never got to him, or if his secretary opened it and read it, she would rather not know out of regret or embarrassment.

But if Muggeridge never had the chance to respond to fans like Diane Murphy, he had plenty of opportunity with Tom Farquharson. In comparison with most of Muggeridge's fan letters, Farquharson's are less informative about his reading experience and much more instructive of his everyday life and experiences, complete with their troubles, joys, and discoveries. Yet, he is a particularly good example illustrating the common theme Muggeridge's fan mail: his readers saw him much more than just the author of the books they read, but as a kindred spirit and friend with whom they would

[112] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 71.

share just about anything. This was the case with Robin Slyfield, Jenny Ford, Roger Groening, Rev. Desmond Baker, Diane Murphy and hundreds of others. What makes Farquharson of particular interest is that he was a mental patient in his 50s or 60s for several years during the 1970s at Bangour Village Hospital, just outside Edinburgh.[113] His exact mental diagnosis is not disclosed in his letters, which are scattered throughout the Muggeridge Papers and span the course of about a decade. Whatever his mental condition, it did not prohibit him from writing lengthy letters detailing his active intellectual pursuits. He read broadly, receiving many works through various book clubs, including the History Guild Book Club. He had read Darwin's *Origins of Species,* biographies of Florence Nightingale and Madame de Pompadour—a "sort of mythical name I heard of so often yet remained shrouded in mystery."[114] Of all that he read, however, he thought "Russian novelists were in a class by themselves." He shared with Muggeridge a particularly deep love for Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, having read *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Now he was just about to crack open Nikolai Gogol's *Collected Tales*. He had even made some Ukrainian friends at the Hospital, from whom he tried his hand at learning some Russian. He also dedicated his energies to learning German. He procured several German textbooks, and was ambitious enough to seek out

[113] Bangour Village Hospital opened in 1906 and closed in 2004. Its records are available at "Bangour Village Hospital," LHB44, Lothian Health Services Archive, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh. According to the finding aid, most of the records predate Farquharson's letters to Muggeridge. The "Register of Lunatics" ends in 1971. The first letter Muggeridge received from Farquharson was in 1974.

[114] Thomas Farquharson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 July 1974, SC-4 95/4.

a German-born patient for additional assistance on grammar and pronunciation.[115] Institutionalization at a mental hospital would in no way inhibit the joy of intellectual discovery.

Muggeridge was impressed enough with Farquharson's intellectual life that he sent him the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. To a certain degree—as with so many fan letters—the letters are frustratingly one-sided, since Muggeridge did not always include a carbon copy of his response, nor did he always jot his thoughts in the margin before sending them off. The only marginalia on Farquharson's letter where he discussed his reading habits said only, "Book sent, 8.8.74."[116] Farquharson did not waste any time at all. His thank-you letter was dated 14 August, and remarked just how much the gift meant to him, and that he had "been devouring the first chapter…and could hardly put the book down to take up my pen and scribble this note of thanks for the very great humour you have done me."[117] It moved him enough that he included two photographs of himself with his fourteen-page letter. Meeting Muggeridge in person was unlikely, so long letters and some photos were the next best thing. In the end, it is perhaps less important for the present discussion to know every twist and turn of Farquharson's life than it is to recognize that he felt Muggeridge should. This kind of connection was forged in the crucible of thought, and was based only on Muggeridge's books and whatever letters he received in return.

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[115] Ibid., SC-4 95/4.

[116] Ibid., SC-4, 95/4.

[117] Thomas Farquharson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 August 1974, SC-4 95/4.

Unfolding Thoughts

We do not know much about Kathy Williams from Surrey. Her fan letter to Muggeridge had less than two hundred words, and included no personal details apart from her name and return address. But it is clear she just wanted him to know one thing: "I feel I know you through your book and also love you for revealing and unfolding your thoughts. *It has served to unfold my own*."[118] Readers would often echo Kathy Williams, detailing how he had "crystalized" their thoughts in a way not anticipated, and yet, as if the words remained their own. This experience occurred regardless of sex, age, religious denomination, or geographic locality, and speaks to the emergence of a distinct textual community, whose members were unaware of their shared intuition. Arthur Marwick, Adrian Hastings, and Hugh McLeod have each pointed to parallel cultural and religious developments occurring in "western" societies during the 1960s and 1970s.[119] For that reason, it should not be surprising that readers in the United States, Australia, and Britain could experience "ideas, thoughts, and feelings…which until now have only existed in the most nebulous of forms."[120]

This was Stuart Taylor's reaction when he read the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. He did not go into detail to inform Muggeridge on the precise character of those ideas,

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[118] Kathy Williams to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 July 1975, SC-4 97/2.

[119] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and The United States, 1958-74*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Marwick also makes this claim in "The International Context," *The Permissive Society and its Enemies: Sixties British Culture*, ed. Marcus Collins (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2007), 169-184. Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 581.

[120] Stuart Taylor to Malcolm Muggeridge, 24 April 1981, SC-4 107/5.

probably because he admitted that he was still trying to understand fully the meaning and implication of the "words and phrases" that had coincided with his own. While appreciative of the help Muggeridge's books gave him, it also depressed him slightly, "to realise that another can so easily express those things which one has hardly begun to grasp."[121] For all we know, Taylor might not have had those thoughts at all until he read Muggeridge, but it *felt* right when he read them, and so adopted them as his own.

The Irishman Anthony Moriarty was more certain about how Muggeridge's words shaped his life. In a brief letter, he wrote:

> I have just finished reading your book "Jesus Rediscovered". *Within those pages you have crystalised for me many of the rather disjointed thoughts I had on the Spiritual side of mans' nature* I know what you have communicated to me in your book to be true…I was brought up a Roman Catholic and was happy in that faith until I became familiar with the Doctrines of Darwin and Freud, etc., as a result my spiritual Barque became unstable. I experienced many dark nights of the Soul. It was you through your writings more than anyone else who gave me light in that darkness.[122]

Moriarty's experience fits the classic "crisis of faith" motif that, until recently, was a caricature of how religious decline occurred from the Victorian era into the twentieth century.[123] The question of religious decline has turned out to be a much more complex problem. It does not appear Moriarty lost his faith, but he did enter into an existential

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[121] Ibid., SC-4, 107/5.

[122] Anthony Moriarty to Malcolm Muggeridge, ND [ca. March 1970], SC-4 22/13. Emphasis added.

[123] The classic corrective to this meta-narrative is Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Certainly, the "rational worldview" argument for religious decline was true for many individuals during those years and afterwards. The error is to assume that everyone's religious development followed that of T. H. Huxley or J. A. Froude.

crisis precipitated by crippling doubts—a more common feature of modernity.[124] Reading Muggeridge helped to alleviate his problem.

Ninety-one-year-old Gertrude Mitchell of Bath had a similar experience to Moriarty. For her, reading *Jesus Rediscovered* and *Something Beautiful for God* was like drinking a tonic. All her life the question she remembered struggling with most was "Where did I come from." But as she aged, she began to ask what felt like a more pressing question: "What awaits me?" [125] She found in Muggeridge's writings expressions of her "deepest thought + aspirations, couched in language far beyond one's own capacity!"[126] Like Stuart Taylor, Gertude Mitchell did not elaborate on how, and in what ways *Something Beautiful for God* helped her. All we know is that it gave her enough peace of mind that she decided to purchase a few more copies and give them to her group of friends with whom she often discussed spiritual matters.[127]

The experience of having thoughts crystalized served a double function. As indicated above, it left Muggeridge's readers to feel like he was their friend. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, it left them with the sense that he was a seer of their own mind's eye. There is perhaps no better sign of influence than someone feeling as if the words were taken right out of their mouth. After reading *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*, M. Jeanne Kett thanked Muggeridge for "putting into words the many

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[124] See, for example, Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1991).

[125] Gertrude Mitchell to Malcolm Muggeridge, 24 May 1971, SC-4 81/4.

[126] Ibid., SC-4 81/4.

[127] Ibid., SC-4 81/4.

thoughts that 'flash through the mind' but never find pen and paper."[128] Her only criticism of Muggeridge was that he ought to take Holy Communion, which, indeed, prior to his 1982 entrance into Roman Catholicism he rarely, if ever, did. Half a dozen references to what Muggeridge had written on the subject with equally as many Biblical proof-texts later acting as refutations, she nevertheless held that it was a blessing when he "put into bound cover" his thoughts for readers like her to imbibe.[129]

Jeanne Kett and Jenny Ford[130] illustrate what was true for many readers: although they felt Muggeridge was a kindred spirit who had the ability to articulate their incoherent and unrealized thoughts, their reading was not of passive approval of every position Muggeridge advocated. Book historians have long recognized that the production, dissemination, and reception of information are never a one-way street.[131] It is much better understood as a negotiation of meaning between reader and author within particular contexts and material circumstances.[132] Understanding how and why people

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[128] M. Jeanne Kett to Malcolm Muggeridge, 16 August 1976, SC-4 99/6.

[129] Ibid., SC-4 99/6.

[130] Jenny Ford is discussed above, under "Kindred Spirits."

[131] See, for example, Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Jonathan Rose, "How Historians Study Reader Response: or, What did Jo think of *Bleak House*?" in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, eds. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 195-212.

[132] See Christine Pawley, "Beyond Market Models and Resistance: Organizations as a Middle Layer in the History of Reading," *The Library Quarterly* 79, 1 (January 2009): 73-93. While Pawley focus is more so on the roles that institutions can have in the history of reading, her analysis is nevertheless helpful by navigating between what she calls the "market" models of reading (i.e. Robert Darnton's "Communications Circuit) and "resistance" models (i.e. Michel de Certeau's notion of "poaching"). Adopting Paul Ricoeur's three-fold mimesis for understanding identity formation in Muggeridge's readers is similar in that it pays closer attention the interactions between author, text, and reader. However, it avoids placing unwarranted emphasis on the reader as the sole source of meaning creation, or on the author

read books in certain ways should thus include when available the various aspects of a reader's life that shaped their interpretation. Thinking about readers as implied, assumed, imagined, inferred, or inscribed will not serve to uncover the individual idiosyncrasies of everyday life.[133]

Such an approach is helpful for understanding twenty-three year old Cheryl Hall, who found Muggeridge and his works much too orthodox. Writing from a Sydney suburb, she wanted Muggeridge to know "that I have gained strength from your words and that many of your questionings have crystallized my own thoughts."[134] *Jesus Rediscovered* had "cast an important light on a seemingly unseeing world," but it did not go quite far enough, as her life story testified. She described her upbringing as a heart-on-fire Methodist, but by the time, she had entered adulthood, her faith in the atonement and Trinitarianism had cooled. She believed the former had dangerous implications for an effective theodicy ("how could a God of love be thought of as angry + unforgiving"), while the latter was blatant logical paradox ("how could there be three Gods?"). It was reading Emanuel Swedenborg's self-published works, and adopting a few of his core ideas, that solved these dilemmas for her. She thought that maybe they might assist Muggeridge, too, as he seemed to have some uncertainties or doubts of his own.

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as the "producer" of meaning, which the reader then "consumes." See also Barbara Ryan, "One Reader, Two Votes: Retooling Fan Mail Scholarship," in *The History of Reading, Volume 3: Methods, Strategies, Tactics*, eds. Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 66-79.

[133] See, for example, Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

[134] Cheryl Hall to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

Cheryl Hall's reading experience also points to a much broader development in the religious history of these years. Hugh McLeod notes that one consequence of the religious crises of the 1960s was a greater willingness among ordinary people to be eclectic about their beliefs.[135] This development is deeply entangled in widespread criticisms towards religious authority and institutionalized Christianity.[136] People were becoming increasingly comfortable with appropriating elements from various theological traditions both inside and outside of Christianity to amplify personal religious experience. Or, in Cheryl Hall's case, she was open to eclecticism as a way to solve troubling theological dilemmas.

Alison Brandow, self-described "housewife + very bad typist," expressed a similar sentiment, though her Christianity was more mainstream than Cheryl Hall's.[137] Brandow had coincidently seen Muggeridge in person at a talk he gave at Queen's University, Kingston, while on a speaking tour in Canada, just as she was reading *Jesus Rediscovered*. She found that it had "opened many new avenues of thought for me and served to crystalise some ideas of my own." But after seeing Muggeridge speak, she admonished him to be gentler with the youth. She felt he spent the entire Q&A session tearing the students down and decrying the inevitable decline of the world. "Would it not be wise," she asked, "to throw them a life line once in a while? Perhaps you feel that

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[135] Hugh McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 2, 140.

[136] This was one of the most important issues that Muggeridge's fans discussed in their letters to him, and so will be the subject of the next chapter.

[137] Alison Brandow to Malcolm Muggeridge, 24 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

they should work out their own answers…but I feel they are crying out for a little gentler understanding." After all, there was so much misinformation and "waves of fact and fiction" from the news media that finding truth, meaning, and purpose were difficult enough to find without the likes of Muggeridge frustrating that effort.[138] What they really needed was a caring role model to give them encouragement and direction.

The timing of her letter is important. When scholars of the 1960s and 1970s talk about youth culture, they often describe it as affluent, materialistic, trendy, and progressive. Prosperity meant that youth groups and church events had to compete with movies and dancehalls. Participation in the former dropped like a rock while it increased in the latter.[139] And whereas youth of various religious denominations might be taught to avoid those outside of the fold, cultural commercialization tended to disregard such demarcations. Confessional subcultures, whether doctrinal or social, were increasingly difficult to maintain. The knee-jerk reaction for many of the older generation was to accommodate, and not alienate. Adrian Hastings describes the religious mood of the 1960s as one resembling a "flight of lemmings," where just about anything theologically rigid or old-fashioned was seen as absurd.[140] If the clergy are not convinced about the

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[138] Ibid., SC-4 22/13.

[139] McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 104-7. For example, Methodist youth clubs in Britain reached a highpoint in 1962, with a membership of 114,211. Three years later, they had plummeted to under 90,000. This trend has continued in regards to Methodism generally. Since the mid-1960s, they hemorrhaged attendees at a considerable rate. By 2015, they recorded a yearly attendance figure of 200,000 or approximately 8% of the total church attendance recorded by churches. Since 1980, that amounts to a 400,000-attendee drop, as well as a 4% drop of total share of church attendees for the thirty-five year period. See "Church Attendance in Britain, 1980-2015," *British Religion in Numbers*, accessed January 5, 2018, http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015/.

[140] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, 545.

strictures of their church body's official theological and social positions, ecclesiastical discipline for not adhering to those precepts would lax. These insecurities were felt at the local level, where active church members like Brandow feared disciplining the youth on religious matters would drive them away. She was probably right, too. The older generation treaded softly where they felt most insecure, and interaction with the youth was where they were most insecure of all.[141]

What is more is that Muggeridge had developed a reputation of being generally uncompromising with youth. Brandow's letter was written not long after Muggeridge had resigned his post as the rector of Edinburgh University two years earlier. The events surrounding his resignation became something of a minor headline. The campus newspaper, *The Student*, had lobbied the university administration to provide free contraceptives through the campus health services. Muggeridge's views towards contraception and abortion were well known by this point. He characteristically dug his heels in, declined their request, and chose to resign rather than remain for a fight. He announced his resignation, perhaps symbolically, in a sermon address that was soon thereafter published in *Jesus Rediscovered.* Part of that sermon was spent accusing the students of squandering their education for cheap thrills: "All is prepared for a marvelous release of youthful creativity; we await the great works of art, the high-spirited venturing into new fields of perception and understanding—and what do we get? The resort of any

[141] Ibid.

old slobbering debauchee anywhere in the world at any time—Dope and Bed."[142] Brandow's observation of his talk at Queen's University alongside her reading of this sermon confirmed to her, at least, his reputation as a stodgy and disagreeable gadfly, particularly with the young.

Some fan letters written to Muggeridge confirm this very image. Andrea Reece was a fourteen-year old student in Liverpool. She had read some of Muggeridge's books, but she was determined to set things straight in what almost reads like a manifesto:

> I am a teenager of the West, I enjoy pop music, going to discos, in fact, I am an ordinary fourteen-year-old working for my O levels. (I hope to get nine). I do community care work including working with mentally handicapped children and so do many of my friends. I believe in God and attend church regularly. I also believe in my generation, we are not perfect but then again neither is yours. We are the New West, a West which you apparently regard with contempt. I do not think we deserve your contempt, which is why I have taken the trouble to write to you. Jesus's gospel is based on trust. Trust us.[143]

Despite the counterpoints that Reece offered, she likely did not get through to Muggeridge. His attitudes towards permissive society and youth culture remained largely unchanged since his time at Edinburgh.

Yet, if Andrea Reece or Alison Brandow give the impression Muggeridge's derisive persona was never helpful to college-aged youth and, if anything, drove them away frustrated, it is only partially true. The dynamics of the 60s and 70s were largely cut along generational lines, but that should not obscure important exceptions. Twenty-one year old Andrew Lacey, for instance, at first thought Muggeridge was "a rather

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[142] Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 55.

[143] Andrea Reece to Malcolm Muggeridge, 7 November 1976, SC-4 99/14.

boring old man who talked about religion a lot."[144] But when he came across *Muggeridge: Ancient and Modern*, he "suddenly realised that you were talking about things which meant a great deal to me, in the sense that you were verbalising and brought into focus, feelings and impressions in myself which were then buried and indistinct." These indistinct feelings largely centered on observing what he saw as a materialistic and pleasure-seeking culture at Loughborough University, where he was pursuing a degree in history. What he thought was supposed to be a "temple of reason" seemed much more an excuse for reckless hedonism. His disagreement with this "fantasy" of modern life, that pleasure is its highest pursuit, made him feel as though he were "a displaced person" from the rest of society. Muggeridge seemed to change that for him by putting his observations in spiritual perspective: "Thank you for letting me know that I am not mad, that somebody else of greater intelligence and infinitely greater experience than I, has also seen the joke of this world, and realised what our true purpose of life, and the true meaning of life, really is."[145]

Parallel Lives and Personal Refiguration

Recognition of Muggeridge as a kindred spirit who crystalized nebulous thoughts was foundational to the various ways that his writings could reshape a reader's self-identity. Readers who might have been decades or continents apart constructed parallels

[144] Andrew Lacey to Malcolm Muggeridge, 12 March 1982, SC-4 109/9.

[145] Ibid., SC-4 109/9.

between their own lives and Muggeridge's, even if they were superficial at best.[146] Personalities, events, localities, and experiences became juxtaposed with the memories of readers as they refigured the narratives of their own lives. Muggeridge's books, in the words of Londoner Diana Raymond, "leave you not quite the same as you were before."[147] Raymond's reading of Muggeridge, and her experience of being changed as a result, corresponds to Paul Ricoeur's argument of the mimetic function of reading cannot *but* alter how a reader sees the world. In examples like Raymond, we are witness to how the particular circumstances of a reader's life interact with a text and transforms them as a result.

L. MacQuisten Wallace, a retired Army major, read Muggeridge's autobiography three times. He had just moved on to his published diary, *Like it Was*, when he typed out a short letter. He could not help but think of his own life as "a (very pale) reflection of yours, not materially…but in attitudes to life, including thoughts of suicide at about the same age."[148] Readers liked to reflect on their lives and to find commonalities—however general—and make Muggeridge aware. In some cases, the connection feels a bit

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[146] To name just two examples: Fred Harwood was eighty-three years old when he wrote a fan letter to Muggeridge. The only similarity between them was a shared working-class background with a father who was politically active. But Harwood was from British Colombia, and unlike Muggeridge, never lost his faith. Frank Harwood to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 September 1973, SC-4 92/16. Likewise, Damaris Allen Zimmerman thought that her time in India was "remarkably similar" with the exception that hers happened forty years afterwards. While Muggeridge stayed in India as a reporter, Zimmerman was in college studying abroad. They lived in quite different regions that spoke in different dialects and had different customs (she was in Andhra Pradesh and Hyderabad, he was in Kerala and Calcutta), but she nevertheless drew parallel experiences, however general they may have been. Damaris Allen Zimmerman to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 November 1971, SC-4 84/3.

[147] Diana Raymond to Malcolm Muggeridge, 12 November 1975, SC-4 97/15.

[148] L. MacQuisten Wallace to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 August 1981, SC-4 107/16.

contrived, though the sincerity does not. Mary Bancroft and Muggeridge were both spies during World War II—he in Africa and she in Europe. Bancroft described her experience reading the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* while working on what would become her famous *Autobiography of a Spy* (1983):

> In a review of your books, I saw your wartime activities mentioned and so in a moment of nostalgia, decided to read what you had been up to. Well, I read that chapter about the liberation of Paris, picked up the phone and ordered "The Green Stick," cancelled all my engagements, shoved my own manuscript aside and just lay on my bed for those five enchanted days and nights…I assume I must have eaten and possibly slept, but have no recollection of such mundane pursuits. And it has taken me at least ten days to reach a point where I can write you a letter a hundred times shorter than I would like to!...I am exactly your age. *But this means that we "experienced," if that is the word, many of the same things even if in different forms*.[149]

Same, but different. Bancroft made herself comfortable in the foreign terrains of Muggeridge's life and conflated their circumstances. Just as Muggeridge had attempted suicide by drowning himself in a moment of inebriated despair, Bancroft, too, had once attempted suicide. Though, for her it was not in India, but off the coast of Florida when she was a teenager. And her change of heart was not result of a quasi-spiritual epiphany, but by the uncomfortable realization, she might be eaten by sharks. Suicide is always a matter to take seriously, but if Christopher Hitchens was right that the sincerity of Muggeridge's motives were suspect, perhaps he and Bancroft had more in common than she lets on.[150] In any case, readers like Bancroft recurrently saw their own life's idiosyncrasies reflected in Muggeridge's, however general they were.

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[149] Mary Bancroft to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 August 1974, SC-4 95/5. Emphasis added.

[150] Christopher Hitchens, "A Hundred Years of Muggery," *The Weekly Standard*, 5 May, 2003.

However, it was much more common for readers to see Muggeridge as an archetypical figure who encapsulated better than anyone the general experience of modern life. Michael Hardcastle might as well have been speaking for hundreds of Muggeridge's fans when he said, "I feel in many ways that your literary pilgrimage is a microcosm of us all; that in an articulated form you have expressed so well the dilemma of most of us in the twentieth century."[151] The dilemma Hardcastle referred to was that of maintaining adherence to Christianity in a context where, by any quantifiable measure, it was losing social and cultural significance. Since Muggeridge's conversion to Christianity went against the general trend of most "Western" societies, his spiritual evolution gave confidence to many readers concerned with either their own faith, or with the general state of Christianity in society. This context is crucial for understanding why so many readers drew parallels between their spiritual lives and his.

Late-life converts to Christianity found in Muggeridge a particularly strong parallel and source of self-reflection. Keith Crawford and Elizabeth Kemp are two such examples. The first time Keith Crawford remembered reading the Bible he was in his twenties. At the time of his letter, he had been a Christian for many years, but reading

[151] Michael Hardcastle to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 March 1978, SC-4 102/4. In his letter, Hardcastle thanked Muggeridge first for introducing him to the works of Hugh Kingsmill and Christopher Booker, especially in regards to *The Neophiliacs.* It has been mentioned above that Muggeridge's home was often open to his fans who wanted to meet and chat. Christopher Booker enjoyed similar treatment. In the acknowledgement he writes, "The probability that I would one day write this book has been with me in one way or another, ever since I first read Malcolm Muggeridge's book *The Thirties* in 1953. It therefore gave me particular pleasure that, having met Malcolm and his wife Kitty many years later, I was able to write a part of *The Neophiliacs* while staying under their roof in Sussex; for all their hospitality and encouragement I am especially grateful." Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Collins, 1969), 5. Hardcastle thought *The Neophiliacs* was "one of the most seminal books of recent years."

the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* re-animated the confusion, uncertainty, and guilt he remembered in his youth:

> Here I was quietly reading through your autobiography, studiously noting passages of interest, when, suddenly, on page 81…I found myself back in the days of my youth, vainly striving to piece together the jigsaw puzzle of human relationships. Sex! Lust! Platonic friendships! Love: all-embracing and yet somehow empty! Where did the pieces fit: all colours seemed blurred, all shapes contorted beyond visible recognition; even the straight pieces appeared to have rounded corners! Finding no solution, I abandoned myself to that "nausea of overindulgence," which seemed to plague every other student at the University of Aston at the time, to such an extent that I reached the point of complete saturation.[152]

During this time of his life, Crawford had sparked a heated affair with the "nymphomaniac fiancée" of a young Austrian who, after learning of it, "soundly thrashed" him. The beating was evidently enough to bruise more than just the body, because he afterwards voluntarily enrolled in sexual addiction rehabilitation course. Since his conversion to Christianity, he had desired to document his journey so that others might benefit, and it was reading the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* that gave him the inspiration to finally begin that project.

Elizabeth Kemp had spent much of her life "without too much concern about religion—or the mysteries of existence."[153] It was only after retiring from teaching in 1958 that she became increasingly interested in spiritual questions. She spent the next

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[152] Keith Crawford to Malcolm Muggeridge, ND [ca. September 1973], SC-4 92/15. The paragraph Crawford had in mind on page 81: "I find it strange that, knowing this, I should so often have inflicted upon myself the nausea of over-indulgence, and had to fight off the black dogs of satiety. Human beings, as Pascal points out, are peculiar in that they avidly pursue ends they know will bring them no satisfaction; gorge themselves with food which cannot nourish and with pleasures which cannot please. I am a prize example." Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Chronicles of Wasted Time*, Vol I., 81.

[153] Elizabeth Kemp to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 March 1970, SC-4 22/13.

twelve years looking for answers, and though she "gained much help" reading authors like Soren Kierkegaard and Simone Weil,

> It was not until I got your "Jesus Rediscovered" that I was brought up starkly against something. I have never written to a "famous" person before, and I am really unable to explain now, why your book stands out...Your book made me look back on my own life as a failure. I know now I should have done a much better job in school, if I had your picture of Christ before me in all I said and did. It is now alas too late.[154]

Like Crawford, Elizabeth Kemp's reading of Muggeridge caused her to look back on her life with regret. Those emotions were facilitated by comparing her past life with Muggeridge's. His writings may have helped her to answer questions she had wrestled with for over a decade, but the restructuring of her worldview came at the expense of the integrity of her own past.

In addition to reconverts, readers of a variety of theological commitments—whether fundamentalist or liberal—recognized in Muggeridge a parallel life. Fifty-one-year-old Edward Vellacott was a member of the conservative Christian Brethren. He was rather old school in seeing his membership in the Labour party as an "extension" of his Christian faith, and not at all as a distinct expression of a secular, political consciousness. He read *Jesus Rediscovered* and found that not only did he agree with him ("your views very largely happen to be my own"), but, more significantly, he saw "rather piquant parallels between your development and my own."[155] That said he still took issue with some of Muggeridge's positions. Included in his letter were several pages of notes that

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[154] Ibid., SC-4 22/13.

[155] Edward Vellacott to Malcolm Muggeridge, 20 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

he had taken while reading *Jesus Rediscovered*, which paint the picture of a deeply conservative Christian who thought Muggeridge was much too liberal dogmatically. The chief problem was that Muggeridge's attitude to Scripture much too vague, especially for a work of "Christian propaganda" that was supposed to convince people of the faith.[156] Vellacott did not share Muggeridge's distrust of institutions, either. He saw the harsh criticisms of the institutional church and its clergy that pepper throughout *Jesus Rediscovered* as crass and sacrilegious hyperbole. Together these issues led him to question if Muggeridge had, indeed, rediscovered Jesus. For how could one be fully in the body of Christ if he refused to recognize its members and institutions?

Like Vellacott, Mrs. Thiel of Lafayette, Indiana, thought that Muggeridge's life "parallels my own experience so much; and there is always joy to discover one is not alone."[157] Her career as a social worker, however, had led her to much different conclusions on a variety of issues, especially his "constant sniping at efforts to control the world's population." His go-to solution of choosing to "withdraw from the world and its problems" confirmed that he was entirely out of touch with actual people.

> Go into the streets, meet and talk with the people, especially the poor and uneducated, the mentally and physically ill. Talk with the children, watch their reactions; get acquainted with the homeless teen-agers; and then dare to tell your public about morality and continence and following rules. Christ would not withdraw from these people.[158]

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[156] Ibid., SC-4, 22:13.

[157] Mrs. John Thiel to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[158] Ibid., SC-4 22/13.

It could be argued that the thousands of fan letters that Muggeridge took the time to read and respond to, and sometimes even meeting with those who wrote them, was his way of engaging with real people—including the poor, uneducated, mentally ill, children and teenagers. The old adage that actions speak louder than words is cliché because it is so often proved correct. It would be difficult to argue that decades of consistent replies, gift giving, and invitations to tea are in some way not actions. But, then again, neither Theil nor anyone else, other than Kitty and Marian Williams, knew that Muggeridge was so dedicated to responding to his fan mail.

In both of these cases, Vellacott and Thiel, themselves representing quite different positions theologically and socially, still saw meaningful parallels between their lives and Muggeridge's. It was because of that affinity, and not despite it, that they each went to such lengths to admonish and direct Muggeridge onto what they saw as the straight and narrow.[159] Their criticisms were cast more so in a spirit of correcting an erring brother than they were the vociferations of hate mail. Ideological disagreement did not preclude meaningful self-reflection.

It also served to inspire hope that they might overcome a similar spiritual dilemma that Muggeridge had. Or at least for the global evangelist Ruth Graham, Muggeridge's life meant hope for her and Billy's youngest son, Nelson:

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[159] We do not know if Muggeridge ever responded to Vellacott, but cursory notes were scratched in the top margin of Thiel's letter that were presumably typed and then later sent to her: "Many thanks for Letter + for taking trouble to develop a carefully + clearly difference of view. We are agreed about problem but disagree about how to deal with it. To regard pleasure of sex as end rather than means, as it seems to me, is calculated to produce the very circumstances we agree in deploring." Malcolm Muggeridge to Mrs. John Theil, ND, SC-4 22/13.

> When I first saw Chronicles of Wasted Time, I thought, "Why should I waste my time reading how he wasted his?" Then I started and couldn't put it down,—both books. You see, I have followed you with fury and fascination since way-back-when. But I kept listening and reading and it was as if I could hear the Hound of Heaven baying in the distance. Something was happening, and we who were out there alternately pulling our hair and/or praying, realized God would win. But I like your writing about yourself better than Ian Hunter's book. In fact, I gave up on page 225…because of all the un-likable traits he brings out. In fact I stopped at one point and listed all those traits you had as a young man. And one evening I read them aloud to Bill…and without betraying you, asked him whom they described. Without hesitation he said, "Ned." Now Ned is our fifth and youngest. He, too, has been on his spiritual pilgrimage, camping leisurely along the way. But progressing. Seeing how God did finally reach you, I realized again, "Nobody's hopeless!" Our Ned will never be a Malcolm Muggeridge, But God has a spot for him to fill.[160]

Indeed, like Ruth Graham, Christian readers would regularly situate their reading of Muggeridge's books, his life, and their own in a broader scheme of divine providential will. Graham's trust that Ned would reach his spiritual destination safely was confirmed for her by drawing a parallel between his life and Muggeridge's. In so doing, Graham collapsed time, space, and circumstance to discern meaning and purpose behind contexts, which for other observers might have remained imperceptible.

This was H. Philippa's experience. He was a sixty-seven-year-old Dutch-born Catholic who immigrated to Australia in 1951, without knowing a spit of English. He

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[160] Ruth Graham to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 December 1981, SC-4 17/12. Interestingly, it was reading the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* that first inspired Billy Graham to invite Muggeridge to speak at the Lausanne Conference in 1974. In a letter to Muggeridge, Graham wrote: "During our recent holiday in Mexico, my wife and I read your book CHRONICLES OF WASTED TIME. I strongly recommended that the Chairman of the Program Committee at the Congress also read it, which he did. This book has made a profound impact on all of us. Therefore, at the Administrative meeting last week in Lausanne, I strongly recommended that you be invited to address the Congress. The invitation was unanimously approved that you be invited to address the Congress for thirty to thirty-five minutes on Monday night, July 22." Billy Graham to Malcolm Muggeridge, 8 April 1974, SC-4 17/12. Muggeridge's talk at the Lausanne Conference was characteristically despondent of current affairs. It was entitled, "Living through an Apocalypse," accessed December 19, 2016, https://www.lausanne.org/content/lausanne-1974-documents.

had been raised in a working-class home, and worked most of his life in manufacturing. His daughter had given him *Jesus Rediscovered* for Christmas in 1969, and he had been "reading and rereading it ever since."[161] His letter to Muggeridge, he believed, was God's doing: "I wonder if Providence had a hand in this, the distance Australia—England, I writing to you, could it possibly serve any purpose, have any constructive meaning? What I am sure of is, that unconsciously we sometimes are like instruments in Gods [sic] hands, mysteriously playing a vital part in His dealings with His creatures, our fellow men." What Philippa's divinely sanctioned role was, he did not say, but Muggeridge wrote back and likely confirmed it.[162]

Harry Fern of Birmingham, England, expressed something similar about his life in a letter to Muggeridge. After reading both volumes of the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, he found therein a reflection of his own life, despite it occurring years earlier: "I have formed much satisfaction in reading your book; for, in terms of intellectual and spiritual experience, you have trodden a path which, in its general direction, I have myself travelled. You, however, traveled the turning points along the way ten to fifteen years sooner than I did."[163] Susie Morgan also thought of herself as a fellow traveler after years of reading Muggeridge. She was seventy-five at the time of her letter and had lived in the same farmhouse outside Bailey, North Carolina, for over fifty years. Members of

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[161] H. Philippa to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[162] His response: "Loved your letter + was greatly cheered by it. Only wish I cd write in foreign language a tenth as well as you do in English. So no more about being illiterate, dear man. Your prayers are most appreciated. Please go on with them." Malcolm Muggeridge to H. Philippa, 3 March 1970, SC-4 22/13. His response is scribbled on the back of the letter.

[163] Harry Fern to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 December 1972, SC-4 90/13.

her family had lived there since the 18th century. She had first learned of Muggeridge because her daughter had given her *Something Beautiful for God* and the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* as Christmas presents, and she had just received *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*. She appreciated enough what he wrote in those books to admit, "I am very glad that I am sojourneying here at the same time that you are; for I have been made richer by insights gleaned from sublime thoughts that you have put down on paper."[164] Like Bunyan's "traveler" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Morgan was guided by the counsel Muggeridge offered. But she also understood her interaction with Muggeridge as providentially sanctioned: Reflecting on her life, and the influence Muggeridge had had on it since she first learned of him, she thought, "I am among the most blessed of all people. Looking back, I can see how the strands of life were being woven into the fabric that is now me. Without a guiding Light all would be darkness. I wish I knew you and Kitty. I feel like I do. I am glad you are still here."[165]

Bernice Moss formed a similar conclusion to Susie Morgan, though hers developed out of an internal crisis. Moss provided Muggeridge with a short narrative of her life to illustrate "just how very ordinary I am."[166] Emphasizing the ordinariness of her background magnified the significance she placed on her interaction with his books. They were the catalysts that changed her life. She considered herself intensely as an introvert and had never lived more than ten miles from Bolton where she grew up. She

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[164] Susie Morgan to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 February 1978, SC-4 103/2.

[165] Ibid., SC-4, 103/2.

[166] Bernice Moss to Malcolm Muggeridge, 12 March 1982, SC-4 109/9.

had been raised in a religious household and attended Catholic school until age sixteen, when she obtained a job as an office assistant. Shortly thereafter, she was married to an agnostic man, though she remained an active member of her church. At the time of the letter, she was in her mid-thirties and had a seven-year-old son and a five-year-old daughter.

Three years before writing to Muggeridge, "her world turned upside down" when she fell in love with another man. Though her letter states that an affair never occurred, the description of her internal conflict is cast in stronger language than Keith Crawford's letter—who actually did have an affair, and a messy one at that. However melodramatic Moss's reactions were in comparison, her clandestine affair of the heart caused her a great deal of guilt. She was not comfortable sharing this internal problem with anyone in person, so she first sought out answers at the local library where she checked out anything she could find on the philosophy of love. During her study, she came across the writings of Richard Wurmbrand.[167] Learning about Wurmbrand's imprisonment and torture for his faith in Communist Hungary was enough to put her own problems into proper perspective. She resolved that her sin was not having romantic feelings for someone else, but rather these feelings were an expression of her own pride and self-centeredness. Her journey of self-discovery led her to reading several of Malcolm Muggeridge's works, beginning with *Jesus Rediscovered* and *Paul: Envoy*

[167] Moss did not name the exact titles of the works she read. However, she does refer to Wurmbrand's torture, so it is likely she read his *Tortured for Christ*. She also mentioned reading Thomas Merton, but it is difficult to pinpoint which books she might have had in mind. He authored dozens of works, though his *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom* does refer to Merton's relationship with his nurse, Margie Smith, which, like Moss, precipitated an internal struggle about what to do.

