

MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

MAN is a complex being, largely due to the fact that he is a microcosm of Creation, comprising within a single unity the essential elements of the vegetable, the animal and the intellectual worlds. This is admittedly platitudinous; but it is also very widely overlooked by so many of those who produce the stream of panaceas for the cure of human ills and the remedying of human evils. Yet the simple truth is that if human nature is to be approached effectively and rightly it must be approached in its completeness and not just from one angle to the exclusion of others. The supreme example of the true approach to man for the furthering of his happiness is to be found in the Incarnation. To reveal the truth of man's purpose, to provide a meaning to the problems of human life and to open the way to redemption and happiness, God became man and adopted as His own all the complexity of the human microcosm; and His subsequent approach to man was and is through all the channels implied in that complexity. Moreover, the point of primary importance in the Incarnation is that it is the final and perfect moment of Divine Revelation—that Revelation which covers not only the nature of God and His love-longing for man, but also the nature of man and his need for God. Though it is true that Faith without good works cannot save us, it is equally true that good works without Faith are futile.

Perhaps at no time in its history has our civilization been so much in need of moral and social reform as it is now; and the realisation of this need has brought forth a remarkable variety of attempts to effect this reform. It is not too sweeping a statement to say that all these have failed signally, except such as have been modelled expressly and understandingly upon the divine prototype of all reform, the Incarnation. The simple fact is that these abortive efforts have failed because, for all their possible sincerity of origin, they have omitted to take account of the

whole need and capability of human nature. They have concentrated attention upon some particular aspect, poverty, suffering, disease, injustice, intemperance, and so forth, and have not attempted to correlate these with the other and often greater issues touching man in time and in eternity. Consequently they have not even discovered the true cause of the very evils they aim to remedy. It is a poor physician that is content to soothe a rash or lower a temperature without probing the source of these external manifestations of disease. As disease in the human body is almost always more deep-seated than its external symptoms, so is it with disease in the body politic.

One of the most notable and widespread efforts at a certain type of moral reform in recent times has been produced by the so-called Oxford Group. It is offered and accepted as a remedy for spiritual disease; actually it is only a symptom of spiritual disease. By its appeal to the latent heroism and self-sacrifice that remain with men as a heritage not wholly atrophied by Original Sin, it appeals to generous youth and hard-bitten business-man alike and enkindles an enthusiasm that has spread like a flame—or an epidemic. The 'Oxford' Group Movement, or Buchmanism, is, in the words of an earlier contributor to *BLACK-FRIARS*¹ and a former member of the Groups, 'only another chapter in revivalistic history, which in a few years will have gone the weary way of all such attempted reforms. Until then, unfortunately, it will take its yearly toll of those more impressionable young people who, to put it kindly, are not over-endowed with the attributes of clear thinking.' Let it not be thought that this is mere offensive criticism; it touches a real and even fundamental weakness in Buchmanism and most other forms of revivalism, namely an appeal to the emotions almost totally exclusive of the higher faculties of reason and will. This is not to

¹ *What Happens at a Buchman House-Party?* By J. Shradly Post. December, 1930.

deny the value and even the need of emotional appeal, still less is it to deny the sincerity of those who have thought to find therein what their soul craves. But in fact they have followed the easier way of sentiment, which, being blind, must inevitably lead them astray, and have thus missed the harder way of reason and faith which alone could lead them to God.

The subtle danger of this 'First Century Christian Fellowship' (as it was originally called) and the explanation of its facile attraction for the uninformed Christian is its vague sensing of something integral to Christianity combined with a wholly sentimental and imaginative method of reducing it to practical terms, so that it appears as a fantastic and distorted reflection of the real thing, but one which has an appeal for those who are led more easily by emotion than by thought. Probably because the more thoughtful of its adherents have gradually become more conscious of this or because they are led, as so many have been in the course of human history, to fabricate a quasi-philosophy in order to justify their *a priori* convictions in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others, efforts have been made recently to give some sort of scientific exposition of 'the Oxford Group Way.' The most recent is a volume by a man of university training and status,² and it is entirely representative of what is best and what is worst in the movement.

