

REFLECTIONS ON  
MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

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By

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## Note

The work which began with Frank Buchman in 1908 came to be called the Oxford Group in the late 1920s, and that is still its legal name in Britain. It was in 1938, on the eve of war, that Frank Buchman launched his call for moral and spiritual re-armament as a fresh statement of the programme of the Oxford Group, in the light of the gathering dangers which confronted mankind. Moral Re-Armament (MRA) has increasingly become the name by which this work is known around the world. But the two are in fact the same: the work was continuous and its basic principles unaltered.

The quotations from the Moffat *New Testament* in chapter six are reprinted by kind permission of Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd.

## Preface

MORAL RE-ARMAMENT is a network of friends across the continents dedicated to remaking the world under God. Men and women of almost every land and background have launched out in faith, over many years, to seek and follow the path God shows them, to play their part in establishing His sovereignty in the lives and the affairs of men.

In 1933, I was one of a hundred men and women who were commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the chapel at Lambeth Palace, for our work with the Oxford Group. Today it is interesting to note how some of the emphases made by the Oxford Group which caught the Archbishop's attention at that time, and which have always characterised the work of Moral Re-Armament, have been assimilated into vital work in many places, and yet how much still remains to be understood of their full significance for us today. Perhaps the moment has come to look at some of them afresh. This is what I have tried to do in these reflections on some of the main themes of the past decades.

My wife and I are conscious that during these years God has taught us many things about life in His service, and given many experiences of His grace and His forgiveness, and of His transforming power in people's lives, sometimes affecting wider issues in their countries. The truths we have learned are not new: they have been part of the life of the faith in all generations. But in Moral Re-Armament historic truths have sometimes been brought into sharper focus, making them vivid and

## PREFACE

concrete and practical where before they were sometimes vague or even half-forgotten, or not expected to work in the twentieth century.

If in sharing some of these experiences I particularly have my fellow-Christians in mind, I do not forget that in the turmoil of today's world they have a bearing on the lives of all men and women of faith, whatever their tradition. They may perhaps be of help to some of us as we seek to play our part more effectively in pursuing God's redeeming purposes for mankind.

## World in need: the God who calls us

THE CHURCH was lofty and splendidly appointed, as befitted its leading position in a great city of the Middle West. Its towering east window was richly sombre. The singing of the choir was above reproach. The ten tall sidesmen who took the collection marched upon the sanctuary with a vigour that would have done credit to the marines. The minister's address was original, up to the minute, combining depth and learning with a light touch. Overhead thundered the magnificent new organ. It cost, we were told, six hundred thousand dollars. The day it was inaugurated, said a local minister, other churches in the neighbourhood were holding a self-denial day to raise funds for the starving Cambodians.

This perhaps pictures one dilemma of Christians in the Western world: how to advance in influence and effectiveness without being drawn into something akin to the very materialism we exist to liquidate; how to keep a right proportion in the deployment of our resources.

This dilemma is widespread. A good many people in our own country, for instance, react against endlessly raising large sums of money for extending or maintaining existing ecclesiastical plant, propping up crumbling and sometimes ill-attended medieval churches and supporting activities which do not always seem to them to be directly related to spreading God's truth where it is most needed. We too might ask ourselves whether there are more effective ways in which men and women of faith can fulfil their unique role in society.

We are called as Christians to upturn the values of the world, which are a present recipe for disaster, and replace



them with Christ's values in personal life and in the policies of governments. Yet this need confronts us at a time when many forces combine to call in question the whole concept of God and the spiritual basis of life, and when there is widespread belief that most Christians are hypocrites or just deluded. It is a time when we need to re-assess both our calling and our total message in a world where powerful tides are moving against every aspect of faith. Sometimes the total message is given more loudly by what is done or not done, and the manner of it, than by what is proclaimed and preached.

"I believe with all my heart in the Church," said Frank Buchman<sup>1</sup>, "the Church aflame, on fire with revolution. We haven't begun to experience the spiritual revolution we need."

It is the nature of that revolution we want to explore.

There is no need to labour the daunting issues which face us all, Christians and non-Christians alike, in today's world, and of which we are only too aware. We would all agree, I think, that the next fifty years are likely to prove formative for generations to come, that we are faced with a new and critical phase in human history. We cannot evade the fact that many of the issues before us call for the most far-reaching re-appraisal of many of our established attitudes and assumptions.

One of the most pressing of these issues is clearly world poverty, the tension between the rich world and the poor world and the widening gap between them, euphemistically called the North-South dialogue. How long it will continue to be dialogue and how soon it will become a torrent overwhelming civilisations in its surge remains to be seen. How long will the patience of the poor endure?

<sup>1</sup>Frank Buchman, initiator of Moral Re-Armament, in *Remaking the World*, London, 1961.

How soon may we witness what President Giscard d'Estaing once called "the world's revenge on Europe for the nineteenth century"?

This is one inescapable backdrop to our calling, both in its unacceptable injustices and its massive dangers. We serve the One who had nowhere to lay His head. But in our Western nations we not only want to lay our heads in the softest places, we also hope to make them progressively more comfortable every year. Yet, as Professor Charles Birch of Sydney and the Club of Rome warned the World Council of Churches,<sup>1</sup> in the world as it is today, "the rich may have to live more simply than the poor may simply live," though no idea could be more remote from the minds of most citizens in the Western world, and indeed the minds of many Christians.

This is plainly one field in which profound change is called for in the attitudes and values of the affluent nations. It is surely the men and women who know that God can transform the most stubborn human nature who are best equipped to pioneer such a transformation. It could be that what we are called to undertake is the one thing we should be supremely competent to do: to bring about radical change in men – both in those who cause the injustices and those embittered by them, to bring about the needed revolution in thinking, in motives and aims, in North and South alike, starting in our own land. This might call for a new sort of militancy – not against anyone but *for* God's strategy to remould the thinking of our own and other countries through men and women brought into a new awareness of His transforming power.

Alongside the issue of poverty and riches stands the stewardship of the earth's diminishing resources, another

<sup>1</sup>In an address to a plenary session of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi, 1975.

area calling for stringent re-consideration of entrenched viewpoints, including the accepted ideas of national self-interest and sovereignty. "The earth is the Lord's" – except the part that belongs to us, and the resources in it: those are ours and no one else's, especially if they include uranium, oil, cobalt, bauxite or anything else in shortening supply but vital to the industrial or military needs of every country. Unless this issue is tackled world-wide on a new basis, we or our children may see the world go down in atomic wars over the dwindling resources of the planet.

With all this, of course, go the massive problems raised by the growth of population and the vast increase predicted in the size of cities in the coming decades, the need for new sources of energy, the growing menace of pollution and the question of how to feed us all, let alone how to make life worth living for every human being. We cannot do it now with half the population the world may have to sustain in fifty years.

At the same time the conflicts of race and colour, of violence and terrorism, escalate amidst economic recession and frustration and even the threatened breakdown of the economies of the affluent nations, while the ever-persistent policies of the communist countries continue their expansion unabated. Over all these conflicts, present or potential, hangs the cloud of world-wide nuclear self-destruction, and the vast expenditures involved in maintaining the capacity to destroy each other's peoples instead of creating a life for everyone to enjoy.

These are aspects of the tumultuous world that God in His mercy is calling us to deal with. It is evident that we need a new level of thinking about these and many other issues. Can our faith be expressed in ways commensurate with mankind's need? Our search is to find how to combine our awareness of the world's dangers with our expectation

of God's power to act directly and decisively in the lives of people He leads us to, wherever we are. We may be surprised to find how often and how closely the two are linked.

One emphasis which is worth holding before us is that we are called to be remakers of the world. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *on earth*." "God so loved the *world*." As Christians we must believe that the outstretched arms on the Cross are for *everyone*—every race on every continent, communist and non-communist, Christian and non-Christian. Our faith, of course, deals with man's destiny in eternity, and "here we have no continuing city". But by His incarnation God bids us find a new approach to all our human relations, personal and social, with all their implications in this world.

It is when our commitment is a world commitment that it becomes fully relevant to the hour in which we live. This does not necessarily mean packing our bags and travelling the world, though some might find themselves doing that if they opened their minds to the possibility, so much as letting the world into our hearts and our prayers and our thinking, taking up such practical action as we are shown, and living our lives in the perspective of the world's needs.

A great deal turns on our level of expectation: how radically and on what scale do we expect God to act—through us and through others? So much, too, hangs on our effectiveness. The issue for most Christians is not our sincerity: what is more often in doubt is the reality of our experience and the effectiveness of our lives. How much really happens to other people and to our community because of what we do and what we are? Has anyone deeply changed as a result of meeting Christ through us? Or are we too often like the fisherman who came home at the end of the day and said, "Well I didn't actually catch any, but I certainly influenced a few"?

If we can raise our sights to God's level of expectation and effectiveness we shall never need to worry whether we ought to "stop mentioning God for a generation" as was once suggested: God will so obviously be generating radical change in us and other people, with such repercussions on our society, that the world will clamour to know more about Him.

It is possible that in trying to live our faith we are sometimes content with too little, and so find it hard to believe that our God will act mightily in our lives and in other people's, and in the lives of our countries. Great numbers of church-goers seem to me to put out a prodigious amount of sacrificial work and giving, and yet not all of them seem to experience Christ's full liberation in their own personalities, or the joy of passing on new life to others or discovering the depth of true fellowship. Nor do they always seem to know the daily direction of the Holy Spirit, not as a general sense of a guiding hand somewhere but as a direct and concrete experience of every day. It is not their devotion that is in question, but their awareness of how these things can come about. They may never have been shown.

I fully understand their situation. My parents were devoted Christians and delightful people. My father was one of the outstanding preachers, writers and thinkers of his generation, a passionate pioneer of the social application of Christian faith, with a versatile and wide-ranging mind, an irrepressible sense of humour and an almost reckless charity towards other people. My mother was gracious and rock-solid in her Christian conviction. They certainly did their best to demonstrate their faith. And yet it never took with me. The reality never broke through to me, even though I went through the motions and never doubted their sincerity or that of my many friends in my father's

churches. I cannot blame my parents – it was my own obtuseness. By the time I reached Oxford in 1931 I had no faith at all. At best I called myself an agnostic. To all intents I was a practising atheist, and a dishonest one at that because I never disclosed to my family my true state of mind.

Meeting the Oxford Group in my second year transformed my life and brought me to a living faith in Christ and to a series of experiences of His power to change my stubborn human nature at its most unlikely and intransigent points. The reason was that I had met people, some very like myself and some totally different, to whom God was a vivid reality in a more definite and practical way than I had ever seen before; people who constantly knew His power to change their lives and other people's on the most concrete points; who had found God could direct them day by day and who had been called to His service in ways I thought only existed in stories describing events of two or three thousand years ago. They moved together, moreover, in a bond of friendship I did not know existed.

To discover these things happening around me in the university and far beyond was a revelation. It was a new world. And there was no vague piety or generalised exhortation about it. These men and women could name dates and places and times when this, that or the other experience happened to them: when God freed them from an ingrained habit; when He led them to an apology which restored a broken relationship and liberated them from bitterness; when they decided to commit their whole lives and futures into His hands; when He told them, Speak to so-and-so, and another man's life was changed; when He made clear what their life's work was to be and they took it up.

I had never met anything like it. They were describing truths I had heard all my life, but for them they were a daily

experience, and, after the hard initial decision, I began to find these same things true for myself, step by step. Of course, the truths I had long heard and had drifted so far away from then became alive and full of meaning, as did the Old and New Testaments and the services of Church. The moment I committed myself unreservedly on 29 January, 1933, even though it was still at the level of "God, if there is a God, I give you my life", Christ became real, and day by day I became increasingly aware of His presence in my life. At the same time I was delivered from some of the most deep-seated fears and flaws in my character, the ones that seemed most impossible to deal with. The process still continues, but unbelievable changes took place in those first days.

From the first I was struck by the fact that here were people, however ordinary, whose outlook was world-wide but who also dealt in the most down-to-earth miracles of change in human beings; people who had a daily, detailed awareness of the guidance of God, whose lives were given to seeking and fulfilling His strategy for every situation into which He led them; people who moved in close teamwork and harmony together, who understood many of the trends of the age and tried to meet them, and who put the winning of men and the remaking of the world under God above every other consideration in their lives. Here it seemed to me was a dimension of living which could enhance the lives of many who already had a knowledge of God and at the same time be a magnet to those like myself who had been without faith. It was the discovery of a faith where real things happened to real people every day, a faith whose outcome was revolutionary in the deepest sense.

This was the era when a number of able men in Cambridge were being won to the communist ideology,

as we now know only too well. In Oxford, men of comparable ability and promise were being won in increasing numbers to the Christian ideology and a lifetime's calling to serve the living God. Indeed, in Oxford at this time the two outstanding forces in the ideological field were the October Club – the communist organisation under another name – and the Oxford Group. Doubtless men were being enlisted for communism in Oxford, though they have not been exposed as their Cambridge counterparts have been, and in Cambridge men were certainly being won to vital Christianity. But in Oxford the weight of influence of men whose lives were committed to God's world-wide battle grew steadily through these years, among undergraduates and in senior Oxford as well. They pioneered the work of Moral Re-Armament around the globe in the following decades.

The impact of these men and women was rooted in their own compelling experience, and in some basic disciplines, particularly the morning hour devoted to the God they served.

The early morning was never my natural habitat, but as I began to get up earlier every day to listen to God in quiet, God did begin to speak to me clearly and unmistakably. He did say on more than one occasion, Make friends with so-and-so, and in the end a man's life was changed through a fresh experience of Christ, with consequences that are still being felt around the world; and He did, a few weeks after I first began, quietly make plain to me what my life's work was to be, and I have been engaged in it ever since.

Moral Re-Armament is not an alternative to the Church. It is not a sect, still less a rival of some kind. For many Christians MRA has been a school of reality



both in their living and in their impact on society. The Dean of Strasbourg, Monsignor Eugène Fischer, used to say at conferences at Caux<sup>1</sup> in the 1950's, "Perhaps the Church may not need Moral Re-Armament – but Christians do!" And Gabriel Marcel, the French Catholic philosopher, commented particularly on the way that "the global and the intimate" are linked in MRA.

There are sometimes people who complain that we must not "use God to improve social conditions", because our first task in this world is to prepare for the next. But this really misses the point. The point is, will we let God use *us* – to make the world a place where His love rules between all men, everywhere. It is because our first calling is "to love God and enjoy Him for ever" that we have to find how to express His love to our fellow men on the planet He has entrusted to us.

<sup>1</sup> Caux: the Moral Re-Armament conference centre at Caux-sur-Montreux, above Lake Geneva, established in 1946 by Swiss initiative.

## The miracle factor: the God who acts

THE METROPOLITAN of India, Burma and Ceylon, the Most Reverend Dr. Foss Westcott, was a man of mature faith and austere life. The only trouble was that inwardly he felt he was ineffective. His influence was beneficent, but no one seemed to be radically different as a result, and his impact on Calcutta where he lived was far less than he had hoped, both among his European and his Indian friends. He might be the revered Archbishop of the Anglican church for a vast area of Asia, but this did not seem to enable him to do what he most longed to with his life.