Extraordinary. These books forced the realization that "this event in my life had thrust me out of my comfortable cocoon into real-life…If I was ever going to mature, now was the time."[168] The spiritual maturity she had in mind was to place the transient worries of mortal life in eternal perspective, which, as we have seen, was perhaps *the* central tenet of Muggeridge's theology. Self-abnegation, she resolved, was the path to emotional and spiritual tranquility. She then delved into the classics of Christian mysticism that Muggeridge had quoted and referenced so liberally in the telling of his own religious journey, including St. Augustine, William Blake, Blaise Pascal, and John Donne. In other words, Moss was describing the central role that Muggeridge played in her own reflexive project. Her crisis may not have been caused (as far as we can tell) by the conditions of late-modernity, but she nonetheless had a personal dilemma that struck her to the core. It caused a serious internal conflict that commenced a three-year study that led her to reading Muggeridge, recognizing his authenticity, and refiguring herself as a result. At the close of her letter, Moss summed up in ancient metaphor, so loved by the mystics, the recognition she finally had arrived at over the past three years: "I have found that thread of gold or silver which has run down the ages since time began and you have been part of my thread."[169]

[168] Ibid., SC-4 109/9.

[169] Ibid., SC-4 109/9.

Chapter 3: Recalibrating Religious Authority

"Thank you for being an apostle—an apostle for those who believe and yet fear the boundaries set about us if immediately we accept a denominational cloak"

Eileen French to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 March 1977

The previous chapter described the kind of relationships Muggeridge's readers formed as they read his books, wrote him letters and, in some cases, were graced with a reply. It argued that they saw Muggeridge as a friend whose religious life ran parallel with their own, and who crystalized their own religious experiences. As part of their self-reflexive project, his books helped to shape their religious identity. This serves as an important premise for explaining why and how Muggeridge's books were textual arenas where readers wrestled with perplexing religious dilemmas. Emotional attachment is an effective condition for persuasion in the religious marketplace, especially when dealing with controversial issues.

Perhaps the most fundamental of these dilemmas centered on religious authority. The question of who curates religious knowledge has been a perennial source of tension throughout the history of Christianity, and was no less so in the late twentieth century. The central argument of this chapter is that as readers' trust in religious institutions declined, they increasingly saw Muggeridge as a surrogate cleric. This will serve to qualify the argument made by some that secularization should be understood as the "declining scope of religious authority."[170] By all quantifiable measures, this observation

[170] This argument is well established in studies on secularization. It was first made by Mark Chaves in "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (1994): 749-774. More recently it has been developed by Clive D. Field, "Another Window on British Secularization: Public Attitudes to Church and Clergy Since the 1960s," *Contemporary British History* 28, no. 2 (2014): 190-218.

holds true. From baptisms and confirmations to church attendance and funerals, the influence of religious institutions declined substantially in western societies during the 1960s and after. Gallup polls that traced the perceived influence of institutions in Britain recorded on average only thirteen per cent of respondents believed churches would continue to significantly influence society.[171] This general observation may be extended to Muggeridge's readers. But while they were anti-institutional (with a few important exceptions), their rationale for leaving churches was much more complex and varied than simply losing their faith, becoming apathetic, or joining a different religion. They largely remained committed Christians, but they *shifted* from *conventional* sources of religious authority to *unconventional* ones. In some cases, Muggeridge was the primary source of religious authority; in others, he was one among many. But this should not be classified as a case of "believing without belonging," in Grace Davie's famous formulation.[172] They did believe in Christianity without belonging to a church, but Muggeridge's readers did not practice their faith in isolation. They sought out alternative forms of belonging through correspondence and belonging to a textual community.

In fact, Muggeridge's conversion during the 1960s, and his spiritual evolution in the 1970s, was largely defined by this very issue of religious authority. He was an anti-

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See also Ben Clements, *Religion and Public Opinion in Britain: Continuity and Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 11-43.

[171] The peak figures were 17 per cent in February 1973 and a low of 10 per cent in June and December of 1968. See Field, "Another Window on British Secularization," 196.

[172] See Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 1994). See also the revised edition, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

institutional gadfly who directed substantial criticisms against religious bodies like the Church of England. He believed spiritual authenticity was hindered, rather than helped, by institutional structures. On this count, he was giving voice to much broader trends in Christianity throughout Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. Just as Muggeridge's readers felt he crystalized their religious sentiments, so they also saw him as one who articulated their institutional discontent. A small number of fans wrote letters with angry refutations and criticisms of Muggeridge's anti-institutional sentiment. But the vast majority of fans were from those who agreed with Muggeridge's claims. This included current and former church members alike. In either case, readers began to see in Muggeridge not only a mirror of their own experience, but also a guide for their future spiritual development. In order to flesh out these themes, this chapter sets out to accomplish three things. First, it establishes the anti-institutional context that characterized most western societies in the 1960s and 1970s. Second, it considers how Muggeridge's fans wrestled with the question of religious authority as they engaged with his books. Finally, it argues that just as his readers were losing trust in the clergy and institutional Christianity, Muggeridge became a surrogate priest that replaced conventional sources of religious authority.

Muggeridge and Anti-Institutionalism in Religion and Society

Though the long sixties are best understood as a distinct period unto themselves, Malcolm Muggeridge had anticipated some of its chief characteristics for much of his career. By the 1960s, he was a seasoned journalist and television personality who had built much of his reputation on criticizing or satirizing those in authority. His reactionary

editorials and opinions seemed off the cuff and sporadic, but his disdain for authority forms a continuous thread throughout his career and intellectual development. One of his first major successes, *The Thirties* (1940), written just after the "Phony War," and was a morose and satiric reflection on the failures of a decade that came to a close without any real meaning or clear sense of direction. Whatever was going to happen next, Muggeridge was at least sure that the establishment and its principal actors were to blame. When the book was reissued in 1971, Muggeridge maintained the same attitude throughout his conversion to Christianity. In the new preface, he was still "unable to take completely seriously, and therefore believe in the validity or permanence of, any form of authority. Crowns and mitres have seemed to be made of tinsel, [and] ceremonial robes to have been hastily procured in a theatrical costumier's."[173]

This last jab was less a new idea formed in communion with the zeitgeist of the sixties, and more a continuation of long-held convictions. Muggeridge's 1955 article "The Royal Soap Opera" saw the monarchy as at best a distraction and at worst disastrous for the nation's unity. He questioned why it was that so much attention was paid to an institution that was, at least constitutionally, powerless. If the monarchy was good for anything, it was to function as a symbol for unity. But how could they do even that when, like trifled celebrities, there appeared so little of substance in their day-to-day activities? It was a controversial piece because support and adulation for the monarchy was quite high in the 1950s. The impressive pomp and circumstance of Queen

[173] Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties* (London: Fontana, 1971), 11.

Elizabeth's televised coronation ceremony in 1953 ushered in a new dimension of fame for the royal family, but Muggeridge only saw, as he put it, "crowns made of tinsel." In the end, the foray damaged Muggeridge professionally. He received hundreds of letters from angry readers that he had over-stepped his bounds. The BBC evidently agreed, because they temporarily banned him from appearing on television as punishment.[174]

These two brief examples are instructive when considered in anticipation of the cultural environment a decade later. Muggeridge's intellectual and cultural influence were not essential for the creation of the revolutions of the sixties, but he cannot be written off as a curmudgeonly anomaly. Criticizing the church, the monarchy, and the government were more socially acceptable in the sixties. The growing acceptance of the iconoclastic opinions that Muggeridge had presented for most of his career should be understood within these broader trends that shaped, not only British, but also all western societies. It is true that Muggeridge was also known for his vitriolic condemnations of permissiveness, but that does not make him any less a part of the "vast number of innovative activates taking place simultaneously" that formed the cultural revolution of those years. The sixties were not monolithic, and Muggeridge's position vis-à-vis institutional authority was very much in step with the times. His anti-institutional instincts remained largely consistent; what changed was that by the sixties the reading

[174] The hate mail he received can be found in SC-4 34/19, 108/4, and 115/21.

public, and the Christian public in particular, became more receptive to the kind of arguments Muggeridge had been making for decades.[175]

This is important because Muggeridge was annoyed by the changes the churches made in the sixties and seventies, despite the fact that he belonged to none of them. Indeed, his anti-institutional satire of the clergy and the churches became more frequent and more pointed.[176] His pessimistic view of the world shaped his criticism of many churches' attempts to become more socially engaged.[177] Muggeridge's theological vision constantly emphasized the stark contrast between divine transcendence and depraved humanity. He returned repeatedly to Christian authors who each rejected storing up treasures on earth: Augustine of Hippo, Blaise Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Simone Weil.[178] Each of these authors emphasized the

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[175] Adrian Hastings also emphasizes that the dynamics of the 1960s were not unique to the church, but of the total culture. "What happened in England was quite closely comparable to the pattern discernible in France, Germany, Australia, almost anywhere within the 'western' world. The social, intellectual, religious crisis of the 1960s was specific to no one particular religious tradition, nor to any one part of the world. More widely still, it was not even a specifically religious crisis; it was rather one of the total culture, affecting many secular institutions in a way comparable to its effects on the churches. It was a crisis of the relevance…of long-standing patterns of thought and institutions of all sorts in a time of intense, and rather self-conscious, modernization…Suddenly the mood changed, neo-traditionalism crumbled in ridicule and the pendulum swung rather wildly to the other extreme, the glorification of the modern." Hastings, *A History of English Christianity,* 581.

[176] Philips, *Contesting the Moral High Ground*, 108.

[177] See Philips, *Contesting the Moral High Ground*, 109.

[178] It was Soren Kierkegaard with whom Muggeridge probably shared the most in common of this list of authors. They both were deeply committed to an anti-institutional vision of Christianity where spiritual authenticity was determined by an existential decision to make a leap of faith against all evidence to the contrary. Indeed, Muggeridge's conversion to Christianity despite his ardent belief in conventional Christianity's decline was a robust expression of this. One might expect that Muggeridge's and Kierkegaard's literary reputation were mutually beneficial. Kierkegaard was in vogue within intellectual circles, especially after the Second World War. However, George Pattison interestingly notes that Kierkegaard actually became less popular in Britain during the 1970s. This was, as we have seen, just as Muggeridge was reaching the peak of his theological reputation. It may be possible that Muggeridge in some ways served the role the Kierkegaard had years earlier, and even succeeded in disseminating his

weakness of humanity and the utter pointlessness of attempting to establish a paradise on earth. As Muggeridge put on one occasion, "There are various things that human beings can do; but there is one thing they can't do, and that is progress."[179] The robust attempts of religious thinkers to demythologize Christianity in an attempt to make it more useful—or at least more palatable—to modern society was one of the main trends that Muggeridge sought to subvert.

Receptiveness to Muggeridge's anti-institutional arguments developed concomitantly with a rapid decline of religious authority.[180] Scholars regularly point to a chorus of familiar statistics tracing decline in every quantifiable religious category: church membership, Sunday attendance, baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals. Clive Field has shown that public attitudes towards the institutional church and clergy mirrored these trends.[181] It perhaps comes as no surprise that just as the public were losing trust and confidence in the church and clergy, they perceived them as becoming less important and influential in society. George Berkeley's classic assertion,

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expression of his ideas to a wider audience. Thus, Muggeridge's readers were receiving some of Kierkegaard's ideas even if they were not reading him themselves. See George Pattison, "Great Britain: From 'Prophet of the Now' to Postmodern Ironist (and after)," in *Kierkegaard's International Reception, Tome I, Northern and Western Europe*, edited by Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 237-269.

[179] Quoted in Philips, *Contesting the Moral High Ground*, 126. The source of this quotation is Malcolm Muggeridge, "Humour, Humility, and Faith," Convocation Address, St. Francis Xavier University, 6 May 1979, Public Relations Records, RG 44/3/519, University Archives, Angus L. MacDonald Library, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

[180] Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (March 1994): 749-774.

[181] Clive Field, "Another Window on British Secularization: Public Attitudes to Church and Clergy Since the 1960s," *Contemporary British History* 28, no. 2 (2014): 190-218.

esse est percipi may be dubious on philosophical grounds, but the old adage is hard to deny when it comes to the politics of reputation. The church and clergy were increasingly seen as out of touch and, at worst, irredeemably corrupt. Field's research focuses on Britain, but other scholarship has shown this trend to be consistent throughout western societies irrespective of Christian denomination.[182] Decreasing religious authority and growing discontent with the clergy were two interrelated expressions of the declining support for traditional institutions that characterized the cultural revolution of the sixties.

However, following Mark Chaves and Field, we should be careful not to generalize that declining indicators of Christianity's social significance and growing distrust of the clergy are synonymous with wholesale religious decline. There are a number of good reasons for this. First, scholars have faced recurring methodological problems with quantifying religious belief in the sixties and seventies. Religion has normally been measured by three criteria: behaving (attending church, becoming baptized, confirmed, etc.), belonging (being a member of a particular church or church body), and believing (the actual content and shape of religious belief). A great deal of

[182] See Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority." Field, "Another Window on British Secularization," Clements, *Religion and Opinion in Britain*, John Hoffmann, "Declining Religious Authority?" *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 1-25. John Hoffmann, "Confidence in Religious Institutions and Secularization," *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 4 (1998): 321-343. Michael Kleiman et al. "Public Confidence in Religious Leaders," *Review of Religious Research* 38, no. 1 (1996): 79-87. Andrew Rosen, *The Transformation of British Life 1950-2000, A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 47-51. Geoff Troughton, "Anti-Churchianity, Discursive Christianity, and Religious Change in the Twentieth-Century," *Journal of New Zealand Studies* NS17 (2014): 93-106. See also *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000,* edited by Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

data is available that shows decline in terms of behaving and belonging. However, quantifying belief has proven to be a much more difficult problem. The most information rich surveys used by scholars to trace religious change did not include any questions on religious belief until the 1980s.[183] Giving up one's church membership and not attending religious services regularly certainly did and could mean that someone is becoming less religious. But Grace Davie's formulation that some were "believing without belonging" reminds us not to assume a necessary connection between church attendance and religious belief. It is entirely plausible that someone might leave their church while still maintaining religious beliefs. Inversely, it is equally possible that someone might attend services and remain members of a church *without* actually believing the doctrinal positions of their church. They might stay involved for familial, social, cultural or any number of idiosyncratic reasons.

Moreover, while questionnaires tell us a great deal, they reveal very little about emotional intensity of respondents, or variations among individual interpretations of meaning. Nor do they always show how religious beliefs change over time. Two surveys with identical answers could very well be produced by people with entirely different religious experiences when the survey was taken. For example, Ben Clements' recent study made use of surveys that defined affiliation as either Anglican, Catholic,

[183] Ben Clements in his study *Religion and Public Opinion in Britain* used five different surveys to trace religious change in Britain: The British Election Study (BES), 1963-2010; the British Social Attitudes (BSA), 1983-2012; European Values Study (EVS), 1981-2008; European Social Survey (EVS), 2002-2012; and the Eurobarometer (EB), 1970-2006. The BES included no questions on religious belief, focusing instead on behaving and belonging. The EVS and BSA included questions measuring belief, but since they both were begun in the early 1980s, they lie outside the scope of this study.

Other Christian, or No Affiliation. There is a *great deal* of religious diversity within any one of these categories, and Muggeridge's fan mail reflects that. The Church of England alone was a broad church that prided itself in its ecumenism, let alone categories so nebulous as "Other Christian" or "No Affiliation." Moreover, some of Muggeridge's fans wrote several letters over a period of several months or even years that reveal evolving religious perspectives and, most importantly for the present discussion, their attitudes towards religious authority.

Indeed, recent scholarship has shown that in some cases anti-institutional activity functioned as an expression of Christian piety. Geoff Troughton has demonstrated that Christians in New Zealand formed a distinction between the "the real Jesus" and the church. These were a group of Christians who, on a social survey, would fall under the category of "No Affiliation." Troughton found that Jesus was simultaneously worshiped and used discursively as an iconoclastic symbol of institutional Christianity. The religion of Christ was understood as distinct and separate from what was wryly called "Churchianity." It formed an anti-institutional Christian piety that defined authentic belief by its disassociation with organized Christianity. The same kind of thought pattern was present in groups like the Jesus People Movement and was commonly expressed in fan mail to Muggeridge.[184]

Muggeridge's readers reflected these broader trends in their rejection of the clergy and ecclesiastical structures as religious authorities. His fan mail confirms qualitatively

[184] The best book on the Jesus People Movement is Larry Eskridge's *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

what Chaves, Field, and Clements have argued quantitatively, that secularization is most accurately understood as the declining scope of religious authority. An important addendum to this argument, however, is that while most of Muggeridge's readers lost respect for institutional and clerical authority, they in turn looked to Muggeridge for religious guidance. In this way, religious authority did not just decline; it also *shifted*[185] as popular individualism increasingly defined group behavior in the 1960s and 1970s.[186] They followed Muggeridge closely in their belief that authentic Christianity meant taking a leap of faith without relying on inherited structures to guide spiritual formation.

Reading Muggeridge and Institutional Malaise

Fans who wrote on the topic of religious authority fit into three general camps. The smallest group included those who remained in the church, and who strongly defended traditional modes of religious authority. The second group included those who remained members of an institutional church, but nevertheless harbored criticisms for their pastor or doubts about their church's authenticity. Readers that can be placed into these first two categories more commonly self-identified with a particular church body, with the Church of England/Anglican and Roman Catholic being the most common

[185] One of the premises of Chaves' argument is that religious beliefs are "socially efficacious only when they become mobilized and institutionalized as structures of authority." It is true that Muggeridge's fan mail displayed a wide array of shared experiences, emotions, and interpretations that indicates a global reading community, but private letters were hardly a "socially efficacious" phenomenon in the institutionalized sense Chaves had in mind. Nonetheless, they reveal a rich and textured account of how ordinary people around the world fundamentally redefined how they understood religious authority. Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," 770.

[186] See Robinson et al., "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain."

church bodies. The last and largest group of readers were those who had stopped going to church altogether due to their declining trust in religious institutions. As one might expect, it was much more characteristic for readers in this category to self-identify generally as "Christian," rather than to think of their identity in denominational terms. Specific church bodies were only mentioned as reference to what they had left. For readers of each of these categories, Muggeridge was recognized as a religious guide. The second and third groups wrote to vent their frustrations and uncertainties about their church. They very often did not feel comfortable voicing such sentiments within an institutional setting, so writing a private letter to a popular religious writer was one way to do that. These readers, though coming from diverse theological perspectives, all could agree that Muggeridge was someone with whom they could share their thoughts, complaints, and questions. Even if the first group wrote to Muggeridge with intentions of proving him wrong, the very act of taking him seriously was an acknowledgement of his influence.

Letters criticizing Muggeridge's anti-institutional positions, while united in a common enemy, in fact reflect the sort of ideological fissures that characterized churches in western societies during the 1960s and 1970s. Adrian Hastings observed that much of the theological development of those years "gives the impression of a sheer surge of feeling that in the modern world God, religion, the transcendent, any reliability in the gospels, anything which had formed part of the old 'supernaturalist' system, had suddenly become absurd."[187] John Robinson's *Honest to God* is perhaps the most famous

[187] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, 545.

example of this, where in less than one hundred and fifty pages, he synthesized in widely accessible prose the demythologized Christianity of Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rudolf Bultmann.[188] Robinson was convinced that if the church was going to survive, it required a radical updating of its language to become more meaningful. That meant integrating the life of the church into the idiom of modernity while adapting its ethical and moral precepts to accommodate social change.[189] Indeed, during the sixties and seventies churches revised their positions on a myriad of social issues, ranging from censorship and gambling to homosexuality, divorce, extra-marital sex, and reproductive rights.[190]

The negotiations on individual behavior included a fundamental restructuring of the relationships between the clergy and laity. Christian churches recognized Vatican II as the leading example of this general trend: It championed a more active role for the laity in the life of the church, supported the authority of personal conscience in matters of the faith, allowed a hierarchy of essential teachings, and ushered in a more ecumenical environment.[191] Yet, while there was great deal of optimism in the benefits of these

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[188] John Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963). See also Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, 536-538. McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 84-86. Machin, *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 176-177.

[189] For the fiery debate that occurred after Robinson's book was published, see John Robinson and David L. Edwards, *The Honest to God Debate* (London: The Westminster Press, 1963).

[190] G. I. T. Machin, *Churches and Social Issues*, 175-231.

[191] The Second Vatican Council has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. For the best recent overview of Vatican II, see John W. O'Malley, S.J. *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). See also McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 92-101 and Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, 519-531.

changes, they also exacerbated long-standing divisions within church denominations. The direction churches would take in the future—whether they would become increasingly open, or whether they would resist change—was a matter of heated debate in the upper ranks of churches. Divisions and theological debate became defined less and less by denominational identity, and increasingly more by liberal, conservative, moderate, and radical factions within churches.[192] These tensions were felt most intensely in the local parish where the clergy, let alone church members, did not always know how to respond to ongoing debates that were fundamentally reshaping the religious character of their church and how it related to others.[193]

Muggeridge's readers reflected these tensions, as they struggled with how to understand the source of the church's authority and, consequently, the reasons to obey it. Even those who wrote to Muggeridge to defend the church reveal sharp disagreement on why it was meet and right so to do. In fact, readers who defended the church's traditional structures promoted two distinct arguments that were not entirely compatible. The first group defended the institutional church on the grounds that it was essential to Christianity. This was most commonly promoted by High Church Anglicans and Roman Catholics who believed ecclesiastical authority was based upon apostolic succession stemming from the Apostle Peter, on whom Jesus had built the church. This reflected a much more conservative vision of the church's future direction in society, and went

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[192] See McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 2.

[193] See Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2004).

against the spirit of Vatican II and ecumenism. For these readers, criticizing the institutional church was tantamount to criticizing Christianity itself. Ecumenism by some was an expression of Christian love and forgiveness, but for many traditionally minded churchgoers, signaled of doctrinal weakness and spineless compromise.[194]

From this position, the life of authentic Christianity was one inside the traditional structures of the church. The High Church Anglican Winifred Rogers articulated a logical conclusion of this premise when she said, "I do not think that ultimately one can be a full member of Christ out of contact with the Church."[195] These readers took for granted that hypocrites or unsavory figures would claim a position within its ranks, but they were confident they posed no serious damage to the church. They were convinced, as Sheila Macartney was, that church leaders like John Robinson were "just a phase" in a history that had weathered the guile of heretics for two thousand years.[196] The church, properly understood, was incorruptible because it was distinct from the composition of those who happened to be within its physical gates. They could take confidence that the "wheat and tares grow together until harvest."[197] Because the institution was understood

[194] See Philips, *Contesting the Moral High Ground*, 41.

[195] Mrs. Winifred Rogers to Malcolm Muggeridge, 20 May 1971, SC-4 81/14.

[196] Sheila Macartney to Malcolm Muggeridge, 23 May 1970, SC-4 22/14.

[197] Frances D. Meredith to Malcolm Muggeridge, 20 March 1966, SC-4 50/13. Citing the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13 was especially common among Roman Catholics and High Church Anglicans who defended the continuance of the institutional church.

as inseparable from the practice of Christianity, these readers took it as a tenet of the faith to remain within the fold, regardless of any apparent "failures"[198] or "weaknesses."[199]

The second, and much more common, argument that defenders of institutional churches made was one of expediency. For this group of critics there were not any dogmatic reasons to remain faithful to any particular church body. In fact, many of these readers conceded that Muggeridge's satire on institutional Christianity was partially justified. The Australian-born Audrey Tate was "quite sure that there are people like yourself who are strong enough in themselves—both intellectually and in the will—to be committed to loving and serving Christ without the support of an institution."[200] But as she saw it, "Only rare spirits can stand alone." Her experience was different. She, her husband, and their three children had converted to Roman Catholicism "after several years of quite harrowing soul-searching." Since her family had struggled with their spirituality, she thought that when Muggeridge would criticize institutional Christianity, he was "unwittingly defeating the very cause" he promoted. She continued, "I am equally sure that the ordinary man NEEDS the props and imposed disciplines of the institution."[201] Her fear was that readers would listen to Muggeridge's "quasi-authoritative voice" and then justify leaving the church to pursue their spiritual life

[198] D.A.C. Blunt to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. February 1966, SC-4 50/10.

[199] Paddy Henry to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 August 1976, SC-4 99/6.

[200] Audrey Tate to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[201] Ibid.

independent of any church. It might work for Muggeridge, but not everyone had his "particular eccentricity."[202]

David L. B. Howell was likewise critical of Muggeridge's anti-institutional position. His experience as a medical missionary in the Katanga Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo for the past twenty-seven years had been formative in this regard. His views were not in any way dogmatically devised, but rather were based on what seemed to function the best. He had worked closely with the Ba-Luba people, who organized their churches along tribal relations. According to Howell, "they found brothers and sisters in every village, whereas previously all contacts with those who were neither blood nor tribal relatives were dangerous on the account of the treachery of witchcraft."[203] In the end, Howell was using the example of the Ba-Luba to critique Muggeridge's anti-institutionalism. As Howell saw it, the church was becoming increasingly incompatible with the current environment of western societies. At the same time, the single biggest problem was the "reckless spirit of independence" that produced "broken homes [and] callous separations."[204] Muggeridge's highly individualized Christianity that eschewed institutional religion seemed to offer no antidote to this problem. Howell argued that it is inevitable Christianity needed the support offered by a congregation. Without it, Christianity would break down.

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[202] Ibid.

[203] David L. B. Howell to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 May 1970, SC-4 22/14.

[204] Ibid.

Diverse understandings of the nature of the church and the source of its authority have important implications. Muggeridge's readers who were also professing Christians were much more likely to remain within an institutional church body if they believed that authentic Christianity was necessarily tied to those structures. However, believers who thought the institutional church was not essential to Christianity, but merely expedient to its practice, were more ready to grant that membership and attendance were only required if you were weak in your faith.

That was Lesley Furniss' experience. She was a sixty-nine-year-old from Buckinghamshire who had struggled with religion for much of her life. She had broken her wrist recently, so her six-page fan letter to Muggeridge is in places difficult to decipher. What becomes clear is that she knew nothing about her biological past apart from the fact that her birth mother in Ireland abandoned her. Even though she had a home growing up, she felt as though she "had no <u>real</u> relations at all root-wise, + still have no <u>record</u> of being on this earth."[205] In her attempt to develop a sense a community, she began to dabble in religion. However, throughout her upbringing her father (who was an atheist and lawyer by profession) would strongly dissuade her from becoming religious. This was an ongoing source of tension between them throughout her upbringing, and it continued for some time after. Her father died in 1959. Her letter to Muggeridge was written over two decades later, but the memory of her father still caused her some pain. One day she rebelled against her father's wishes and joined the nearest

[205] Lesley Furniss to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 January 1982, SC-4 109/1.

church that was "within walking distance," which happened to be Church of England. She was confirmed because she "needed to belong to a church—to belong somewhere."[206] In her letter, Furniss did not assert that every Christian must be a member of a Church, nor even that it was theologically mandated. Her argument was that because of her particular circumstances it was what she needed, even if it meant estrangement with the man who adopted her. Her interaction with the church was not one in which she humbly submitted to the church because of apostolic succession. She joined a church because she felt she needed it; the fact that she happened to be Anglican was more a matter of convenience that principle. Beneath her conflicting emotions was a theological position that understood religious authority not as something ontologically present in the structures of the church. On the surface—and recorded in statistics—readers like Furniss and Audrey Tate would have defended the institutional church on the grounds of their own personal experience. Yet, however passionate they were, their argument confirms an important assumption that helps to explain why churches declined in the 1960s and after: people on a large scale began to believe they were not necessary for Christianity to exist.

Even ministers doubted the footing of their own position. The Methodist minister Samuel Arthurs' letter to Muggeridge expressed several conflicting emotions. His interaction with the church from his youth was overwhelmingly positive. He had been raised in a working-class home with a father who was a "rationalist" and faithful reader

[206] Ibid.

of *The Freethinker*. While his mother had a "luminous Christian Faith," she did not go to church herself, nor did she insist that her son attend, either. Both parents agreed that their son should be free to form his own views. At an early age, he began attending Sunday at the local Methodist church largely because it was what his friends did. What began as an environment for social interaction grew into religious faith. As he described it, "the Church became a wider experience (and warmer) of family life…I discovered the Church, before I discovered Christ."[207] He experienced a great deal of tolerance for his questions and uncertainties. At the time he had not cared much about the "dogmas about [God] or methods of Church Government," and he never "came within a mile of the 'great and wise' who run the Church at 'the top.' I only met the rank and file."[208]

Once he became a minister, his experience with the church and the "rank and file" changed. It all began to seem so superficial: "One can wax enthusiastic about a Sale of Work, one can discuss the Church building, one can get heated about liturgy, one can advocate change, or protest at it," but spiritual authenticity seemed nowhere in sight. The problem was exacerbated by his current position, where he had a hard time connecting with his parishioners, let alone shaping their theological conversations. "Spiritual fellowship…is largely overlaid with associated trivia [and] spiritual talk is most often carried on indirectly in surface concern over exteriors such as the Building, or the Establishment." They seemed to think that those who spoke about religious matters were

[207] Samuel Arthurs to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 July 1969, SC-4 22/15.

[208] Ibid.

"either professionals, or specially saintly, or hypocrites."[209] It was only in settings outside of the church—on deathbeds or in times of intense crises—that people opened up and shared their spirituality. These observations and experiences, together with reading Muggeridge, made Arthur's question if he really had discovered the church at all.

Most readers who harbored some of these same doubts and criticisms about the life of the institutional church did not have the inclination to go on defending it. Some thought the church and its clergy were embarrassingly corrupt. Nancy Frost was a Roman Catholic convert of about forty years. Once she read *Something Beautiful for God*, she felt an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance between the character of Mother Teresa and state of her church. "It is a dreadful but true fact that the Church, which teaches Christianity, is the very means of turning people away from it….there are many things which simply appall me…Unfortunately, the field in which the 'pearl' is hidden is a very dirty field. There are stones, lumps, weeds, rabbit-holes, and cow muck everywhere."[210] Martin Biersmith of Stony Brook, New York, would have had a lot to talk about with Frost. He had read *The Chronicles of Wasted Time* and confessed to Muggeridge that "It is so hard to be a Catholic nowadays; one succeeds in doing it almost in spite of the Church."[211] He still attended regularly, but he felt the need to supplement it with private devotions and frequent readings of G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Isabel Taylor of Edinburgh agreed—the clergymen were too often corrupt, or obsessing

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[209] Ibid.

[210] Nancy Frost to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 April 1971, SC-4 81/9.

[211] Martin Biersmith to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 April 1978, SC-4 103/5.

only to "demonstrate their own cleverness." Nancy Green of Suffolk extended to the Church of England what Frost and Taylor had said of Roman Catholicism: the problem stemmed from "bad leadership" and was continued by pastors who thought of their high calling as little more than a day-job for a paycheck.[212]

One fan from Ridgegate, just south of London, felt that church was becoming detached from the experiences and problems of its parishioners. They were much too materialistic, only using members ("predominantly middle-class mostly female and elderly") to keep a steady stream of income flowing into its coffers.[213] The result was a church that had become "cold, physically and spiritually."[214] Like Parliament, it had turned into a "ramshackle institution" that was in dire need of a change to the "whole structure of the Established Church" if they wanted to survive.[215] This was why James Stewart of Edinburgh appreciated *Jesus Rediscovered* so much. The book was released while he was participating in the General Assembly of the Scottish Presbyterian Church. He felt "it is the kind of book to call us back from our tiresome irrelevancies to the things that really matter."[216] Like Samuel Arthurs, Stewart was not content with the superficial topics that seemed to preoccupy his church. Unlike Arthurs, however, Stewart did not

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[212] Nancy Green to Malcolm Muggeridge, 31 January 1966, SC-4 50/2.

[213] [Illegible] to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 January 1966, SC-4 50/2. Someone, presumably Muggeridge, spilled coffee or tea on the bottom quarter inch of this letter. Unfortunately, it smudged the signature making it impossible to identify the name.

[214] Winifred Riccio to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 September 1977, SC-4 101/16.

[215] [Illegible] to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 January 1966, SC-4 50/2.

[216] James Stewart to Malcolm Muggeridge, 23 May 1969, SC-4 22/14.

elaborate on what precisely constituted irrelevancy and what really mattered (his fan letter was less than two hundred words), but it nonetheless points to the common sentiment that the institutional church was in need of reform.

The type of reform needed was another story. Churches were willing to, and certainly did, change by accommodating to cultural and social change. But these reactions caused divisions and dissent, especially among more conservative members. They felt the church was changing too much and too quickly. Nancy Frost, who strongly criticized the corruption of the clergy, was equally distressed by the church's attempts at reform. "The constant changing of everything in the name of Ecumenism makes one dizzy."[217] Madeleine Hayes was an Anglican from Middlesex and felt similar emotions: "I am completely bewildered by the constant changes taking place so quickly in the church…Oh for a leader with the courage to thunder against the sick world and not lower the standards of the church by trying to get with it."[218]

Innovations in worship practices were the most uncomfortable changes for many of Muggeridge's readers.[219] Teresa John was a Roman Catholic living on Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village. She had read several books by Muggeridge and watched William Buckley interview him on *Firing Line*. She had been determined to refute his criticisms

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[217] Nancy Frost to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 April 1971, SC-4 81/9.

[218] Madeleine Hayes to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 March 1966, SC-4 50/12.

[219] For more context on innovations in worship, see Patrick Pasture, "Christendom and the Legacy of the Sixties: Between the Secular City and the Age of Aquarius," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 99, no. 1 (2004): 105-108. This was an important cause for the decline of church going in the Netherlands, as well. See Paul Van Rooden, "The Strange Death of Dutch Christendom," in Callum Brown and Michael Snape (eds). *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod* (London: Routledge, 2010), 175-196.

of institutional Christianity, and had even written several drafts full of carefully crafted arguments supported by numerous Scriptural proof-texts. But she eventually realized she really was not being honest with herself. In reality, she found herself agreeing almost completely with Muggeridge's criticisms—she just felt compelled to defend the institution she associated with. She had to admit, "There is a sort of madness going on in the institutional churches today."[220] Even though she still regularly attended the local Roman Catholic Church in order to experience congregational life and to receive communion, she was growing "very annoyed at the changes being made in the liturgy." She was particularly fed up with attempts to update the language of the service to be more gender-neutral. Such movements on her view were patronizing and assumed women were too stupid to know that they were included in the older phraseology. But most upsetting of all was that there seemed no end in sight. On her account, worship would just become "more bland, homogenized, 'modernized,' and overall meaningless year by year. These changes are jarring on the ear and a distraction to prayer."[221] The changes were foreign enough for Martin Biersmith that in his private devotions, he preferred to recite the Old Latin mass to himself from memory. A Jesuit education had left its mark.[222]

But for Christian conservatives it was not just a worship problem: it was a doctrine problem. Christophe Bartley was a medical doctor in London. He was a

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[220] Teresa John to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 November 1980, SC-4 105/12.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Martin Biersmith to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 April 1978, SC-4 103/5.

committed member of John Stott's church, All Souls, Langham Place, which was the heart of the evangelical movement in the Church of England.[223] Bartley's evangelicalism is confirmed by the fact that his fan letter reflects every corner of the David Bebbington's quadrilateral.[224] In only about three hundred words, he used Scripture as a proof text four times (Biblicism), emphasized that his church preached "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (Crucicentrism), called for Muggeridge to accept Jesus as his savior (Conversionism), and mentioned his involvement in religious organizations like Inter-Varsity Fellowship and the Keswick Convention (Activism). As he saw it, the Church of England was in need of a revival.[225] He estimated that "perhaps not more than five per cent of the whole Establishment" could in any honesty be described as a faithful church. The problem, as he diagnosed it, was that the vast majority of churches were not "in accordance with Biblical promises and true Church of England doctrine as defined in the Book of Common Prayer, and the Thirty Nine Articles."[226]

Ted Kern was also an Anglican Evangelical who thought of things in the same way as Christophe Bartley. He saw All Souls as an exemplary church, but he recognized it was highly unusual for its doctrinal commitments. "The crux of the matter," he continued, was that "the clergy themselves although assenting to the 39 articles of the

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[223] Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also his "Secularisation and the Ministry of John R. W. Stott at All Souls, Langham Place, 1950-1970," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56, no. 3 (July 2005): 496-513.

[224] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge Press, 1989).

[225] Christophe Bartley to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 January 1966, SC-4 50/4.

[226] Ibid.

church seemingly without shame neither practice, preach nor uphold them. It is [no] small wonder that the power of conviction and direction have gone out of the churches and that they are in the main empty."[227] In short, the churches were the cause of their own demise.

This was an issue for Roman Catholics as well. Martin Shaw was a thirty-year-old Catholic priest who, while in seminary at least, had been enthralled with the direction of the church in the wake of Vatican II. But once he had spent several years in the parish, he began reading Fyodor Dostoevsky, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Malcolm Muggeridge. These books reconstituted his attitude towards his church:

> At the end of "Chronicles", you describe with devastating poignancy the preposterous scene in Westminster Abbey. I must confess to feeling slightly crushed by it, as I am a priest of the same Church. Certain passages in "Jesus Rediscovered" have had the same effect. Some time ago, I heard an interview in which you were involved (B.B.C.) in which you mentioned "The Brothers Karamazov" and the importance of that book for you. As a result of that interview I read the book myself and again the same crushing experience came to me—particularly from the chapter called "the grand inquisitor," if I remember rightly. But somehow there has been a resolution for me, however slight and temporary it may be, in your mention of the illuminated signpost—My Kingdom is not of this world.[228]

Shaw regretted how he used to think about the world, which according to Charles Taylor, was to understand religious meaning purely in the immanent frame.[229] It was Muggeridge who led him to see the world anew as one of seeking transcendence.