Buchmanism has shown itself adept at seizing upon effective titles and slogans; and it has not been slow to alter them as circumstances seemed to demand. Indeed, this is symptomatic of a movement which of its nature can only persist by continual alteration, for its scope is woefully limited notwithstanding its professed aim to include within individual experience the absoluteness and infinity of God. Consisting as it does in the individual's 'feeling'

² *The Philosophy of Courage or The Oxford Group Way.* By Philip Leon. (Allen and Unwin; 6s.)

and 'experience' of the divine, it has only itself to feed upon, only the internal urge and exaltation which must be renewed or bolstered up continually by every suitable device. Slogans and catch-phrases help tremendously to this end; the latest, 'Moral Re-armament,' is now doing splendid service to the cause—though some of those upon whose lips one finds it incessantly seem anxious to dissociate it from the Groups. The volume we have already mentioned has its high-sounding title, 'The Philosophy of COURAGE,' enhanced by a cover-slip bearing the words: 'A Book for MORAL RE-ARMAMENT.' Within its covers is a spate of colourful words and fine phrases that will often be found either persuasive or nauseating according as the reader is sentimental or thoughtful. Let me try to show this in quotation.

Having spoken of God as 'constructive Power,' he gives 'a picture of what happens when two or three or more are gathered together under the control of that Power . . . as an attempt to make graphic my definition of constructive power. There is produced by such a gathering an electric atmosphere—an atmosphere magnetised, purified, sensitised to the utmost, dynamic, charged with the *n*th power. It combines the maximum of concentration with the maximum of ease. In it you are always doing something, always giving the whole of yourself to something or some person, but always ready for something new, always busy, always at leisure, always hastening, always unhurried; you feel as though you were walking on air. In this atmosphere you see far and you see through. Everyone is transparent. All pretences, masks and pomps have been stripped off. All eyes are wide open, seeing what is in front of them and showing what is behind them. Everyone is like a modern building—all window. Everyone is brand new, young, uninhibited, fearless and carefree . . . Complexities are simplified, conflicts harmonised, knots untied, tangles unravelled . . . Quietness, special insight or wisdom, mutual interpenetration, freedom—these and other fea-

tures I would single out in analysing the power. But at one's first meeting with it one does not analyse it at all. It impinges upon one as a unitary atmosphere. One breathes it in as one breathes the air' (p. 22, f.).

In his Introduction the author announces that it is his aim to give to 'Everyman' the 'pre-eminently public aspect' of his own personal discovery of 'the reality and familiarity of God . . . in the language of Philosophy, of Psychology and of the imagination.' The following passage may perhaps help one to judge which of the three latter predominates in fact. 'Reflecting on the change or evolution which has taken place in me since I let in the power of God and also on the ideas suggested by the theory of evolution—that life has developed from mere matter through the stages of vegetable and animal to man—I am led to sum up pictorially God's infinity in relation to the world as the infinite Cross lifting up an infinite number of worlds of inertia (death, sleep, defeat, arrested development and repetition, conflict and destruction) and changing them into pure energy (absolute love, patience, wisdom, creativity, newness, harmony). It is through His infinity, rather than through His absoluteness, that God is essentially distinguished from man. It is possible for me, with God's help, to be absolutely loving, wise, brave, etc. But even if I were this every time, I should still be only becoming and unfolding piecemeal the infinity which God is in its totality all the time' (p. 35). What *does* it mean?

His 'Proof of the Existence of God' consists in showing 'that God is a fact because we see Him, because we feel Him, and because we comprehend Him . . . This seeing is not physical seeing. It is an intuition. Everyone has glimpses of God. He has them in individual acts of absolute love or wisdom or unselfishness which he either sees done or which call to him for the doing of them. I feel God in the self-sickness, the stir or fermentation set up in me by such a glimpse and pre-eminently by the impact of the dynamic atmosphere I have tried to describe.

