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THE RIGHT VIEW OF MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

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# MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

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MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

*By the same author*

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THEOLOGY OF THE APOSTOLATE  
OF THE LEGION OF MARY

EDEL QUINN: A HEROINE OF THE APOSTOLATE

# THE RIGHT VIEW OF MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

by

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*With a Preface by His Eminence*  
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## PREFACE

THE Belgian hierarchy has recently thought it its duty to forbid the faithful to partake in any way in the activities of the movement known as "Moral Re-Armament", on the ground that it contains latent dangers to the integrity of Catholic Faith.

The pages that follow clarify very opportunely the nature of these dangers. They strongly emphasize the fundamental incompatibility between Moral Re-Armament and the Catholic Church, an incompatibility which we ourself recently brought to the notice of our clergy. Bishops before and after us have taken the same stand, and for the same reasons. So these pages, calm, objective and well-informed, express not only the author's personal opinion, but reflect the common mind of those hierarchical authorities who have been led by circumstances to make a pronouncement on the subject.

We are convinced that this account, based as it is upon a complete and thorough documentation, cannot fail to enlighten everybody about a subject concerning which there is a great deal of confusion. Catholics, once familiar with it, will understand better the riches of their Faith, and the imperative duty of respecting those riches in all their purity. They will realize that the Catholic Church offers them spiritual aids for an interior life far more satisfying and effective than anything offered by Moral Re-Armament. Our separated brethren, on the other hand, will here learn to know the Church better. They will learn that she is

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uncompromising only because of her maternal love, and order that she may better transmit the message of salvation entrusted to her by the Master.

May it please the Holy Spirit, by His light and His grace the souls of men of good will, to make fruitful the reading of this little book.

✠ J.E. CARDINAL VAN ROEY,  
*Archbishop of Malin*

Malines.

*January 4th, 1953.*

## INTRODUCTION

THE movement known as “Moral Re-Armament”, with its European centre at Caux-sur-Montreux in Switzerland, has attracted growing attention, especially since the end of the war, and has given rise to conflicting opinions. Newspapers and reviews have devoted articles to it, and these have produced reactions of many different kinds. Such evaluations, often contradictory, have merely deepened what has been called “the mystery of Caux”. Their very divergence suggests that the subject is delicate and not to be judged too hastily.

Have we here a spiritual and moral revivalist movement, born outside the Church but capable of being brought into harmony with her, or is it some kind of new religion, propagated in novel forms ?

To leave the question unanswered would be to harm both MRA and the Church. Nothing is to be gained by confusions and ambiguities, and clarity of atmosphere is indispensable to the effecting of any eventual harmony.

We have been asked to set forth in these pages the basic characteristics of the movement; and especially to answer this question which dominates all others: Is MRA a religious movement or not?

We shall do so with the sole aim of serving the integrity of truth—here, as everywhere else, the highest form of charity and its necessary condition.

The pages which follow are not the result of a mere reading of documents and sources. We ourselves had the

opportunity of meeting the most striking personalities of the movement, at Caux and elsewhere, and of taking stock of the imponderables which make up an atmosphere, colour an assertion, and define a position.

Personal motives are not in question, nor the sincere and sometimes touching piety that inspires this vast attempt to right individual consciences and peoples. Let us leave it to God to judge all that belongs to the realm of the subjective; our task will be confined to examining, with a favourable bias, the work being attempted and to bringing out the main impulse of that work and its fundamental tendency. Before embarking on criticism, we shall explain quite frankly the attractiveness of the movement and the extent of its success. "One is just," said Joubert, "only towards those one loves. We must recognize, set in perspective, and love the essence of the truths put in practice by MRA before we can point objectively to its gaps, deficiencies and errors. There must be no underestimating a force which is not, as we shall see, without dangers; but neither must there be gloating over minor blunders.

Although we shall have to define strictly the reservation required by the Catholic point of view, we willingly acknowledge that MRA produces in the Protestant world a better atmosphere for understanding the Church, by eliminating some age-old prejudices and animosities.

In contact with such good-will, we feel even more keenly the grievous tragedy of the Reformation and the separation from their Mother the Church of children who are still living on the treasures carried away four centuries ago. Many of them have preserved a keen sense of prayer, and a homesickness for the lost hearth. Although we must speak of the errors, we do not forget that these errors are only truths misused, that it is the positive aspect of error that has led them astray, and that it is this they want above all to promote.

Humanly, one would be tempted to stress what is reconciling, to tone down all that makes for estrangement. A more God-centred charity compels us to stress differences out of respect for truth. This is no subject for bargaining; only truth can bring healing for it gives out a power that makes it blossom into love. To serve it reverently and humbly, but in all its purity, means hastening, in spite of appearances, the hour of return to the Church's unity. Like the rowers mentioned by St. Francis de Sales, who go straight to their goal by turning their backs to it, we draw closer together by standing apart, for truth alone can bring forth life. The Church's doctrinal intolerance, so far removed from our short-term human wisdom, is a real form of love; love that hurts, only to liberate the truth held captive in the grip of error, and is a standing invitation to one and all of us to rise above the narrow limitations of self. The present study must be understood in this light.

The problem set by MRA lies at a depth often unsuspected, and our attention must not be distracted by the mere superficial.

We ask the reader to study these pages in their entirety, and to avoid extracting or isolating parts of them. It is a complicated subject to study: before reaching conclusions, we must scan the horizon patiently; not forgetting, either, that all things living develop, and that reforms are possible however unlikely.

We shall set forth the actual state of the movement as it is at present. Only the future can decide whether it will remain permanently in its present stage of development.

This book is meant principally for the Catholic reader who wants to see the movement clearly in terms of the principles of his faith. Will it blend, or is it incompatible? It is an important question, because if MRA is pronounced orthodox, then he has at his disposal an effective instrument of

action for bringing God to the materialist masses who are out of our reach and deaf to the direct message of the Gospel. No Catholic has the right to be indifferent to the question; he must make use of any legitimate means capable of increasing the influence of God and the extension of His kingdom.

These pages are addressed also to the Protestant reader, the simple believer in God, and also to the unbeliever interested in MRA. The book does not aim at proving the truth of Catholic standpoints: that is not our aim. All it sets out to do is to expound them with a view to making a clear comparison. Conversation is impossible unless we make some effort to enter into the other person's mind, to see through his eyes and from his own particular angle. By understanding why the Church takes certain stands, in virtue of her very nature and not for diplomatic and provisional reasons, the non-Catholic reader will understand better the real gist of the argument. He will realize that it is not the ideal of human brotherhood that is disputed, but only the means of furthering it. We too believe in the imperative need of re-making a world threatened with collapse into a dark materialism from which there is no escape. We too believe that time presses; that the stake is high and chaos impending; that it is urgent to join forces, and so to respond to the moving appeal to the world, made at the height of the last world war by His Holiness Pope Pius XII:

"On the ruins of a social order which has given so tragic proof of its impotence to procure the well-being of people, must not all great souls, all men of good-will, unite in a solemn pledge to give themselves no respite until, in all states and in all nations upon earth, hosts of men are arrayed, with the sole resolve to rebuild the social structure with the divine law as its unshakeable centre of gravity, completely dedicated to the service of persons and communities that have recovered their true nobility in God."

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## I

## MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

## ITS ORIGIN

THE movement known at present by the name of Moral Re-Armament goes back a few decades. Its founder, Frank Buchman, is an American minister of Swiss descent, born in 1878 in Pennsylvania (U.S.A.). He himself dates the first inspiration of his work from a religious experience that he once had in Europe:

I found my way to England [he relates], and there something happened! Something for which I shall always be grateful.

A tiny village church. A tiny congregation. A special afternoon meeting. The speaker—a woman! . . . a simple, straightforward, conversational talk to a gathering of about seventeen persons, including me. The woman spoke about the Cross of Christ, of the sinner and the One who had made full satisfaction for the sins of the world.

A doctrine which I knew as a boy . . . which that day became a great reality for me. Listening, I realized that I was a sinner. I hadn't thought about it. I even thought myself extremely good! Something stirred at the bottom of my heart. I had entered the little church in contradiction with myself, nursing pride, selfishness, ill-will, which greatly hindered my apostolate as a minister. This woman's simple talk personalized the Cross for me that day, and suddenly I had a poignant vision of the Crucified, entirely real and living.



I saw a luminous image of the Cross rising gradually real as if it were taking shape on the wall facing me. There was the Crucified, His arms outstretched, His side pierced with the nails driven into His limbs. But between Cross and me there was a chasm.

I had at this moment the sensation of being alone : naked before the Crucified. 'I come to Thee to be saved,' I murmured. Something surged from the inward depths of my being, tore my soul from the selfishness to which it was anchored and lifted me over the chasm to the foot of the Cross. 'Save me,' I cried, 'or I perish!'

Suddenly all the oppressive feeling of distress vanished. I experienced a gripping impression of having received Grace, as if a powerful current had run through the whole of my being. The divine Love possessed me. 'Take my heart, my soul, my life!' It was the affair of a moment—a spiritual flash of lightning, hidden from human eyes. When I left the church, I was a new creature. Old things had passed and all things had become new.

With this deeper experience of how the love of God bridged the chasm dividing me from Him, and the sense of buoyant life that had come, I returned home feeling a powerful urge to share my experience.<sup>1</sup>

Buchman at once turned to action, and wrote six letters of apology to people with whom he had violently quarrelled.

This gesture of reparation was to have weighty, momentous results; it contained the seed of the whole future movement.

On his return to America, Buchman became chaplain to the students at the University of Pennsylvania. He threw himself ardently into his pastoral activities, but soon became aware of his impotence and limitations. He had one more

<sup>1</sup> Mostly from *Remaking the World, the Speeches of Frank N. D. Buchman*, Blandford Press, 1947, p. 190.

discovery to make, the value of silence. He himself tells how he at last grasped the absolute necessity of prayer—of "recollection"—to vivify action. It was a decisive step in his life:

I was very busy working eighteen to twenty hours a day. So busy that I had two telephones in my bedroom. I was still dissatisfied with the results. There was a constant coming and going, but the changes in the lives of my visitors were inadequate, not revolutionary enough to be permanent. So I decided on a drastic measure—to give one hour every morning (from five to six when 'phones were unlikely to ring) to listening to the Spirit, that still gentle voice that alone could inspire and direct me. . . .<sup>1</sup>

This new hierarchy of values was to govern the rest of his life.

#### FROM THE OXFORD GROUP TO MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

This inner revolution immediately transformed his apostolic activity. He hastened to communicate the secret of his new life to others. After various vicissitudes and many journeys across the world, Buchman arrived at Oxford one summer's day in 1921. This date also is decisive.

To conquer Oxford was to win the Battle of England. Buchman knew it; nor was he unaware that it would be a hard-fought match. The atmosphere of the university was hardly favourable for his message of conversion. Yet he succeeded in winning some disciples, whose rallying to him created something of a sensation. These were to remain faithful. He formed them over a long period, grouped them in well-trained teams, and sent them out finally to conquer the world. They were apparently known, until 1927, as

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, pp. 55-57.

“First Century Christianity”. This name went out of vogue during a propaganda tour, someone dubbed them “The Oxford Group”—from the origin of their first recruits—this name, carrying with it the prestige of the great university, cloaked groups that had no direct connection with Newman. Moreover it gave rise to constant confusion with Cardinal Newman’s famous “Oxford Movement” of a century before which had brought back many Protestants to the Catholic Church. This had nothing in common with the “Oxford Group”, but the name persisted until 1938.

It is not our task to study here the gradual expansion of the groups, and how they grew from the stage of operation individually to that of activity on a world scale. The change of label—thenceforward the movement was to be known as “Moral Re-Armament”, not the “Oxford Group”—was in the second phase. The new name was dictated by the major preoccupations of those years; it was in 1938 that the spectre of the Second World War began to loom on the horizon and men began to organize defence against the coming scourge. Although MRA enlarged the sphere of action of the Oxford Group, it is important to note that far as the underlying impulse is concerned, there was no break between the two phases, as indeed Frank Buchman confirmed when I questioned him on this point. There was the same background, the same homogeneous development, the same “message”.

The idea of building up a vast movement of spiritual revival on a world scale came to Buchman in 1938 during a holiday in the Black Forest. He put it into words for the first time in London, at the East Ham Town Hall, on May 15 of that year, to a gathering of 3,000 people, most of them from the working class.

The crisis [he declared] is fundamentally a moral one

The nations must re-arm morally . . . we need a power strong enough to change human nature and build bridges between man and man, faction and faction. This starts when everyone admits his own faults instead of spotlighting the other fellow’s. God alone can change human nature. The secret lies in that great forgotten truth that when man listens, God speaks; when man obeys, God acts; when men change, nations change . . . new men, new homes, new industry, new nations, a new world. . . . We can, we must, and we will generate a moral and spiritual force that is powerful enough to remake a world.<sup>1</sup>

The ambition is clearly vast: nothing less than saving a civilization in peril. The official handbook of the movement—the only one that bears the founder’s name—has the significant title *Remaking the World*. Individual salvation is closely linked with world salvation. Are we not, everyone of us, responsible in a certain measure for our brothers’ salvation? Let us admit it: we are on earth not only to know, love and serve God, but to make Him known and loved and served. The second duty follows from the first. Buchman, conscious of this social responsibility, desires to bring to his contemporaries in distress, a new message, world-wide in scope.

#### THE FOUR ABSOLUTES

What is this message?

MRA tells us it consists, first and foremost, in the acceptance of the four absolutes imposed by the conscience: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, absolute love. The Ten Commandments are thus reduced to four. Loyalty to these four absolutes, they say, will prove the test of true adherence to the spirit of the movement. Every-

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, pp. 55-57.

one is expected to be ruthlessly logical and to combat sin in its most subtle hiding-places. With a keen sense of psychology MRA finds out every lurking place of artful selfishness, even sin cloaked by pretence. Incidentally it makes hardly any distinction between mortal and venial sin, rejecting the deceptive subtlety this classic distinction always made by the Church; that is so, at any rate, if we are to believe what some of its members have written, and the answers usually given by responsible leaders when questioned. And we may be sure here, to avoid returning to it later, that the standard of absolute purity in marital relations, both advocated and practised, is puritanical in conception.

To begin with, then, a faithful obedience to the dictates of conscience is demanded. The four absolutes are bright because they search into the hidden places of the soul and banish the twilight of compromise. This being so, they are to be observed as the strictest moral principles.

At Caux, in September, 1950, a Burmese lady, Ma Nya Tha, made a picturesque defence of this rigidity of outlook. "Relative standards do not interest me," she declared. "Who wants to eat a relatively fresh egg for breakfast? Can you live in a house which nearly shelters you from the rain? Or do you prefer to sail a boat that is afloat only most of the time? Or do you receive the greater part of his salary? . . ."

How are these commandments to be understood? They are elaborated as follows in a pamphlet called *The Guide*.<sup>1</sup>

Absolute honesty indicts our consciences for all lies, great or little, all addition to truth, all attitudes adopted to make us appear better or worse than we are. Honesty excludes fraud, material wrongs, and debts; the bread

<sup>1</sup> *L'itinéraire réel*, by a group of Swiss writers which includes Dr. Foucault, Th. Spoerri, M. Mottu.

of promises, mental reservations, neglect of duty in professional, family or civic matters. Absolute honesty destroys our illusions about ourselves, our pretences and dissimulation.

Absolute purity indicts all thoughts, acts, looks, all reading or day-dreaming contrary to God's commandment for our emotional life, whether we are married or not.

Absolute unselfishness indicts all self-centredness, all preoccupation with the part we play; all concern for other people's opinion of our knowledge and capacity, our qualities or faults; all egotistical or prideful mental reckoning of the services we give or of those we receive; all personal interest directed towards family, national, or professional matters.

Absolute love indicts all hatred, ill-will and contempt, all jealousy and fear, all irritation and indifference; and all the difficulty we find in revealing ourselves to others, in breaking the ice, in making our interest in people greater than common usage permits, and farther-reaching than what is thought "decent".

Such is the moral code in brief.

#### GUIDANCE

A man who wants to practise the four absolutes in his daily life must surrender his life to the constant direction of the Holy Spirit. This is what MRA calls "guidance". To lay one's self open to the breath of the Spirit, to be sensitive to its least urgings, one must create an inner silence and listen to God. Man has two ears, they say, but only one mouth: a reminder of the obligation to keep silent and be attentive to the voice of the Lord. Deploring the confusion of the world, Buchman says to his contemporaries:

“The whole problem is that you endure an evil rather than cure it. You would rather pay than pray.”<sup>1</sup>

It is urgent, he says, to let oneself be led afresh by God, receive His guidance. This can be achieved only if a man resolutely applies himself to listening, in recollection—“quiet time”. A small pamphlet, with no author’s name, explains the basic attitude to adopt:

“Let your prayer be an offering, a silent offering of your day; unfold your day before Him, purify it, dedicate it to His advance. Present to Him those whom you expect to meet, that He will come between you and enlighten the meeting with His presence . . . and then, be silent. Make a great silence within you, a great void. Ask God what He has to say to you, then wait. Do not present God with a dilemma. Do not say ‘Shall I turn right or left?’ Simply ask, ‘Whither shall I go?’”