On the liner from Bombay to London in the summer of 1934 he was a dignified but solitary figure, and during the voyage he failed to achieve a single talk with anyone which vitally affected that person's life.

On the voyage back to India a few months later he had deep personal talks with eighteen people who committed their lives to God as a result. To the end of his life he never stopped winning people, including some of the most hard-boiled members of the British community.

Why the difference? He had come to one of the summer conferences which the Oxford Group held over several weeks in Oxford in those years. There he had faced fresh truth about himself. Almighty God, being ultimate Reality, has a way of making us all face reality, especially about ourselves, when we allow Him. He is very gracious and will not force it on us, but when we ask Him, the truth revealed is sometimes devastating.

It was so with the Metropolitan. Facing reality led on

to experiencing in a new way God's power to change and redirect his life, to give him the secret of fellowship in place of a shy aloofness which held even his own clergy at bay and, above all, to bring home to him the ever-available guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead him to the people he was meant to help and whose lives were now often transformed as a result.

So it was a Metropolitan with a fresh experience of God's liberating power who embarked on the voyage home to India and found his life crowned with an effectiveness he had always longed for.

A tall, distinguished African stood at the back of a multi-racial meeting called by Moral Re-Armament in Salisbury, Rhodesia, in the early 1970's, to observe what was going on. He was sceptical, embittered, a leading figure in the independence struggle, an active organiser of the guerillas in the bush – and a Methodist minister, with a large church in Harare township in Salisbury. He hated white men and had good grounds for doing so. But that night he was captivated by the power of change in men's lives, black and white alike, turning hatred and superiority into love and intelligent cooperation above the barriers of race and colour. He saw the effect of miracles of change in men and the new range of possibilities they opened up. Everything he heard called to the deepest levels of his own spirit and brought to vivid life the faith of which he was a minister.

The subsequent change in the life of Arthur Kanodereka was felt throughout the country and far beyond its borders – in London, in Washington, in Pretoria and in the "front line states" bordering on Rhodesia. Kanodereka worked tirelessly and with immense courage for a policy of liberation that would

include everybody of all races, united in care for each other and for their country. He repeatedly travelled to the guerillas in the bush and in the neighbouring countries to try to give them a new and different philosophy from hatred and killing. In the end it cost him his life, a dire loss to Zimbabwe. But the movements of reconciliation and understanding which he set in motion have been playing their part with telling effect ever since, in spite of every difficulty.

In all this, Arthur Kanodereka's most trusted friend and fellow-fighter was perhaps the most unexpected man in Rhodesia – Ian Smith's son Alec. Alec Smith, as he told the British public on BBC television, had rebelled at being the Prime Minister's son and had gone out of his way for years to cause trouble, had been sent down from his university, convicted of drug offences, and had generally been the despair of all who knew him, and wholly irresponsible towards his country. He had then been unexpectedly delivered by an experience of conversion which considerably altered his mode of life. When he met Moral Re-Armament shortly afterwards, the men he talked to helped him to understand how his new experience of liberation in Christ needed to be related to the pressing needs of Rhodesia. He was one of the speakers at the meeting to which Kanodereka first came, and before long they became close friends. The campaigns Alec Smith fought alongside Arthur Kanodereka and many others, black and white, followed from this, and were eventually a factor of some significance in the settlement which ended the war in Zimbabwe and set the country on the road of independence. This was a decisive hour in the history of Zimbabwe, whatever trials that troubled country may still have to endure.

The miracle factor as it might be called – the experience that God will transform the life of anyone who will let Him, however bad, however good they may be – this has always been the daily bread of Moral Re-Armament. But for many of us Christians the miracle factor is too often the forgotten factor. We don't expect, as a normal course, to be led to men and women who will change and who may change history as a result.

Nowadays, all the same, there is far more expectation of such changes in human nature in the churches, especially in the active evangelical and charismatic wings, than there used to be: all over the world people are being transformed, often in the most impossible circumstances. And yet among too many Christians the possibility, the normality of radical change is discounted in their hearts, either because they have never thought it possible, or because no one has shown them how it can be brought about, or above all perhaps because they secretly doubt whether anything of the sort could ever happen to themselves.

Naturally enough, if you have never experienced the power of God to revolutionise your own life, you may have a low expectation of what He can do for other people.

One product of the theology of the 'sixties (the "God is Dead", "Don't mention God for a generation" era) was a revulsion against anything which seemed to challenge people about anything on moral grounds. Many reached out for a more "compassionate" approach. But compassion without Christ's inner revolution can merely lead to condoning what was previously condemned. It may be better to condone than condemn, perhaps. But it is remote from "Neither do I condemn thee: go and *sin no more*." The answer is neither to condemn nor condone but to cure. That is what God

does for people: the hating man becomes loving; the violent man becomes a peacemaker; the lustful man is satisfied in Christ and freed from his bondage; the dishonest man restores for the past and learns to live straight; the fear-driven man is at peace in the strength of an inner security. That is the miracle power of the living God at work today.

But of course those who have never known such things in their own lives are unlikely to expect them to happen to others. Yet unless this is what we are dealing in, in our churches, in our jobs and our homes, we are not touching the fringe of people's need. And unless we deal with human nature thoroughly and drastically on an ever increasing scale, many of our social aims will prove less than effective if not actually abortive.

Today Christians are more aware than ever before of the inequalities and injustices in the world, and they often make the most courageous stands of protest on one issue after another. But sometimes they seem to ignore the element of miracle and so miss out on their unique and primary role: to win and change the people who can unlock the problems from within.

Doubtless the Christians of Damascus could have staged a protest march against the unjust excesses of Saul of Tarsus in his persecution policy. The Holy Spirit's way was totally different and with the aid of a brave, if hesitant, Ananias, the arch-persecutor of the Church was changed into its greatest advocate. We are here today as a result.

Nowadays the British press and television comment from time to time that the French seem to have a closer relationship with the Germans than they do with us in Britain. "Former foes toast a special relationship", was a

headline in *The Times*, reporting on the twentieth anniversary of the Franco-German treaty of 1963, signed by Adenauer and de Gaulle. "West Germany", wrote the Bonn correspondent, "now has closer links with France than with any other leading Western country." After three devastating wars in seventy years, culminating in Hitler's occupation of France, with the concentration camps and gas chambers, it is an almost unbelievable change of attitude. But the miracle factor played its part in bringing it about, as historians of the past forty years have pointed out. R. C. Mowat, in his book *Creating the European Community*, particularly singles out the contribution of Madame Irène Laure, post-war member of parliament for Marseilles and secretary-general of the Socialist women of France.

Irène Laure, a lifelong Marxist and a wartime resistance leader, came to the Caux conference centre, in 1947, largely to give her children some good Swiss air and food. When she discovered Germans at Caux – among the first to be allowed to make contact again with the rest of the world, including some who had suffered severely under Hitler – she was furious. She stormed out of a meeting where they were present and headed for her room to pack. On the way she ran into Frank Buchman. He enquired what she was so obviously upset about. She told him, not mincing her words. He looked her in the eye and said, "You are a socialist. You believe in the brotherhood of man. What kind of Europe do you want? How can you rebuild Europe without Germany?"

Irène Laure went to her room and wrestled with the implications of Buchman's questions. The sufferings of her friends and family and of her country had burned an implacable hatred of Germany into her. Although before the war she had been interested in furthering

Franco-German understanding, in the war itself she had rejoiced to hear the fleets of allied bombers passing overhead to devastate the German cities. But—however strong the reasons, could a peaceful future ever be built on hatred such as hers? Would it not in itself be the breeding ground for the next war—and the next? Yet how could she be freed from hatred so deep and so justified? Or was it that hatred was never right and could never be justified?

For three days she struggled with the issue. Then she asked to speak. Before the whole conference of several hundred people she apologised to the Germans for her hatred and her bitter desire for vengeance. The response from the Germans, as R. C. Mowat points out,<sup>1</sup> was overwhelming, not only at the time in Caux but later in Germany. Nothing less could have brought home to them the depth of their own responsibility for what had happened in the past. That winter Irène Laure travelled the length and breadth of Germany. She spoke in nine of the eleven regional parliaments as well as on countless other occasions and on the radio, and everywhere she asked forgiveness for her hatred and explained how she and a growing number of others in France, some of whom had suffered terribly, had been changed in their deepest attitudes and were seeking a new, hate-free basis for the future relations of their two countries. The effect was electrifying and became part of the ground-swell of a new public opinion which was growing on both sides of the Rhine, and which made the subsequent political and economic developments possible, including the “Schuman plan”, the European Coal and Steel Community, which was the forerunner of the European Community of today. No wonder that the French Prime Minister, Robert Schuman, and Chancellor Adenauer in

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Mowat, *Creating the European Community*, London, 1973.



Germany both said that she had contributed more than any other single person to the new understanding between their countries. No wonder both governments decorated Frank Buchman for the part Moral Re-Armament played in those post-war years.

For Irène Laure and her husband Victor, a trained Marxist in the Seamen's Union, these experiences opened the road to faith and to the Church. But how many people would have known how to help her find from Almighty God an answer to the hatred which consumed her? How many would just have sympathised with her? How many would have condoned her hatred as perfectly natural in the circumstances? How many others might have exploited it in the interest of dividing Europe? We shall never know how many people's lives have been affected by her change and her courageous action; and not only in Europe but in every other continent to which she has carried her experience, and is still doing so in her eighties.

I have been struck again and again, as a Christian, by our low level of expectation of what the Creator of all worlds can do. Perhaps it is the residue of our unredeemed worldliness. So many of us really seem to feel that the Power which created the galaxies of our expanding universe couldn't swat a fly on planet Earth. But if we really regard God as impotent, despite what we profess personally and in the creeds, we may not find Him doing very much for us or around us. If we ever launched out like Peter on the water, trusting His everlasting power and love to sustain us, we might be astonished every day at what He did for us and through us. It is our level of expectancy that needs lifting, because that affects how far we believe that God can transform our lives, and whether we are sure that the redeeming work of Christ on the Cross, His resurrection

power and His continuing love, are capable of changing anyone to the depths, capable of forgiving the past and setting us on a new road, capable of remaking the society in which we live.

The expectation of miracles in other lives and situations starts with ourselves. There is no difficulty in pursuing the possibility of miracle for others if we have once allowed it to happen to ourselves.

Every Christian is meant to be engaged in leading other people to the Source of this radical change. We do not have to know the answers for another person's life: we *can* share with other people the deepest places where God has healed us, and we can go with them to where the answer can be found, where they can receive it for themselves at the hands of the Giver.

That is our work. It takes skills that we can learn, courage we can pray for and insight which comes from knowledge of ourselves and from the Holy Spirit as we listen to Him.

"You need to be able to read a man like a page of print," Frank Buchman used to say. In the early years of his work Buchman was once acting as a counsellor in a campaign in America. A local atheist used to delight in going the rounds of the counsellors on such occasions and confounding them with his arguments for atheism. He had quite a reputation for it. On this occasion, following his usual custom, he talked with one man after another until he came to Buchman. As soon as he walked into the room he said truculently, "I want you to know right away that I'm an atheist." Frank Buchman looked at him squarely and said, "My friend, you are not an atheist: you are an adulterer." The man's defences crumbled. "How could you know?" he asked. A long talk followed which ended on their knees. Afterwards a fellow counsellor asked, "Buchman, how did

you *know* he was an adulterer?" Buchman answered, "It was written all over his face as he walked in."

Not many interviews are likely to be so dramatic. But the need for diagnosis, for reading people, holds good. It comes from honesty about ourselves, from learning sensitive understanding of other people and from the light shed by the Holy Spirit. After that, even though we may now have gained an accurate idea of another person's need, it needs skill and delicacy, as well as courage, to know how fast to bring the truth he needs, and what aspect of truth to bring.

Not everyone's idea of personal dealing nowadays is as crude as the old enquiry, "Are you saved?" at the revival meeting, but some are not far off it. Some sincere people feel that unless you are "telling people about Jesus" in every breath you are not seriously engaged in personal ministry. But of course this ignores the entire art of the fisherman. You have to get to the place where you *can* tell them, and it may come sooner or it may come later. Fish have to be landed one by one. It takes time sometimes, and it means giving friendship that seeks no return. It takes restraint as well as boldness. It often takes sacrificial effort. A parson friend of mine went at seven a.m. every morning for many months to the home of a very difficult man several miles away to help him learn how to listen to God. He laid down his life for the man. As a result, hundreds, perhaps thousands of people have since been reached with God's truth in three continents through this man and his family.

Archbishop Appleton once said to me, sitting together in the Westminster Theatre, that the problem with modern men and women is how to get within talking distance of them. This is true indeed, and it also means that when we do come within talking distance we must know how to put our truth, or those we hope to win may be

alienated before we start. "It's no use hunting rabbits with a brass band," as someone said.

In the years immediately after the war, men and women in Moral Re-Armament were invited into the Ruhr, the devastated heartland of German industry – coal, steel, engineering. For months on end they were at grips every day with the highly trained Marxist miners and steelworkers, men of immense toughness who had never bowed the knee to Hitler. They were atheist to a man, deeply convinced Marxists, trained through special Party courses with every argument at their finger tips.

The spearhead used was a play, *The Forgotten Factor*, by Alan Thornhill, a realistic and penetrating picture of conflict in industry and the home, and the change in men needed to resolve it through the power of God, the forgotten factor. In the novelty of the post-war situation hundreds of miners and their colleagues, together with mine-owners and managers, flocked to see it over a period of eighteen months in city after city, and this at least introduced the idea of an unexpected element in the industrial scene as well as in the home life of men in unions and management alike. More important, it led on to innumerable talks in homes, in groups, in works canteens – meetings that often went on for five hours, far into the night. The Germans undertake these things seriously.

To talk to such men in terms of conventional piety and evangelistic testimony would have been self-defeating. But one thing they could understand without immediately compromising their atheist position: the need for a new moral basis for society. When they were confronted with the standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love and were asked, "What would you think of a society based on these standards?" they would answer, "That is the very

society we are after.” The next question, naturally, was, “Are you living these standards?” This led, as time went on, to profound heart-searching among scores of these hard-bitten men, as the men and women in Moral Re-Armament told them with candid honesty where they themselves had had to face those standards and find change if they were to live what they talked about.

In time it became increasingly clear to man after man in the Ruhr, in spite of their Marxism and their party commitments, that they were often very far from living the standards they regarded as necessary for society, least of all at home and on the job. Many, most indeed, were great democrats on the platform and great dictators at home. They denounced exploitation – by other people – and now discovered they themselves were often callous exploiters, especially of their wives and families, and sometimes of their fellow workers. When they had the honesty to face such matters, and realised how they would have to change to live what they professed, they were faced with decisions based on recognising the realities of their human nature, something Marx never knew how to deal with.

One of the ablest of the communist miners, who had been trained in East Germany to be in charge of propaganda and training for the Party in his area of the Ruhr, said later at Caux, “What if we plant the red banners on the Atlantic coast and all Europe lies in ruins behind us – what would we have gained for the workers of the world?” He added subsequently, “In its final stage, class war becomes atomic war, which utterly destroys any economic basis on which we could build socialism. . . . Here (at Caux) was something the Marxist structure lacks. We had forgotten man. We hadn’t allowed for the force of moral values. We planned revolution with our heads while here was a revolution of the heart.”