'This stir is the creative urge . . . Everyone of us at every moment has either negative or positive God-feeling. We comprehend God . . . when we understand that all instances of absolute love or wisdom, for example, are instances of the same love or wisdom, that all the absolutes are one, that their number is infinite and that each of them is infinite. This is the comprehension of the unity of God . . .' (p. 37, *f.*). The author confesses that he is not God: 'Much as it would flatter me to be taken for God, I must decline the compliment *in the interest of intelligibility*' (p. 41. The italics are, of course, mine.) The next paragraph is headed: 'I AM THE LIMIT.' Would it be uncharitable to express agreement?

We are told of this book, in the publishers' blurb, that 'at the moment when fear and fortifications are beginning to build about us the prison of the new Middle Ages it is proclaiming in the language of the times the religion which consists in breaking down all the walls of fear.' If the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas, that classical example of profound thought, sane vision and clear language, is a sample of the prison of the old Middle Ages, we confess that we prefer this 'prison' which binds us to reason and faith in place of the proffered phantasmagoria where words have no meaning and ratiocination no value, where there are only monstrous shadows of some of the great truths given to us by Revelation, by Theology and by common-sense Philosophy. 'Here,' writes the author, 'what philosophy of God we are offering is a philosophy of experience. Such a philosophy is the philosophy of the Cross. If, sticking to experience and avoiding mere inference, I wish to illustrate what I mean by God's omnipotence, I must refer to the Crucifixion. For whatever is illustrated by it, with the exception of triumph over physical death, I can vouch for by my own experience. In the growing-changing-making process to which I have been referring all the time, I experience the transmutation of the death (degradation or inertia) of my imagination, intellect, will and affection

into a life endowed with that intensity, poetry and capacity for constant renewal which are denoted by the term "Heaven." Hence in his view (and it would seem to be common among Groupists) 'the Cross for me is any constructive possibility which runs counter to my inclination or nature.' He naïvely brings out as a new discovery this hoary old monster of heresy, which has raised its persistent head again and again throughout the history of Christianity from the Manichees of the first century down to our own day, modernised by being draped 'in the language of the times.'

When this old gnostic doctrine of inherent evil in all material creation appeared in the Middle Ages, Europe was saved for the faith largely through the crusade initiated by St. Dominic and his friars, who gave to the people again the truth and beauty and capability of nature, and particularly of human nature, as revealed in the Incarnation. But the heresy itself is persistent and, in the cogent words of the late Fr. Bede Jarrett, O.P.,³ 'it has done, perhaps, more mischief in the world than any other form of misbelief. Of course, it is sheer dogma, of which there cannot possibly be any proof, and it is accepted by many because it saves trouble and excuses them from thinking. Hence also, in the last century and this, it has appealed immensely to generations which are vague and lazy in thought, and through them created Theosophy and Christian Science. Fortunately, however, in our own time it has never been wholly logical, precisely because the minds that have accepted it have been . . . too vague to understand the principles, and thus they retain enough of the Christianity they pretend to despise to prevent them from giving way to the full evils of their system.' There can be no doubt that it is the same mischievous doctrine that has invaded the undoubted sincerity of the Oxford Way.

³ *Life of St. Dominic*, p. 20. New Ed. 1934. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne.)

Only this could have originated the notion of the 'Cross' quoted above; only this could dictate that 'self *qua* self is something diseased or wrong' or is 'maniacal or something like maniacal' or that 'every particular desire, whether called mania or not, is by its very nature, it would seem, diseased or impure because mixed with fear.' It is this fear motive which the author introduces constantly throughout his book; and there is one particular passage we must quote which gives more than a hint of the danger lurking in the general doctrine.