> At Theological College in a predominant atmosphere that cannot now be described as anything other than dilettante, one was lead to think that one was

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[227] Ted Kern to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1 February 1966, SC-4 50/5.

[228] Martin Shaw to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 August 1974, SC-4 95/5.

[229] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

> entering a Church which had now adopted the optimism of secularity. In other words, priests were freelance social workers. Perhaps I ought to be more accurate and say that I allowed myself to be sucked into this atmosphere. And now I have come to the point of emptiness that you might expect. And it is thanks to your experience that I can now say that is a point of hope rather than despair.[230]

In paradoxical fashion, Martin Shaw found hope through a rejection of optimism in the imminent frame in exchange for an immaterial transcendence. He thought of himself as becoming more faithful to the spirit of his church by eschewing its current preoccupations.

The churches faced something of a catch-22. The same object of criticism for some was a point of pride for others, and preference for any course of action inevitably alienated one or several groups. Evangelicals like Ted Kern and Christophe Bartley, and Roman Catholics like Martin Shaw, were upset that their churches were loosening their doctrinal focus. But there were others with equal stakes in their churches' futures who felt quite differently. Church of England Canons J. R. Percey and C. J. H. Mill, and the Rev. C. E. Pocknee all wrote to Muggeridge defending clerical freedoms not to believe every little jot and tittle of the Thirty-Nine Articles.[231] They each explained that it was perfectly acceptable to support, or as they each put it, give "assent" to them. Canon Percey described much of his church's teachings as "symbols" that have a great deal of meaning, but need not be taken literally. Indeed, he saw such attitudes as an expression of Christian humility—"only the small minded can define exactly" the meaning of the

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[230] Martin Shaw to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 August 1974, SC-4 95/5.

[231] J. R. Percey to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 July 1969, SC-4 22/11. C. J. H. Mill to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 January 1966, SC-4 50/2. C. E. Pocknee to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 January 1966, SC-4 50/2.

creeds and confessions of the church. He continued, "I glory in the comprehensiveness of the C of E. We are wide enough to realise that the whole truth needs the whole Church to interpret it."[232]

There were clearly some fundamental divides within Christian churches.[233] With so many different positions represented, some people felt entirely uncertain about what to do next. Church of England Canon Herbert Waddams in some ways illustrates how ideological divisions within churches and between clergy and congregation members were at the heart of the religious crisis of those years.[234] He read *Jesus Rediscovered* and struck up a correspondence with Muggeridge to confess his internal conflict:

> What you write about the feebleness of Christianity and the Churches finds an equal echo within myself. I am almost wholly in agreement with your scathing criticisms of the structures of the Churches as they are, and of the posturings of many of its more prominent members. But whereas you can safely indulge these feelings of yours from the outside, I find myself inside, entangled in the spider's web of millions of strands which hold me prisoner.[235]

Waddams was sure that *some* kind of structure was necessary to promote and preserve Christianity, but he had no idea what it would look like. Would it require a radical updating of the church's language? Should worship be restructured to better reflect

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[232] J. R. Percey to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 July 1969, SC-4 22/11.

[233] This contradicts Ian Hunter's claim that the reception of *Jesus Rediscovered* was largely cut along institutional lines. He wrote: "Whatever rejoicing may have been in heaven over a sinner who repents, there was none in the institutional church. In fact, the most withering criticism of *Jesus Rediscovered* came from ecclesiastical, not secular, quarters." Hunter, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*, 232.

[234] Herbert Waddams was the general secretary for the Church of England's Council on Foreign Relations from 1945 until 1959. He was author of several many books, including *A New Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, which was a counter-argument to the idea that traditional Christian ethics should be expunged in favor of new moral principles.

[235] Herbert Waddams to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 August 1970, SC-4 22/15.

social developments? Should the churches double-down on doctrinal purity? Or was the problem that the church had become too materialistic? Waddams was not sure. Muggeridge, he admitted, was excellent at pointing out errors—those he recognized. But could Muggeridge help him to devise some strategy of how to positively promote the church?

> I am really asking for help myself, caught as I am in the Establishment and [part of] the establishment, unable to see a way forward. I have gradually become convinced that God is kicking the Churches to pieces anyway, and I am happy to hasten this process.[236]

Waddams' may have admitted that it was a good idea for another structure to rise up for the spreading and preservation of Christianity and, perhaps controversially, even help the disintegration of the Church of England. However, as he admits, he was too immersed in its machinery to do much of anything about it.

Many of Muggeridge's Christian readers did not feel these internal conflicts because they no longer associated with any church. Fans who no longer attended or remained members of any church had three general reasons for not going. Some readers were not raised in a religious home and, after they converted to Christianity, had not yet found a church they liked, or perhaps did not feel the need to join one.[237] Others left their

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[236] Ibid.

[237] One such person was a Detroit mechanic. The signature is difficult to decipher, but the fan does indicate he is the owner of an auto shop named "Walter's Pipe Shop." The store has since closed. He had read *Jesus Rediscovered* and said, "I suppose it will become a great book for there are people like me who have learned thru trial + error that peace of mind + freedom from fear is only found thru that Inner peace one obtains from Christ's teachings. I have been raised with no religion, was never an atheist but rather an agnostic. I am probably still a poor Christian—Don't attend any Church—But am in a way successful. At any rate thanks again for what really served to confirm my own beliefs." [Illegible] to Malcolm Muggeridge, 12 June 1970, SC-4 22/14, Muggeridge Papers. Another was 63-year old Harold Swanson of Illinois. He wrote, "I find myself in complete agreement with your ideas and thoughts on the present state of organised religion. For most of my adult life I, too, was an agnostic, in fact, indifferent to

churches because of innovations in doctrine or worship practices.[238] Indeed, it is interesting that many readers made the same complaints as those who decided to remain in their respective churches. The major difference is that they made a final decision to practice their religion privately, though we do not always learn precisely what the catalyst was that made them do so. These types of responses seldom occurred, but they are nonetheless important for recognizing the diversity of religious expression among Muggeridge's readers.

The third and most common reason for Muggeridge's readers to leave institutional religion was that they did not feel it supported authentic Christianity. What constituted "authentic" is not always clear, but it appears to be more an issue of attitude and process than any particular set of propositions. It made no difference if Muggeridge's readers were conservative, liberal, moderate, or radical: Christians of all perspectives found reasons to leave the church. What links them together is their common practice of interpreting the Bible and Christian tradition without the imposed hermeneutics of organized religion.

These readers most closely aligned with Muggeridge's own approach to Christianity. They reflect a resurgence of popular religion that was at once dogmatic in its insistence for hyper-individualized religious experience, all the while remaining

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any idea of God. Fortunate it has been for me that I had a spiritual awakening and developed a conscious contact with God. Not through the church, however, but as a simple gift of faith. Harold Swanson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 November 1969, SC-4 22/11.

[238] For example, the 54-year old Australian Keith Parnell said, "I don't go to regular Church services anymore. Too much honkey-tonk. But I like to go into the Church + have it all to myself + feel at peace." Keith Parnell to Malcolm Muggeridge, July 1974, SC-4 95/2.

tolerant of the shape one's religious beliefs took. Very few of these examples offered Muggeridge any criticism at all, which is a clear departure from those who defended institutional Christianity, or even those who remained in the church while harboring some criticism towards it. Like the New Zealand Christians analyzed by Geoff Troughton, who saw disassociation from a church as an expression of Christian piety, many of Muggeridge's readers likewise distinguished between "Christianity and Churchianity."[239] "Churchianity" was rigid, overly dogmatic, stuffy, and inhibited authentic spiritual expression. These readers were not shedding their Christianity; rather, they left their churches because they felt they could more faithfully express their faith independently of them. This sentiment was pithily summed up by the Australian Andrew Smith when he casually wrote: "I am a Christian like yourself—I was an Anglican before I was converted."[240]

This kind of sentiment that true and authentic Christianity could only take place in the heart, and was in fact inhibited by the churches, was common throughout all western societies. Ernest Kelly was a thirty-six-year-old sales representative in the printing industry. He did not belong to any church, and was in the middle of a dispute with local curate. The spiritual isolation he felt inspired him to build on Coleridge: "'Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink,' fantastic amounts of religious syrup available on all sides, and yet hardly a drop of it runs in accord with one of the more simple statements of

[239] See Troughton, "Anti-Churchianity." Nancy Brown to Malcolm Muggeridge, October 1969, SC-4 22/11. Charles Mylne to Malcolm Muggeridge, 4 July 1975, SC-4 97/1.

[240] Andrew Smith to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 August 1975, SC-4 97/4.

Jesus: 'Blessed are the Meek.'"[241] He had a wife and two children, but he felt his only spiritual companions were books: Kierkegaard, Pascal, Bunyan, and now Muggeridge. When he read *Jesus Rediscovered*, he found it "strange to find myself reading a book which seems to say many of the things I think but which, with me, are only vague thoughts which do not find expression in words." It was the same sensation he had when reading the works of Soren Kierkegaard who dramatically shaped his religious outlook.

> It was as though the veil had been drawn aside and all that I had heard before concerning Christianity was so much rubbish…Before this time I was of the opinion that clergyman while occupying no great place in my life must, at least, know what they were talking about and yet now I can see straight through them. Never again will I be able to listen to a clergyman as though he speaks with authority. Before I read Kierkegaard I seemed to have an unconscious secularity, in that if I did not know the great secrets of life at whom I could turn for guidance and comfort if need be, but now I find that I really am alone.[242]

Though, one could argue that the very act of writing letter like is evidence that Muggeridge stood alongside Kierkegaard as two authorities from which he derived "guidance and comfort."[243]

James Henderson of Saginaw, Michigan did not quite have the feelings of isolation as Ernest Kelly did, but he shared the critical view of institutional Christianity after reading *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*. His emphasis differed from Kelly's in that he aimed his criticisms less at ministers and more at the historical baggage the church had accumulated over the past two thousand years. Muggeridge's journalistic exposé of the

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[241] Ernest Kelly to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 November 1969, SC-4 22/12.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Ibid.

synoptic Gospels gave him a vision of the "real" Jesus that the churches were incapable of delivering: "You have such a gift for cutting out the fat, the 'goo,' the confusing tradition…all the sediment and sentiment of centuries upon the realities of Jesus, the will of God, and man, His creation." Henderson compared Muggeridge to C. S. Lewis in how much he had shaped his spiritual life, but he felt Muggeridge was in some ways superior to Lewis because of the latter's "over-reliance upon the church…the institution and its rites and ordinances."[244] The church might work for people like Lewis, but for Henderson disassociation allowed for a greater practice of Christian freedom. The comparison with C. S. Lewis is telling, too. Henderson was not alone in comparing Muggeridge to the famous author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, and *Surprised by Joy*. But Lewis was associated with dogmatism in a way Muggeridge was not. That comes through in Henderson's letter, but it was widely accepted. Stephanie Derrick has recently established that it was the perceived dogmatism in Lewis that hampered his reputation among his British readers.[245] Muggeridge's rough and tumble personality as one who had lived a hedonistic lifestyle only to realize it and then pursue instead spiritual meaning on his own terms appealed a great deal to his readers.

Spirituality for many during the 1960s and 1970s was about independence and self-discovery.[246] The idea of deferring to a clergyman for spiritual guidance or

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[244] James Henderson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 January 1978, SC-4 103/1.

[245] Stephanie Derrick, "The Reception of C. S. Lewis in Britain and America," (PhD Dissertation, University of Stirling), 277.

[246] Christie and Gauvreau, *The Sixties and Beyond*, 15.

becoming indoctrinated through catechesis was repulsive, even childish, to some of Muggeridge's readers. John Buffield almost echoes Immanuel Kant's definition of enlightenment as the process of emerging from one's own self-incurred immaturity:

> I think it is merely pre-adolescent to expect to pay one's admission fee (speaking metaphorically) at a sort of spiritual box-office, go in an expect to find all the secrets about the source of life, the precise reasons why we are here, the where we have come from, the whither we pass to, all flashed on to the screen.[247]

At almost sixty years old, Buffield had had enough of that. He reminisced that as a young boy,

> The old world had still many years to go; all the years of my schooling up to almost eighteen it was daily prayers, Church, instruction, religious study and the Bible all the way. It was after years of adulthood that I began to understand one has to interpret all the teaching according to one's own understanding; the resulting vision or knowledge then becomes one's own.[248]

For Buffield he was much more content spiritually to pursue his own devotional practices—which included reading Muggeridge's spiritual books.

Elizabeth Russell felt similar emotions to Buffield. She had been reading an article in *The Sunday Post* by Muggeridge entitled, "The Crucifixion," which was later reprinted in *Jesus Rediscovered*. The article seemed to crystalize her thoughts and give meaning to actions she had taken.

> I have simply <u>had</u> to give up going to church, because I just couldn't find God there. And when I came out, I was so depressed + unhappy. It took ages for me to fight my way through this fog of Pauline Doctrine. You may know the sort of thing—what Paul thought Jesus meant when he said…or what he ought to have meant when he said…this plus the minister's own interpretation—so worried and depressed me that I couldn't find the Heavenly Father so simply exemplified by

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[247] John Buffield to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 December 1970, SC-4 22/15.

[248] Ibid.

> Christ's teaching. It is a great relief to find that a man with a clever penetrating mind like yours has had similar feelings.[249]

Charles Mylne likewise felt that institutional churches were unable to direct the people to God. That activity was best left to yourself. He had long respected Muggeridge for promoting this view, but after he read *Something Beautiful for God*, he was triggered to write a letter. Though Muggeridge would not join the Roman Catholic Church for more than a decade after meeting Mother Teresa, his interactions with her made him sympathetic to, and even to romanticize, the experience of corporate worship and the sense of belonging to a religious community.[250] Upon reading these sentiments of Muggeridge—this symbol of spiritual independence and iconoclasm towards religious institutions—Mylne wrote to make sure he stayed on the straight and narrow path of anti-churchianity:

> There is absolutely no need whatsoever to be envious of those who go to church. On the contrary, "going to church" reduces the Spirit of the living Christ to the level of a spectator sport for most people, though obviously not for such as dear Mother Teresa.

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[249] Elizabeth Russell to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 April 1967, SC-4 54/18.

[250] Muggeridge wrote: "What is more difficult to convey is the longing one feels to belong to the Church; the positive envy of those the bell calls to Mass. How often I have watched them, particularly in France—those extraordinary old women in black with their lined faces, clutching their prayer books; the children in their Sunday best, the muted fathers and bustling mothers with wisps of black veil about their heads, all making their way to Church on a Sunday morning. What joy to be one of their number! To kneel with them, advance to the alter with them, there, side by side, swallowing the Body of Christ. Then the plainsong, the flickering candles, the solemn familiar words, the acrid incense. Of all the purposes which draw people together—excitement, cupidity, curiosity, lechery, hatred—this alone, worship, makes them seem like a loving family; abolishing the conflicts and divisions of class and race and wealth and talent, as they fall on their knees before a Father in heaven and his incarnate Son; confess their sins, renew their hopes, find the strength to snatch another mortal day from the splendid prospect opened before them of eternity, their immortal dwelling-place." Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Walker and Company, 1984), 48-49.

> Indeed, it is rather touching to read of her adoration of the church but things are really in exactly the opposite perspective. The church should be following Mother Teresa. The Mother Teresas of this world are the true church and the hierarchy is worse than useless—it is deadening…
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> So it is that we leave churchianity altogether…All priestcraft, whether spiritual or political, must eventually go. To hand over the responsibility for your own spiritual welfare to a priest is as much a folly as to hand over your material welfare to a politician. In either case, you sell the birthright of your own integrity for a mess of most unreliable pottage.[251]

Mylne thought it was something of a poetic coincidence that, even though he was British, he wrote his letter of spiritual independence on the 4th of July.

Each of these three groups of fans illustrates the crisis of the institutional churches. Those who shared with Muggeridge their criticisms of the church—whether they remained members of not—demonstrate the growing resentment towards conventional religious authority. Even those who wrote to Muggeridge with the intent of defending the church reveal how fractured the churches were. There was no shared vision of what the church was or why it was worth preserving. Some defended it on theological grounds, but most did so on the grounds of personal experience. Yet, within that argument was the concession that not every Christian needed to be a member of a church. Muggeridge was a prime example of someone who could thrive spiritually without the tutelage of a religious institution. The assumption that the church was not necessary for everyone to have a healthy spiritual life, combined with the anti-institutional fervor of the sixties and seventies, produced a climate unfavorable to conventional sources of religious authority.

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[251] Charles Mylne to Malcolm Muggeridge, 4 July 1975, SC-4 97/1.

Muggeridge as a Spiritual Guide

It is true that the public perception of the church and clergy worsened considerably in the sixties and seventies. Statistical surveys and countless anecdotal evidence prove that the scope of conventional religious authority declined during those years. However, it would be a hasty generalization to suggest that this trend indelibly indicates declining religious belief. Grace Davie has shown that while "Europeans have ceased to participate in religious institutions," they did not necessarily shirk their "deep-seated religious inclinations."[252] This same observation may be extended to other Western societies, like Australia, New Zealand, and North America.

As we have seen, Muggeridge's fan mail offers some evidence to confirm these findings. It is nevertheless important to recognize that while people were growing distrustful of religious institutions in droves, they also found alternative religious authorities to take their place. This was the true for Christians of all three categories discussed above—defenders of institutional religion, critics who remained in their churches, and critics who left. Muggeridge could serve as a religious authority among many, or in some cases as the central source of spiritual guidance. After the Australian Eileen Harrington and her friends found themselves returning repeatedly to *Something Beautiful for God*, she casually remarked, "So you see all these miles away you are

[252] Grace Davie, "Europe: The Exception that Proves the Rules?" in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Peter L. Berger, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 68.

carrying out an apostolate you were not aware of."[253] She may have been onto something.

Through imbibing his books, writing him letters, and even receiving replies, Muggeridge became, essentially, a surrogate cleric. He was never ordained, did not conduct worship services, and he never administered any sacraments, but his books and personal correspondence performed many of the functions parishioners might expect from a minister. He provided spiritual counsel, served as a confessor, gave guidance in times of crises, and helped people grapple with questions of meaning and purpose. This adds a rich dimension to the themes explored in chapter one. Readers who saw Muggeridge as a kindred spirit whose spiritual development paralleled their own began to look to him as an authority for directing their spiritual life.

Muggeridge even took on a prophetic quality for many readers. Keith Parnell and Sarah O'Brien read his books like they were Biblical literature.[254] Jeffrey Johnson of South Carolina "reached a firm conclusion that your body dwells here on earth, but your mind is among the heavens viewing the true meaning of Christianity."[255] His minister at the local Southern Baptist Church simply could not compare. The Armenian-American Harold Gregory could not help but think of John the Baptist when he read Muggeridge because in his native tongue the word for "Baptist" (մկրտիչ/ mkrtich') was

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[253] Eileen Harrington to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 June 1976, SC-4 99/3.

[254] Keith Parnell to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. July 1974, SC-4 95/2. Sarah O'Brien to Malcolm Muggeridge, 4 July 1975, SC-4 97/1.

[255] Jeffrey Johnson to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. December 1980, SC-4 105/14.

onomatopoetic with Muggeridge.[256] If he was not prophet, then Muggeridge's readers at least insisted on placing him on par with other literary giants. Ernest Kelly linked Muggeridge with Soren Kierkegaard.[257] Where Diane Murphy saw Leo Tolstoy, Jeanne Kett saw Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[258] Kathy Williams thought of Saint Francis, and John Lisle was reminded of C. S. Lewis.[259] These attitudes do not appear to have been affected by age, social class, education, national origin or gender. People from a wide range of social settings looked to Muggeridge as a spiritual guide. Like the letters analyzed by Clarence Karr in his ground breaking study on fan mail, "It was the shared experiences, shared concerns, shared values, and shared hopes which linked them."[260] From the evidence of the fan letters, the common denominator that defined these shared experiences was mutual detachment from, or dissatisfaction for, institutional Christianity.

Much like the relationship between parishioners and ministers, readers often felt the impulse to write to Muggeridge in times of personal crisis, or when they were trying to make sense of tragedy that had befallen them.[261] Many of these readers were explicit that priests and the institutional churches did not help them, or that they had no desire to

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[256] Harold Gregory to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 July 1977, SC-4 101/6.

[257] Ernest Kelly to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 November 1969, SC-4 22/12.

[258] Jeanne Kett to Malcolm Muggeridge, 16 August 1976, SC-4 99/6.

[259] Kathy Williams to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 July 1975, SC-4 97/2.

[260] Clarence Karr, *Authors and Audiences: Popular Canadian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 156.

[261] For example, see the discussion of Methodist minister Samuel Arthurs, above.

see if they would. For instance, Jane Willey wrote a letter to Muggeridge after six months of trying to cope with the death of her son:

> I was utterly confident that he was being cared for and that my love and the love of God would see him through. He was born shortly after 28 weeks and weighed 2 lb. I was overjoyed to hear him cry and, when he was in the incubator, to see his tiny chest moving as he breathed. A couple hours later, when a nurse came to tell me that he was struggling and it would take a miracle to save him, I was still completely unafraid, because I knew God would give us that miracle and that my baby boy would grow and laugh and play in the sunshine. But he died.[262]

She had met with a priest for guidance but, according to her, "his philosophy appeared to be that life is like a piece of machinery—we are fed in at one end and come out at the other, with no divine interference." She would not accept that explanation, but she began to feel guilty anyway because her confidence in a loving God had been broken: "This worries me deeply as I can see it like a worm eating slowly away at my soul. I know that I must come to an understanding, as well as an acceptance, of what has happened, and I see no way. As a Christian, can you, please, help me?"[263] We do not know how, or if he did, help her, but the margins of the letter include a time stamp that a response had been sent.

Letters like these were relatively common, and their regularity speak to Muggeridge's bona fide status as a surrogate cleric. Fans often made prefatory remarks, such as "I have nobody I feel I can turn to"[264] or "of all living people I know or know of,

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[262] Jane Willey to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 September 1975, SC-4 97/6.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Ibid.

you are the one person who can answer my question, or so it seems."[265] But the plethora of rich examples are all so embedded in the raw emotions of personal experience that it is difficult to find representative examples. A daughter who asked Muggeridge to help her struggling father cope with an advanced case of aplastic anemia[266]; a man who was currently in an acute crisis of faith[267]; a woman whose husband had just died of brain hemorrhage[268]; an ex-convict with four children who was wrestling with alcoholism and guilt for having multiple extra-marital affairs[269]; an underemployed college graduate who was facing eviction with nowhere to turn.[270] Young or old, rich or poor, highly educated or not, people of all sorts of social settings and circumstances found in Muggeridge someone to provide them with spiritual guidance.

Sometimes this occurred once Muggeridge and a fan began to write back and forth, but most of the time it occurred through reading. Reading can be deeply formative, but we are not always privy to the internal struggles that people have as fans wrestle with challenging ideas. The unfortunate reality for the history of reading is that the vast majority of ordinary readers do not record their innermost thoughts on paper. That is why examples like Londoner George Althaus and a Canadian named Enid are so rich.

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[265] Edward Venner to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 July 1974, SC-4 95/2.

[266] Betty Payne Rosen to Malcolm Muggeridge, 7 June, 1976, SC-4 99/1.

[267] John Kerrington to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 May 1974, SC-4 94/18.

[268] M. J. Harrison to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 August 1980, SC-4 105/8.

[269] Alex [no surname] to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 January 1982, SC-4 109/2.

[270] Mary Hines to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 March 1972, SC-4 87/8.

They are two examples of readers who laid bare the struggle they experienced while they read.

Altaus had been reading *Honest to God* and Enid had worked her way through Ernst Renan's *Life of Jesus*. Right around the time Althaus has picked up Bishop Robinson's book, he had by chance read an article called, "I Believe," which Muggeridge would later include in *Jesus Rediscovered*: "Recently, I've been through a very rough time + in any case, I am a weak man, with a struggling weak faith. Then along the book by the Bishop of Woolwich, which affected + shattered me deeply…you see, your article appeared before the Bishop's book, + I put it aside. Then came the book 'Honest to God,' which I found very distressing + then happened to find your article again + re-read it. I must say, it has renewed my faith + helped me enormously."[271]

When Enid read *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* at her home in Victoria, British Columbia, she felt the impulse to buy three more copies: another for herself, one for her son-in-law, and one for a friend. Her excitement was because the book, in dramatic fashion, fundamentally altered religious convictions that she had held for fifty years. She had two defining moments in her spiritual development: the first was reading Ernst Renan's *Vie de Jesus* when she was pursuing a master's degree in French. The book shaped her so deeply, as she remembered it, because it was a fresh contrast to the rather fundamentalist Christian Student's Union that she was then active in. Additionally, the authenticity of reading it in the original language made it more meaningful.

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[271] Ibid.

The second was reading Muggeridge. By the time Muggeridge had written *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*, he had arrived at a more creedal understanding of Christianity, though he nevertheless stayed clear of any institutional religion. Muggeridge in fact used *Vie de Jesus* as his foil, his central criticism being that Renan's Jesus was humanized at the expense of his divinity. Muggeridge was thus quite hard on Renan, seeing *Vie de Jesus* as just a Gallicized version of D. F. Strauss' *Leben Jesu* that "amounted to a first rough draft of *Jesus Christ Superstar*."[272] Using it as his foil, Muggeridge placed miracles, the resurrection, and transcendence at the center of his argument. Enid's engagement with such voracious rejection of a book that had so centrally shaped her youth was jarring: "But—Renan? Oh, Malcolm, do I need to read him all over again, because I think you judge him harshly?" Renan was influential, but Muggeridge was a higher, and more current, authority:

> You must be right—you've read him more recently, and I must admit that Renan reconciled me to the point of view that Jesus was a wonderful human being, rather than, as you say, "part of the Christian godhead." But, when you say Renan's Jesus was a rough draft of Jesus Christ Superstar (that I loathe!) you make me realize that to me, as a young student, Renan's Jesus <u>was in effect</u> the 1924 equivalent of Jesus Christ Superstar! Odd, isn't it, and Renan, though dead, innocently spurred me on to the agnosticism that has plagued me ever since, though Renan (like Voltaire) denied being an atheist.
>
> And now I can't afford to be an agnostic any longer, so I will finish your book, dear Malcolm, and hope it will cure this ache in my heart for all the dear ones I have lost, I hope not forever.[273]

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[272] Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* (San Francisco: Harper, 1975), 4.

[273] Mary Hines to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 March 1972, SC-4 87/8.

Other intellectuals who saw Muggeridge as a spiritual guide followed a similar path as Enid did. Readers remembered their lives as if they were a plot in the template of a voyage and return.[274] The general narrative was as follows: the reader has a religious upbringing that was shaken by a negative interaction with religious institutions. Along the way s/he reads works critical of Christianity that spur a crisis of faith and subsequent departure from the church. Then, after coming into contact with Muggeridge's books, the reader reconsiders the reasons they had left Christianity in the first place, which led to a reconversion.

This was basically Enid's experience and it was how Hans-Peter Breuer described what happened to him, too. He was born in Germany before becoming a naturalized American citizen when he was nineteen. He was raised Roman Catholic, but had left the church during Vatican II. He entered into a "rationalist phase" during his college years after becoming interested in the life and work of Samuel Butler.[275] He went on to earn his PhD in English from Stanford University where he produced an annotated critical edition of *Erewhon* for his dissertation. He had a distinguished career that included stints at a number of universities, grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and several publications that are still citied as authorities today. At the time of his letter to Muggeridge, he was teaching in the English and Comparative Literature department at the University of Delaware.

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[274] See Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 87-106.

[275] Hans-Peter Breuer to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 April 1978, SC-4 103/5.

A few years into his time there, he came across *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* in a bookstore over winter break. As a Butler scholar, Breuer would have been familiar with *The Earnest Atheist*, which Muggeridge had written while in a "rationalist phase" of his own. Breuer had never thought about Muggeridge as a religious thinker, so Muggeridge's journalistic expose of the synoptic Gospels piqued his interest. Reading that book was a turning point in his life: "I bought it, and Christmas was quite different that year. I read your evaluation of Pascal, of Simone Weil; that led to reading them, your autobiography, and your essays on rediscovering Christ, on Mother Teresa."[276] These books had put him, as he described it, "back on to a wiser path." At the time of his letter, he was reading *Jesus: the Man Who Lives* for the third time

> with as much, even more, excitement as before; and I think you ought to know that. You have not provided just another book among the all too many, but one very much needed, one which has met, I believe not just in me, a great hunger: in dry moments I have read snatches from it to be inspirited, and so it has been for me a light that shines luminously in the general darkness of our confused time. Your retelling of an ancient story is so bracing because you tell it boldly, bluntly, and eloquently, without the evasions and qualifications with which others seek to make it "acceptable" to the sophisticated; and without yet another set of Germanic abstract arguments, but rather with the wisdom garnered from reflecting on a long career in the hurly-burly of the world. Stressing as you do so clearly, in counterpoint to the modern illusions to which we have all fallen victim, the blessed paradox at the heart of Christianity, you have helped me—rather faint of heart and all too skeptical—to see again the powerful alternative it is to all the predictable dead ends of modern thinking. How curious that what is considered the great enemy of human development and dignity turns out to be the only true justification and defense of either.[277]

[276] Ibid.

[277] Ibid.

Is it possible that for readers like Enid and Hans-Peter Breuer, they were able to look to Muggeridge as a spiritual authority only because they had experienced a formative upbringing in Christianity? Perhaps experiencing a "reconversion" in their forties (Breuer) and seventies (Enid) speaks less to Muggeridge's influence and more to the lasting impressions of their youth. That is possible, especially given the paucity of evidence available from a single fan letter. Then again, maybe Muggeridge was just as influential as these readers attest, with or without a formative religious upbringing. There are cases of readers without any religious background who looked to Muggeridge as a guru to guide them on a path of enlightenment. Glen Jones was a Canadian university student who struck up a correspondence with Muggeridge during his freshman year. He was not raised in a religious household and at the time of his first letter was a self-avowed agnostic. Like many first-semester freshmen away from home for the first time, college was a time of discovery and new experiences. During those first few months, he became uncertain about who he was and what his values were. Muggeridge had piqued his interest in a TV interview he had watched, and found himself agreeing with many of the things he heard Muggeridge saying. He wanted to learn more so over the next six months he systematically worked his way through Muggeridge's books, and looked for his television appearances whenever he could. His first letter was less a typical fan letter full of fawning praise, and more a request for prolonged guidance:

> I wonder then if it might be possible to somehow carry on some form of correspondence with you and by some chance to meet you should you ever find yourself within some reasonable distance of Toronto. (Perhaps sub-consciously I have a desire to become some kind of disciple…I have a number of specific

> questions and problems to ask, but, I thought I should first of all establish some communication with you.[278]

If his desire to make Muggeridge his spiritual counselor was subconscious, he evidently had reached a point of self-realization. Muggeridge sent out a reply a couple weeks later.[279] We do not have the letter carbon copy, but he did jot down a few brief notes in the margin of Glen's letter that he would be happy to correspond and meet with him the next time he was in the area.

These were not empty words. Two weeks after Muggeridge had sent his reply, Jones wrote back. In that short time, he had finished *Jesus Rediscovered* and blazed through both *Tread Softly because you Tread on my Jokes* and *Muggeridge Through the Microphone*. What he really wanted was some advice on what he should do with his life. He wanted to become a journalist, like Muggeridge, and asked for some help on deciding a major. But it is clear that Muggeridge's influence went much deeper than steering him towards a career choice. Imitation is a form of flattery, and Jones was imitating more than Muggeridge's profession: his entire worldview was undergoing a reconstitution.

> The most remarkable thing about reading you has been that you have challenged the validity of many institutions which I have always felt to be relatively invulnerable: the U. N., heart transplants, psychology, education (paradoxically I ask for advice on just this subject), liberalism, the franchise, birth control, and the notion of creating heaven on earth. But to my amazement I find myself in very great agreement with you. I don't mean to say that I am a different person but I have come to examine and criticize myself with the result that a large part of my philosophy of life has completely reversed itself.

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[278] Glen Jones to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 December 1969, SC-4 22/12.

[279] Ibid.

> As I sit here, I can't help but think of the many questions to ask the SAGE but I am sure that you must be occupied with other correspondence.[280]

Muggeridge sent a short reply two weeks later, including a pointed suggestion that Glen should study history.[281] It should not be underestimated the effect of writing personal replies. So much of the criticisms directed at institutions during the sixties and seventies had to do with a search for more "authentic" experiences. Developing a personal connection with a well-known critic, and then receiving thoughtful replies meant a great deal to people like Glen Jones.

It meant even more to meet in person. At some point between February and June (when Jones wrote his third letter), Muggeridge had followed through on his promise to meet him if he were in the Toronto area. By then he had read *Jesus Rediscovered* two more times and had begun to self-identify as a Christian. Significantly, he did not attend church—Muggeridge gave him all the spiritual guidance he needed: "I find that I am very often trying to apply, what are now, your 'teachings' to almost everything I do and think. If I am ever lucky enough to meet you again, I can't think of anything I would want to discuss more than religion and life."[282] Reading some books, exchanging a few letters, and meeting on at least one occasion in the course of six months had dramatically reshaped his self-identity.

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[280] Glen Jones to Malcolm Muggeridge, 22 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[281] Ibid. Muggeridge's reply: "Dear Glen, Thanks. The subjects, in my opinion, most useful to a journalist are history + modern languages. But, of course, in the end where writing's concerned you can either do it or you can't. And only experience can show. Keep in Touch."

[282] Glen Jones to Malcolm Muggeridge, 8 June 1970, SC-4 22/14.

It thus appears that age, religious upbringing, education, and gender were not significant factors in readers seeing Muggeridge as a spiritual guide. Neither does class appear to have made much of a significant impact. Jane Adams and Rupert Kendrick were in very different financial circumstances, but they both sent letters to Muggeridge seeking his guidance. Between the two of them, they had read almost every book he had published. Indeed, from what can be gleaned from their letters they only thing they had in common was their love of Muggeridge. She was a middle-aged woman who had recently divorced her husband of eighteen years. They had seven children together and the husband's lack of care was at the root of her abject poverty and the central cause for their separation: "hardship + struggling, not just myself, but the children, not being able to feed them, or cloth them, not being warm in winter, + shoes to wear, having to beg free school dinners, etc., as the one I married, had no interest in any of us, except for personal pleasure, he never provided food or clothing for them, never spoke to them, he never provided anything, as we were never able to buy anything, or go anywhere, all we had, was what friends gave us."[283] She was not begging for money. The description of her situation served as context to the central point of her letter: to explain how Muggeridge's books had helped her and to solicit spiritual advice. She had tried out Baptist churches, the Church of England, Methodism, and Roman Catholicism, but nothing seemed to work.

> I am still searching, I cannot find peace, or that I belong…I cannot find it in any of the ordered denominational Churches, they seem to be set against each other, by their set rules, you can go for years, and not learn anything, you just go, and

[283] Jane Adams to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 September 1973, SC-4 92/13.

> sing the same hymns, say the same prayers, and read the same lessons year after year. What I am looking for is a way of life, which is FREE, and not dominated, and ruled over.[284]

Muggeridge was her spiritual role model and, since he had no association with institutional religion, she thought he could help. She went on to ask him to write back with a description of what he did for spiritual devotion. The only record we have of his reply was a note in the marginalia stating "Finished 7.9.73."[285] Given what we know about Muggeridge's habits of responding to his fan mail, there is good reason to think that he probably honored her request.

Rupert Kendrick also wrote to Muggeridge asking him for advice for his spiritual development. But his search for meaning and belonging was not born out of the hardships of poverty and marital abandonment; his emerged from a sense of emptiness after achieving his career goals. He was a thirty-one-year-old solicitor, married to another lawyer, and had no kids. He had no financial problems, and wrote his letter while vacationing on a Rhine River cruise.

> Approximately 18 months ago, I became a partner in my firm—effectively the highest pinnacle that I can reach in private practice—and having for so many years, striven to reach that goal, I now find that I am asking myself—where next![286]

For the greater part of the last decade, he was entirely preoccupied with achieving his goals that when he finally reached them, he experienced a sensation of being a stranger unto himself. He could not shake the feeling that there was some greater purpose for him

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[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid.

[286] Rupert Kendrick to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 June 1980, SC-4 105/6.

to dedicate his energies to, rather than just representing "criminals in their defense, husbands and wives in dispute, businessmen taking money from other businessmen, etc."[287] *Things Past* and the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* made him believe Muggeridge could help, so he requested that they could meet and talk in person. The two-hour drive from Shefford to Park Cottage at Robertsbridge seemed like it would be worth the trip.

Western societies witnessed a radical religious transformation during the 1960s and 1970s. By all quantifiable measures, the scope of religious authority declined rapidly. This was a crucially important aspect of the cultural revolution of those years. Muggeridge, though a fresh convert to Christianity, remained just as opposed to religious institutions as he had for much of his career. While his anti-institutional position was treated with enmity in the 1950s and before, by the 1960s it resonated with many of his readers—most significantly self-identifying Christians. These readers expressed a strong dissatisfaction with their clergy and church bodies and, for any number of reasons, led to decreased attendance or even striking their names from the membership roster. Muggeridge's fan mail shows that conservatives, moderates, liberals, and radicals alike found reasons to leave institutional Christianity. Even those who wrote with the intention of defending the church did so without any unified vision of what the church was, or why people should remain within it. Moreover, the attempts the churches made to interact more effectively with a growing pluralism in society backfired by deepening divisions within the churches, which led to some to leave it in exchange for alternative expressions

[287] Ibid.

of Christian piety. As Christians left the church, and as their trust in the church and clergy declined, they did not necessarily reject their faith. And even those who maintained their faith did not continue in complete spiritual isolation. Many of Muggeridge's readers began to see him as a surrogate religious authority as they practiced their religion apart from any institution. Through his books and personal correspondence, he provided his readers with spiritual guidance. Yet, in that process, Muggeridge's readers placed him in a position to shape and influence their religious perspectives on a fundamental level, even to the point of directing how they understood the very future of the churches they had left and the destiny of the religion they practiced.