Sometimes he would say with a rueful smile, "My wife and I learned Esperanto to further international understanding. But at home we quarrelled in German just the same!" It was a new reality breaking through, and it led them straight to an experience of the God they had always rejected. For needless to say, when they tried, along with their wives, to live Christ's moral standards themselves they found that in their own, atheist strength they could not do it. No man can pull himself off the ground by his own bootlaces, and as this truth came home to them, so they came increasingly to realise the need for some Power from outside to do for them what they could not do for themselves to change their own natures.

This was the high road to faith and to the Church. It took patience and it took time. It often meant men and women from countries which had suffered at Germany's hands living for months on end in the homes of miners and steel-workers amid the ruins of the Ruhr. Some of the men who responded wrote to the Communist Party leadership declaring that the new ideas they had met were "the next step forward for every sincere communist and every sincere non-communist." They were nevertheless expelled from the Party, though in some cases only by the narrowest of votes after heated debate in the local party caucus. So many of these men were changed that the Communist Party in the Ruhr had to be reorganised, and party members were forbidden to speak to anyone in MRA for fear they too would be changed! The communist representation on the works councils of the Ruhr industries dropped from 72 per cent to 8 per cent in this period, in great part due, said Hubert Stein, a member of the national executive of the mineworkers' union, to the influence of these men.

The whole experience of the Ruhr in those years was a

telling illustration of the Holy Spirit's way of winning those men and women and leading them, with all their immense courage and sterling qualities, out of atheist materialism into the Kingdom of God.

One characteristic of the dedication of those who carried through this whole movement was their readiness to come to grips with the real issues in men's lives and call things by their real names – "plain dealing" as John Wesley called it. Behind all the ideological and philosophical questions and smoke-screens it meant grappling with hatred, lust, stealing, power-seeking, jealousy, ambition, greed – everything from corruption to mistresses and alcoholism. It is no good being starry-eyed about people, be they coal miners or cabinet ministers. The cleansing and redeeming power of Christ is there, available for them all the moment the need is faced and accepted.

It is the disbelief of Christians in the power of God to shift the deadlocks in men's lives that sells faith short today, and leads people down the side alleys of writing God's obituary, financing freedom fighters and all the other substitutes for expecting the power of God to work in the twentieth century.

Miracles are normal for men and women of faith. Faith without miracles is sub-normal. The reality can be tested – at a price – by anyone at any moment. This is the primary work of the Church, of all Christians. "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"<sup>1</sup>

Today it is the healing of peoples and races that is urgent, the healing of accumulated hatred and corrosive bitterness. It is fear and frustration and the feeling of meaninglessness that call for cure, and the cruelty that can spring from them. Most of the world's deepest ills

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of the Apostles*, 3, v. 6.

are beyond legislation. Changes in structure, needed and often imperative as they are, can leave the deepest forces in people's lives in bondage still. Something much more profound is needed if life is to be worth living, if we are to have satisfying goals to aim for, if we are even to be able to enjoy our own family life.

“We must go to the root, and the root is man himself,” said Karl Marx. But it is the men of faith who know how to go to the root, unlike Marx or Lenin whose idealistic view of human nature has long been belied by events. It is our pristine calling to bring God's miracle factor to bear on human nature itself, starting with our own and going out to every one He leads us to, so creating the new men and women who can create and operate the new society under God.



## Guidance: the God who speaks

IT WAS a recent Archbishop of Canterbury who said that only those can minister to others who have themselves learned to listen to "the God who speaks."<sup>1</sup>

Canon B. H. Streeter, the New Testament scholar and writer on science and religion, called his last book *The God Who Speaks*.<sup>2</sup> I vividly remember Streeter reading the preface to me from the proofs in his study in the Queen's College in Oxford, where I was staying with him shortly before the book was published. Towards the end of his preface he speaks of mankind's supreme need today, socially and individually, for a true sense of direction. Is it possible, he asks, that guidance could be available to man "on his dark and dangerous course" from some higher wisdom than his own? The answer to that question, he adds, with typical understatement, is "of more than academic interest".

Indeed it is. Today this confidence in the guidance of God in the daily affairs of men is far more widely acknowledged and experienced than it was at the time Streeter wrote in 1936, following his encounter with the Oxford Group. One contribution of Moral Re-Armament has been to bring home to so many people in clearly practical terms the ever-present availability of God's direction for those who turn to Him for it, especially for everyone committed to His service, not in some vague and general way, but clearly and concretely every day.

One of the lessons of the New Testament is that the

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Donald Coggan in *Convictions*, London, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> B. H. Streeter, *The God Who Speaks*, London, 1936; abridged edition, London, 1971.

Voice that spoke through the prophets is available to everyone who seeks to know and do the will of God. It was the constant experience of the early Church. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." "The Spirit said, Set me apart Barnabas and Saul. . ." "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, Arise and go towards the South . . ." The Spirit says to Ananias in Damascus, "Go to such and such an address and you will find Saul of Tarsus waiting for you." Poor Ananias. It was like telling someone in the French Resistance to go and call on the head of the Gestapo. But Ananias, about whom we know nothing else at all, had the mettle to obey, unwise as it seemed to him, and the grace to carry out his mission to perfection, and so changed the course of history.

There are, as Moral Re-Armament has always insisted, clear conditions for receiving God's direction and clear tests of the validity of the thoughts that come to us through the prayer of listening. The guidance of God is there to be obeyed: it is not offered "on approval" to see whether we want to follow it or not. If that is our attitude, guidance is unlikely to be given us. It depends on maintaining the attitude, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," rather than, "Listen, Lord, for thy servant speaketh."

Guidance from God may be given to anyone in a moment of crisis, as countless stories from wartime can tell, or in a time of sudden need, and often without the person concerned necessarily realising where the decisive thought or impulse comes from. But what is of infinitely greater significance is the countless people who base their lives not on occasional flashes of inspiration but on daily waiting upon God for whatever insight and direction He has to give them.

The condition for a life that is led by the Spirit is commitment, the surrender of all we have and are into the

hands of God. It is a decision to seek and obey His will before every other consideration. The second condition, naturally enough, is to set aside enough time every day to be in the presence of God, with wills and minds open to the thoughts He gives us and, if we are wise, to write them down. He can and will speak to us at any time, but the least we can do is to be unhurriedly available every morning.

It is hard to overstress the difference which the daily discipline of the morning quiet time makes in any person's life or the riches which come from that unhurried hour with God before the rush of the day begins, and the value of writing down the thoughts which come to us then. "The strongest memory is weaker than the palest ink", as the Chinese say, but even more important is that writing down your thoughts is an aid to clear thinking. It is difficult to hold two thoughts in your mind at once: if you write down the first you can go on to the next without confusion.

Guidance requires our human thinking at its best, plus that extra that God's Spirit gives. Guidance is not the elimination but the illumination of reason. It is the trusting, obedient search for a Wisdom higher than our own. At times God's guidance may sound like inspired common sense; at others, it transcends both reason and knowledge, because God knows more than we do.

To be led by the Holy Spirit is a crucial part of the committed life of every Christian. There is little point in doing what we assume to be God's work if we have not provided enough time to be sure it is also God's will. The two are not necessarily identical, and even work that is God's will at one stage may be superseded by another course later.

So often God's will crosses our will, even when what we are doing is good, let alone the times when it is anything but good. We busy ourselves with work in our locality when He may want us to move out to transform our industry or to

fight His warfare on the other side of the world. Or we may have a sentimental, or ambitious, desire to undertake a great work in other lands when the Spirit wants us to bring His power to bear in the road where we live.

Attempting to live under God's direction searches us out to the depths. His guidance can call in question all our accepted attitudes and aims – career, income, success, marriage, race, class, pride of intellect or education and everything else. It calls for a basic willingness to seek and respond to God's fresh insights in all these fields.

The late Lionel Jardine was a very senior administrator in India in the days of the Raj. He was known to the Indians as "Bad smell" because he always went around with his nose in the air, with a magisterial disdain for everything not strictly British. For him, beginning to live under the guidance of God meant that he had to revise every previous attitude and assumption. His change, and the new relationships he built with his Indian colleagues, Hindu and Muslim, based on costly apologies to some of them, had a far-reaching effect in the part of India for which he was responsible.<sup>1</sup> It finally came to the attention of Mahatma Gandhi, who had the whole thing quietly investigated. "And it's all true!" Gandhiji told a friend of mine. "Politics," added Gandhi, "has become like a great game of chess . . . But if men's motives and values can be changed like Jardine's, the whole board is upset. We can begin again and anything can happen."

Guidance from God has a way of expanding our horizons and stretching our ideas of what we are meant to be and do, until we sometimes protest inwardly at the discomfort of facing all that is being asked of us. Yet today's seeming impossibility soon becomes tomorrow's

<sup>1</sup> See Lionel Jardine, *They Called Me an Impeccable Imperialist*, Bombay, 1979.

norm as we continue to accept God's claims on us in terms of heightened vision, an expanding heart, widening sympathies and an inner willingness for actions that often require more courage than we think we can summon.

It was F. B. Meyer who first told Frank Buchman that if he wanted to be fully effective he must give God that first hour of the day, however early it might mean getting up. At the time Buchman was conducting a vigorous and outwardly successful work in a Pennsylvanian university. He had two phones on his desk, and was busy from morning till late at night. But he was inwardly dissatisfied with the depth of his work. He did not feel he was bringing men in the college to the deeper, transforming experience they so patently needed. Then F. B. Meyer came at his invitation to speak to the students. But it was what Meyer said to Buchman himself that had the most long-term consequences. It was Buchman's subsequent experiment of getting up at five to have an hour alone with God before the phones started ringing that led him into the lives of other people with a new effectiveness and depth and which eventually led him out, step by step, to a work which expanded world-wide in the following thirty years.

As a result countless people the world over have lived their lives on this basis from the 1920's onwards, and have accumulated a wide range of experience of the guidance of God, not only in the significant decisions of personal and public life, in the strokes of God which sometimes affect the policies of institutions and governments, but also in the thousand humdrum elements of daily living which are transformed into an endless adventure in faith by the Spirit's touch. No doubt, being human, they have made their mistakes, but the frailty of our nature does not invalidate our need to search for the guidance of God; indeed it heightens it.

For many people, myself included, God's direction is found in different contexts. There is the simple word of command: Go and see so-and-so; say this to him; or Take up that task; Accept the invitation to that meeting, or that country; or alternatively, Do not go now – stay where you are for the present. Sometimes, indeed usually, such thoughts come in the morning quiet time as my mind revolves around the people and the possibilities in the situation where I find myself, or as I let my mind go out to ponder the wider needs of the world and the divine strategy to meet them. One thought which came to me in my very first morning quiet time, on a freezing January morning in Oxford in 1933, was to go and call on a friend in another college after breakfast. Normally I would not have dreamed of going to see him at that time. I found him ill in bed and needing medical care which I was able to get for him. It was the first time I had ever done anything for anybody else because God had sent me. Another thought that morning was to write an honest letter to my parents about the life I had been living and my new beginning, which led to the talk of a lifetime with my father a couple of days later, sweeping away the barriers of several years.

Sometimes guidance comes, whether in the morning or as the day goes on, as the merest "tick" of a thought, more a whisper than a command and easy to miss or disregard. But once obeyed, such thoughts sometimes lead to consequences beyond our imagining.

In my last year at Oxford we had arranged a meeting over tea to tell as many freshmen as possible about our experiences of the Christian life, before the university engulfed them. I had the clear thought to invite a particular man, but hunt high, hunt low, I could not find him. At ten to four that Sunday afternoon I jumped on my bike on the other side of Oxford to pedal off to the tea. As I did so, I

had the clear whisper of a thought, "Go via your own college". This was in exactly the opposite direction. "I'll be late", was my first reaction. My second fortunately (as these were still early days of learning to live by God's direction) was, "Oh well, if it's guidance I'd better do it." Needless to say, as I swung into the curb outside my own college, out through the archway, with faultless timing, walked the man I had been looking for. He dropped all his plans and came to the tea. Afterwards, he had a long talk with a friend of mine, at the end of which he went down on his knees and gave his life to God. (He was later ordained and when I saw him last was an archdeacon doing an outstanding work in the antipodes).

A few days after his decision, he had the thought to tell a friend in another college what had happened to him. The friend said, "Do you think I could do the same?" They ended on their knees together. Later this friend, a talented creative artist with the camera, started and built up the films of MRA and is still at it forty years later. He had been a morose, inwardly drifting young man, and his change into a cheerful, outgoing, purposeful personality shook the man in the rooms opposite so much that he finally said, "For heavens sake come in and tell me what has happened to you." They too ended on their knees together. In the late 1960's this third man, after a lifetime of Christian service in many lands, was living in Ottawa with his Canadian wife. He is a writer, and felt a growing conviction to write a life of St. Columba (the Irish prince in the sixth century who became one of the strategists of Christendom). When his book, *The Magnificent Gael*,<sup>1</sup> was published it caught the imagination of two writers in Oxford who wrote a play based on it. The play *Columba*<sup>2</sup> has since travelled up and

<sup>1</sup> R. B. Hale, *The Magnificent Gael*, Ottawa, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Juliet Boobyer and Joanna Sciortino, *Columba*, 1982.

down the land as part of God's strategy to re-build the spiritual life of these islands.

I mention this lengthy tale because it illustrates that a thought obeyed (even if you can't always see the point of it at the time) can have consequences, as this one did, which are still being felt in different parts of the world half a century later. It makes me tremble for the times, which may be many, when I have not heard or have not heeded that still, small voice.

In addition to the word of command there is also the word of insight, into ourselves, into other people, into situations. The insights into ourselves are sometimes uncomfortable. They strip off illusions about ourselves and reveal traits of character we did not realise we possessed (though our wives and colleagues have known about them long enough). Many times I have been given deeper insights into my own nature: my devious motives, unvoiced ambitions, buried hurts, hidden fears, or that arrogant "I know best" approach. There are so many places where we need to know ourselves and let Christ in to heal us if we are ever to be of any help to other people, or even bearable to live with in our own families.

A few months after my wife and I were married I came home one evening in a black mood. My wife asked, "What's the matter?" I snapped back, "What do you mean, what's the matter? Nothing's the matter." A child of two could have seen I was lying, so she persisted, and finally I burst out, "So-and-so just treats me like an office boy!" So-and-so was one of my oldest colleagues, a bit senior to me. My head of steam was so high that it was plain to my wife that there was more to it than some casual remark by an old friend in the course of the day. So she tried to find out what lay behind it. I hadn't the faintest idea. But she persisted, and for quite some time we talked and pondered



and listened. Then in a moment of quiet it came to me: an incident six years before when this man had done something to me which I felt was unjust, and I hadn't had the nerve to have it out with him. Although we had often worked together, I had nursed a deep resentment against him ever since, and this is what had burst out again that day. The old hurt was pushed so far down inside me that I no longer felt it consciously, but it was still governing my actions, and God put His finger on it with unerring accuracy. A few days later I had a long talk with the man and apologised deeply for my bitterness; I told him exactly what had happened six years before, and we have been close friends and colleagues again for the past thirty-five years and more.