'We may define the self in brief by saying that it is habit or automatism, which is fear, which is impurity, which is disease, which is sin. What we know from experience to be true of the self we may apply by analogy to the whole of organic and inorganic nature. The inertia which has kept so much of it mere matter and has not allowed the rest to progress beyond the vegetable and animal state, we may look upon as fear—the fear of, or shrinking from, the possibilities which have been realised in man The whole spatio-temporal cosmos is the realm of inertia or automatism. Since automatism is law, we may say that it is the realm of law. Since its laws constitute necessity or fate, we may call it also the realm of Fate or Karma. In fine we may designate it as the realm of the larger self or the Kingdom of Fear.' In order that we may not mistake his intention the author adds a footnote to explain that by 'automatism' he means 'behaviour according to law, whether a "law of nature" or a law prescribed by man' (p. 53, *f.*).

Add to this that the man 'who believes that humanity can guide itself by a number of prescriptions laid down by its "reason"' is dubbed 'pharisaic' and it is not very hard to see how the liberty sought in the Oxford Way might very easily become licence. That is the practical danger point, yet it is inevitable in a movement which depends for guidance upon the 'feeling' of God and therefore eliminates and despises

all authority and all law. Thus self-blinded, how can it avoid the multitudinous pitfalls which await those who are in fact a law unto themselves? In this connection we may refer to an incident related by a medical man in his autobiography.⁴ In the chapter entitled 'Buchman' he describes his introduction to the movement, his confession or 'sharing,' and its production of relief and exaltation, his enjoyment of the 'quiet time,' and his experience at various 'house-parties.' In spite of his enthusiastic adherence, the author was from the first somewhat uneasy as to the 'direct guidance from God' supposed to be obtained in the familiar 'listening to God.' After a time his 'critical sense once more began to assert itself.' He 'began to notice certain illogical and mutually incompatible rules of life which formed part of Buchman's code. He was wont to state that "good food and good Christianity go together," while at the same time holding that tobacco and wine were snares of the devil. He always lived in the best hotels, travelled first-class on transatlantic liners, discussed with relish his food, but neither smoked nor drank wine himself nor allowed his supporters to do so.' It was over this point that a test case arose. The author having smoked in Buchman's presence, the latter reproved him and argued with him. Eventually the author was able to point out to his leader that 'carried to its logical conclusion' the doctrine expounded 'would lead to the extinction of the race; that surely the right course for those whose path lay through the world was to live life to its fullest while obeying the rules laid down by God and Nature.' Finally, 'Buchman . . . brought up his last reserves, his trump card . . . "Let us listen to God," he said.' At the end of a period of 'quiet' Buchman remarked: 'I got a clear message from God that you were to give up smoking.' 'Queer,' replied his companion, 'but I got a direct message that I

⁴ *The Silver Fleece*. By Robert Collis, p. 116, f. (Nelson: 1936.)

could continue.' 'Buchman got up,' he continues, 'and left the room in no happy or gentle manner. The encounter had been much more formidable than I have been able to express here, and I did not laugh . . . , but from that moment I ceased to believe in Buchman as a new spiritual leader.' There is no need to labour the point of the inevitable chaos of such supposed individual 'guidance.'

The fact to be noted is that the few 'dogmas' of the Group Movement are entirely eclectic, a heterogeneous bundle of twigs broken off from the Tree of Life which is Divine Truth, and are mixed up with a certain measure of knowledge in the realm of psycho-analysis. Buchman himself shows a queer mixture of Lutheranism and psychology. By a more or less judicious mixture of the two in practice he found himself notably successful in dealing with sex tensions. And those troubles always seem to loom large in the business of 'sharing' and 'deep sharing.' Having invented his jargon to cover the poor counterfeits of elementary Catholic practices like Confession, Amendment, Restitution, Meditation, Mental Prayer and Fraternal Correction, he employed all his practical psychological acumen in devising the atmosphere and circumstances best suited to emotional surrender, soft lights, deep armchairs, and the receptivity which supervenes on good food, then the 'gathering closer' and the insistent suggestion to confess, the recitation of sob-stories in the dim light and the witness of the 'changed'; and finally the insidious and persistent talk, talk, talk in private until resistance is broken down. The truth is, of course, that Buchmanism, for all its jargon and its genteelness, is no whit different in essence from the mass hypnotism, emotional hysteria and blatant sentimentalism of negro revival meetings. But where does it lead? What solid foundation is there upon which to build the changed life? Let me quote in answer the contributor to BLACKFRIARS referred to earlier on in this article. 'Buchmanism . . . makes meeting-hounds out of its adhe-