Chapter 4: The Religious Politics of Decline

There was an old man: Malcolm Muggeridge
Who seemed to belong to anotheridge
The age he was in
Was all sorrow & sin
And he blasted & damned it to buggeridge

- Thomas Putfield to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. December, 1980

A key pillar of Malcolm Muggeridge's intellectual development was his conviction that Christian churches in Britain and beyond were in a state of inexorable decline. Not only that, but Muggeridge promoted an informal and popularized version of the secularization thesis throughout many of his religious writings. These ideas were not lost on his readers, who would often use them to interpret their own lived experiences. The acceptance—and even conscious rejection—of religious decline shaped their identity as Christians. A small handful of readers outright denied that their churches were in a state decline. For the most part, however, readers took it for granted, and expressed a deep anxiety about the future of their religion. The social challenges facing their churches became harder to deny, but Muggeridge's his life and writings served as way readers came to terms with living in a secular society. This chapter seeks to build on recent attempts to historicize the secularization thesis by analyzing how it shaped the thoughts and actions of ordinary people during the 1960s and 1970s. Secularization should not be seen merely as a subject of religious history. This chapter will also seek to flesh out how, through the work of Malcolm Muggeridge, secularization became embedded in the cultural politics of decline that animated economic debate during the 1960s and 1970s. To this end, the chapter will first sketch out the context of decline in Britain after the

Second World War, paying special attention to Muggeridge's role in those general debates. It will then demonstrate how Muggeridge reframed a debate about Britain's supposed economic and political decline with then emerging discussions of secularization. Finally, it will demonstrate how readers received Muggeridge's arguments about religious decline, and how the specter of religious, cultural, social, political, and economic decline entered into their thinking.

Muggeridge and Decline in Cultural Politics

The question of decline is among the most important themes of British history since 1945. Especially after the Suez Crisis in 1956, cultural critics produced doomsday texts that analyzed the nature and cause of Britain's dire status, both domestically and internationally.[288] While a substantial body of scholarship has since undermined this interpretation of post-war Britain, it is nonetheless crucial for understanding Britain's intellectual and social climate during the 1960s and 1970s.[289] Whether or not decline was actually happening is perhaps less important for the present purposes than that

[288] Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 215-242. Classic examples include Andrew Shonfield's *British Economic Policy since the War* (London: Penguin Books, 1958); Michael Shank's *Stagnant Society* (London: Penguin Books, 1961). C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959). The centrality of Arthur Koestler's *Suicide of a Nation*? will be discussed below.

[289] See Robert Tombs, *The English and Their History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 765-879. George L. Bernstein, *The Myth of Decline: The Rise of Britain Since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2004); Jim Tomlinson was among the first to pioneer this interpretation. See his "Inventing 'Decline': The Falling behind of the British Economy in the Postwar Years," *The Economic History Review*, New Series 49, no. 4 (Nov. 1996): 731-757. A more thorough discussion of his can be found in *Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-war Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), but a more recent consideration is "Economic 'Decline' in Post-War Britain," *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000*, Paul Addison and Harriet Jones, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 164-179.

"declinism," as Jim Tomlinson has termed it, motivated action and was used as a pretext to shape the future of British society.[290] Several scholars have now demonstrated that decline narratives were made manifest in widely disparate fields. They not only shaped economic debate, but also shaped conversations about the environment, morality, the intellect, and politics in general.[291]

Guy Ortolano has shown that the effectiveness of declinism was partially because it "consisted of a malleable set of assumptions and anxieties that could be harnessed to competing—indeed, contradictory—ends." It could be summoned to critique Britain's economic and international status, its history, and political policy from virtually any perspective. He continues that it thus "may be better understood as a rhetorical weapon deployed by advocates of rival positions in the cultural politics of postwar Britain."[292] The "Two Cultures" controversy was one such manifestation of these cultural politics. F. R. Leavis and C. P. Snow both assumed decline, but they disagreed about its relative causes as well as its proper solution. Snow's technocratic liberalism envisioned scientific experts, technology, and industrial expansion as the vehicle for prosperity and, with it, the reversal of Britain's decline. On the other hand, Leavis sought to continue the Clerisy tradition of British intellectual history, which he believed would protect creativity from

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[290] Tomlinson, *Politics of Decline*, 2.

[291] Oliver Bennett, *Cultural Pessimism: Narratives of Decline in the Post Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 1.

[292] Guy Ortolano, "'Decline' as a Weapon in Cultural Politics," *Penultimate Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain*, edited by William Roger Louis (London: I. B. Taurus, 2005), 202.

"mass civilization."[293] In Ortolano's words, "the Rede and Richmond lectures provided the *occasion* and 'arts-versus-science' the *language*, for a dispute that was *political*."[294] This debate was just one expression of a larger social and cultural context where people in a variety of social settings were in a process of reassessing and redefining Britain's "past, present, and future." A number of groups—Marxists, Christians, Tories, and liberal-technocrats alike—vied for preference in their competing visions for Britain's future. Peter Mandler has seen the decades after the Suez Crisis as a crucial period in which growing individualism weakened the gravitational pull of a shared and monolithic "English National Character."[295] Society was simply becoming too diverse, and it was changing too quickly to give reliable credence to anything essential about English—or by extension British—national character.

Declinism was taken for granted and shaped cultural politics for decades. It originated on the political center-left, but it proved to be an attractive narrative regardless of ideological commitments. It was based primarily on two key premises. The first was that Britain's political status and economic vitality were each decaying before their very eyes. The rapid contraction of Britain's imperial possessions and the relatively stronger economic growth of other west European countries animated key texts like Andrew Shonfield's *British Economic Policy since the War* and Michael Shanks' *The Stagnant*

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[293] Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.

[294] Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy*, 24.

[295] Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy.* For the debate on "English National Character," see Mandler, *The English National Character*, 196 ff. See especially pp. 222-223.

Society.[296] The second key notion was that decline was deeply rooted in the structure of Britain's educational, political, economic, and social institutions. It was not just the effects of bad policies; it was a caused by the very "culture" of Britain. The BBC, Oxbridge, the Civil Service, and the ruling elite were accused of perpetuating the very characteristics that were causing decline in the first place.

But it was arguably Arthur Koestler's *Suicide of a Nation?* that crystalized the "What's Wrong with Britain?" genre best. It brought together an impressive list of Britain's most influential pundits that included not only Shonfield and Shanks, but also Cyril Connolly and Malcolm Muggeridge. First appearing in the July 1963 issue of *Encounter*, the articles were successful enough that they were published as an edited collection of essays the following year. Koestler's introduction summarized the intended thrust of the essays when he asserted "psychological factors and cultural attitudes" were the crux of Britain's economic problem. For the most part the essays extended C. P. Snow's arguments in *The Two Cultures*: only a robust investment in technology with scientific experts at the helm could save Britain from the mediocracy of its past national character, which impeded future progress by class divisions and incompetent leaders.

The generalization from these premises was that Britain was fundamentally ill equipped to prosper in the modern world, and that radical change was necessary. Declinism was extremely important rhetorically because it provided the rationale to make real and long-lasting changes on British society. The Robbins Report (1963), which

[296] Tomlinson, "Economic 'Decline' in Post-War Britain," 165.

recommended the immediate expansion of higher education throughout Britain, confirmed the ideological vision of commentators like Snow and Koestler who wished for a more professionalized society. Expanding access to education shaped the political platforms of Conservative and Labour governments alike. Student populations grew four-fold in the twenty-five years following the publication of Robbins Report. The number of teachers followed at roughly the same rate. This transformation of the universities was the result of a conscious attempt to create a more specialized, professional, and economically efficient population that could reverse Britain's decline.[297] Indeed, the economic platforms of Harold Wilson (1964-70, 1974-76) and Edward Heath (1970-74) may have articulated different diagnoses and remedies to Britain's problems, but they both assumed decline in their attempts to modernize the economy.[298] And Margaret Thatcher, whose leadership began just as the 1970s ended, likewise built her political platform on various versions of decline.[299]

Malcolm Muggeridge was recognized as central participant in these debates. Even in popular culture, he appeared as himself in the award-winning satire *I'm All Right, Jack* (1959), which poked fun at the ironies of economic decline. Decline, the film suggested, was caused chiefly by the greed of management and labor alike, each trying to find ways of extracting as much money as possible from the other. In some ways, the

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[297] A. H. Halsey, *The Decline of Donnish Dominion: The British Academic Professions in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 11.

[298] Tomlinson, "Economic 'Decline' in Post-War Britain," 167.

[299] Indeed, Martin Wiener's *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981) inspired and directly shaped the course of Thatcher's leadership.

film's argument that decline was at its heart a moral, and not technological or educational, problem anticipated the arguments that Muggeridge would make time and again over the next few decades. Like Koestler, Muggeridge assumed decline, but his contribution, "England, Whose England?" defined it in a way that was diametrically opposed to the general argument of *Suicide of a Nation?* That is why Koestler called it a "Blind Man's Bluff" that the reader was supposed to accept as a mere prelude to the more salient contributions of other commentators who, in fact, did offer solutions along the lines of Snow's technocratic liberalism. It would seem that the reason Koestler included Muggeridge's "attribution" to the collection at all (perhaps in addition to name recognition) was to serve as a foil.

For Muggeridge, however, economic decline was really a non-issue. As he saw it, Britain was actually in a state of unfettered affluence—really, the fruit of a robust economy—and it was that which he saw as part and parcel of Britain's decline. The real problem was a lack of moral fiber and a poverty of spirit. Perhaps Muggeridge sensed the demise of a shared "English Character" that accelerated during the 1960s when he said that there appeared to be "no correlation between word and deed, between the aspirations ostensibly entertained and what actually happens."[300] There was plenty of drive to do *something*, but whatever that something was lacked a common goal or real meaning. No amount of technological investment would magically solve the real problem at hand. Muggeridge resented everything from the proliferation of housing

[300] Malcolm Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" 31.

estates and the growing primacy of science to transformations in higher education and (ironically) the expanding influence of television. He ended his essay with a mock-benediction to illustrate the spiritual and moral decay of British society:

> The B.B.C. lifts up our hearts in the morning, and bids us good night in the evening. We wait for Godot, we shall have strip-tease wherever we go. Give us this day our *Daily Express*, each week our Dimbleby. God is mathematics, crieth our preacher. In the name of Algebra, the Son, Trigonometry, the Father, and Thermodynamics, the Holy Ghost, *Amen*.[301]

"England, Whose England?" shows how declinism could function "less as a shared *experience* than as a shared *resource*."[302] He used a different form of declinism to criticize precisely what Koestler hoped the essays would promote as the remedy to Britain's problems. In effect, what Muggeridge did was to make the cultural politics of decline, a topic that centered mostly on Britain's economy, to be about the religious dynamics of the early 1960s.

Indeed, during the 1960s newly emerging debates about the secularization of British society ran parallel to the culturally charged economic arguments of commentators like Snow, Koestler, and Muggeridge. The result is what might be termed the "religious politics of decline," whereby religious leaders, commentators, and parishioners alike wrestled with the causes and proper response to secularization. Of course, what exactly was meant by "secularization" was more often assumed than agreed upon. Even today the debate still rages as to whether the concept of "secularization" is

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[301] Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" 36.

[302] Malcolm Muggeridge, "England, Whose England? in *Suicide of a Nation?* Arthur Koestler, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 29-36. Ortolano, "'Decline' as a Weapon in Cultural Politics," 211.

an adequate category of analysis and, if so, its relative causes and proper chronology. A scholarly consensus has not yet been reached on the issue, and it is doubtful to happen any time soon. In fact, the lack of consensus and certainty actually helps us to reconsider not just whether secularization is right, but how it has been used, and how it has shaped scholarly and popular conversation. It was nevertheless a powerful idea that motivated individual action, institutional policy, and personal belief. For that reason historians have directed more attention towards historicizing the secularization thesis itself. They have made inroads into this question by paying attention to how people understood the notion of religious decline and, most importantly, how their thoughts and actions changed as a result. Subjecting religious decline to cultural analysis has yielded fruitful results for understanding the religious history of the 1960s and 1970s.

Hugh McLeod and Simon Green each have shown just how self-aware people were during the 1960s that they were witnessing a dramatic change in religious character of British society. Britain was no longer a definitively Christian society, and this change occurred very suddenly in the 1960s.[303] Ian Jones has demonstrated that fears about decline certainly shaped the "congregational mood" of parishioners in postwar Birmingham.[304] Sam Brewitt-Taylor offered an explanation why this was the case when

[303] McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 240 ff. See also Green, *The Passing of Protestant England*, 294. Alister Chapman has made the convincing case that the decline of empire and the rise in immigration were important factors for understanding the decline of Christian national identity. See "The International Context of Secularization in England: The End of Empire, Immigration, and the Decline of Christian National Identity, 1945-1970," *Journal of British Studies* 54 (January 2015): 163-189.

[304] Ian Jones, *The Local Church and Generational Change in Birmingham 1945-2000* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 52-72.

he argued "Britain's 'secular society' was not so much discovered as invented" by Christian clergy and then promulgated by the BBC's highbrow broadcasts between 1961 and 1964.[305] A close friend of Muggeridge's, Alec Vidler, was among a small group of Christians who began to think about British Christianity in terms of secularization as early as the 1940s.[306] This was a common assessment of Britain's spiritual vitality in the religious press, and was made widely popular when John Robinson published *Honest to God* in 1963. This general argument formed a two-way street with secular sociologists like Bryan Wilson and Alan Gilbert who advanced this interpretation in more academic circles.[307] Church leaders then acknowledged the authority of sociological theory, and depended on it as an objective fact as they wrestled with how to reinvigorate the church for a secular society.[308]

It is crucial to recognize that whether or not secularization—however it is formulated—was actually happening is a distinct, though not entirely separate, issue from how narratives of religious decline entered into the lived experience of historical actors

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[305] Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "The Invention of a 'Secular Society'? Christianity and the Sudden Appearance of Secularization Discourses in the British National Media, 1961-1964," *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 330.

[306] Brewitt-Taylor, "The Invention of a 'Secular Society'?" 335.

[307] Ibid., 336-337.

[308] Jeremy Morris, "Enemy Within? The Appeal of the Discipline of Sociology to Religious Professionals in Post-War Britain," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016): 177-200. Indeed, this is a phenomenon not just in Britain but across Western Europe as well. For instance, Chris Dols makes a similar argument about the role of the Dutch KASKI institute, which influenced how Catholics understood secularization between 1940 and 1970. See Chris Dols, "Of Religious Diseases and Sociological Laboratories: Towards a Transnational Anatomy of Catholic Secularisation Narratives in Western Europe, 1940-1970," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016): 107-132.

themselves. As Dominic Erdozain has argued, the secularization thesis became "an agent in the events it was asked to describe."[309] Just as declinism in economics was persuasive enough to shape the Heath, Wilson, and Thatcher governments—not to mention its role in fundamentally transforming education—declinism in the form of secularization also directed movements like evangelicalism and the policies of Church leaders.[310] This was not just the case with progressive theologians like John Robinson. Archbishop Arthur Ramsey (1961-1974) may have censured Robinson after *Honest to God*, but he took for granted that the Church was in a state of decline. It was this fear that motivated his support to revise the Church of England's liturgy for the first time in over three-hundred years.[311] Likewise, as Matthew Grimely has shown, the Wolfenden Report (1957) and the Church of England's changing position on homosexuality was a conscious reaction to accommodate, and stay relevant for, an increasingly secular society. Even though "this wider secularisation was perhaps more imagined than real" (by the late 1950s classic indicators of religiosity like Sunday attendance remained strong) it nevertheless "informed the clergy's decisions."[312]

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[309] Dominic Erdozain, "'Cause is not Quite What it Used to Be': The Return of Secularisation," *The English Historical Review* 127, no. 525 (2012): 378.

[310] For how secularization shaped evangelicalism, see Andrew Atherstone and John Maiden, "Anglican Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: Identities and Contexts," in *Evangelicalism and the Church of England in the Twentieth Century: Reform, Resistance, and Renewal*, edited by Andrew Atherstone and John Maiden (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 1-47.

[311] Peter Webster, *Archbishop Ramsay: The Shape of the Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 104-108.

[312] Matthew Grimley, "Law, Morality, and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954-1967," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 4 (October 2009): 740. Secularization also shaped the ministry of the evangelical preacher John Stott. See Chapman, "Secularisation and John R. W. Stott," 511.

Church officials were becoming increasingly aware of their declining authority in the public sphere and in response some groups within the church were ready and willing to recalibrate their social positions and religious practice. This is precisely what happened to the British Student Christian Movement (SCM) which, under the leadership of bishop Ambrose Reeves in 1962, "shed its 'religious' identity in favour of an emphasis on serving 'the secular world.'"[313] Secularization, in this context, could be viewed positively as a signal of God's providential will for religion in society.[314] In J. C. D. Clark's words, secularization was not necessarily "a process," but it could also be "a project…urged by some individuals who seek historical validation for a cause."[315]

In this way, we can see that debates about secularization in the 1960s possessed some of the same features as the cultural politics of decline. Like declinism, secularization also could be quite ambiguous. Did it refer to the fate of religion in the modern world generally? Or was it a specific threat to the future of institutional Christianity? What were its causes? Was it something to be welcomed and encouraged?

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[313] Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "From Religion to Revolution: Theologies of Secularisation in the British Student Christian Movement, 1963-1973," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66, no. 4 (October 2015): 792-811. See especially pp. 798 ff.

[314] Brewitt-Taylor, "From Religion to Revolution," 794.

[315] J. C. D. Clark, "Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'." *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012): 190. It should be noted that for Clark this statement is made in accusation of atheists and agnostic intellectuals who are, in effect, reading their own ideological perspective into the past. While that is true to an extent, the same observation should be extended to religious thinkers as well. For a discussion of this same phenomenon in a German context, see Thomas Mittmann, "The Lasting Impact of the 'Sociological Moment' on the Churches' Discourse of 'Secularization' in West Germany," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016): 157-176. See especially pp.160-167.

Could it be reversed? If so, would its reversal require a fundamental restructuring of the Church and its language? Or would the proper response be to retreat into the metaphorical cloister and avoid direct engagement with "the world"? How these questions were answered, and the solutions posed as result, gave secularization "a malleable set of assumptions and anxieties that could be harnessed to competing—indeed, contradictory—ends." The debate about religious decline was a debate about the "past, present, and future" of British Christianity. It acted as a "shared resource" that shaped the lived experience of people at all levels of British society. The "invention" of a secular society could thus produce significant effects. It could decrease the cultural authority of Christianity; it could influence a recalibration of the theological and social positions by church leaders; it could give rise to radical and counter-secularizing movements; and it could and did shape the thoughts and actions of ordinary rank-and-file Christians who accepted it as fact.[316]

In light of the foregoing discussion, "England, Whose England?" can be seen as a contribution to the cultural politics of decline *and* an inchoate expression of the religious politics of decline. The article was written and published before Muggeridge converted to Christianity, but the central point that Britain's biggest problem was its spiritual poverty would feature the most prominent theme of his theological output.[317] There is not sufficient space here to conduct a systematic analysis of Muggeridge's statements on

[316] This follows the argument made by Brewitt-Taylor, "The Invention of a Secular Society? 347-348.

[317] See Phillips, *Contesting the Moral High Ground*, 101 ff.

decline if only because they are so common. It was not just a theme in ominous titles such as *The End of Christendom* or "What Hope for the West?" that Muggeridge discussed various versions of decline. In *Jesus Rediscovered* Muggeridge admitted decline was "an absolute basic part of my thinking which governs all my feelings about the world that I live in."[318] He saw it as infecting all of modern society, and was caused by a laundry list of factors: materialism and affluence, the rise of individualism, sexual liberation and the church's softening tone on promiscuity, technology, and the culture of neophilia.

Yet, Muggeridge was not always consistent, and would change his emphasis and characterization of decline depending on his audience or who was asking the question. To take just one example: in an interview with Roy Trevivian Muggeridge made the claim that in modern society "the Christian religion and [moral] values no longer prevail; they no longer mean anything at all to ordinary people."[319] That characterization assumed a secular society in which Christians were a small remnant fighting for survival. Hardly two years later at the Nationwide Festival of Light, Muggeridge told his audience to display their faith "so that the relatively few people who are responsible for this moral breakdown of our society will know that they are pitted against, not just a few reactionary people, but all the people in this country who still love this Light."[320] So which was it?

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[318] Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*, 210.

[319] Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*, 213.

[320] John Capon, *…and There was Light: The Story of the Nationwide Festival of Light* (London: Lutterworth, 1972), 45. Quoted in Amy C. Whipple, "Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the 'Silent Majority'?" *Contemporary British History* 24, no. 3 (September 2010): 323.

Was society already secular and Christians a minority class? Or was it a small, but vocal group of people who were compromising the integrity of society's moral and religious majority? Whatever was the case, Muggeridge was at least consistent in his antipathy for the Churches' role in this two-faced dynamic. His anti-institutionalism and declinism were mutually reinforcing: the decline of Christianity was "inevitably involved in this death of our civilization" and it was "very doubtful whether institutional Christianity will be able to separate itself from the general process of decomposition."[321] Muggeridge seemed to see decline everywhere, and could argue it was caused by just about anything associated with cultural revolutions of the 1960s. For readers who accepted his arguments, it had the potential to create a great deal of confirmation bias—if the churches looked like they were changing at all to accommodate society, it was evidence of decline. Yet if the churches did nothing and shrunk in any way, it was yet more evidence for decline. The churches were placed in a lose-lose situation.

Muggeridge's statements here might at first glance look like he thought decline was inexorable. That would be consistent with many of the theories of secularization that inspired sociologists during the 1960s. And on one level he was. Just after *Jesus Rediscovered* was published, a fan from Adelaide, Australia, asked Muggeridge why he thought, "Nonconformist denominations are at their last gasp; that he church of England is sustained only by its connection with the State; and that the Roman Church, in the near future, could consist of all chiefs and no Indians."[322] Muggeridge's reply in the letter's

[321] Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*, 210.

[322] Keith Marshall to Malcolm Muggeridge, 13 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

margin stated that "figures of membership of various denominations valuable + show steady fall."[323] This would suggest that Muggeridge's conclusions about the unlikelihood that decline would reverse were at least partly based on simply looking at church attendance and membership statistics in 1970. Yet, according to Tomlinson and Ortolano, a key aspect of declinism in cultural politics was that most commentators framed the problem as one with a solution. How else otherwise could it used as a "weapon" to promote particular political and economic programs from particular ideological perspectives? If Muggeridge had sounded the death knell on the future of institutional Christianity without any reasonable alternative for his readers, he would not have been very persuasive in the religious politics of decline we have been considering. Muggeridge was known for his pessimism. This was especially the case when we consider his remarks about institutional Christianity explored in the previous chapter. Muggeridge's solution to the problem of religious decline was to define one's life of faith apart from both the institutional church and from secular society. The devotional practices he exhibited through his religious works—private reading, mystical contemplation of beauty and poverty, giving alms to the poor—were all safeguarded against decaying religious institutions.

In another way, fans thought Muggeridge's late-life conversion was itself a counterpoint to narratives of religious decline. Muggeridge's conversion to Christianity was public and it occurred at precisely the same time and in the same press mediums that

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[323] Marshall to Muggeridge, 13 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

"invented" the idea that Britain was a secular society. Thus, just as declinism in economics functioned as a rhetorical tool towards effecting particular political platforms, Muggeridge's preoccupation with religious decline could inspire and confirm certain behaviors, attitudes, and practices *independent* of institutional Christianity.

Readers and the Reception of Decline

But how did Muggeridge's readers interact with his statements about decline? Did they care all that much? Or was religious decline, like the question of the loss of English national character, something that was possibly just the preoccupation of intellectual elites, politicians, and the media?[324] The importance of religious decline to rank-and-file Christians is demonstrated by the sheer volume of fans wrote to Muggeridge about it. Even though Muggeridge's statements about decline were largely made in response to the British context, his readers from other "Western" societies nevertheless were experiencing many of the same things. The question of religious decline had high stakes. Believing that churches were nearing their doom could significantly influence how people thought about and behaved concerning them. We have seen that at an institutional level the churches made conscious efforts to secure their continued existence in a society they believed was essentially secular. Whether by adjusting worship practices and the prayer book (Ramsay), by promoting an invigorated evangelicalism (Stott), or by abolishing theological language altogether (Robinson), there certainly was no lack of trying to address the challenges of a secular society, whether

[324] This question follows Peter Mandler, *The English National Character*, 228.

invented or not.[325] Through reading Muggeridge, these issues came to occupy the thoughts and concerns of parishioners regardless of class, sex, occupation, or geographic location. Decline became everyone's problem, and could even act as an agent of change.

The fact that declinism in religion was a rhetorical tool is demonstrated by the fact that at least a few of Muggeridge's readers only learned about it once they picked up writings, which they then applied to their own lived experience. Elfrida Poxon is a good example of this. She was the wife of a butcher in the industrial city of Walsall, UK. Her letter was sent in 1970 after seven years of wrestling with how to understand the religious change happing around her. She felt that her church in a Birmingham suburb "grew visibly smaller after 'Honest to God'" and that financially it was "in the red." Her experience was quite similar, then, to the subjects of Ian Jones' excellent study on generational change in Birmingham.[326] Reference to 1963 and the publication of *Honest to God* corresponds to both Callum Brown's and Arthur Marwick's dating for the onset of rapid cultural and religious transformation, as well as Hugh McLeod's emphasis on Bishop Robinson's text for shaping this period.[327] At the same time, she did not have the benefit of historical perspective, sophisticated theory, or creative methodology. What she had was a book Malcolm Muggeridge wrote. It was only after reading it that these two examples were cast into a narrative of decline:

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[325] See also Machin, *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 175-215. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, 507-671.

[326] Jones, *The Local Church and Generational Change*, 62-72.

[327] Marwick, *The Sixties*, 7. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 84-86.

> It wasn't until I read the book "Jesus Rediscovered" by Malcolm Muggeridge that I saw what I knew in print. I could feel the various pressures within my Church, and throughout society as a whole, but couldn't place them. If I could write, I would say exactly what he says. I don't think a day goes by that I don't come across a problem, find what he says about it in one or other of his books—in his own "dry" way.[328]

Poxon is an example of readers who may have had a nebulous feeling that religious culture was changing, witnessed declining attendance and membership in their churches, or perhaps encountered first-hand in their day-to-day experience an increased ambivalence towards Christianity. Those feelings were widespread among Christians who, like Poxon, remained active members of their churches amidst religious change. But personal anecdotal evidence does not prove macroscopic changes in society. What Muggeridge did for many readers was to offer them a broader narrative of decline in which they voluntarily situated their personal experiences. This act could prove profound in shaping their religious identity within a society they now accepted as secular. Muggeridge accomplished this for the same reasons he was able to crystalize the thoughts of so many readers' religious experiences, and by the same authority that made him a surrogate cleric. His influence was not just in putting into words their own experiences—it was giving them the categories through which to select and attribute meaning to past experiences. Even some ministers used him this way, as they tried to figure out just what to do for their parishioners amidst cultural and religious change. The Church of England cleric Valentine Fletcher told Muggeridge that his arguments about the church's decline

[328] Elfrida Poxon to Malcolm Muggeridge, 13 September 1970, Muggeridge Papers, SC-4 22/15.

was "of considerable value" as he tried to understand "what every kind of person feels about the obvious malaise in the CofE today."[329]

However, some readers disagreed with Muggeridge's characterization altogether. As might be expected, the majority of this group was made up of active church members and should be seen as a running parallel to those discussed in the previous chapter who criticized Muggeridge's anti-institutionalism. They made up about 17% of the letters analyzed for this chapter. Most of them were Church of England (6%), though a few were Roman Catholic (3%) and Methodist (~1%). The remaining 7% either referred to their church in general terms, or did not mention it at all. These readers included those who tried to refute Muggeridge's claims and those who outright denied religious decline. It also included those readers who recognized that society were changing, but who insisted religious transformation did not pose a problem to the health of institutional Christianity.

What is rather telling about these readers participation in the religious politics of decline is just how much they relied on anecdotal evidence. Godfrey Clark thought Muggeridge was peddling a "tired cliché about near empty Churches."[330] While this in some ways anticipated in undeveloped form Robin Gill's *The Myth of the Empty Churches*, Clark was not basing his argument on the systematic analysis of church attendance statistics in light of overly zealous church-building campaigns.[331] Rather,

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[329] Valentine Fletcher to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 January 1966, SC-4 50/3.

[330] Godfrey Clark to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. February 1966, SC-4 50/7.

[331] Robin Gill, *The "Empty" Church Revisited* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003).

Clark reached his conclusion by personally attending eight different churches in the Home Counties at various times over the previous thirty years: Allhallows, North Greenford; Ealing, Twickenham, Richmond, Shanklin, Brighton, Eastbourne, and Folkestone. Each of these he found "well filled," and it made him wonder: "Possibly my experience is a little wider than yours in this respect?"[332] Actually, Clark's experience was quite narrow given the thousands of churches across Britain, but it was nevertheless enough in his own mind to contradict the suggestion religion was declining. Likewise, M. C. Forman from Derby claimed, "I have never found 'half- empty' churches full of middle class elderly females" Muggeridge had described.[333] And S. D. M. Horner of Farnham wrote, "I should be interested to know where the empty churches are of which you write. Those I know here + elsewhere are by no means empty."[334] The only possible truth in light of these personal findings was that Muggeridge's views were either "born of ignorance" or based upon "a great deal of prejudice and arrogance."[335] If only he would see things for himself, he would change his mind. Charles Blackburn was an Anglican cleric and implored Muggeridge: "come and spend a couple of days in this Diocese, and I would take you round to show you evidence that the Church is not in the advanced state of decay, nor is a 'ramshackle institution'."[336]

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[332] Ibid. SC-4, 50/7.

[333] M. C. Forman to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 February 1966, SC-4 50/5.

[334] S. D. M. Horner to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 February 1966, SC-4 50/5.

[335] Charles Blackburn to Malcolm Muggeridge, 7 February 1966, SC-4 50/6.

[336] Ibid. SC-4 50/6.

It was very possible that readers like Forman, Horner, and Blackburn attended churches that really did not witness considerable decline at the time of their letters. And it was likely that Elfrida Poxon did. The decline of institutional Christianity was a real trend in the 1960s and 1970s, but it varied in speed and effect from church to church, and likely from region to region, too. On a personal level, however, anecdotal evidence ultimately rests on unreliable epistemological grounds to assert or deny religious decline at the societal level. Nevertheless, the act of writing a letter to affirm, refute, or deny decline points to how the threat of decline deeply unsettled Christians whose identity was embedded in the continued health of their church. In a way, aggressive denial of declinist narratives, even if justified at a local level, is the exception that proves the rule: narratives of religious decline served as potent rhetorical devices that sometimes acted independently of the changing religions dynamics it purported to describe. But that did not mean they were any less effective to shape the lived experience of those who imbibed them.

Decline narratives were therefore political because they could be used by various parties to shape belief and action. Some readers were perceptive enough to notice this and write a letter to call out Muggeridge for it. To Timothy Deniger, the commentary of decline said more about a flaw in Muggeridge's character than actually reflecting a social reality:

> In a curious way, The Third Testament was more a portrait of you than of any of the six men described, and not only because in selecting whom you did to you told us about yourself. Beyond that, your frequent "editorializing," via asides and comments upon the current state of our civilization, added up to a surprisingly clear portrait of yourself and your world view.

> In a sense, The Third Testament is a jeremiad, and, as such, is says more about you than about what you purport to describe. The overwhelming effect was of a man embittered, disillusioned, and quite thoroughly committed to a grim, pessimistic concept of human life. I feel for you—you do not seem a happy man, and that is unfortunate.[337]

He thought Muggeridge was peddling the same narrative as "the media, the governments, [and] the religious establishments." This would only serve to foster a pessimistic outlook on life that that was neither helpful nor true. What emerges from Deniger's letter is a philosophy of life that one's vision of the world shapes reality around it, and for that reason, pessimistic narratives of decline could act as self-fulfilling prophecies. Though Deniger was as much a participant in the religious politics of decline by his personal attacks against Muggeridge, he is nevertheless quite self-aware of how narratives of decline could act as agents in shaping one's lived experience.

The majority of Muggeridge's readers were not quite as percipient. Muggeridge simply confirmed what they already took for granted. "Nobody would deny," wrote the Anglican David Cooper in 1966, "that the majority of our countrymen are to a large extent ignorant of and indifferent to the Christian message, whether proclaimed by the Church of England or any other branch of Christ's Church."[338] Even though the main thrust of Cooper's letter was to argue that the church would survive, it is significant that he assumed British society was secular and unlikely to reverse. This was only a few years after Britain's s society was "invented" as secular. Cooper was a lay reader in his

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[337] Timothy Deniger to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 March 1982, SC-4 109/8.

[338] David Cooper to Malcolm Muggeridge, 10 February 1966, SC-4 50/6.

Hatfield church, so perhaps he was in a better position than others to notice the downward statistical turn. Yet while traditional markers of religiosity declined at an accelerated rate after 1963, Cooper's statement was really a conclusion about a revolution that was then only beginning to happen. Can we explain his response by interpreting it in light of classic theories of secularization that religious decline was an inevitable facet of modernity? A better explanation, in the words of Hugh McLeod, is that "the 1960s provided the social context in which ideas which had previously been relatively esoteric could gain a mass audience."[339] It was this context in which Muggeridge's long-held anti-institutionalism gained a wider audience, and it is this same context in which his popularized secularization thesis fell on fertile ground.

If Muggeridge's readers accepted as a matter of fact that society was secular, or at least in a rapid process of religious decline, it invites the question of what caused it. As we have seen, Muggeridge's discussion of religious decline was very much informed by his participation in the cultural politics of decline. Even though Muggeridge was inconsistent when he discussed its causes, religious decline nevertheless was a key pillar of his religious thought. And like economic declinism for Snow or Koestler, religious decline was an important resource in Muggeridge's criticisms of institutional Christianity. Of course, Christianity really was experiencing a crisis during and after the 1960s, but as recent scholarship has demonstrated, the various ways that popularized narratives of decline (i.e. secularization) shaped individual identities and behaviors is

[339] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 16.

crucial to understanding how that religious change occurred. Secularization may not be entirely reliable as a lens through which to interpret religious change, but it is an essential factor for understanding the lived experience of historical agents themselves.

Muggeridge's readers had a wide range of explanations for the decline of religion in Western societies. They can be summed up in four general categories, all of which Muggeridge promoted at one time or another. They include the influence of permissiveness in society, materialism and affluence, the churches themselves, and the influence of technology. Like Muggeridge, readers thus saw the causes of decline as both intrinsic to the churches themselves, as well as created by external pressures from society. Some readers conflated both while others emphasized one cause more than others. Even if readers understanding of religious decline was shaped by the clergy, media, or sociologists—and for many it likely was—they were nevertheless shaped by Muggeridge's presentation of it. By writing letters to him about arguments he had written, their understanding of decline interacted with the framework that Muggeridge provided.

Scholars may disagree about the timing, causes, chief agents, and secularizing effects of the permissiveness in society, but Muggeridge's readers were certain it explained why religion was undergoing a fundamental transformation.[340] Fans made countless passing references to the "morally sick society,"[341] their "sex-crazed and

[340] For a discussion of this debate, see Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain, 1963-1967," *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (June 2017): 519-524.

[341] Bethyl Keiner to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 October 1970, SC-4 22/15.

greedy"[342] culture, and "moral degradation."[343] There appears to be no particular cluster of years where these references spiked, which suggests some degree of continuity in the belief that permissive society was at the root of religious decline. Richard Jones of Hull described this sentiment most plainly in 1966 when he said,

> the fact that the number of adherents to the Church is diminishing year by year is surely not an indication of the failure of the Church, but a sign of the change in moral and ethical attitudes over the past century...Christianity, if truly preached, is virtually bound to have fewer and fewer believers, simply because the civilised world today is searching for a more immediately comfortable credo.[344]

Though Ian Jones has made a convincing case for the presence of generational change in six historic Birmingham churches, age does not appear to have been a distinguishing factor for the ideological perspectives of Muggeridge's readers. Ian Miller was a twenty-five year old Londoner who had spent all of his teenage years in the 1960s. He read the *Chronicles of Wasted Time* and wrote a letter to Muggeridge relating what he thought was the most serious problem of his generation: its "unrestricted sexual adventures."[345] He continued:

> The tragedy of modern life is that moral standards are being discarded and nothing is being put in their place. The absence of any authoritative moral standard is the primary cause of so many young lives being shipwrecked. We cannot realise our true selves, I believe, apart from moral standards. Moral ideas are not invented like a political theory, by man. They are the foundation stones of the world God has made. This is a moral universe. Moral laws belong to the nature of things….Without such a standard man is like a rudderless ship with the engines running: He has drive without direction.