Such insights eventually brought me to realise how deeply sin resides not just in the many things that I do wrong but in the fact that I myself am wrong: that my own nature, by itself, is so warped and marred that it is beyond my power to put it right, and that it is the very citadel of self that needs to be yielded and made new. That is why we need a Saviour: to save us from ourselves, not just our actions. Only the Power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead can, and will, raise us from our old nature and begin to form in us the new.

Another context in which guidance comes is that of calling. This may, and often does, come as a clear word of command, but more often, I think, it comes as a slowly forming conviction in our minds that a particular course is right, or that a particular fresh commitment of our already committed lives is now called for. The first time it happened to me began in my lodgings in Oxford a few weeks after I first gave my life to God: I found a quiet inner conviction growing in my consciousness that what I had begun to experience was to be my life's work, wherever it might

take me, rather than pursuing a conventional (and salaried) career. I can remember that first occasion vividly. The conviction continued and slowly grew during the next eighteen months until I finally took my degree and left the university, and launched out on the life of faith and prayer to work wherever God showed me.

There is a further aspect of God's guidance which may have a considerable bearing on the future: the development of a new thinking to meet the needs of our present age. We need new truth and new concepts from the mind of God in so many fields. How urgently we need fresh thinking on how the world is meant to run in the light of the inescapable realities of the coming years in the areas of population and resources, of deepening division between rich and poor, of pollution, nuclear war and the dangers to our whole environment, mentioned earlier. If anyone is to give a new thinking to the world so that it can come nearer to God's idea of how we are meant to live, it should surely be the men and women who know at first hand His transcendent power.

Whatever our own part in this, great or small, we all need to learn that secret of daily direction from our heavenly Father which makes every day fresh and fascinating. My wife and I, throughout our married life, have found the hour of the morning quiet time of paramount importance, not only for our own touch with God and our work with other people, but for our unity together. It has often meant starting at very early hours and, when our children were small, it meant teaching them to respect our daily "time with Jesus" and providing them with acceptable alternative occupations when they woke. But we have found God's daily guidance of inestimable value for our family life and for the larger community with whom we have normally lived, as well as for our work in general which has

been varied, non-stop and often very demanding. We have also found that it has made all the difference to two very fully occupied people, constantly on the stretch, who often hardly met between breakfast and bed-time, or who met in the thick of some crowded event. The morning hour and the chance to share with each other the thoughts we have written down have meant that each knew what the other had to contend with, where each needed the support of the other's prayers, and so we have been able to move in unity of heart throughout the day. In this way, too, nothing accumulates between us: the decks are cleared daily, and we are ready for whatever lies ahead, including the unexpected which so often breaks upon us.

There is an even deeper significance to this morning hour of listening to God: the need we all have for a centre of stillness in our lives. "Be still and know that I am God." Cardinal Hume writes of our need to learn how to live in the silence of the "desert", the inner place of communion with God, if we are to know how to live in the "market place" amid the pressures and conflicts of everyday life. "The desert", says Brother Carlo Carretto, "is not just the absence of people. It is the evidence of God's presence."

"Truly my soul waiteth upon God", says the psalmist, and in the prayer of listening, especially in the quiet of the early morning hour, we wait unhurriedly – not only for guidance but on God Himself. In the stillness of that hour He surrounds us with His love and pours into us the courage and the compassion we so often lack; He spurs our resolve and, as St. Paul says, "lifts us right out of the old life" into newness of living.

The guidance of God is also the bond of fellowship. As men and women listen to Him together and obey Him, they find their unity in carrying out His will, however

diverse they may be in age or education, class, colour or confession. That is why the Oxford Group was ecumenical long before the ecumenical approach became the general concern of so many people as it is today, and why it superseded class war and colour conflict in its ranks from the earliest days. This is the road on which all men of faith can travel side by side.

What stops people finding the guidance of God? Pride and self-will are the obvious answers – too proud to acknowledge our daily and hourly need of God's higher wisdom, and a determination to go our own way, to do things our way rather than find out His; and also, sometimes, a readiness to hand over nearly all of our wills to Christ while resolutely reserving that last five per cent for our own deciding: "I will do anything You ask, except. . . ."

There are some people, too, who ask, "Didn't God give us our intelligence? Aren't we supposed to use that instead of running to Him for guidance?" I suppose there are many ways of camouflaging our selfwill. Of course God expects us to use our intelligence. But intelligence can only work from the known information, and I think that even such questioners would concede that God knows more than we do and has information at His disposal which is not and perhaps cannot be known to us, so that His guidance at times transcends anything our intelligence can tell us unaided.

Of course, any communication from God to man is going to pass through finite and faulty instruments, usually much in need of improvement, and may sometimes be distorted or misunderstood in consequence. People who have no intention of being guided by God sometimes make sage remarks about the "dangers of guidance". These, needless to say, are trivial compared with the dangers of

not being guided by God, which can be disastrous.

What is important is to keep the great tests of guidance before us: is it in line with the teachings of Christ in the New Testament, and with the teaching of my Church? Is it in conformity with the moral standards of Christ – with absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love? And, often most searching of all, the acid test of fellowship: what do my friends say who also seek the mind of God? “O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us To see oursels as others see us!” Our friends do that for us. They see us more objectively than we see ourselves. I have only to voice some bright idea in the company of such a group for it to wither into thin air as I speak. On the other hand, a thought that is truly from God receives solid re-inforcement from their conviction.

The greatest block of all to finding guidance is not allowing enough time each day for that hour alone with the living God. It is idle to say we are too busy. That only underlines our need for guidance. It was St. Francis de Sales, I believe, who said that everyone needs at least half an hour a day for his morning meditation unless he is particularly busy: in that case he needs a full hour. In the morning quiet time we are touching the nerve-centre of our faith: here is one of the cardinal places where our obedience and our effectiveness are forged as we take time, day by day, to wait upon the One who asks us still, “Could you not watch with me one hour?”

Finally, as I have written elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> I have found that there are two great stages in learning to live by the guidance of God. The first is when we say, “I will do anything God tells me.” This is a long stride forward for most of us, including many Christians. The second, much more

<sup>1</sup>K. D. Belden, *Meeting Moral Re-Armament*, London, 1979.

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searching, much more far-reaching, comes when we say, "I will do only what God tells me." This can sift us to the depths, but it represents the life of full commitment to the God whose service is perfect freedom.

## Reality: the God of righteousness

PEOPLE have varied reactions to the word "moral" nowadays, most of them negative.

Some years ago I was making the arrangements for two plays from the Westminster Theatre to run at the Theatre Royal in Brighton. (The plays were a double bill: *The Ladder*, Peter Howard's moving play about the Cross, and *The Hurricane*, a study of the answer to racial clash in Africa.) When I showed the proposed poster advertising the plays to the manager of the Theatre Royal, the immaculate and monocled Jack Keat, he looked at the line "Moral Re-Armament Presents" with growing uneasiness. Finally he asked, "Would you mind *very* much if we put 'MRA Presents' instead? Moral isn't a very good word to use in Brighton."

Moral isn't a very good word to use in a good many places these days. A Scottish friend of mine once took part in a public discussion at one of the more way-out occasions at the Edinburgh Festival. At one point he put in a plea for more plays to be produced by Shakespeare and by other dramatists who had a sense of moral values. He was shouted down with cries of "Fascist!" (We have come a long way from the founders of the British labour movement if men and women of the left think moral values are right wing!)

Frank Buchman used to tell us about the black preacher in the southern states who said, "When I preach to my people about the love of God and the beauties of nature and the moonlight on the water, they all think it's wonderful. But when I preach to them about chicken stealing, a kind of a coolness comes over the congregation."

A “kind of a coolness” is only too apparent with a lot of people at the mention of absolute moral standards. Yet they stand at the heart of the Gospel, and they are taken by Jesus far beyond the act to the thought and the intention. “Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees. . . .” Not in His view, we may be sure, in a more scrupulous keeping of the rules: He was talking about the deepest impulses of the heart and will.

Because the Christian faith is a life to be lived, not only a belief to be professed, the faith must be incarnate in the way we live or it is ineffective, a point made often enough by St. Paul. Dr. C. H. Dodd wrote that one of the distinguishing marks of the early Christians was their “moral competence”. They lived what they believed. There was to be no gap between their faith and their life, or if there were they were expected to repent and put it right.

Of course, only one Person in history has lived absolute moral standards absolutely. Absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love: no one of us may attain them in this life, but as searchlights to show us where we stand they are incomparable: and when we see where we stand, our need for a Power to transform us becomes overwhelming.

Christianity has a moral backbone, not a moral wishbone. We have grown too accustomed to being reasonably honest, comparatively pure, occasionally unselfish and intermittently loving. The ceaseless propaganda against every kind of moral standard, with its vast commercial spin-offs, permeates every home today, and has even rubbed off on some of us in the churches. This assault on morality is orchestrated round the world and finds some echo in most of us, because we all like to be reassured that what we want to do is what we should feel free to do. It comes from many quarters and with many motives. Huge profits are reaped, or wait to be gathered in, from slack-



ening standards of behaviour by millions of people. We are in a much bigger conflict for the soul of man than many people realise and more forces are at work than we sometimes understand.

We should test every moral issue against what we know of Christ. No one wants to see moralistic, long-faced, rule-keeping Christians. But there is a world of difference between these and the Christians who have found the liberty of the sons of God, not by throwing off all restraints but by letting Him liberate them from the dishonesties, the impurities, the selfish drives and the hatreds which so easily beset us. They are the ones with the passion and the joy to carry forward the Kingdom in the modern world.

The absence of the cutting edge of Christ's standards is only too apparent as you look at the lives of some Christians, and of our own often enough. Yet the battle we are called to demands the steel of God's fullest claims upon us if we are going to capture the hearts and wills of men and women under the pressures of today, or meet the chaotic confusion in so many people's lives.

There are some people even in the churches who seem to feel that the worst thing that can happen to anyone is to feel a sense of guilt about anything. But the trouble is that most of us *are* guilty, and what we need is not soothing reassurance but the cleansing forgiveness of God which is given for guilt acknowledged, not for guilt denied. We need to face the truth about ourselves, not in despair but in hope. "Our falling hindereth Him not to love us", as Julian of Norwich tells us. The love of God is waiting to liberate us. But we must plainly recognise what we need to be freed from if we want Him to do it. We are all responsible for our own actions, however much some people try to explain our responsibility away, and for our reactions – even towards those who have hurt us or done us harm. Whatever anyone

else has said or done, however wrong it may be, my reaction is entirely my own responsibility, and I am accountable before God for it. To tell us otherwise is to diminish our stature as human beings and to drive a wedge between us and the healing grace of God. So many people nowadays are so busy explaining away our sins, or our share of blame (in a broken marriage, for instance) that they no longer leave room to let Christ come in and mend us.

To recover the bracing reality of absolute standards can be a tonic for any Christian. It will give him an armoury of weapons in the eternal warfare between good and evil because he will know what God has done for him in the places where he most needed it. To any thoughtful person it must be apparent that a serious consideration of Christ's moral values becomes a test of our sincerity and our effectiveness. "Do lead a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ", says St. Paul. Facing these standards is a gateway to the knowledge of the grace of God and His love for us. It leads straight to the Cross. As Pope John Paul II says, it is in "that moment of inner truth about himself" that a man finds himself in touch with the living God in a special way.

This facing of the reality of sin as a highroad to finding the reality of God is at the very centre of Moral Re-Armament. I was once with Frank Buchman in his room at the Caux conference centre, in Switzerland, when three men came in to say goodbye to him before returning to their work in the Ruhr in Germany. They had been spending themselves day and night for months in the battle to win the Marxist miners and steelworkers and their very tough management. Buchman, who fully appreciated what they had been doing, looked at them in silence and then said, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin": till you get to that place with these men you

haven't begun." He was not belittling what they had already achieved: he was re-affirming their calling to meet men's need at the deepest levels, as a spur to their action.

Conscious or even unconscious compromise is deadening. Moral standards face us with truth – and life. Christians and non-Christians need this invigorating impact of reality about ourselves. What is the use of proclaiming or believing we serve a God of love if we harbour bitterness and resentment towards someone else – at work, at home, in the church? If we criticise people behind their backs but do nothing to help them become different? If we despise or even hate people of another class, another colour, another party, another country? If we are consumed by our own self-importance? If we promote conflict rather than unity? If we cheat the income tax or the railways or engage in dishonest business? If pride of family, intellect, rank or race motivates our life? If we are greedy for money, for position, for another man's job, for another man's wife? Unless we learn to live what we talk about, through the grace of God freely given and accepted, we are unconvincing: bald-headed barbers recommending hair-restorer.

We live in a corrupt world. Are we going to be part of the corruption or part of the cure? The Rev. John Watt of Edinburgh used to say that lust is, "I want it, I want it in large quantities, I want it *now!*" This applies in a great many fields and not only in the obvious one. Purity has become an almost unacceptable word today. Yet it is the pure in heart who see God. What purity means for each one of us, in or out of marriage, is something that the Holy Spirit will show us clearly. It is His gift, and part of the secret of the passion we need to make God regnant in the lives of men. A Canadian doctor friend of mine sometimes says

that facing the truth about ourselves in the light of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, is like a surgeon washing up before an operation. The washing is not the operation, but without it the operation might end in disaster. It is a necessary preliminary. It liberates us for the job to be done.

Indeed, the exact knowledge of what God has done for us makes it possible for us to help other people find the same experience. Neither our lives of compromise nor our general woolly belief that we are Christians will do much for other people. What really lights up the road ahead is when we tell them the concrete places in our own lives where God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves, and we go with them to the place where they can find their own need met from the same Source.

The standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, of course, go far beyond their personal application, vital as this is. They are indispensable for society as a whole, especially for democratic, free society. It is unreal to imagine that we can sustain our democracies without them, for they are an integral part of our responsibilities as citizens without which no democratic system can survive. They are, moreover, appreciated by people of every faith, as well as by many who have none, and their value is a point of understanding between people of diverse traditions. They are indeed corner-stones for a new social order.

One of the founders of the Norwegian Communist party, Hans Bjerkholt, once said at Caux, "No idea like the four standards ever came out of the Kremlin." But of course, if the idea of Christ's standards ever got into the Kremlin, communism might be transformed from within. And if they ever get fully into *us* we might transform the world.

## Commitment: the God who asks everything

THE FIRST MAN who spoke to me about the Oxford Group, a school acquaintance then at an Oxford theological college, made one point supremely clear: it meant committing the whole of your life to God. He made it so clear, in fact, that I decided to have nothing to do with it, and steered clear of it for the next three years to my own loss, before I finally took that crucial step which opened the doors to real living. I had feared that such commitment would be far too upsetting to my whole mode of life. How right I was. And how glad I am that I eventually took that decisive step.

Since then I have discovered how many people who regard themselves as Christians have never wholly done this themselves, or have tried to do so without fully weighing what it means, or who have committed themselves in such general terms that it adds up to little more than a set of good intentions. We need a more thorough-going approach.