This recollection is to be not only a morning exercise at the threshold of the day. It has to be repeated all day long. It should precede or frame the most varied tasks, the planning of a social gathering as well as the choice of a menu, the allotting of the daily duties as well as the producing of a paper or the calling of a meeting. This atmosphere of prayer, that steps the daily life of thousands and thousands of souls consecrated to God, in and out of religious houses, and is the blessing bestowed on all devout Christians, this is what MRA would make the common property of all laymen throughout the world, and one of the aims of its teaching is to create this atmosphere.

In order to be practical, and not simply content with the vague and indefinite, MRA recommends, in the manner of Père Gratry, the use of a notebook for recording thoughts during prayer, and for noting “directives” believed to

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 164.

received from the Holy Spirit. It frequently quotes the Chinese maxim which affirms that the strongest memory is weaker than the palest ink. This notebook, always within reach, plays a considerable part in the life of members, and provides them with very useful psychological help.

I have discovered that the fact of carrying a notebook [writes one of them] saves an enormous amount of time. In this way it is possible to preserve many fleeting ideas—some of which may be authentic guidance—that might be lost if they were not noted down. In striving for divine guidance, one must take every possible precaution not to let slip what comes to one’s mind. Otherwise, the strongest instincts of human nature combine to stifle what is most important. Forgetfulness is an essential function of the mind; without it no ordered thought would be possible. Everything insignificant or useless we put aside to keep it from encumbering our thought or hindering our reflection on what is essential. Forgetfulness is an indispensable condition for clear thinking and resolute action. If we kept everything in our memories, our lives would be no better than chaos.

Guidance when it came to us, may be disturbing or even dangerous to our self-esteem. In that case it would be rapidly obliterated from memory unless we had taken every precaution against that happening. . . . Naturally we must not think that all our thoughts are God’s directions. It isn’t a kind of knack to be turned to use on every occasion.

This last remark is important. To judge whether or not “guidance” comes from God, MRA lays down certain tests for the initiated. They are to ask themselves:

Does this guidance contradict the highest stages of faith that we have already attained?

Does it contradict the revelation given us by Christ in the Bible?

Does this guidance conform to the four moral standards?

Does it conflict with our obvious duties, especially those that concern other people?

These are a few negative tests which will provide, I think, a preliminary means of distinguishing between "thoughts of God" and the products of our imagination and fancy.

#### TEAM SHARING

To this inner control by oneself is added an independent control by the judgment of others. The notebook is also to be used in baring oneself to others, in becoming, as it were, transparent to members of the team. In order to judge fairly of its usefulness, it must be seen always as functioning together with its habitual complement, known as "sharing."

Let us pause for a moment to consider this practice, since it is one of the keys to the MRA movement. *The True Gospel* describes its whole importance in detail:

The fingers of the hand are enough to reckon up the hours lived in a real human communion. This remains true even when we think of our families. How many times have we approached those subjects which we have cleared at heart with one of our dear ones?

Without always being aware of it, men are like actors on the stage of life. They play a character as well as they can in attitudes dictated by the events that happen to them, and with their real faces hidden under conventional masks. To establish contact with their fellows again, they must remove both masks and costumes, and set themselves resolutely and honestly to face life. They must cease to play a part; they must cast off the character they have taken

playing and be simply what they are: they must acknowledge that we humans are separated from others by the fear of being seen as we are. We tremble lest men discover our weaknesses, the small failings that may humiliate us more than our serious faults.

We must approach others naturally, give them confidence, speak to them as friends, sharing with them our thoughts, our difficulties, our everyday joys.

Where will this lead us? We must be resigned to not knowing beforehand. Courage is needed, certainly, and an intense desire to re-discover God, before we can admit even the person we love best to a knowledge of certain details of our life, thoughts that we have tried to hide from him by all the means in our power. But we know very well that there can never be any true communion between us as long as we hide behind the barrier of self-esteem. . . .

We can see, then, that this sharing aims at bringing about a mutual transparency capable of drawing men to each other in an atmosphere of confidence. "Sharing", in short, means to be absolutely honest with others about oneself. It is to make common property of our motives, of our temptations as well as of our good impulses; which does not mean, they explain, a pouring out of everything indiscriminately to the first comer. But one must be ready to open one's soul to anyone if the circumstances point to it as the effective way of bringing about a deeply sincere relationship.

A member of the movement writes: "It is bad for the world and bad for us to live in isolation. Not only does it raise barriers between ourselves and those we live with, but it encloses us within ourselves, gives rise to a morbid solitude, to repression and the warping of our judgment; things which are all largely responsible for our mental and spiritual lack

of balance. If a man reveals himself as he really is in his relations with his fellows, a revolution results."

Such "sharing" brings to the lay world, to some extent, a practice common in religious communities, where, over and above confession, all reveal themselves to their superior and acquaint him with their inward life, or even, accuse themselves publicly of faults against the rule, and receive fraternal correction. This practice, which operates on a restricted plane, within defined limits, and subject to established authority, is extended by MRA to a very large scale, and it adds the feature that it is the team as such, by mutual consent, that wields the authority. From this arises the very pronounced influence of the team on its members. We shall have occasion to come back to a consideration of the result of this sort of mutual spiritual direction. For the moment, we will merely state that though this sharing calls for very delicate handling, yet it may serve to foster understanding. We have learned to split the atom; we are less inventive in the art of drawing men together. Everything that contributes to this deserves *a priori* consideration and sympathy. Within the bounds of good sense, discretion and charity—three rare qualities—"sharing" can help to let down drawbridges and make bonds between people. MRA knows this; and it applies this psychology of mutual self-revelation on a large scale and with a tenacious insistence that is often disturbing.

It uses this means of influence to the full, not only within the teams but also, in the form of "testimonies", outside them. In both private and public meetings, there is the widest possible use of accounts of personal conversion, the aim of which is to prompt a similar conversion in the listener, winning from him thus the hoped-for change and reparation for the fault committed. For mere repentance is not enough; there must, they say, be reparation as well as apologies, appropriate restitution, all sorts of friend

approaches. "If thou art bringing thy gift, then, before the altar, and rememberest there that thy brother has some ground of complaint against thee," said the Lord, "leave thy gift lying there before the altar, and go home; be reconciled with thy brother first, and then come back to offer thy gift." An effort is made to atone for the fault in the sight of God and man at the same time. Once we have obtained God's forgiveness, we are put right in His sight, but the full effect of our act on the community remains. If we have offended our neighbour and are sorry for it, God forgives us, but the wound remains open in the heart of him we have offended. Therefore we must go to him at once and make amends. That, at any rate, is the logic of entire repentance, even though it may not be always possible or practicable. This is not new to anyone who has read the Gospels.

By strongly insisting on this point of community reparation, MRA does no more than emphasize a normal obligation too often forgotten.

These are, in the main, the essential features of MRA, deliberately stripped of some less important practices which are simply the result of these basic principles. Summarizing the fundamental duties that it desires to instil, we should say that it aims at teaching men to obey God, to follow conscience, and to reveal themselves to others. Guidance, the four absolutes, "sharing", these express, each in its own way, the threefold duty towards God, oneself and others.

But it is not enough to announce a message. Acceptance must be won for it. It remains to be seen, before we proceed to detailed criticism, whether MRA has succeeded in reaching men's hearts and whether its efforts have been crowned with success.

## II

### ITS SUCCESSES

#### SUCCESS IN INFLUENCE AND RECRUITMENT

WE have outlined what MRA hopes to accomplish. We must admit that to a great extent it has succeeded. What is the reason for this success? It is impossible to give a brief and exhaustive reply, for the movement has so many aspects that it is not easy to get a clear view of it at a glance. It is not surprising, then, that reasons for acceptance, for admiration, or for reservations, should vary according to the angle from which it is approached. We intend simply to give a list of some successful results that strike one at once, without any attempt at classification.

Frank Buchman must feel gratified when he glances at a map of the world. Within a few years MRA has penetrated America, as well as Japan, India, the Scandinavian countries, South Africa, and Australia. At the present time it is attempting the conquest of countries like Italy, France, and South America. The founder has friends and admirers in every capital of the world, and if their number is not great their quality makes up for the quantity. If you open any of the movement's illustrated magazines, you will see, well to the fore, prime ministers, members of parliament, generals and directors of trust companies, Indian princes and English peers rubbing shoulders with trade-union leaders, docker miners, and militant Marxists. With a remarkable sense of psychology, Frank Buchman has been able to adjust himself to the whole range of human variation; he moves at ease in every class of society. He is known to interest him-

specially in the humble and obscure, he is a born organizer, a leader of men. The fact is, he has succeeded in gathering round him an impressive number of full-time workers. This is the name given to the men and women, some fifteen hundred in number, of every age and condition, who have sacrificed their careers, sometimes very brilliant ones, to devote themselves entirely to MRA. We say "devote themselves" intentionally, for if, as they claim, no obligation binds them, nevertheless they must be considered in the category of lay apostles, like the members of our "Secular Institutes", dedicated body and soul to a direct apostolate. First-class journalists, cinema directors, university professors, members of parliament, landowners, industrial magnates, communist leaders—all professions, all types are to be found in their ranks. They have given up all the world has to offer so as to place themselves at the disposal of the cause and spread its teaching.

Humanly speaking, the quality of the recruiting is excellent, and the tone of the movement reflects it. Those in charge of it—if not all, a very large majority—are Protestant in origin, but drawn from a great variety of sects. Some, even, are ministers, although for the most part they rarely exercise their ministry, if they do at all. They live in teams, the personnel of which is interchangeable according to the tasks to be performed. The part they play is discretion itself, for MRA does not like the full-time members to be set apart from the others, since it strives to have everybody on the same apparent footing.

Lay monks, they have been called. Yes, if you like, but with this difference, that they may be either married or single. Their daily routine has something of the monastic, with its early rising, daily meditation for an hour, spiritual reading, work and life in a team where everything is in common and shared, from the most prosaic details to the

spiritual life. It is the team that decides, orders everything, corrects and judges; everything is submitted to it, even tentative plans for marriage.

The teams are astonishingly mobile. A transatlantic cable is enough to set in motion this standing army of all races and tongues, and to disperse them from Los Angeles to Brazil, from Italy to Finland. No sooner is the signal, the "inspiration", received than you see a husband start for Australia, his wife for Norway; separation is accepted with uncommon abnegation, and family life is sacrificed to a higher ideal. You see groups of twenty or thirty leaving for the Ruhr or Northern France, then suddenly you find them again in Denmark or the London Docks.

It is not quite clear where the money comes from. Sometimes they move about in a luxurious setting and travel when necessary in private planes though they live in a spirit of considerable detachment. They may be received in princely fashion as guests of the great, but they sometimes lack the price of a taxi fare or a stamp. They circulate round the world, ready to be used at will, ignorant of where they will find themselves next month. Everything is arranged primarily for the benefit of the apostolate. They only want one thing, to obey what they believe to be the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and to further whatever is strategically necessary for the fight to conquer the world. They set off in the hands of God and His Providence, settle for better or worse in the field of action allotted to them, and at once begin approaching the most influential authorities as well as visiting the poorest quarters.

It is arduous work, calling for perseverance in extending personal contacts, organizing meetings between employers and workers, persuading industrialists as well as trade-union leaders to attend local meetings or the great annual assembly at Caux. For example, a report on one team's activities in

Milan during the last two years, lists results as follows:

- Seven hundred employers and workers, a hundred and thirty of them communist, brought to Caux.
- More than five thousand visits to working-class homes.
- More than three hundred information meetings.
- Six radio talks in Milan.
- Organizing twenty-five industrial delegations to go to Caux.

And so the list goes on. Nothing of all this is left to chance, and each move is the result of a team's deliberation. So much for its exterior apostolate.

Seen from within, each team resembles a large family. A married couple presides over each centre, acts as chaperon, and sees that the proprieties are observed. Sometimes members of the same family work together, but they may also be widely scattered. Some of the working-teams are of both sexes, but their behaviour is entirely correct, and the most careful precautions are taken to keep it so. The founder's pedagogic genius has enabled him to multiply responsibilities, to decentralize duties. The orchestration is done with such art that everything seems to happen spontaneously; but the most minute details are obviously regulated and standardized, and the "inspiration" no less obviously works only within the definite limits prescribed. The orders seem to be transmitted by means of concentric circles, in accordance with the unrevealed laws of an invisible hierarchy. The teams of full-time workers aim, in their turn, at organizing other teams to carry on the work on the spot, and recruit members bound together by looser ties suited to local conditions. Suppleness and rigidity are not mutually exclusive except in appearance, and MRA makes use of both in its methodical progress.



## TECHNICAL SUCCESSES

Never for a moment do they lose sight of the desired goal, namely, to change others and bring about their conversion, with the aim of re-making a better world. Everything converges toward this end, and in order to realize it, MRA calls into play all the most highly-developed resources of modern technique. A spiritual use is made of all that can charm and win people to the cause: the gracious welcome given to guests, the "apostolate during meals," the studied grouping of those invited, cleverly casual meetings, delicate attentions of every kind. All Dale Carnegie's psychological wisdom in his *How to Win Friends and Succeed in the World* is applied here with the utmost skill and ingenuity.

The adventurous visitor to an MRA centre is caught up in a machine that engrosses him completely. He is like a football passing from player to player and hardly ever touching the ground. Over and over again, he hears repeated relentlessly, with supporting examples, that MRA is the salvation of the world, that personal change, through examining one's life in the light of the four absolutes, is urgently needed. Although this *leitmotif* recurs again and again like another *Carthago delenda est*, its monotony is wonderfully camouflaged. Sometimes it is said in the guise of a film, sometimes under cover of a play that drives home the moral already suggested. These plays, *The Forgotten Factor*, *Annie the Valiant*, *The Good Road*, have no artistic pretensions, but they are acted with moving sincerity, often by people who have played their parts in real life. And the crowds are stirred. Thousands of spectators have been touched by this means. Everyone's gifts are cultivated to the utmost, whether he be writer or film director, singer or pianist; no medium capable of exercising influence is neglected. Buchman frequently speaks to the world over the wireless, and scores

of stations pick up his speeches and transmit them. Luxuriously illustrated periodicals, magazines in all languages, massive editions of the main works, sometimes a daily press service, everything is provided for, utilized and perfected, all with great pains and a genius for detail. The results show that the use of methods of mass psychology, even of psychotherapy, are not without fruit.

## INDIVIDUAL SUCCESSES

At the level of the individual, conversions are recorded which are something more than a flash in the pan. Everyone is urged to struggle against himself to the end, until "unconditional surrender"; frequently a real change in the way of life results. Some of the "testimonies" cannot justly be queried, even though they are sometimes repeated and exploited far beyond their value.

There are, of course, conversions and conversions; the man who gives up smoking cannot be placed in the same honours list as the man who renounces a life of sin. If there is sometimes a tendency to extol conversion for its own sake, without looking too closely at the content, if there are "cheap" conversions, too emotional and without sequel, if it all seems sometimes a little like "conversion for the fun of it", yet it must be acknowledged that in certain cases the shock was salutary and had lasting results. The very fidelity of the disciples to their master arises, in many of them, from the grateful memory of a liberation, a transformation of life that has stamped their existence permanently.

We hear of notorious communists who once they came into contact with MRA have hauled down their colours on discovering that love is stronger than hatred, and have crossed over, bag and baggage, to the MRA apostolate. We hear of employers who have discovered suddenly that their

enterprises are primarily for the good of the community, not for their own, and that they have to fulfil social duties hitherto unsuspected. We hear of non-practising or little-practising Catholics who have learned their religious duties anew; and Protestants who have come to lose their most deeply rooted prejudices against the Roman Church. We hear of materialists who, discovering the sense of God and of prayer, and having made the initial surrender, are raised to unsuspected heights of spirituality, unimaginable before. We hear of men of all countries and races who have learned from MRA that obedience to God's will is the first duty of His creatures, and that prayer is as necessary for the soul as oxygen for the lungs.

#### FAMILY SUCCESSES

Similar results are to be found at the level of the family. Under the influence of MRA there are families now that embody the ideals of sharing and mutual revelation, not only between husband and wife, but between parents and children, sometimes throughout the household. Sharing, carried out by means of the notebook, in an atmosphere of recollection and as the result of recollection, very often brings light to a strained environment, and allays stifled feelings of hostility, which either evaporate or relax as soon as they are brought to the light of day. Thanks to this deeper and more genuine sharing of life, we see members of a family, who have lived together for years, at last discovering one another. War is declared on repressions, on misunderstandings, on meannesses. Sharing is an open-air cure that kills many of the microbes, the effects of which are virulent, just because they are secret and hidden. And when it goes hand in hand with the practice of forgiveness and reparation, it is easy to imagine the increase in its influence for good.

MRA can set to its credit its successes in bringing harmony into families; in some it has created or intensified a communion of souls, absent before, which is the only quality that makes a home strong and durable; elsewhere it has contributed an impulse for other forces to feed and sustain. MRA knows that if nations are to be re-made, families must first be cemented; that a building is as strong as the solidity of each brick. The fate of nations, MRA rightly thinks, is at stake in each home, and it is decided according to the same fundamental laws. By setting the four moral absolutes to work in the heart of the first of human societies, MRA certainly co-operates in the great work of cleansing society as a whole, spiritually and morally.