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[342] Ken Thompson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[343] F. Goodwin to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1 February 1966, SC-4 50/5.

[344] Richard Jones to Malcolm Muggeridge, 29 January 1966, SC-4 50/4.

[345] Ian Miller to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 July 1973, SC-4 92/8.

On his account, this was the state of modern society, and explains "much modern apostasy" from Christianity. Perhaps it was youthful optimism, but Miller thought that it was possible for society to reorient itself onto a moral path.

Tim Simpson would have found much to agree with Miller about, but his tone was decidedly more pessimistic. To him, permissiveness was irreversible. He was a seventy-year old man from a London suburb who had suffered an eye injury from bomb shrapnel during the Battle of Britain. He had to hold up his eyelids with one hand as he wrote a fan letter with the other to ask,

> Well, Malcolm, what do you think of our poor old world today? All honesty, kindness, courtesy, morality, love of God and neighbour, willingness to work and earn our daily bread, etc. seems to be slowly dying out, and being replaced by greed, violence, law-breaking, sexual filth for entertainment, and getting money by any means seems to be growing.[346]

For others permissive society was so bad that it could hardly get much worse. In his pessimism, Lenny Ransond quoted Jimmy Porter from *Look Back in Anger* when he thought there really were "no great causes anymore…All that is left to defend is the indefensible."[347] He was a newlywed who feared what kind of world his future children would grow up in.

> I envy people of your generation who have been able to bring up their children in an atmosphere which contained at least a degree of moral stability. Sometimes one dreads the prospect of having children at all, but I suppose that is cowardly. However, it is difficult to reject the new attitudes without appearing to be a crank and I fear that it will be made more and more difficult as time goes by. If I had a daughter I wouldn't want her to wear "sexy" clothes and make-up at the age of

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[346] Tim Simpson to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. March 1978, SC-4 103/4.

[347] Lenny Ransond to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 December 1972, SC-4 90/13.

> twelve, but when other kids have these things it must be hard to deny them to one's own without making them feel left out or different…We are told there is more freedom today, but it seems to me that the pressures to make us conform are as great as ever. All that has changed is the pattern that we are expected to conform to.[348]

It was quite common to see materialism and permissiveness as part of the same problem. Muggeridge's readers felt that there was almost a necessary give-and-take when it came to material improvement and moral integrity. The pursuit of economic growth was both a cause and "symptom of the failings of the Western world."[349]

Western societies enjoyed an unprecedented affluence and economic growth, despite declinist narratives of some cultural critics. This affluence included the creation of a youth culture with more disposable income than any generation before them. Statistically, they began to move away from Church youth groups to spend their time at other activities, like attending dance halls or meeting at coffee shops.[350] However, we should be careful not to interpret statistical trends too literally. Fewer kids going to Bible camp does not necessarily mean fewer Bible-believing youth. Donald Fallon from Birmingham is a good illustration of this. In fact, he had read some of Muggeridge's books enough times "to quote large chunks from memory," and he admitted not only to adopting Muggeridge's views as his own, but also to spreading them at every opportunity.[351] He even followed Muggeridge's example in his interaction with

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[348] Ibid. SC-4 90/13.

[349] Ibid. SC-4 90/13.

[350] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 103-107.

[351] Donald Fallon to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 June 1973, SC-4 92/5.

churches: "I am not a church member for the same reasons you have given." Fallon was in the midst of a Pauline struggle with Muggeridge's views on permissiveness, largely because he was part of it.

> Alas, although you have pinpointed the sickness of the current way of life, stated the cause and prescribed the only true medicine, I feel so inadequate, + so unable to take the medicine so urgently needed. At the moment, I feel like the motorist driving along the motorway and fast approaching...the city of destruction. He sees the true way but cannot stop, reverse or turn around. What is he to do?...I feel so ineffectual and cannot see how to escape from the boring, spiritless, materialistic and selfish way of life that I have lived and still lead.[352]

Despite examples like Fallon, the perception that youth were losing their religion *en masse* was more real than imagined, and it was a concern to Muggeridge's readers. Another exception, Ramsay Lingard was a Scottish evangelical who identified as "one of the countless youths of Britain who would like to see a spiritual awakening."[353] It just did not seem likely to him because of the neophilia so pervasive in society. The young simply liked to do other things: "I note with disappointment, if not dismay," he continued, that "youth in Britain today tend to shrink away or laugh, when suggestions, such as group bible readings, are put forward either in the community or at home."[354]

Hemorrhaging church attendance combined with the interpretive lens of the secularization thesis proved effective motivation for Church officials to make conscious changes to their theology and practice. Yet, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, many of Muggeridge's conservative readers left their churches for precisely those

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[352] Ibid., SC-4 92/5.

[353] Ramsay Lingard to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 June 1980, SC-4 105/6.

[354] Ibid., SC-4 105/6.

reasons. In a similar manner, they could also interpret the actions of their churches as evidence of religious decline. An important difference is that most of the readers who were preoccupied with decline in the churches remained members. At least from their letters, they do not indicate a desire or intention to leave their churches. Their discontent was expressed as anxious complaint, almost as if there was no other option outside of the churches. Margaret Vaughn was a Catholic from Edinburgh. She claimed, "Many of us 'feel in our bones' that things are wrong, but don't know how to put our feelings into words. This is a terrible time for the Church, + much prayer is needed...One of the deepest sorrows, to us Catholics, is that it is our own Priests who are betraying us."[355] It was not just conservative Catholics who were not favorable to the developments after Vatican II who felt "betrayed." Joan Halcomb consoled herself by thinking "the Church of England and Christianity are not the same thing." Because the church had compromised with the "affluent society" they inhabited, it was "no wonder" the church "was like a sinking ship."[356]

Readers followed Muggeridge in their tendency to conflate religious decline with seemingly every other version of declinism that animated the cultural politics of postwar Britain. A common theme in this sense was interpreting the kind of technocratic society promoted by Snow in *The Two Cultures* as evidence of a religious crisis, just as Muggeridge had in "England, Whose England." This was true whether inside the

[355] Margaret Vaughn to Malcolm Muggeridge, 10 June 1966, SC-4 51/8.

[356] Joan Halcomb to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 February 1966, SC-4 50/5.

churches or not. It was this that led the twenty-four year old Roman Catholic John Heywood to be "horrified at the way the mass media machine is being used to influence the minds of my generation."[357] Technology giveth and technology taketh away, and Muggeridge's readers thought it took more than it gave. According to F. Goodwin Christianity was declining mostly because of the BBC with "its too great output of violence, sex, blasphemy, and so-called satire."[358] All of this amounted to several readers echoing Thomas Carlyle and conclude that the "swift technological development has outstripped our rate of spiritual growth."[359]

It was for that reason that some readers could thank Muggeridge for his rejection of the scientific culture promoted by Snow. Peter Harris was one such example. He was a twenty-five year old from the Brierley, a town in the West Midlands with only a few thousand inhabitants. He had been following Muggeridge since he converted to Christianity and saw him as "a wise and fatherly figure." He looked to Muggeridge as one who would "put to silence and shame those amongst us who advocate the 'blessings' of the 20th Century science and technology,--the so-called 'age of enlightenment,'—with its space labs, computers, 'higher criticism,' vacuum-packed potatoes…and propaganda,--all boasting of intellectualism."[360] It was primarily a scientific culture that "polluted the

[357] John Heywood to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 August 1973, SC-4 92/9.

[358] F. Goodwin to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1 February 1966, SC-4 50/5.

[359] Mary Crewe to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 May 1978, SC-4 103/8.

[360] Peter Harris to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 July 1976, SC-4 99/5.

mental and moral atmosphere in which our society somehow manages to continue."[361] The only solution Harris thought would work would be a return to spiritual vitality, which he believed Muggeridge's books could accomplish. Kathleen Wyndham also thought that science and technology were outpacing society's spiritual development, but she could not put much hope in the churches because they were "bogged down in outworn dogma; + have all but lost real contact with the people."[362] Christianity needed to break free from the churches if it wanted to survive secularization.

We have seen that readers accepted declinism, and were shaped by Muggeridge's presentation of it throughout his works. But what kind of effect did the acceptance of decline have? As an interesting point of comparison, all of these themes (affluence, neophilia, sexual liberation, technology, the church's themselves) have been explored thoroughly in current historiography. We can thus say that, for the most part, Muggeridge's readers—and likely most thinking people by extension—were generally aware of all the categories scholars today point to as characterizing or causing the religious dynamics of the 1960s and 1970s. The important difference, however, is their interpretation of those categories.

Understanding cause is only part of the equation, however. Their desire to understand the cause of religious decline reflected their deep concerns about its future implications. Accepting religious decline as a foregone conclusion prompted emotionally

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[361] Ibid., SC-4 99/5.

[362] Kathleen Wyndham to Malcolm Muggeridge, 16 May 1967, SC-4 54/28.

varied and complex responses from Muggeridge's readers. Their letters included sentiments of ambivalence, victimization, forlorn isolation, and pessimism that might be described as a kind of *sehnsucht*, an intense feeling of detachment and unfulfilled idealism.[363] Muggeridge's readers historicized their own present by assuming that the "modern world" consisted of various essential attributes that included, and was explained by, the teleology of religious decline. Indeed, Muggeridge's readers who began to believe that to be modern was to be secular began to feel as if they were foreigners in the world they inhabited. It was this notion, that the logic of history was one of increasing secularity, which inspired Bruce Heffner to conclude that Christians had become "strangers in a strange land."[364] Likewise Mariam Commell sympathized with Muggeridge when she said, "I know what you mean when you say you feel like a visitor here. I feel the same way now."[365] This feeling of displacement could provoke quite a pessimistic outlook on life: John Casella was still young by all accounts, but he admitted, "I am now thirty years old, and for the last ten years, I have felt increasingly alone in this tottering, meaningless world that we have created."[366] *Sehnsucht* applied to Christianity

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[363] For a discussion of *sehnsucht*, see Susanne Scheibe, Alexandra B. Freund, and Paul B. Baltes, "Toward a Developmental Psychology of *Sehnsucht* (Life Longings): The Optimal (Utopian) Life," *Developmental Psychology* 43, no. 3 (2007): 778-795. According to Scheibe et al there are six key characteristics of *sehnsucht*. They include "(a) utopian (unattainable) conceptions of ideal development; (b) a sense of incompleteness and imperfection of life; (c) a conjoint focus on the personal past, present, and future (tritime focus); (d) ambivalent emotions; (e) a sense of life reflection and evaluation; and (f) richness in symbolic meaning." Muggeridge's readers displayed all of these traits, though the most important ones for the present discussion include the first three listed.

[364] Bruce Heffner to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. August 1981, SC-4 107/16.

[365] Mariam Commell to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 July 1981, SC-4 107/14.

[366] John Casella to Malcolm Muggeridge, 22 June 1971, SC-4 81/19.

was distinctly external in the sense that the shared experience of these readers was nebulously caused by forces outside of themselves that prevented an alternative state—in this case, where one's personal faith did not exist in a state of decline. It was thus not the same as those readers in previous chapters who wrote to Muggeridge for help with their struggles of self-doubt or complained about something they did not like about their churches. Readers preoccupied with religious decline and living in a secular society were distinct in that they cast their feelings of incompleteness and displacement within historical perspective.

This helps to explain the reading experience of R. J. Russell, a young high school teacher in a Sydney suburb. Muggeridge's books made her feel increasingly detached from "the world." She wrote her letter sometime in 1976, several years after Australia's declining church attendance began to accelerate.[367] The relative secularity of her students created a deep sense of pessimism about herself and her future: "I sometimes see myself, at only 32, as one of the last group of tourists through this life who was still able to capture, before the evening gloom of materialism, pleasure, and sensuality, a glimpse of the edifice unseen."[368] There is here a forlorn sense that there was a missed opportunity for spiritual renewal, and that the only thing left to do was accept that modern society was now at the twilight of faith. Marie Webster of Newcastle on Tyne had a similar

[367] See David Hilliard, "Australia: Towards Secularisation and One Step Back," in *Secularisation in the Christian World*, Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape, ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 75-92. There were regional differences throughout Australia, but Hilliard argues that religious decline accelerated everywhere after 1965, and especially after 1970.

[368] R. J. Russell to Malcolm Muggeridge, ca. November 1976, SC-4 99/15.

sentiment after reading four of Muggeridge's books: "Jesus and his everlasting love come down to Earth on the winds of morning, alas so soon to be lost in the working day, engulfed in the roar of the traffic, the petrol fumes and the confusion. Sometimes at the end of the day all that is left of the beautiful vision of the morning is a bleak emptiness, a yawning chasm of despair."[369]

The language may come across as somewhat histrionic, but there is little reason to think it was exaggerated in their own minds. What reason would they have for admitting such emotional turmoil in a private letter, if it was not genuine? Practicing a hermeneutics of suspicion can be useful to any historical interpretation, but it would not be accurate to conclude that these letters were little more than facile attempts to seek attention from a minor celebrity. A handful of melodramatic letters might be written off as anomalies. Hundreds suggest a plot. Together they indicate the reality of an authentic social phenomenon during the 1960s and 1970s that cannot be explained solely by class, gender, or even religious denomination. The threat of religious decline created real anxieties, produced actual fears, and inspired reaction in the form of letter writing to one they felt understood what they were experiencing.

That said, some of fans were feverish in their concern of what religious decline meant for them personally, or what it would mean for the future of the world. This went beyond agreeing with Muggeridge's haphazard definitions of decline—religious or otherwise—that appeared throughout his works. Lewis Smith of Edmonton believed that "perhaps never before in the world's history has the conflict been so strong between good

[369] Marie Webster to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 December 1972, SC-4 90/6.

and evil, with the evil forces organized as never before, and threatening the very existence of man, and perhaps the earth itself."[370] Smith did not elaborate on what these forces were, but he was at least sure they were making things worse they had ever been. Trevor Stroud of Kent not only knew that "Western Civilization is in decline," but that the rate of decline was speeding up "not yearly, but almost daily." "The signs of decline are so obvious," he continued, "I am amazed that most people fail to recognise them, let alone argue that they don't exist!"[371] Unlike Smith, Stroud did take a stab at what was causing decline. He cited pollution and environmental damage, modern art (especially Tachisme and Action painting), surrealism in philosophy, affluence, vandalism, sexuality and even pop music. To him this all spelt imminent "breakdown of law and order, and governments—any government—leaving only the forces of organised labour and organised crime to fight it out for dominance."[372] Others entering into this line of thinking conflated religious decline with a laundry list of events and circumstances: a few poor wheat harvests in Russia, the 1970s energy crisis, Cuban immigration into the United States, the creation of the state of Israel, and the possibility of nuclear attack as anticipating the end of the world.[373]

This was declinism on steroids. It was characterized most sharply by the view that collapse—whatever it might look like—was not only imminent, but Biblically

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[370] Lewis Smith to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 December 1974, SC-4 95/15.

[371] Trevor Stroud to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 September 1975, SC-4 97/7.

[372] Ibid., SC-4 97/7.

[373] Robert E. Dean, Jr. to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 June 1980, SC-4 105/6.

ordained. Scholars like Jeremy Morris have argued that secularization received much of its fuel from a pathology of decline present within Christianity itself. That argument does not explain why the 1960s was the key decade in which secularization became fashionable, but it does help explain readers like the fundamentalist Christian Esme Jobbuls who, after reading *Jesus Rediscovered*, situated Muggeridge's arguments within the context of Old Testament prophecy:

> Belief in the entirety of God's Word bring enlightenment concerning world events and nations e.g. The role of the British Empire—Rome— Mohammedanism—Communism—Ecumenism—the present crisis in the Middle East—This bring me to your conviction that Western Civilization is coming to an end. We are at the end of this present age of Grace. This age began on the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church at Jerusalem, and is about to end; it will be followed by the Kingdom Age. World War I ushered in the beginning of the end; the final conflict for Jerusalem—Armageddon—(Zechariah 12 v 3 and 14 v 2-3).[374]

Declinism, and religious declinism in particular, was an extremely flexible concept that, as the previous few readers show, could be cast in into just about chain of reasoning that confirmed general dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Decline in religious culture was thus an important agent in shaping not only ecclesiastical policy, but also, and perhaps more importantly, individual religious identity.

It is not only possible, but plausible that many of Muggeridge's readers were well aware of decline before they encountered his books. Certainly some, like Elfrida Poxon, encountered declinism for the first time in books like *Jesus Rediscovered* or *The End of Christendom*. What makes Muggeridge particularly important for this history is the degree to which readers used his books and his lived example as a means to come to

[374] Esme Jobbuls to Malcolm Muggeridge, 4 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

terms with, and even placate, these feelings of despair. Muggeridge was a living counterargument to religious decline. The 1960s and 1970s had profound implications for how people thought about the role of Christianity in modern society, but Muggeridge's spiritual development ran opposite to the trend of society. His public conversion thus gave his readers a great deal of hope that, even if the churches continued to decline and even die, it was not a death sentence on the future of Christianity. In the words of one Oxford fan and his wife, Muggeridge was a "light amidst the encroaching gloom."[375]

This could ease the concerns of Christians who experienced a sense of not belonging to the time or place they inhabited. About 80% of the letters analyzed for this chapter indicated that Muggeridge's books alleviated their fears about religious decline, thus making it the most common feature of these letters. For many readers Muggeridge's conversion "reaffirmed"[376] or helped them to "gain…reassurance"[377] that decline was not inevitable and that Christianity might still be an important force in society. It gave some relief to Judith Savin who said, "Your writings, your thoughts reinforced my belief that Christianity is not only still relevant but more important to our society than ever."[378]

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[375] Patrick [No last name] to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 January 1974, SC-4 10/26.

[376] Sheila Hands to Malcolm Muggeridge, 28 August 1980, SC-4 105/8.

[377] David Power to Malcolm Muggeridge, 23 December 1975, SC-4 97/17.

[378] Judith Savin to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1 November 1974, SC-4 95/11.

Whether it was invented or not, Muggeridge helped his readers come to terms with living in a secular society. Charles Fink was a Catholic Priest who began to have these kinds of feelings once he entered into seminary:

> I saw scripture demythologized…morality relativized, and dogma made meaningful to modern man; this last a particularly bitter pill to swallow as, not finding the new theology very meaningful to myself, I was forced to conclude that I was not a modern man. I still haven't figured out quite what I am.[379]

It was not until he came across Muggeridge's books that he had a turning point: He first read *Jesus Rediscovered*, but then moved on to read *A Third Testament*, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*, *Something Beautiful for God*, and the *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. "Just knowing that you remain to walk the same earth as me makes my pilgrimage a lot more bearable and a little less lonely."[380] Likewise, Marguerite Horley took confidence in Muggeridge's conversion just as her confidence in the Catholic Church was weakening: "Can you image what it is like to be a Catholic today? In this appalling world—+this appalling world of no values, no morals, no adequate justice—+ I turn to the Church + the Church isn't there."[381]

Bruce Fitzpatrick was an Australian farmer who experienced the same feelings of displacement that Charles Fink had. Yet, in his case, Christianity made him feel, not as though he were living in the wrong time period, but as though his mind was out of sync with "the world." He explained,

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[379] Charles Fink to Malcolm Muggeridge, 20 July 1978, SC-4 103/9.

[380] Ibid., SC-4 103/9.

[381] Marguerite Horley to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 September 1975, SC-4 97/10.

> the reason for this letter is to thank you for either saving my sanity, or for the assurance that it is quite normal to be insane…Thanks to you, I can now see my experience for what it was, and it gives me great comfort to know that there are others too, who have known what I have known. If, as you say, one of your friends considers you a little mad for your view of the world and your beliefs, then I too am a little mad, and could wish for no finer company.[382]

Lois Lang-Sims thought of the same thing after she read *Christ and the Media*. "Thank you…for helping to reassure me that I am not mad when I feel as if I were living in a criminal lunatic asylum, being one of the very few who, although doubtless criminal, have resisted becoming a lunatic."[383] She went to describe how she felt "out of step" with modern society and even her church, which she believed as partly causing its own decline. "Here in Canterbury I wage continuous battle at the Cathedral—where straightforward commercialisation joins forces with a weird phenomenon known as 'secular Christianity' and the two surge forward together destroying everything in their path—holiness, worship, beauty, order, even the most elementary normality and reverence."[384] She believed that Christianity and its institutions would continue to decline as they became more and more trivialized by the media and desire for profit. Nonetheless, it gave her some comfort to know she was not the only one who thought modern life was a "mind-blasting nightmare."[385]

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[382] Charles Fink to Malcolm Muggeridge, 20 July 1978, SC-4 103/9.

[383] Lois Lang-Sims to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 December 1978, SC-4 103/11.

[384] Ibid., SC-4 103/11.

[385] Ibid., SC-4 103/11.

Muggeridge even took on a prophetic quality for his readers. Isabel Taylor of Edinburgh thought, "The Light of the World has chosen you to shine at an increasingly dark period in our history."[386] In Ray Overall's mind, Muggeridge was like Ezekiel: "Your voice has become that of a prophet in our age," offering "sanity" in a period of "confusion and despair."[387] It was he who gave to the remnant "guidance and encouragement in these difficult times of disillusionment" by being a living counterpoint to the "chaotic age" in which they lived.[388]

Declinism was a central part of Muggeridge's social and religious thought. After his conversion, his religious works promoted a popularized version of the secularization thesis. His fan mail shows a complex and varied response from his readers that included everything from outright denial and rejection that churches were in a state of decline to a great deal of anxiety and fear about what religious decline would mean for themselves and the future of society. This chapter has argued that this phenomenon should be understood not merely as a subject of modern religious history, but should be understood as an expression of the cultural politics of decline that animated economic debate during those same years. In so doing, this chapter has shown how narratives of decline shaped the thoughts and actions of ordinary people during the 1960s and 1970s. Whether his readers remained in their churches or not, the acceptance of Muggeridge's presentation of decline served to lower the social prestige of the churches. However, Muggeridge did not

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[386] Isabel Taylor to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 October 1970, SC-4 22/11.

[387] Ray Overall to Malcolm Muggeridge, 24 October 1976, SC-4 99/13.

[388] Ibid., SC-4 99/13.

only influence how his readers thought about decline; he also provided a means through which they could come to terms with it. Just as he became a surrogate cleric for those who grew discontented with institutional Christianity, he provided a way to placate fears about the future of Christianity in a secular society.

Chapter 5: Reading for Social Engagement

"It must be admitted…that considered apart from reading, the world of the text remains a transcendence in immanence…It is only in reading that the dynamism of configuration completes its course. And it is beyond reading, in effective action, instructed by the words handed down, that the configuration of the text is transformed into refiguration."

-Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, 159.

The previous three chapters have demonstrated various ways that readers interacted with Muggeridge's writings as they wrestled with issues of faith and doubt, their relationship with institutional Christianity and clergy, permissiveness in society, and even the future health of Christianity. In these ways, the foregrounding discussion has been concerned largely with how his writings shaped readers' thought, self-identity, and their perception of Muggeridge himself. Yet, reading has always been much more than merely a mental activity. Reading shapes behaviors, habits, rituals, customs, and it can even inspire social activism. Writing a fan letter is itself an *act* that reading inspired, just as wishing to visit Muggeridge or gifting his books to a friend were *acts* that were prompted by the experience of reading. Historians have long take for granted that reading is a transformative act, but we are not always privy to exactly how a particular reading experiences influenced the social engagement of historical actors. There are good methodological reasons why histories of reading have mostly sought to interrogate the act of reading by pursuing the classic questions outlined by Robert Darnton in "First Steps towards a History of Reading." With some difficulty historians of reading have been quite successful at discovering who read what, where, when, how, and why from memoirs, autobiographies, school records, and oral histories. In that painstaking process

of uncovering the experience of reading itself, historians have recognized that the act of recording a reading experience is distinct from the act of reading itself. More often than not, the historical record may answer one or several of these questions, but not always all of them. We are left to reconstruct the act of reading from whatever evidence is left behind.

Now if the act of reading itself is difficult to reconstruct, more problematic still is demonstrating how a particular experience of reading directly caused some future action. Unless we make use of creative guesswork or sophisticated theorizing, the historian of reading is entirely dependent upon the evidence created by the reader itself. In fact, Muggeridge's fan mail includes many examples of readers doing just that. Muggeridge's books inspired his readers to send letters with donations of money for a cause; they moved them to become missionaries, priests, or nuns; they influenced them to volunteer their time and energy to help the poor or underprivileged. Muggeridge's fan mail helps us to understand how the emotional experience tethered to reading that inspires social engagement.

To this end, this chapter sets out to uncover three interrelated phenomena. It will first describe how the rise of the welfare state affected the long tradition of Christian voluntarism in Britain. The effect of welfare systems on Christian voluntarism after World War II was an international phenomenon, but Muggeridge was predominately writing in response to the British context. The second section will explain Muggeridge's understanding of poverty and perception of the welfare state. This will provide sufficient context to consider then how the social activism of Muggeridge's readers was a significant phenomenon in post-war Britain. This context is essential for a discussion of

Muggeridge because some of his most influential writings, particularly *Something Beautiful for God*, offered a distinct philosophical alternative to the prevailing social attitudes towards welfare and poverty in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Welfare State and Christian Voluntarism in Post-War Britain

The 1942 Beveridge Report marks a crucial turning point in the history of welfare in Britain. It envisioned a path towards reconstruction after the war that, in contrast to Nazi Germany's "Warfare State," promoted a welfare state that would target five evils of modern society: want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness. The election of the Labour Party in 1945 reflected the popularity of these suggestions. Indeed, in 1948 pollsters found that nine out of ten people in Britain thought that charity was no longer necessary in Britain.[389] Thus, parliament went on systematically to pass and implement a series of acts in the following years that included, most importantly, the National Insurance Act (1946), which began the National Health Service in 1948, and the National Assistance Act (1948), which formally abolished the Poor Law. These marked nothing less than "cradle to the grave" social services for people of all classes.

The practical effect of these acts was to transfer the responsibility of providing social services from private religious and philanthropic organizations to the bureaucratic structures of the state. Before the Beveridge Report and 1945, Labour victory governmental welfare largely worked in cooperation with religious charities. Cultural Christianity had provided ample motivation to assist the impoverished and needy, and its

[389] Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 149.

institutions had created the infrastructure to accomplish it. Frank Prochaska reminds us it was Victorian Christians who built schools and hospitals, trained personnel, and administered services. Christians who inherited this vast philanthropic network surrendered control to the state in the climate of postwar Britain. It was not forced, but welcomed. The Church of England provided theological justification in 1948: "The State is under the moral law of God, and is intended by Him to be an instrument for human welfare."[390] Linda Woodhead has marked this moment as the "sacralization of political ideals" among Christians and church leaders alike.[391] State-organized welfare was hardly a replacement for Christian voluntarism in the eyes of Christians; it was simply a more effective expression of God's command to love thy neighbor. In fact, it is this attitude widely held by Christians and clergy that helps to explain why the church supported so many social reforms. Relaxing laws on abortion, homosexuality, and divorce while modernizing theological language and practice should be seen as part of the same cultural pivot as surrendering the responsibility of welfare to the state. The priority was to accomplish the greatest possible human flourishing in the immanent frame, whether in the form of state-run welfare, or in the form of loosening doctrinal and social strictures. The conclusion was that the machinery of the state provided the best tools to achieve Christian ends.

Nevertheless, very early on leading figures—no less eminent than William Beveridge himself—feared that the expansion of the welfare state would diminish and

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[390] Quoted in Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, 151.

[391] Linda Woodhead, "Introduction," in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Chatto, eds. (London: Routledge, 2012), 14.

replace the long-standing tradition of voluntarism in society. His 1948 *Voluntary Action: A Report on the Methods of Social Advance* was a published as an extension of the Beveridge Report and argued as much. On his view, if the state controlled welfare it would cause the double effect of reducing the need for volunteers (by reducing the number in need) and eliminate their purpose by doing their job for them. Beveridge believed the welfare state was necessary, but he hoped it would not come at the expense of free association with others:

> The making of a good society depends not on the State but on the citizens, acting individual or in free association with one another, acting on motives of various kinds—some selfish, others unselfish, some narrow and material, others inspired by love of man and love of God. The happiness or unhappiness of the society in which we live depends upon ourselves as citizens, not only the instruments of political power which we call the State.[392]

With a few noteworthy exceptions, historians have shown that Beveridge's fears were realized. Church-run charities largely did become redundant. Since it was the philanthropic side of churches that often served as their public face, they "became increasingly invisible in the welfare era."[393] When church charities were visible, they became increasingly disparaged. Part of this was due to the growing anti-institutionalism that mushroomed during the 1960s and 1970s that had affected religious institutions. The fact that people were trusting churches was not lost on how the philanthropic activities were viewed. An equally important reason for this shift was the growing professionalization of society. The "White Heat" of industry promoted by Harold Wilson

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[392] William Beveridge, *Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1948), 320. Quoted in Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, 158-159.

[393] Woodhead, "Introduction," *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, 15.

and the concomitant scientific culture championed by C. P. Snow had little patience for amateurs. Of course, it was because charities depended on amateurish volunteers that they were able to keep costs so low. The welfare state by contrast was designed to be run by professionals with higher standards of practice. Philanthropy and charity in this context were recast with negative connotations as being both patronizing and inefficient.

At the heart of these changes was a philosophical transformation of how poverty was understood in British society. Poverty, once seen as a problem designated chiefly as religious and ethical in character, became in the modern era a political issue reserved for the interests of the state. The fundamental shift in social thought was one in which poverty was seen less as an inevitable condition of sinners in a fallen world, but as an unfortunate price of economic growth and industrial development. In the former case poverty took on an almost metaphysical quality that made it part of the natural order. In the latter view it could, given the right social policies, be fully eradicated. The right policies were, like those recommended by the Beverage Report, ones that integrated the impoverished into the economic community by finding ways of encouraging self-sustaining work—whether through education, health services, or state insurance. Amateurish charity efforts, according to critics, "serve[d] only to reinforce the social and psychological attitudes which generate poverty."[394] Of course, if poverty was an inevitable and natural part of human existence, then seeking to alleviate its symptoms was an act of love. After all, if poverty was simply a fact of life, no amount of charity would ever be enough. However, if poverty and squalor could be eradicated, then doing

[394] Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, translated by Agnieszka Kolakowska (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 245.

little more than alleviating symptoms, however pious the intention, was arguably cruel in the long run because it allowed it to persist. In the latter view, charity could be interpreted as an attempt to earn cultural capital out of a spirit of sanctimonious hypocrisy.

For over two decades following the publication of the Beveridge Report, Britain's welfare state was "optimistic, progressivist and utopian."[395] During the 1950s and 1960s, the general climate was that scientists *did* know better, and that the government could be trusted to eliminate poverty and create a better, healthier society. Indeed, in 1951 Benjamin Rowntree and George Lavers published *Poverty and the Welfare State*, which concluded that there was minimal poverty in urban settings and that this reflected the condition of England in general.[396] Confidence was high that the state really could stamp out want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness.

This assumption was increasingly challenged during the mid-1960s, and became deeply problematic by the 1970s. Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend's 1965 study *The Poor and the Poorest* inaugurated a "rediscovery of poverty" by drawing attention to those not eligible for social assistance as well as the shortcomings of those programs

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[395] Woodhead, "Introduction," *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, 10.

[396] Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree and George Russell Lavers, *Poverty and the Welfare State: A Third Social Survey of York Dealing Only with Economic Questions* (London: Longmans Green, 1951). See also Janet Fink, "Welfare, Poverty and Social Inequalities," in *A Companion to Contemporary Britain, 1939-2000*, Paul Addison and Harriet Jones, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 263-280. Here, 271 ff. Within intellectual circles, Marxist critics were concerned that welfare was in effect a bribe to the dispossessed to accept the legitimacy of government. Meanwhile, critics on the right thought that the welfare state was not helping consumers because it subsidized unprofitable sectors. Feminists also contended that the welfare state was patriarchal in its framework because it relegated women to pre-determined roles within the home. See Rodney Lowe, "Introduction: The Road from 1945," in *Welfare Policy in Britain: The Road from 1945*, Helen Fawcett and Rodney Lowe, eds. (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 10-11.

accessible to the impoverished. It invited a reconsideration on both the political left and right of how poverty ought to be defined and understood, as well as whether or not the welfare state was at all sufficiently capable to solve it.[397] *The Poor and the Poorest* was crucial for deflating the optimism of the professionalized technocratic state to quell social evils like economic inequality. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that this loss of confidence in government experts was a partial cause of Harold Wilson losing power in 1970.[398] Moreover, confidence eroded further in the first part of 1970s when the welfare state came under financial strain due to the 1973 oil crisis, rising unemployment, and stalling economic growth.[399]

Malcolm Muggeridge had been a long-time critic of the welfare state and its philosophical underpinnings well before the "rediscovery of poverty" and the economic crises in the 1970s. Muggeridge expressed his distaste—even fear—of the welfare state both privately and publically ever since he had lived in Moscow as an investigative journalist for *The Manchester Guardian* during 1932 and 1933. His criticisms were primarily of two kinds. In the first place, he thought that any expansion of the state threatened personal freedom.[400] For the present purposes, however, it was the second criticism that was perhaps more salient. He believed the problem of the welfare state was

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[397] See Fink, "Welfare, Poverty and Social Inequalities," 271.

[398] See Robinson et al, "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain, 272.

[399] See Fink, "Welfare, Poverty and Social Inequalities," 273.

[400] Muggeridge might have been thinking of his old friend George Orwell when he wrote in his diary [get year] that the coming of the welfare state was a "nightmare" where "all the faceless men, the men without opinions, have been posted in key positions for a bloodless take-over, and that no one is prepared to join a Resistance Movement in defense of freedom because no one remembers what freedom means." See Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service*, 156-157.

that it fundamentally compromised the motives for helping others at all. During his short tenure as editor of *Punch*, Muggeridge published a barbed attack called "The Importance of Being Beveridge." In that editorial he asserted that "the basic fallacy…in the whole Beveridge concept of welfare" was that "it leaves out of the account the charity without which, according to St. Paul, benevolence itself is of no account and the service of others no more than yet another manifestation of the demanding ego."[401] The irony, of course, is that Muggeridge actually was expressing agreement with Beveridge just as he attacked him. It nevertheless points to Muggeridge's relative consistency on this position throughout his later career.

Muggeridge thus did not share the popular social attitudes towards poverty and charity that characterized British society in the first decades of the post-war settlement. And as his national fame grew to a global scale, those same positions were then disseminated to contexts where the welfare state had developed differently. The views he championed really had more in common with the classic view of poverty as a natural and inescapable reality of the human condition that no amount of charity could fully eradicate. But, then again, eradication was not the point of charity for Muggeridge. Before his conversion to Christianity, he described charity as an important and irreplaceable expression of human solidarity—that was at the heart of his remarks in the 1955 editorial in *Punch Magazine*. Once he converted in the 1960s this understanding remained, but it was cast in religious terms. When attitudes regarding charity and the welfare state began to transform as a result of the "rediscovery of poverty" and the economic crises of the early 1970s, Muggeridge's ideas were then viewed with new eyes.

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[401] Malcolm Muggeridge, "The Importance of Being Beveridge," *Punch* (6 January): 74.

Muggeridge must have been aware of the developments in the social climate, because after 1968 he began to promote his vision of poverty, charity, and social engagement in earnest through a series of books, articles, and interviews. It is worth noting that in 1972 Muggeridge's BBC program *The Question Why* (which ran from 1968-1972) dedicated an entire episode to poverty. One the headlining guests was none other than Peter Townsend himself. He was one of eight guests who appeared on the program, but his spot on the seating chart placed him in a prominent front and center position.[402] Muggeridge's opening statement was prepared beforehand and was read by Muggeridge to establish the framework for the discussion. The framework of the program was to interrogate the irony of why that in the midst of vast technological developments poverty appeared to increase. Muggeridge put his ideological positon on full display when he complained "the exaltation of poverty as such which so uplifted Christians like St Francis makes little appeal nowadays. At the same time, it has to be admitted that abolishing poverty, in the sense of assuring for one and all the basic necessities in the way of food, warmth and shelter, does not necessarily make for contented, fulfilled citizens."[403] Muggeridge was not just reacting to the "rediscovery of poverty"—he was actively shaping it.

Nothing came as close to shaping the conversation about poverty and charity as did his work exploring the life and work of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Muggeridge first interviewed her on the BBC's *Meeting Point* in June of 1968. The massive and

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[402] "The Question Why: Poverty [Feb 14. 1972], SC-4 170/26. Other guests included economic experts like Sir George Bolton and Peter Jay, social reformers like Marion Stubbs, trade unionist Jimmy Reid, and politicians like Brian Griffiths.