This total commitment of ourselves to the God who loves us is central to our effectiveness and to our experience of His presence in our lives. But although in the Church of England, for instance, we regularly commit and offer "our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice" in the post-communion prayer, we may not always fully grasp the implications of these mighty phrases. "Commitment" has far-reaching consequences: it is commitment to the God who demands everything and drives us out to fulfil his strategy in the world; the God whose power can destroy our dearest idols, free us from our most cherished indulgences, separate us from our over-

riding ambitions, deliver us from our entrenched prejudices and set us apart for His service only.

To do the will of God – and only the will of God? It covers a wide field, from the factory floor, the office desk, the kitchen stove to career, money, the marriage bed, responsibility for the community and much else besides. It means not what I want but what Christ wants in every area of life. It means honesty, purity, unselfishness and love in every relationship, inside and outside the family. It means daily experience of the Cross, sometimes many times daily, when God's will crosses our will and we choose His. It means accepting the forgiveness and the grace of God in every area of life; it means allowing Him to transform us, with no reservations.

God will indeed show each of us what commitment means for us in concrete detail. We shall not see everything at once. Commitment has to be extended and renewed as insight into ourselves and the demands of life mature and open out. But some things are clearly included from the start.

Career for instance. How am I going to spend my life (if I am young) or, am I spending my life in the right way (if I am older)? Am I going to spend the rest of my life doing what God wants or doing what I want and hoping He will bless my selfwill? This does not mean everyone seeking ordination or heading for the mission field, though it could for some. Far more often it means laying everything before God in complete willingness for anything He may show us, and making sure that we are where we are, doing what we are doing, and planning for the future because that is what He wants and not just because it fits in with our ambitions, our need of money or our personal preferences. And it means being ready to change direction if He tells us to. God's guidance

may confirm our present choice but may also refine it by purging out the self-seeking, the selfish ambition, the excessive thrust for power or gain or position, replacing these with new motives of greater social and personal value. Or He may call us to something quite different. It is a matter of calling and obedience.

Along with career goes the consecration of talents to the service of God and other people, no longer just for our own advancement and satisfaction. Sometimes, as for the artist or the writer, these gifts are enhanced by new inner freedom and the integration of the whole personality around great, God-given aims. Sometimes talents unknown or long hidden blossom as they are used to advance God's kingdom. In this way Alan Thornhill, whom I first knew when he was fellow and chaplain of an Oxford college and a lecturer in theology, became an outstanding playwright, giving God's truth to people around the world through his plays and films.

Money, needless to say, is one of the places where we are most reluctant to yield control. "Capital is sacred", even from God. Money is a great test of dedication, not only in matters like giving to church or charity but in all our spending. It is a great deal more than giving a proportion to God and using the rest as we like. True commitment means that all our resources – income, capital, possessions, prospects – are given to God to use as He directs. This may make us reconsider what we spend our money on if it all now belongs to God: the size of our house, the size of our car, what kind of holidays we take or where we send our children to school, whether we spend God's money on tobacco or alcohol, and in many other ways. "Why don't you smoke?" a Russian diplomat asked Peter Howard at a Washington reception. "Because all my money goes into my revolution,"

said Howard. "Does it mean as much as that to you?" said the Russian. "Then why don't you drink?" "Because when I talk to men like you I need to keep a clear head," Howard replied.

God is generous, but he also has the needs of the world and the advance of the Kingdom in mind. Discipline over the use of resources applies as much to people with incomes, small or substantial, as it does to people like ourselves who have lived on faith and prayer, without salary, for many years. Large or small, what we have is meant to be at God's disposal once our commitment is made.

When I was in my twenties, working in the South of England, I had the thought in my quiet time one morning, "Send James £10". James was a colleague, also living on faith, who was at that moment working in Exeter. My total resources amounted to £15, so my first reaction was, "Lord, that's my money you're giving away." However, second thoughts prevailed and I posted the money that day, not knowing why. By return I heard from James: "Your cheque was a Godsend. It arrived in the nick of time. I had been summoned urgently to Bristol and had no money for the fare. Your gift enabled me to leave at once and more than covered my return ticket and my other needs." (Those were the days.) In the next twenty-four hours two gifts, totalling £10, came to me completely unexpectedly, so I was not even out of pocket for very long. God's economy seems to work partly by moving the resources of His followers around at an increased velocity! But it requires obedience if it is to work properly. A minor incident perhaps, and such stories could be multiplied by most Christians at much higher levels than my £10, but it taught me a permanent lesson.



Along with money, marriage is something we usually want to keep firmly in our own hands. We would prefer not to trust even God Almighty with something which affects us so closely. It is the measure of our unwisdom as well as our selfwill. Are we to marry or not? (An unthinkable question to many people, but true obedience means being open to any possibility and indeed any sacrifice God may ask of us.) For fourteen years after my first commitment I quite thought I might never be led to marry. I often found this hard, and perhaps the period was unduly prolonged by the intervention of the second world war. Nevertheless, even so I used to feel that this was really the only thing about the committed life that cost me anything. Everything else was such a gift, and even letting go a career was little enough in comparison with the adventure of moving out in God's plan to shift the modern world. So I was content to wait God's timing, with occasional impatience, and when the moment was ripe He spoke decisively and it all happened very swiftly.

So whether we marry is one point. Whom we marry is another. And why we marry is a third. There is more sense as well as more costly discipline in these questions than some might think. I do not know a single marriage that God has been allowed to guide from the first which has broken up in the past forty years and more, whereas marriages based only on mutual attraction, sudden impulse, a determination to get a particular girl or man, or some other inadequate motive, break down around us in their thousands. In fact marriage for too many people has become serial co-habitation, built on immature and often crassly selfish demands, and so missing the riches and pleasures of permanence in the lifelong partnership of two maturing people.

So it is not just a question of “am I attracted to this girl or this man,” or “do I feel in love?” but also, “is it God’s will for us to marry and create a lifelong partnership?” If it is, what is such a marriage for? What does He tell us about that? Is it just for our mutual satisfaction and enjoyment? That by itself is a basis fraught with danger. Just as the true source of married unity is the eternal triangle – my partner, myself and God at the head, in touch with both – so one of its great safeguards is to have a joint purpose outside the home itself, in service to community, church or whatever it may be, which is big enough to call out our combined dedication all the time.

In fact, God-directed marriage is really the extended life-commitment of two already committed people. That will carry us through all the ups and downs, and give us realism about each other, so that we are not starry-eyed but clear-sighted about each other’s needs and natures from the first. Then we can each help the other to come closer to God in deeper change and self-giving. This too gives the right background against which children can grow up, where no one, least of all mother and father, lives just for themselves, but all live to find and pursue the biggest thing God is asking of them.

Many other aspects of life which need giving to God will occur to us: our movements, for instance – where we live, where we travel; how we spend our time (always a test for golfers and gardeners) as well as whether we are prepared to relinquish our prejudices (racial, political, class, religious or whatever) and our cherished points of view, some of which can be anything but Christian, or our indifference to other people. How we use our home is a key aspect of commitment: is it our retreat into the creature comforts or a weapon in the

battle to win men and women to their highest calling?

Commitment is liberation for our calling, whether it takes us across the earth or keeps us rooted where we are. I have a friend who says, "My shop is my parish", and in his one-man business he gives his message a hundred times a day by the way he receives people and conducts his business with them with helpfulness, consideration and honesty. They all observe his truth without his needing to ply them with it, though he is always ready if they want to know what lies behind what he is and does.

Commitment to be true self-giving has to be without limitations. I had to learn that it could not go with attitudes like, "Here am I Lord – send him", or "I'll work anywhere You tell me except in that place or with that person; I'll do anything You say except – speak in public, approach people personally, take on the administration," or whatever it may be.

Some years ago my Salvation Army cousins, Arthur and Violet Ashby, senior officers of lifelong experience, took me and my wife to the annual commissioning of new officers at the Albert Hall. That night 150 new young officers, men and women, were being commissioned. They came up in batches with their banners to the platform and only then, as each saluted the commanding officer one by one, was each one told where he or she was posted to work. Some were obviously elated at their posting, some were shaken, but all were plainly ready to pitch in heart and soul in disciplined commitment, whether they were called to serve where they had hoped to or not.

Full commitment includes the widest outreach of our lives – into our industries, our trade unions, our schools and colleges, to our fellow citizens of Asian or Carib-

bean origin, to our local government, our editors, our members of Parliament. "I want you to think in continents," Frank Buchman was telling the young men working with him in the 1920s. It means a basic readiness in us to take on the world for which Christ died by whatever means He shows us and wherever He sends us.

The life of total commitment is the life of the liberty of the sons and daughters of God. It is searching, it is rewarding. It is the whole-hearted who carry forward God's will – world-wide.

## Teamwork: God in community

THE DAY after I first gave my life to God, I went to talk to the friend in my college who had helped me to decide.

“Well,” he said when I told him I had taken the decisive step, “that means you’re on the team now.”

“The team?” I asked, “What’s that?” No one had mentioned this before.

“Oh,” he replied, “it’s all of us who are trying to live by God’s guidance here in the university. We meet every day in the old library at St. Mary’s (the university church) at 1.30. You’d better come along today.”

“What do you do there?” I asked.

“We give the news of what we have been doing the day before,” he told me, “and we share the lessons we are learning, and what God is showing us about how to live the life.” It appeared that they usually studied the Bible together and the principles of the Christian life, especially how to become more effective channels of God’s grace in winning other people, and that their fellowship together reinforced their determination to try to live as God wanted them to. “Anyway,” my friend concluded, “today you’re the news from our college so you’d better give it.”

My blood ran cold at the idea of recounting my almost non-existent experience of a few hours to eighty or a hundred people I had never met before. But I knew something had happened to me since the night before, that Jesus Christ had come into my agnostic heart. I knew that my life was already different deep down inside, even if my understanding of what all this meant

was still practically zero. So I went along and at the appropriate moment told them about it with unexpected ease for someone as pulverisingly shy and self-conscious as I was, and found it the beginning of the deepest friendships I had ever known, with virtually every person there in due course, friendships which are alive and richer than ever today.

This was my introduction to the fact that the Christian life is designed to be lived in teamwork. The norm, from earliest days, I came to realise, is the action of a team. It may be two people, it may be twenty, it may be two hundred, but it is in the team that the faith is demonstrated. Circumstances may sometimes force us to work alone, but only until we have won new team-mates wherever we live or work. Anyone who deliberately chooses to work alone is missing a vital part of the Christian life. And it means equal teamwork: not one star performer among a group of admiring helpers.

Jesus created a team from the first and seldom moved without one. He came back from his weeks in the desert where He had wrestled with the implications of the manifestation of the Spirit at his baptism by John the Baptist. It was clear that His hour had come. This was the decisive point to which His whole life had led Him. How was He going to act? We know from His own account the ways He rejected. The way He decided to act became clear from what He then did.

First, as St. John so vividly describes, He rejoined John the Baptist by the Jordan. Many of the men flocking to John, stirred by the anticipation of greater events which he aroused, were from Jesus's home territory in Galilee. These were the men He knew, some of them personally, and here He came to recruit His first team for His first offensive. John the Baptist, with char-

acteristic selflessness, put some of his best men in Jesus's path.

Four men are named: Andrew and his brother Peter, Philip and his friend Nathanael. One is anonymous, John himself, and the chances are there was a sixth, James the brother of John, but John is always exceedingly reticent about mentioning himself and his family. Five, perhaps six, men, all from around the Lake of Galilee, are enlisted in that first twenty-four hours, and immediately Jesus takes them into action with Him – to a wedding, the improbable but endearing setting for His first open miracle which confirmed to His new team all that they had begun to believe about Him in the previous few days.

Some time later the moment came for Him to call them from their homes and livelihood by the lake and they “left all and followed Him”, men already prepared to commit their lives and throw in their lot with Him, whatever might follow. These six were with Him till the Crucifixion, till the Resurrection, till Pentecost – and out into the world as His messengers.

Some while after they first set out with Him the time came when opposition gathered momentum and a murder plot against Jesus was afoot. His answer, after a night spent in prayer with his Father, was to choose a larger team, the Twelve, who included, needless to say, all the original six.

And so it has been ever since. Paul moved out across the Roman Empire with a succession of small and ever varied teams, starting with Barnabas and Mark, continuing with Silas, with Timothy, with Luke, with Aquila and Priscilla and eventually with a succession of men drawn from the groups he had established in city after city. It was all training for the future.

Indeed, at that time the Church was a network of committed teams of men and women across the provinces of the empire. As every letter of Paul shows, their quality of life, their understanding of the battle, preoccupied him day and night. "Only do lead a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. Whether I come and see you or only hear of you in absence, let me know you are standing firm in a common spirit, fighting side by side like one man for the faith of the gospel." "Now in the Lord I insist and protest that you must give up living like pagans. . . . You must lay aside the old nature which belonged to your former course of life, that nature which crumbles to ruin under the passions of moral deceit, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, putting on the new nature. . . ." "O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you?" "Do you not know the saints are to manage the world?" "And then there is the pressing business of each day, the care of all the churches. Who is weak and I do not feel his weakness? Whose faith is hurt and I am not aglow with indignation?" "Yes, I want you to understand my deep concern for you and for all who have never seen my face. May their hearts be encouraged! May they learn the meaning of love! May they have all the wealth of conviction that comes from insight! May they learn to know that open secret of Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden!"<sup>1</sup>

Frank Buchman re-emphasised the concept of teamwork as normal Christian living. As a young man he learned to take teams of students up and down the universities of the eastern states of America and later, too, across the Atlantic, training them in action to live

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1, v.27; Ephesians 4, v.17 and 22-24; Galatians, 3, v.1; 1 Corinthians 6, v.2; 2 Corinthians 11, v.28-29; Colossians 2, v.1-3.



the life, give their message, win men and move together. When I first met him in 1933, he was just back from taking a team of 100 from coast to coast in Canada with an effect which prompted the Canadian Prime Minister, R. B. Bennett, to say his work had been felt in every part of the Dominion and had "made the task of government easier." The first time I travelled with him was with 150 others to Northern Ireland for three months in 1934, and next year with a team of 300 from many lands to Denmark. He always felt that a team, of whatever size, was more effective and gave a wider picture of God's action than any individual could give. He had little confidence in the lone-star evangelist, which he could so easily have been himself, because such work was often transient in its effect. It was a team which offered continuity, where everyone was at work, not just one. "Better to train ten men to do your work better than you can do it yourself than do ten men's work," he often used to say.

Of course, the idea and practice of teamwork in the churches is far more widespread today than it was in the 1930's, when many regarded it as a surprising and not always agreeable novelty. However, belief in teamwork and gathering a team together is one thing: living in teamwork is another. This is the point at which realism is needed if good intentions are not to break down. Perhaps one of the essential elements is a deep and intimate knowledge of each other, which often calls for costly honesty. I was struck in my early days with that team in Oxford by the way in which my new friends, one by one, took the trouble to share their whole lives with me, including the deepest places where they had most needed the healing touch of Christ. In this way our lives were an open book to each other, which meant that any action

we undertook together was carried through with a maximum of trust and a minimum of friction. We had nothing to hide, and we grew in understanding of each other.