rents, where they are always publicly and at length "surrendering" some perfectly innocent pleasure, until their lives rapidly develop into a series of petty negations, a torment of scrupulousness. Also, its followers have to be recharged at frequent house-parties to be kept going, and in between times the leaders may be found taking rest-cures in some expensive sanatorium. Is Buchmanism Christianity? No one knows the meaning of Christianity until, very humbly, he has knelt beside the poor as with childlike hearts they poured out their simple prayers to God.'

Grateful followers of Frank Buchman, like Mr. Philip Leon, may attempt to make a seeming philosophy out of this emotional eclecticism, and its very indefiniteness and fantasy may help to keep alight a movement that must otherwise burn itself out. I believe without difficulty that he is entirely sincere, like the many of those attached to the doctrine of 'Moral Re-armament,' and I am no less aware than he is of the need for this re-armament. But the Oxford Group Way of emotion and imagination is not the solution; neither is his 'individual philosophy' of that movement. God Himself has provided the solution in the Incarnation, and to the Incarnation, as a whole and not in one or two isolated facets, must we turn. The fact that the youth of to-day, deprived through no fault of their own of their Christian heritage, are responding to this specious Group call to the Courage of Self-sacrifice and Moral Re-armament shows their readiness to profit by the real truth of the Incarnation. It would be a tragedy if this hunger for God were to be stayed and surfeited by cloying sentiment instead of being filled yet increased by the Word of God made Man. It would be a tragedy if the glorious possibilities of human nature, in all its amazing complexity of weakness and strength, of animal and spiritual, of sense and intellect, emotion and will, its capability of suffering and joy, of repentance and obedience and love, the possibilities revealed by the Incarnation and realised by the

Saints, were all to be reduced to 'positive and negative God-feeling,' to a single good urge, called 'passion,' harassed and blanketed by a host of evil parasites, inhibitions and complexes produced by the fear element. Yet the tragedy will be enacted unless these unfortunates can be made to know the grandeur of Divine Wisdom and Love in making the very complexity of His creature the means of its own salvation. When this same Wisdom and Love brought Him down to earth in the person of His Son to re-create what man had marred, He did not come to destroy the law—the law of God, of Nature, of Morality, of Reason; He came to fulfil it. Mr. Leon and his co-feelers have never even glimpsed the true wonder of the Incarnation nor the true significance of the Cross; falling into a common error, they have rejected Christianity as false because they see that many Christians have been false, rejected the truth of the Word of God which has turned countless thousands into saints, 'other Christs,' because no doubt countless others have turned a deaf ear to that same truth and have betrayed the Word. In its place they have presumed to build up, out of a febrile imagination, not indeed an entirely new thing, but a grotesque travesty of the original, a distillation of the more blatant aberrations of bygone days, such as appears in this 'individual philosophy of the Groups.' Incidentally, in this connection, it is not surprising to find the author numbering himself 'amongst the "free-thinking," "progressive," "advanced," "enlightened" left wing people,' for his 'philosophy' shows the ear-marks of a distorted Hegelianism much in the same way that Marxism does.

It is clear from such a book as this that the purpose of Buchmanism is to overthrow, in its 'world revolution,' all the truth which Revelation, Theology, Philosophy, Reason and Common-sense have established in men's minds. If the quotations I have already cited are not sufficient to indicate this, let the following be added: 'Nothing can so efficiently exclude sanity as a really able intellect.'