#### SOCIAL SUCCESSES

MRA has achieved a similar success of reconciliation in industry. Across the barriers erected by the social classes against each other, it has thrown the bridge of "sharing" according to the four moral absolutes. There are factories where the employer and the trade-union delegates meet for a moment of recollection together, to seek in unison how best they may serve the real interests of the working community. The experiment has not as yet spread widely enough to make it possible to draw conclusions; but it is asserted that this straightforward man-to-man approach has succeeded, sometimes, in creating a new atmosphere in the avoiding or solving of a dispute or a strike. MRA endeavours to overcome class war, to go "beyond Marxism", and its influence has made itself felt more than once in particularly difficult environments such as mines and sea-ports. Between 1949 and 1950 more than two hundred meetings of the movement were held in British ports alone. *The Forgotten Factor* had a nine months' run in London, and a hundred and fifty mines

in all parts of the country asked to see the play. It was presented up and down the country, from Yorkshire to the Midlands and from Scotland to Wales, before 70,000 miners. MRA literature abounds in facts of this sort.

The new atmosphere of social understanding makes itself felt in many places by a noticeable increase in production. It would not be just to infer from this that MRA's influence is a tool at the service of capitalism. Its one-sidedly anti-communist attitude in the period just after the war might have caused it to be thought so, but at present it preaches the conversion of the capitalist as forcibly as it does that of the worker. A German miner, formerly a communist, recently described this attitude as follows: "It is not a question of making a bad compromise between the middle class and the proletariat; there must be a complete transformation of both classes". This courageous language can be put to the credit of MRA and it gives it a standing as a peace-making factor at the heart of these antagonisms.

It would be unjust also, we believe, to reproach the movement with having disregarded or forgotten certain structural reforms which are required. It certainly appears that the part played by technical arrangements is soft-pedalled by dint of repeating that the world's salvation lies in making people change. If MRA literature errs easily by oversimplification and makes too great use of slogans, it does not appear that this reproach can be levelled at the most highly qualified among those in authority, for these know well that the old proverb *Quid leges sine moribus* must be completed by *Quid mores sine legibus*? But they resolutely place the emphasis on the moral transformation of the capitalist and the trade unionist who are called upon to set in motion the whole apparatus of social laws, in a new spirit of disinterestedness and of service for the common good.

Continuing the inventory of the positive contribution o

MRA—of what we call its successes—we must acknowledge that it exercises a similar pacific influence between peoples and races at the international level. It aims, and successfully, at bringing face to face men deeply separated by age-long hatreds. Frenchmen have gone to the Ruhr, and German workers to France to effect the bridge-building that brings mutual understanding. Sometimes such gestures are more spectacular than deep, more transitory than enduring, but their value is not to be underestimated as long as we do not exaggerate their importance or lose a sense of reality. We do not intend here to pass any final judgment on the side of their manifold activity that touches political events. We confine ourselves to recognizing the movement's character as a mediator, and to assigning to its work a place in the ranks of the peace-makers.

#### THE SUCCESS OF CAUX

To gain a real, concrete picture of the strength and success of the movement, we must have experience of centres such as Caux in Europe, or Mackinac in the United States. So many travellers have recounted their impressions of the "inspired hill" of Caux that it is unnecessary to give a detailed description. Unhappily, in many of these accounts the essential features are blurred by the picturesque, and by some of the less important characteristics. Trees can hide a forest, and the glittering fairy-like setting may lead the observer to forget the seriousness of this attempt at world conversion. The monks of old knew how to choose their sites with a view to lifting the soul to God, and MRA knows how to choose its scenery! A huge luxurious palace—Mountain House—raises its towers some 4,000 feet over Montreux, on the slopes of the Naye cliffs overhanging the Lake of Geneva. The palace is a microcosm, a league of nations in full

activity. Caux received 10,700 people from 86 countries in the summer of 1951, as well as delegations from 400 industrial companies. At week-ends thousands of travellers came in successive batches of fifteen hundred from all quarters of the globe, from Japan or from Iceland, from Norway or Chile. It is a bewildering medley: dockers from Singapore, Glasgow or Genoa, miners from the Ruhr or from Wales rub shoulders there with well-known figures belonging to high finance and to manufacturing combines. Trade-union leaders, diplomats, civil servants, novelists, artists, generals, Tibetan or Burmese monks, African kings . . . it is a veritable Tower of Babel, but with this difference, that they strive to overcome the confusion of tongues by means of earphones, which permit everybody, as they do at U.N.O., to pick up the speeches in his chosen language. It is not an international; it is an inter-humanity. Twice a day this motley crowd finds its way to the great hall for a meeting which replaces a sermon. Instead of the single and monotonous speaker of so many conferences, here a dozen people are on the platform, and each tells his personal story straightforwardly. These confessions are all embroideries on the same theme: life before encountering MRA, the record of the shock received when the four absolutes were applied to each personal case, and the ensuing resolutions. The assembly applauds. An admirably trained international choir accompanies the "testimonies" with appropriate and catchy songs. Finally, in a few clear-cut words, the presiding full-time worker expounds one of the fundamental principles. The thoughts are straightforward and condensed, the imagery highly-coloured, the style forcible with plenty of humorous relief.

So the retreat progresses—for it is really a vast retreat in disguise—punctuated by meals where the guests are mutually and appropriately introduced according to hints gathered by the organizers during their "quiet time".

Companions will be chosen for you who will sit at your table for tea or dinner as if by chance. They may be Swedish or Japanese, Italian or German, Malagasy or Hindu, Polish or Chinese or Arab . . . Astonishing encounters take place, a cocktail party of an entirely new sort, where Colonels of the Wehrmacht meet Generals of the Resistance; Frenchmen meet Indo-Chinese; bankers meet ex-founders of the Communist party. And the conversation will not stray for an instant, for the full-time workers will see to it that every second is used for the tireless inculcation of the same idea; working in relays, they proclaim the triumphs of MRA throughout the world, but with complete relevance and disarming courtesy.

Not a minute is left to mere chance or whim; and, to finish the day, a play from their repertory brings the guests together again and repeats the same message through the mouths of volunteer actors, inspired by the same apostolic desire, whose sincerity there is no mistaking. And before the curtain goes up there is a long moment of recollection behind the scenes, when the actors share their inspirations, finishing with impromptu prayers said aloud. As they come to the end of their part, the actors become absorbed in prayer once more while they await their cue to return to the stage. This may sound odd, but actually the prevailing atmosphere is lofty, serene and stimulating.

In the free intervals, the house-work is distributed among the guests without distinction, for this giant inn operates, with very rare exceptions, with no paid staff. Indian princes work the pumping plant, and French or Turkish generals do the washing-up, while ladies of the high aristocracy of England or Sweden wait at table or prepare the vegetables. It is really, for a few weeks—for the session only lasts for two or three months—the idyllic society, without class, above conventions, beyond conformity. Nothing stiff or awkward;

on the whole it is first-rate art. For in spite of the numbers and the crowd, each person is taken care of individually; the fresh flowers decorating the bedroom of each new arrival are a personal attention, and they symbolize this personal care. A careful eye will be kept on each individual, in case he strays or gets lost in the crowd; he could receive no more attention if he were the only one there—even though this may make some of them feel that they are on a leash !

It would be impossible, too, not to admire the atmosphere, the style and the finish in all this work of transforming men. For they are past masters in this class of subsidiary things, and one could wish that our own congress organizers would take a lesson from them in this. Setting and decoration, distribution and decentralization of work, concern for the visitor, even to choosing a special song in his honour, a healthy atmosphere between girls and young men, sober living (neither wine nor cigarettes), natural virtues, distinction, fraternization, equality rightly understood, manual work welded into the whole to counterbalance the intellectual, a sense of humour and of the picturesque, of the concrete and direct, reception and press services, the introducing of speakers, the absence of objectors who would mar the atmosphere, the clear-cut style of the testimonies, the brevity of the speeches, the genius for repetition, and the choice of rudimentary themes, earphones, loud speakers, instant translation services, the educational bearing of the plays or films—all these and a thousand other details are studied and elaborated. In a word they are successful.

If, with a few primary truths—ignoring the errors for a moment—it is possible to work on men to this extent, what an invitation for those whose task is to transmit Christ's Gospel in all its integrity and enhance it, to develop to the full its power of penetration! Possession of the truth dispenses no one from ingenuity, courage, imagination or good taste ;

and virtue gains nothing from a crabbed exterior. An idea put into colour takes on a new look. It is for us to study the devices of mass psychology and to extract the things we can apply; always remembering, however, that religious truth cannot submit to measures of publicity that would degrade it.

A Catholic will be surprised to find himself surrounded by many kind attentions: at Caux, the only chapel on the Mountain House estate is a Catholic chapel, just as the only church on Mackinac Island—the American centre of MRA—is the Catholic church of St. Anne. He will be surprised sometimes to see in Protestant hands the Roman Missal, crucifixes, lives of the Saints he holds dear. He will notice that on days of fasting and abstinence, the laws of the Church are observed, even though this may mean imposing an abstinence menu on all the other guests as well. Briefly, he will see himself surrounded, as someone said, by "Protestants who no longer protest", who of their own free will increase and emphasize all the features that resemble Catholicism. He will be edified by hearing of non-practising Catholics who have rediscovered at Caux, under the influence of some Protestant full-timer, the practice of the Sacraments and the path of the Church. Could the liberal spirit go further? What more, then, is needed for the Catholic to feel at ease and at home?

And, yet, it must be admitted, in spite of recognizing the sum total of these facts, the Catholic guest perceives—at first by very faint signs, though they grow gradually more obtrusive—that the air he breathes is other than his own and that the people who surround him obey other laws. What causes this disquiet? In spite of all the successful factors we have just listed, can there be some hidden reason for fear and anxiety? Could there be something that troubles this well-being, disturbs its charm and causes him to hesitate? This is the crucial question we now want to examine.

## III

## ITS BASIC AMBIGUITY

## THE PARADOX

THE situation facing the Catholic is strangely paradoxical. On the one hand Moral Re-Armament appears to do all it can to attract the sympathy of the Church; on the other, the Church through the voice of her bishops, accentuates her reserve or even manifests her disapproval clearly and publicly. We shall quote texts which leave no room for doubt; and they cannot be explained away.

In some ways, MRA is like a suitor who wishes to win a girl's heart with a display of jewels, gold and diamonds. It shows the Church the fruits of its activity throughout the world; it lays particular emphasis on its anti-communist contribution. It talks figures, facts and statistics. The Church appears unmoved. Does she then, thinks MRA, live so remote from the realities of life, does she not apprehend the threat that hangs over the whole of our civilization? Ought we not to unite all available forces to win this race, this supreme battle?

More than anyone else, the Church is aware of what is at stake in the struggle; if she refrains from approval, even tacit, it is because she has most weighty reasons which allow of no compromise. The suitor who hopes to win acceptance through his store of riches, and the dazzling effect of precious stones will never understand the girl's refusal until he has looked into her soul to find what she prizes more than his treasures, and has divined the ideal that masters her heart. The same thing applies to the Church. Before paying attention to the immediate usefulness or efficacy of what is shown

her, she asks the preliminary question: "What is its real nature, its fundamental truth?"

Modern relativism identifies the truth with the useful. The Church does not accept the equation. In her eyes, the end can never justify the means. Before investigating further she requires that the means be examined in itself and for itself. The Church, therefore, brought face to face with MRA, asks before going any further: "What is its true import, what is the inspiration deep down in its soul?" And hence the question, essential in the Church's eyes: "Is this, or is it not, a religious movement?" This question is crucial, for if the answer is "Yes", then the Church, by virtue of her very essence, cannot recognize its credentials, and is bound to dissociate herself from it. But if the movement operates on another level, then the road in itself is clear, and in principle a harmony may be achieved. Let us then question MRA itself on this point. *Quid dicis de teipso?* What do you say of yourself?

## MORAL RE-ARMAMENT'S RELIGIOUS ASSERTIONS

Unanimously, the leaders of the movement reply—and they vie with each other in repeating it in their words and writings—that they do not claim in any way to be a religious movement. In a report written by Count Carlo Lovera di Castiglione—said expressly to have been read, corrected and approved by Dr. Buchman—there appears this point-blank declaration concerning the founder: "He never founded, or even had the intention of founding, a sect, a new Christian association, a specific philosophy and still less a new religion, at any time, neither at the time when the movement was called the Oxford Group nor later when it was named Moral Re-Armament."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report published in the Roman Review *Unitas*, December, 1948.

In the face of so categorical a statement, it may appear unseemly to question the non-religious character of MRA. Yet we are forced to say that if this was the founder's intention, its fulfilment has belied the assertion. It is here that the matter becomes serious, because we are entering on peculiarly delicate ground. If one opens the movement's only official book, *Remaking the World*, which has been carefully revised, one will be surprised to see to how great an extent the author—Frank Buchman—has recourse to specifically revealed truths, and that he speaks of them with authority, the origin of which remain obscure.

To prevent any misunderstanding, let us say at once that by religious movement we mean here any movement resting upon the data of positive Revelation from God, which consequently assumes that God has spoken to men, and therefore makes its appeal to "faith", however vague. A movement would not come into this category if it made use of the name of God, not as the Revealer, but solely as the Author of nature, to be reached by prayer and knowable by man without recourse to faith and to Revelation properly so-called. In the latter case, God is considered solely as the origin of all spiritual reality, and of a natural religion which does not exclude the supernatural. People do not come in His name to transmit His message, they do not speak of truths which are known only through supernatural Revelation.

Let us see, then, whether MRA remains at this level or whether it lays claim to a positive divine Revelation or to a message that would properly be called supernatural. To be clear on this subject it is enough to run through the literature of the movement, to talk to the full-time workers and to members of the teams, or to listen to what is said by the full-time workers on the platform at Caux. And make no mistake: it is not the number of statements or significant

texts that is important. One would be enough to prove violation of the Church's territory. Unfortunately there are only too many to choose from. Let us open *Remaking the World*:

"The Oxford Group," we are told, "is a Christian revolution, whose concern is vital Christianity. Its aim is a new social order under the dictatorship of the Spirit of God. . . A new spirit is abroad in the world to-day. A new illumination can come to everyone and bring men and women of every creed and social stratum back to the basic principles of the Christian faith, enhancing all their primary loyalties."<sup>1</sup>

A "Christian" revolution, with an aim of establishing a vital "Christianity"—that is indeed, unless words have lost their meanings, a religious movement, with this peculiarity that it wishes to bring men and women of every creed—are we to understand by that Buddhists, Confucians, Mohammedans?—back to the principles of the Christian faith. We will not try just yet to discover what is the content of this Christian faith. It is enough to establish the fact that we are well and truly on religious ground.

A passage that follows speaks of the need for a new Pentecost.

"At the first Whitsun God spoke to a group of ordinary men. They changed the course of history. May He not to-day have a plan which can solve the problems of a troubled world? The Holy Spirit is the most intelligent source of information in the world to-day. He has the answer to every problem. Wherever men will let Him, He is teaching them how to live. The world needs a miracle . . . A miracle of the Spirit is what we need."<sup>2</sup>

We too believe that the Holy Spirit has the key to all problems and that God has a plan. But do we need a new

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Pentecost to teach us what it is? Does not the first Pentecost still fulfil the plan fixed unalterably by God, which is to save mankind through the Church established by Himself? To say the least, such a passage has a very distinct religious sound, even if it has no intention of introducing a new doctrine.

"Has Christianity after all the answer?" Buchman asks again a few pages later. "Is the answer a Dictatorship of the Holy Spirit? Is the answer a spiritual mobilization of Europe?"<sup>1</sup>

We believe, as he does, that the teaching of Christ offers our contemporaries the solution of life and hope, the solution they need if they are not to perish; but is the "Dictatorship of the Holy Spirit", which is to grant us this solution, to be understood in the Catholic or in the Protestant sense; in other words, with or without the Church's agency?

Surely one has a feeling here that each of these religious words is charged with alarming equivocations and ambiguities, like those high-tension pylons that stake out our highways and cannot be touched without danger? A heedless Catholic might think they transmit the doctrine of the Church, but as soon as his attention is drawn to them he will notice that the verbal similarities cover different worlds.

One might think that expressions such as those we have just quoted, the "Dictatorship of the Holy Spirit" or the "New Pentecost" are verbal exaggerations, and that a kindly interpretation could soften their force. Let us assume it for a moment; the fact remains that we are right in the heart of the religious sector, and that is all we want to establish for the moment. But it would be a mistake to minimize them for similar statements recur persistently.

Again, take this passage quoted in *Remaking the World*:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

"One may ask oneself what is the motive power behind the movement? It is the Holy Spirit. The forces of primitive Christianity have arisen anew."<sup>1</sup>

This is not merely rhetorical, if I am to believe another author who states: "When I asked one of the leaders of the Oxford Group who was the founder of the movement, he replied with simple conviction: 'The Holy Spirit.' So that was the amazing claim which had escaped Fleet Street's attention. Not a man, but the Holy Spirit, had founded a new religious movement in Oxford University, and here were three of His representatives. Either the most blatant piece of post-war blasphemy, or a movement that might accomplish anything."

Once again, either words have lost all meaning or we are in the presence of a new "religious current," expressly created, it appears, by the Holy Spirit for the world's salvation. Moreover, we are exhorted to give ourselves up to this Spirit, to make trial of it. "You must have that emphasis on morals plus the saving power of Jesus Christ. Then you experience the dynamic which is almost forgotten—the Holy Spirit. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

We are invited, then, to take part in a vast experience of the Holy Spirit, working through MRA to re-make the world. The conviction that the Holy Spirit has invented MRA as a new instrument of salvation for our contemporaries—this is what is at the bottom of MRA's activity. It is said so clearly that no one can be mistaken about it.