[403] Ibid.

unexpected success of the interview prompted a second screening of the interview within a month. The success was enough for the BBC to commission Muggeridge to film a documentary the following spring about Mother Teresa's organization, the Missionaries of Charity. It was broadcast at the end of 1969. The grass-roots response to just the interview appearances and documentary resulted in over £20,000 in donations, many of which were sent to Muggeridge's personal residence. Muggeridge later adapted the documentary into a book of the same name, *Something Beautiful for God*. The text included, in addition to a transcript of the documentary, some commentary from Muggeridge that gives clear summation of how he was promoting an alternative vision of poverty and charity:

> Mother Teresa was almost laconic when I asked her whether she did not think that the destitution she was trying to cope with in Calcutta required a government agency disposing of vastly greater resources of money and manpower than her Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity did or could. The more government agencies did the better, she said; what she and the Sisters had to offer was something else—Christian love. Criticism of Mother Teresa is often directed at the insignificant scale of the work she and the Sisters undertake by comparison with the need. It is even suggested that, by seeming to achieve more than she does, or can, she may actually lull the authorities into a complacency the situation by no means warrants, or at any rate provide them with an excuse for inaction. Again, her necessarily limited medical resources and the old-fashioned methods allegedly used, are pointed to as detracting from her usefulness. It is perfectly true, of course, that, statistically speaking, what she achieves is little, or even negligible. But then Christianity is not a statistical view of life.[404]

Muggeridge's journalism was here challenging the suspicion that charity was amateurish and patronizing, and that the state was the sole authority for promoting social welfare.

Controversially, Muggeridge's view of poverty and suffering was such that it could even be noble or beautiful. He therein rejected the assumption that poverty and

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[404] Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 27-28.

crime were necessarily intertwined, seeing it instead as a fulfillment of what it means to be human. He continued that poverty and hardship

> are not the breakdown of a machine, but part of the everlasting drama of our relationship with our creator. Far from being an unjustifiable violation, an outrage, they exemplify and enhance our human condition. If ever it were to be possible—as some arrogant contemporary minds are crazy enough to believe—to end suffering, and ultimately death, from our mortal lives, they would not thereby be enhanced, but rather demeaned, to the point that they would become too insignificant, too banal, to be worth living at all.[405]

On a rhetorical level, these arguments certainly benefited from a sort of Chestertonian-style of paradox that invites contemplation without settling on practical solutions. On a theological level, Muggeridge seems to have adopted the Roman Catholic doctrine that poverty and suffering could be redemptive, though this was a solid decade before he formally joined the fold. This perhaps helps to explain one of the reasons why so many Roman Catholics read and appreciated his journalism. It was not just that he was providing good press for what many considered a living saint; Muggeridge was therein also promoting Roman Catholic social theory. Theology is important here, but it alone does not explain why his journalism was so influential. Its widespread receptiveness—popular among many who did not accept Catholic social theory—was more likely due to the concomitant dwindling of confidence in the welfare state that had already led to a rediscovery of poverty and a reconsideration of charity. In short, part of its success was simply its timing.

It is a wooly business attempting to estimate just how influential *Something Beautiful for God* actually was. The short answer is: *very*. In terms of raw sales, it was undoubtedly a bestseller. Muggeridge designated that all of the royalties would go

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[405] Ibid., 131-132.

directly to the Missionaries of Charity. They, as a result, sent Muggeridge letters reporting how many books sold as well as how much they earned. It was immediately translated into several languages and entered into multiple editions within months. During its first three years on the market, the English edition sold 167,648 copies domestically and overseas. The American edition sold just over 24,000 copies, and the Danish and Italian translations together sold about 7,000 copies.[406] Selling just shy of 200,000 copies worldwide within three years is remarkable, but that does not at all take into account readership. Even though Muggeridge's fan mail was mostly written in English, *Something Beautiful for God* was translated into Swedish, German, Polish, Korean, and Japanese within five years. Richard Ingrams note that it was reprinted over twenty times is probably a low estimate—the German edition alone with through at least eleven printings.[407] A closer estimate is that, all translated versions included, the text went through over forty editions between its publication and Muggeridge's death. Ingrams estimate that by 1994 it had sold around 300,000 copies is also probably low, considering the English and American editions alone sold almost two-thirds of that within the first three years of publication.[408] But even statistics fall short because they do not tell us exactly how many people purchased, were gifted, and read the book. As will be discussed further below it was quite common for the same copy to be distributed among an entire reading group or among friends. And that does not take into account how many times library copies were checked out from a library. We do not have records of book

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[406] J. C. Reid to Margaret [no last name given], 18 April 1974, SC-4 39/12.

[407] Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography*, 213.

[408] Ibid.

sales in the years following 1974, but we do have a 1986 letter from the treasurer of the Missionaries of Charity, Patrick John. He indicated that in terms of pounds and pence, Muggeridge brought in £109,252 in royalties between 1971 and 1985.[409]

These figures do not count the money from other financial awards that came, at least in part, as a result of Muggeridge's work. Muggeridge was instrumental in Mother Teresa being the first recipient of the Templeton Prize in 1973. Not long before the submission period was over, the Vice President of the organization, W. G. Forker, sent a letter to Muggeridge about the state of Mother Teresa's application:

> Dear Mr. Muggeridge,
>
> Mother Theresa of Calcutta is one of a number of people who have been nominated for the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion. Unfortunately, the nomination is very scantily written and I think it does not do her justice.
>
> Knowing of your interest in the life and work of Mother Theresa, I wonder, would it be possible for you to make a detailed nomination? If my recollection is accurate, I think you recently published a book on this…
>
> Time is not actually on our side, as I would require this by the end of this month in order to have it processed for the various judges.[410]

Whether this points to unfair bias on the organization's part to justify Mother Teresa winning the prize is a matter of debate. Whatever the actual intentions, Muggeridge did reply one week later:

> Dear Mr. Forker,
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> …I am submitting a copy of Something Beautiful for God, and also the 1971 report of the International Association of Co-Workers of Mother Teresa. From these the scope and value of her International mission can be readily assessed.[411]

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[409] P. E. John to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 April 1986, SC-4 39/19.

[410] W. G. Forker to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 October 1972, SC-4 39/3.

[411] Malcolm Muggeridge to W. G. Forker, 12 October 1972, SC-4 39/3.

Muggeridge may have been in a hurry to leave on a month-long lecture tour in Canada when Forker sent the request, but simply submitting a book already widely accessible in print with a twenty-page annual report as application is unconventional to say the least. Nevertheless, the fact that it succeeded in winning £34,000 prize for Mother Teresa's organization points to how influential the book was.

Additionally, Muggeridge was an active proponent of Mother Teresa's selection for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. He began the campaign for her to win in the early 1970s, even submitting an application for her on his own accord in 1975. He sent letters to heads of state, religious leaders, and other dignitaries in his attempt to muster up support for her. He sent letters to American diplomats like Sargent Shriver, British politicians Harold Wilson and Philip Noel-Baker, former Nobel Prize winner Lester Pearson, the Prime Minister of India Indira Ghandi, the Governor of West Bengal A. L. Dias, the president of Zambia Kenneth Kaunda, and Pope Paul VI.[412] He even tried his luck a second time and sent August Schou, the director of the Nobel Institute, *Something Beautiful for God* as part of the application. It is uncertain how instrumental he was in Mother Teresa winning the Nobel Prize—nothing as precise as his letter to the Templeton Foundation exists—but he was undoubtedly an active proponent years before it was awarded. And after she failed to win in 1975, he was part of the campaign to resubmit her name for the award in following years.[413] Since Muggeridge was the first major

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[412] See "Correspondence about nomination for Nobel Prize, 1967-1977," SC-4 39/2.

[413] Most of the evidence available relates to his work in 1975 and before. There is at least one letter from Eileen Egan who replied to a 1977 letter of Muggeridge's which regarded the re-submission of Mother Teresa's name for the Nobel Peace Prize. See Eileen Egan to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 February 1977, SC-4 39/2.

journalist to introduce Mother Teresa to the "Western" world, there is good reason to believe he was not only instrumental, but essential in that process.

Muggeridge's influence was not just financial or honorary. There is good evidence that his work contributed to an increase in Mother Teresa's ranks. Whenever a fan wrote to Muggeridge asking how they could volunteer their time or where they should send a check, he or his secretary would point direct them to the International Association of Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, supporting organization begun by Ann Blaikie in 1969. The annual report of the Co-Workers includes worldwide statistics for the Missionaries of Charity from the previous year. The reports record numbers of professed nuns, novitiates, and postulants. Numbers in every category rose between 1970 and 1973. The number of nuns rose from 331 in 1970 to 570 in 1973. As will be discussed in more detail below, some of Muggeridge's readers directly cited his book, *Something Beautiful for God*, as being their reasons for giving money or joining the Missionaries of Charity. Indeed, at least some of the increase was because the Co-Workers used Muggeridge's book and documentary as their primary marketing materials.[414]

The reception of Muggeridge's journalism on Mother Teresa—and by extensions his alternative understanding of poverty and charity—was overwhelmingly positive in the press. A close reading of critical reviews of *Something Beautiful for God*, however, does reflect the ongoing tensions surrounding poverty and charity in the context of the welfare

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[414] See the reports for 1970, 1971, 1972-3, and 1973-4 for the International Association of Co-Workers of Mother Teresa in "International Association of Co-Workers of Mother Teresa Reports," SC-4 273/12. All of the reports make regular reference to distributing or showing *Something Beautiful for God* either in its documentary or book form to highlight the work of the Mother Teresa and her organization.

state. Indeed, some of these reviews anticipate the most famous of Mother Teresa's (and Muggeridge's) critics, Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens' investigative journalism lies outside the chronological scope of this study, but it is nevertheless important to be aware that some of his chief criticisms were expressed in less forceful terms by contemporary reviewers of *Something Beautiful for God*. His 1994 documentary *Hell's Angel*, later published as *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, was a biting critique of her methods and activities. His arguments were not entirely original, but he was the one who made them most effectively. An important pillar of his overall argument was to show that Mother Teresa's understanding of poverty was cruel because it meant people under her care were given improper treatment. He believed that promoting suffering as something beautiful, even redemptive, was "evil".[415] Their lot was one of "austerity, rigidity, harshness, and confusion," as they were allowed to die in conditions that were well within the financial resources of Mother Teresa's organization to improve.[416] Hitchens admitted that his criticism was grounded in his own anti-theistic position, but it would be blatantly false then to assume that the reception of Muggeridge's journalism was cut along religious lines. The ideological tension is more complex than that. Some of Muggeridge's most noteworthy critics on this matter were religious leaders and committed Christians. This is true whether we are talking about the press or his fan mail. Conversely, as will be shown in the next chapter, some of Muggeridge's agnostic readers were inspired by *Something Beautiful for God* and expressed their desire to

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[415] Christopher Hitches, "Christopher Hitchens on Mother Teresa (Interview), by Matt Cherry, *Free Inquiry Magazine* 16, no. 4 (Fall 1996). Box 273, Folder 10, Muggeridge Papers.

[416] Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (London: Verso, 1995), 46.

donate their time or money to helping Mother Teresa's organization. The immediate reception of Muggeridge's journalism was shaped by several factors, including the context of rising religious pluralism in society, the rediscovery of poverty, and the concomitant crises of the welfare state after 1965.

Some reviewers objected that Muggeridge seemed to disparage those who pursued charity through the mechanism of the state, as had most churches in Britain as a result of the post-war settlement. One reviewer complained that there were

> many modern social reformers and revolutionaries who also claim to derive their thirst for social justice from evangelical principles can be judged with equal reason to be authentic followers of Christ. Muggeridge would have little sympathy with the Helder Camaras, Dorothy Days, Berrigans or Camilo Torres of this world. Indeed, he would use the example of Mother Teresa to berate their ilk. Therein lies his blindness and folly.[417]

But it was not just a question of motivation. It was also one of efficiency. The Anglican Bishop of Southward Mervyn Stockwood had lived through the postwar settlement when his church had given full assent toward the formation of the welfare state twenty years earlier. His 1971 review of *Something Beautiful for God* criticized the work chiefly because Muggeridge appeared

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[417] Michael Costigan, Review of *Something Beautiful for God*, by Malcolm Muggeridge, SC-4 225/6. The clipping of this review was cut small enough that the place of publication is not listed in the Muggeridge Papers. It would seem that the review has not been digitized in any format either, so it is difficult to track down the exact newspaper it appeared in. A good guess would be the Melbourne based Catholic publication, *The Advocate*, which a Michael Costigan edited for many years. It would make sense that they would have wanted to include a review of *Something Beautiful for God* for their readers. Additionally, if the Michael Costigan who wrote the review was the same Michael Costigan who edited *The Advocate*, his remarks would make sense, too. He was a leader of the pro-life movement among Catholics during the 1960s and 1970s. All of the counter-examples he names were Roman Catholic social activists who did not find serious problems with using governmental authority to further social justice. According to WorldCat, the only two depositories that hold *The Advocate* are at the National Library of Australia and at the University of New South Wales. The National Library of Australia has digitized some of *The Advocate*, but only until 1954. See https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/title/792. [Accessed 2 January 2, 2018].

> to dismiss with contempt the people who try to remove the causes of suffering. By all means let us salute Mother Teresa and her devoted companions who tend the lepers, but let us be equally generous in saluting the devoted doctors and research workers who quietly and often anonymously give their lives and their skills for the elimination of leprosy….to engage in cancer research in the hope of eliminating disease can be as beautiful.[418]

But it was not just Muggeridge's disregard for scientific professionals to make medical advancement that irritated some reviewers. It was also his insistence that trust in government directed welfare was misplaced. "Many would disagree with the methods," said one reviewer, "that, seemingly needlessly, she will accept no government grants of any kind, relying solely on voluntary contributions." He continued, "In the brutish inequalities and injustices of poverty, begging can never be anything but further degrading both for the recipient and the giver."[419] The methods confirmed the "acceptance of the most degrading poverty."[420] These few reviews were, of course, the minority opinion. They remain important examples to show that Muggeridge's journalism on Mother Teresa was not universally praised until 1994.

Muggeridge's Readers, Poverty, and Social Engagement

Pointing to book sales, royalties earned, prizes won, and the raw statistics of Mother Teresa's organization provide enough evidence to show that Muggeridge's journalism, and *Something Beautiful for God* in particular, was influential. And the

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[418] Mervyn Stockwood, Review of *Something Beautiful for God*, by Malcolm Muggeridge, *Books and Bookmen* (June 1971): 52. SC-4 225/2.

[419] Martin Smith, Review of *Something Beautiful for God*, by Malcolm Muggeridge, *Brewwarinna News* (23 February 1973). SC-4 225/6.

[420] Lisa Hobbs, "Memories of Saint Blessing Calcutta," *Vancouver Sun* (28 October 1972). SC-4 225/2.

reviews in the press, with a few noteworthy exceptions, confirm that people felt the influence was largely positive. But what about Muggeridge's "ordinary" readers? Statistics really tell us nothing about how the book was actually read by all those who purchased, borrowed, or were gifted the book. How did it influence his reader's actions? Did they agree with his presentation of poverty? Or did they find it highly romanticized and ultimately unacceptable? Interestingly, his fan mail forms something of a parallel with his reception in the press. It was overwhelmingly positive. The genre of a "fan letter" is such that we should expect this. However, it certainly was not a "weak feedback loop" where readers just repeated to him their uncritical agreement. Some expressed sincere reservations about what Muggeridge was advocating for in his journalism. And those who agreed did so in nuanced ways. Taken as a whole, Muggeridge's fan mail on the issue of poverty and social activism can be split into two general categories. The first included those who engaged with the ideas on a purely intellectual or emotional level. The second and much larger category included those whose reading prompted some expression of social activism. Together these letters provide a lens into changing attitudes towards poverty, emotional responses of readers, and even how reading could directly inspire attempts to enact social change.

If we would take Muggeridge's own words at face value, we might be led to assume that the response of his fans was universally positive. That, at least, was the impression he gave in *Something Beautiful for God* where he discussed fan letters he had received length. He summarized:

> I myself received many letters enclosing cheques and money orders ranging between a few shillings and hundreds of pounds. They came from young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated; all sorts and conditions of people. All of

> them said approximately the same thing—this woman spoke to me as no one ever has, and I feel I must help her.[421]

That was not entirely the case. Just like the press, some fans were critical of romanticizing poverty and death, as well as his rejection of the welfare state to produce social goods. Dr. Carl Vossen was a linguist who had read *Something Beautiful for God* with pleasure. He felt he could agree with most of what Muggeridge said, except for his disparaging comments about secular social reformers like Beatrice Webb. Vossen held her in great esteem because in his view she, like Mother Teresa, "gave up comfort and pleasures to help the poor."[422] Muggeridge's reply to Vossen explained in no uncertain terms his opinion: "I consider Beatrice Webb was a prig…Her virtue was of the abstract variety." He continued that the key difference was analogous to the difference between Christian and a social worker: "the Christian does good for a person, the social worker for an idea."[423] Of course, even some of Muggeridge's own fans disprove this notion. The ludicrousness of the statement is perhaps only explained by the fact that Beatrice Webb was Kitty Muggeridge's aunt, and that Malcolm and Beatrice Webb had a falling out after his return from Moscow and subsequent disillusionment with Soviet Communism. She remained committed to the political system, while Muggeridge went on for the rest of his career denouncing it as evil and ineffective.

Vossen's criticisms were layered between otherwise glowing praise for Muggeridge's work. The same could not be said for Sybil Haddock. She was an eighty-

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[421] Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, 30-31.

[422] Dr. Carl Vossen to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 September 1974, SC-4 95/8.

[423] Malcolm Muggeridge to Dr. Carl Vossen, 10 October 1974, SC-4 95/8.

six year old journalist who had written a column for the *Methodist Recorder* for forty years. She listened to *Something Beautiful for God* on tape three times before she typed out her short letter in July of 1973. She concluded that Mother Teresa was "a very mistaken saint. The very Church to which she was born, to which she is obedient without question, is one of the major causes of poverty whose victims she serves."[424] We do not have the reply that Muggeridge must have sent, but we do have Haddock's second letter of 10 August. Whatever Muggeridge said, it did not have much effect:

> I agree with every word you say about reverence for life, but I just cannot see how you can believe that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that reverence. In my opinion, it teaches the exact opposite. Human beings, poor mentally, poor physically and financially, are taught by that Church that they can produce huge families, so poor miserable weaklings are born who should never have been conceived. Do you seriously call that reverence for life?[425]

Haddock's views reflected those of a large percentage of the population, but among Muggeridge's readers, she was in the minority. Even though cries of "no popery" were a thing of the Nineteenth Century, there remained widespread criticism of Roman Catholics, as Haddock's letter indicates. What characterized these views of Roman Catholicism was less the fear that the pope was a bogeyman ready to undermine Britain's constitutional structures and more the suspicion that Roman Catholic visions of social justice were depressingly outdated for modern ethical common sense.

The examples of Vossen and Haddock are important because they provide us with a sense of how a large percentage of the population might have responded to Muggeridge's vision of poverty and welfare. His fan mail, however, allows us to

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[424] Sybil Haddock to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 July 1973, SC-4 92/8.

[425] Sybil Haddock to Malcolm Muggeridge, 10 August 1973, SC-4 92/9.

recognize how people experienced striking changes in their understanding of, and motivations for, supporting the welfare state. Connie Lake explained that her first career as a shorthand typist had left her unfulfilled. She then trained for social work "as a non-Christian" out of "a little love of humankind," and was later employed by the local governmental authority in Wolverhampton.[426] For a while thereafter she "groped and dithered" with religious questions when she eventually joined the local Anglican Church. Even though she did not accept everything it taught, she felt joining a church—any church—was an important expression of her newfound faith. Converting to Christianity led her to redefine her motivations for social work, and even to reformulate her perception of the welfare state:

> As a Christian, I see my paid social work as having been inspired by Christians who lived to follow the example of Christ by caring for the poor, and crippled, and aged people. Humanists were not responsible for starting these services, although I get "Trade Union rates," and "equal pay" for my part in them. It pleased me to think that the Saints have made it easier for ordinary unsaintly people to do good in a practical way. The dangers of an increasingly "non-Christian" welfare state are very obvious, and perhaps you have a vocation to expose them. But don't be too hard on us.[427]

She did not expand on what she felt those "very obvious" dangers were, but the sentiment is nonetheless revealing.

Some letters were written with no other purpose than to serve as a vessel for the emotional feeling that arose when reading one of Muggeridge's books. Marie Therese, for instance, was a Roman Catholic nun who was so "struck with compassion and admiration" at the "suffering [and] honest openness" that it "made me want to do such a

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[426] Connie Lake to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 July 1969, SC-4 22/11.

[427] Ibid.

thing as writing to you the thoughts that welled up in me."[428] For Wallace Haines of Berkshire reading Muggeridge helped him reformulate the way that he perceived poverty. After reading *Something Beautiful for God* he began to think that that God was "present in the slums, in the broken body, [and] in the children." Seeing Mother Teresa dedicate her life to impoverished conditions caused some readers to experience mixed emotions of admiration and guilt. Muriel Alperen wrote that "I just finished reading your 'Something Beautiful for God' and cried and yet feel full of joy and a deep sense of loss, that I—with all my striving cannot reach that state of selflessness that Mother Theresa [sic] has."[429] Many readers expressed similar sentiments, whereby they felt intense emotions after reading Muggeridge's books, but did not feel they were worthy or able to act on those emotions. In the words of Wallace Haines, he confessed, "I lack the vocation (or will or love) for the Poor! I see it theoretically but I fear it—fear to fail."[430]

One of the commonest responses was when readers wrote to signal their *wish* to engage in social activism. It is possible that some of them did, too. But merely expressing one's desire to help in some way, shape, or form—even if the desire is sincere—is not the same as actually doing something. We have no way of knowing from their fan letters if they followed through and volunteered their time. What can be said about such letters is that they were clear instances of emotional sympathy and intellectual assent. They thus have more in common with readers like Wallace who changed his perception of poverty, or Marie Therese who wrote to express the emotions she felt after

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[428] Marie Therese to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 August 1972, SC-4 88/7.

[429] Muriel Alperen to Malcolm Muggeridge, December 1973, SC-4 93/8.

[430] Wallace Haines to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 April 1971, SC-4 81/6.

reading. M. Bracey of London, for instance, wrote to say, "I have some spare time + would like to offer my services to the Mother Teresa Organizations."[431] There was Fran Loral who wanted "very much to work for her in India or elsewhere."[432] Or an anonymous fan who could "think of nothing that I could do for her, but if there is the smallest thing I am completely at her service."[433] Again, it is difficult to know how serious to take such examples. They are all very short letters that say just about the same thing in a rather vague way. From such scant evidence in a fan letter, we cannot tell whether such statements were empty gestures reflecting an emotional reading experience or sincere intentions to volunteer.

Peter Lowes' letter reflects something of a similar sentiment, but with a little more detail. He was a divorced fifty-six-year-old who had worked in non-profits for his entire career. At the time of his letter, he was stationed in Geneva as a coordinator for the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-90), an initiative begun by the United Nations. Lowes had traveled to many developing countries with the overarching goal of supporting access to clean water and sanitation. When he wrote his letter the program was in its early stages, but his authority was built on a long career of successful leadership in other philanthropic initiatives. Before moving to Geneva for his current post, Lowes had been a Resident Representative for the United Nations

[431] M. Bracey to Malcolm Muggeridge, 10 September 1973, SC-4 92/15.

[432] Fran Loral to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 October 1973, SC-4 93/4.

[433] Anonymous to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 June 1971, SC-4 81/19.

Development Programme in Rabat, Morocco.[434] By the program's end, it would help some 1.3 billion people gain access to clean water.[435] His twenty-five years in non-profit and philanthropic work for the United Nations somehow left him unfulfilled: "I feel I have received so much in life and I would like to find the inner strength and discipline and faith to live in a better, more spiritually based manner."[436] At the time of writing Lowes was not a practicing Christian, though he had been raised Anglican while growing up in England. Throughout his life, he had felt he was always "in a search for God," though any sort of intellectual paths towards Christianity fell on rocky ground. What inspired him to seek spiritual meaning were those who expressed Christianity through their actions.

> A teaching or nursing nun in the malarial lowlands of Malawi or a Father among the moslem Berber tribesmen of the High Atlas or a simple priest in a U.S.A. slum move me much more…than does the conspicuous consumption of intellectual resources which abound around me. Mother Theresa's example lived out right there in the guts of the "developing" world when my work is in so called development, puts any secular efforts like mine to shame and I would like to learn from it.[437]

Reading *Something Beautiful for God* created in him a sense of guilt that despite all his efforts, he was not doing enough—or at least he felt he was not doing his work for the right reasons. He then went on to explain he had a fervent desire to do something, but he

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[434] Lowes makes some references to working in development, but his name is also listed in the *United Nations System of Organizations and Directory of Senior Officials* (New York: Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-Ordination, 1976), 77, 90.

[435] See General Assembly Resolution 35/18, *Proclamation of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade* (10 November 1980), available from http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/35/18. See also "Water," accessed 25 July 2017. http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/water/index.html.

[436] Peter Lowes to Malcolm Muggeridge, 7 October 1982, SC-4 110/15.

[437] Ibid.

had no idea what that would be or even what it would look like. His letter was written in the hope that Muggeridge would give him some direction on what to do next.

What was it about reading Muggeridge's books that caused such a desire to make dramatic changes in one's life? The sort of longing for more meaning expressed by Peter Lowes was common. A great number of readers wrote of how Muggeridge's books forced them to redefine themselves and their interaction with the world around them. Ken Thompson had just been promoted to the board of a large manufacturing company in Ireland when he felt guilty about how much of his life revolved around money. He read Muggeridge and even thought of joining a relief organization or charity, but decided against it when he realized that would only be "pandering to [his] ego."[438] He finally decided to leave his job and went to seminary to become a minister for the Irish Methodist Church. In telling his story, it was reading Muggeridge that sparked his decision to make a dramatic change in his life. Ken Hutchison of Wellington, New Zealand worked for the government until he read Muggeridge, which led him to quit and begin training as a nurse.[439] A young woman named Michaela from San Diego was moved to become a Carmelite nun after reading Muggeridge and corresponding with him.[440] Ellen Ball from Essex read *Something Beautiful for God* and was inspired to visit homeless families on London on her own, without being connected to any organization. She then decided to join the Co-Workers so that she could continue "serving the poorest

[438] Ken Thompson to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 February 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[439] Ken Hutchison to Malcolm Muggeridge, 15 November 1980, SC-4 105/12.

[440] Michaela [No Last Name] to Malcolm Muggeridge, May 1980, SC-4 105/5.

of the poor, the sick and any in great need."[441] Rita Clayden of London wrote to Muggeridge telling him of how after she read his work on Mother Teresa she joined her organization two years earlier.[442]

What is interesting about these instances is their almost impulsive character. It was not very common for readers to finish one of Muggeridge's books and then mull over the decision in their mind of what they should do. In many instances, there is a spontaneous element where the reader drops everything to donate their time and energy to philanthropic work. That sort of behavior perhaps lends itself to the genre of fan mail. Sometimes it seems the decision to act was so sudden that there was little preparation at all. Melanie McBride was a student at the University of Surrey who was inspired to contact the Missionaries of Charity and volunteer to live in India for two months during the summer holiday. It does not appear she thought very much about what that decision would actually mean for her, so she wrote to Muggeridge for advice:

> I have never been in a hot climate before and have no idea about the practicalities—and even less about Calcutta itself. Could you help me?...I'd be grateful if you could tell me what to take with me in the way of clothes and money. Mother Theresa's secretary wrote saying that I could work with them but that there were probably no vacant places to sleep actually in the home but that there were cheap hostels nearby. Do you have any addresses of any places I could look for accommodation, or is it better to find somewhere to stay when I get off the plane?...I speak English and a little French only, can you advise me of any language or any cultural customs to be aware of?[443]

If the example of Melanie McBride was the only one of its kind, it might be written off as the youthful idealism of a college student. That was likely an important factor. But the

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[441] Ellen Ball to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 April 1972, SC-4 87/12.

[442] Rita Clayden to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 March 1972, SC-4 87/7.

[443] Melanie McBride to Malcolm Muggeridge, 24 April 1978, SC-4 103/5.

fact is that her attitude was shared by others who lived in different social settings. Steven Brackfield lived about twenty miles away from the University of Surrey, though his letter was sent a few years before McBride's. He had just finished reading *Something Beautiful for God* when he decided quite suddenly that he had to help Mother Teresa:

> I have felt a calling to help the poor of the third world in any small way that I can. Your book has acted as a final catalyst to put these thoughts into action. As a result, I have made arrangements to take a month leave of absence…to be able to go to Calcutta and be of help to the Mission of Charity in any one of their numerous projects to relieve the suffering and enhance human dignity.[444]

The problem was that due to the circumstances of his job he had to take his leave of absence from the middle of February until the middle of March. His letter of 5 February letter thus allowed very little time to make preparations. He had sent a letter to the Missionaries of Charity to organize his time with them, but he had made the decision so quickly that he feared the letter he sent to the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta would not give them enough time to respond by the time he was ready to leave. His letter to Muggeridge was, like Melanie McBride's, primarily to learn "the severity of the conditions and the type of work that I may be asked to do."[445] Like Melanie McBride, Steven Brackfield made a commitment before he had learned all the details of what he was signing up for. One of his reasons that he gave for going was nothing more than an admission that he had rediscovered poverty through Muggeridge's work. "I think that the comfort that we are accustomed to in the West tends to blind us from the harsh realities of life in the third world and forget our common duty to the poor and uncared for."[446]

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[444] Steven Brackfield to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 February 1972, SC-4 39/7.

[445] Ibid.

[446] Ibid.

Most readers did not have the flexibility of student life or the benefit of taking a leave of absence to fly to another country where they volunteer for weeks or months at a time. A more common practice was to donate money as an expression of their desire to enact social change. Donations were as small as a single pound while others were gifts in the hundreds or even thousands. Not every reader knew how to make sure their donation made it to Mother Teresa's organization, so they just opted to send it to Muggeridge instead, trusting that he would take care of it. This was probably due to the fact that in book version of *Something Beautiful for God* Muggeridge discussed how after the documentary many people sent him donations to pass onto Mother Teresa. Discussing fan letters as much as he did in that book probably motivated some of his readers to follow through and donate money.

Some fans were trusting enough to send Muggeridge a check made out to him or even a wad of cash with a request to pass on the funds to the Missionaries of Charity. Is it possible Muggeridge pocketed some of this money? From what evidence exists in the letters themselves we have reason to believe he did not. One example is from Kenneth Surin, a student at the University of Birmingham who was studying theology. He was one who mailed a check made out to Muggeridge. The carbon copy of the reply from Muggeridge's secretary, Marian Williams, instructed Surin to include "for Mother Teresa" on the check so that the organization could then send him a receipt of donation.[447] Another is Mary Millenbach. She had given Muggeridge a check after reading *Something Beautiful for God,* which he ended up losing. When the check did not

[447] Kenneth Surin to Malcolm Muggeridge, 15 January 1973, SC-4 91/4. Marian Williams to Kenneth Surin, 25 January 1973, SC-4 91/4.

clear, Millenbach cancelled it and then mailed him another to him to pass on to the Missionaries of Charity.[448] In his reply Muggeridge said, "Thank you for your letter and I am delighted that the business of the cheque has been cleared up. I have sent it off at once to the co-workers. Actually—again divine intervention: Mother Teresa will get double the amount because I was so conscience stricken at losing your cheque that I sent $100 myself for the co-workers."[449]

Some readers, instead of sending their own money, organized charities or other types of events to raise money that they then mailed to Muggeridge to pass on to Mother Teresa. Caroline Hall, Julie Butters, and Beverley Lowndes were three middle-school students from Stoke-on-Trent who organized raffles on two different occasions. In February of 1973, they sold a Harry Secombe record and a few months later, they sold off one of their dolls. Altogether, they managed to bring in five and a half pounds, which they sent on to Muggeridge with their personalized pastel-decorated letters.[450] Martin Blake read *Something Beautiful for God* and then found a group of friends to go caroling during Christmas of 1972 from which they raised £14.[451] More often than not, the donations from Muggeridge's fans were small. Very few had the funds, or were willing to send, large amounts of money. But donation size really is not the point here. What matters more is stated motive, which emerged through their encounter with Muggeridge's

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[448] Mary Millenbach to Malcolm Muggeridge, 15 June 1977, SC-4 101/3.

[449] Malcolm Muggeridge to Mary Millenbach, 24 June 1977, SC-4 101/3.

[450] Caroline Hall to Malcolm Muggeridge, February 1973, SC-4 91/10; Julie Butters to Malcolm Muggeridge, February 1973, SC-4 91/10. Julie Butters to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 April 1973, SC-4 91/18, Muggeridge Papers. Caroline Hall to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 April 1973, SC-4 91/18. Beverley Lowndes to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 April 1973, SC-4 91/18.

[451] Marin Blake to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 January 1972, SC-4 85/19.

books. Plain and simple reading was an effective catalyst in inspiring various forms of voluntarism. Their reading was in large part embedded within the larger context of the rediscovery of poverty. In the words of Anthony Wintle, their motive was to help "the poor and dying through Mother Teresa's work."[452]

It is an imprecise business trying to gauge just how much money readers sent to Mother Teresa because of reading *Something Beautiful for God*. In the first place, there is no way of knowing how many fans donated money without mentioning so in a letter. But even among the dozens that told Muggeridge they did, it was not uncommon that they might not state the check's value. For that matter, the replies that Muggeridge or his secretary made typically did not state the exact amount, either. The letters that include donations are scattered throughout the many thousands of letters he received, so it is difficult to collect exact figures. For whatever reason, Muggeridge's secretary did decide to keep a file of Muggeridge's correspondence to fans about donations from 1977.[453] About two dozen letters roughly evenly distributed throughout the calendar year enclosed a combined total of £2,644.53. One of these letters included a £2,000 donation from a Mr. O'Donnell who gave his life savings to Mother Teresa, which was unusually high. That said, many of the letters frustratingly do not indicate how much their donation was for, so even though the actual figure was higher, it is impossible to guess precisely by how much. It nevertheless leaves us with a good, if incomplete, picture of the grass-roots donations that people spontaneously gave after reading Muggeridge's books.

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[452] Anthony Wintle to Malcolm Muggeridge, 15 May 1981, SC-4 107/8.

[453] See "Teresa, Mother—Correspondence about Donations, 1977." SC-4 39/22. Cross referencing this file with the other boxes of fan mail from 1977 shows that the secretary missed only two letters that tell of donations, £100 each, to Mother Teresa.

An important expression of social activism was the dissemination of Muggeridge's books to other readers. Readers like George Kane read *Something Beautiful for God* and explained that because it was "one of the most inspiring books" he had ever read, he went out and purchased forty copies that he then distributed to friends and relatives.[454] Of course, we cannot know how any of those forty copies were read, if they were read at all, but it does tell us a great deal about George Kane's reading experience. Sometimes individual dissemination meant the books would travel many thousands of miles. W. H. P. Ager lived near Hyde Park in London. After he read Muggeridge's work on Mother Teresa, he sent it to a friend who was a Roman Catholic priest in Patna, India. The book took nearly two months to arrive, but when it did, Ager reported that the priest passed it around to an untold number of people who read it.[455] Instances like this are good reminders that books may be read by multiple people. This is especially the case with library copies, which is precisely how M. Mart got a hold of a copy. She had never heard of *Something Beautiful for God* until her daughter had checked it out from a public library in Leeds, and then gave it to her mother after she was finished.[456] Sometimes the most avid of fans are not those who look for a particular book, but are those who chance across a text that has a deep effect upon them. There are dozens of other examples of people sharing *Something Beautiful for God*, or one of Muggeridge's other books, with close friends, acquaintances, church groups, or family

[454] George L. Kane to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 September 1971, SC-4 39/9.

[455] W. H. P. Ager to Malcolm Muggeridge, 3 February 1972, SC-4 86/5.

[456] M. Mart to Malcolm Muggeridge, 11 February 1973, SC-4 91/9.

members.[457] This is part of what made up the textual community that this study has been exploring. For the most part this community was characterized by the fact that even though most of Muggeridge's fans never would meet each other, they nonetheless shared similar responses to his books regardless of sex, age, geographic location, or socio-economic status. When readers explained their motivation for sharing it with others, it was usually due to the emotional response they recorded while reading the book. Their reasons for sharing the book with someone else ran parallel to why people loved reading him in the first place. In short, they wanted other people to experience the same kinds of emotions they did, which, in a manner of speaking, would amount to trying to grow the textual community. Thus, Stanley Girling or Birmingham "cried after reading" *Something Beautiful for God*, and for that reason wanted to share the book with his most "special friends" who might read the book in the same manner he did.[458] It was, in the words of Martin Klingber, a book worth sharing because he felt it "talks *our* language and reaches like a surgeon's scalpel deep down where *we* think and live."[459]

This same impulse inspired fans around the world offer to translate Muggeridge's books in to French, Spanish, German, Japanese, and Hungarian. In most cases, the fan sought to organize their efforts through a publisher with Muggeridge's consent. Others, like Sister Marguerite Choquette, just went ahead and wrote after they had finished a

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[457] For example, M. Nichols and Sister Martinia wrote their letters to Muggeridge within months of each other. Nichols was a Trappist monk in Utah and Sister Martinia was a nun in Watford, England. They both explain how, after reading *Something Beautiful for God* by themselves, it was then read aloud during meal times. Thousands of miles apart, the same reading practice disseminated the contents of the book to an entire communities. Sister Martinia to Malcolm Muggeridge, 7 May 1971, SC-4 81/12; M. Nichols to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 December 1971, SC-4 84/10.

[458] Stanley Girling to Malcolm Muggeridge, 8 May 1982, SC-4 110/1.