As a result of this level of fellowship no one goes for long with unvoiced needs or unhealed reservations or differences over someone else, or criticisms, or prejudices. No one gets written off as being "always like that". No one has to be treated gingerly because he is so touchy or easily hurt. Love and honesty are the essential ingredients. Love without honesty can become sentimentality and fail to come to grips with need; honesty without love can become abrasive criticism. But love and honesty together make effective teamwork possible. And if I react negatively to another person I can take my reaction to God and find out whether *I* need to change, and where simple frankness on my part, with no demand for a response, might help him see some further step in change for himself.

Realism is also needed about our built-in attitudes – personal, racial, national, religious, class – of which we are often wholly unaware. When the Swiss, with immense courage, took over the vast derelict hotel at Caux, re-named "Mountain House", in 1946 and launched the first post-war assembly for Moral Re-Armament, they gathered volunteers from many lands to help run the place. There were teams of people dealing with housekeeping, who cared for the hundreds of rooms, with cooking, cleaning, dining-room service and the rest, all of them a mixture of nationalities separated from each other for years by the war. After a time a number of other countries began to complain that on these teams, "the price of British co-operation is control"! Quite unconsciously people

from Britain, on whatever team they found themselves, assumed they were in charge (well, we had just won the war, hadn't we?) and took command of everyone else in much the same way as our forebears took charge, uninvited, of large tracts of the earth and their inhabitants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not for the last time we, as Britons, had to face our own need of change if we were to learn how to work with other people. In one team of housekeepers, who met every morning to plan the day's work, a red-haired English-woman always led the meetings. Eventually someone asked her, "Why do you lead the meeting every day?" To which she replied with unconscious candour, "Well, I'm British!" It is fair to say that this was a long time ago, and she has long since learned the wisdom and grace that would now render such a reaction unthinkable! One advantage of community life is that such inherent attitudes do not go unnoticed and people can be helped to find God's answer to them – but they often run deeper than we realise.

Another necessity of teamwork and life in community is a united goal on which all are agreed without reservation. This is a gift of the Spirit, and may search the members of the team to the depths of their points of view, of their prejudices, preferences and dislikes, hopes, fears and motives. Unity is usually bought at a price in honesty and change. "Division is the mark of our age. . . . Unity is the grace of rebirth."<sup>1</sup> The difference between a team and a committee is usually commitment – to God and to the goal to which He is calling us.

There can be a weakness in some well-intentioned groups which comes from the lack of an adequate,

<sup>1</sup> Frank Buchman, in *Remaking the World*.

God-given purpose. They sometimes remind me of a friend of mine at school who was in the first eleven at hockey. I once asked him, "Do you ever play any hockey at home in the holidays?" He replied, "Well, I belong to a club, but we don't actually play any matches. We meet at the local on Saturday evenings and discuss hockey topics instead." This is far from true of most such groups needless to say, but it is a point worth bearing in mind in building a team.

Freedom from points of view is of cardinal importance. We all approach life from different angles and our pride and our prejudices are often bound up with them. In fact we often confuse our prejudices with what we think are our principles. We all know people who are like porcupines with prickly points of view sticking out all over them. We sometimes have a few more reasonable prickles ourselves. Even giving and receiving the "peace" in modern church services can be a source of prickly attitudes! But if I am wedded to my point of view, or my idea of what should or should not be done, so strongly that it is more important to me than the unity of the team, that unity is doomed, and it is harder to find God's wisdom. It is also lamentably time-consuming. Rampant individualism, or even thoughtless individualism, is a destroyer of team life. The surrender to God of cherished points of view, and openness to His direction even if it cuts across my ideas, is fundamental to any community life. It does not mean that I do not voice or maintain my convictions but that I recognise that I am not always right, even over things I feel strongly about, and that others sometimes are, and that there may be more important things for us to do together than maintaining my particular views at all costs.

Ambition and rivalry are deep in us all, even among committed Christians. Euodia and Syntyche were only

among the first of a long line of Christian workers who have sometimes found it hard to get on together<sup>1</sup>. When such things arise in the world at large people simply keep their distance or take themselves off. In a God-led community we work through to an answer. We all at different times want the limelight, or recognition, or leadership, or the appreciation of other people even for our work for God, and we can have hard feelings towards anyone who belittles it or, worse, takes it over from us. God's work can become *my* work, and if someone else tries to move in on it there is trouble. "Each humbly considering each other the better man", to use St. Paul's words, is a test I have often found it hard to live up to. But "living to make the other fellow great", as someone put it, is so much more rewarding than trying to make sure my own splendid qualities and selfless work are fully recognised!

Teamwork and the life of a community are impossible without absolute moral standards which keep every relationship redemptive. Honesty is one great key – about my own sins, not the other person's. This often calls for honest apology as well, the golden key to teamwork. It also means never harbouring attitudes we know to be less than Christ-like. I have known sincere Christians who have nursed deep reservations about colleagues in their church, sometimes over a period of years, but have never been honest about them, thus rendering true fellowship impossible, regardless of how many times they may have met and even prayed together. Honesty is one supreme solvent of the rubs and differences that can arise in a team.

In the same way teamwork and community need purity, so that all relationships are Christ-centred and all motives clear; unselfishness, so that we are keener on what others can achieve than on what we can do ourselves, while

<sup>1</sup> *Philippians* 4, v.6.

remembering that it is sometimes more unselfish to take a lead than to hold back unobtrusively; and love, which embraces even the sharpest corners on our friends and moves closer to our heavenly Father with them. These are all indispensable to teamwork and community, large or small.

An inevitable and enthralling consequence of team life is that you find yourself moving with people whose whole background is different from your own, people of different race, colour, class, age, confession, education. It is endlessly interesting. I remember once sharing a small dormitory in a school we had been lent for an Oxford Group assembly in Denmark in the 1930's, with a British general, the headmaster of a public school and a former communist trade union leader from Slough, a pretty rough diamond. I was in my twenties and would never have met any of them in the ordinary way. I can still hear the ex-communist asking, "Has the general made the beds yet?" on the day when it was his turn.

Another aspect of teamwork, long experienced in Moral Re-Armament, is what might be called the ecumenism of the battlefield: not the patiently worked out formula of agreement, however important such work must be in the long run, but the appreciation and love you feel for a fellow fighter in a war, whatever the colour of his skin or uniform. This is closely akin to the practical ecumenism so often found today at local level which has already gone far ahead of official pronouncements and decisions in the churches. From earliest days in MRA Christians in all their diversity have worked together in harmony.

One of Buchman's favourite words was "over-arching". To him, the committed life was lived at a level that soared above division. He knew that people who move together to fight God's battles under His direction fling bridges across the chasms that normally divide us, lifting

us into a new dimension far above the separating walls. This does not mean that all areas of difference or disagreement are unimportant, but that what unites us in the great task of our age is overwhelmingly more important in the eyes of God.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren”, wrote St. John towards the end of his long life. “Jesus stand among us in Thy risen power” was one of Frank Buchman’s favourite prayers in the midst of a team. Sometimes he would look at us when he thought we could be doing better in our common life together and repeat the words of a hymn which had been a favourite since his boyhood:

Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow Thee;  
Destitute, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my all shall be.

Perish every fond ambition,  
All I’ve sought and hoped and known;  
Yet how rich is my condition,  
God and heaven are still my own.

Living in a community or working with a team in the field is not a *method* that will make our work more effective, still less a duty to conform to, so much as a desire of the heart, a gift of grace and love, because wherever a team gathers, united in honesty and care for one another and centred on the divine purpose, then, in a unique way, “there am I in the midst of them.”

## Strategy: the God who redeems the world

“SET ME ASIDE Barnabas and Saul for the task to which I have called them,”<sup>1</sup> said the Holy Spirit to the central team of committed Christians in the great city of Antioch, around the year AD 44.

What was “the task to which I have called them”? Nothing less we now realise than the capture of the Roman Empire. It took 300 years, but this was the start of the crucial opening phase which laid the lines for the future. The initial strategy, based on a small but experienced mobile group, was to move out from their base in Antioch into the neighbouring provinces of the empire, to enlist key men where they could, like the Roman proconsul in Cyprus, and to establish active cells in each centre fully reliant on their own local initiative under God, but linked together as time went on by small travelling teams and later by the world’s most remarkable series of passionate and practical letters, as well as by the leadership of dedicated men in the slowly evolving organism of the Church.

Barnabas and Saul, with Mark, Barnabas’s young relative who travelled with them, tasted first blood in Cyprus, Barnabas’s home province. It was here that Saul decisively took the lead and adopted his Roman name, Paul. Then the two older men moved into Asia Minor, which was Paul’s territory, tackling it city by city. Later Paul, with a different team now including Luke the doctor, crossed into Europe through Macedonia and Greece; and many years later, after working in many of the major Greek cities and for three years in Ephesus, as well as being imprisoned for two years in Caesarea, finally reached his long-hoped

<sup>1</sup>*Acts of the Apostles*, 13, v.2.



for objective, Rome itself. All this was carried out in the thirty years between Paul's dramatic conversion on the way to suppress the Christians in Damascus and his martyrdom in Rome. Nearly half that time was spent in preparation: his years in the desert thinking it all out, and the long years working in and around Tarsus till Barnabas, who had a genius for friendship, brought him to Antioch, already a seasoned revolutionary with a wealth of experience behind him, as well as possessing one of the most creative minds in Christian history.

What he left behind him at his death was a trained organism spread across the empire from Syria to Italy which was God-impelled, self-perpetuating, passionately convinced, with the fire of a faith no totalitarian state could deflect or quench, and a concept of the magnitude and depth of the Christian message which has inspired every succeeding generation.

How far was he conscious of his goal? In a sense it hardly matters. It was the Spirit's strategy he was following, not his own. His own expectation seems to have been for the imminent ending of the age and the return of Christ in majesty. Yet his work proved capable of sustaining a much longer-term struggle for the human race; and it is unlikely that a mind as wide-ranging as Paul's, with his cosmic sense of the purposes of God, would have thought it unusual to expect the vast, all-powerful Roman Empire to bend the knee to Christ, as eventually it did.

Can we find a comparable level of expectancy in the last decades of the twentieth century? For Soviet Russia? For communist China? I once heard someone say, "Christ said, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.' He did not say, 'Repent, for there are twenty centuries of church history in front of you.'" It is surely for us to find how to maintain the immediacy and the scale of our expectation of

God Almighty's action today, always apparent to Paul in his time as to so many others down the centuries, so that it matches the need of our contemporary world.

Frank Buchman sometimes said he had devoted his life to one short word: How. It is when we consider *how* God is to be Lord of all areas of life that we begin to see the need for the divine strategy: what we should aim for, where to start, whom to win first. We cannot do everything at once: we must start somewhere and follow through as God directs. It is not that some people are more important than others but that some may be more strategic in terms of His ultimate objectives. It is in this light we can see John Newton setting out to win the young Prime Minister's closest friend, William Wilberforce, to lead the campaign to abolish the slave trade. It is a question of where you start and how you continue with the greatest effect. Nor is it necessarily the public standing of a man that makes him strategic. It may be someone quite obscure who holds the key to the lives of people who shape great events or who can reach a nation swiftly.

A capable middle-aged woman, Edith Ducé, worked as secretary to the general manager of the *Express* newspapers at the beginning of World War II. Her life had been transformed from bitterness and loneliness, following her broken marriage, by meeting the Oxford Group, and she faithfully set aside time every morning to listen to God for any direction He might wish to give her. One day she had an unnerving thought – to ask Peter Howard to meet some of her friends in the Oxford Group. This was no light assignment. Howard was a formidable figure though he was still in his early thirties. He was immensely tall, a former captain of England at Rugby football, and the most abrasive columnist on the Beaverbrook papers. Cabinet ministers dodged behind pillars to avoid him when he

stalked through the lobby of the House of Commons in search of prey for his Sunday column. Edith Ducé's approach to him was contemptuously brushed aside. She was downcast but determined, and awaited the next opening. It came sooner than she expected.

Lord Beaverbrook had recently entered the War Cabinet. He had then ordered Howard to cease attacking his cabinet colleagues in the Beaverbrook newspapers, thus lopping off the juiciest part of Howard's column. In frustration Howard was looking for other quarries. He thought again about Edith Ducé and Moral Re-Armament. Here might be game for his vitriolic pen. He asked her, after all, to arrange a meeting with someone in MRA. The encounter which followed radically changed Howard's life and, to the fury and consternation of many in Fleet Street, he eventually became one of the great Christian voices of our generation.<sup>1</sup> He was part of God's strategy for Britain and, as it proved, for many other lands. Four million copies of his books went out in many languages in the next twenty years, and his plays and films and broadcasts reached millions more. Many people in many countries have reason to be grateful to Edith Ducé for her courage and obedience. She lost her life in an air raid a few months after that first encounter, but the results of the guidance and obedience of this ordinary housewife and secretary are still felt in every continent. She was the strategic person in that situation and only the wisdom of God knew it.

Frank Buchman sometimes used to tell the classic tale of what he called his "laboratory experiment" in State College, Pennsylvania where he was invited in 1909, the year after his experience of the crucified Christ in Keswick

<sup>1</sup>See Peter Howard, *Innocent Men*, London, 1941, and Garth Lean, *Good God, It Works!* London, 1974.

which changed the course of his life in his early thirties.<sup>1</sup> He found the college in uproar and considerably demoralised, with nineteen liquor parties the night he arrived, losing every game at football and not too good academically either. Three years later there were 1,200 members of the college doing voluntary Bible study, the atmosphere was transformed, work had improved, games were being won and men were going out to other colleges up and down the eastern seaboard to pass on their vital faith.

As Buchman surveyed the scene when he first arrived, with its undisguised hostility to himself and anything religious, and considered what his strategy should be, the Holy Spirit pointed to three men who would prove the keys to the whole situation. They were the bootlegger Bill Pickle, a rascally pirate who peddled liquor to the students and threatened to knife Buchman; Blair Buck, a leading student who was well liked but had no faith; and the sympathetic but agnostic Dean Agee. Buchman was hard at work with all the students he could reach, but his strategy rested on winning these three men, and when they changed eventually – first Blair Buck, then Bill Pickle and finally the dean – it was decisive in its effect.

In an English coastal town in the years just before the war, a leading portrait photographer, who had his studio there, pondered who would need to be won if the atmosphere of the town were to be changed and the community given an impetus towards faith. As he turned it over in his mind the names of five people eventually came to him during his morning quiet times. He and his wife and some of their friends set out systematically to win them.

One was the town's headache, Gerry, given to rowdy parties, fast cars and generally causing havoc in the place: a

<sup>1</sup> See Frank Buchman, *The Making of a Miracle in Remaking the World*.

generous, warm-hearted mountain of a man, with limitless energies. He was in trouble over a motoring offence when Dick, the photographer, first thought of him. Dick and a friend went to see him and began to make friends with him. Over the following year they won him completely. He became a positive, rollicking influence in the town and his change reverberated in every corner of the community.