Let us look at some other passages, even at the risk of wearying the reader. In the preface to the official book, Thornhill says, speaking of Buchman: "Being Spirit-led his work cannot be cut off from its sources of power. Being vitally Christian, it has been everywhere irrepressible."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18, French text, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



Again: "The best way," he says, "to keep an experience of Christ is to pass it on."<sup>1</sup>

From the pen of Count Lovera di Castiglione who wrote the preface to *Rifare il mondo* we have these lines:

"The whole inner strength of MRA is in the identity of its spirit with the spirit of Christ." And elsewhere: "MRA is not a philosophy. In fact, it possesses no principle of its own. Its content, the advice it gives, are nothing other than the words of eternal life of Our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

So much for the founder and authorized preface writers. In less official works it would be easy to find statements like the following:

"This religious experience was the miracle that changed Frank's whole life, and from it came a new religious movement of which one can hope all things. . . Frank's personality is absolutely identified with the growth of the invisible Church to be formed by Christ's body on earth."

There we can stop; not because we are short of quotations, but because there is no need to break down a wide open floor. Do they, or do they not make use here of the name of Christ and of the Holy Spirit? Is this encroaching on religious ground? You do not have to be a theologian or even a Catholic to see it.

An agnostic, who was a member of MRA, wrote these very pertinent lines of warning to his friends:

"Alas, I see in this fine building a serious crack which, in the more or less distant future, may cause its collapse, or at least arrest the progress of building. I refer to the political and religious attitudes taken up by MRA, in spite of those who affirm, though in all good faith, that it is neither a political nor a religious movement."

After drawing attention to both these features, and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Some Reflections on the Secret of Caux.*

showing that the religious nature of *Remaking the World* has alienated the sympathy of many agnostics and simple believers in God, he urges on MRA the adoption of a genuinely universalist basis, and the abandonment of all religious territory. It is not our business here to remark on what is said about its politics—we shall say something of this later—but we must record our agreement with this objective and lucid criticism, especially as it comes from a convinced supporter who regrets such confusion of purpose.

But how is it, someone might ask, that the movement itself does not see this undeniable religious character? It is indeed a puzzle. Perhaps, in all good faith, the leaders think that they are not a religious movement from the fact that they have, properly speaking, no ecclesiastical organization. They have no definite creed, no place of worship, no form of worship, no sacraments, no hierarchy. It is only a step from this to claim that they are not a religious revival like so many others. We do not say that they are a religious movement of the classic type; but they are one of a new hitherto unknown variety. Any movement is a religious movement, whether it likes it or not, if it professes, in terms of Revelation and the Bible, to offer men the way of salvation and obedience to the Holy Spirit, who is known only through Revelation. The fact of being vague and formless, the absence of certain factors usually found in definite religious sects, these are not enough to qualify it for different classification. One must look things in the face and call them by their name. If MRA cannot be compared to a sect already known to history, it will be unable to avoid becoming one by the logic of things, a process which is actually taking place. History itself will make it its business to fix the label. The basic ambiguity lies in this, that in spite of its assertion to the contrary, MRA operates, beyond any dispute, on a religious plane.

## THE CLASH

That is the really serious issue: for the Catholic Church considers herself, as she is entitled, the sole attested depository of Christ's message, the sole unfailling and infallible interpreter of Revelation. Believing and professing that she is the only and authentic visible Church founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ, conscious that she is not only the depository of an entrusted treasure but that she is, to use Bossuet's expression, Jesus Christ Himself "imparted and diffused", she owes it to herself to ask to see the credentials of any prophet who comes forward, in whatever manner, claiming to be sent by the Holy Spirit. For her, Christ's revelation closed with the death of the last apostle, and although understanding of the revealed truths entrusted to the Church's living tradition may increase, there can be no revelation properly described as new. If anyone in the Church, even a saint, rises and claims some special revelation, it is the Church in the last resort that judges it; even so she does not incorporate it in the special deposit of Revelation. If the Church, then, judges even saints, if, within her fold, authority controls the exercise of prophecy, how could she allow her children to listen to "prophets" outside her fold, who actually claim to be spokesmen of the Holy Spirit? Since these men are merely men, fallible beings and necessarily subject to error—*errare humanum est*—it is not to be thought of that Christ could have left His message to the mercy of their wavering moods. Without the guarantee of a supreme infallible authority, the Revelation of Christ grows dim and peters out in the multiplicity of contradictory interpretations, the fruits of unchecked private judgment. Since Pentecost, a long list of heresies runs across the history of the Church, for error multiplies as well as meanders. All these false prophets made use of the name

of the "Holy Spirit" to proclaim their own wisdom. In the first centuries they were called Gnostics, Marcionites, Novatians, Valentinians, Montanists . . . in the Middle Ages Cathari, Waldenses, Spirituals, Apocalyptic. Since the Reformation, there is no counting the varieties.

A heretic, as the word indicates, is someone who makes a selection in the revealed message, who chooses to suit himself what truths seem vital, or else adds errors of his own invention. How can anyone find his way in this labyrinth except by using the conclusive test determined by Christ Himself? The Master would not have us be deceived about His true thought, and He prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail . . . that he might, in his turn, be the support of his brethren (St. Luke 22. 32). Peter, continuing among us in the person of the Popes, remains the ultimate rock on which rests God's truth. Union with Peter, the guarantee of Peter, remain the supreme bulwark of all religious certainty. If a prophet arises, before listening to him and asking from what mount Sinai he has descended, the Church asks him first the question that precedes all others: "Are you united with Peter? Does your message bear the seal of the Fisherman? Are you sent with his mandate to speak in the name of the Master?"

The moment they speak a religious language, Buchman and his disciples must answer this same question, "Where is the guarantee of your authenticity?"

Everything else is conditioned by the answer.

## IV

## ITS PROTESTANT INSPIRATION

WE must now take a step forward and prove not only that Moral Re-Armament is a religious movement but that also it is a religious movement of Protestant inspiration.

This should surprise no one, indeed the contrary would be astounding. The founder, Frank Buchman, is a Lutheran pastor. Many of his disciples were, or still are, Protestant ministers; almost the whole body of the fifteen hundred full-time workers consists of Protestants of all denominations. The result is that the environment in which MRA develops is steeped in the ideas of the Protestant world. If the leaders do not always realize it themselves, and are sometimes surprised to hear it said, it is because they are so much accustomed to the air they breathe that they are no longer aware of its ingredients. If you ask a British subject to describe the insular temperament, he will not think of mentioning the essential characteristics that pervade him through and through. *Ossibus haeret*: the national character fills him down to the marrow of his bones, but he does not observe it, whereas it hits the eye of a foreigner as soon as he lands. It is a common enough phenomenon. Being unfamiliar, or little familiar, with the Catholic world, MRA leaders cannot attain to full self-knowledge because they have not at their disposal the change of scene or the counter lighting necessary. Some of them even believe themselves Catholic, giving this word a very loose sense that in no way corresponds to the reality we denote by it. Hence come the confusions and ambiguities, due not (as is sometimes said) to a defective

vocabulary or to an Anglo-Saxon mentality less inclined to theoretical accuracy, but to doctrinal differences which are all the more serious because they pass unnoticed. It is rendering MRA a very ill service to minimize the fundamental antagonisms, the cause of the separation, instead of indicating clearly that on the religious plane we are in two different worlds.

A Catholic guest passing through Caux might be struck at first by the charming welcome; hearing the words Church, Christianity, Holy Spirit, the Redemption of Christ, he might suppose himself in a Catholic atmosphere.

Without thinking, he will give these words the sense familiar to him, all the more easily since his hosts seek only to convince him that he is at home. This perfect courtesy, however, cannot deceive us: words are not to be varied in sense to suit our convenience. The Catholic who makes closer inspection, detaching himself from the surrounding atmosphere, will soon notice that he is in a Protestant world. If he knows the history of the Oxford Group, which was the origin of MRA, he will feel, in spite of certain minor modifications, that the same Protestant movement is here at work under another name. Buchman himself, as we have seen, is far from denying this origin, and between the Oxford Group and MRA he sees no cleavage, such as some would have us see.

Besides, it is something that is plain enough on mere inspection. We have no intention here of passing value-judgments on the two organizations; we simply note a derivation and mark an identity that tries to evade detection.

One may ask at this point why they are so unwilling to admit the underlying Protestantism of the movement. We think that one of the psychological reasons for such reticence, or even denial, is that the movement is linked to no precise

Protestant sect. Being neither Calvinist, nor Lutheran, nor Wesleyan, nor Unitarian, nor Baptist, nor Anglican, nor Presbyterian, nor Episcopalian, MRA thinks itself outside and above all this variety of religious persuasions. But although it may be true that MRA belongs to none of these categories, that it cannot be purely and simply reduced to any known species of Protestantism, it still has to be proved, and not merely asserted, that it does not, though perhaps unknowingly, adopt the basic postulates common to all Protestantism. And such a proof would be doomed to failure. Whatever it may think about it, MRA belongs, if not to a species, at least to the Protestant or Reformed genus. We use the two terms here as synonymous. Protestantism had its source in the Reformation, and the Reformation is the norm of Protestantism. We are aware that some authors distinguish strictly between the two expressions, arguing that everything bearing the label "Protestant" does not always rest on the original Reforming principles. We do not dispute the correctness of the distinction, but it is irrelevant to the present argument. It is enough for our purpose to point out that just as a tree can belong to the genus "tree" without being an oak, a birch or a poplar, so MRA cannot escape its underlying generic Protestantism even though it is not directly connected with any particular Protestant species, in the common meaning of the word. Nor is lack of attachment to any particular Reformed forebear anything new in Protestantism. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin do not exert on their disciples the authority one would expect. There are ardent Lutherans who have only a very relative veneration for Luther; men are of small account when people think themselves directly guided by the Holy Spirit. The time has gone by when a Confession of Augsburg, or the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, strove to mark out a definite rule of faith, binding on

everyone. So the indifference of the members of MRA towards their great ancestors is not peculiar to them.

With this made clear, it remains to show that the movement actually does adopt the elements common to the generic Protestantism we are talking about. To prove this, it is enough to take the classic heading of Protestant teaching about Christ, about the Church, about Christianity and the Bible, and we shall find from the evidence that it is the Protestant version that is in the minds, vocabulary and hearts of MRA.

We shall limit our survey to a rapid and elementary consideration of a few essential subjects, beginning with the figure of Christ Himself; this of course predominates in any Christian religious attitude.

#### THE PROTESTANT IDEA OF CHRIST

Who is the Christ they are speaking of? What are His features? How is His presence revealed?

The Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer, mentioned in Buchman's speeches, is the classic Christ of Protestantism. It is the Christ who, after redeeming us with His blood, ascended again to Heaven, whence He works mysteriously in our souls. He no longer continues, living and working here below, in the one visible Church which is His body. Is this the full stature of Christ? Is it not a partial Christ, mutilated, in some sort relegated to history and the past, and if so, a false Christ? We are bound to say that it is not the Christ of the true faith; it is not He who visibly guides, enlightens, and quickens this Church He established, for all time to come, on Peter and the apostles. The Catholic believes that Christ is still visibly and mysteriously, "the way, the truth and the life", and that through the Pope and the bishops, the successors of Peter and the twelve, He

continues to show us the path of salvation, to enlighten every man that comes into the world, to give life to His disciples by the grace of the sacraments. As against all Protestant symbolism, the Catholic professes that among these sacraments is one that excels all others, because it contains the unique presence, both human and divine, of the eucharistic Christ; and this reality is the basis of a liturgical worship, transcendent in nature. Only this Christ is ours, a Christ whole and complete in all His aspects. Christ cannot be divided or diminished under any one of His aspects. A Catholic cannot accept a limited representation of Our Lord if he wishes to keep the purity of his faith intact, to respect Christ in the visible Church to which He gives life, and to receive God's thought in its entirety.

#### THE PROTESTANT IDEA OF THE CHURCH

What has just been said about Christ is true also for the Church. The word "church" occurs very frequently in MRA literature, as it does in its conversations and discourses. Used in the plural, "the churches", it means earthly religious organizations, purely human. In the singular, "the Church" denotes an invisible reality in process of formation and reaching completion gradually; it consists of the spiritual unison of all believers, beyond the earthly organizations that separate them. Here is another typically Protestant conception.

For the Catholic, the Church is at once an earthly reality, incarnate and tangible, and also an invisible and divine mystery, because she is Christ continuing amongst us. By this very fact, just as Jesus is indissolubly both God and man, the Church, His continuation, is a reality both human and divine with a unity that cannot be broken.

And the confusion starts afresh; MRA professes the

greatest possible respect, it says, for "the Church", and a Catholic understands it to mean the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, "the Church" they are talking about is not that of his baptism and his faith but an invisible church with blurred outline. Is this what Christ wanted when He said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and it is upon this rock that I will build my Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it"? We look in vain for Peter, for the visible Rock on which this immaterial edifice rests. *Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*. To speak of the Church and leave out Peter is to disregard the fundamental idea of Jesus who willed to build upon the Rock. It is to substitute a creation of our minds for the will of the Founder. The respect with which MRA surrounds "the Church" is not directed to the Church as we mean it, but to a cheapened fantasy, a false Catholic Church alien to the Master's idea. The basic ambiguity penetrates here too. It is important to draw attention to this point. The only way to reach understanding is to have the points of disagreement clear from the start. In order to have any hope of finding common ground, it is necessary to begin by summing up the respective positions satisfactorily and defining the frontiers. All that confusion of terms can produce, no matter how good the intentions behind it, is a pseudo-respect, delivered at the wrong address and settling nothing.

#### THE PROTESTANT CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY

What we have said about Christ and the Church is also true for every mention of Christianity as such. Here again, the word is applied to very dissimilar realities. For MRA, as for all literature Protestant in inspiration, the word has a generic sense and includes various kinds of "Christian religions", in the plural. It serves as an ultimate fold that embraces all those who call themselves disciples of Christ.

It covers, as one of the varieties, the Catholic Church herself.

Such a conception, considered from the point of view of Christ, is the very negation of Christianity. We have not the right to put into the plural what the Master put into the singular. Jesus established only one "Christian" Church, the visible continuation of Himself, endowed with His powers and His strength, and this authentic Christian Church is for us the one Catholic Church. The sense of the word "Christian" is not to be interpreted at our own discretion. It belonged to the language of God before making part of the language of men. There are human words, as old as the world, which divine Revelation has since transfigured; others it has drawn, as it were, out of nothingness. The word "Christian" is a new one; it says plainly what it means, a disciple of Christ. But the nobility of the word exacts standards which must be respected with scrupulous care. The fact is that for several centuries—ever since the Reformation, to be exact—there has crept into use a sense of the word that diminishes and uncrowns it. Through forbearance or politeness or broadmindedness, the name of Christian is given to any group that claims, by whatever right, to be based on Christ, His work and His spirit.

For the word "Christianity", then, as for a mass of human words, a wide sense is allowed as well as a strict sense. As if there could be any other way of being a disciple of Christ than the way laid down by the Master Himself! As if there could be two equally lawful ways of being a follower of the Son of God: a free and easy way for those who are satisfied with it, and a strict way for those who, from personal choice, like it better!

Such a manner of expression, once its implications are considered, not only hides a doctrinal error and destroys the basis of faith, but also disregards the origin of the word "Christian".

We need only re-read Chapter 11 of the Acts of the Apostles to be sure of this. "And Antioch was the first place," says the text, "in which the disciples were called Christians." Let us look at them. Did Christ come to teach them miraculously, as He taught St. Paul? Not at all. Was the New Testament put into their hands? It was not yet in existence. Were they content to pray and wait, as MRA does, for the instructions of the Holy Spirit? Holy Writ tells us nothing whatever of the sort. What does it tell us? Something precise, lucid and intelligible, which should suffice to clear up this whole question. It tells us that the "good news" had been taken to Antioch by the laity of that time; that the Church in Jerusalem, being informed of this, sent an official delegate, Barnabas. It is the regular intervention of the hierarchy. The text tells us further that Barnabas, finding himself confronted with a rich harvest too great for him to manage single-handed, went to find Paul of Tarsus, and that together they instructed for a year these men of good will. And then comes St. Luke's statement, that for the first time the disciples were called Christians.

These Christians were Catholics; that is to say, they were believers receiving the doctrine of Christ from the lips of the hierarchy, adhering to Christ present in His Church, to Christ teaching through His Church; and they gave this adherence absolutely, without argument. From the very beginning, only one type of Christian appears, he who unites himself to Christ in His Church.

To speak of Christianity as if it were a genus capable of subdivision into different species, Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, is to give rise to the idea that a general Christianity exists and that it is to be found as such in every species, and that each of these species possesses an authentic Christianity.

It is one thing to grant that there are fragments of the

Christian truths in these non-Catholic persuasions; another thing to ascribe to them an authentic Christianity, a common denominator, fundamental to all and underlying all.

It is one thing to admit the individual salvation of all men of good will; another thing to array the religious persuasions themselves under a common standard.