[459] Martin Klingber to Malcolm Muggeridge, June 1970, SC-4 22/14. Emphasis added.

translation. Marguerite was a nun whose primary job was to be the librarian at her convent in Sherbrooke, Canada. Her letter explained that "for almost two years now, I have your beautiful book, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, translated into French. All the sisters read it with greatest interest."[460] She is yet another demonstration of how book sales are a misleading indication of how much a book was read. Here was, for all intents and purposes, a pirated translation that was read by multiple people within a religious community. Sister Marguerite's letter continued with a request for how she might get ahold of more English copies because she wanted to buy some and share it with some of her English-speaking friends. Muggeridge did not appear to mind the unauthorized translation of his work. He sent two letters afterwards; one to Sister Marguerite, the other to the Distribution Department at Fontana requesting that they send three copies more of *Something Beautiful for God* to the convent in Sherbrooke, billed to his account.[461]

Perhaps Beveridge was mistaken after all, at least for a part. It is true that Christian voluntarism "became increasingly invisible" during the postwar settlement. But we must be careful not to conclude that it went away entirely. Malcolm Muggeridge's journalism, and especially the publication of *Something Beautiful for God*, entered the public scene at a crucial moment when the rediscovery of poverty was entangled with a loss of confidence in the power of the welfare state to eradicate want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness. Amidst that conversation, Muggeridge promoted an understanding of poverty and suffering that was sympathetic to the Roman

[460] Marguerite Choquette to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 October 1974, SC-4 95/10.

[461] Marian Williams to Fontana Distribution Department, 4 January 1975, SC-4 95/10.

Catholic theology he would later accept as his own. When his readers interacted with his work, they proved that the voluntary spirit that had characterized British public life for generations was not dead yet. Muggeridge's readers wrestled with the nature and scope of poverty, expressed their sympathy, donated money, volunteered to help those in need, and even went so far as to travel to different parts of the world to do it. As they disseminated texts, and even translated them, Muggeridge's readers made a clear and conscious effort to enact social change, one person at a time. Though Muggeridge's writings were deeply shaped by his own interaction with the welfare state and its development, the global scope of his readership meant that this expression of voluntarism was not merely a British phenomenon. It was the joint expression of a textual community who thought they could make a real difference in in the world, even if only by reading and writing a letter to Malcolm.

Chapter 6: Reading Muggeridge in Plural Societies

"I have no religion but you have the power to bring me nearer to what I feel religion could be."

- Ruth Dixon to Malcolm Muggeridge, 17 August 1970

"I read and reread with tremendous absorption your Jesus Rediscovered*, and was profoundly moved by it. This in spite of the fact that I hold no religious belief, which is something I cannot explain. Now I am wallowing in* Muggeridge: Ancient and Modern*, and the Diaries are queuing up to await their turn, jostling somewhat in impatience."*

- A. Stephen Pimeoff to Malcolm Muggeridge, 21 July 1981

Until now, we have been dealing exclusively with Malcolm Muggeridge's Christian readers. Indeed, nearly 85% of the letters he received were from people who either identified as a Christian or who were readily identifiable as belonging to some version of Christianity. This number was likely higher, too. About 10% of letters did not include any indication or evidence of adherence Christianity, but it is likely that at least some of them counted themselves in that religious tradition. Muggeridge's readers were young and old, rich and poor, lived on practically every continent, were highly educated and left school before graduating, and belonged to a variety of Christian denominations. Analyzing this group of people reveals that even with a great degree of social, economic, and geographic distance, Muggeridge's readers responded to his works along a relatively small number of common themes that constituted the central focus of each of the previous four chapters. Even though authors never determine how their books are actually read, we cannot discount the formative role text plays in framing the conditions in which meaning is created. This is particularly true of readers who share a common

cultural context—in this case, that of maintaining and expressing their faith in a climate where Christianity was losing its social significance. Thousands of Christians read Muggeridge as they wrestled with this challenge. As they did so, Muggeridge's writings shaped and directed how they understood some of the most pressing issues of the 1960s and 1970s. It was by reading and letter writing that Muggeridge became a friend and kindred spirit, a surrogate authority, a means to placate fears of decline, and an inspiration to change the world through social activism.

However, it would be a mistake to suppose that all of Muggeridge's readers were Christians. The religious demographics of Muggeridge's readers were shaped by the pluralism that defined Western Europe, North America, and Australasia generally during those decades. Muggeridge received fan mail from readers who were Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Baha'i, vaguely spiritual, Hindu, Agnostic, and Atheist, as well as those who practiced Transcendental Meditation. This religious diversity adds considerable complexity on top of all those factors of age, sex, economic status and geographic location that characterized Muggeridge's Christian readers. And while readers who identified as something other than Christian made up less than 5% of Muggeridge's fan mail, they remain essential if we are to understand properly the scope of Muggeridge's readers. It may seem odd to analyze people from such diverse religious backgrounds in the same chapter. Doing so in no way is meant to suggest that they can be lumped together as somehow marginal or less important than the Christian readers examined in the previous chapters. On the contrary, it is a contention of this chapter that considering such religious pluralism together reveals something significant about the role of Christianity in the formation of self-identity after the Second World War. Most striking

about these non-Christian readers as a whole, however, is that their reading experience shared a great deal in common with Muggeridge's Christian readers. Whatever their background, Muggeridge's non-Christian readers saw him as a friend and kindred spirit; they looked to him as an authority, even if they did not see themselves as spiritual; they witnessed and wrestled with the idea that the "West" was in a period of rapid decline; and they struggled with Muggeridge's challenge to change one's views of poverty and the welfare state.

Self-Discovery and Spiritual Authority

It is immediately apparent why a Christian might seek out Muggeridge's religious writings, and then feel compelled to write him a letter. But what about this diverse group of readers? What would a lead a teenaged Atheist from London to read *Jesus Rediscovered* and admit in a personal letter to Muggeridge, "your voice is strong inside me" and felt "seldom unconscious of it"?[462] Why would a Jewish man from Essex express that Muggeridge was "the only person who has come near to expressing the view I hold"?[463] For what reason did an agnostic bookshop attendant from Edinburgh confess that "for some reason which I cannot understand, I know that you will be able to help me in some way to come to some understanding about [the] question of religion"?[464] Was it the seductive allure of his prose? His witty and magnetic personality? Was it his ubiquitous presence on the BBC? Certainly, these played a part. But there are two key

[462] Lindsay Perigo to Malcolm Muggeridge, 15 September 1977, SC-4 101/14.

[463] H. Salkin to Malcolm Muggeridge, 23 September 1971, SC-4 82/19.

[464] Lesley D. Hale to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 August 1977, SC-4 101/9.

factors that explain why these people were reading Muggeridge at all. The first is the context of rising pluralism in "Western" societies after 1960. The second is how Muggeridge expressed his religious faith within this context.

Dynamic social change was not something that only Christians experienced. Just as there has been a recent call to pay closer attention to the lived experience of those who remained Christians while their churches emptied,[465] so also should we pay close attention to how those who rejected Christianity (as well as those who were never a part of it) made use of its cultural resources in their own search for meaning. How can conventional narratives of secularization account for, say, an Anglican-turned-Hindu who still read and imbibed Christian literature in her spiritual life?[466] Or what about a life-long atheist who picked up *Jesus Rediscovered* in the midst of personal crisis?[467] Clive Field offers a realistic reminder in his recent study *Secularization in the Long 1960s* when he confirmed, "statistics reveal [Christianity] to have been in long-term decline."[468] Few would doubt that claim. But the question is whether such measures of religiosity can adequately account for ongoing interplay between various religious and irreligious points of view. Here, again, the typical religious categories of "believing," "behaving," and "belonging" miss the mark. A close examination of Muggeridge's non-Christian readers include many who would not fit cleanly into any of these categories while yet at the same

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[465] See Callum Brown, "What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?" *Journal of Religious History* 34, no. 4 (December 2010): 479.

[466] Rita Blanks to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 August 1980, SC-4 105/8.

[467] John W. Atkins to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 February 1976, SC-4 98/13. His letters are discussed in more detail below.

[468] Clive D. Field, *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 229.

time they made extensive use of Christian cultural resources in the crafting of their own identity. For some, the religious crisis of the 1960s and 1970s was also an identity crisis. Muggeridge's readers who rejected Christianity carved out their identity in a rapidly changing religious landscape. A cultural focus on the lived experience of these readers may help us to understand the role that religion continued to play even as its institutions declined.

North America, Western Europe, and Australasia each had religiously diverse communities with long histories,[469] but they were all so small that these regions remained overwhelmingly Christian. Not only that, citizens believed that the constitution of their "imagined communities" were defined by a shared Christian outlook.[470] The 1960s and 1970s marked a watershed when the rapid decline of Christianity's social significance became especially pronounced in the context of increasing religious pluralism. A significant number of immigrants and the subsequent internal growth of those communities helped to transform Britain into a more ethnically and religious diverse society.[471] The British Nationality Act of 1948 was prompted largely economic

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[469] For example, see Mary Heimann, "Christianity in Western Europe from the Enlightenment," in *A World History of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 497-505. What follows will focus primarily on the British context. Most of Muggeridge's readers were British, and it is that context that had the greatest impact in shaping Muggeridge himself.

[470] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

[471] Clive D. Field, "Religious Statistics in Great Britain: An Historical Introduction," *British Religion in Numbers*. http://www.brin.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/development-of-religious-statistics.pdf. [Accessed 10/6/2017]. In England and Wales alone, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus each experienced roughly a ten-fold increase between 1961 and 1981. The Muslim population increased approximately from 50,000 in 1961 to 553,000 in 1981; the Sikh population from 16,000 to 144,000; and the Hindu population increased from 30,000 to 278,000. We should be cautious about trusting raw figures of these groups, however. Clive Field has noted that statistics about "non-Christian faiths" are not altogether reliable because historically they (with Judaism excepted) have not attached a great deal of importance to counting themselves. See "Hindu, Muslim and Sikh Adherents," *British Religion in*

insecurity, and so provided pathways for Commonwealth citizens to migrate to the United Kingdom. Many of these migrants did not practice Christianity. Muslims, for example, became the largest religious community after Christianity by the 1960s. Thus, one important consequence of the Act was a small but important shift in Britain's social and religious make-up.[472] This demographic shift played a crucial role in destabilizing the idea of a shared and monolithic British (i.e. English) national character. It became increasingly difficult to talk about an "essential" national character when immigration, individualism, and the concomitant "death of Protestant England" opened up possibilities for creative self-fashioning never before experienced on such a large social scale. Britain's overseas political expansion had developed in close alliance with a shared Christian (i.e. Protestant) character, and so the demise of empire was tethered to the decline of Christianity's social significance. Britishness became less a prescribed cultural ideal that one inherited or aspired towards, and more a descriptive phenomenon of all the people who participated in a shared political process. During and after the 1960s British identity became, according to Peter Mandler, "a bricolage of traits, habits, [and] preferences"[473] that was more globally oriented in its scope. Alister Chapman has observed that this cultural shift became positively "toxic" to the language of Christian

Numbers, accessed October 6, 2017, http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/hindu-muslim-and-sikh-adherents/. See also Ceri Peach and Richard Gale, "Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in the New Religious Landscape of England," *The Geographical Review* 93, no. 4 (October 2003): 469-490. Peach and Gale make the important case that influx of religiously diverse communities transformed the visual landscape of Britain, too. The creation of sites of worship for Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims accentuated the reality of Britain's religious diversity.

[472] Field, *Secularization in the Long 1960s*, 76.

[473] Mandler, *The British National Character*, 222.

nationhood.[474] The rhetoric of Christian nationhood was seen as both atavistic and exclusionary. As a response, the church establishment, the schools, and the media changed their tone. The Church of England began to emphasize more pointedly the "kindness towards those outside the bounds of traditional Christian morality and belief," a rhetorical shift consistent with the doctrinal reforms made during those same years.[475] They were willing to accommodate other faiths (and earn a few pounds) by selling redundant sanctuaries to other faiths, as John Maiden has recently showed in his case study of the Church of England in Bedford.[476] Similarly, multi-faith religious education began in the 1970s as a direct response to the ethnic and religious diversity that had grew rapidly from the 1960s.[477] And between 1960 and 1979, the BBC changed quite dramatically its religious broadcasting by departing from predominately Christian

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[474] Alister Chapman, "The International Context of Secularization in England: The End of Empire, Immigration, and the Decline of Christian National Identity, 1945-1970," *Journal of British Studies* 54 (January 2015): 163-189.

[475] Chapman, "The International Context of Secularization in England," 179.

[476] John Maiden, "'What Could be More Christian than to Allow the Sikhs to Use It?' Church Redundancy and Minority Religion in Bedford, 1977-8," in *Christianity and Religious Plurality*, Charlotte Methuen, Andrew Spicer, and John Wolffe, eds. (WoodBridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 399-411.

[477] Stephen G. Parker and Rob J. K. Freathy, "Ethnic Diversity, Christian Hegemony and the Emergence of Multi-Faith Religious Education in the 1970s," *History of Education* 41, no. 3 (May 2012): 381-404. A central critique of Parker and Freathy's article is that Christianity maintained a prominent position within this educational platform, itself based on the 1975 Birmingham *Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction*. The critiques from Christian conservatives were, therefore, over stated. It is true that some cases immigration caused religious fragmentation that could ignite reactionary movements within Christianity, what Peter Berger called "resurgent religion." Yet, that reaction to alternative belief systems was not typical, despite recent characterizations to that effect by Callum Brown. As Alister Chapman has demonstrated in his local study of Derby, multi-culturalism could foster the creation of a new civil religion whereby diverse religious communities worked in concert, each mutually concerned for the good of society. Tolerance and various forms of appropriation were the norm; militant fundamentalism the exception. See Berger, "The Desecularization of the World," Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 297-314. Alister Chapman, "Civil Religions in Derby, 1930-2000," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2016): 817-843.

programing to include more discussions of religious diversity. [478] Both the reality and perception of Britain as a multi-cultural and religious diverse society were widely recognized at all levels of society.

Additionally, rising affluence and new media provided unprecedented access to alternative belief systems and practices. Indeed, Muggeridge's television career facilitated this just as he converted to Christianity. He was often found with furrowed brow discussing some hot-button religious issue with a panel of religiously diverse leaders in society. For those Chapman analyzed in Derby, their reaction to diversity in this setting was to work in concert for the benefit of society as a whole. Conventional religion could thus remain an important social force, not despite, but because of increased religious diversity. The general trend of institutional Christianity to accommodate, rather than resist, changes in society is another example that runs parallel to the development of multiculturalism in Derby.[479] Yet, the same diversity that transformed the religious culture of Derby also led to a greater willingness among people to become eclectic in their religious beliefs—sometimes at the expense of Christianity. This rise in affluence, felt in all classes in society from the 1950s, supported new sub-cultures, drew people away from churches and allowed them the freedom to develop their lives without the guiding hand of the churches.[480] One of Muggeridge's younger readers, Ian Prior,

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[478] Caitriona Noonan, "Piety and Professionalism: The BBC's Changing Religious Mission (1960-1979)," *Media History* 19, no. 2 (2013): 196-212. See also Asa Briggs, "Christ and the Media: Secularization, Rationalism, and Sectarianism in the History of British Broadcasting, 1922-1976," in *Secularization, Rationalism, and Sectarianism: Essays in Honour of Bryan R. Wilson*, Eileen Barker, James A. Beckford, and Karel Dobbelaere, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 267-286. See esp. 276-277.

[479] See chapter 3 for a discussion on the reactions of institutional Christianity to the religious crisis of the 1960s.

[480] Hugh McLeod, "The Sixties," *Religion and the Political Imagination*, Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 264-265.

reflects in personal practice what was widely available. After reading *Jesus Rediscovered*, he informed Muggeridge: "I am only seventeen but have been searching for Truth ever since I can remember. I have studied all of the world's religions, except Mohommedanism, in some depth, and find that they are all different paths to the same destination. Would you agree? I have been a member of the Buddhist Society, but have recently felt the magnetic pull of Christ."[481] Prior eventually joined the Society of Friends, but the path he described was one many traversed. Experimenting with different religious traditions was seen by some as part of their coming of age.

The exact religious tradition one joined was less important than the Bunyanesque journey of self-discovery through which one arrived there. One perceptive reader put it this way in his letter to Muggeridge: "The truth is that the search for meaning in life could be futile and that there is no meaning, that the real and only truth is our searching; that we seek a meaning that meets our requirements."[482] The Celestial City was the sense of meaning and fulfillment that people experienced as they constructed their own identity. Anti-institutionalism worked hand-in-glove with the desire for freedom and self-determination that began in the 1960s and became popularized during the 1970s.[483] Readers could agree on their right of self-determination; what they could not quite figure out was where and how it could be found. The burden of each individual was to find something that felt authentic. A good starting point was to accept at a basic level the

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[481] Ian Prior to Malcolm Muggeridge, 27 October 1971, SC-4 83/16.

[482] H. Salkin to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 April 1970, SC-4 75/11.

[483] Emily Robinson et al. "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain."

validity all religious options available; that is, except for the church establishment and traditions inherited from youth. Thus, similar to Ian Prior was forty-six-year-old Australian Margaret Ginsberg. Her mother had been a "devout" member of the Church of England and her grandfather was even a rector. But the church just was not for her. "Early I rejected the trappings + emptiness of the Church. I never rejected Christ because his words + life are truth. So also are the words of Krishna + Ramakrishna + Yoganadra."[484] It was a similar way of thinking that animated the spiritual life of Enid Corfe of Wiltshire who was inspired to share her faith with Muggeridge once she had read *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*. She had recently decided to become a follower of the Indian guru Meher Baba, who she believed the most recent "historical manifestations" of God's love, a line that also included Krishna, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Mohammad.[485] Or Thelma Halbert of London. She had been a Christian for many years before coming to the realization that "all religions—such as Buddhism, the Jewish Faith, Islam, etc.—taught the same spiritual truths. Then I came across the Baha'i World faith…and found the answer to the predicament of religious thought today."[486] The answer, in her mind, was to empty religion of divisive doctrines so as to preserve its authentic spiritual essence. Joining the Baha'i faith was just one way of doing that. The kind of attitude reflected in Ian Prior, Margaret Ginsburg, Enid Corfe, and Thelma Halbert contributed to the reconstitution of the religious character of society, as well as

[484] Margaret Ginsburg to Malcolm Muggeridge, February 1973, SC-4 91/24.

[485] Enid Corfe to Malcolm Muggeridge, 1 November 1975, SC-4 97/14.

[486] Thelma Halbert to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 October 1966, SC-4 52/23.

many people's assumptions about the future of Christianity in it.[487] This attitude played a fundamental role in weakening the degree to which young people were enculturated within a tightly knit, doctrinally defined, Christian nation.[488]

Rejecting one's Christian upbringing and experiencing the multi-culturalism that resulted from immigration, affluence, and the media inaugurated a flurry of creativity in the arts and philosophy. For many it was a liberating experience to define oneself in a culture that was becoming less and less shaped by Christian institutions. Not least of all were those professing "no religion," whose numbers rose significantly in all "Western" societies after 1960.[489] Callum Brown's project of writing a narrative of "no religion" as the "growth of a positive ideology" rather than as merely the deviant behaviors of a once Christian culture is an important one. He calls our attention to recognize that "a person's drift from a religion within a religious society…was also an act or journey of adventurous rejection—involving neglect of family values (frequently involving revolt against parents), dismissal of school compulsion, and a counter-cultural revolt."[490] This history must include close examination of the lived experience of those who made this "journey of adventurous rejection." For some, this was a blissful freedom from the chains of oppressive religion. Yet, this was not the case with everyone. Especially among those atheists and agnostics who read and wrote a fan letter to Muggeridge, they expressed

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[487] See chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of how Muggeridge's readers engaged with living in a "secular society."

[488] See McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 2.

[489] See Callum G. Brown, "The People of 'No Religion': The Demographics of Secularisation in the English-speaking world since c. 1900," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 51 (2011): 37-61.

[490] Ibid., 60.

some difficulty with crafting their identity after leaving the religion of their youth. H. Wilman of Potters Bar, Hertfordshire is typical.[491] He had rejected Christianity once he concluded that religion was just an expression of humanity's need to understand those aspects of life outside its control. Prayer was a highly effective therapeutic technique, but only because it stimulated the necessary bio-chemical responses in the brain to cope with trauma. Wilman's crisis of faith had lasted eight years—his questioning of the "fundamentals of religious belief" that he had learned in his youth had led to an "open mind" that was liberated by evidence, reason, and logic—all those things that he found wanting in his Christian upbringing.[492] The flip side of enlightenment, however, was "a terrifying feeling of vacuousness, pointlessness, of there being no rhyme or reason, direction or purpose, to my life or those of my fellow men. The fabric of my life had been built upon sand—quicksand."[493] Wilman is a good reminder that the religious crisis of the 1960s and 1970s was acutely felt by some who left Christianity. The hopeful liberation and optimistic sentiments for new beginnings was certainly a prominent aspect of those decades, but we cannot ignore those whose own struggles of religious faith amounted to an identity crisis. Charles Taylor has famously defined a "Secular Age" as one where Christianity is only one option among many. It was not a process of linear decline, but was part of the conditions of experience that everyone had to come to terms with. But not everyone did so in the same way. Some who felt Christianity was

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[491] Brown notes that the typical "non-religious" person in the mid-twentieth century was young, white, and male. See Brown, "The People of 'No Religion'," 58. For attempts to classify varieties of atheism, see Matt Sheard, "Ninety-Eight Atheists: Atheism among the Non-Elite in Twentieth Century Britain," *Secularism & Nonreligion* 3, no. 6 (2014): 1-16.

[492] H. Wilman to Malcolm Muggeridge, 30 September 1973, SC-4 92/17.

[493] Ibid.

intellectually and morally untenable still drew upon its resources in that process. For Muggeridge's non-Christian fans, his writings were just one source for them as they wrestled with understanding their place in the world.

But why Muggeridge of all people? His alliance with moral activists like Mary Whitehouse, his involvement in the Nationwide Festival of Light, together with his recurrent lambasting of permissiveness in society might give the impression that he was strict about his theology, too. Moral strictness often derives from theological conservatism, but the two did not go hand-in-hand for Muggeridge. His conversion to Christianity did not include an immediate jump to orthodoxy. Indeed, *Jesus Rediscovered*, itself a chronicle of Muggeridge's spiritual development during the 1960s, included his initial skepticism about standard-fare teachings of Christian orthodoxy, such as the Virgin Birth, the divinity of Christ, and a literal death and resurrection. He admitted the irony of his current state of mind: "I find myself praising a position I cannot uphold, enchanted by a religion I cannot believe, putting all my hope in a faith I do not have."[494] Of course, it was by accepting an allegorical interpretation of Christianity's central tenets that he was able to come to terms with this dilemma. This early stance against conventional Christianity was animated, at least in part, by its doctrinal specificity. It is not a coincidence that Muggeridge's criticisms of institutional Christianity during the 1960s and after was directed primarily at their evolving positions on morality. The idea of debating esoteric points of theology was foreign to him. It was not until the mid-1970s (around the time he published *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*) that he

[494] Quoted in Hunter, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*, 225.

arrived at a more conservative version of Christian theology. Yet, even then, doctrinal difference was not altogether important to him. In 1977, while delivering his lectures, which would become *Christ and the Media*, Muggeridge said there really was not any substantial difference between "Roman Catholics or Anglicans or Jehovah's Witnesses." As he saw it, "All the different categories we have devised just don't apply. There is but one category: our common fellowship in Christ."[495]

The fundamental principle driving this conclusion was Muggeridge's commitment to his belief that each person must ultimately find out for oneself the content of their religious life. This was at the heart of not only his anti-institutionalism, it was one of the fundamental principles that defined Muggeridge's theology. Authentic faith could not be taught—it had to be experienced. On this count, Muggeridge, despite his insistence on defining himself apart from trends of modern society, had a great deal in common with it. It is not that Muggeridge, after accepting Christian orthodoxy, ultimately did not think doctrinal precepts like Jesus' Divinity or the Virgin Birth mattered. Rather, Muggeridge's own personal experience taught him that one had to arrive at such supernatural ideas on one's own. He sensed, and was participant of, the hyper-individualism that defined post-war religious culture. As Emily Robinson et al have shown recently, popular individualism that characterized the 1970s had "multiple political and cultural valences"—and to that we might add religious valences, too.[496] Even though Muggeridge was a gadfly who was known to denounce everything from the

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[495] Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 72.

[496] Robinson et al, "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain," 276.

pill to Monty Python, the basic attitude of hyper-individualism was still a prominent feature in Muggeridge's theology.

The fact that Muggeridge participated in this sort of mentality was at least one of the reasons why he chose to remain outside of institutional Christianity for fifteen years after he converted. This could be interpreted by some—those who had a strong sense of religious identity—that he needed guidance himself. As we might expect, Muggeridge's Christian (and especially Catholic) readers spilled a great amount of ink trying to convince him to join their church. Converting Muggeridge was a goal of his readers from other religious traditions, too. A. K. Mohiuddin Ahmed was a Muslim from Glasgow who read Muggeridge's autobiography the year it came out. We do not know much about Ahmed other than that he enclosed in his short letter a book called *Islam and the Muslim Prayer* by Khwaja Kamal-Ud-Din.[497] The book was first published by the Woking Muslim Mission in England, a missionary society begun by Kamal-ud-Din in 1913. The text was written primarily as a Muslim apologetic for those in Britain who were unfamiliar with or who had misconceptions of Islam. The book was designed to be shared with others in the same way that any of the Victorian Christian missionary societies might disseminate godly tracts or books free of charge. Significantly, *Islam and the Muslim Prayer* includes a refutation of Christianity as its second chapter. Ahmed's brief letter did not spend any time trying to convince Muggeridge to convert to Islam, but the inclusion of this text may suggest evangelistic intent. Likewise, John and Rouhi Huddleston tried to convince Muggeridge that the Baha'i Faith had the answers he was

[497] A. K. Mohiuddin Ahmed to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 October 1972, SC-4 89/9.

looking for, especially since Jesus Christ was counted among the historic manifestations of God. The Baha'i Faith, in their view, was the best possible chance the world had to overcome "the barriers of prejudice between peoples of differing race, class, culture and creed."[498]

But most non-Christian readers did not see him as one who needed converting. Rather, they saw him as a fellow traveler on a journey of self-discovery wherever it might lead. T. Lovatt Williams thought that he and Muggeridge were on the same wavelength when he confirmed that he believed one's spiritual mentality was "not something that can be taught or preached."[499] Williams had left Christianity, but he still saw Jesus as someone worth emulating. For the most part, Muggeridge's non-Christian readers came from a similar background as Williams. The majority were raised in a religious household, but then joined an alternative belief system, or left religion altogether. Seldom were his readers born into a religion other than Christianity. Richard Poole of London is a good example of this. His seven-page, hand-written letter described how in his youth he looked to find meaning and purpose by joining various causes—at one point even traveling to South America to fight in political liberation movements. He gave credit to reading *Jesus Rediscovered*, which "filled me with strength and resolve and soon freed me from the wells of man-made ideas in which I had become deeply entangled."[500] As he reflected on Muggeridge's role in the development of his spiritual journey, he confessed that it was "easy to believe that my hand was guided along the book shelf,

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[498] John and Rouhi Huddleston to Malcolm Muggeridge, 25 December 1968, SC-4 67/11.

[499] T. Lovatt Williams to Malcolm Muggeridge, 15 August 1966, SC-4 52/4.

[500] Richard Poole to Malcolm Muggeridge, 12 June 1977, SC-4 101/2.

because from the first instant of reading I felt myself filled with a joy that I had unknowingly longed for all my life but never experienced."[501] Ultimately, Muggeridge was just one important step among many on his personal journey of spiritual enlightenment. What he found inspiring was that Muggeridge had found spiritual meaning in his life after so many years without it. Christopher Hitchens said once that Muggeridge should be understood as a "divine discontent,"[502] an apt description for someone who, at least during and after the 1960s, was on a constant mission for deeper spirituality, defined as it was *outside* of an institutional framework. Poole thought of his own life as parallel to Muggeridge's, though he found enlightenment, not in Christianity, but in the Baha'i Faith. His letter included not only a narrative of how he found it, but something of a rough apologetic of his new religious tradition itself, even hoping that Muggeridge would become a member and spread its message.[503] The emphasis in the Baha'i Faith on the equality of humanity and fundamental unity of religion throughout the world generated in Poole a freedom to seek for spiritual inspiration wherever it could be found. That perhaps explains why he told Muggeridge, "I feel so drawn towards you, perhaps as one person whose life has taken the form of an unfettered search for Truth."[504]

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[501] Ibid.

[502] Christopher Hitchens, "A Hundred Years of Muggery: The Life and Times of Malcolm Muggeridge," *The Weekly Standard*, 5 May 2003, http://www.weeklystandard.com/a-hundred-years-of-muggery/article/3859. [Accessed 27 October 2017].

[503] The Baha'i Faith underwent something of an evangelistic pivot in the late 1930s under the leadership of Shoghi Effendi. Since then, it has launched several ambitious plans to grow their numbers. See Moojan Momen, "The Baha'i Faith 1957-1988: A Survey of Contemporary Developments," *Religion* 19 (1989): 63-91. Richard Poole's attempts to convert Muggeridge to the Baha'i Faith may well have been the result of this larger project. This does not deny the fundamental teaching of the essential unity of all religions, but it does cause an attitudinal shift in how the more zealous of its adherents would interact with others outside the Baha'i Faith.

[504] Richard Poole to Malcolm Muggeridge, 12 June 1977, SC-4 101/2.

Muggeridge's response to Richard Poole reveals much about his position on the various ways that someone arrived at a sense of spiritual meaning. He wrote, "Thank you so much for your very interesting letter. I am not personally familiar with the Persian cult you write about so I don't believe I would be able to help much in propagating it. However, after reading your letter and the enclosure, I feel that now I know a little and feel sure that your own devotion is not misplaced."[505] This response was written in 1977, several years after Muggeridge had embraced traditional tenets of Christianity. From someone who wrote and spoke on so many occasions of berating cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, his response to this Baha'i convert is rather tolerant. Is it possible that Muggeridge was just being polite? If this was the only response of this type, then that might be a possible explanation. In fact, this response was part of a pattern in Muggeridge's replies to fans. It aligns with his choice not to enter into debates about particular doctrines. Every person's spiritual formation was different and, as far as Muggeridge seems to indicate, doctrinal rectitude was not the priority.

The same year that Richard Poole sent his letter, Muggeridge also received a note from a Mrs. I. S. Stoby of St. Helier on the island of Jersey. Her letter complained to Muggeridge that her daughter had left the Christian faith and was experimenting with various aspects of Eastern religions (though she does not specify which). She hoped that since Muggeridge was a convert to Christianity himself, he might be able to provide some advice on how to convince her daughter to return to Christianity and, by extension,

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[505] Malcolm Muggeridge to Richard Poole, 21 June 1977, SC-4 101/2.

their church.[506] Muggeridge's response was not what she asked for and, in fact, does more to confirm the daughter's choices than the mother's wishes.

> I am so sorry to hear of your troubles. A lot of young people today, in a way to their credit, find contemporary life intolerable and because of the poor leadership often of the Christian Churches, turn to these eastern cults. I have lived some years in India myself and I think I can assure you that your daughter is not likely to come to any serious harm and may even be helped in sorting herself out. I can imagine how painful it must be for you but good may come of it.[507]

Muggeridge's response reflected his attitude that, though Christianity was his confession, each person must ultimately arrive at their own conclusions about the content of their faith. This perhaps explains why people of so many different religious and non-religious backgrounds saw Muggeridge as someone they could relate to.

Muggeridge's own life of spiritual self-discovery, and the assurance he seemed to have as a result, was attractive to people who were themselves going difficult times. Perhaps the most common reason many of these readers wrote to Muggeridge was because, at that particular moment of their lives, they felt the need to get in touch with a spiritual authority. As we have seen, Muggeridge earned the reputation of being a spiritual authority who stood in opposition to institutional Christianity. People from many different non-Christian perspectives felt comfortable they could tap him for some advice, even if they found his Christianity ultimately unconvincing. Often these readers were those who had only recently rejected Christianity and its institutions, but had not yet figured out what to do next.

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[506] I. S. Stoby to Malcolm Muggeridge, 4 April 1977, SC-4 100/13.

[507] Malcolm Muggeridge to I. S. Stoby, 23 May 1977, SC-4 100/13.

Others wrote when they faced a crisis in their life and did not know where else to turn. A poignant example is that of John W. Atkins, a Sheffield bartender:

> Dear Mr. Muggeridge,
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> I am writing this letter at 7:00AM after having identified the bodies of two friends who were killed in a car crash earlier this morning. I am obviously very shocked—and you may ask why a letter to you. I am NOT a Christian—I have never believed in "life after death" as I totally question the validity of Christian beliefs based on assumptions over 2000 years ago. I desperately want to believe in "something"—something to follow after my own death. I believe you were a non-Christian for most of your life and then suddenly changed your beliefs. I would like to know why—what motivated you to change your mind (I fully realize your reasons wouldn't be mine) but I guess I need an "intellectual shoulder" to lean on at this moment. I admire your very much—the reason for writing to you and I would value a reply.[508]

We do not have a copy of Muggeridge's reply, but Atkin's second letter, dated four months later, thanked Muggeridge for sending him a copy of *Jesus Rediscovered*.[509] It would appear that in those four months, Atkins transitioned from atheism to some form of agnosticism. He did not know if there was a God, but he admitted to praying for therapeutic reasons when he felt like it. He had since lost his job and was trying to pay his bills by working two part-time jobs, adding on hours as a janitor at a local factory. Ultimately, *Jesus Rediscovered* was not convincing to him because he felt Christianity did not make the world any better. His lot included dead friends and financial hardship. He continued that "Religion to me doesn't seem to represent reality, a mere belief in something just doesn't seem to answer our problems let alone provide the answer for them…We are surrounded by a society which doesn't care."[510]

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[508] John W. Atkins to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 February 1976, SC-4 98/13.

[509] John W. Atkins to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 June 1976, SC-4 99/2.

[510] Ibid.

Atkins was typical in that it was common for Muggeridge's atheist and agnostic readers to write him a letter while they were going through personal crises, suffered loss of friends, were fired from a job, or felt convinced there was no meaning left in the world. Some answers were better than none at all, and readers who did not believe in God thought they would explore their options by tapping a figure like Muggeridge. Yet, once they worked through their problems, Muggeridge's advice was no longer needed. Having these feelings did not mean that Atkins all of the sudden became a religious seeker for one hot minute. The difficult circumstances he was then facing—as even he seems to admit—were what drove him to contact Muggeridge for a spiritual take on his problems. He was looking for answers, and even entertained religious sources, but that did not mean he was seeking to become religious himself. *Jesus Rediscovered*, and Malcolm Muggeridge by extension, functioned as intellectual and cultural resources through which he wrestled with the struggles of his own life. It is a clear example of, not growing secularization, but of how an individual who defined himself *against* Christianity participated in a continual process of reconstituting his own identity in the crucible of personal crisis.

The same might be said of Rosamund Hunter, a university student in Aberdeen, who read Muggeridge's books and listened to a public lecture he delivered at Marischal College in 1968. She wrote him a letter mostly because she had not been able to pluck up the courage to ask him a question during the Q&A session. It was easier to express herself in writing rather than face the pressures of a live audience. She struggled with finding meaning in her life and thought it rather perplexing that Muggeridge displayed such confidence in his beliefs:

> My question would have been how can you be so sure that there is in fact a god? I try to practise Christian ethics in my daily life simply because I think they speak of utter truth and beauty and know that had I known Christ I should have loved him dearly and would have undoubtedly been a "follower" of Him. I was interested in the talk of modern knowledge being capable of driving us mad. I am aware of this increasingly and times, more and more frequently, just because I have no faith whatsoever, find utterly suicidal….
>
> Can you possibly help me in this? I have talked to so many theologians but just seem to be talking into a dark vacuum. I cannot accept the modern church at all and if I were ever to believe that Christ were the son of god I doubt I could worship him through a church medium.[511]

She continued to describe her doubts that Jesus could really be anything more than "one of the greatest men the world has ever had in it." In her youth, she had been a "fervent" believer, but once she lost the feelings of "peace and serenity" that had accompanied her faith, it seemed like she had become something of a fraudulent Christian:

> If I am sure there is no god—while yet longing with my whole being to believe in Him, and therefore life taking on a completely futile, meaningless and hopeless form, why cannot I commit suicide. I see this objectively. The very beauty all around me, which I love so much, becomes almost unbearable because it, too, seems without point. The only fact which in fact has stopped me committing suicide has been the knowledge of my parents love for me and their need of me…but even this sometimes seems to become less sharp in its "staying power" and I am so afraid. Could it not be that Man's need for a God is so great that he has simply created God in his own image to satisfy this great need?[512]

Muggeridge was moved enough by Rosamund Hunter's letter that he wrote her twice within the next two weeks. We do not have the first letter he sent, but we do have the second and it is worth quoting in full.

> Dear Rosamund,
>
> I read your letter over again when I got back here and was more than ever impressed with it.

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[511] Rosamund Hunter to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 May 1968, SC-4 61/11.

[512] Ibid.