' Education is nothing else but the communication of the larger self to the particular self by contiguity and the piling up of it by summation. It is therefore an intentional or unintentional contamination by disease or fear. Even the most conscientious of education is this. For it is the scrupulous inculcation of manias or fanaticisms with their idols or idealisms . . . soon whatever infection he (the child) catches becomes associated with sex . . . ' ' The business of Philosophy is not to discover truth but to expose error . . . Redeemed thought, even though it be of the most abstract kind (*e.g.* Logic or Metaphysics), is always autobiographic.' ' Christianity—that is, the doctrine of the Cross—has provoked an incredible number of crazy philosophies, sickening sentimentalities, slimy hypocrisies . . . so that coming from the ancient into the modern world is like entering from a sacred grove—an 'asylum' in the Greek sense—into an asylum in the modern sense, that is, a madhouse.' (In so far as such movements as Buchmanism are concerned we are unfortunately obliged to agree.) ' . . . Theology, Metaphysics and Ethics . . . each is scarcely better than a science of nonsense.' And finally: ' Of course, when faith is contrasted with knowledge, reason, thought or intellect, these are identified with the blind and superstitious acceptance of a few metaphysical dogmas ignorantly called science. I have never seen any reason for using any other name but "wilful stupidity" for this acceptance' (p. 91).

This writer spoke more comprehensively than he intended when he wrote that ' the mad ideas we propagate constitute error,' and that ' this is a good illustration of the way in which, if we do not allow ourselves to be purified, we act as poisons in all sorts of ways which at the time we do not see because we are not looking at them ' (p. 217). We, who are content with the truth expounded by Our Lord and His Church and maintain its glorious ideals notwithstanding our individual failure to realise them in ourselves, we do not believe ' that our world has been going

more and more mad for nearly two thousand years,' but we do know that such pseudo-mysticism as has appeared in the Group Movement has evidenced an element of madness amongst men from the first centuries of Christianity. We do not think that any sane man will believe that the supreme Revelation of God has had to wait nearly two thousand years for its true exposition by such people as Mrs. Baker Eddy and Mr. Frank Buchman. At the same time we can see how such people 'act as poisons in all sorts of ways which at the time' no doubt they 'do not see because' they 'are not looking at them.' We do not accuse the Buchmanites of a deliberate attempt to overthrow all Christianity, all objective truth, all sanity; but this is what they are in fact attempting to do. We should not pay much attention to their sentimental and imaginative emotionalism were it not that, for the reasons we have set forth, it is calculated to exercise a mesmeric appeal over a great number of people who have forgotten how to think for themselves, who have been deprived of their heritage of the Faith, who have not known the glorious privilege of incorporation in the Mystical Body of Christ which is His Church, the true splendour of the Cross of Christ, the divine liberty to be found in obedience to true law and the participation in the Sonship of God. They are being persuaded that traditional Christianity has been tried and found wanting, whereas the truth is that it has, in the classical phrase of G. K. Chesterton, 'been tried and found difficult.' Moral re-armament is a thing of urgent necessity, but it must be with '*the armour of God*' and not with some nightmare counterfeit of human fantasy; it must be in line with the magnificent sanity of Our Lord's teaching on God-given human nature, its power, its weakness, its needs, its capacities, to be found preserved only in the Church He founded to that end. For all its jargon and its clamour against escapism, Buchmanism is escapism—the attempt to escape from the difficulties and obligations of obedience under the pretence of Love. But love

knows no escape from obedience. *If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

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REQUIESCANT IN PACE

We record with the deepest regret the triple loss that the Church at large and Catholic letters in particular have suffered in the recent deaths of Archbishop Goodier, S.J., Father Keating, S.J., Editor of our contemporary, *The Month*, and Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C. Each has done yeoman service with the pen and to each BLACKFRIARS recognises its indebtedness not only for the material help it has received from them, but almost more for the personal interest they have taken in it, and above all for the splendid example of unflagging work, apostolic zeal, unfailing charity and saintliness of life which they offered. May God give them rest and the reward of their labours.