According to the Church's doctrines, there is no other organism of salvation outside her, and dissenting communities cannot be regarded as parts or branches of the true Church of Christ. If, for convenience of speech, the word "Christian" is used currently in a geographical and historic sense, and not in its doctrinal strictness, it must be observed that words convey ideas, and that ideas run the risk of being cheapened in the long run if one does not consciously re-establish their original meaning. It is understandable that they should be used in a neutral sense by historians, sociologists and psychologists; for these, by their calling, leave doctrinal truth out of the argument. But when one speaks in the strictness of truth, the terms must be taken at their source and used in their primitive purity, according to Christ's will, the only conclusive guide.

The same thing happens to the word "Christian" as to the name "Orthodox". We use it conventionally to describe our brethren separated from us by a state of schism. If anyone asks us to define Orthodoxy, we are bound, rigorously, to say that Orthodoxy is heterodoxy. Although one may, by a conventional usage, employ terms which have lost their essential meaning there is always a danger of compromising truth if words are allowed to drift; and so we must say that our Protestant brethren are Christian to our eyes in proportion as they are unconsciously Catholic. If they have received valid baptism, it has made them, not Protestants, but Catholics, since there is only one baptism as there is only one God. At the threshold of life, they were all Catholics,

and it is only their free adherence to the Reformed teaching that has separated them from us and drawn them far away from Holy Church, their one and only Mother. Protestants of good faith, and they are the vast majority, can be called Christians in so far as they are attached in soul and conscience, invisibly but in fact, to the visible Church of Christ to which they are put in relation, according to His Holiness Pius XII's expression, "by a certain unconscious desire and longing". There can be no duality between true Christianity and Catholicism, for man cannot divide what God has made one. This is what His Eminence Cardinal van Roey meant when he wrote recently in the following strain to the heads of the Belgian Catholic Boy Scouts, "Remember your Christian training, and never forget that Christianity is transmitted in the Church and by the Church." Only this logical use of the vocabulary retains respect for the logic of God's thought; but it is hardly necessary to say that this in no way limits the outpouring of grace into souls nor its spreading beyond the historically traceable frontiers of the Church, nor the sincere adherence to Christ of each individual soul.

In the literature of MRA, however, and in its oral statements, the term "Christianity" frequently occurs, with this indefinite sense which we reject as fundamentally inadmissible. When a Catholic like Robert Schuman speaks of Christianity in his preface to *Remaking the World*, he is referring to something other than what Buchman means by the term. The use of the word by both is a constant source of misunderstandings which ought to be carefully avoided. This is not being doctrinaire, but simply faithful to God's will.

#### THE PROTESTANT IDEA OF THE BIBLE

MRA's Protestantism is again perceptible when it is a question of the Bible.

In the *True Guide* there occurs this passage: "The Gospels, the Bible, hold a great place in our interior life, since it is the first means God chose for speaking to men." The Bible as the first means is a specifically Protestant conception which ignores the living Tradition of the Church. For our part, we believe that it is the Church that has laid down which are the inspired books; that it is the Church that has separated them from the apocryphal books; that her oral catechesis preceded the Gospels, which only echo it; that her infallible authority guarantees their valid and sure interpretation. The resulting change in point of view is obvious, and is not without important results. It follows that there are two ways of reading the Bible, and that the Catholic exegesis differs radically from the Protestant. The same text will be read very differently according as it appears as a thought entrusted to a Church whose mission is to extract the full meaning gradually, or as an announcement sufficient to itself, capable of withstanding the hazards of future interpretations. MRA rightly asks to be judged on its living tradition, the only thing that can give the atmosphere, the thousand imponderables, and it has not much liking for texts, even the most official, that occur in its own literature. The Church demands something analogous, although for different reasons. She requires that the letter of the Scriptures be regarded through the living Tradition that illuminates it—as a ray of light illuminates a stained-glass window—and reveals unsuspected glories to its immediate hearers. She believes that Christ, the Father of the world to come, speaks beyond local Palestinian conditions to the ages to come, that He wills His words to reach our ears and our hearts intact and guaranteed. If Protestants reject the authority of this living Tradition, it is because they think it adds something to the Scriptures, that it creates a second authority, which coexisting with that of the

Bible would come to be a substitute for the Word of God.

From the Catholic point of view, there is no duality between the Bible and the Church. The faithful receive the Bible from the Church and they read it in her and with her. She is the one to guide them to a full understanding of Holy Writ, for only the bride knows the King's secrets. But this duality clearly exists for the author of *Remaking the World*. At one moment, he asks himself how are we to judge of the genuineness of an "inspiration" from God. He replies: "One means of control is the Holy Scriptures. Another excellent means of control is to consult other people who have been listening to God themselves, and especially the authorities of the Church."—what Church?—"It is a fundamental law of our spiritual communion . . . no one, in isolation, can be entirely guided by God."

The Bible on one hand, the authority of the Church on the other; no essential link is visible, and there appears to be no reason why, according to this conception, the two means of control should harmonize. This juxtaposition by itself contradicts Catholic doctrine. Other writings by Buchman's disciples go farther still, and assign no part to the Church at all.

We read the following passage in *When Man Listens* by Cecil Rose: "Most of us"—he is speaking of the Oxford Group—"believe that God speaks to us in a general way through Nature, through conscience, through reason, through circumstances or through other people; but the Bible shows us a God who speaks in a much more intimate, personal and definite way to those who will listen and obey. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

That God speaks through the authority of the Church is not imagined for a moment. Silence on this point amounts to a negation, the more serious because the book quoted

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 271.



purports to expound "the essential elements of the Christian life".

#### THE PROTESTANT IDEA OF "PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY"

It is again Protestant to insist on wanting to recreate a "primitive Christianity" from which we are supposed to have strayed. This argument implies nothing less than default on the part of the Church in keeping the trust deposited with her, the breakdown of her essential mission, the denial of the promise of infallibility made to her by Christ. This lost "primitive Christianity" which is to be restored is in the Church's eyes a heresy she has known for a very long time. Th. Spoerri, a former Rector of the University of Zurich and one of MRA's leading full-time workers, has written the following significant sentence in a pamphlet, published in the *Cahiers de Caux* series, called *How History is Made* :

"The three components of Western culture created a harmonious whole under the banner of primitive Christianity, which is distinct from all other religions."

We will not at present dispute the historical statement, but we have a right to ask some questions. Does MRA wish to establish a "primitive Christianity" thus imagined, or not? And is this Christianity a religion distinct from all others? One would like a decisive answer on this point, for the statement of Th. Spoerri is fraught with consequences. Is it necessary to recall that throughout her history, the Church has encountered sects preaching a similar return to such "primitive Christianity"? Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, the Salvation Army and many others take their stand on this return to primitive purity, and even before the Reformation, the Montanists in the second century, the Albigenes and the Waldenses in the twelfth, the Hussites

and the Lollards in the fourteenth, gave themselves out as the only representatives of the original spirit.

A Catholic might think that this appeal to the primitive Church is no more than a simple invitation to refreshment at the source, such as current Catholic literature frequently and rightly recommends. Perhaps he will see nothing more than a stimulus to dip his faith anew in the living waters. But the lines we have just quoted, though they use the same words, aim at an entirely different reality and one that we cannot admit.

#### PROTESTANTISM BY OMISSION

MRA's Protestantism appears not only in what it says, writes and asserts. The test of counter-proof will reveal it again in what is left unsaid, what is passed by in silence, or minimized. Certain omissions, or the lessening of certain essential values, imply a complete doctrinal contradiction. In the words of Monsignor Charrière, Bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg: "The seeking for, and presenting of, values common to various persuasions or religions is legitimate, but it must not lead to a sacrifice or minimization of values which are not common, because these are often of fundamental importance." This observation is noteworthy since, humanly speaking, one might be tempted to look upon what unites as essential, and what divides as subordinate. This has its place in human diplomacy, but it is not applicable to Divine Revelation.

Is it necessary to make a list of all that MRA passes over in silence? We have given one example already when we spoke of the Church and the Bible. It would be enough to open a catechism and compare the teaching there with the practice of MRA. We say "practice" expressly, because it refuses to teach. But there are so many ways of teaching

that one does not escape professing a faith even by silence! And what a silence there is on basic realities: the motherhood of the Church, the part of Mary, the Mass, communion, confession! If the movement made no claim to Christian revelation, this reproach would be out of place, but seeing that it does so we are bound to say that no one has a right to make a private selection from the Lord's revelation.

The truth is, it is impossible to breathe the air of MRA for long without feeling a threatening, an atrophy of Catholic vitality, a certain hardening of the tissues; in short, without being aware that the atmosphere is Protestant.

## V

### FALSE PERSPECTIVES

UNTIL now we have considered Moral Re-Armament in its religious and Protestant aspect, leaving aside some tendencies which, although they are not specifically Protestant, are none the less unacceptable. In this chapter we wish to draw attention to some particular stumbling blocks, and some important deviations which we shall analyse under the following headings: religious indifferentism, passivism, temporal Messianism and illuminism.

#### THE DANGER OF RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENTISM

MRA has no conscious intention of preaching religious indifferentism. The leaders say they make no claim to judge the value of the various religions in the world, that they abstain scrupulously from propaganda in favour of any definite persuasion. They want everyone to follow his own religion with the utmost loyalty. "Since Moral Re-Armament," says Count de Lovera, "is neither a religion nor a church—everyone in it follows the rules of his own religion . . . But it is quite different from religious indifferentism . . . since it recommends everyone to practise his own form of worship".

Such an attitude constitutes a real danger. Two degrees of indifferentism are to be distinguished. The first would say: It is indispensable to adopt a religion, but it matters very little which one, as long as it upholds a moral way of life. At the second degree, a more deeply-rooted indifferentism would put it thus: A religion is by no means indispensable to

the moral life; one may be adopted, although it doesn't matter which, provided it is of help. In the present section we are considering only indifferentism in the first degree, which considers some form of religion essential but does not consider it essential to choose one rather than another—not, at any rate, according to any given order. This, in the present case, comes to the same thing as stating in practice the virtual equivalence of the various religious persuasions which claim to be founded on Christ. We do not say that MRA actually teaches this equivalence; but it breathes it and lives it, which is a more discreet but perhaps more effective way of diffusing it unconsciously.

So this initial attitude formulated by Count de Lovera, if logically developed, would be an invitation to the Lutheran to be a better Lutheran, to the Anglican a better Anglican, to the Catholic a better Catholic. And what, apparently, could one ask better than that? Could there be greater respect for every religion than this? Is not this the very essence of fair play? MRA refrains from taking decisions on doctrinal questions, declaring itself incompetent in all such matters; it urges men to unite on a level above the things that divide them. That is the declared object. "We have forgotten the art of uniting", declares Buchman, "because we have lost the secret of personal changing and of spiritual renewal. We seek a common ground . . . we despair of finding it because we do not look for it on the only level where it can be found: in a universal ideology . . . MRA is the good road which leads to the higher level of God's will. Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, Confucians, all find out that they can change when it is necessary, and they can walk together along this good road".<sup>1</sup>

It is an invitation to leave the supposedly shifting ground of dogmas that separate, to come to an agreement about a

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 160.

common way of moral life. The pamphlet already quoted, *The True Guide*, illustrates the state of mind implied by this attitude in some lines appealing to "realism." "Face to face with these four standards"—meaning the four absolutes—"man to-day re-discovers a sense of religion lived, of a religion which leaves the comfortable ground of theories and academic views to enter the realm of the concrete and lead to visible transformations." These lines might lead one to think that the search for doctrinal truth belongs to a somewhat out-of-date pedantry, that life demands more positive decision. A wholly pragmatic attitude, perhaps, leaving the value of truth intact. But does it? The almost inevitable effect of moving on a level that envisages only action, is to imbue people with the idea that truth in religious matters is inaccessible or relative; or at any rate that this truth, supposing it could be found, has not the vital importance we attribute to it, since, according to MRA, life can be built without it. With agnosticism or relativism on one hand, with the truth emasculated on the other, we steer between Scylla and Charybdis. We should like to know what comes under the rather vague heading of "theories and academic views". Are we to understand by it that the highest mysteries of faith are without practical interest for human life, that there are academic issues, idle and inopportune, and that man should concentrate his energies, not on finding truth and living by it, but solely on leading a better life, ignoring the ultimate reasons for doing so? The least we can say is that all this is not clear, and that the atmosphere of MRA, not merely practical but pragmatic, gives rise by its nature to a superiority complex in regard to the doctrinal truth which is of such little apparent importance. By leaving in brackets, or obscurity, the fundamental and initial question: "What is the true Revelation of God?", by behaving as if Revelation existed at best only in a fragmentary and scattered

state, people at least in practice end up in relativism. "This temptation to lose interest in their own religion," writes Brémont, a Protestant pastor, about MRA, "is much stronger for Protestants than for Catholics, in as much as Protestants, filled with the idea, so dear to them, of universal priesthood, may easily and conscientiously think that they can dispense with the services and ministry of the pastor, as well as with the sacraments and teachings of the Church".

For his own part, he fears the danger of "slipping towards a new Quakerism, towards setting-up of a universal substitute for the Church, with neither dogmas nor sacraments." He adds this observation: "Many of MRA's partisans know that their allegiance to this movement can and must represent no more than a forceful impetus which will make them more devoted and faithful members of their respective churches. But there are some I know who find an excuse for lessened interest and for dissent; and for these, belonging to MRA means enrolment in a new ecclesiastical system, more agreeable because more dynamic."

The observation is illuminating, and shows that the danger to which we draw attention is felt even outside the Church.

It puts a finger, indeed, on what is the real temptation in the movement. Many of the "permanents" are no longer attached to a definite persuasion. This, too, is typical. All the literature of MRA, and still more the oral statements, tend to present the movement as the new and universal mysticism of the future, a vague, formless, higher religion, beneath which, logically, Catholicism would have to take its place as one sect among others. Here once again appears the basic ambiguity fostered by the whole atmosphere at Caux. For the movement's propaganda is wholly centred on this one theme: MRA is the salvation of the world, even the salvation of the various religions, to which it promises to

give new life. It is impossible to be present at its meetings or to make a systematic study of the movement's writings without finding that one fixed idea predominates: not only is MRA a contribution to the reconstruction of the world, not just one brick in the building; it is *the* solution. It seems that during the last session at Caux there were to be heard assertions like the following, repeated in countless ways by authoritative voices:

"MRA is a lamp lit in a world of darkness."

"The only light in the world is that of MRA."

"A union of all countries and all religions, that is MRA."

"We must accept the greatest call that God has kept for us and give all to remake the world. MRA is the only answer for the world."

"Christ has influenced the world for thousands of years. What we are doing will also influence the world for thousands of years."

Assertions of this sort, indefatigably repeated, make the movement appear as the supreme absolute to which all the rest are subject and subordinate, something that outclasses everything else.

#### THE DANGER OF PASSIVISM

Another stumbling-block that MRA does not avoid is a passive attitude to the search for truth. It seems to think that, if only sin is removed from the soul, then God is obliged to enlighten it directly in prayer, without our collaboration in this difficult and imperative undertaking. It is rightly explained to us that God not only directs our lives as a whole, but wishes to control them down to the smallest detail. To illustrate this, we are told to commit to God "the choice of our careers, the way in which we spend a ten-shilling note, whatever work we are doing at the moment,

those with whom we form friendships, all our decisions about salary or business . . . .” Very good; but is there not, too, a first duty to fulfil, that of seeking for the truth with all one’s soul? Must we not cherish a virginity of the spirit as well as chastity of the body? “To work at right thinking is the principle of morality,” said Pascal. It is essential for us to submit our thought to God’s, and for this end to undertake to look for it in every quarter. Our thoughts must be true for our actions to be faithful. Does not Scripture require us to “follow the truth in a spirit of charity”? Here is an invitation to be true first of all. “You must let truth lead you,” Brunetière used to say. “Absolute honesty” requires us to respect all that Truth exacts and to take trouble to acquire it. It is most striking in the Gospels how uncompromisingly Jesus fought sin of the mind, when He showed Himself so compassionate towards sins of the flesh. For Him, sin is primarily sin against the light, pride of intellect. In the examinations of conscience offered to us by MRA, we are invited to observe subtly and persistently a whole series of moral duties, up to and including absolute scrupulousness towards the Public Revenue; but there is no trace of this primary duty to seek what is true at any cost. Here, we are to wait until God reveals ready-made answers by direct inspiration, as if faith absolved us from every effort. We are to expect the Holy Spirit to answer our questions without, it would seem, any suspicion that when He teaches us He ordinarily uses and animates all kinds of secondary causes. But God is not obliged to reveal to us “by some inward certainty” what well-directed study can always teach us. For example, in order to know the rules for the ethics of business or of marriage, it is not enough to settle down to pray. On these matters, treasuries of wisdom have been amassed by moralists through the centuries; and it is our business to open their books or consult the proper authorities.

Is this rationalism? No; each person’s own work, as well as all done by others, is made fertile by grace, and it is there we should seek God’s thought, the better to obey Him and live by His influence. Normally there is no need for everyone to start from scratch in his difficult search for truth, when he has tradition to offer him guidance and support. It is not right to expect God to make up for our want of effort. That is no homage to His transcendence, it is merely a disregard for the part of human co-operation in the unfolding and fulfilment of God’s design.