The mayor was another on Dick's list, a taciturn, upright business man, disillusioned and thinking of pulling out of the endless petty conflicts of local government. Disconcertingly he hardly spoke a word during Dick's early talks with him. But nevertheless he and his wife were led to a new experience of God which brought them much joy and transformed their attitudes in many ways, not least in the handling of council affairs.

The stone in the mayor's shoe was third on Dick's list, the white-haired, cantankerous but inwardly kindly left-wing leader of the opposition on the council. This man's subsequent change, combined with the mayor's, led to private and public reconciliation which speeded council business, reduced petty bickering in council meetings, brought a better atmosphere into the town's affairs and proved invaluable when, eighteen months later, the town became part of the invasion coast after Dunkirk.

Two other keys to the town were the housing manager of the council's large and growing new housing estate, an able woman who did not suffer fools gladly and was the object of guerilla warfare from the fifth on Dick's list, George, the outspoken secretary of the tenants' association on the estate. George ran the local fruit barrow and still suffered from wounds received in the first world war, which did nothing to improve his temper. He was embittered and embattled vis-a-vis the housing manager,

and causing trouble for her was his favourite vocation and dedicated intent. To bring change to the housing manager first and then to George was not done in a day, but when it happened and they became firm friends and allies, the effect was considerable. The atmosphere on the estate improved. Some tenants found the same experience for themselves. All benefited from the new attitudes of the housing manager who surprised everyone by her genuine warmth and understanding, and of the secretary. In this friendlier setting many outstanding problems of the estate were settled.

Needless to say, the strategy for Dick's town which had centred on these five people reached out at the same time in many other directions and touched the lives of hundreds in all walks of life through meetings and conferences, through personal contacts, through the churches and through the local press. On the eve of war, more than 4,000 people from the town and from all over the area gathered there one weekend to answer the call for moral and spiritual re-armament to match the material re-armament that might so soon be needed.

Then war broke out. Dick, the photographer, was thinking about the town's hazardous situation one morning just after the fall of France, when invasion seemed imminent. Was there anything he and his friends could do to sustain people's courage and morale, living as they were on what could, any day, become the front line of the war? A thought came clearly to him: "Write a short statement on how morale is based on faith in God and on moral standards which could go to twenty million homes." Dick's own faith wavered a bit at this point, and he crossed off one of the noughts and left it as "two million", which still seemed steep enough to him. Nevertheless he went ahead and drafted his call, "Morale – How to play your

part”, with the help of friends, and before long the first thousand copies, signed by the mayor and the leader of the opposition, were printed and distributed to the homes on the housing estate by the secretary of the tenants’ association.

In the following months as people came to hear about it, the idea caught on right across the country. Dick’s *Morale Call* was eventually taken up by 350 local authorities in cities and towns up and down the land. They issued it either as a leaflet delivered to every home or as full pages in the local press, so that eventually it reached even more than the twenty million of Dick’s original guidance. It played a timely and deeply appreciated part in some of the most heavily blitzed areas of the country.

I mention this particular story because I saw it at first hand, and because it illustrates what can be done when we break out of our preconceived ideas of God’s work and seek the divine strategy for reaching our community, or whatever it may be that we are called to tackle.

In the 1930’s, on an altogether different scale, the Holy Spirit led *Moral Re-Armament* into the Scandinavian countries – Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland – into the Netherlands and to Switzerland, in some cases on a very large scale indeed. “Have you noticed,” Canon Streeter said to me one day, “how God has led Frank Buchman and his work into so many of the countries that surround Germany?” Germany itself, with its ferocious Nazi hostility to *Moral Re-Armament*, was hard to penetrate. But after the war I often thought of Streeter’s words because it was the men and women from these very countries, won before the war and tried and tested through the years of occupation and conflict, who took *Moral Re-Armament* into the ruined cities of Germany from 1946 onwards. It was they who played such a crucial

part, along with others from many countries, in the industries of the Ruhr, in encouraging the new democratic Germany, and in bringing about reconciliation with France and other countries. It was God's long-term planning at work in unforeseeable ways.

In the post-war years this strategy of reconciliation was seen in other fields as well: in the rebuilding of relationships between Japan and her former enemies, for instance, through Japan's "diplomacy of the humble heart"; among some of the emerging countries of Africa; in the ending, at that time, of the bloody independence struggle in Cyprus; in areas of South-East Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. Often the Holy Spirit's work, transforming the attitudes of men and women at strategic points, played a part, sometimes a decisive part, in helping, with others, to shift these larger problems.

To some Christians such issues may seem remote. But they are not remote to God. His unfolding plan in every situation, local, national or international, is an expression of His love for mankind. And for everyone He has a strategy that will affect the sphere in which he finds himself.

During the war a hard-living RAF sergeant in the Western desert came across a book on Moral Re-Armament in Cairo and his life was radically changed as a result. After the war he eventually found himself employed at London Airport, and in due course was elected shop steward in British European Airways, an office he held for many years until he retired. As a servant of God, however, he conceived his calling as going beyond simply dealing with the day to day issues on the shop floor: he sought also to develop a strategy to establish God's truth at the heart of his airline and his industry. He became in due course a voice for sanity both to the leaders of his union, nationally



as well as locally, and to management whom he took the trouble to get to know personally, right up to the chairman of the board. He never felt his responsibility for his industry and the men who ran it need be limited by his position as a simple worker and shop steward. He went to the men to whom God sent him, to help them bring a fresh, constructive approach to their enterprise. Nor was his aim just to answer grievances but to create the attitudes at all levels of the industry which could make it thrive and serve the public better. More than once in those years BEA planes were flying at least partly because of the relations of confidence and honesty he had helped to establish. He also joined with others in creating friendly links with the airline industries in other countries, not least in France, and also took pains to meet with other trade unionists, in the spirit of MRA, in the Middle East where he had served in the war, and in other parts of the world. In this way an ordinary man in an ordinary job was given an extraordinary outreach to other people and other situations because he faithfully aligned himself with God's strategy for the sphere of life in which he found himself.

Henry Drummond once wrote that, "Next to losing the sense of a personal Christ, the worst evil that can befall a Christian is to have no sense of anything else." Drummond constantly stressed the application of the love of God to the great issues of this life, affecting men the world over. He describes the realisation which breaks into a new Christian's life that God has a purpose for mankind which embraces everyone everywhere, and deals not only with their spiritual needs but with every part of their lives: "their progress, their health, their work, their wages, their happiness. . . ." and that what Christ calls us to is "a prodigious task – to recreate the world."

Whatever may be the ultimate fate of the world, and

whenever that may be, and whatever God's eternal purposes for man, He has clearly created mankind to live in time and in society on this planet, has deigned to enter the world of men Himself in a unique way in Jesus Christ, and has given us the capacity to choose whether to follow Him and live together for the good of all, or whether to go our own way to exploit, divide and even destroy what has been entrusted to us.

It is in the light of the momentous issues which face our world that we need to shape our idea of an adequate Christian work and decide whether we expect to be used in a strategy that can shift nations. We have to consider whether we can rely on the Source of all intelligence to lead us in intelligent ways to win our needy, rebellious, self-indulgent, selfwilled world to Himself more effectively, ending its cruelty and its waste, its injustice and inhumanity, and creating a new society out of new men and women. Are we justified in planning for victory, not for defeat?

Of course the issues we face are so immense and we are all so inadequate and limited that we naturally shrink from what God may be calling us to undertake. We are very small Davids before armies of Goliaths.

Yet God's battle is always being carried forward by Him worldwide, and part of it through our obedience – not primarily through our sagacity, ability, skill or training, though all these will be used to the utmost. But the issue rests on His shoulders, not ours, as we do our best to find and follow what He asks of us, and the strategy is always people.

God's purpose is always seeking to reach out to the world in fresh ways, to cross the frontiers into new territory, from Philip affecting the court of Ethiopia or Paul being summoned into Europe from Asia Minor, to Francis

of Assisi setting out to meet the Soldan in 1219, or Francis Xavier moving from India to Japan in the sixteenth century and Matteo Ricci almost capturing the imperial court of China a generation later, down to Russian dissidents leading the awakening of faith inside the Soviet Union in our own day. God's initiative is ceaseless: it is up to us to do all we can to discern it and align ourselves with it.

His is a strategy that works far beyond the frontiers of the faith and enlists men and women who may never realise they are part of it: "Cyrus...My shepherd...shall fulfill all My purpose."<sup>1</sup> Even the great and fanatical movements against God may yet be used by Him and turned to His glory. Bishop Fulton Sheen called communism "the neglected conscience of the West." He was not approving atheism or recommending dialectical materialism, but was pointing to the fact that the very existence of communism, with its sweeping critique of the existing social and economic order, should be a spur in the flank of a complacent and callous society and of Christians especially, and should confront them with the challenge of dealing with the poverty and suffering which mankind has so signally failed to answer.

The crucial issue for all of us, surely, is to be so aware of the needs and trends of the world, and so open to the Spirit of God, that we are always ready to take the next step in God's purposes and never rule out the possibility of being used to play a part beyond our dreams, however insignificant or remote we may feel from great affairs. He can deploy and use us anywhere He wants to if we are ready, and every obedient man or woman is vital to His strategy for the world.

<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah* 44, v.28 (RSV). Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of the Babylonian empire, permitted the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem.

## Ideology: the God who commands

THE MARK of the twentieth century has been the rise of the ideologies of materialism, most obviously fascism, nazism and communism. Their hold on men's minds, in spite of their catastrophic failures and their inexorable descent into tyranny and cruelty, is formidable still. They are far more than theories, speculations or mere systems of ideas. They command a force and faith as powerful as a religion, mobilising the entire lives of men and peoples for their goals. They are all-compelling, embracing and enlisting every aspect of life for their purposes. They supersede all normal loyalties. They have a passion to invade the minds of men, a philosophy, however inadequate and wide of the mark, and they plan to take over mankind. They are a force to be reckoned with, marshalling men's bitterness and their cravings for power. Simply demonstrating their palpable shortcomings or their acknowledged cruelties and dangers does little or nothing to stem their advance.

Indeed, as Frank Buchman said a good many years ago, "An extreme of evil must be met by an extreme of good. A fanatical following of evil by a passionate pursuit of good. Only a passion can cure a passion. Only a superior world-arching ideology can cure a world divided by warring ideologies."<sup>1</sup>

Can we understand the role of our faith today as the ideology of freedom? As the only guarantee of democracy in its battle for survival? As the ideology of the dignity of man because it expresses God's purpose for mankind?

To reach an understanding of the extent to which the struggle for the world is ideological is a vital development

<sup>1</sup>Frank Buchman, in *Remaking the World*.

in our thinking, and a key to our understanding of much that goes on today which is otherwise obscure. It indicates the setting in which we need to frame our message and our action: the setting of the eternal, world-wide battle for the hearts, minds and wills of the millions of mankind, the eternal struggle between good and evil which is rising to a new intensity today.

When we see our faith as part of this battle, as the source of the convictions that will move nations Godward, it sharpens our idea of how we are meant to live and what we are meant to be doing.

Could our Western nations live in such a way that God's way of doing things would seem supremely attractive to the Soviet Union? Or to the millions of China? Or to Cuba? Could the nations which call themselves Christian show the communist world a way of living and behaving so different, so effective, so compelling in its compassion and care of men, that they would have to re-think their basic philosophy in the face of a more far-reaching revolution?

The alternative seems to be the self-defeating one of continuing to oppose the hard materialism of the communist states with the soft materialism of Europe and North America (even if it does have a Christian tinge some times) while we in the West go on doing our business, exploiting the world's resources and often bribing our way into the emergent countries of Asia and Africa, in the same old pattern which is so remote from the faith we are supposed to represent.

It is no use saying complacently, "We are superior because we are free and democratic and can do what we like". That sort of freedom has led us into two world wars in fifty years, it has permitted three centuries of colonial exploitation, created the horrors and injustices of the slave trade, the industrial revolution and the opium wars,

invented nuclear destruction and perpetuates the imbalance of the world between the have and have-not nations. Clearly our present way of doing things, in spite of all that is also good and creative in it, needs a mighty upheaval of change if we are to preserve the good, reduce the evil and demonstrate a God-directed way of doing things which matches the needs of the hour. How much we need to rediscover our freedom to serve the living God and our fellow men, the freedom to be responsible for the life of our country and the needs of other peoples, the freedom to express our faith in the way we treat all men.

We live in a world where vast forces and resources are being deployed to destroy faith, to destroy any view of life and morality which is rooted in any conception of the Spirit. We are not just facing the down-drag of sin and the clinging folds of evil round men's lives: we are facing the intelligently orchestrated, heavily financed, sustained destruction of the idea of God, because that idea threatens not only the exploiters of moral weakness but also threatens every totalitarian trend of left or right. That is the difference between the ideological age and its predecessors.

It is no longer that Christianity has been tried and found difficult: what we are facing is the world-wide campaign to discredit the whole idea of any other measure of mankind than the material. "Man is the measure of all things" (heaven help us); "man has come of age"; "God is dead." "Our revolution will never succeed", said Lenin, "till the myth of God is removed from the mind of man."

It is of course a propaganda of lies. But it has a strong appeal, partly because it proclaims an "inevitable" onward movement of history, and partly because it rolls back centuries of civilising influences and justifies the return to the beast in man. It is one of the oldest tricks in the book to

invent a new philosophy to justify the things you want to do anyway. Aldous Huxley exposed it in *Ends and Means* when he described how he and many of his contemporaries deliberately developed their philosophy of meaninglessness because it justified their revolt against the morality that limited their sexual freedom, as well as against anything else in the social system which they disliked. It happens repeatedly in every generation.

It must also be remembered that all those who claim that man is less than human unless he is free to give full rein to his instinctive nature and throw off every moral claim, never tell you that there is more than sex in our instinctive nature. That is the least of it. What is unleashed by this philosophy is not just animal indulgence, nor is it confined to the bedroom. What is let loose is cruelty; it is lust for power; it is violence and sadism, the physical destruction by whip and chain, bomb and gun of anyone who disagrees with you. If you burn down a man's house, run off with his wife, shoot him in the knee-cap or put a bomb in his car, there is nothing to complain of: you are just fulfilling your instinctive nature and doing what is good for you. These are potent human impulses, and when you add to them hatred and desire for revenge and destruction, you are providing fuel for the materialist ideologies which will exploit them to the limit for their own ends. They can only be met by the sacrificial fire of love.

No wonder, however, that there is opposition to vital faith wherever it appears. No wonder MRA, in company with many others, has been attacked over the years from extreme right or extreme left, from dishonest and immoral rogues and from compromising or prejudiced Christians—from anyone, indeed, whose way of life seems threatened by the sovereign claims of God, and not least from the pedlars of materialism whose revolutions have been such a

sorry disaster again and again in this century. The wildly untrue statements put around by some of them about MRA would fill a book and are usually prefaced by the equally erroneous words, "I know all about MRA."