> I am getting my bookshop to send you the Simone Weil book I referred to in my other note because I think she was so exactly in your case.
>
> There is never any occasion to despair, I promise you. I can give you this assurance with the utmost confidence from forty years, away, as it were.
>
> Behind our lives and behind the universe itself there is a principle of unity, a God, expressive of love not hate or indifference, creativity not destruction, light not darkness. It is possible to establish contact with this God through the living person of Christ. This is what the Christian religion is about.
>
> These may seem just empty words to you, but they are not. They're the only truth there is.
>
> Please write again if you feel like it.[513]

Muggeridge's response to Rosamund here seems to take on a quite different tone than what he sent to I. S. Stoby and Richard Poole. The key difference is what his fans were looking for. Poole had found confidence in the Baha'i Faith and so did not write to Muggeridge for any real spiritual guidance. His letter told of the influence *Jesus Rediscovered* had had on his spiritual journey. The point was to draw a parallel between Muggeridge's spiritual development and his own. Muggeridge's reply thereby met Poole where he was, responding in tolerance rather than taking the correspondence as an opportunity to convince him to return to his Christian roots. Stoby's letter requested the very thing that Muggeridge found unacceptable within institutional Christianity: she wanted Muggeridge to instruct her daughter on why she ought to return to the church of her youth. But Muggeridge's theology was consistent in that the content of one's faith could not be taught. That is why he was confident "some good may come" out of Stoby's daughter experimenting with various alternative religious beliefs. But what about

[513] Malcolm Muggeridge to Rosamund Hunter, 11 June 1968, SC-4 61/11.

Rosmund? Here he tells her Christianity is "the only truth there is." Was Muggeridge talking out of both sides of his mouth? We have certainly seen him act inconsistently. His remarks about what was causing Britain's decline changed depending on audience. What makes Rosamund Hunter different from either Stoby or Poole is that she was actively seeking out his advice, whereas Poole and Stoby's daughter were not. In this case, Hunter invited Muggeridge to be an active participant in the self-fashioning of her religious identity. The fact that she claimed to be depressed and suicidal added a sense of urgency to the message Muggeridge wanted to her to have. That is why he sent two letters in such a short time. The layered and complex responses that Muggeridge wrote to his fans reveals in another context how deeply attached Muggeridge was with his fans. It was not the vainglorious conceit of a public figure who was in desperate need of validation. These letters were the result of a genuine concern for the people whose lives his books changed.

It would be over a year before Muggeridge received another letter from Rosamund. She sent her next reply in August of 1969, though Muggeridge was traveling at the time, so he did not receive it until September. Between her first and second letter she had experienced several momentous changes in her life. She took a break from school, married a physics lecturer who happened to share her agnosticism, and moved to London where they purchased a flat in Forest Hill.[514] She still struggled with questions of meaning and purpose, but she appeared to have been slowly working through her troubles by alternative methods than what Muggeridge had advised. She was thankful

[514] Rosamund Meeten to Malcolm Muggeridge, 18 August 1969, SC-4 61/11.

that Muggeridge had sent her *Waiting on God*, and had even read it, but it did not do what he had hoped. She affirmed,

> I am still an agnostic and seem to see no other way of being. I wonder if you know Th. Hardy's poetry; I seem able to identify well with him—an agnostic with joy and a feeling of wholeness in nature but sad because it all seems to pass…
>
> I had a breakdown ~ 6 weeks ago and have been in the Maudsley since but seem to be on the 'mend' and should be discharged in 2 weeks' time.[515]

Whatever the exact causes of her mental breakdown, she and her husband felt it was necessary to find a quieter place to live than London, so they purchased a house near Ware, about thirty miles north of the city. Rosamund sent her letter mostly to thank Muggeridge for the book, and expressed some optimism at the thought of enrolling in the nearest university to finish her degree. At this point she did not need Muggeridge's guidance anymore like she did while living in Aberdeen. There is the close of her letter a sense of finality: "That's all my news. In your letter of 11th June '68 you said to write if I felt like it and I do today but am sorry not to have felt like it before so that I am rather late in thanking you for your book and letter."[516] One gets the sense that she was perhaps writing out of a sense of guilt than any desire to continue correspondence.

Muggeridge, it would seem, was more invested in their relationship than she was. After all, he wrote more letters to her than she did to him:

> Dear Rosamund,
>
> I was delighted to get your letter. Actually, I received it rather belatedly because I have been away.

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[515] Ibid.

[516] Ibid.

> You have often been in my mind after the very sweet way you wrote to me from Aberdeen and I have wondered how you were getting along
>
> Yes, I love Thomas Hardy's poetry too, but it only conveys part of the illumination one can find in life. For the whole, one has to go to a poet like Blake or Herbert.
>
> I am so sorry about your breakdown and hope by now it's all over. Your husband sounds a most delightful man and I wish very much you would both come and see us one of these days. Please write again when you feel like it.[517]

Muggeridge signed the letter "affectionately," a complementary close he rarely used when writing to fans. But Muggeridge's emotional attachment has other tells. First is his apology at a late reply, even when it took a year to for Rosamund to send her second letter. It is significant that he remembered and that she was often on his mind, given all of the fan mail that Muggeridge received each year. Muggeridge received roughly three letters *every day* between his conversion to Christianity and formal entry into the Catholic Church. Muggeridge thus received about one thousand fan letters between the two Rosamund sent him. But the most unusual aspect of the letter is that it was Muggeridge who initiated the idea that Rosamund and her husband visit his home in Robertsbridge. It was normally his fans who wanted to come by for tea and a chat. As we have seen elsewhere, Muggeridge was certainly happy to oblige a visit when they requested it, but this is perhaps the only instance when it was Muggeridge's idea. Significantly, Muggeridge says nothing to try to convince her that she was mistaken in her agnosticism and ought to trust his advice from his previous letter. One might make the claim that his preference for William Blake and George Herbert over Thomas Hardy was a subtle form of Christian apologetics, but then again, subtlety really was not

[517] Malcolm Muggeridge to Rosamund Meeten, 4 September 1969, SC-4 61/11.

Muggeridge's style. As far as we know, Rosamund did not respond to Muggeridge's letter or accept his invitation to visit. There was nothing to indicate that at all in Muggeridge's date books and, as we have seen, he *did* put fans on his calendar when they wanted to visit.[518] One way to explain this correspondence is to recognize that the context in which she wrote to Muggeridge was one of distress. Muggeridge was an important resource as she wrestled with struggles of faith, doubt, and meaning. Yet, by her second letter that was ending. Like other readers—regardless of religious or irreligious background—she saw Muggeridge as a religious authority whom she could use to make sense of herself and the world around her, even if only for a brief moment.

Decline and Social Activism

Dozens of others read Muggeridge's books and wrote letters similarly. Readers who did not agree with Muggeridge's Christian faith nonetheless saw him as one whose life ran parallel to their own and, for that reason, felt they could tap him as a spiritual authority. They were likewise critical of institutional Christianity, even if they found a more comfortable home in another form of religious tradition with its own venerable institutions. And like many of Muggeridge's Christian readers, they also engaged with his idea that "Western" civilization was in a state of decline. However, unlike the readers who used Muggeridge's own conversion as a way to come to terms with their fears about decline, Muggeridge's readers from alternative belief systems interpreted the idea of decline differently. Take Tom Foster who had been a student at the University of Victoria while he read *Jesus Rediscovered.* His main reason for writing was that he was

[518] For example, see the example of Glynis Evans and Desmond Baker above in "Reading and Writing as Self-Discovery."

relieved to find that he was not the only one who thought the entire "world has gone mad."

> I first started asking myself, "what the hell is going on in this world," about two years ago. Well two years ago I started looking for that answer. I found it soon enough, in meditation. I was taught to meditate by…Maharishi, and have been doing so (meditation) for the last year and a half….In fact, he is doing the job that the church isn't. Well anyway, during the past year I've been going around to different meditation groups and what I have found is a lot of good people. The people that used to be filling the churches.[519]

It was through reading Muggeridge that Foster had been "introduced to the guru of gurus, Jesus Christ." No thanks to "all the crap" inside institutional Christianity that made it "so hard to find out what the teachings of Christ are." Muggeridge and Maharishi were better teachers, and it seemed obvious to him that with the current leadership, it was doubtful the "church [could] ever hope to survive."[520] A key difference here, between the attitude of Foster and those Christian readers who accepted Muggeridge's popularized secularization thesis, is that the former was not at all disturbed by it. All it did was to justify even more his decision to practice Transcendental Meditation. Tom Foster's experience exhibited religion in the counter-culture. His thoughts were almost exactly those of the Beatle, George Harrison: "it was only through India and through Hinduism and through yogis and through meditation that I learned about Christ and what Christ really meant and stood for."[521] The fact that Tom Foster was Canadian underlines the global impact of these notions on the religious landscape of "Western" societies. A

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[519] Tom Foster to Malcolm Muggeridge, 6 April 1974, SC-4 94/15.

[520] Ibid.

[521] Quoted in McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 131.

deeper, more spiritual experience was a way to escape the glum conventions of the church and, by consequence, the feeling that they were dying.

For the most part, readers accepted as a matter of fact that they were living in a period of Christianity's decline, but they fundamentally disagreed with Muggeridge's pessimism. The nineteen-year-old agnostic John Knox was one reader who simply would not allow declinism to colonize his mind. He was reading Muggeridge while studying at the University of Aberdeen and, not enjoying the culture of those around him, the book made him wish to "move away from the sordid, materialistic world we live in."[522] At the same time, he was not ready to wallow in glum resignation.

> My youth impels me to be hopeful and to doubt your fascinating prophecy of the end of our civilization. While many of the signs exist, as you quite rightly say, you do not take account of the rate at which our present day civilization can change. Morals and beliefs have changed very quickly over the past few decades…so there is no reason to suppose they cannot change again and this time more quickly. Besides I could not live with your morbid belief that this civilization (which I admire and even love) is going to completely destruct itself…I live for tomorrow, I don't live my student life from day to day, I live it and work at it because I am hopeful of an exciting useful life in the years ahead and if that means I have to reform or change this civilization (or at least give a tiny helping hand to that change) than so much the better.[523]

Others were not quite as hopeful as Knox that youthful idealism and a stiff upper lip would reform civilization. The Australian Henk Hout described of how after years of looking for meaning in his life, he became a disciple of Meher Baba. He left Christianity because it "did not give the answers to the questions that the generation of today is asking."[524] Christianity was dying because it was out of touch. Indeed, this is precisely

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[522] John Knox to Malcolm Muggeridge, 13 January 1970, SC-4 22/13.

[523] Ibid.

[524] Henk Hout to Malcolm Muggeridge, February 1973, SC-4 91/24.

the kind of criticism that many of the clergy and members acknowledged. This was at the heart of the diagnoses for *why* churches were losing members, and it is to address this issue that many of the churches updated their moral and doctrinal formulations during the 1960s and 1970s. Of course, the irony is that Muggeridge had some readers who became upset with their churches—in some cases even leaving—as a result. However, in the case of Hout, he was convinced that a pivot towards the East was what could save their dying Western Civilization when the churches could not:

> Why don't we admit that the East is far more advanced in spiritual matters and try to learn from them and eventually adopt their superior knowledge in our way of life? I believe that the future of the West can only be saved by a close relationship with the East. We have so much to give and learn! I don't agree at all with the hippy movement, but I am convinced that this movement contains the germs of the future of the whole world and they are more right than most of us think! One thing is certain, something has to change if the world is not going to blow itself up, so why not reach out and beyond our Church and see what the East has to tell us?[525]

In each of these three cases, the reader wished either to escape the decline of civilization or to reverse it. All of the strategies in the reader's minds centered on avoiding excessive materialism in some way, shape, or form. On this count, they were very closely aligned with Muggeridge. As we have seen, he also lambasted material excess that characterized modern life. One of his responses was to produce a number of documentaries that focused on poor pilgrims to Lourdes, monks with nothing but a hard floor as a bed, and most famously, a wizened old woman with a house for the dying in India. Muggeridge's response to rising affluence was to rediscover poverty and place a spotlight on methods of care that did not depend on the machinery of the state.

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[525] Ibid.

When Muggeridge's non-Christian readers picked up *Something Beautiful for God*, they met it with the same mixed responses that reflect the tensions surrounding the question of the welfare state and poverty discussed in the previous chapter. There were those who thought Muggeridge's views of poverty and the work of Mother Theresa were reprehensible alternatives to a modern welfare state that actually worked to alleviate suffering. Yet, being an atheist or agnostic was not a certain indication that a reader would find Muggeridge's arguments untenable. There does not appear to be any common denominator for the position one took on it. From Muggeridge's fan mail, at least, it would appear that the personal experiences one had with welfare, suffering, and poverty were the greatest factors in shaping their views on it. Their reading of Muggeridge's books served to animate particularly strong feelings, which they then were compelled to communicate in their fan letters. Patricia Dawson was an agnostic whose personal experiences led her to see *Something Beautiful for God* as a farce.

> My main criticism on reading your book "Something Beautiful for God" was exactly this, something beautiful for God? Why not "Something beautiful for Humanity?" Why does Mother Theresa have to find Christ in each of her poor? Why the insistence throughout the book that everything must be done because of Christ, as if, if one does something for mere humane reasons, it is not only enough but does not work.
>
> I cannot agree, I cannot agree that an atheist + an agnostic…cannot bring joy, warmth, love and hope to the suffering, unloved and uncared for, for no other reason than love of that fellow human and human compassion.[526]

Dawson had worked in the health-care industry and had enough personal experience with loved-ones dying to see Muggeridge's view of poverty as sheer folly. Her own daughter had come close to death on several occasions as an infant and, though she survived, her

[526] Patricia Dawson to Malcolm Muggeridge, December 1971, SC-4 84/14.

experience confirmed that Muggeridge was entirely out of touch with reality. "It is very fine to quote the hackneyed and rather empty words about God taking care of even the smallest bird," but "has anyone actually told this to those starving children with pot bellies, stick limbs and empty expressionless eyes, where suffering has long since obliterated hope?"[527] Dawson had an all too clear understanding of poverty and suffering in the world—Muggeridge was not needed for her to rediscover it. But her rediscovery of poverty was not filtered through the piety of Mother Theresa, communicated as it was by Muggeridge's crystalline prose. There was nothing redemptive or beautiful about it. There was no question in Dawson's mind. She would throw her support behind those who pursued practical measures for health care (contraceptives) with sensible motivations (for the good of humanity). The alternative was to trust a warped sense of piety that resulted in only "more of this suffering, more starving children who even in conception clutch fiercely at the flickering flame of life so uselessly."[528]

Muggeridge's arguments in *Something Beautiful for God* were jarring for Dawson chiefly because her convictions on welfare and poverty had already been forged by her own close interactions with death and suffering. To suggest that, in the words of Muggeridge, poverty and suffering "exemplify and enhance our human condition" was offensive in light of what she had experienced firsthand.[529] The fact that Dawson self-identified as an agnostic in her letter indicates that she felt it was at least one factor in shaping her position on these issues. As we have seen, for Muggeridge, the development

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[527] Ibid.

[528] Ibid.

[529] Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, 27-28.

of his theological convictions fundamentally transformed how he understood them. Yet it would appear that one's faith or non-belief should be seen as a sufficient, and not necessary, cause in one's position on welfare and poverty. Much more important were the personal idiosyncrasies of one's life.

This helps to explain why another agnostic, Jane Baweden, wrote to Muggeridge to express her "deep appreciation of your publication, recording the dedicated life and work of Mother Teresa and her community."[530] Her letter also underscores the autobiographical nature of Muggeridge's fan mail more generally, because she felt the need to provide "personal details, which I only mention to emphasize the impact and sincerity of your book."[531] Baweden explained that she did not have a religious upbringing and, though she admired the fellowship of the church communities she observed, she never could imagine herself joining one for the simple reason that it would be intellectually dishonest for her to do so without knowing whether God existed. The only reason she stepped into the library at Upton Hall Convent at Wirral and checked out *Something Beautiful for God* was because of her daughter, Gail.

> My only dearest daughter most happily (without influence or encouragement) always believed, asked to be Christened when she was five in a Church of England in Suffolk, and chose to become a Catholic at sixteen. There were just the two of us and she tried to help me believe, and I felt as a child when she spoke. At nineteenth (although it must have always been there,) she was diagnosed as being schizophrenic, and suffered a deep and continual mental depression.[532]

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[530] Jane Baweden to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 January 1972, SC-4 85/2.

[531] Ibid.

[532] Ibid.

Baweden continued to explain her daughter was not helped by the hospital staff and insisted on being at home and moving on with her life. But since Baweden worked as a teacher full-time, she had difficulty giving her daughter the attention she needed. Gail's mental condition continued to deteriorate and drove her to take her own life. Baweden's letter is full of guilt and regret that this might not have happened if only she would have given her daughter more love and attention. Living through this personal hell was what made Baweden fell that "I may understand a little the desperate loneliness of those whom Mother Teresa and her Sisters love, and thus give the one and only possible form of happiness to them before they die."[533] It made Baweden somehow come to terms with the loss of her daughter to know that Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Charity were doing their work halfway around the world.

Given their personal histories, the contrast between Patricia Dawson and Jane Baweden's reading of *Something Beautiful for God* is instructive. Both had daughters who suffered from serious medical conditions. Dawson's daughter went on to live, thereby putting into stark relief just how abhorrent Muggeridge's highly idealized vision of suffering was. In her case, the instruments of the welfare state had worked remarkably well. What is more is that she witnessed a great deal of people suffer, almost needlessly. Jane Baweden, on the other hand, blamed herself for her daughter's death. Even though Baweden's daughter was in a hospital's care for a time, she implies that the welfare state—like Baweden herself—did not provide the kind of emotional care her daughter needed. Stepping into a library run by the church her daughter had joined is telling, too. She, like so many other readers, was looking for answers at a moment of crises and it just

[533] Ibid.

so happened that Muggeridge's book was what she checked out. Baweden's reading of *Something Beautiful for God* was therapeutic because it cast her suffering into a context where it made sense. It also helped her cope with the loss to know that there were people providing the type of care she felt her daughter missed. What both of these deeply emotional letters seem to suggest is that their agnosticism did not necessarily cause them to reject Muggeridge's view of poverty and suffering, even if Dawson implies as much. Much more important were their own personal, idiosyncratic experiences, which they brought to bear on the subject matter of what they read. In both cases, however, Muggeridge's formed the textual location in which they articulated their views. What was a foil to Dawson was remedy to Baweden. Yet, they were in virtual agreement on religious matters.

For these readers, religion was by no means a zero-sum game. Their letters reveal that even if they did not believe in Christianity—and in many cases remained hostile to it—they nonetheless turned to one of its most outspoken apologists for help as they wrestled with personal challenges in their own lives. They thereby confirm recent attempts to interpret post-war religious culture not as a simple story of Christianity's linear decline, but rather as one that was opened up to "multiple modernities," wherein secular and religious perspectives co-existed in a state of "continual constitution and reconstitution."[534] Undoubtedly, this only occurred *because* of Christendom's decline. The fragmentation of society that resulted from the death of a predominantly Christian culture provided a fertile seedbed for individual expression and self-determination on a

[534] See S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedulus* 129, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 2.

social scale never before experienced. It was not an overstatement when Hugh McLeod stated, "These years may come to be seen as marking a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation."[535] A key aspect of this transformation was the social pluralism that opened a diverse array religious, cultural, and ideological perspectives. It was in this environment that people forged new identities. Some picked up Muggeridge's books in that process of discovering who they were, what they stood for, and to what end they would direct their life. As far as we can tell, none of the readers examined in this chapter converted to Christianity. Nonetheless, reading Muggeridge proved to be a rich resource. They felt he formed a parallel with their own lives and was the guiding hand they needed, even if only for a brief time. Muggeridge's non-Christian readers are a helpful reminder that the role of religion in society was as undetermined then as it is now.

[535] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 1.

Conclusion

On 27 November 1982, Malcolm and Kitty Muggeridge became members of the Roman Catholic Church. Richard Ingrams, one of Muggeridge's biographers, suggested that "to anyone who had followed Malcolm's career over the years, [his conversion] came as a logical conclusion."[536] Gregory Wolfe's rather hagiographic interpretation of the event likewise described it as though it was embedded within the internal logic of his developing faith:

> He had been an outsider and a non-participant for so long that his desire for communion finally outweighed his reluctance to join in...Getting down on his knees with his fellow men was the final step toward communion and humility and away from loneliness and pride. At the altar rail in Our Lady, Help of Christians, he had come home. Having walked along the Emmaus Road for so long, he came to know his Lord in the breaking of bread.[537]

The consensus among his biographers is that Muggeridge's spiritual life ultimately followed the plot of "Quest." The imagery of taking a "final step" on the "Emmaus Road" and arriving "home" rhetorically suggests that Muggeridge's life had an inevitable final destination. It is true that throughout his career Muggeridge had worked closely with Roman Catholics—reading them, studying them, writing for them. It is also true that he deeply admired the rich history of the Roman Catholic Church and felt a great deal of comfort from imbibing its mystical tradition. And for years his Roman Catholic fans sent him letters imploring him to join their church, especially after he published *Something Beautiful for God*. A selective reading of his fan mail might confirm the argument that his conversion was, indeed, a "logical conclusion." As we might expect,

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[536] Ingrams, *Muggeridge: The Biography*, 234.

[537] Wolfe, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography*, 412.

his conversion generated considerable support from Roman Catholics. In the following months, he received hundreds of letters from fans who welcomed him into their church, how it was an answer to their prayer, how they knew it was going to happen all along, etc…

But we would do well to remember that hindsight affords a certain weight of inevitability that was not necessarily felt in the lived experience of those we study. In the years and months leading up to it, Muggeridge's conversion really was only *one* logical conclusion among many. Even though the content of his faith became increasingly aligned with Christian orthodoxy in the 1970s, he was consistent in remaining outside of institutional Christianity since first publically identifying as a Christian in the mid-1960s. Yes, Roman Catholics were particularly zealous in their attempt to coax him to the fold, but so too were evangelicals, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and a myriad of other Christian and non-Christian readers who wished to count Muggeridge among their own. The fact that his entry into the Roman Catholic Church came as a shock even to close friends and family members, let alone the press and general public, is a good reminder that Muggeridge's contemporaries did not see it as inevitable by any stretch of the imagination. The first biography of Muggeridge, which Ian Hunter published in 1980, said nothing that would have anticipated him joining the Catholic Church in less than two years' time. What is more is that whenever anyone asked Muggeridge why he would not join the Roman Catholic Church when he seemed to have such admiration for it, he consistently provided the same answer: he simply could not join a church that he felt was compromising with permissiveness in society.[538] His

[538] Wolfe, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography*, 409.

admiration for its history was held in check by knowing that "it went on crusades, it set up an inquisition, it installed scandalous Popes and countenanced monstrous iniquities…In the mouthpiece of God on earth, belonging not just to history, but to everlasting truth, they are not to be defended."[539] Let alone to be joined. As late as 31 August 1981, Muggeridge replied to one inquisitive Roman Catholic fan named Genevieve Porter that he was in exactly the same frame of mind as Simone Weil who, while identifying as a Christian, could not bring herself to join the church because of strong disagreement with its dogma. Muggeridge's faith was deeply shaped by the mystical Christian tradition. Indeed, there was a certain impulsiveness to Muggeridge's conversion to Roman Catholicism that underlines just how unexpected it was. It was only mere weeks before his November 1982 reception into the church that Muggeridge began formal religious instruction under Father Bidone. Normally such a process might take several months or up to a year. Gregory Wolfe notes that it was chiefly because of the great brevity of this process that so few people knew about his conversion before it was reported in *The Times*.

In statistical terms, the years following Muggeridge's conversion correlated to a general decrease in the number of letters he received from fans. The eight years between his conversion and passing, Muggeridge received a total of between 2100 and 2450 fan letters. This included the hundreds of letters that Roman Catholics sent to welcome him into the fold. If we consider the eight years before his conversion, however, Muggeridge received between 3900 and 4550 fan letters. Muggeridge's biographers have attributed

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[539] Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, 56.

his declining public image in the 1980s to his old age and declining productivity, but that only partially explains a forty-six per cent drop in fan mail. In the first place, most of his best-selling books were still in print. A new edition or imprint of *Jesus Rediscovered*, *Something Beautiful for God*, and *Chronicles of Wasted Time* came out every few years, even after his conversion. The drop in fan mail was not due to a lack of circulation of his works. Nor was it owed to a sudden reclusiveness on Muggeridge's part. He was still in good enough shape to appear on television after his conversion (interviewing, for instance, Alexander Solzhenitsyn on the BBC in 1983), as well as to see the publication of several more books, such as *Vintage Muggeridge* (1984), *My Life in Pictures* (1987), *Picture Palace* (1987), and (another) spiritual autobiography, *A Twentieth Century Testimony* (1988). Richard Ingrams makes the additional argument that in his old age, Muggeridge was running out of things to say, and so his lack of originality played a role in his dwindling public reputation. However, that was not anything stylistically new for Muggeridge. He had a knack for repeating the same arguments, phrases, and talking points repeatedly in multiple contexts. He was a television personality, after all. His consistency made it so that people thought they knew what they could expect. That was partially why he so successfully exploited print, sound, and visual media. Yet, none of those books published after November of 1982 resulted in the same kind of fan response he received during the 1960s and 1970s.

Age and energy are important, but we cannot discount the role that his conversion played in disrupting the politics of his literary reputation. For one thing, he would no longer be found lambasting hierarchies and clerical hypocrisy, a trope that he had been associated with for decades. In effect, what his conversion did was to transform him

from being a symbol of anti-institutional Christianity to being one who exemplified the continued allure of the Catholic Church in a "secular age." He also began to write more so with Catholics in mind, both in the shape his writing took, as well as the outlets he chose to write for.[540] The move confused readers and compromised his status as a religious guru among non-Catholics. Scott Whipple wrote that he thought he knew who Muggeridge was, but he had to confess: "I cannot understand your recent conversion to Roman Catholicism. Perhaps it is not my business to understand it. I realize you have been influenced by the love Mother Teresa has demonstrated…but, you have also for years rejected the institutionalized church."[541] Daniel Roe likewise wrote to say, "Considering statements you have made not all that long ago about the Catholic Church, your decision perplexes me."[542] The reason Roe felt affinity with Muggeridge was because he thought they both "loathe[d]" the institutional church. His letter was an inquiry of explanation so that he could make sense of such conflicting ideas. In addition, another reader, who was at first inspired to write a letter after reading both *Something Beautiful for God* and *The End of Christendom*, had learnt by "word of mouth" that Muggeridge had become a Catholic. He had to admit, "At the moment, I am unable to reconcile this action with some of the things you wrote in these two books. It is not my intention to challenge your latest step of faith in any way…but I would be most appreciative of hearing from you personally as to how this…came to be."[543]

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[540] Wolfe, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography*, 415.

[541] Scott Whipple to Malcolm Muggeridge, 14 March 1983, SC-4 113/12.

[542] Daniel Roe to Malcolm Muggeridge, 19 February 1983, SC-4 113/13.

[543] Frank [no last name] to Malcolm Muggeridge, 9 January 1983, SC-4 113/2.

If the decision caused puzzlement in some, it evoked a deep disappointment in others. James Woodbury put it most strongly when he sent his letter two weeks after learning Muggeridge was a Roman Catholic:

> The ultimate obscenity of your apostasy is that you have destroyed the credibility of your life's work as a person who had the mental courage and intestinal fortitude to look squarely and unafraid into the smug face of people and institutions who have the ineffable gall to suppose that they alone have a monopoly of wisdom to direct men's minds and actions. Your invigorating cynical and skeptical laughter at such arrogant presumption has now turned to bitter ashes in the throats of those who thought you sincere in that therapeutic mission.[544]

Woodbury's tumid letter is nonetheless insightful by its recognition that Muggeridge's credibility as a public figure was closely tied to his iconoclastic reputation. He was popular because he embodied so well the popular individualism that characterized the anti-institutional spirit of post-war society. Much more than that, people believed he was "sincere" in those sentiments. His conversion seemed to Woodbury a flat-out contradiction of his character. Likewise, the Pennsylvanian fan Roger Smith had "always respected your openness and honesty as a Christian," but he began to doubt that now: "I can only say how upset and disappointed I am at you and your wife's decision."[545] A central reason for Smith's frustration was that he believed the institutional structures of the Catholic Church prohibited authentic faith. A personal relationship with God could not depend on the mediator of a priest or pope, and so Muggeridge's actions hampered his own spirituality. But perhaps the worst outcome was the effect it would have on others: "you are a rational figure, and many people may be led astray by your decision.

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[544] James Woodbury to Malcolm Muggeridge, 2 December 1982, SC-4 112/2.

[545] Roger Smith to Malcolm Muggeridge, 5 December 1982, SC-4 112/4.

Are you going to put your confidence and trust in God or in a church?"[546] For readers such as these, Muggeridge's conversion was less the fulfillment of a life-long quest, and more a tragedy of the divided self.[547]

Smith was apt to recognize the power of influence that Muggeridge had on his viewers and readers. But, if fan mail is any indication, his conversion did more to narrow the scope of his readers than to amplify his influence. As we have seen, Muggeridge exemplified what it meant to embrace both the popular individualism of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as how one could maintain Christian faith despite secularization arguments to the contrary. That was what imbued him with "authenticity" among so many readers of such a wide array of religious backgrounds. But by joining institutional Christianity *par excellence*, his readers began to question who he was. Anthony Giddens has made the important observation that one's identity is deeply dependent on "the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*."[548] It is not just about having a history of where one has been; an identity requires decisions and actions to link that history to a vision of where one is going. Muggeridge was able to communicate a public image of anti-institutional Christian satirist to wonderful effect. Indeed, the narrative of his life was the commodity he packaged and sold in print. Nevertheless, entry into Rome, while fulfilling the utmost desires of his Catholic fans around the world, signaled an abrupt and unexpected redefinition of Malcolm Muggeridge. This was jarring to the thousands of others. In

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[546] Ibid.

[547] Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*, 173 ff.

[548] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 54.

short, his conversion broke the narrative that had animated his authenticity for readers around the world.

That can help to explain why Muggeridge received an increase in the number of letters from Catholics just as the total number of fan letters declined. The sort of fans who had written to Muggeridge between 1966 and November of 1982 often did so for spiritual guidance because they, too, felt estranged from the churches even as they wished to continue practicing their faith. They believed (sometimes *because* of Muggeridge) that institutional Christianity was in a state of irreversible decline that required a fundamental reformulation of what it meant to be a Christian. Muggeridge's quasi-mystical expression of Christianity was an answer to what that would look like. But what did it mean now that he joined the very thing he said was failing? For many, it meant they no longer saw Muggeridge as a kindred spirit who led a life parallel to their own. An unintended consequence that we can discern from Muggeridge's conversion was that it destabilized the textual community of readers around the world who, in the words of Eileen Harrington, made up his "apostolate."[549]

Destabilized, but not gone. Muggeridge's refigured religious identity attracted those who could appreciate his *bona fide* status as a Catholic thinker, just as it repelled those who did not. Yet, people sometimes could care less about who wrote the books they read. What matters most is how it affected them at a particular moment in time. And for Muggeridge's readers—whether they were Christian or not—the most common effect his books had was to inspire hope. It was in this spirit that one fan decided to write

[549] Eileen Harrington to Malcolm Muggeridge, 26 June 1976, SC-4 99/3.

a letter to Malcolm to say, "I have just finished reading *Jesus Rediscovered* at one sitting last night having only bought the book yesterday…I really feel that you have shed a little light for me and that my life will have more meaning henceforward."[550]

The Twentieth Century has been called "The Age of Extremes," and that was felt acutely by ordinary people around the world as they sought to create meaning in their lives just as inherited structures loss social significance. Meaning cannot be found in a vacuum. Muggeridge's readers had to make it for themselves and his books served them in that purpose. Muggeridge was full of flaws and inconsistencies, and he often admitted that. Then again, Christopher Hitchens was close to the mark when he said, "no serious person is without contradictions."[551] People could relate to Muggeridge for that very reason. He was many things: author, satirist, gadfly, womanizer, contrarian, journalist, television personality, religious guru, Catholic convert—the list goes on. Yet, his chief significance to thousands of readers around the world was that they felt he helped them navigate the struggles of understanding themselves and their place within the world they inhabited.

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[550] Barbara Harrild to Malcolm Muggeridge, December 1983, SC-4 114/22.

[551] Christopher Hitchens, "A Hundred Years of Muggery," *The Weekly Standard*, 5 May, 2003.

Appendix A: Editions of Malcolm Muggeridge's Books, c. 1969-1990

Book Name	**Language (Format)**	**Place of Publication**	**Publisher**	**Year**
Jesus Rediscovered	English	London	Fontana	1969
	English	Garden City, NY	Doubleday	1969
	English	Wheaton, IL	Tyndale	1969
	English	Wheaton, IL	Tyndale	1971
	Italian	Milan, Italy	Rusconi	1971
	English	Wheaton, IL	Tyndale	1972
	English	London	Fontana	1972
	English	Wheaton, IL	Tyndale	1974
	English	New York	Doubleday	1974
	English	London	Collins	1975
	English	London	Collins	1976
	English	London	Collins	1977

	English	London	Collins	1979
	English	Garden City, NY	Doubleday	1979
	Dutch	Laren, Netherlands	Novapress	1980
	English	London	Collins	1982
	English	London	Collins	1987
	English (Audio Book)	Ashland, OR	Blackstone Audio Books	1989
Something Beautiful for God	English	London	Collins	1971
	English	New York	Ballantine Books	1971
	English	New York	Harper and Row	1971
	English	New York	Walker and Co.	1971
	Swedish	Stockholm, Sweden	Verbum	1971
	English	London	Fontana	1972
	Italian	Bari, Italy	Paoline	1972
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1972
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1973

	English	New York	Ballantine Books	1973
	Polish	Warszawa, Poland	Instytut Wydawniczy Pax	1973
	Italian	Cinisello Balsamo, Italy	Edizioni Paoline	1973
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1974
	Korean	Soeul, South Korea	Sŏng Paoro Ch'ulp'ansa	1974
	Italian	Bari, Italy	Edizioni Paoline	1974
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1975
	Polish	Warszawa, Poland	Instytut Wydawniczy Pax	1975
	English	London	Collins	1976
	English	New York	Ballantine Books	1976
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1976
	Swedish	Stockholm, Sweden	Verbum	1976
	Japanese	Tokyo, Japan	Joshi Paurokai	1976
	Italian	Cinisello Balsamo, Italy	Edizioni Paoline	1977
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1977

	English	London	Collins	1977
	English	New York	Image Books	1977
	English	Garden City, NY	Doubleday	1977
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1978
	Finnish	Helsinki, Finland	Kirjapaja	1978
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1979
	Hungarian	Eisenstadt, Austria	Prugg	1979
	Norwegian	Oslo, Norway	Luther Forlag	1979
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1980
	English	London	Collins	1980
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1982
	German	Freiburg, Germany	Herder	1984
	English	New York	Walker and Co.	1984
	English	New York	Harper & Row	1986
	English	London	Collins	1987

	Italian	Cinisello Balsamo, Italy	Edizioni Paoline	1988
	English	San Francisco	Harper & Row	1988
	English	London	Collins	1990
	Italian	Torino, Italy	Edizioni Paoline	1990
Paul: Envoy Extraordinary	English	New York	Harper and Row	1972
	English	London	Collins	1972
	English	London	Fount Paperbacks	1979
Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick	English	London	Collins	1972
	English	New York	William Morrow	1973
	English	London	Collins	1973
	English	London	Fontana	1975
	English	London	Fontana	1981
	English	New York	William Morrow	1981
Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Infernal Grove	English	London	Collins	1973
	English	New York	William Morrow	1974

	English	London	Fontana	1975
	English	London	Fontana	1981
	English	New York	William Morrow	1981
	English	New York	Quill	1982
Jesus: The Man Who Lives	English	London	Collins	1975
	English	London	Fontana	1975
	English	New York	Harper & Row	1975
	English	London	Collins	1976
	English	New York	Harper & Row	1976
	Dutch	Baarn, Netherlands	Ambo	1976
	German	Einsideln, Switzerland	Johannes-Verl.	1980
	English	New York	Harper & Row	1987
A Third Testament	English	Boston	Little, Brown and Co.	1976
	English	London	Collins	1976
	English	New York	Ballantine Books	1976

	English	London	Collins	1977
	English	London	Collins	1978
	English	New York	Ballantine Books	1983
	English	Farmington, PA	Plough Publishing House	1983
Christ and the Media	English	London	Hodder and Stoughton	1977
	English	Grand Rapids	Wm. B. Eerdmans	1977
	English	Grand Rapids	Wm. B. Eerdmans	1978
	English	Grand Rapids	Wm. B. Eerdmans	1981
Things Past	English	London	Collins	1978
	English	New York	William Morrow	1979
Some Answers	English	London	Methuen	1982
	English	London	Methuen	1984
Muggeridge: Ancient and Modern	English	London	BBC Publications	1981
Like It Was: The Diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge	English	London	Collins	1981
	English	New York	William and Morrow	1982

Vintage Muggeridge: Religion and Society	English	Grand Rapids	Wm B. Eerdmans	1985
Conversion: A Spiritual Journey (US edition entitled *Confessions of a Twentieth-Century Pilgrim*)	English	London	Collins	1988
	English	San Francisco	Harper and Row	1988
	English	London	Collins	1989
	English	London	Fount Paperbacks	1989
	Dutch	Baarn, Netherlands	Arbor	1989
	Spanish	Madrid, Spain	Rialp	1990

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