Such a passiveness towards truth is in odd contrast to the bustle displayed in the domain of action. At the slightest sign they will fly from Mackinac to London, or from Pakistan to Los Angeles, to spread the good news; and this is most praiseworthy. We should like to see the same concern for truth in itself, and for truth’s own sake.

Brémond again, noticing, just as we have, this characteristic lack of interest in the quest for truth, wrote as follows:

“There would be no benefit to clear thinking in frequenting these gatherings too often. I fear particularly for all these young people, these very young enthusiasts in the full joy of their complete consecration, committed heart and soul in this warfare for God, but seemingly attaching so little importance in their armoury of spiritual weapons, defensive and offensive, to the girdle of truth.<sup>1</sup> It is a good thing never to forget, especially in our time, that we must take up all God’s weapons and that we must love Our Lord, not only with an ardent heart, the strength of youth and a fresh soul, but with all the resources of our thought, made fertile by grace.”

This passiveness as regards doctrinal truth contains nothing that need surprise us. The origins, the very ancestry of MRA, determined it in this direction: it is deeprooted

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 6. 14.

in a current that has been a marked feature of Protestantism, namely, pietism. We know that this was a reaction made in the name of piety and vitality against the official Protestantism of the eighteenth century, so manifestly tainted as it was with formalism and rationalism. Since that time, this renewal, which started with Spener's German pietism, was the moving spirit in many religious revivals. We find the same thing in George Fox's Quakers, in the Herrnhuter organized by Count Zinzendorff, in Charles and John Wesley's Methodists.

Seeking an ancestor of the movement, we could find Methodism as a direct forebear. A Protestant Bishop, Dr. H. Gresford Jones, writing in *The Times*, greeted Buchman sympathetically as the successor to John Wesley. In both there is the same striving after an ideal of high morality, the same stress on an emotional experience of Christ, the same indifference about dogma. Someone has just said that Buchman would have subscribed to Wesley's famous declaration, "It is of no importance whether one is Protestant or Papist so long as one has the spirit of Christ."

At the beginning, Wesley also did not mean to found a new sect. He wanted only to renovate existing Christianity and breathe a new life into it. And his efforts undoubtedly created a strong current of vitality among the enthusiastic disciples who followed him. Yet this does not prevent Methodism from taking its place in history as a new type of religion. We are aware that Buchman does not like people to describe his movement as Buchmanism; but we fear that unless it changes its course, history will find no other name for it, and will place it on the list, long enough already, of Protestant revivals of the pietistic type. Similarities are not lacking. In almost all the revivalist movements, as a Protestant writer remarks, "our experience has been that of lives transformed, of recollection made fruitful in action, of

God's clear guidance given to those willing to obey him, of working together in teams. Luther recommended silent meditation, pen in hand. The La Drome revival, at the time of the missionary Brigade, circulated a very vigorous pamphlet entitled *Life Delivered*, every page of which contained an invitation to allow oneself in all circumstances to be led by God, like little children . . . A little later, the Revival of Ardèche experienced the liberation that came from total sharing during common prayer . . ." MRA's method is new, but its basic tendency is not.

The emotional pietistic current which we have come to recognize in MRA is further reinforced by the pragmatistical tendencies so popular in America. The multiplying of religious sects over there has spread in Reformed circles a general weariness of doctrinal controversy, accentuating in its own way the utilitarian and ethical tendencies it prefers. America has seen the birth and growth of Societies for "Ethical Culture", "Christian Science", "Mind Cure", "New Thought." The first named are a rallying point for people preoccupied above all with moral progress, though leaving to each the fullest doctrinal freedom. The others practise a sort of psychiatry with a religious basis. Both these attitudes have served to reinforce the tendency to ignore doctrinal truth and concentrate solely on moral results. If we want to place and understand MRA we must never forget that it hails from America.

#### THE DANGER OF TEMPORAL MESSIANISM

The third stumbling-block is that of a temporal Messianism. With MRA you never quite know on what plane you are standing: there is a constant transition, almost imperceptible, from the religious to the worldly. People talk in the same breath about the dictatorship of the Holy Spirit, the increased tonnage of coal production of the Ruhr, the

stopping of a strike, a Biblical allusion and the Peace Treaty with Japan. We should, of course, hold nothing profane, for we live in a supernatural order. But although there are no separations or partitions in the supernatural order, the different levels are distinct. We are not very clear, for example—for the subject is discussed *recto tono* with all the rest—whether the “inspired democracy” so often talked about is the form of government willed by God for our age, as was the theocracy of the Old Testament, or whether it is a matter of free choice, something left to human wisdom. Democracy seems to be fully canonized from the MRA point of view. But this, in our view, is only a matter of detail, which we mention in passing. What appears more serious is the link seemingly established between virtue and earthly happiness, between the moral change that the movement advocates and its visible and direct results. By way of example, we pick out these lines on prayer from one of their authors:

“My first revolutionary direction, obtained in ‘guidance’, was to make a new price list. God showed me that it was wrong to use varying discounts and secret agreements. He also gave me the power to obey, because, as far as I could see, it would cost me my business. I expected to lose all the customers with whom I had made a secret agreement. The new price list had the following results:

“(a) Increase in sales by £3,000; (b) Increase in profit by twenty per cent; (c) More orders than before by letter, as customers knew what the best prices were and did not wait for our salesmen to quote special prices; (d) No fear of being away from my business because the youngest employees can now give anyone the prices and conditions.

“I learned that it is no burden, but rather a privilege, to have God with me in my business, because God knows more of real business than I.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cecil Rose, *When Man Listens*, pp. 102-3.

A certain temporal optimism, recalling the Messianism of the Jews, is present in the message of MRA, at least in its presentation. It is repeated endlessly that when men change, nations will change, the face of the earth will change, and that peace will come to live amongst men. MRA offers itself as a certain promise of an earthly paradise to be regained. Buchman promises wonders to those who will follow him: “MRA is the scenario of a Golden Age—a God-directed production—a preview of a new world.”<sup>1</sup>

“Our young men,” again he proclaims, “will know why they fight, our wars will be victorious and we shall be at peace with all men and with the whole world.”<sup>2</sup> Or again: “Three great tasks confront this generation. To keep the peace and make it permanent. To make the wealth and work of the world available to all and for the exploitation of none. And with peace and prosperity as our servants and not our masters, to build a new world, create a new culture and change the age of gold into a Golden Age.”<sup>3</sup>

Even if we make allowance for the rhetorical style and for a conventional optimism designed to attract adherents, it remains true that there is a too heavy stress on earthly happiness as the inevitable consequence of a reformed way of life. We ought, indeed, to strive with all our might to proffer to men, while they are still here below, the best earthly conditions; the task of social betterment is a duty in conscience. But while we exert ourselves to the full towards this end—we freely acknowledge that there is nothing quietistic about the movement on the social level—we must remember that God has not linked virtue to visible happiness on earth and that the world will remain, until the end of time, partially subject to the influence of evil. We have to make the

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Light, More Light*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 98.

best we can of it, and render it as habitable as possible for the common man, but at the same time realize that success will never be complete. Since original sin destroyed certain harmonies, an earthly paradise is finally closed to our hopes. Here below, we shall always know death, the fruit of sin, and all the train of sufferings that follow in the wake of sin: discord and human selfishness.

The doctor fights death—it is a fight which does him credit—but he knows that he can never abolish it; this realism conditions his efforts and limits them. We shall never conquer either illness or pain. This does not mean that we are not to muster all our energy to avert and diminish them. We must fight, but with our eyes open, without discouragement but without deceptive hopes.

The world is still partly, as the Master told us, under the dominion of the devil and the forces of evil. It bears the weight of original sin and of men's personal sins. We must not be surprised at what we see of this mystery of evil, which makes man feel his littleness and weakness. Christ merited Salvation for us, but creation still groans and sighs, as it waits for the new heaven and the new earth which will mark the consummation of time.

"Jesus will be in His agony until the end of the world," said Pascal: "we must not sleep during that time." Yes; mysteriously Christ re-lives in our midst His former life. Still, in His mystical Body, He knows nativities and epiphanies, but also flights into exile, condemnations by Pilate, Herod's mockeries, agonies in the garden and crucifixions. It is not strangers who heap on Him these persecutions, but men who have once belonged to Him, by their baptism at least, such as Hitler and Stalin in our time. This life of Christ continues; hidden in contemplative monasteries; penitent in those of the Trappists or in Carmels; apostolic in the life of priests, missionaries, or lay apostles; glorious in those

inward resurrections which are the conversions of sinners. The world exists only to serve this mystery, and to support it. Jesus promised peace to men of goodwill, but He also promised the sword and persecution. He spoke of hating one's father and mother the better to follow Him; He declared that the servant would be no better treated than the Master. He foretold how His disciples would be betrayed, scorned, dragged before tribunals. But at the same time He assured them, as a foretaste of heaven, an ineffable and sovereign joy of heart: "Your gladness will be one which nobody can take away from you." Peace of soul, trusting self-abandonment to God, these are the assured rewards which give strength to withstand outward storms and reverses. The fact must be recognized that the Master came not to save civilizations but souls, because civilizations are only mortal—we know that well to-day—whereas souls never die. We do not say that the leaders of MRA ignore this truth; we do say that a too one-sided optimism in the handling of their message gives rise to or supports this misleading point of view. It is not said often enough that the peace promised by God is first of all a peace of soul and heart. The other, the temporal peace, is something we must strive our hardest to obtain, while knowing that it will never be final on earth. MRA would profit by allowing for these facts in its presentation.

#### THE DANGER OF ILLUMINISM

MRA develops on the shifting sands of subjectivity. The faith upon which it relies is the entirely experimental assurance-faith which belongs to the various forms of Protestantism. It follows that the word "faith" as used by its members is a constant source of misunderstandings for a Catholic, for the religious experience implied is wholly



different from his own. It is very difficult to exchange ideas on such an essentially subjective and individual basis. One is struck, on encountering MRA, by the ease with which everyone claims to have "directions from the Holy Spirit". They expect "directions" from God about all sorts of things, and they think they receive them in more or less accurate and detailed form. "God told me that . . ." is a phrase that could be heard in season and out, until Catholic critics persuaded the leaders to choose a less conspicuous vocabulary. But with or without the expression of it, they think they have a right to receive God's utterance about the way to end a strike as about the choosing of a menu. They expect as a matter of course that Buchman should receive "direction" from God as to whether he should open the annual session at Caux on August 1st, and orders and counter-orders alternate with each other, until the "inspiration" arrives. They speak, as the most natural thing in the world, of God's plan for European Federation, the reform of the mining industry, unemployment—a plan that is to be received during recollection. "We are called to prove to our generation," we are told, "that God has a plan for the world, for His Church,"—again, what Church is this?—"for me; that He can communicate it in a detailed accurate way to those who are ready to obey Him; that His plan is the perfect solution to public and private chaos. The price to pay is to be ready to listen."

Things are not so simple. Prayer does, of course, create in us a fundamental disposition of docility towards God, and opens us to His action and light. It gives rise to an attitude of complete receptiveness which forms a ground to the intenser action of grace. But grace does not take the place of the human work of collaboration, the toilsome and tiring quest for satisfactory solutions. Ordinarily, God does not dictate the choice of conduct for the material details

of life. Even the great mystics, although they live habitually and directly under God's influence, have to use discernment—no easy task—and submit to independent control the different interior promptings they feel. MRA appears to act on the assumption that mystical experience is the norm; as if God had to reveal to us directly and in detail what His will is that we should do. This is opening the doors to illuminism. How are we to select from these "inspirations" and establish the authenticity of their origin? Is it really God who speaks? What prevents it from being my imagination, my subconscious or an unnoticed suggestion by someone else? They submit them to the control of the team. Buchman tells us that his disciples "can be nothing else but men speaking with authority; with an authority founded on daily experience of divine direction." It is pushing back the difficulty without solving it. How can ten or twenty men, all fallible and subject to illusions as I am, assure me that it is really God who speaks? Holy Scripture tells us to beware when the blind lead the blind. Such gropings are all the more dangerous because, in the last resort, all is made to depend on the impulses received. "God's plan," announced the founder quite recently, "is that we should be a community guided by the Holy Spirit." Nothing is harder than "discernment of spirits", and therefore the Church in her wisdom has laid down precise and subtle rules for judging them. These people do not seem to notice that they are gaily skirting the brinks of deep chasms, that the absence of all sure infallibility makes the whole system suspect and creates a temptation to fill the void with substitutes.

For man instinctively looks for a safe guide; he has an inborn need of certainty and support, and is loth to walk by himself in the dark. If no star from the firmament guides him, he will try to light a torch himself. We fear that more than one member of MRA yields to this subtle temptation

and attributes to Buchman, in fact and as a matter of practice, a charism of infallibility against which Buchman protests with only partial success. Obedience to orders received, seemingly an absolute obedience, is a striking feature of MRA, and it renders the danger we have mentioned the more acute, especially as we know nothing of the source of this authority or of the machinery that starts it working. Some people have thought that MRA represents a kind of modernized freemasonry, Anglo-Saxon in type, that is to say, not anti-religious, with a mysterious inner mechanism and strong inner discipline. If this were true, the danger of abandoning oneself to the uncontrollable "inspirations" of other people would be immeasurably increased. However this may be, we are walking on treacherous and uncertain ground.

Being unable to lay the first foundations of the movement on doctrinal bases, objective and irrefutable, the leaders prefer to avoid attempting any proof by proclaiming obstinately that they are not a movement, but simply a spirit. "It is not a movement," one of them announced at a conference in Paris, "it is people in movement." The assertion appears like a recurrent theme and is found again in Buchman's oft-quoted statement:

"MRA is open to all and bars none. It is a quality of life. You don't join and you can't resign. You live a life."<sup>1</sup>

If this passage means that it is not an organization with a membership card, a fixed subscription, badges and standard bearers, then there is nothing to say. But if, as they try to do, they draw the conclusion that it is not a movement in the sense of a visible organism, then we are bound to say that this is pure self-deception. MRA's spirit does not exist as Platonic Ideas exist: it is spread through the world by very material and corporeal men and institutions. Every-

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 125.

one can see a centre such as Caux, everyone can read the official reviews and books, everyone can meet the fifteen hundred full-time workers who systematically propagate its mystic teaching across continents. And everyone has always termed a sociological and collective reality as visible as this a "movement", or something equivalent. *Ideas Have Legs* is the title of an MRA book. Yes, but legs can be seen, they touch the ground, and the spirit relies on them as an effective and tangible instrument for the spreading of ideas.

## VI

## THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE

## CATHOLIC REACTIONS

THE attitude of Catholics and the Church towards Moral Re-Armament is determined by the answer to the primary question: Is it a religious movement?

If the answer is in the affirmative, the general laws of the Church at once become applicable, without further need of a special pronouncement. There is no need to know whether in a more or less distant future the Church will condemn MRA by name. Only let it be a religious movement, and it falls at once under the ruling of the general laws of the Church. The Church forbids her children to take any active part in religious movements outside her own fold; and in order to avoid the very shadow of indifferentism, she has a very strict legislation for everything that concerns interchanges with non-Catholic persuasions. For her, it is a sin against faith to allow that religions are interchangeable and relative. Therefore she forbids at mixed gatherings any common use of the sacraments, sacramentals, or public worship. This is not an arrogant and disdainful attitude, but plain fidelity to her mission as the sole successor of Christ among men.

There is no disagreement in principle between Catholics about the attitude they should adopt towards MRA, only a difference in appraising its character as religious or non-religious.

As for MRA itself, it formally denies that it is a religious movement, and its leaders repeat the denial with conviction.

They are constantly protesting and making conciliatory overtures to the religious hierarchies of various countries in an attempt to convince them of this.

Roughly speaking, there are two sorts of reactions to be distinguished among Catholics who are well-informed about the problem. We say "well-informed" because we need not discuss over-simplified, hasty or intransigent statements, wanting in both objectivity and charity, and basing their condemnation on polemical considerations which are either facile or wounding.

First, there are the sympathetic Catholics, not in fact very numerous. Misled by its protestations, these see MRA in a non-religious light and collaborate on a purely social level. Struck by the positive results we have mentioned, they think that with certain changes of vocabulary and the filling in of a few gaps, it is possible to work with MRA on a level accessible to all. They wish to use this medium of action for reaching that vast materialist mass on which the Church no longer has a hold. The charity of these sympathizers, directed towards the people rather than the doctrines concerned, leads them to ally themselves with MRA and become its champions.

There are others who feel that the whole movement is pervaded by something fundamentally disquieting, and before going any farther they desire to dispel the mists and ambiguities. They want to clarify the atmosphere, and disentangle the real character of MRA before entertaining the thought of any eventual co-operation. These also recognize that there is room for an apostolate to reach the masses on a basis within everyone's range. They want the movement to help in making the initial breach; but to start with they want an atmosphere of truth and they are disappointed at not finding it. In their eyes, the unconscious lack of absolute honesty on Buchman's part, and that of other leaders,

about the real nature of their movement, vitiates the whole activity and forces them to draw apart, even when the immediate results of the activity are, or seem to be, good. Truth, they rightly think, must first of all be judged by itself and in itself; and the end, however laudable, never justifies the use of questionable means. This second class of Catholics would reply to the first that it is often very hard to use the argument that "the tree is known by its fruits", because these have to be examined closely before a conclusion can be drawn.