One of the most tenacious and tendentious of these was the late Tom Driberg who vilified Buchman continuously from 1928 until his death, for reasons best known to himself. But Driberg explains in his autobiography that he was a compulsive pervert who could equally go out on a homosexual rampage during the week and then serve at the altar on Sunday morning because, as he put it, each was what he most wanted to do at the time so he was doing each with complete sincerity! He left the Communist Party in order to join the Labour Party and stand for Parliament, according to a recent investigator, but continued to work for the KGB and also, with splendid impartiality, for British intelligence as well. He was, unaccountably, raised to the peerage some time before he died. But you can understand the pathological hatred of such a man for Christians who stressed the moral claims of Christ and, at the same time, resisted the attempts of the materialist ideologies to take over their churches or their countries. Yet many people were misled by this man over many years; many passed on without thought the lies he lodged in their minds; and there always seemed to be unlimited funds available for him to distribute his wares around the world.

The truth is that what all of us, as human beings, most hate is being disturbed in our established ways, in our accustomed indulgences and compromises, in our deep-set prejudices and viewpoints about ourselves and the world. We kick back like infuriated mules at the mere idea. When you are faced with the challenge of change you either have to accept it and go to the Source of forgiveness, or you fight back and go to any lengths to prove that



whoever challenged you is wrong. Of course, you do not say that. You attack on quite other grounds, like the opponents of John Wesley and the Methodists during the war with France and Spain in the late eighteenth century who put it about that Wesley was raising an army of 50,000 men to help them invade England! Wartime is always a good moment to denigrate people you dislike. It is not much more fantastic than some of the things that have been said of MRA. I suppose it is all done on Goebbels' principle that the bigger the lie the more likely it is to be believed.

But more than this, there is continuous opposition to the faith whenever it moves men beyond a purely personal piety, because then it is dangerous to the ideologies of materialism: it threatens their whole concept of man as the slave of the state; it exposes and opposes the death of freedom implicit in totalitarianism of left or right; it denies the exaltation of almighty man in place of Almighty God. "Wherever men give man the place in their lives that God alone should have, slavery has begun. 'Men must choose to be governed by God or they condemn themselves to be ruled by tyrants'."<sup>1</sup>

The faith is not only dangerous to evil morally but ideologically. That is why the assault on faith is incessant, insidious and worldwide. That is why all manner of people are enlisted in the attack. The threat of God's truth to the power-drives of materialism is far greater than most of us imagine, which is why many neither understand the attacks nor grasp the magnitude and urgency of the battle.

Frank Buchman was entirely realistic about the progress of the ideological struggle: "While statesmen plan for armies and conferences and alliances, the disruptive forces win a dock worker, a civil servant, a scientist, a

<sup>1</sup> Frank Buchman, quoting William Penn, in *Remaking the World*.

soldier, a school teacher. They mobilise the grievances, the bitterness, the righteous longings for a better world in the hearts of these men. They set them on the march with a total commitment to capture the world with their idea. So while cabinets call for more production, there are slow downs in industry. While statesmen call for another conference, vital secrets are betrayed. While everyone calls for unity between nations, disunity grows within nations."

"Suddenly", he said, "the statesmen of the democratic nations have woken up. They rub their eyes as they see what is happening. The world force of materialism has penetrated every nation. It has infiltrated their schools, their industries. It has invaded their offices and government departments. It has influenced their families, their colleagues and even themselves."

The answer, Buchman said, "is the statesmanship which can set the ordinary man on the march with a vision, comradeship and plan to remake the world. . . . The secret is 'Not my way but God's way. Not my will, but God's will.' This is the cure for confusion, not saying 'Yes' with our lips only but also with the discipline of our lives." It is to the Holy Spirit that we must turn: "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. But 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>

We shall never understand what is going on in our countries, in our parliaments, our trade unions, our universities, our newspapers, unless we understand the power of ideologies to command men's allegiance and capture their loyalties, so that what they do or write is activated, however

<sup>1</sup>Frank Buchman, *ibid.*

covertly, by the thrust of their ideological commitment.

When Christians are as committed to making the living God regnant in every field of human life as these men and women are to bringing about the triumph of materialism in one form or another, when we are as passionate for liberty under God as they are for totalitarian tyranny of left or right, then we may begin to capture the best revolutionary minds for God's greater revolution. Until then we are hardly playing in the same league, and the world may be lost by our default.

Some people dislike the word ideology. But it is a fact that must be taken into account whatever we call it. Mrs. Stanley Baldwin once said to Frank Buchman at lunch in a friend's house in the 'thirties, "Dr. Buchman, I don't like that word 'sin' you keep using." "Well," said Buchman affably, "let's call it something else. How about calling it 'rheumatism'?" "Oh no!" cried Lucy Baldwin, "I'm full of rheumatism!" Whatever we call it, we need to grasp the reality of the ideological struggle, and add to our own daily service of God the dimension of the battle for the world's thinking and living. It is going on all around us, all the time, whether we realise it or not. What we have to find is how to place before men and their countries the eternal issue: *Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.*

## The unfettered Spirit: the God of all men

IF THE BATTLE for faith, the world-wide ideological struggle, is to be won, if freedom and a worthwhile future for the human race are to be secured, it will take all men of faith everywhere, moving as allies and friends, not as rivals or competitors. For us as Christians this may call for a new appreciation of the action of God in today's world.

Does the Holy Spirit only speak to Christians?

You have only to ask the question to realise its absurdity. Every Sunday we affirm in the Creed that "He spake by the prophets", centuries before Christ came. Christians celebrate the descent of the Spirit at the first Pentecost. But the Old Testament also records the Spirit's action through two thousand years of the history of one non-Christian people before the world was ready for God to reveal His nature to men in Jesus Christ.

If there is one lesson of history it is that we cannot confine the Spirit of God. He may do many things we might think inadvisable, but we cannot cabin Him within the smallness of our human concepts any more than we can cut God down to size so that we feel comfortable with Him. He is always blasting open the doors of our preconceptions and our prejudices, especially the ones we feel we are most right about. He cannot abide our smallness of heart, our contentment with the second best, our indifference to human need.

Does God care for communists? Or even conservatives? Is He only interested in paid-up church members in good standing? Or does His heart go out to the Chinese? The Hindus? The Buddhists? Does he love devout Muslims? Or South Africans, of all colours? Or Jews? Or Arabs?

These questions are not irrelevant: we as Christians

need to wrench our minds away from a parochial, narrowed down, inturbed view of humanity. The entire human race is God's creation and the object of His love, every man, woman and child on earth, and He bears the pain of all races and colours in what we do to each other.

They are not all Christians, nor are they likely to be in the foreseeable future. But they are all God's children. God loves them. He knows how they came to their present systems of belief over the slow centuries, the millennia of man's existence. A loving Father could not have left His children in total ignorance of Himself through all those thousands of years. "God is self-revealing", as one theologian put it, and in fact something of Him, of the spiritual world, of the Reality behind our universe, is known to virtually every race on earth. Some of the interpretations have been profound, some cruel and degrading, some noble, some beautiful. All have represented man reaching out to the divine, from the Dream Time of earth's oldest race, the Australian Aborigines, or the Great Spirit of the North American Indians, to the flights of contemplation and imagination of the sages of India in their search for immortality, the lofty conceptions and devoted life of the Buddha, the moral strength of Zoroaster, the single-minded dedication of the Holy Prophet of Islam. One line proved of unique importance for the human race: the leaders and prophets of the Hebrew people. Over the centuries we can follow the way in which their experience shifted decisively towards the highest levels of God's communication with men, steadily enhancing their idea of the One True God, slowly moving from understanding Him as the guardian of a single people to realising Him as the God of all men, Creator and Sustainer of the universe. They provided the setting, through their genius for faith, for the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It must always be remembered that when you talk to Asians, Africans, Arabs or Aborigines about Christianity, what you are talking about is to them the religious expression of the imperialism, exploitation and expropriation from which they have long been fighting to free themselves. This is not to belittle the centuries of devoted missionary work and its fruits. But it is the Opium Wars, not the missionaries, that the Chinese remember; the Amritsar massacre the Indians recall; the seizure of their ancestral lands that burns in the North American Indians and the Australian Aborigines; the two million slaves we cruelly transported and sold through two hundred years which Africans, Caribbeans and black Americans can never forget. There has been too much shocking sin by people from Christian countries in all these lands for us ever again to be able to take up the old, simplistic Crusaders' cry, "Païens ont tort, Chrétiens ont droit" – pagans are wrong, Christians are right. Our only hope is to live our faith in such a way that people of other cultures see Jesus Christ in us and want to know Him as a result. They might then find it in their hearts to forgive what so many people who called themselves Christian have done in their lands.

Some of my Christian friends are so sure that they know who is going to be in the Kingdom of Heaven, always including themselves, and who is not, who will be saved and who will be lost. It never seems to cross their minds that Jesus Christ Himself never took such a pharisaical attitude. He warned people of the possible consequences of their way of living for their eternal future. But His view of who would be out and who would be in never seemed to turn on doctrinal correctness. He praised the Roman centurion who displayed more faith than any Israelite because he understood obedience and authority; He held

up the example of the Good Samaritan who came from the despised neighbouring country and did not even believe in the Jewish religion; He responded to the spirit of the Syro-Phoenician mother in pagan Tyre; He gave some of His deepest truth to another Samaritan, the woman at the well. None of these could be called Christian in formal terms, but they had the essence of faith that Jesus was looking for.

Who is to be in the Kingdom and who is not is for Almighty God to decide and not for us to forecast, still less prejudge. By all accounts there may be some surprises. In that most chilling of stories in the New Testament, the separation of the sheep and the goats, both are astonished at being included in the one group or the other. And the ground for selection, as sheep or goats, has no trace of any test of doctrine or belief. It all turns on the prison visit, the care in hospital, the meal for the hungry man, the clothing of the needy. In other words, profession of faith and correct beliefs may not be enough: it is how you behave, particularly towards other people that counts. Did you act in a Christ-like way or didn't you? Is your belief incarnate in your life or not? It is love of our fellow men in action, rather than cries of "Lord, Lord!" that decides the eternal issue.

Christ died, we know, for every person on earth, whether everyone knows it or not. He died to reconcile them to God, to redeem them, to show that God, who to us is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, would go to any lengths to show His love for men. All men.

It is easy to forget that Jesus hardly talked to an audience of Christians in His lifetime on earth. All His hearers were non-Christians – Jews mainly, with a sprinkling of Samaritans, Greeks, Romans and the rest. What He tried to convey to everyone through those vivid, down-to-earth stories of His – the lost coin, the lost sheep, the prodigal

son and so many more – was the limitless love of God for men, a love He sealed and demonstrated Himself by His own sacrifice on the Cross.

But is this what we Christians have tried to show men and women of other ancient faiths or of no faith – the infinite love and compassion of God? Or have we been in danger of making Christ's very sacrifice into some kind of modern law which we, latter-day Pharisees, require everyone to accept, word perfect, or be written off in this world and the next?

“No man cometh to the Father but by Me.” Is this the lock on the door of salvation for which only well-versed Christians know the combination? Is it the great excluder? Or could it be, rather, that it manifests the infinite range of God's love for all men everywhere? A friend of mine came across a commentary on this verse by Dr. Brooke Foss Westcott, the theologian and Bishop of Durham, which opens new horizons for us: these words, the bishop writes, “which at first sight seem to narrow the magnificent prospect on which we are allowed to look, do in fact only define it. They do not set limits for the access to the Father, but give us a wider view of the action of Christ. They carry light into the dark ages and dark places of the earth. They tell us that wherever there is heroic self-surrender, wherever there is devoted study of the ways and works even of the unknown God, wherever there is a heart yearning towards the undiscovered glories of a spiritual world, there is Christ: there is Christ, though we see Him not, and His name is not named, and where Christ is, there is the approach to a loving Father.”<sup>1</sup>

God's ways are, by definition, not our ways. We are so sure we know when in fact we are far from knowing. We let

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Roger Hicks in *The Lord's Prayer and Modern Man*, London, 1967.



our hearts grow narrow when they ought to be going out ever more widely to other people – “For the love of God is broader than the measure of man’s mind.” *Our* calling surely is so to live our faith in Him that others want to come closer to Him, whatever their tradition of religion or of atheism; so to demonstrate the love of God ourselves that we may open the windows of all our minds and hearts to let in the Spirit of truth who can make us all part of the onward-moving march of man towards God’s Kingdom.

It is encouraging to note the changes in attitude of the churches to the followers of other faiths in recent years. In Rome a cardinal heads a commission of the Church for dialogue with leaders of other faiths. In all the churches there seem to be fresh approaches of respect and discussion, and appreciation of each other’s qualities, a readiness to learn from each other quite different from the intolerant attitudes of the past. It was interesting to read a few years ago that when the revered Islamic leader from Egypt, the Sheikh al Azhar, was in London for the Muslim Congress, he commented afterwards that what meant most to him was “my reception by my Christian brothers (the Archbishop of Canterbury and others) at Lambeth.” Only a few months ago, Sayed Ahmed el Mahdi, the spiritual leader of six million Muslims in the Sudan, said to me in London that the peace of the world may depend on the capacity of Christians and Muslims to understand each other and move together.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II spoke of Islam and its peoples, “who hold like us the faith of Abraham and the One Almighty and Merciful God”, when he visited Turkey in 1979. “When I think of this spiritual heritage,” said the Pope, “and the value it has for men and society, I ask myself if it is not urgent today, as Christians and Muslims have entered a new period of history, to recognise and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us . . . in order to preserve and promote together for the benefit of all men peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

The declaration by Vatican II on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions affirms that the Catholic Church (which can hardly be accused of indifference to Christian doctrine) "rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She has a sincere respect for those ways of acting and living, those moral and doctrinal teachings which may differ in many respects from what she holds and teaches, but which none the less often reflect the brightness of the Truth which is the light of all men." The declaration adds, "We cannot call on God, the Father of all men, if there are any men whom we refuse to treat as brothers, since all men are created in God's image."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it would be fair to say that in the modern world the true line of division is not so much between the great faiths as it is between those whose unremitting aim is to destroy all faith and expunge the idea of God from the consciousness of man, and those who have a belief in God, in the spiritual dimension of the universe and in moral values rooted in faith. If we move together in harmony rather than in conflict we can place our confidence in the Spirit of God who will clarify where truth lies for each and every one.

There can be only one Reality behind our universe, and in all ages there have been men who sought Him and still seek Him however much their ideas of Him may be conditioned, as our own must often be, by their own traditions, their cultures and modes of thought and the contemporary currents of ideas in their societies. But if anyone turns to that living Presence in prayer, in quiet, honestly seeking to know His will, that person is thereby laying his life open to the Holy Spirit of God. Indeed it is in the prayer

<sup>1</sup> Published by the Catholic Truth Society, London 1966.

of silence, the prayer of listening, that it is possible to move in harmony with men of other traditions in a unity of the heart and of common purpose. For anyone, however different or even atheist his background, who deliberately and honestly listens to that inner Voice is thereby opening his heart and mind to the One and Only God.

However much or little any such listener understands of God, the attitude of readiness to hear and obey what He says opens the way for God Himself to move closer to him and enlighten his understanding in His own way, in His own time.

If we will have the grace to allow the Spirit of God, unfettered by our narrowness of heart and our preconceived ideas, to work in us and in everyone we meet, whoever they may be, it is He who will lead them and us into all truth.

## For further reading

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MEETING MORAL RE-ARMAMENT, by K. D. Belden, London, 1979.

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