We gave a list of the "fruits" referred to in the second chapter, and so we do not need to mention them in detail again. But since some Catholics have become partisans, because they have been particularly impressed by conversions to Catholicism said to have been prompted by MRA, we shall have to gauge these more closely, and analyse them. The subject is delicate, and it is not possible for us to disclose the details of some of the cases most advertised; they are not, in any case, very numerous. We shall deal only with a bare minimum, just enough to show the weakness of the argument, and leave out of the discussion whatever is exceptional about personal cases.

In order to estimate accurately the influence of Caux on Catholics, these latter must be grouped according to whether they are practising or not, and according to the length of time they have been under its influence. If a tree is to be judged by its fruits, the first task is to inspect them all, not a few selected specimens. What do we find?

In the first place, that a good number of Catholics, who go to Caux because they are told that the movement is not Protestant and not religious at all, feel instantly disturbed by the fundamental ambiguity. Often they have some trouble in disentangling what shocks them from what they rightly admire. But on the whole their Catholic instinct

guides them and directs them not to join. This is the first fact.

Others are perplexed by the human success of Caux, and they try to compare its success and its methods with some Catholic methods which rightly or wrongly seem to them antiquated. They receive the impression that the Church has aged in her fashion of presenting the truth, and the comparison they make between the respective psychological methods employed is unfavourable to the Church. As Canon Tiberghien justly remarked: "MRA is like a landing. To those downstairs it means coming up; to those upstairs it means going down. This is a danger for Catholics, all the more when the flat on the landing-floor is well-lighted, well ventilated and furnished in modern style, when it creates the impression that one would be able to work there in better conditions." That is the point: the brightness of the lighting makes it impossible to see the sun, and the interior decoration charms and dazzles by its brilliance. Not everyone is constituted so favourably as to be capable of the required discernment, and of recognizing Truth, even poorly dressed as in the stable at Bethlehem, as always a sovereign queen. This is the second fact to be reckoned with; a confusion which may sometimes lead even to a degree of disloyalty to the Church.

For others, again, the encounter is a salutary prompting to become better aware of their Catholicism and to practise it better. Seeing at close quarters the religious void in so many men of good will and the doctrinal impoverishment of Protestantism, many have felt, so they have told us, an enhanced pride in their own faith. This is incontestably one fruit of Caux; but this is the result of a reaction, not the legitimate fruit of the tree itself.

A healthy reaction, even a conversion, does not necessarily prove the truth of its occasion or cause. Psichari, watching Muslims praying in the desert, became conscious of his own

baptism and of France's Catholic vocation. He rediscovered the faith of his fathers. No one will pretend that this conversion was a fruit of Mohammedanism. The *Action française*, in the first years of its existence, brought a number of its partisans back to the faith and fostered respect for the Church in traditionalist circles. Did this prove the fundamental truth of this nationalistic movement?

Was not Jansenism a school of high morality, and of some dazzling virtues, even though sometimes humility may not have been brilliantly conspicuous? Did not the leaders at Port Royal have to their credit those famous conversions that made such a stir in high society? Other examples could be quoted, for there is a long list of movements which, in spite of their "fruits", have been reproved by the Church for doctrinal shortcomings. It is natural enough that, in a complex movement containing errors as well as truths, the truths should retain a health-giving property unstifled by error. The Church fully recognizes, and is glad to do so, the working of God's grace outside her borders—we do not say without invisible connexion with her—but she has never regarded any dissident's lofty virtues as proof of his doctrinal soundness. These fruits of grace derive just from those elements of Catholic life which these separated brethren retain; they are portions of the family treasure which was once common property. Many times in the course of history the Church has had to choose between doctrinal fidelity and success, or immediate "fruits". She lost England because she declined to betray the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage, and she would have been able to keep whole nations within her fold if she had sacrificed or weakened some article of her creed. It is a choice that will always remain unintelligible to those who do not see that she has a paramount duty to the truth entrusted to her, a duty that is the reverse of everything we associate with the pragmatic spirit.

If, in spite of all this, they still insist on the number of conversions, they must acknowledge that the few cases connected with visits to Caux are a minute number compared with the thousands effected directly through the religious apostolate. Nor is this all. In order to weigh the quality of a conversion, it is not enough to show a return to religious practice, for this is only a corollary; what has to be evaluated is the mentality of the new-found Catholic. Does Caux make Catholics more Catholic, as they like to tell us? We believe that, in certain cases, Caux has given a moral shock, thereby teaching non-practising Catholics some of the moral virtues for a second time. Caux aims at combating sin, or, to put it better, at combating what is sin in its eyes; but the catalogue of sins is far from complete, it lends itself to various interpretations, and takes no notice of anything irrelevant to its own one-sidedly moralizing point of view. The moral aspect is the only aspect to be found there. But it is to the whole man, body and soul, that Catholicism speaks; the authenticity of a genuine conversion is measured by taking account of all the dimensions, of all the levels of life. Catholic in conduct and practice, a man can have a mind filled with Protestant ideas on a number of subjects; and this danger—no imaginary bogey—more than outweighs some happy but accidental effects.

On the other hand this unconscious Protestantism is a natural result of the movement in its present form. Every Catholic knows that he must not belong to a Protestant school of spirituality. MRA never tires of saying that it is not a school, that it "teaches" nothing, that it "professes" no precise religion, and that it respects all religions. Or, if preferable, it recognizes that it is a school of action, not of doctrine. It draws attention to the fact that it has established no professorial chair nor imposed any definite body of doctrine. It says it is outside and above all conflict of ideas

on the religious level, and it begs everyone to choose the truth he prefers. Such an assurance leads Catholics to overlook the practical and daily influence which is exerted all the time and so becomes doctrine in deed and application. A school of action, unfortunately, is a school of doctrine, whether deliberately or not. It is not even necessary to be aware of the fact, for life itself takes care to bring out the doctrine inherent in action. Monsieur Jourdain was astonished to discover he had been speaking prose without knowing it; and in the course of a day we all put into practice, whether we like it or not, doctrinal principles implicit in our very life. In all behaviour there is "metaphysics in action". Parents do not bring up their children by teaching from text-books on education, but the principles of education are lived from morning till night in the family circle, even if they are never formulated or appreciated as such. We know very well how these influences stamp a child for ever, how they control his destiny. Teaching is better done by a living example than by words. This or that choice, omission or abstention, this or that silence, are singularly eloquent and powerfully contagious. The same holds true for the atmosphere of MRA. However upright the intentions of its leaders may be, its very existence is bound to subject Catholics to a slow and insidious protestantizing influence.

This can be felt and seen as soon as it is at all prolonged, especially in the case of the Catholic full-time workers, plunged from morning to night in Protestant surroundings, and making use of the vocabulary there current. The literature of MRA cannot be read without danger, exuding as it does a brand of spirituality foreign to the Church. Every Catholic is supposed to know the general laws of the Index; he must know that writings dealing with morality and religion and written by Catholic authors must bear the Church's imprimatur. He must not read books published

without this guarantee unless he has special permission, least of all such books or pamphlets by Protestant writers. But these are what he finds at Caux. And not only books; there is also the whole oral transmission of the message. Experience proves that it is dangerous for a Catholic to live in a spiritual atmosphere not his own. Catholic fresh-air cures may counteract these injurious influences to some extent. But the eventual resistance of certain organisms does not prove there are no unwholesome elements in the air. A Catholic cannot, without detriment, live in a religious environment that reduces the mediation of the visible Church to a mere abstraction; that, in fact, denies her divine nature. If the contact is prolonged, even for a little, the genuine Catholic sense becomes weakened and numbed. MRA sees only the soul uniting to God, without intermediary, through the private prayer of the "quiet time". What the Church knows first is Christ's own prayer, made real for us in her public, social and official worship. This liturgical prayer of the Church is the stream that feeds private piety, that carries and sustains it. At the heart of this cult is the sacrifice of Christ, really, eucharistically present in His humanity and divinity; by Him, with Him and in Him the Church makes contact with God and renders Him all honour and all glory. The personal prayer of the faithful is like a trickle of water, pouring itself into this one majestic river of the Church's own prayer, lived and shared by all; and the Church absorbs it that she may carry it forward with the force of her own current, and pour it into God. Protestantism knows nothing of all this, and MRA is silent about it because it does not recognize the divinity of the Church, nor the active and enduring presence in her of Christ. It knows nothing of the real and present mediation of Christ in the Church, and so it knows nothing of the living spiritual motherhood of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God

—she, too, being relegated to history and the past. A whole world of grace escapes it. The house offered by MRA is a motherless home, it does not know the warmth and tenderness of the woman who has been called “God’s smile”. And how many more treasures are buried and left neglected! Piety once planted in an individualist setting—my soul and God—no amount of subsequent adjustments can fit the Church into her proper place. It was a false start; they must retrace their steps if they want to return to Our Lord’s first thought. If Catholicism is just stuck on a Protestant foundation the result is a hybrid mixture, with the supernatural as a veneer, rather than an integral part of the living thing.

This practical disregard of the vital part played by the Church unbalances true Catholic life and leads to a whole series of very grave consequences. Instead of being the leaven and the starting-point, sacramental and liturgical life takes on something of an extraneous adventitious aspect. No sooner do we cease to recognize Christ as continuing to operate and work in her than the Church becomes alien to our faith, a shackle, a screen between God and ourselves. Catholic full-time workers, who have found their vocation in MRA and live in teams with Protestants, are virtually cut off from the full life of the Church; they no longer take part in the great missionary currents or in Catholic action; they devote all their energies to a Protestant movement which, as such, spreads what is error in the eyes of the Church, their mother.

Catholics and non-Catholics in the movement may talk about God’s plan and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; but as soon as we examine these expressions to discover what they stand for, we perceive that identical expressions clothe concepts fundamentally irreconcilable. In the fog of words it is impossible to see distinctly the shape of the realities they blur, and there is a risk in trying to breathe an air so foreign

to Catholicism. Minority members of a mixed team, Catholics are bound to be citizens of secondary importance, obliged to leave their own Catholic life in the background. They cannot really share it with Protestant co-members of the team, much less receive directives from them. The very fact that they can feel at ease shows how the mysticism of the movement has veiled their anomalous position, and how much they have been beguiled by some of the successes of MRA.

Certainly no visitor would deny that the actual surroundings are most alluring. You meet highly educated and distinguished men and women in a family atmosphere morally irreproachable. There is no lack of interesting and unexpected contacts, and it is all far removed from the monotony of austere daily toil. The whole setting, at Caux, is one of the most beautiful in the world, and the prevailing sense of well-being blurs the memory of the poor everyday reality that awaits one at the foot of the funicular. The contrast between this society of cultured, pleasant, idealistic people, and the tenor of life to which the traveller returns at the end of these spiritual and rather unreal “holidays” is apt to give rise to a comparison by no means favourable to his customary and far less colourful surroundings. Such a transition from poetry to prose may make it hard to resume those humble but noble daily tasks that must be performed without applause and without any halo. It must be acknowledged that MRA, from the human point of view, offers dazzling and ultra-modern equipment and techniques that have proved their efficiency. It is a temptation to use these perfected weapons for the conversion of mankind instead of the “paltry methods” of the Gospel. It is a temptation, in the interests of efficiency, to minimize the doctrinal divergencies and seek alliances against the common enemy. It is a temptation to make a show of broadmindedness and tolerance

under the cloak of charity towards all men; but it would be detrimental to the higher and purer charity that springs out of obedience to the truth, the only source of life and of enduring salvation.

It is this aspect of MRA, together with its reassuring assertions about its non-religious character, that has led some Catholics to join it. Relying on these affirmations, they have not thought it necessary to question the doctrinal basis: they have succumbed to the massed charm of many natural qualities, to the attraction of immediate returns, and they have taken a hand in it without critical examination of the doctrinal implications inherent in the movement.

The Church, who watches over the spiritual welfare of her children, seeing them deluded and deceived, was bound to warn them of the danger and dispel the ambiguity. She has not failed, wherever the confusion has come to light, to express by the voice of her Bishops not only her maternal anxiety but also her disapproval.

#### THE VOICE OF THE BISHOPS

The attitude of the religious hierarchy in regard to MRA is clearly expressed in various documents.

The first hierarchy to make a stand was naturally that of England and Wales. We say "naturally" because it was in that country that the Oxford Group saw the light. In 1938, Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, published a note in which he declared:

"The group movement is so tainted with indifferentism, with the error that one religion is as good as another, that no Catholic can join it to take any active part in it or co-operate with it formally." During the war, the Oxford Group was widely discredited in England because of its pacifist tendencies. When the movement reappeared under the name

of "Moral Re-Armament", the hierarchy of England and Wales examined the question afresh and in November 1946 published a collective note which was substantially a restatement of the late Cardinal Hinsley's condemnation.

"Moral Re-Armament is so tainted with indifferentism . . . that no Catholic may take any active part in such a movement or formally co-operate. Catholics should be warned not to attend its meetings or gatherings even as spectators." This is still the attitude of His Eminence Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, and of all the episcopate, who judge that it retains all its relevance at the present time.

A similar disclaimer was expressed in Germany, at Whitsun 1950, by His Eminence Cardinal Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, as part of a sermon in his cathedral. Drawing attention to some dangerous tendencies peculiar to our time, the Cardinal declared: "The Church likewise makes a stand regarding the movement at Caux called Moral Re-Armament. She is of the opinion that the principles on which this movement is based are simply a vague and dangerous religious syncretism which completely conditions moral influence. The Church therefore takes every opportunity to counsel the faithful, and priests above all, not to take any part in this movement." This warning, as we know, has not been modified since.

During the year 1952, His Eminence Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan, also declared: "This movement, Protestant in origin and structure . . . is dangerous . . . because it offers a kind of diminished and subjective religion . . . an arbitrary and therefore highly erroneous religiosity. What is found at Caux is a subjective pietism which bears the unmistakable stamp of Protestantism."

Echoing this pronouncement from Italy, which reflects the opinion of the whole Italian episcopate, there came in



August 1952 the statement signed by His Eminence Cardinal van Roey, Archbishop of Malines, in the name of the Belgian hierarchy: "The episcopate of Belgium bids the faithful beware of any participation of whatever nature in the activities of 'Moral Re-Armament' which has its European centre at Caux; this is because the movement contains concealed dangers to the integrity of the Catholic faith."

In Ireland, Monsignor Brown, Bishop of Galway, devoted a pamphlet to a study of the Oxford Group called *The Group Movement*. He closes with these terms: "To recapitulate our review, we think it certain that the Oxford group forms a heretical sect. . . . It follows that no Catholic can become a member without rejecting the teaching of the Church. To become a member of the movement and to accept all its opinions would for a Catholic be the equivalent of apostasy." Although it refers to MRA in its initial phase, the judgment broadly holds good for its present stage, and it therefore still has value as a directive.

The American episcopate has not yet had to take up an official position in the matter. It must not be concluded that this silence is due to a more favourable judgment. According to several bishops questioned on this point, it is explained by the fact that Catholics, almost in unison, have felt instinctively the Protestant nature of MRA. Having a first-hand acquaintance with the sects engendered by the Reformation, they recognize them more easily under the most varying disguises and hold themselves aloof.

The attitude of the American episcopate is accurately represented in the following lines, written in October 1952, by an American Bishop who had been duly informed of the movement's activities: "We consider the MRA as a non-Catholic sect in process of formation, and we regard as a dangerous symptom the attitude of certain Catholics involved in the movement."

And on the occasion of an important MRA delegation visiting India, with Dr. Buchman at its head, the permanent Committee of the Conference of Catholic Bishops urged the Ordinaries to put all clergy and the faithful on their guard against the MRA, described by *Osservatore Romano*, in printing this item of news, as a "grave moral peril". To follow up this warning, Monsignor Leonard, Bishop of Madhurai, wrote a pastoral letter in which he recalled the pronouncements of Cardinals Hinsley, Griffin and Schuster, and he added: "You must know that this is a movement Protestant in origin and bearing the stamp of Protestantism. Although it works frankly for the betterment of morals, the movement embodies important errors from the very fact that it separates morality from its firm foundations, namely revealed truth, as well as from the necessary principle of authority; also from the fact that it reduces religion to a religious subjectivity, independent of all dogma and of all profession of faith, thus opening the door to religious indifferentism. No Catholic may take part in the movement."

As we see, these interventions all go to the heart of the matter. They do not reject as a whole the techniques of approach or the influence exerted, but they go directly to what animates the whole movement, its Protestant spirit.

This impressive agreement between religious authorities defines beyond any possible doubt, the attitude of the Church. A passage from *Remaking the World*, quoting the *Osservatore Romano* of 1939, might lead people to think that Rome is favourable to the movement, and skilful propaganda is not slow to quote it. It is nothing of the kind, and the responsible leaders, who are aware of certain directives from Rome on the subject, cannot fail to know it.

They cherish the illusion that these disapprobations are subject to revision, not understanding that when doctrine

is at stake, the conflict is one of fundamentals, not of superficialities, and that no compromise is possible. The Jesuits, they are wont to say, were condemned at one time and now they have been reintegrated into the Church. We must undeceive them. The Jesuits were not condemned but suppressed, which is not at all the same thing. They were suppressed for reasons of political expediency outside the scope of our present discussion, and the motives for their subsequent re-establishment were similar. There was never any question of doctrinal error. That is the whole difference between the two cases.

Another argument they use is that Catholics have only to join them in large numbers and they will effect the reform they desire from within. But as long as they argue that the very presence of some Catholics is a guarantee of the orthodoxy of the movement, and as long as the fundamental reasons for disagreement are not even grasped, the infiltration they propose would only increase the confusion that already exists.

MRA can still resort to telling Catholics that their bishops are ignorant of its real character and are mistaken through a lack of accurate information. There is no need to waste time over the unlikelihood of such an allegation. Between MRA and the Church there is no misunderstanding about the root of the matter. Clear enough ground for action lies in the basically Protestant nature of the movement, and this, as we have demonstrated at length, is beyond doubt. Everything else is subordinate to this main point, which is the essential reason for the Bishops' attitude and the cause of their pronouncing the *non possumus*. This they do in the name of the integrity of the faith of which by Christ's own appointment they are at once the trustees, the witnesses and the guarantors. For all Catholics the matter is settled; no participation whatever in the movement as it is at present

is compatible with the logic of the faith or with complete fidelity to the Church.

It is not necessary for the Church to go to the length of excommunication before the faithful understand the tenor of these interventions. What would be the state of a home where the children refused to obey their mother until she threatened to turn them out? The warnings quoted have the force of a prohibition which leaves no room for hesitation, and dispels all uncertainty.

## CONCLUSION

### A QUESTION AND AN ANSWER

WE have tried in the foregoing pages to establish the true nature of Moral Re-Armament, using data furnished by its own members. Such an examination was an indispensable preliminary for any discussion. How can you talk to someone who refuses to acknowledge his own identity? How can you make him admit the soundness of criticism if he declines to accept this primary responsibility?

That is why, when I received a personal invitation to go and explain the reasons for the episcopal prohibitions to a group of leaders from various countries, all of them Dr. Buchman's collaborators, I thought it my first duty to discuss quite frankly this problem of their basic identity. So for several days I explained to them in the form of lectures, the substance of these pages, but refrained from pronouncing any judgment about truth or error.

After presenting the case I put as follows the question underlying its final trend: "Do you recognize that the MRA has been until now a Protestant religious movement despite its intention to the contrary?"

The reply can be summed up in a very few words: "We cannot answer yes or no to a question based on false premises: We deny that MRA is a 'movement'. Neither Buchman, nor ourselves, nor anyone else can define MRA or say what it will be tomorrow. MRA is pure spirit and a quality of life. MRA is the production of the Holy Spirit at work in the world to-day."

We have said above how impossible it is to sustain the thesis that MRA is not a movement and we shall not return to the theme. We shall note only that at the very moment

when it denied being a movement, the founder himself employed the word and also gave the widest publicity to an article congratulating it on being a "genuine Christian movement". The rejection of the word when it proves inconvenient, and its adoption when it suits the purpose in hand, shows the small importance attached to the correct use of words, even in matters judged to be essential. Yet words ought always to convey the basic truth of things, and this inconsistency shows how greatly utilitarianism predominates over respect for ontological truth.

To present MRA as something quite independent of its founder, of its full-time workers and of all that gives it form and body in our eyes, is to forget that it is composed of creatures of flesh and blood, and that its spirit is bound to result from the mentality of its members, and especially of its chiefs. Even the invisibility they would impose on MRA is true to the Protestant line of development, which recognizes only an invisible church!

For the rest, their answer clearly makes all discussion impossible; if no one knows what MRA is, if no one is qualified to speak in its name, if the official texts themselves have no exact meaning, it is clearly impossible to ask for any justification.

Yet this very answer is the clearest possible confirmation of what we said before. For, if MRA is the direct production of the Holy Spirit in the contemporary world, then we must conclude that this is a movement—or an organism or something of the sort—with a clearly defined religious character. If nobody knows where the movement is going or what urge it will follow tomorrow, it is inevitably exposed to the risks of subjectivism, and all sorts of surprises are possible, since the "directions of the Holy Spirit" are not related to any guaranteed control. The door is open to that religious pietism of a Protestant stamp referred to by Cardinal Schuster in the passage we have quoted.

Is this not a frank claim to be a "religion of the Holy Spirit", which appears to us to characterize what we are obliged to call "Buchmanism"? When the founder announces, "God's plan is that we should be a community guided by the Holy Spirit", he inevitably transforms Caux into a new Cenacle, announces a second Pentecost, and opens a new era in the already long history of religions.

This certainty of being "guided by the Spirit" stimulates its members, and feeds their enthusiasm and generosity. In their eyes, the common denominator which should unite all men of good will is "fidelity to the Holy Spirit"; submissiveness to its "directions". They have no doubt but that these are expressed in striking fashion in MRA and especially through its founder, whose "directions" surpass all others, in fact, if not in principle.

By claiming to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit with the aim of avoiding any definition, any precision, or any coherence—for the Holy Spirit can instantly overturn and change everything—one doubtless escapes all the laws of logic, but one falls into illuminism, with all its dangers.

Given these preferences and psychological tendencies, to ask whether there can be a common non-religious denominator is to raise a question of no practical importance. Nevertheless, in the interests of thoroughness, we shall indicate briefly what would logically follow from the would-be universalism proclaimed by MRA.

#### A WOULD-BE UNIVERSALISM

What did MRA set out to be originally ?

A really universal meeting-place, where all men of good will could meet on an equal footing, whatever their differences of language, race, class, or religion. The main idea of this movement was to be an international clearing-house,

where without renouncing a jot of their personalities, except sin, each could be in fraternal communion with all others. Buchman expressed this dream in a declaration as clear as could be wished. "MRA is the common denominator on which everyone can unite."<sup>1</sup>

Alas! As the facts have shown, it is far otherwise. In spite of its intentions, MRA seems affected by a congenital particularism.

By definition, a common denominator is that which opposing elements have in common.

MRA thought to find in the generic "Christianity" we have described this common centre which could bring together Catholics and Protestants, and even, it appears, Buddhists, Moslems and Confucianists. Obviously the basis is too narrow to accommodate this ambition. For Catholics in particular, the very idea of a supra-confessional Christianity is unacceptable: they cannot come to an agreement based on a heretical presupposition.

It seems as if, at times, the movement itself felt the need of enlarging its base and emerging from its unavowed particularism. Instead of speaking of "Christianity", they prefer now to talk of a common "ideology" framed to rally everybody. There is a statement in *Remaking the World* which might have led the movement in this direction if it could have been disentangled from other influences. "Today," said Buchman, "we can see three ideologies battling for control. There is Fascism and Communism, and then there is that great other ideology which is the centre of Christian democracy—Moral Re-Armament. We need to find an ideology that is big enough and complete enough to out-march any of the other great ideologies. Until that time comes, men will flounder. They will not find their way."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Remaking the World*, p. 167.

These lines seem to place MRA on a non-confessional plane. But immediately after comes the following: "When the Holy Spirit of God rules the hearts and lives of men, then we will begin to build the new world of tomorrow that all of us long to see."<sup>1</sup>

To say nothing of the ambiguity of the expression "centre of Christian democracy", these two passages betray the vacillation, and emphasize the contrast, between the universalism of the intention, and the religious particularism embodied in the facts.

Is the word "ideology", as used by Buchman, a happy term? Certainly it avoids the religious terminology, but it lacks clarity. Again, will it not necessarily, and almost immediately, be given a religious significance? Speaking of MRA's message, Buchman states: "It is a great ideology. It is the full message of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> It would be as well to know what one wants and stick to it!

Again, they have said—for there are a score of definitions of MRA, and each one defines it according to his own ideas—that it is a plan, a passion and a philosophy. Let us leave the philosophers to examine this definition. Although it groups together very heterogeneous elements, at least it has the advantage that it does not appeal to Revelation seen from a Protestant angle.

To the question "What does MRA want?" others answer, "It seeks to apply a technique, an experience of men and of principles which can and must help statesmen as well as industrialists to solve the social problems which are their responsibility, and bring to workers and citizens an ideology capable of satisfying their yearnings and the need for justice which is at the bottom of every man's soul."

The very juxtaposition of these definitions shows that the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167. *Message from San Francisco, June 4th, 1945.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

movement has not succeeded in bringing its universalism to fulfilment. The reason is its inability to define a real basis of collaboration between men. If it wanted to be logical, it could be successful only by excluding any form of positive doctrinal religion, and by depending on God and the conscience, whose demands are inscribed in the heart of human nature.

Supposing that such a change of aim were feasible and faithfully intended, then the role assumed by the movement would be notably reduced. Instead of aiming at making Christians more "Christian", which, as we have shown, covers an ambiguity, it would tend only to make them more moral. Instead of comparing Buchman to Amos, the Old Testament prophet, as one of his disciples does, one should place him in the line of great teachers who have the gift of awakening the conscience of their fellow creatures. In brief, MRA should confine itself to playing the part of a precursor, like that of John the Baptist in the desert, though it would not have the mission to reveal Christ to the world. Such a hypothetically universalist movement would not be post-Pentecostal but pre-Christian. It would be founded on a purely natural basis, and although open to the supernatural it would never cross its threshold.

The simple setting forth of these logical requirements shows very well that the universalism claimed by the movement, as it is at present, is nothing but a pseudo-universalism, the true nature of which it has failed to perceive. That is all that we wanted to prove.

#### THE CHURCH, UNIVERSALISM AND CHARITY

As we said at the beginning, brotherhood between men is what the Church desires with all her heart. It is not the goal but the means of reaching it that makes her oppose

MRA. She must be favourable to everything that fosters true union between men. Her very catholicity lays on her the duty of upholding everything that cements peace between human beings. We have more need than ever of such universal union. One look at the map of the world is enough to make us conscious of the chaos in which we struggle. The contemporary world, which from a technical point of view walks with giant strides towards the annihilation of distances and the interpenetration of civilizations, is spiritually decimated and destroyed, in a manner never before equalled. The breach between the peoples under the communist yoke and the other nations is being continually widened. Even the free peoples quarrel among themselves, trying to push their conflicting material interests and speculating anxiously about their respective futures. Asia has to a large extent won her autonomy. Africa is waking up and in her turn wants to secede. We are far, very far, from true human communion.

And yet the longing for unity is keener than it ever was. Men desire to enrol in the crusade of a constructive love. They instinctively feel the nobility of all that draws men together; to acknowledge one's wrong-doing, to ask pardon, to open the door, offer one's hand, build bridges, break the ice . . . every call to unity by way of love touches them to the quick, because it responds to an inborn desire for universality and compassion.

The Church feels this need more than anyone, because she is a mother, and this is a first reason why she is disposed *a priori* to encourage anything that tends in this direction.

Further, from a more direct point of view, the Church must surely wish to apply any force available that can dam the wave of atheist materialism which threatens to overwhelm everything. Anyone who aims at restoring the sense of God, at re-awakening consciences, is her natural ally; but

only on condition that he uses weapons above all reproach, for God wishes to be served in a manner worthy of Him : that is to say, in truth. What a vast field for action they provide, those apathetic masses who have no religion, who have to rediscover the supremacy of God and brotherhood among men! The Church hears with anguish the cry of this multitude, dying of spiritual hunger without even thinking of calling for help. To mitigate this moral distress she would mobilize all men of good will. But such a mobilization can never be achieved in a state of confusion. Her children must rally to her own flag, and she cannot permit them to enrol in an army that does not offer the necessary safeguards.

MRA, too, has dreamed of such a mobilization, but unfortunately, at its present stage, it is the victim of its own particularism. If, as everything leads one to expect, it maintains this position, it will never be able to count on the four hundred million Catholics scattered throughout the world; and by that single fact, it will lose all chance of a true universalism. The Church's refusal would doom MRA, if it were not doomed already, to be only one more sect among others. It will be called the Super-Church of the Holy Spirit, or some such name; and the woeful catalogue of errors and divisions will be lengthened by one. For it is only too true that what they have in mind is a Super-Church of a special sort, in spite of the inaccuracy of the words and the fog that blurs the outline. Super-Church of tomorrow, direct production of the Holy Spirit, MRA would bring to the world a new Pentecost. We must have no false illusions; its true character will eventually be clear to all; it is impossible to remain in ambiguity indefinitely; sooner or later, one has to give one's name and state one's identity. It is impossible for long to sustain the paradox of a particularism which pretends to be a universalism, or of a sect turned super-church. Life takes its revenge for illogicalities and ends by

triumphing over appearances. Reality will have the last word and overcome fiction. The mirage of this sort of a religious common denominator, to be accepted by all, cannot but dissolve as soon as it is examined at all closely.

And surely it is paradoxical for Buchman to define what is suitable for everyone. What right has he to claim that his position in no way conflicts with Catholicism? Is it not for Catholics themselves, and they alone, to judge whether they are able to breathe at ease in the palace of Mountain House or in the climate of Mackinac? If it is objected that we lack understanding, we answer that in this case true liberalism is on our side, and that it is in the name of an unconscious dictatorship, christened "dictatorship of the Holy Spirit", that they decree that MRA must necessarily suit us and that it respects our beliefs. The least they should do is to respect the opinion of the people concerned, for Catholics alone are qualified to pronounce on what suits them.

Nor is it only Catholics who refuse to accept this common pseudo-denominator. Grave warnings have emerged from the Reformed churches themselves. Many of them oppose MRA precisely because of its religious character; they cannot come to terms with the formless religion that it preaches, so doctrinally boneless, a religion which for all its protestations is inculcated by all its practical behaviour.

Non-Christian sympathisers, as we have said, also feel disquieted, but for other reasons; what causes their disfavour above all is the confessional atmosphere of the movement, an atmosphere which from the very outset makes them feel ill at ease. Those Catholics who have been deceived and led into error ought to denounce in vigorous terms this ambiguous foundation. We do not know whether MRA is irremediably linked to the Protestantism that animates it, or whether it will ever succeed in dissociating itself from it, as other movements have done.

The history of the Scout Movement is a notable proof that such a dissociation is not impossible in principle. When this movement, originally Protestant, wanted to spread to Catholic circles, Baden-Powell had the good sense and also the humility to inquire of Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, whether any point in his programme clashed with the Catholic conscience. He scrupulously followed the advice he received, and thanks to this, the Boy Scout Movement had a triumphant success in the Catholic world. If Baden-Powell had obstinately persisted in tying the Scout training to Protestantism, a matchless instrument of education would have been barred to Catholics, to their own great loss as well as to that of the Scout cause. If it had been necessary to mix Catholic elements with Protestant troops or vice versa, clashes would inevitably have resulted. As it is, all feel at home in the movement; they meet at the grand jamborees to join in activities, clearly defined in scope, which leave them free to live their own religious life, though drawing inspiration in the atmosphere of truth they find congenial, and from fundamental principles common to all.

In such matters, nothing is so dangerous as a compromise peace. It would be a very poor charity—a very unintelligent charity—to minimize divergencies, cover over what is false with a temporizing policy, and seek to unite on a false foundation when the choice that ought to be made is clear. *Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas.* We should love our neighbour well enough to be able to tell him that he is on the wrong path, but humbly enough, too, to make him understand that we obey a truth that transcends and judges us. We carry the treasures entrusted to us in fragile vessels, but we must still preserve them intact and unmarred. Only such a course can help our separated brethren to realize the gulf that separates us, thanks to the level on which they stand. There are ravines we have to skirt, and it doesn't do to

camouflage them with shrubs or flowers; rather we should warn of the dangers and call them by their proper names.

At his consecration, every bishop takes a solemn oath: "To hate pride, to love humility and truth, never to betray them under the impact of praise or fear. Not to make darkness out of light, nor light out of darkness. Not to call evil good, nor good evil." Obedient to these injunctions, the pastors of the Church have made the pronouncements we have quoted concerning MRA. They would fail in their mission if they were to sacrifice truth to ill-conceived charity. We are to walk before God, says the Scripture, "in truth and with a perfect heart." The truth must be loved above all things, and first served. Man has need of truth as a plant of the sun; he cannot blossom except in an atmosphere where everything is labelled by its right name, where every "yes" is a "yes" and every "no" a "no". A Chinese sage was once asked: "What would you do if you were the master of the world?" "I should restore the sense of words," was the reply. This absolute loyalty to the truth, however great that truth, or however trifling, is the preliminary condition for any fruitful and enduring action. Only this love of truth, faithfully looked for and loved for itself as a pure reflection of God's countenance, can preserve us and free us from the "deceiving influence" mentioned by St. Paul (2 Thessalonians 2. 10). Christ meant nothing else when He spoke those words which hold good in all ages: "The truth will set you free."

And into the realm of true brotherly love, where we shall love men as our brothers, truth will bring not a human love, made to our own standards and at the mercy of all our waverings and choosings, but God's own Love, victorious over all obstacles. Only that Love can reconcile these two duties of ours: of loving the truth as the Master willed, without compromise to the last jot; and of loving with all

our heart those who in all good faith are ignorant of that truth, but who desire, like us, not to sin against the light. For to hate error and to cherish those who err is one and the same commandment in two different aspects. There is nothing surprising about this either, since both duties have their source in Him who is undividedly Light and Charity.

At the end of a long spiritual journey that led him to the discovery of the Church, a convert wrote these lines of rare penetration: "I believe that the greatest truth is to be found where there is the greatest love." As we conclude these pages, we invert these terms, since they are really identical, and say that we also believe, with the whole Church, that the greatest love is to be found where there is the greatest truth.